

Geographical Study of Religious Activities and their
Roles in the International Migration Processes:
A Case Study of Christian Church in Japan and the
Republic of Korea

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Abstract

As international migration expands and diversifies, adaptation to the host society, formation and transformation of community activities, and the impact of the migration experience on migrants' everyday lives have become important issues. The role and characteristics of religious activities also are heavily discussed in this context. Research on the relationship between international migration and religious activities shows that migrants' participation in religious communities has created diverse roles in urban spaces of North America and Europe. However, the study of geography of religion has not focused on the social and religious backgrounds of individual migrants and differences in their perceptions of religious activities, or the role of religious facilities or activities in the daily lives of migrants has not yet been examined. With the challenges faced by host societies and trends in other ethnic organizations, it is necessary to understand the relationship between religion and the everyday lives of migrants.

In this study, I focus on the relationship between the everyday life of migrants in host societies and their visits to and activities in religious facilities. Based on the kinds of existing social services, such as fellowships, language or religious education, and social welfare, I chose activities of Catholic churches in Japan and Protestant churches in Korea as case studies. With the aim of evangelizing the growing number of migrants, these religious organizations established worship services and foreigner churches and expanded the scope of their activities to house migrant communities. International migrants in East Asia have been diversifying since the 1990s. In addition to the "production-oriented migration" (PM) that aims to shift their social class through economic activities and settlement, "consumption-oriented migration" (CM) that aims to experiential consumption such as international marriage or foreign education, has been expanding since 1990. Based on the above, we selected Filipino migrants living in the southern part of Ibaraki Prefecture as PM subjects, and Japanese migrants living in the Gyeonggi region, Republic of Korea (ROK) as CM subjects, and analyzed their day-to-day lives and religious activities.

Analysis of the Filipino migrants revealed that social relationships among Filipinos were established in the Catholic Church at the beginning of their arrival in Japan. A shared connection with the religious culture of their home countries and the dispersed residential patterns and lifestyles in the settlement process influenced their extension of mutual support. In addition, the social relationships thus formed continued to occupy an important position in the everyday lives of the Filipinos after long-term settlement and played a significant role in the cultural and social aspects. In the case of the Japanese migrants, Japanese churches and Japanese-language worship services have expanded their activities since the 1990s because of evangelism and support for international migrants in the host society in Korea. The purpose of Japanese migrants had diversified, and "community centers" were urgently required where they could participate continuously. Field surveys showed that the community in the religious facilities was formed due to the religious backgrounds of the members and their active involvement. While dealing with problems in social relationships and linguistic-cultural issues, Japanese migrants remained connected with the activities in religious facilities. Formation of social relations and ethnic identity and their maintenance took place through such activities.

New findings in this study are as follows. First, the expansion and diversification of international migration in East Asia has gradually led to the need for platforms for the communal activities of migrants in Japan and ROK. In the case of Filipino migrants as PM, the migration process, based on the "migration system" have rendered the activities of ethnic groups in the host society weak. In the case of Japanese migrants as CM, multiple ethnic organizations coexist due to the existence of diversified motivations and residences, and it has emphasized the selectivity of individual migrants.

Among the various sectors involved in the inclusion of international migrants, Christian churches have been actively involved in East Asia since the 1990s, and a migrant community has formed within the churches. Such religious communities are composed of migrants with various backgrounds in the migration process and residential choice. Two notable case studies are a migrant couple of different backgrounds who have settled in the host society and aim for permanent residence, and interns or foreign students who seek to return to their home countries. In interviews, migrants expressed an understanding of the issues in establishing and expanding social relationships, and cultural adaptation and communication in the host society. Therefore, ethnic events and communication mediated by religious activity provided opportunities to maintain transnational connectivity with their home countries.

Religious facilities have cultural and social roles, which influenced the migrants' continued participation in religious activities. In the initial stages of their visit, activities promoted communication and the formation of social relationships among the migrants. As the migrants deepened their religious commitment, the community activities took on a religious meaning, and they gained importance and respect in day-to-day life. Through these processes, the existence of religious facilities was internalized by the migrants, and a community formed in which migrants with a variety of purposes were loosely connected.

In Japan's geography of religion, religious organizations and facilities have been the main objects of discussion, while individual believers have been held to be subordinate elements. In this study, however, I focused not only on religious facilities but also on the conditions of individual international migrants and their problems in local communities. In the study of religion, the "individualization," "privatization," and "post-secularization" of religion has been discussed since 2000. A discussion of religious facilities and communities through a geographical lens will open conversations on religion itself from a wide range of factors.

Keyword: Religious Activities, International Migration, Christian Church,
Community Activities, Social Relationship, Tokyo Metropolitan Area (Japan),
Gyeonggi Region (Korea)