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# Do You See What I See? ‘Religion’ and Acculturation in Filipino–Japanese International Families

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**Abstract:** Catholicism prides itself on being a ‘global religion’. However, just how this ‘religion’ is contextualized into a specific culture has led to intercultural and intergenerational problems. In Japan, the Filipino–Japanese struggle to fit into a society that sees, in their Catholic upbringing, ‘religious’ activity that it deems un-Japanese. The concept of ‘religion’ (*shūkyō*) in Japan has been largely associated with congregational activity, an aspect that neither Shinto nor Buddhism stress. As a result, the Japanese people label acts such as the purchasing of lucky charms, temple and shrine pilgrimages, visits to power spots, and performing birth or death rituals as ‘non-religious’ (*mushūkyō*). On the other hand, they label similar Christian acts as ‘religious’. Associating Christianity with ‘religion’ has had consequences for Japan’s Filipino residents and their international families. This paper considers the role the concept of ‘religion’ plays in the acculturation of Filipino–Japanese children into Japanese society. Through qualitative interviews of four Filipino–Japanese young adults, it delineates, in eight sections, *how* the discourse of ‘religion’ isolates Filipino mothers from their ‘non-religious’ children and husbands. This begins at adolescence and culminates with the children’s absence from the Roman Catholic Church of Japan.

**Keywords:** ‘religion’; Filipino–Japanese children; Filipino; Roman Catholic Church in Japan; acculturation

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## 1. Introduction

When the Japanese claim something is a ‘religion’ or ‘religious’, they do so implying membership or close association with so-called world religions such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Omitted from this identification is a wide swath of behavior the majority of the Japanese see as being related to family, culture, and tradition, but not specifically ‘religion’ (*shūkyō*) (Horii 2018, chp. 4). When discussing ‘religion’, one must remember that there is no universal agreement regarding this term’s meaning.[1] There simply is no sui generis definition for this term. For this reason, how we define ‘religion’ comes with real consequences, not the least being political and educational. This has resulted in confusion surrounding actions that some ‘see’ as ‘religion’ and others not. This paper considers how the term ‘religion’ has been adopted in Japan, promulgated in its public schools, and used as a tool of acculturation within international families.

Since the 1980s, Filipinos entered Japan annually in the tens of thousands, leading to a wave of ‘marriage migrants’ throughout the country (Takahata 2015, p. 97). Filipino women’s rate of marriage to Japanese men ranks second only to Chinese.[2] In other words, through her Filipino–Japanese children, the Filipino woman is on the cutting edge of multicultural issues in Japan. The transition of culture from parent to child occurs in relationship to the speed at which acculturation occurs. Likewise, the speed of Filipino acculturation into Japanese society hinges on how ‘religion’ is defined. The aim of this work is to locate the discourse of ‘religion’ within the acculturation process of Filipino–Japanese children to assess how an early departure from the mother’s religious community impacts their sense of culturally hybrid identity. The conclusion of such inquiry is that the narrow manner in which ‘religion’ is contextualized in Japan has led to an increased degree of dissonant acculturation for Filipino–Japanese children who want little to do with their mother's Catholicism.

## 2. Filipino and Filipino–Japanese Acculturation

The Philippines is a country saturated in Catholicism. Whether it be public or private, education, prayers, and mention of the Christian God can be found everywhere. We see this in the statements of Linda[3] (50s) who told me in an SNS interview in 2021 about the ubiquity of Catholicism in the Philippines. She said she took her Catholicism for granted before moving to Japan in the 1990s. "[Being Catholic] isn't a choice, but more like a tradition being passed on, [where] Filipinos just have to follow all the rituals and memorize the prayers". In this manner, Catholicism is heavily integrated into Filipino culture.

Linda and her Japanese husband had a daughter (now age 22). For Linda, her Tokyo-based church is where her Filipino friends gather, and where she interacts with Japanese society by conversing with Japanese people and other ethnics, such as Filipinos, Koreans, and Brazilians. It also is where she taught her daughter about Filipino culture. While church attendance helped Linda teach Filipino culture to her child, she was, however, unable to pass Catholicism from the church to her daughter in the way she had hoped. The daughter, now in her twenties, enjoys Filipino food and even speaks some Tagalog, but attends church only irregularly, due to work priorities and other commitments.

The author includes Linda here as a 'success story' of a Filipino woman married to a Japanese male, who has managed to teach her daughter about being Filipino *without* leaving Japan. Linda achieved this by exposing her daughter to her church and its youth community from a young age. The friends she made there helped transform the space of the church from the mother's to her own. Linda's daughter is an unusual example of a second-generation Filipino–Japanese child who succeeded in connecting with the identities of each parent. Her case is exceptional, however. Most cases of Filipino–Japanese identity formation include early absence from the Catholic congregation *at the expense of* their Filipino heritage.

According to migration study experts Portes and Rumbaut, second-generation migrants tend to exhibit three kinds of acculturation when settling into a foreign country: consonant acculturation, selective acculturation, and dissonant acculturation. Consonant acculturation is when acculturation of the parent and child into a new environment occurs at relatively the same rate, but does not concern us here. Selective acculturation, on the other hand, is when culture is negotiated between the parent and child with "a relative lack of intergenerational conflict, the presence of many co-ethnics among children's friends, and the achievement of full bilingualism in the second-generation" (Portes and Rumbaut 2001, p. 54). If selective acculturation is thought to occur gradually, dissonant acculturation is sudden, producing extreme stress on the parent-child relationship. This form of acculturation is associated with a "parental authority" and of "parental languages", "role reversal" between parent and child, and "intergenerational conflict" (Portes and Rumbaut 2001, pp. 53–54). Some examples of this acculturation in Japan include Filipino–Japanese children raised in single-parent Filipino households, or in households without the financial means to pay for regular trips to the Philippines or for private education. The most extreme examples of dissonant acculturation are illustrated by children who do not communicate with their Filipino mothers, and find themselves becoming members of Japan's poor and uneducated class early in life.

The Filipino migrant and her children occupy an important position for understanding how 'religion' is wielded by Japanese society in a way that discourages church attendance and advances rates of acculturation. For the better part of half a century, Filipinos have used the infrastructure of the Catholic Church in Japan[4] as a convenient location to strengthen the Filipino–Japanese child's hybrid identity. Much to the dissatisfaction of the Filipino mother, however, most of these children leave church before reaching adolescence. Some might criticize Filipino parents for their children's apostasy. Others might criticize the church itself. While there is no limit to the factors leading to Filipino–Japanese apostasy, this paper considers the use of ‘religion’ as a discourse, and how this has affected young children and their heavy acculturation into Japanese society.

## 3. Identifying with ‘Non-Religion’ (*Mushūkyō*)

*Mushūkyō* is the Japanese antithesis of what is referred to as ‘religion’. This term came into vogue in the 1990s and 2010s after a series of turbulent events, such as the 1995 Aum Shinrikyo sarin gas attacks and the beheading of journalist Kenji Goto by ISIS in 2015. This led to a wave of negative feelings toward ‘religion’ that continues today. Being called ‘religious’ has become synonymous with piousness, extremism, danger, and terrorism. Moreover, being associated with ‘religion’ (for which Christianity is ‘religion’ par excellence) has led to children’s ridicule, marginalization, or worse. Marginalizing Christians for their beliefs and customs is one way Japanese society molds the minds of these “ideological minorities” (Clammer 2001, p. 163).

In recent years, there has been an explosion of research about ‘religion’ and how it relates to non-Judeo-Christian contexts. A common theme has been for scholars to claim what they call ‘Asian religions’ to focus more on ‘experience’ and ‘action’ than on belief. McGuire (2008) in *Lived Religion* suggests that part of the problem with ‘non-religion’ in the East has to do with how religion has been defined. Her solution is to introduce a neologism called “lived religion” as an alternative to understanding ‘religion’ as merely something ‘believed’. She argues such a term is necessary because notions of ‘religion’ are conceptual tools, “limited to European bias” that “do not adequately apply to non-Western religions, especially those religions that are not structured at all like Western religious organizations with ‘membership’ of individuals” (p. 24).

Adkins (2017) continues this line of reasoning by explaining differences between what she calls Eastern and Western religions. “Today, many Japanese may not necessarily practice Shinto as a religion, but still, often almost unconsciously, incorporate its customs and traditions into their daily lives.” This has created a kind of cognitive dissonance, which “is practically a defining feature of modern Japanese psyche” (n.p.). Mullins (2021), a scholar and resident in Japan for over a quarter century, explains in his *Shintoism and the Modern State of Japan* that what scholars normally regard as religion exists as “customary practices” (*shūzokuteki kōki*) and “social rituals” (*shakaiteki girei*), which are “regularly employed to cover a range of behaviors in everyday life and events in the annual calendar. Even though these activities occur at sacred sites in the home or at shrines and temples, they are often understood to be distinct from the category of religion” (p. 4). The breadth of actions some see as being ‘religious’ is such that some scholars explain Japan as possessing a ‘religious culture’ that permeates every part of society (Covell 2009; Pye 2009). This endeavor to capture the religion-outside-religion has created a new lexicon that includes words such as: spirituality, occult, civil religion, agnosticism, irreligion, nones, believing-but-not-religious, and more. These terms make clear that speaking on matters of ‘religion’ and its equivalents is “not a clear-cut matter” (Quack and Schuh 2017, p. 6).

If things ‘religious’ cannot be taken at face value, things ‘non-religious’ (*mushūkyō*) cannot either. As stated above, the ‘religious’ default for many Japanese is to claim they are *mushūkyō* (non-religious), a term Horie (2019, pp. 35–36) claims operates in Japan differently from Western equivalents that were used as an extension of New Age spirituality.[5] *Mushūkyō* begins with a general silence on issues deemed by others as ‘religious’. Talk of ‘religion’ is seldom had among Japanese who consider Buddhist and Shinto practice as more cultural than ‘religious’. Silence about what is and is not ‘religious’ supports a status quo that limits the definition of ‘religion’ to monotheistic practices, such as those of the Christian or Muslim persuasions, or (in the case of new religions) when they are perceived as fanatical, dogmatic, or irrational.

‘Religious’ marginalization affects the identity formation of Filipino–Japanese Catholics whose easiest outlet to the foreign parent’s culture is at their church community. Filipino–Japanese children are emblematic of such cultural loss, due to the poor cultural capital Filipino culture commands at home and in society. Some parents send their children back to their homeland for periods of months or years to be exposed to their native culture and language. These exposures to foreign culture become more difficult, however, as children age, as the cost of airfare rises, and the potential window for school absence closes (Kamibeppu 2020, p. 60). A popular alternative to foreign travel is for Filipinos to take their children to church to teach them about Filipino culture. As Celero (2017) states, "[Filipino mothers] incorporate religious practices in their children's socialization experience, taking them to church to hear mass, and raising them as churchgoers" (p. 190). However, attending church is about more than 'belief'. Those from minority cultural groups may use church to teach children formally and informally about what it means to be bicultural. Examples of how church becomes a place for cultural transition include mothers speaking their native language, cooking their national cuisine, talking about national events, and occupying church leadership positions otherwise inaccessible elsewhere.

The author records the life stories of Filipinos and Filipino–Japanese to capture the complexities of church attendance. Data to achieve this goal were collected over video chat, digital surveys, and social-networking applications from January to November 2021. In addition, insights and relationships forged from the author's membership at Yamagoe Catholic Church (pseudonym) (2010–2020), a congregation with a large Filipino membership, helped further inform this research. Throughout this period, the author helped develop church youth-group events that frequently had strong cultural components (LeMay 2020). Sometimes children were encouraged to dress in Filipino traditional dress, practice Filipino customs, eat Filipino food, and speak a Filipino language. In addition, heavy attendance by children with Filipino backgrounds made discussions of culture and its expression a key part of church activity. Basic catechetical information was taught at this church school, but activities often included information on the Philippines and other world cultures. In this regard, Filipino–Japanese children who left the Catholic Church also lost an opportunity to learn about their Filipino identity, leading to the author's premise that acculturation accelerates when children leave their mother's church community before adolescence.

## 4. The History of 'Religion' in Contemporary Japan

'Religion' (*shūkyō*) has a short history in Japan, dating back to the Edo period (1603–1867). At the end of the 19th century, foreigners began entering Japan after its centuries of closure. With them they brought an understanding of 'religion' previously foreign. As Josephson (2012) reminds us, "there were no medieval religions" (p. 258). The idea of 'religion' became formally written into law when Meiji elites successfully campaigned for the term to appear in the Meiji Constitution. Meiji diplomats eventually "translated 'religion' in such a way as to quarantine Christianity and forestall missionary activity" (Josephson 2012, p. 256). They achieved this by creating a tripart system of the real, the religious, and the superstitious. Implied in this differentiation was that 'religion' included "membership in a recognized social institution, which could be regulated" (p. 256). The Meiji state (1867–1912) controlled what it deemed 'religious' through instituting a national education system and legal framework that segregated 'religions' from these putatively 'secular' institutions. In turn, acts the nation could not control were labeled 'superstitious' and actively discouraged (Josephson 2012, p. 256).

Fast-forward half a century to when the post-war Showa-era government[6] negotiated with the American-backed GHQ, resulting in an idea of 'religion' that would limit 'foreign' 'religions' such as Christianity and Islam. This was achieved by defining aspects of Shinto under the Western definition of 'world religions', whilst intentionally holding fast to notions that 'religions' were fundamentally congregational in nature. In 'freeing' religion from the state, it placed "behind bars ( . . . ) some aspects of social life" in order for "others to survive and thrive (Thomas 2019, p. 250). The Showa government (1945–1989) achieved this by adopting ideas of 'religious freedom' that seemed accepting of ideological difference, but in practice were discriminatory. The process of creating 'religious freedom' was not about maintaining peace, nor about validating the beliefs of followers. Instead, it was about creating "prescriptive notions about how religious people should be and how they should behave" (Thomas 2019, p. 253). The new Japanese government adopted the notion of 'religious freedom' less as a "prophylactic against terror and repression" and more as a means of placating pressure from abroad. At the end of the occupation, Japan's foreign benefactors (as represented by the GHQ) saw the country as having accepted 'religious freedom'—but more in theory than in practice. In actuality, 'religion' continued to be tolerated in Japan by "giving priority to the claims of the state and political authorities over the claims of religious groups and individuals" (Thomas 2019, p. 253). This was achieved by the state forcing churches into an oppressive "good religion/bad religion binary that granted the former to communities that complied with the status quo, and the latter with those deemed subversive like 'cults', 'superstitions,' or threats to common decency and peace and order" (Thomas 2019, p. 255).

Josephson and Thomas make clear that there are political consequences to how we define 'religion'. Herein lies the controversy about teaching religion to children. Takahashi and Yamamoto (2012) and Iwata and Omi (2020) show how the politics of 'religion' have found their way into public discourse. In Japanese schools, 'religious education' (*shūkyō kyōiku*) has been inserted into lessons on history, geography, morality, or ethics by appearing as 'denominational education' (*shūha kyōiku*), 'religious knowledge education' (*shūkyō chishiki kyōiku*), and 'religious sentiment education' (*shūkyōteki jōsō kyōiku*). Denominational education is reserved particularly for private 'religious' schools, such as those affiliated with Christian or Shinto traditions. At these schools, texts that are generally regarded as 'religious' can be discussed in detail. Examples of such texts include the Bible and the *Nihon Shoki*. Religious knowledge education, on the other hand, is found in public schools without affiliation to a particular 'religion'. Facts, dates, and geography that pertain to 'religion', such as the Protestant Reformation, and certain historical buildings, such as the temples of Nara and Kyoto, are discussed. Finally, 'religious sentiment education' tautology includes teaching designed to cultivate what is called students' 'general sense of religiosity' through classes such as morality and ethics. This may include exposing students to the Tale of the Heike[7] (*Heike Monogatari*), orchestra pieces with 'religious' significance, or speeches with 'religious' and moral significance (Iwata and Omi 2020, p. 95). 'Religious' teaching is seldom the main point of lessons where the emphasis on historical facts associated with 'religion', whether events, people, or ideas, functions to water down any creative application of 'religion' to children's lives.

Japanese schools do not require their teachers to be qualified in 'religious education', thus making the balanced teaching of controversial topics difficult. Public schools have responded by shifting the center of lessons from 'religion' to talk of 'national character' (*kunigara*). This shift might affect how talk of installing the Reiwa emperor[8] avoids connecting this ceremony to Shinto, while emphasizing the emperor as a 'cultural symbol' of Japan.[9] Such emphasis has been criticized as unlawfully supporting a Shinto-based emperor system. Other examples of the opaque relationship between Shinto and 'national character' education include teaching the importance of Yasukuni Shrine[10], flying the national flag at school events, and performing 'purification rituals' (*okiyome*). These teachings have been pointed to as "attempts to roll back religious freedoms enshrined in the American-drafted postwar constitution" (Thomas 2019, p. 258). Other more abstract views include teaching students to have awe toward life, to respect nature, or to have a certain 'Japanese' mentality—all of which conjure up feelings of Japan's Shinto-centered pre-war theocracy (Takahashi and Yamamoto 2012, p. 226).

Over the past several decades, what many scholars may identify as 'religious ideas' that support Shinto and Buddhism have matriculated into the public school system. This has occurred slowly yet steadily, such that few are aware of how they or their children are being influenced. By framing the myriad customs and rituals of Japan as 'non-religious', children grow up unable to reflexively consider their own actions as related to 'religion'. This has led to a double standard that paints certain acts as 'religious' when practiced by foreigners, yet regards similar acts as 'non-religious' Japanese 'culture'.

As a university professor in Japan, the author often encounters such a double standard from his Japanese students who perceive foreigners' actions as 'religious' and 'dangerous'. This skepticism can be felt in the following comment received from a twenty-year-old woman writing on 'religious freedom'.

> I think there is a contradiction between parents teaching children religion, and religion being a personal choice. [How] parents' religion affects [children], is a big problem because a child will [learn a] religion before choosing their own. I guess it is possible to change your religion, but it is difficult to change [one's] belief after [it is initially] believe[d]. So, this problem should be solved. In many religions they have routine works (such as going to church) that prevent children from avoiding their parent's religion. (Student A)

In this quote, Student A describes the "problem" of children learning their "parents' religion" while young, as if all children are born with complete objectivity. Notice that the "big problem" is only the issue of the parents' beliefs and the "routine works" associated with them. Student A also believes that children *should* be able to avoid their parents' religion, regardless of the effect this might have on the parent–child relationship. This student states this by relegating 'religious' acts to congregational activity and excluding daily acts that might be associated with a parent's customs or culture.

What the Japanese consider to be 'religious' or 'non-religious' is important because, as seen in this example, the Japanese tend to emphasize congregational activity as 'religious', while excluding acts they might perform with family by referring to these as 'Japanese culture'. They fail to understand that many foreigners also practice family or cultural expressions that they themselves might classify as 'non-religious', but because they choose to perform these in congregational settings, they become 'religious'. This double standard, if you will, has its roots in the widespread diffusion of animism and Shinto-based ideologies that permeate politics and the public education system, but have relatively no connection to congregational activity. In the words of Clammer (2001), Shinto epitomizes this difference by not being perceived as 'religious' because, by its very nature, Shinto "resist[s] ideological hegemony" in the way it embodies "a complex of beliefs and, more importantly, practices encapsulating an understanding of human–cosmos relationships" (p. 224). Precisely because Shinto "has never been a single thing, but rather a loosely connected set of localized behaviours", it resists being labeled as 'religion' (Clammer 2001, p. 224), and thus finds its way into the public education system under the auspices of secularism. This opaqueness, we will see below, causes confusion when Japanese interact with foreigners.

## 5. Seeing 'Religious' Activity

Why is it that the Japanese use 'religion' to identify Catholic attendance of foreigners, while identifying similar acts of the Shinto or Buddhist persuasion as non-religious (*mushūkyō*)? By way of an example, several personal experiences from the author's twenty-five-year life in Japan are showcased below. The first comes from an elementary school field trip the author's son took in October 2021 to a factory where *daruma* dolls are made. The *daruma* doll takes its origins from Bodhidharma, a Buddhist monk accredited with the founding of Zen Buddhism. Bodhidharma was so enthralled with meditation that he cut his useless arms and legs off after losing feeling in them after prolonged meditation. He also cut off his eyelids to stop from sleeping. This is where the *daruma* gets its egg-like body and oval white eyes. Despite the *daruma* doll's connection to Zen, the above school field trip was conducted with no mention of Zen Buddhism[11] or any relationship to 'religion'. It is possible that the teachers did not even know about this history or how it is related to the founder of Zen. Instead, children were taught that the *daruma* doll gave its proprietor good luck. Nonetheless, even if his teachers were knowledgeable about the *daruma* doll's origins, it is unlikely they would have referred to it as 'religious', given how this popular practice is referred to as being representative of Japanese 'culture'.

Another example comes from the author's father-in-law who lost his first-born son at a few months old. This traumatic event, as his daughter explained it, left him without "any belief in religion". Despite never speaking about 'religion', he joins the family on visits to the local Shinto shrine on New Year's Day, where he purchases lucky charms for himself and his grandchildren. He also makes a point of buying Shinto paraphernalia to place in front of his home *kamidana* (Shinto) and *butsudan* (Buddhist) altars. In 2019, he spent the equivalent of over USD60,000 on a funeral plot at the local Buddhist mausoleum. Despite these actions, the author's wife and her family do not consider him to be a pious man, and would even go so far as to call him 'non-religious' (*mushūkyō*).

Japanese scholars of religion often conceptualize the above practices as paradigmatic of Japan's 'religious' culture. This is in contrast to how most Japanese would opt to consider the examples above as 'culture' as opposed to 'religion'. This academic vs. popular distinction creates confusion between foreign and Japanese communications. After all, why is it that church attendance and purchasing of statues of Mary or Jesus would be considered 'religious', but attending shrines and purchasing *daruma* dolls are not? To understand the mindset of the Japanese, on this matter I look to Ikeuchi who writes on Brazilian Pentecostalism in Japan. Ikeuchi claims that 'religion' in Japan is a "cultural framework of discipline" that makes the Japanese "interdependent between the self, material forms, and social others" (Ikeuchi 2019, p. 166). On the other hand, Brazilians understand 'religion' (according to Ikeuchi) as a *transcendence from* "material and social entanglements". This is reflected in their "spontaneity in interaction" that allows their "inner selves" to "show through". In other words, 'religion' as defined by Brazilians would transcend social convention, rules and order, whereas 'religion' defined by the Japanese would interact with it (Ikeuchi 2019, p. 166).

The author's in-laws do not see 'religion' in his father-in-law's actions because he is not acting independently of Japanese culture, but rather interdependent with it. His actions do not separate him from his family, but on the contrary, complete him and his social responsibility toward it. He did not consider his trips to the shrine as 'religious' because they were merely a sign that he cared for his family by fulfilling his social obligations to them. His acts were not 'independent' from his family obligations, and thus, not considered 'religious'.

Omori touches on Japanese interdependence in her study of Japanese Catholic women in Tokyo. She illustrates how Japanese Catholic women's husbands participate in home affairs by maintaining Buddhist home altars, washing Buddhist tombstones, and buying talismans. She carefully points out, however, that they do not consider these acts as 'religion'. They see them, rather, as signs of caring "about the living or the dead" (Omori 2020, p. 168).

When 'religion' is labeled by others prescriptively, this artificially connects one act and another in a way that all participants may not agree. This was the case with Linda (from above) who had lived in Japan for over thirty years. Linda attends church every Sunday and has been instrumental in the creation of an English-language choir. She even raised her daughter there. When I asked about her relatives and their perception of her church activity, she replied,

> My father-in-law is a very religious man and I presume he understands [me]. I say my father-in-law is religious because his faith is incorporated in his daily life. Every day before he leaves his bedroom to start the day he does the same rituals in front of an altar and before going to bed he does the same. He regularly makes offerings to all his gods. I see his religiousness not only on Sundays when he regularly attends their assembly or worship [but every day].

Linda admitted her father-in-law never used the term 'religion' when talking about his actions, but she assumed his actions were 'religious', acknowledging a propensity in him to understand her own Catholicism.

Despite Linda's strong conviction that her father-in-law is "religious", we cannot take at face value that he defines his activity in the same way as Linda does. Despite the actions of ancestor veneration acting similar to Linda's church activities and personal devotions, what they are 'perceived' as being is not the same as how participants identify them. Linda identifies herself as a practicing Catholic who asks to be let off from work on Sundays and the four days of Holy Week. “When it comes to work . . . I always say that I cannot work on Sundays and during the Holy Week because I am a practicing Catholic.” She admits that sometimes this has prevented her from full participation in Japanese society. Linda’s unwavering attitude toward Sunday worship is significantly different from her Japanese father-in-law’s actions that fit neatly into his daily activity. It is this fact that makes her actions seem more ‘religious’ than those of her father-in-law.

The difference between ‘religion’ and ‘non-religion’ is one of social acceptance. When the author’s father-in-law visits the shrine to buy lucky charms, he does so at a certain time of the year that does not conflict with prior commitments. By not having to ask for a reprieve from work, his actions fit neatly into what is considered Japanese culture. On the other hand, when Linda and other Filipinos attend church, they may leave their children at home; they may ask their husbands to cook lunch or dinner; they may even ask their employers for a day off. By placing their church community above the responsibilities of work and family, they qualify their actions as ‘religious’. Despite Linda claiming her father-in-law understands her behavior toward her ‘religious’ beliefs, it is doubtful he sees his own personal actions toward his gods as comparable to Linda’s congregational activity. This line of reasoning will be further fleshed out with the following four informants and their relationship to Catholicism.

## 6. Case Studies of Filipino–Japanese (and Filipino–Filipino) Young Adults

The next four stories were chosen from eleven initial interviews with Filipinos and Filipino–Japanese young adults, conducted in 2021. These were chosen because they illustrated the discursive nature of the second generations’ struggle with their mothers’ Catholicism. All the names used are pseudonyms. Of the following, the author met Maria and Nozomi between 2008 and 2020 during fieldwork at Yamagoe Catholic Church in Tokyo. Kenta and Ryuji were former students at Bunkyo University. Communication included online surveys, online interviews of an hour or more, and repeated correspondence on social messenger systems (SNS). The following stories have been summarized, translated, and edited for easy comprehension.

### Case 1: Maria (Filipino–Filipino, 24)

Attending Catholic Mass on Sunday has always been a family event for Maria. As early as she could remember, when people asked her to do something on Sundays, she would decline by telling them she had church. Maria was raised at Yamagoe Catholic Church in Tokyo. Although she was baptized in the Philippines, she came to Japan as a second-grade elementary pupil. “I remember when they were introducing transfer students. I was given special treatment by being asked to stand on stage. My homeroom teacher translated the principal’s Japanese. I was the only foreigner in my school, so I was exotic. Sometimes children from other homeroom classes would even sneak a peek at me.” There were a few times Maria was taunted by students, but largely she had a positive experience. “I was protected by my many friends,” she stressed.

After spending four months in the Philippines to learn Tagalog and English, Maria began junior high school three months late. She had already missed the club initiation process most of her classmates went through, making her choice less about conformity. “I [eventually] joined badminton, but told my coach I could not attend Sunday due to church. My club practiced constantly, even during summer break. I couldn’t understand why, so I refused [at these times]. I had classmates criticize me, telling me that I should attend practice, but I didn’t listen. I would just change the subject. Eventually, I dropped out of badminton at the beginning of my second year and spent the remainder of my time popping into other clubs like track and field and the tea ceremony.” When it came to Sunday Mass, Maria was frank with her classmates, telling them she had church, and thus, could not participate in extracurricular activities. They interpreted her response as the recalcitrant refusal of a Christian requesting special attention.

"Sometimes I was met with strange looks, which I can only assume came from their lack of understanding of religion. Once a boy told me not to convert him. I responded by telling him we wouldn't want him anyhow." Maria would answer her friends' inquiries explaining that church was a place where she would sing and pray. Her friends would reply with, "Ah, that's right, you are Filipino" or "So, that is a Filipino custom." Maria explained that attending church for her was "like when they ate dinner with their families". Despite what she felt to be a good explanation, it did not evoke the desired response. "I never really thought it strange that I spend time on Sunday with my family. In the Philippines it is natural. [Compared with the Philippines] I get a feeling that Japanese do not spend time with their family regularly." Maria believed she was the only person in her class with such a family custom. "I think that when it comes down to it, Japanese teenagers prioritize time with their friends over that with their parents".

Maria is the paradigmatic representation of a Filipino–Filipino women raised in Japan who struggles to maintain her Filipino culture while engaging in Japanese society. Achieving this balance, as will be further explained below, was not always easy, given that a major location where she practiced Filipino culture was at church—a place her friends misunderstood by negatively associating it with 'religion'.

Case 2: Nozomi (Filipino–Japanese, 22)

The relationship Nozomi's story seems to have with other Filipino–Japanese may be unclear at the start, but her experience of acculturation into Japan, despite spending half her life in the Philippines, makes her an important addition to the four stories presented here. Her time spent at Japanese elementary school during a key period of her cultural development led to her avoidance of 'religious' identification and a significant distance from her mother's church community.

Nozomi was the first generation to attend Yamagoe's church school. In the fifth grade, she was a slim and quirky girl standing at 140 cm. Due to her confident and assertive demeanor, she had a unique ability to make friends with other Filipino–Japanese children. Yet, she had not always been this way. "I was timid after entering Japanese elementary school in grade two. I had just come from the Philippines and did not speak any Japanese. Along with my language handicap, I experienced bullying and power harassment. Seriously, I never thought at the age of seven I would encounter so much racism in Japan. I thought the Japanese were going to be friendly, but they were not."

Nozomi was born in Japan, but began her life in the Philippines as an eight-month-old baby. While her mother worked in Japan, she was raised by her aunt and grandparents until she was a second grader. "My aunt loved me like her own. She had two boys, so I was the only girl in the family. We would go shopping and even to the bathroom together. We were inseparable." Then one day her mother appeared from Japan completely unannounced, and with a policeman. At that moment, Nozomi was in the shower and had to leave the Philippines with only the shirt and pants she had hastily thrown on herself. "I can still remember crying on the plane to Japan and being afraid when I saw my stepfather at the airport. His eyes were so slim and his features hard." All Nozomi had known of Japan to that point were the chocolates he would send her.

Back in the Philippines, Nozomi was at the top of her kindergarten class, but upon moving to Japan she plummeted to the bottom. It did not help that she was transferred into second grade, despite having no knowledge of Japanese or Japanese culture. She was in a complete state of ignorance and no-one helped. "[Even my homeroom teacher] knew I did not understand anything. She just gave me origami to do during class instead of teaching me." One day, Nozomi's mother opened her bag to see it full of nothing but folded paper cranes and paper boxes. "Where is your homework?" she asked. To her mother's horror, Nozomi had not written a thing in her textbooks, and her school journal was blank. "My mother was furious. She went to talk to the teacher and the principal, but because her Japanese was limited, she did not get very far."

On top of the continuing neglect from her teacher came ridicule from her classmates. "Children called me 'disgusting' (*kimochi warui*) or 'foreigner' (*gaijin*). It reached the point where I would come home covered with bruises." A typical practice in Japan is for schoolchildren to walk home after school in orderly single file. On these trips home, she was kicked and punched by other children. One day, the sixth-grade group leader signaled to her that she should head in the direction that was completely opposite from that of her home. "I trusted her and went the wrong way. I walked around aimlessly until 6 pm. After finding my house, I approached it crying. An older neighbor asked if I was okay, but I lied saying I had been playing with friends. I did not want to cause trouble or have my mother return to school and complain. I was convinced nothing would change."

The next year Nozomi's new homeroom teacher took a liking to her by purchasing for her Japanese language books. "She was so nice to me. It made all the difference." Nozomi began studying earnestly, eventually earning top grades in Kanji. She was also the nominated class representative for track and field. Despite her achievements, she always remained a foreigner to those around her. "Adults would say to me, 'You are a foreigner, but doing so well.' 'I am also Japanese', I wanted to say."

By fourth grade, Nozomi had heavily assimilated into Japanese society. She spoke only Japanese at home and school, and seldom participated in things Filipino. At the end of the fourth grade, the Yamagoe church school began a year-long cultural activity where children could learn about being Filipino. Nozomi's mother encouraged her to attend. Nozomi naturally fit in. "I was so excited to go to participate because the people I met there made me feel like I was not alone. For me, church was my second home and a comfortable place for me." She would look forward to church events to reaffirm her multicultural identity. When it came time to choose a junior high school, her mother urged her to return to the Philippines. Nozomi refused. She had only recently gotten used to Japan, and was not interested in moving again. Nonetheless, after repeated entreaties from her mother, Nozomi left Japan to spend her junior and high school years in the Philippines.

When Nozomi returned to her aunt and uncle's house, she spoke neither Tagalog nor English. "How could you let her lose her native tongue?" her incredulous relatives inquired of her mother. In the Philippines, Nozomi would study English under one tutor and Tagalog under another. On those summer breaks when she returned to Japan, her mother would feel it best that she spent her limited time with her, rather than become too involved in church school. "You can go back to church school when you are not busy because you have a lot of things to do now," her mother would tell her. After spending four years in a Filipino high school, Nozomi returned to Japan for university. She attended Mass about once every other month. "I was so happy to see new children at church school and the '*ates*[12]' singing in the choir. They were older, but still the same. They told me, 'You came back'. They were so happy to see me. I was happy too because even though I left for years, they still remembered me. It made me feel that I could go back anytime because I would always have a place to call my second home."

Church for Nozomi was a liminal space she used to create a Catholic identity *in* Japan. The minority status of Catholicism in Japan contrasts sharply with the culturally laden Catholicism of the Philippines. Nozomi's few years of activity at church school helped her better understand what it meant to identify as Catholic in Japan. This identification was later buttressed by repeated return to the Philippines. It will become clearer below how her cosmopolitan upbringing between Japan and the Philippines influenced her understanding of the 'religious' practice of her Filipino mother and Japanese father.

Case 3: Kenta (Filipino–Japanese, 25)

Kenta was raised by his grandparents in the Philippines. He remembers attending church with his extended family as a child. He remembers his mother throwing a party for his first communion, and attending a Catholic elementary school that was "very Catholic". "I remember elementary school being strict. We would pray in the morning and at the end of each day. At 3 pm a prayer would boom over the loudspeaker and we were all required to stop what we were doing. I remember 'freezing' once in the middle of the playground while playing hide-and-go-seek as the music blared."

Kenta's life in the Philippines was interrupted when his mother came with her new Japanese husband to take him to Japan. "I remember this awkward moment of meeting my new father. I did not know who he was." The next school year, Kenta's last name changed. "My name changed twice due to my mother's remarriages, so it took a while for it to sink in." There was a time when names were called in class when he did not at first recognize that it was his name they were calling, it being called not once, but twice. Because he did not know Japanese, he was held back two years, entering the first grade of junior high when he should have entered the third. "I was a bit popular in my first semester, but then bullying began. Other children told me to return to my country or called me a 'banana' (yellow on the outside, white in the middle). After a while I learned to shrug it off. In high school, I became popular with the girls and used this to get back at my Japanese classmates. Sometimes I would even tease them in return."

When Kenta first arrived in Japan as a junior high student, his mother and he would attend the English or Tagalog Mass in Tokyo. Sometimes when family members from the Philippines would visit, they would all go to Mass together. Church attendance for Kenta consisted of himself, his mother, and an occasional Filipino friend or family member. He never attended church school because he was too old; thus, he never made friends there. As his Japanese language skills improved, Kenta spent more time outside the house on weekends, but still attended church at his mother's behest. At this time, Kenta recalled an uncomfortable experience he had had with his friends. "My friends asked me why I had to attend church on weekends or believe in fairytales like Moses parting the Red Sea or Jesus walking on water." Comments like this taught Kenta that church was not something he could talk about with his school friends. In a sense, church attendance was as foreign to them as his Filipino upbringing.

In junior high school, Kenta entered the basketball club. "Religion was not an excuse to skip games or practice." After receiving criticism from his classmates about his Christianity, Kenta gave up going to church with his mother. "I eventually came to believe church was a waste of time. At that time my mother and I fought about going to church. She would yell at me to go and I would eventually give in. But as I got older, I would intentionally schedule plans with my friends in the morning so as to be out of the house when my mother went to Mass." By high school, even if Kenta did not have plans with his friends, he would sneak out "like some kind of ninja" and disappear before his mother could ask him to go. Kenta's mother was powerless to stop him, and his stepfather, who worked on Sundays, never intervened. Even if his stepfather had been there, Kenta told me, "He probably would have told me to study—he valued homework over church." In this way, by the end of junior high school, Kenta had stopped attending church.

Kenta, like Nozomi, struggled from divorce and remarriage of his parents and a satellite upbringing in the Philippines apart from his mother. His entry into Japan was much later than Nozomi's, making his age a barrier to participate in such a culturally liminal space as a church school. This forced him to assimilate quickly, which he did by surrounding himself with Japanese people. He later found Filipino friends in Japan in adulthood, but only after severing connections with his mother's church community while in grade school. This background contributed to how he would conflate the church activities of his mother with 'religion'.

Case 4: Ryuji (Filipino–Japanese, 22)

Ryuji has only vague memories of attending Yamagoe Church as a child. "I attended a few times, but I didn't stay long afterwards. There was a time I remember going to lunch with another Filipino and her son after Mass, but I did not know him, so the two of us said nothing." Ryuji passed through Yamagoe Church just as the resident priest changed and before a new church school had begun. He was instructed in catechetical teaching, but he barely remembers this on account of being so young. He disappeared around the age of eight, shortly after catechism. Ryuji has difficulty remembering church because as soon as he became conscious of what was taking place, his interests were diverted toward soccer. "I enrolled in soccer from the time I was in preschool. Compared to soccer, I found church boring," he admitted. "[In elementary school] I recall having arguments with my mother over church. She told me when I did not have soccer that I had to attend church with her." First, Ryuji respected this request, but the more friends he made at soccer and the busier his schedule became, the easier it became for him to refuse her. By grade 3, he had left church completely.

Throughout this period of transition, Ryuji's father was out of the picture; he had a demanding job with an overseas NPO that required long absences from home. "Even if my father had been there, he would not have done anything," reasoned Ryuji. "He is shy and never approaches the topic of religion. He also sleeps in on Sundays," meaning that he did not weigh in on his wife's child-rearing decisions. Ryuji never heard the word 'religion' uttered from his father's lips. He would leave domestic decisions up to the mother, who had little power to oppose her son's soccer.

Via online interviews, Ryuji showed me various articles of Christian paraphernalia placed throughout his home: a picture of the Last Supper in the kitchen, an altar in the hallway decorated with a Filipino Bible, figurines of the Virgin Mary and Santo Niño, and several pictures of Jesus. Despite all this centrally placed physical evidence of his mother's devotion, Ryuji never asked her who each figure was and was, therefore, unable to explain the significance of even one of them to me. Ryuji asked me to explain each of these one by one, revealing his apparent ignorance about his mother's Catholicism.

Ryuji had the most 'Japanese' proclivities of the above four. He did not speak Tagalog and contacted his relatives in the Philippines only every few years. On the contrary, he spent most of his time with Japanese–Japanese friends. This started in elementary school when he entered community soccer. Heavy acculturation led him to associate his mother's Catholicism with 'religion', while avoiding similar language to describe the actions of his father.

## 7. The Significance of Church Flight on the Filipino Mother–Child Relationship

The above life stories portray a conflict between Filipino parents and their Filipino–Japanese children's identities. As children age, their contact with the host society becomes more involved, displacing weekend attendance at the church communities of their mothers. Immigration experts claim that participation in ethnic communities such as those at church can "slow down the cultural shift [of children] and promote partial retention of the parents' home language and norms" (Portes and Rumbaut 2001, p. 54). When churches work well, they can create coethnic communities that can help bicultural children gradually acculturate themselves into the mainstream without disposing of their cultural difference. We saw this in how church attendance for Maria brought her family together or about how it taught Nozomi about being Filipino–Japanese in Japan.

Paradoxically, separation from such communities, especially while children are still forming their sense of self, can lead to painful ruptures between the first and second generation. In his seminal work on identity formation, the sociologist Strauss describes how exiting from the mother's church community is both a form of expression on the part of the child, and one of pain and regret from the mother. Second-generation rejection and drift away from immigrant parents illustrate this.

> Betrayal of this type consists, *usually, of a series of incidents* (Italics mine), rather than of a single traumatic event. During the course of day-to-day living, decisions are made whose full implications are not immediately apparent. People can go on deceiving themselves about paths that actually have been closed by those decisions. At the point when it becomes apparent that former possibilities are dead issues, the person (Filipino mother) stands at a crossroads. ( . . . ) This kind of crossroad may not be traumatic, but nostalgically reminiscent, signifying then that the gratifications arising from past decisions are quite sufficient to make past possibilities only pleasantly lingering "maybes." Final recognition that they are really dead issues is then more of a ritualistic burial and is often manifested by a revisiting of old haunts—actually or symbolically. (Strauss 1959, pp. 98–99)

The absence of the Filipino–Japanese son or daughter at church marks the kind of "crossroad" Strauss mentions here. The absence sends a signal to the mother that her church activity' holds no "value" for them. Often, the child is not aware of how their actions affect their mother or how leaving her cultural community will affect their retention of Filipino culture in the future. Nonetheless, when they decide church activity to be "not wholly satisfying", they might go to great lengths to convey this through speech or action. Kenji illustrated this in his passive manner of escaping the pressure of church attendance. Ryuji did so through using sports as a wedge that liberated him from attending church with his mother.

Each informant experienced discomfort with church to varying degrees. Sometimes this included heated arguments (Kenta and Ryuji). Sometimes absence was more gradual, such as with Maria and Nozomi, whose church attendance has become less frequent with age. The pain of this split and the impact this has on identity formation depends largely on when this occurs. Those who leave church before high school, such as Ryuji and Kenta, tend never to return. Children who leave later into their formation process (such as Maria and Nozomi) have a tendency to consider part of themselves invested into the church of their mother. For them, church is part of who they are. It is part of their 'culture'. These children take less of a confrontational stance with church, and attend when asked to or when they feel so inclined.

These two kinds of identity formations can be depicted below (Figure 1) in a line of progression from selective to dissonant acculturation.

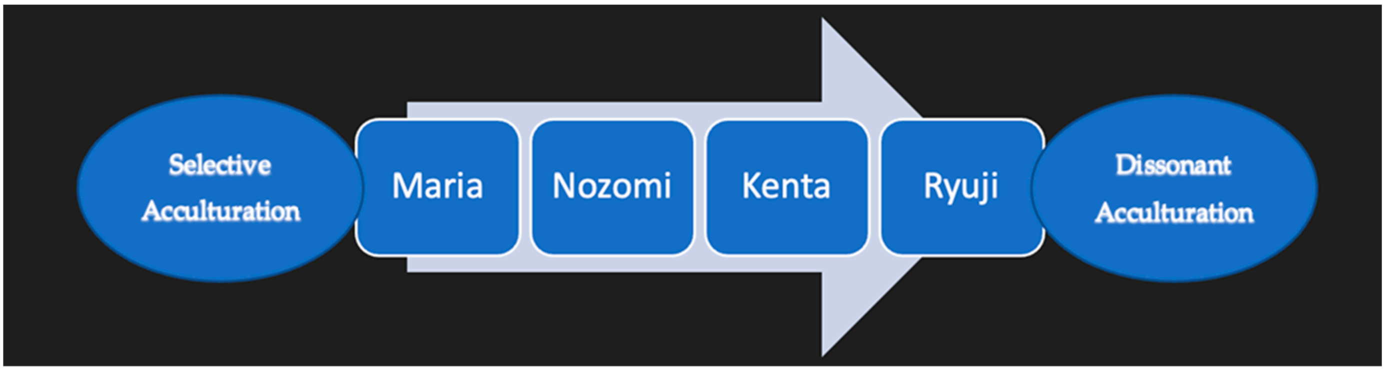

**Figure 1.** Selective–Dissonant Acculturation Spectrum.

Figure 1 illustrates the aforementioned four children's life stories and how they fit in the trajectory from selective to dissonant acculturation. The left of the graph marks a high rate of selective acculturation. The rate decreases toward the right where, at the extreme level, a bifurcated relationship with the Filipino parent results. By way of summary, these stories show that the earlier children leave from their mother's church to be surrounded by non-Catholic Japanese, the closer they move toward dissonant acculturation. This shift from left to right can also be gauged by how informants used the term 'religion' and 'non-religion' to define their actions or those of others.

Maria was raised by Filipino parents. She talks to them in Tagalog, attends the Catholic Mass on occasion, and talks of Catholicism as part of her 'culture'. We could say she has internalized her Filipino identity in spite of being raised in Japan. On the opposite side of the spectrum is Ryuji. He looks back on the several years of his church experience as an outsider. He does this by talking about Catholicism as 'his mother's religion'. The words he used to describe the relationship he had with Catholicism were cold and detached. Ryuji saw his mother's church not as a community with which he had any emotional connection, but rather as a 'religion'. He had distanced himself from it in order to participate more fully in Japanese society.

The issue of gender must be taken into account when considering the trajectory between selective and dissonant assimilation. Maria and Nozomi both had a strong relationship with their mothers, which they buttressed by going to church. From observations, the author found it was common for Filipino mothers to attend church with their daughters well into elementary school. Such expectations did not exist with boys who were often given more freedom to join clubs that demanded time on Sundays. As an example, Maria never took clubs very seriously (not to mention, Nozomi was absent from Japan during junior and high school). On the other hand, Kenta and Ryuji were both active in club activities, replacing the parental bond of their mothers with their Japanese (male) friends. This separation was furthered by their Japanese (step) fathers, who were generally more supportive of clubs than church.

Another factor playing a role in how Catholicism was viewed as 'religious' comes from how children perceived the heavy influence of Filipino women at church. All of the church communities the above four attended had Filipino populations of several hundred participants who were upwards of 90% women. It is not difficult to imagine how such femininity would negatively influence young boys looking for a male role model, whereas it helped to attract young girls. The absence of such a male figure at church might have had something to do with Kenta's and Ryuji's absence and subsequent apostacy and Nozomi's and Maria's familiarity with Catholicism.

The above life stories illustrate the power public education has on children's cultural identity formation. Early exposure to Japanese public education and school sports changed how they identified with their mothers' Catholicism. Negative talk of 'religion' by teachers, coaches, and friends influenced how they disassociated themselves from church. Talk of the Japanese as 'having no religion' goes hand in hand with negative comments of 'religion' as 'dangerous', 'frightening', and 'foreign'. Studies by Dias (2016) and LeMay (2019) show how prolonged exposure to a Japanese environment that pits notions of 'safe' and 'peaceful' 'religion-less Japanese' against those of 'dangerous' and 'fanatical' 'religious foreigners' creates an impression of church activity as being un-Japanese. Over months or years of children opting out of church activity, Filipino mothers cave in to their children's preferences for weekend sports or social activities. Unable to convince their children of the importance of interacting with the (heavily Filipino) Catholic community leaves them little choice but to attend church alone. Filipinos might blame their child's absence on the Japanese school system's unwillingness to compromise with church activity. This would not be incorrect; but the reality is that the causes of labeling church as 'religion' can be traced back to the relationships Filipino–Japanese have with Japanese fathers.

## 8. Religion and the Family

An important factor that keeps second-generation children from slipping into dissonant acculturation, say Telzer et al. (2016), is the adolescent's ability to maintain "heritage culture" (p. 1422). Filipino parents in Japan try to raise their children in the Roman Catholic Church as a means of coping with economic and cultural capital deficiencies. Given the often middle- to lower-middle class standing of many Filipinos, it is natural to depend on the 'modes of incorporation' of the Catholic community when introducing Filipino culture to their children. Studies by Portes et al. (2009) show that, in the United States, there was a positive effect on cultivating a segmented acculturation in children when there was a "presence of strong and stern parental figures who controlled, if not suppressed, extensive external contacts and who sought to preserve the cultural and linguistic traditions in which they themselves were raised" (p. 1095). Observations of interactions between Filipino–Japanese children and their Filipino mothers reveals a tendency of Filipino mothers to be strict when it comes to church attendance. This harsh enforcement in Japan, however, is often undermined by the non-confrontational stance of the Japanese father toward their children and his acceptance of sports and other group activities. The more the Filipino mother demands her children attend church *despite* having commitments otherwise, the more her church activities become 'religious' and something unappealing.

A *leitmotif* in the above interviews was how church was used by Filipino mothers as representative of their culture. Full Japanization had the effect of disconnecting children from church and depriving them of a cultural reference point for which to ground their sense of self. Discontinuation of church attendance minimized domestic exposure to foreign culture. More alarming was how children, after having left their mothers at church, would point to the very institution they had left as responsible for interfering with family activity (LeMay 2018). They did this subtly by labeling their mother's church activity as 'religious'. This transformed church attendance, an activity the Filipino mother hoped would strengthen the bonds between her and her children, into something that would isolate them from her family.

Of the four above case studies, Maria was the independent variable. She had been raised in the Catholic Church by her Filipino parents. For her, church was less something 'religious' and more a part of who she was. When she discussed church activity with her friends, she would talk of "going to church" as part of her "culture". She did not explicitly avoid discussion of 'religion', but she preferred not to use this word for its negative ring. When her friends asked her why she could not do things on Sunday mornings, she would link 'church' with her Filipino identity by replying: "I am Catholic" or "I go to church with my family".

On the contrary, Nozomi spent half her life in the Philippines and half in Japan. Sudden uprooting from each made it difficult for her to take part in any substantial way in church youth activity. Nevertheless, the two years she attended Yamagoe Church taught her valuable lessons about her "heritage culture" that became the bedrock of her affinity toward church. Nozomi's acculturation into Japanese society has led her to avoid connecting church activity with 'religion' in much the same manner as her Filipino–Japanese counterparts. Intergenerational differences between Nozomi and her mother are apparent in the following narration of the 'religious' behavior of her father.

> My father is Shinto. My mother told me that relatives from my father's side were religious. They had their own altar inside their house and there was a story that my grandmother suggested my father go to the shrine and get an *oharai* (blessing) together with my mother because he had a bad habit of physically abusing my mother and grandmother. When they got there the *obosan* (Buddhist monk) (sic.) told them that my father has a lot of bad spirits and *oni* (evil) behind him, such that an *oharai* (blessing) could not remove them. After that, they bought a lot of *fuda* and *omamori* (lucky charms) for my father because they believed that [if his actions continued] he would bring bad luck to our family. My father came to believe that maybe he was being controlled by evil spirits, and that was why he would do such things to hurt us. This led him to buy an altar and place it in his house upon moving to Tokyo (and leaving us).

The author doubts whether Nozomi's father or his parents would agree that what is described above is something 'religious'. What we have here is not their telling of the story, but Nozomi's version of a story her mother told. Given such background, it was her mother who labeled her father's acts as 'religious'. Nozomi identified this as being "religious" because the actions of her father were extreme and impacted the lives of him and his family.

By contrast, when I asked about Nozomi's stepfather, she described his seasonal visits to the Shinto shrine on New Year's Day as "non-religious". "I am sure he doesn't have a religion," she wrote. The acts of Nozomi's stepfather were non-religious because they did not rise to the extent of demanding compliance of other family members. Her stepfather, as with the author's father-in-law, merely followed the lead of other Japanese and what Japanese culture prescribed. He did not disrupt the social order, but worked within the national holidays provided by the government to perform such activities. This differed from her father whose violence caused the family stress, for which his wife and mother were forced to perform a holy intervention. This eventually escalated to the point of registering for a special blessing and the purchase of artifacts to appease evil spirits. Nozomi used the words 'religion' and 'non-religion' in much the same way as the Japanese—

to epistemologically qualify her fathers' actions as being abnormal and incongruent with the natural flow of Japanese life.

Kenta's understanding of 'religion' also was conditioned on how it fit into his family's behavior. His story was unusual, however, because his stepfather was raised Catholic. Nonetheless, both he and his stepfather exemplified many of the controversies indicative in assigning the term 'religion'. Remember that Kenta was raised in the Philippines at a Catholic school. He also attended Mass with his mother for several years upon moving to Japan. These acts gave him rudimentary knowledge of Catholicism. Despite this, he fought against his mother's desire that he attend church. For Kenta, his attendance at church shifted from being an expression of his Filipino-ness, to being something unattractively 'religious'. After years of being surrounded by Japanese people in and out of school, Kenta came to associate his family's heritage as Catholic in much the same way the Japanese associate themselves with Buddhism. Kenta and his Japanese stepfather would attend weddings and funerals when they were offered at a church. They may even attend a Mass at the behest of Kenta's mother. However, this did not make them Catholic (at least from Kenta's perspective), and it certainly did not make them 'religious'. For Kenta, the link between Catholicism and 'religion' had to do with the Catholic congregation and church attendance. He referred to his mother as 'religious' because she would attend church in spite of his weekend basketball games. It did not matter whether she left her two sons at home alone to attend. This level of church commitment was what came to Kenta's mind when he thought of 'religion,' and the reason why he believed himself to be 'non-religious'.

Finally, we have Ryuji, the interlocutor closest to dissonant acculturation. Ryuji did not spend any significant period of his life in the Philippines. He did not speak Filipino, he had no friends from church, and remembered very little about his time there. His early flight from Yamagoe Church reflected a kind of "childhood amnesia" that Shinskey (2021) claims derives from the discontinuation of an activity before the age of seven or eight. For him, church was a different world his mother attended *at the expense* of time spent with family. In his childhood, she spent Sundays at church and not at his soccer games. This made it seem like church kept her from fully participating in family activities. "When I was young," he told me, "I saw my mother going to church and praying in front of a statue of Jesus Christ before going to bed. I questioned what she was doing, believing in something not of this world." Ryuji questioned his mother's activities by referring to them as 'religious', while at the same time, situating himself closer to the actions of his father.

"My father is non-religious," he told me. However, being 'non-religious', according to Ryuji, included the purchase of amulets at Shinto shrines or the veneration of ancestors in front of a home Buddhist altar (*butsudan*)—both actions his father performed. For Ryuji, his father's actions were not 'religious' because they were not done apart from family expectations. Ryuji's father certainly did not ask for days off work to attend shrines. Nor did he invite relatives over to pay respects to the ancestors on a weekday. In the eyes of Ryuji, his father's actions were not 'religion' because he did them during holidays set aside for their performance. Such was not the case at all with his mother and her Catholicism.

In the above four ethnographic accounts, the congregational nature of church activity challenged family commitment within the Filipino–Japanese household. It also challenged the schedules of school and more personal activities, such as playing sports with friends. The Catholic requirement of believers to attend Mass weekly creates a demand on them and their families that Japanese society does not tolerate. This is why Linda has to ask for special permission to have Sundays off or why Maria tells her friends that doing things on Sunday mornings is off-limits. The idea of a Sabbath day or a time reserved for congregational activity that trumps work, school, or pleasure is foreign to most Japanese. It is this 'foreignness' that makes the actions of Filipino mothers 'religious' and why so many Filipino–Japanese children leave the Catholic Church, a community that personifies this foreignness.

## 9. ‘Religion’ and Acculturation

It is common for many Filipinos to become more devoted Catholics in Japan than when they were in the Philippines. This is especially the case when their children are young because the Catholic Mass and the church congregation provide an ethnic and diasporic community that is convenient for transmitting foreign culture. This is exemplified in the large numbers of Filipino–Japanese children who have been baptized Catholic. Baptism is a promise from the Filipino mother (and sometimes her Japanese husband) to raise the child in the parish congregation. This promise, however, is often made in ignorance of the heavy acculturation their children can succumb to as residents in Japan. Part of this acculturation is a conflict: the mother’s church as something dangerous, scary, and foreign vis-a-vis the father’s mainstream Japanese culture. How these terms are applied in the Filipino–Japanese family exemplifies this fact.

It could be argued that, in our high-paced, ever-changing world, it is essential that people from different parts of the globe accept a common definition of terms to expediate communication. It might also be said that the Japanese have certain religious proclivities that must be acknowledged or that the Japanese need to adopt a term like ‘lived religion’ so they can communicate with followers of other ‘religions’ around the globe. Such an argument might claim this to be the only successful path for interreligious dialogue. As good-intentioned as such an argument might be, it would ignore the fact that ‘religion’ and ‘non-religion’ are relatively new terms with no universal application.

The ethnographic accounts in this study have shown that ‘religion’ to the Japanese is not conditioned on some perverted sense crafted to their own liking. Rather, ‘religion’ in Japan is different from the Western notions because Japan has chosen to define ‘religion’ differently. This is not to claim Japan is special in some *Nihonjinron*[13] sense, but simply that ‘religion’ is specifically contextualized into the Japanese social landscape. This has had real-life consequences for Japan’s Filipino resident population who find themselves without the helpful hand of their church congregation to raise their children. If mutual understanding is to be had, what is and is not ‘religion’ cannot be taken at face value. The congregational bias associated with ‘religion’ and its ensuing repercussions must be acknowledged. Without doing so, Filipino or Japanese parents might unknowingly pass beliefs and practices onto the next generation in unintended ways because they see ‘religion’ or ‘non-religion’ in acts where others may not. This has been one of the causes behind Filipino–Japanese children’s flight from the Catholic Church, dissonant acculturation, and the loss of the kind of hybrid identity Japan so desperately needs.

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**Data Availability Statement:** Not applicable.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

## Notes

[1] Thus, in the following, ‘religion’ is referred to in semi-quotation marks as geographically, historically, and culturally dependent.

[2] This study focuses exclusively on Filipino women married to Japanese men. Discussing the inverse is beyond the scope of this paper.

[3] “Linda” is a pseudonym, as well as all other proper names used in this paper.

[4] Catholicism, while not being the only form of Christianity Filipinos are involved with, continues to be the most prominent (see Miura (2015) for examples of Filipino Protestant Churches).

[5] By this, Horii refers to the 1960s and its renaissance of new ‘religions’, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and many other forms of spirituality and philosophies that challenged the Christian status quo.

[6] The Showa era lasted from 1926 to 1989.

[7] The Tale of the Heike was an epic that depicted the struggle for the control of Japan, culminating in the Genpei war (1180–1185). This is a classic text and required reading in Japanese public schools.

[8] The Reiwa period began on 1 May 2019.

[9] The emperor is considered the head of Shinto. Despite this, oftentimes, public funds are used to support cultural or national acts with 'religious' origins. Depending on how these are defined, they could pose serious problems for ideas of separation of 'religion' and government.

[10] Yasukuni Shrine is a Shinto shrine most famous for its controversial burial of Japanese war dead and visits by Prime Ministers to honor these dead.

[11] The intention here is to highlight the contrast of how the ordinary Japanese categorize Zen Buddhism as 'culture' as opposed to 'religion'. This is in spite of the fact that Zen Buddhism is usually assumed to be 'religion' in academic discourse.

[12] 'ates' is Tagalog for 'aunt', as either a relative or a neighbor.

[13] *Nihonjinron* is a genre of literature, albeit written or spoken, that attempts to explain who are the Japanese. Incidentally, this has been heavily critiqued for being nationally and culturally essentialistic by scholars too numerous to mention here.

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