

Hisako Omori, *From Situated Selves to the Self: Conversion and Personhood among Roman Catholics in Tokyo*

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In Japan, social relations can be a hassle, requiring you to know the age and social position of someone before deciding what level of honorific expression you use to address them. Language is merely one example of how self is constructed in relation to the other, not independent from them but interdependent with them. Some Japanese

Christians use religion as a way out of this interdependence by replacing the gaze of Japan's Confucian-based society with that of Christian God. This switcherydo relieves the stress of relationships by making the Christian feel like "barrel hoops have come off" (82), leaving them freer to make their own decisions. In her ethnographic fieldwork in one of Japan's largest Catholic parishes in Tokyo, Hisako Omori shows how her informants rediscover themselves by allowing God to take the place of the relational self they had once considered normal.

Omori's study makes a valuable contribution to Christian studies in Japan by showing how her informants maintain their Christian faith without disrupting the relationships with society. They achieve this by resituating themselves above the gaze of society (*sekken*) and by trusting in a higher power. Omori's informants talk about how becoming Christian has given them a new view of life, but this view has not required that they change their daily actions. They can still dress as they had before conversion, perform the same family-centered religious acts, eat the same food, and drink the same beverages. Some did not even reveal they were Christian to their own family (chapter 4).

It is not Omori's goal to judge her informants but rather to make their choices palatable to the reader. She achieves this by describing how their choice of conversion can be understood as a historical consequence that begins with Roman Catholicism's support of Japanese women's education (145). Her informants stopped pursuing religion after graduation for work and marriage, but they came back to it later in life to germinate the seeds that had been planted. Omori explains how prior exposure to Christianity and positive relations with clergy serve as reasons her informants chose the Roman Catholic Church in Japan (RCCJ). Fewer men than women study at Christian "mission schools," creating a gender bias in church circles. Add to this men's responsibilities to maintain social relations with their colleagues and family, and you start to see why so many Japanese men struggle to tell others the truth about their religious beliefs. This is epitomized by some men "stealing heaven" (153) by waiting until their deathbed to convert to Christianity.

For readers curious about religion in Japan, Omori explains why fear of social retribution influences the degree to which Christians reveal their new selves. It seems contradictory for Omori's informants to claim they feel Christianity has liberated them from the gaze of society only to admit they hide their faith from those around them. This is unless you understand that is exactly the deal Japan made with religion at the beginning of the Meiji era when it adopted the theory of freedom of belief. Accordingly, the individual was free to believe whatever they desired, but acting on this belief was regulated by family and society. In *Invention of Religion in Japan*, Jason Ānanda Josephson describes this "belief vs. action" dichotomy as "a fake Cartesian idea of the mind as an autonomous unit, such that an individual's belief and practice can be fundamentally distinguished" from each other (Josephson 2012, 234). Nilta Dias (2014) contextualizes this dichotomy showing how teachers and classmates constrain children from freely expressing their beliefs in public. Similarly, as Japanese enter the workplace and become parents, the watching eye of society discourages religious acts, compelling adults to hide their religious beliefs. Omori explains how this led her informants to psychologically bifurcate their lives into personal and social "selves."

I confess I was troubled by the lack of context about the parishes where Omori obtained her interviews. Regardless of the views of her informants, Catholicism clearly requires believers to attend Mass and be involved with their parish community. Omori

is straightforward in the introduction, warning the reader that her ethnographic interviews are in no way representative of the entire multicultural RCCJ, but I was surprised at even passing references about parish activities being omitted. This may be due to the selective nature of her interviews, but I have an inkling it is more linked to her informant's inability to sacrifice their weekends to take part in parish activities, a point I have raised elsewhere concerning Filipino-Japanese children and their participation in Mass (LeMay 2018). These women have time and knowledge of Japanese culture and language to make meaningful contributions to parish life if they felt so inclined. No doubt the RCCJ would appreciate help with bookkeeping, liturgical preparation, intercultural dialogue, or any number of practical matters that the loss of Japanese membership has made difficult.

Despite discarding their relational self, adopting Christianity has not given them the social power needed to oppose the expectations of society (185). Without the ability to come out as Christian, their alternative has been to adopt a personal interpretation of self. This seems like a consolation prize and the next best thing to a faith they can act upon publicly without fear of social reprisal. I hope Omori's research will help the RCCJ and Japanese society understand that the Christian self, described by her, falls short of a Catholic ideal where the believer is free not only to believe in what they feel to be true but also to act publicly upon what they know to be right.

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