

The Philippines as a Center for Clerical Formation in Asia:

A Case Study of Filipino Language Schools for Clergy and the Mobilities of Clerical Probationers

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【Abstract】 Research was conducted on language schools in the Philippines that teach English and local languages such as Tagalog to non-Filipino clergy. Classes and other activities of three schools were observed, and statistical data about the students was analyzed. Among the schools studied is the one that is a pioneer language school of this kind. It was founded as a Protestant institution in 1961 and originally taught Philippine languages exclusively to foreign Protestant missionaries. However, it eventually started accepting other students and also introduced English teaching. These changes led to the increase of students who were Catholic clergy to the point where they formed a majority, a state of affairs which has continued up to the present not only in the pioneer school but also in the other case schools. Regarding the recent trend of those clergy students, the statistical data suggests that those from some Asian countries (Myanmar, Vietnam, China, Indonesia, and South Korea) account for two thirds or more of all the students and that more of them study English than Tagalog. They have to study English presumably because they are still clerical probationers (still under formation) and will undergo theological education or formation later, in which English is the medium of instruction. Relatedly, the data also reveals that most clerical probationers in the school are from the above mentioned Asian countries. This composition of students seems to reflect the recent inflow of clerical probationers into the Philippines from nearby countries. In this light, we can draw an alternative map of East and Southeast Asia, where the Philippines is not a sending country but a receiving country and serves as a center of religious formation in the region.

keywords: Catholic Education, Catholic Vocations in Asia, Migration to the Philippines

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1. Introduction

Most popular language schools in the Philippines are English schools that train local Filipinos for jobs in call centers or ones for Koreans and Japanese. Some of the students of the latter schools, mostly Koreans, plan to study in a university in the US afterwards. Besides these major ones, there are relatively minor language schools that teach mostly clergy¹ such as priests and nuns who have moved to the Philippines from abroad. These minor language schools are the focus of this study.

Many migrants need to acquire a new language upon arrival in their destination country, and some of them go to language schools for that purpose. This is also the case for the clergy who have moved to the Philippines. Many of them go to a language school for studying either a local Philippine language or English, which is an official language in the Philippines and a medium of instruction in universities as well. By examining these language schools, especially the trend of the students there, this study aims to gain perspective and provide insight on the recent moving of clergy toward the Philippines.

In the language schools examined in this study, most students are Catholic clergy from East or Southeast Asia who belonged to a congregation. Many among them were still probationers, who had not yet taken a lifelong vow and therefore, were still under formation as clergy. They are to undergo the formation in the Philippines.

Interestingly, the flow of these clergy is incoming into the Philippines, and its direction is opposite to that of the flows of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) and emigrants, which have been the major focus of the Philippine related migration studies. It is worthy of note that, in this flow, the Philippines is the destination of the Catholic clergy from nearby countries, which stands in contrast to its position as a sending country in the international labor force movement.

2. Three Cases of Language Schools

As far as the researcher has been able to ascertain, the clergy, especially Catholic regular clergy, who have newly arrived in the Philippines choose a language school from among only a handful of schools with a Christian atmosphere for their study. They do not go to other language schools such as those that accept non-religious Koreans or Japanese. It is probably because their superiors want them to study not in those “secular” schools but in a school with a Christian atmosphere. In fact, some convents send new clergy to the same school every time they arrive in the Philippines. Put simply, those convents are “regular customers” of the school. Accordingly, most students in those schools are clergy.

A mixed-methods case study research was conducted in three of those language schools by the researcher², and the result is presented in this chapter. Real names are not used for the schools, but one alphabet letter is used instead for each of them.

2-1. School C : Pioneer School for Clergy

School C claims itself a pioneer in the teaching of Philippine languages to non-Filipinos, which is probably true. It offers English and Tagalog classes regularly, and Ilocano and Cebuano classes upon request.³

The school published its own Tagalog textbooks, which have been used in its classes. The currently used

ones are revised editions, which were issued in 1995. The teaching method and the curriculum of Tagalog in many other schools and textbooks follow these School C textbooks. In this respect, it is safe to say that school C made a significant contribution to the early development of the local language education in the Philippines. The two other language schools described below were both founded by former teachers of school C. They resemble School C in various aspects of school operation such as classroom layout, which suggests that they learnt a lot from School C. It is indeed a forerunner of the schools for Philippine languages.

According to its website, School C was founded in Metro Manila in 1961. Since its foundation, School C has been an inter-sectoral Protestant institution, and at the beginning, it taught local Philippine languages exclusively to Protestant missionaries from abroad. Although, some time later, it opened its doors to non-missionaries, such as businessmen, embassy personnel, and university students. It still remains a Christian school. Among 9 board members, a majority are supposed to be representatives of Protestant denominations or institutions. Besides, School C held a branch for some time in the past in a building of a Union Church in another area of Metro Manila, which can be deemed as a visible affiliation of the school with the Protestant Church.⁴

In 1972, School C introduced English into its curriculum, which was its major turning point as a language school. Since then, many of its students have been studying English, and a certain part of its teachers have been qualified only as an English teacher. (While all the teachers of School C are qualified to teach English, only a limited number of teachers who have undergone proper training are qualified to teach a Philippine language such as Tagalog. This is also the case in the other two schools described below). The introduction of English teaching also brought about a change in a religious aspect of the school because students other than Protestant missionaries increased in the school. Among them, Catholic clergy were the most prominent, outnumbering nonreligious businessmen and overseas students.

At present, School C is in Quezon City in Metro Manila. It is located in a quiet residential village with gates that check incoming cars. The school building is an average size house in the neighborhood, which contains four classrooms, a faculty room, an administrative office, a director's room, an audiovisual room, an activity hall, a library, and an accommodation space for a caretaker and his family. It underwent renovations, and its layout got changed several times. The four classrooms are divided by wooden screens into some 20 spaces for lessons. Each space usually accommodates one teacher and one to four students, and is equipped with a table, chairs, and a whiteboard hung on a wall or a screen. Compared to the other two schools, it is larger and better furnished, yet its building is old and is suffering from a leaky roof. Besides, the sound of heavy rain on the roof oftentimes interrupts classes. It also suffered from inundation caused by torrential rain in 2010.

There are full-time and part-time teachers. The former go to the school from Monday to Friday while the latter attend only at the time they have classes, mostly in the morning. Some of the part-time teachers do not go to school for a long time when the school has only few students. There are oftentimes new hires and turnovers both among full-time and part-time teachers.⁵ The researcher counted 6 to 8 full-time teachers during the research visit in 2010 to 2011 besides part-time teachers, who seemed nearly equal in number.⁶ In-service trainings for teaching skill enhancement and for Tagalog teaching mentioned above are occasionally held in the afternoon when classes are few.

In spite of the high turnover, a certain portion of the teachers remain Protestant with relatively higher rate than that of the population in Metro Manila, where Catholics dominate. In addition, all the three who held the post of director during the research visit were Protestant pastors, and most of supervisory teachers were also Protestant followers who were devout church goers and not followers in name only. These seem to reflect the religious standpoint of the above mentioned board, which exercises the authority over personnel appointment of teachers. On the other hand, other teachers are all Catholic, although some of them are not church goers. However, it seemed that the teachers seldom considered the difference of sect among themselves, which is also the case in their relationships with students.

Among the students, the most were Catholic regular clergy from Asian countries who were still probationers. Although no numerical data was provided by the school, many of them were apparently from Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar, Indonesia, China, or South Korea. They were mostly in their twenties. Usually, a group of around 3 to 5 from the same convent attended classes together. In general, they had classes for 3 hours a day, from Monday to Friday, for 3 to 6 months.

Some Catholic congregations seemed to assign their probationers from the above-mentioned countries to the Philippines and give them formation there. However, they need to study English beforehand for the preparation for their studying at a theological institution in the Philippines as well as for their survival there. Thus, some congregations make it a rule to send their probationers to School C who had newly arrived in the Philippines. For this reason, the same habits of the congregations were seen almost every time the researcher visited the school.

There are also some Catholic clergy who have already taken a lifelong vow, that is to say, “full-fledged” clergy such as priests and nuns. They also belong to a congregation, which have assigned them to the Philippines from abroad. Some of them study not English but Tagalog or any one of local Philippine languages.

There are also a few Protestant pastors among the students, who also study a local Philippine language for their missionary works. Although the language teaching to them was the original purpose of the School at the time of its foundation, they are no longer majority among the students.

Among few nonreligious students, a certain portion consists of students and researchers from abroad, and especially, Japanese students were always seen in school C during the research visit. They belonged to Tokyo University of Foreign Studies or former Osaka University of Foreign Studies and were studying in the University of the Philippines (UP) at that time for a one-year exchange program. Different from the other students, who attended School C every day, those Japanese students attended only twice or three times a week when they did not have classes in UP. Similarly, a number of Japanese researchers studied Tagalog or Ilocano in School C before when they were still students in UP or other universities in the Philippines. In addition to those who belonged to academic institutions, some NGO members studied Tagalog in School C for their activities in the Philippines.

Lastly, there are some students, including Japanese, who stay in the Philippines only for studying English in School C. However, the school does not conduct any particular campaign to acquire these kinds of students. Most of them have chosen School C because of the recommendation by their acquaintances who studied in School C before.

Extra-curricular religious activities are more often seen in School C than the other two schools. It holds

an activity called “integration” every Friday at one of the morning recesses, which was extended from its original 10 minutes to 30 minutes. Worship and recreation alternate weekly. The school staff and the students who attend the school at that time participated in it. The worships are non-denominational and students who are clergy including Catholic priests offer prayers and conduct services then. Short prayers are also offered before and after the recreations. In addition, a simple graduation ceremony is held at this “integration” time for students, if any, who are to finish their schooling on that week. At the graduation of clergy students, their superiors of the convents are invited.

Around Christmas time, a party is held with a worship at the beginning of the program. Although the other two schools have two weeks vacation at Christmas time, the vacation of School C is as short as one week presumably because the school considers requests from nonreligious students.

2-2. School I : Newly Rising School

Several language schools were reportedly founded by former teachers of School C. Among them, two had been found so far by the researcher. Both were smaller than School C. One has survived to this day and seems to be operating successfully, while the other had already been closed in 2006 after about 10 years operation. The foundations of these schools indicates the multiple development of the language schools that originated from School C.

School I was founded in 1990 by a married couple, both of whom had taught at School C earlier. The husband passed away in 2013, and since then the wife has been the director of the school. The school teaches only English and Tagalog but not other Philippine languages.

School I does not have its own property nor building but rents a room of an office complex, which stands near School C in Quzon City. In 2014, the school had 4 spaces for classes by dividing the rented room by screens, then in 2015, it moved to a larger room in the same complex, where it made 8 spaces. This implies the stable development of the school at the time of this writing although their new room is still much smaller than the premises of School C. On the other hand, the school does not seem to aim to expand its operation, for the incumbent director said that the school was not trying to acquire more students because “if many applicants come to the school at one time, the school cannot accept them all”. This remark also suggests her confidence that the school can expect constant acquisition of students. As mentioned later, those students are Catholic regular clergy.

As with School C, there are both full-time and part-time teachers in School I. In 2016, School I had three full-time teachers and two part-time teachers besides the director, who also taught. Notably two of the three full-time teachers had transferred from School C in the previous 3 years. It is probably because many Filipinos find jobs through personal networks, and thus, the one who first transferred from School C to School I acted as a catalyst for the following transfers. Besides, many teachers left School C around 2015.⁷ In-service trainings for teachers seem to be held more often and in a more organized way in School I than in School C.

Almost all the teachers of School C are Catholic, except one Protestant part-time teacher who was seen in 2015. The incumbent president is also Catholic and two clerks are as well. It is probably not because the school prefers Catholic teachers, but it just reflects the population ratio by religion in Metro Manila, and the

school hires teachers in accordance with their teaching ability and experience.

School I is characterized by its students who are almost all Catholic clergy. Among 64 new enrollees in 2013, only 2 were non-clergy, who were recorded as “lay”. Likewise, only 2 among 74 new enrollees in 2012 and 6 among 67 in 2011 were recorded as “lay”. The remaining were all recorded as clergy, such as “priest”, “brother”, and “sister” or by stages of clerical probation, such as “postulant”, “novice”, and “aspirant”. The detailed categorization like this in the students’ record implies that the school expects clergy as primary customers. Thus, although religion is not mentioned in its brochure, the everyday scenes of the school are like those of Catholic institutions, where priests in Roman collars, nuns wearing habits, and aspirants wearing crosses attend classes.

School I does not hold religious extra-curricular activities weekly, yet it has parties before Christmas vacation and on its anniversary in September. The writer attended the Christmas party in 2014 and the anniversary party in 2015. Both started with mass, which were celebrated by priests who were students at each time. After the mass, students gave performances of the local dances or songs of their home countries while refreshments were served. The mentors of students and the superiors of their convents were invited to the parties in the same way as the graduation of School C. On the other hand, School I does not hold a graduation ceremony. In addition to these annual ceremonies, the school celebrates birthdays of students by serving refreshments during a morning recess, which is extended for that purpose. On those occasions, a student who is a priest or a brother is requested to say a blessing. However, it should not be considered as a religious aspect of the school, but as a natural course of events in the situation where all those there are Catholic.

2-3. School A : Short-lived School

Similar to School I, School A was founded by a former School C teacher. She was the director for the entire time and also taught classes there. Both School I and School A are under individual management while School A was smaller than School I in number of both teachers and students, and also in facilities. English, Tagalog, and Ilocano were taught in School A. The School was closed in 2006 because of financial problems and personal reasons of the director.

School A operated in an office complex in the same way as School I. It was located near the main campus of Ateneo de Manila University, a prestigious Catholic institution in the Philippines. During the research visit, the school rented two adjoining rooms, which were divided into five spaces for classes.

In 2005, there were four teachers besides the director. All of them were employed as part-time. One of them had been teaching longer than the others in School C and also had teaching experience in other language schools. The other three had no experience as a language teacher before School A, and their experiences in School A were only one to two years. However, one of the three had taught in a public school before. The school also hired one part-time accountant.

All the teachers were Protestant. Three of them belonged to the same church with the director. It is not clear whether the director selected devout church goers for her school or the only network available to her for recruiting teachers was the church, yet it is safe to say that she was not able to secure capable and experienced teachers because she had to select from only a limited number of candidates. Besides, no in-service training was seen to be held for those unexperienced teachers.

Similar to the other two schools, most students of School A were Catholic regular clergy, including probationers. The director constantly communicated with the convents that had sent their members to the school before. She was apparently more aware than the School I director of the fact that the Catholic congregations were the most important customers, and accordingly, she put in effort to acquire students constantly from them.

On the other hand, some of the students were not Catholic clergy. Among them were Protestant missionaries, who studied Tagalog or Ilocano. Besides, taking advantage of its close location to the Ateneo de Manila University, School A acquired students from among foreign students and visiting researchers of the university, which can also be said to be a result of the director's effort. Some nonreligious NGO members also studied Tagalog in School A.

As an extra-curricular activity, the school organized a day trip every year on its anniversary. Its purpose was to provide opportunities for social bonding, and so, various recreational activities were held on that day. When the researcher observed the trip in 2006, many clergy who had been students of the school before were also invited, which suggests that it was also an effort of "customer retention" of the school. In addition, a graduation ceremony was observed once in 2005, when the school was still financially stable.

3. Data Analysis

The above-mentioned development of the language schools for foreign clergy in the Philippines has been possible because of the continuous flow of clergy from abroad, who are prospective students of the schools. Recently, the majority of them are Catholic regular clergy. Through the analysis of data provided by School I, this paper looks into the recent trend of those clergy, especially their countries of origin and purposes of moving to the Philippines.

Personal information of students who enrolled in School I from 2011 to 2013 was provided, which includes nationality, language studied (English or Tagalog), belonging congregation, and in case of probationers, stage of formation. As already mentioned, almost all the students of the school are Catholic clergy.

Table 1 shows major nationalities of students. New students came from more than 20 countries between 2011 and 2013, but students only from the seven countries in the table newly enrolled every year while new enrollees from any other country during the 3 years were only 4 or less. Among the seven countries, the top five (Indonesia, China, Vietnam, South Korea, and Myanmar) outnumbered the other two every year, as shown in the table. Besides, the students from those five countries accounted for two thirds to 80 percent of the entire student population. All of them are East or Southeast Asian countries. School I is apparently occupied by these Asian students.

Table 1 also shows the number of students by language studied at the school. In total, more students studied English than Tagalog, with a proportion of 70 to 90 percent approximately. The same holds for the above 5 countries. In fact, except for South Korea, the proportion of any of the four countries is higher than that of the entire students every year. It is worth noting that this distribution of students is far different from that of School C at the time of its foundation.

As most students are clergy, they are assigned to School I by their superiors. The purposes of their studying (or more precisely, being ordered to study) English or Tagalog are presumably the following:

Table 1. Number of students of major nationalities by language studied, School I, 2011-2013

Nationality	2013		2012		2011		Language
Total	64	44	74	56	67	59	English
		17		17		7	Tagalog
		3		1		1	Both
Indonesia	6	6	10	9	24	24	English
		0		1		0	Tagalog
		0		0		0	Both
China	8	7	9	7	20	19	English
		1		2		1	Tagalog
		0		0		0	Both
Vietnam	13	12	14	14	4	4	English
		0		0		0	Tagalog
		1		0		0	Both
South Korea	9	3	12	8	6	4	English
		5		3		2	Tagalog
		1		1		0	Both
Myanmar	6	6	6	6	1	1	English
		0		0		0	Tagalog
		0		0		0	Both
Spain	3	1	2	1	2	2	English
		2		1		0	Tagalog
		0		0		0	Both
India	3	1	1	0	2	0	English
		2		1		2	Tagalog
		0		0		0	Both

Source: Record of School I

– Students who study Tagalog need to be fluent in the language in order that they can survive in and interact with a local community where they will engage in their mission, such as education, social welfare, and pastoral work.

– Students who study English have to do so because they will later undergo theological education or formation as clergy, and their medium of instruction is English,⁸

The students from the above five countries mostly studied English, and therefore, their purpose of moving to the Philippines is likely the latter, to undergo formation there.

In this regard, the students who are clerical probationers in School I are mostly from the five countries as revealed in Table 2, which presents the number of probationers from the five countries as well as the number of all the probationers. Those from the five countries accounted for about 80 percent of the total each year.

However, it must be noted that not all clergy from the five countries are probationers. Table 3 shows the number of clergy students by nationality and whether the clergyperson had taken a lifelong vow or not yet (that is to say, “full-fledged” clergy or probationers) . It reveals a difference of proportions of full-fledged clergy and probationers among the five countries. In the case of Myanmar students, almost all are probationers while the proportions are relatively smaller among Vietnamese and Chinese students. Furthermore, among Indonesian and Korean students, full-fledged clergy outnumber probationers every year. Put simply, the ratio of probationers are relatively higher among students from Myanmar, Vietnam, and China than the other two countries.

Table 2. Number of Clergy Students from 5 major countries who had not yet taken a lifelong vow, School I, 2011-2013

	2013	2012	2011
Total in the School	22	25	18
Subtotal of the 5 countries	17	21	15
Vietnam	8	9	1
China	4	2	8
Myanmar	5	6	0
Indonesia	0	1	6
South Korea	0	2	0

Source: Record of School I

Table 3. Number of clergy students from 5 major countries by whether the clergyperson had taken a lifelong vow or not yet, School I, 2011-2013

Nationality	2013	2012	2011	had taken a lifelong vow or not yet
Myanmar	5	6	0	had not yet taken
	1	0	1	had taken
Vietnam	8	9	1	had not yet taken
	5	5	3	had taken
China	4	2	8	had not yet taken
	4	5	9	had taken
Indonesia	0	1	6	had not yet taken
	5	8	16	had taken
South Korea	0	2	0	had not yet taken
	9	10	6	had taken

Source: Record of School I

Admittedly data examined here are limited, nonetheless the above composition of School I students seems to reflect the recent religious situation in the Philippines, that is, the inflow of considerable number of clerical probationers from some Asian countries.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

It is worth discussing here factors which lead the above mentioned recent moving of clergy to the Philippines from some Asian countries although the researcher has not yet been able to study thoroughly the situation in those countries as well as the Philippines.

The Philippines, the receiving country probably appears to many superiors of congregations in nearby countries to be an ideal place where they should send their probationers for formation because it is a preeminent Catholic country in the region, with many prestigious theological institutions. Besides, it has a long history of clergy formation, which started as early as 15th century, when a pontifical university was established there. Many congregations set up their regional headquarters there as well.

Turning to the sending countries, more vocations have reportedly been observed recently in countries such as Myanmar, Vietnam and China, where vocations were few in the past. It is allegedly because many congregations began to recruit in countries other than major Catholic countries like Europe, where vocations

were many before but recently declined. However, in those new countries, proper religious formation is presumably not always available as of now. Besides, in some of those countries, national policy toward religion imposes constraints on religious activities including education. For these reasons, some congregations in those countries find it difficult to provide proper formation to their probationers and thus, assign them to another country like the Philippines with the expectation of their undertaking more suitable formation there.

These conditions in both receiving and sending countries are likely to have led to the above mentioned trend of moving of clerical probationers to the Philippines. It should be stressed that the direction of this moving is opposite to the one of OFWs and Filipino emigrants, who have been a major focus of migration studies related to the Philippines. By turning to the recent moving of clergy, we can draw an alternative map of East and Southeast Asia, where the Philippines is not a sending country but a receiving country and serves as a center of religious formation in the region. Regarding the language schools studied here, they play an essential role in this moving, that is, making the newly arrived clergy ready to undergo the formation by teaching English, which is the medium of instruction in the formation.

Before closing this article, it is worth mentioning issues that are beyond the scope of this article but deemed critical in exploring the theme of moving of clergy toward the Philippines. One is clergy who do not need a language school. Among the clergy who have arrived in the Philippines, those who are already fluent in English will not go to a language school but will start undergoing formation at once. Therefore, if only focusing on the language schools, the inflow of clergy from English-speaking countries will be overlooked. Moreover, some congregations may teach English to their probationers from abroad inside their convent instead of using a language school outside as a response to the constant arrival of new probationers in the Philippines. In order to obtain a more comprehensive view of the inflow of clergy into the Philippines, these cases should also be studied in one way or another.

Research on the theological education and formation programs that clergy from abroad undergo in the Philippines is also needed. This article focuses on the language schools where non-Filipino clergy study upon their arrival in the Philippines, but this form of schooling is only preparation for their formation as clergy later. Hence, for the next phase of the study, it is essential to look into the formation of clergy, which is the purpose of their assignment to the Philippines, in order to obtain deeper insight on the moving of clergy.

Notes

- 1 In this article, the term “Catholic clergy” refers to Catholic priests, brothers, and sisters, including their probationers, but it does not include the laity. Brothers and sisters belong to one of congregations. Priests are only male and are authorized to offer Mass and some other sacraments. Some brothers are ordained as a priest while the others are not. On the other hand, “clergy” refers to not only Catholic clergy but also to Protestant pastors and those who assume an equivalent religious role in other sects.
- 2 Major research visits were made in School C from November 2010 to March 2011, in School I from November 2014 to March 2015, and in School A from November 2005 to September 2006. Then, one to three weeks visits for follow-up research were conducted in School C and School I around twice a year until 2017. Besides, interviews with two former School A teachers were conducted in March 2017.
- 3 Tagalog, Cebuano, and Ilocano are the three major local languages of the Philippines. Tagalog is the base of the

national language and most widely used among local languages. The researcher observed classes on Ilocano which were provided to two American Protestant missionaries in November 2010.

- 4 This branch was located in a business district of Metro Manila. When it was closed in 2011, most of the teachers and administrative staff transferred to the main branch in Quezon City.
- 5 The reasons for leaving the school varied from problem of personal relationship to transferring to a job with higher salary. It seems to be same with other work places in the Philippines.
- 6 According to its website, the number of full-time teachers of School C at present was only three, which was far less than the number of 6 to 8 at the time of researcher's visit in 2010. The school seems to have downsized its operations.
- 7 There was an alleged conflict between the teachers and a newly appointed office manager at the time, and some teachers moved to School I. The above mentioned sharp decline in the number of teachers in School C is presumably a result of this conflict.
- 8 A few probationers were ordered to engage in a missionary work in the Philippines as a part of their formation program. In those cases, they studied Tagalog in School I even though they were assigned to the Philippines for the purpose of formation as clergy. On the other hand, some may study English in spite of their purpose of mission in a local community because their local counterparts in the mission are middle-class Filipinos who are fluent in English.

