

Kakure Kirishitan Survivors

oleh Roger Vanzila Muni¹ - Nanzan, Jepang

Abstract:

Artikel ini menguraikan dinamika hidup komunitas-komunitas *KakureKirishitan* (Orang-orang Kristiani Tersembunyi), yang ada di Jepang, seperti di wilayah perkotaan Nagasaki. Digambarkan bagaimana konstruksi-konstruksi spiritual, psiko-religius, dan sosio-kultural mencirikan kehidupan riil dari komunitas-komunitas ini. Teknik etnografi dan observasi yang dipakai oleh penulis dalam risetnya mengungkapkan bahwa orang-orang *Kakure Kirishitan* secara intrinsik dan ekstrinsik memiliki ketahanan spiritual yang mengagumkan: pengalaman-pengalaman psiko-religius, moral Kristiani, dan ikatan historis dengan pendahulu-pendahulu mereka yang sudah meninggal. Komunitas-komunitas ini, dengan tempat-tempat suci dan ritus-ritus keagamaannya, secara sadar memperjuangkan kelangsungan hidup kepercayaan dan praktek-praktek religius mereka di ranah publik; dan pada ranah privat mereka membentuk dan menguatkan lagi gambaran-gambaran komunitas yang sesuai. Analisis ini menegaskan pentingnya pengakuan bahwa berbagi warisan yang sama, identitas, dan memori itu meneguhkan keunikan komunitas mereka, disamping masuknya elemen-elemen khusus dari adat istiadat dan nilai-nilai lokal. Studi ini memberikan alat interpretatif guna menunjukkan bagaimana komponen-komponen religius itu saling memengaruhi; dan ini mencerminkan perjuangan komunitas-komunitas tersebut sampai mencapai kondisi seperti sekarang ini, di satu pihak mereka bisa menyesuaikan diri dan di lain pihak mempertahankan pola-pola tetap dari masa lampau.

Keywords: *KakureKirishitan* survivors, religious constructs, spiritual constructs, sharing, remembering deceased predecessors, Japanese shrine festivals, time-persistent relational patterns, Nagasaki Christians

1. Introduction

Recent developments in the restricted field of *Kakure Kirishitan* (Hidden

-
- 1 Roger Vanzila Muni mengajar antropologi budaya kontemporer di Universitas Nanzan, Jepang. Fokus penelitiannya: praktek-praktek religius dan aspek-aspek sosio-kultural dari *KakureKirishitan* (Orang-orang Kristiani Tersembunyi) dewasa ini. Versi yang lebih luas dan komprehensif dari artikel ini pernah diterbitkan dalam jurnal ilmiah *SwedishMissiological Themes (SMT)* 102/4 (2014): 351-390 (sejak musim gugur tahun 2015 jurnal SMT berganti nama menjadi *Global Christianity Studies in Religion and Society*). Versinya yang lebih ringkas dan telah direvisi diterbitkan dengan judul “*Kakure Kirishitan Survivors*” dalam jurnal ilmiah *Japan Mission Journal* 69/4 (2015: 267-280). Versi terakhir ini, dengan izin penuh, diterbitkan di sini. Hanya saja ada sejumlah tambahan dan sedikit perubahan kecil dilakukan pada artikel ini. Penulis juga menyertakan beberapa gambar lain untuk maksud memberikan ilustrasi kepada pembaca.

Christian) studies have brought renewed interest in what are actually the least distinctive aspects of their experiences and struggles. Here I would like instead to highlight the singularity of some salient socio-cultural, psycho-religious, and spiritual constructs that define and determine KakureKirishitan survivors in urban settings, and to forge a connection between these significant characteristics. The synthesis includes ethnographic data gleaned from Nagasaki settings, namely Shimokurosaki, Shitsu and Wakamatsu on various dates between 2004 and 2015. Three Kakure Kirishitan communities were purposely chosen because of the level of participation in various religious activities and the importance ascribed to religious beliefs, relic veneration, feelings and experiences of connectedness, as well as their association with both relevant adjacent Kirishitan shrines and interconnected nonlocal communities.

Within the sampling strategy adopted, I particularly tried to understand various aspects of their religion and lived experiences from the members' point of view, not merely analyzing them from a third-person perspective. The term 'religion' is used herein to merely denote 'a covenant faith community with teachings and narratives that enhance the search for the sacred and encourage morality' (Dollahite, 1998:5). Five integrated and inter-related themes surveying past and recent research drive the analysis forward. I argue that the specific constructs of KakureKirishitan survivors represent a great common heritage bequeathed to them by their deceased predecessors or righteous ancestors in faith. It is precisely in terms of this precious heritage of socio-cultural, material, moral, psycho-religious, and spiritual values that individual KakureKirishitans have most often been inspired to identify themselves and which has become meaningful today on their continuing spiritual path and in their struggle to remain viable.

2. Common Heritage and Fond Memories

The Roman Catholic Church in Japan, at least in Nagasaki, now has a history of nearly five centuries, beginning with the mission of Francis Xavier and his fellow Jesuits in 1549. After the ban on Christianity from 1614 was lifted in 1873, a sizeable number of believers eventually returned to the Catholic Church. Although the hidden Christian communities have been tolerated by the Japanese State for almost 150 years now, remnants of the communities have continued their separate and partly private life as independent, Christian communities. It appears that the 'hiddenness' has really become part of their continued Christian life and worship.

Particularly intriguing is the question of why remnants of Kakure Kirishitan communities continue to exist and function privately in some remote areas of

Nagasaki prefecture. The reasons for this are varied. One of the more consistent findings is that the tiny Kakure Kirishitan communities of 1,500 to 2,000 have survived in virtue of shared fond memories of their deceased predecessors or righteous ancestors in faith. These ‘mediator saints’ are accessible to the Kakure Kirishitans partly because there are relics, images, and records of them in the region. Kakure Kirishitan are inheritors of the knowledge secretly passed down to them, along with all its gaps, erasures and rewritings. Nosco (1993) provides us with the best synthesis of such a secret transmission and maintenance of faith and tradition within a long latency (incubation) period.

It would be surprising if this had not been the case. Looking back, we recall how those early Japanese Christians showed, despite relentless persecution, tremendous perseverance in their Christian faith and community life. This great Christian witness should not be treated here in isolation but researched in conjunction with other features of seemingly integrated minorities of KakureKirishitan.

Kakure Kirishitan believers have long considered that their ancestors in faith should be remembered, re-imagined, and praised over generations. Conversations with individual KakureKirishitan families in Shimokurosaki, Shitsu, and Wakamatsu have revealed that a few still remain instrumental in transmitting orally those long-proven social and religious values and passing them on (with little or no distortion of content) to the younger generation. Along with this storytelling, we can add the too-often overlooked *silent transmission* of central tenets through the very real presence and activities of Kakure Kirishitan survivors in both the private and public spheres. I draw attention to this most frequently overlooked consideration merely because I have long been of the opinion that ‘history is not only shaped by stories that are told, but also by those that are silenced or forgotten’ (Climbo& Cattell 2002:163).

3. The Cult of San Jiwan

Another striking result that emerges from the data is that the present-day remnants of Kakure Kirishitan hold a common memory and intensive folk veneration of San Jiwan (distorted Portuguese for St John). He was reportedly a Portuguese missionary who took particular care of the Kakure Kirishitans in the Kurosaki district during the period of persecution. In the past, he was probably seen as someone worth knowing. Despite some fine legendary tales that serve to define the saint’s identity and his marvelous deeds in the region, including his supernatural qualities according to some believers, very little is known about him. But this fact, according to KakureKirishitan informants, does not

seem to really matter, for their longstanding religious sentiment towards San Jiwan depends on oral report of his deeds, transmitted over generations.

Thus it is inappropriate even to pose the very basic question: Is he really buried in what is commonly regarded to be his tomb in the Shimokurosaki district (Nagasaki)? San Jiwan blends the mythical, the historical, and the sacred. Evidence from the field is accruing that legends about him and his connection to various individuals among the Kakure Kirishitans have long persisted in the region. I have come to think—along with an increasing number of other scholars—that such socio-cultural, psycho-religious, and spiritual constructs have naturally formed the basis for respectful toleration of minority communities of Kakure Kirishitan within their specific environments.

Especially significant in the context of Kurosaki is the central role played by the KarematsuJinja (‘weathered pine’ shrine) in the preservation of people’s religious beliefs in San Jiwan (see Figure 1.1). It is about a forty-minute drive from Nagasaki and is the setting of Endo Shusaku’s *Silence*. It is located on a mountaintop of weathered pine trees (*karematsu*) in Shimokurosaki district. San Jiwan is reportedly enshrined here. Inside there are pieces of the original pine trees, and a grave with an inscription to San Jiwan, *papa confesoru*—a ‘Latin’ tribute to the priest-confessor (see Figure 1.2). The ethnographic and historical records show that during the period of persecution the Japanese hidden Christians of Kurosaki secretly gathered on this mountaintop of weathered pine trees and handed down prayers (*Orasho*) taught to them by San Jiwan and his Japanese aide Bastian [short for Sebastian], using one side of a large grove for prayers (*inori no iwa*), especially during Lent (see Figure 1.3). Note in passing that the *Orasho* is a collection of ancient [Catholic] prayers and hymns made up of an amalgam of Latin, Portuguese, Japanese and a number of undecipherable words.

Figure 1.1
Front view
of Karematsu Shrine.

Photo by the Author,
3 November 2003.

(See Mungsi 2012a:102;
2012b:371; 2013:91)





Figure 1.2
Interior view
of Karematsu Shrine.

Photo by the author,
19 August 2004.

(See Munsii 2012a:96;
2012b:371; 2013:89)

Figure 1.3 A
Sacred grove for
prayer located near the
Karematsu Shrine

Photo by the Author,
19 August 2004.

(See Munsii 2012a:65;
2013:95)



Initially, there was only the tomb of San Jiwan on this mountaintop. Then in the beginning of the Meiji Period, the Kakure Kirishitan survivors erected a very small shrine (*hokora*) on that ground in memory of San Jiwan. This was regarded as ‘camouflage’ to disguise their veneration of a martyr’s grave. Not until the 1930s was this shrine thought of as a sacred place, where soldiers going off to war would pay their respects. In addition, one finds scattered around the Karematsu shrine many graves and cemeteries of early Japanese hidden Christians. In recent years, however, a great number of these remains have been transferred to new graves nearby to meet the requirements of actual Japanese-style graves, consisting of a stone monument with places for flowers, incense, and water in front of the monument, and a chamber or crypt underneath for the ashes. The evidence of Kakure Kirishitan connection lies in the general use of Christian names and the sign of the cross on these new graves.

The actual San JiwanKarematsu shrine building only dates back to 1938—just within the specific context when Shinto became the State Religion in Japan. This shrine is considered to be one of the so-called Kirishitan shrines

found in Japan. Later, when it was completely rebuilt in 2003 the same location and design was retained. Generally a Shinto shrine has at its entrance, a traditional Japanese gate (*torii*), which marks the transition from the profane to the sacred. Curiously, Karematsu shrine is a rare instance of a shrine with no *toriigate*. Karematsu shrine is the only sacred site found in the region where people venerate a foreigner. It is striking that this shrine has long been considered to be the locus of a supernatural presence, with the many effects that this entails.

During the period of fieldwork, I came across many striking anecdotes telling how the Karematsu shrine's sacred time and space (including the sentiments surrounding it) have reinforced the underlying sharing of collective heritage and fond memories. A similar observation holds of the Kakure Kirishitan survivors associated with the Yamanokami shrine and Tsumoriko shrines found in Shinkamigotô.

4. Urban Religious Festivals

Recently the influence of those socio-cultural, psycho-religious, and spiritual constructs upon Kakure Kirishitan survivors has increasing through their public engagement during festivals. The most interesting emergence of this phenomenon is found in the 'tranquil and highly centered' festivals held annually by the present-day remnants of Kakure Kirishitan.

Ethnographic studies have fully acknowledged the core aspects of the festivals performed in Ikitsuki by Kakure Kirishitan communities. Another example of this type of Kirishitan festival is the Kuwahime shrine festival that takes place in summer. Kuwahime shrine is located within the compound of a Shinto shrine in Nagasaki city (see Figure 2.1). During its festival, participants commemorate Otomo Maxência as the Mulberry Princess or Goddess (see Figure 2.2). Reviewing Kataoka's early findings in *shinkonikagayakunihon no joseitachi* [Japanese Women of Faith] (1931:35-36), Haruko notes that:

According to Kataoka, ironically during two hundred years of persecution, people in Nagasaki forgot that Maxência was a Christian virgin but commemorate her as Kuwahime (the Mulberry Princess or Goddess). The legend was that Kuwahime was a teacher of reading and writing for young women as well as a grower of mulberry trees (*kuwa*) silk worms and a spinner of silk to help the community. Descendants of Sôrin's subjects built a stone memorial in 1830, and dedicated a shrine to the memory of Kuwahime in 1838. (Haruko 2005:427)



Figure 2-2. Tomb OtomoMaxência
(Interior view of Kuwahime Shrine).
Photo by the Author, 27 January 2008



Figure 2-1.
Front view of Kuwahime Shrine
in Nagasaki City
Photo by the Author, 2 March 2013

At Shimokurosaki and Wakamatsu we find two distinct and intriguing features of these festivals. Firstly, the basic structure of the festivals there displays the visibility of confessional affiliations. The Karematsu shrine festival (Nov. 3rd) in Shimokurosaki, for example, brings KakureKirishitan, Catholics, and Buddhists together—*three religions, one festival*—in ways not provided for by the established structure or the prevailing dogmas of officially established religions.

Interestingly, when we examine the participants' various degrees of involvement with the entire religious sphere of the Karematsu shrine festival, we see how San Jiwan has been conceptualized as an intermediary who encourages interfaith gatherings. Equally, the Yamanokami shrine festival (Sept. 23rd) in Wakamatsu (see Figure 3) involves chiefly KakureKirishitan and Shinto practices, but Buddhists and Catholics are often represented in the parties.

The reason why I singled out these religious festivals is that they are performed at/around Kirishitan shrines, which have long been recognized among the core symbolic representations in the local communities. The use of the term 'shrine' is partly associated with the well-known camouflage strategy hitherto adopted by the Kakure Kirishitans. Discussion with KakureKirishitan informants readily yields the awareness that the driving forces behind the organization of these special religious festivals at Kirishitan shrines rely on their spiritual nature and the key symbols found in them. This suggests immediately that some of these Kirishitan shrines are generally thought of as highly regulated spaces embedded with spiritual power and aura.



Figure 3. Yamanokami Shrine in Wakamatsu (Shin-Kamigotô)
Photo by Sakai Yoshihiro (Fukaura Community), 23 September 2013.

There are other features of great interest. Typically, Kirishitan shrine festivals are characterized by the heterogeneity of their particular contents and contexts. This is unsurprising perhaps, as they are held annually by Kakure Kirishitan survivors in a very different political and cultural climate from that of their ancestors in faith.

The festivals display specific expressions and symbols of the local community's religiosity which are unique to its socio-cultural historical context. It was this which initially led to an examination of these specific Kirishitan shrines and festivals as sites for an investigation into the visualized religious patterns and culture of Kakure Kirishitan survivors in decidedly urban spaces. It can thus be assumed that Kirishitan shrines and festivals represent a very visible religious, cultural, and historical record of change in the spiritual path of seemingly integrated Kakure Kirishitan religious minorities.

At one level the festivals display a kind of 'emotional program' (Riis/Woodhead 2012) for participants who fit well into the whole physical and religious setting. At another level they indirectly or even naturally function as vehicles for the promotion of interfaith gatherings. Considerations at the functional level of analysis suggest that participants naturally operate and share common memories, attitudes, devotional gestures (making the sign of the cross, using candles, making offerings of money, *sake*, flowers and so forth), using words (prayer intentions, etc.) and symbols, as well as sharing cultural and social interests.

5. Forms of Participation

Kakure Kirishitan women in Kurosaki emphasized that they hold a two-fold notion of ‘participation’ in the Karematsu shrine festival. First, they can go to the top of the hill and participate physically and ritually in the Karematsu shrine festival. Second, they can also be spiritually involved therein in the clearing of vegetation and tidying of San Jiwan Karematsu Shrine. Moreover, the spiritual participation includes members’ involvement in the preparation of the necessary foodstuffs and other items at home on the previous day, and in the setting up of a community center where the social gathering will take place just after the religious festival. They strongly believe that such time-consuming activities in respect for San Jiwan are themselves prayers, offered in the hope that San Jiwan will provide the same blessing upon them and that the festival will produce the same spiritual effects for them, despite their physical absence. The individual Kakure Kirishitans’ idea of context in this case is not only that of the physical space in which these Kirishitan shrine festivals are held, but also the social and emotional context.

Observing the overall program, we may reasonably assume that a set of prayers handed down for several generations (*Orasho*) is one of the key components of the Kirishitan festivals. In fact, when the Kakure Kirishitan formal leaders recite it publicly it seemingly takes the form of ritual prayers to mirror the climax of these religious festivals.

Minagawa (1981; 2004) has substantively recorded and studied some important hymnal aspects of *Orasho*. At this stage, the importance of the role played by Kakure Kirishitan leaders in this decidedly public setting is obvious. That is, during Kirishitan shrine festivals in particular, Kakure Kirishitan leaders involve themselves in publicly reciting (either loudly or silently) specific *Orasho* with the explicit intention of reinforcing the experienced blissful connection between the visible community of the living and the invisible community, the abode of their deceased predecessors. This is perhaps their single most significant action in such religious events. Here the hitherto hidden recitation of *Orasho* has now emerged into the public sphere. In the past, such a thing was largely unthinkable or even thought to be impossible.

From a culturally informed phenomenological and sociological perspective (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2012; Pinxten&Dikomitis 2012;Davie 2012), we may discern that Kirishitan shrine festivals (with their repertoires of interreligious rituals and symbols) have allowed both a great flexibility in religious outlook and unprecedented combined efforts of the parties that had previously lived side by side in the region. This sort of atmosphere is closely similar to that surrounding the sharing of sacred spaces reported by Bowman (2012) on the

mixed-communities of West Bank Palestine and Western Macedonia. In reviewing Bowman's core findings in his introductory chapter, Couroucli (2012:6) aptly observes that 'sharing' in such an urban context typically 'implies the blurring of religious frontiers and the opening up of specific spaces (limited in time and space) where the human community sharing common knowledge on ancestral holy places gets together.'

It is important to note that many different, but related, Kirishitan shrine festivals exist beside those outlined thus far. Kirishitan shrines and related festivals should not be viewed in isolation from one another, but should rather be perceived as the constituent elements of the continuing representation and authenticity of both Kakure Kirishitan survivors and local communities in urban settings. Participants exemplify, through these religious phenomena, the effects of the new 'interconnectedness' of space and place. In this respect, our ethnographic analysis yields results that undergird the following statement of Albera (2012:225):

The fact that the whole population sets aside its religious differences to take part in commemorating local saints on important dates in the year's calendar is an indication of its awareness of living in a "territory of grace," and of its gratitude to the supernatural beings whose benevolent power guarantees that the groups' vital activities will be crowned with success.

6. The Symbolism of Religious Forms and Member Bonds

The symbolism of religious forms (including the representation of the sacred) proved a very important dimension in the life experiences of Kakure Kirishitan survivors. Along with Turner (1967) and others, I understand 'symbolism' to mean 'something which is totally different, the restricted and very special use of certain items, for example, the bread and wine of the communion service' (Bloch, 1989:110). In the particular case of the subjects under study, this symbolism of religious forms has long been recognized and highlighted through three defining patterns: (1) the frequent practice of the age-old collective religious ritual of *Ohatsuhôage* (symbolic communal meal); (2) the reciting or singing of established ritual prayers (*Orasho*) and devotional hymns, both written and memorized; (3) annual religious festivals (especially Kirishitan shrine festivals).

Returning briefly to Turner's 1967 definition above of symbolism, what is brought into relief is the typical example of 'bread and wine of the communion service,' it is interesting to note that these two elements (bread and wine) were observed, in the particular case of Kakure Kirishitan communities, to correspond closely enough to their notion of 'rice' and '*sake*.'

During the prayer gathering the room is spiritually and formally transformed temporarily into a ‘sacred site.’ In this respect, the old-age collective ritual process of *Ohatsuhôage* (precious offerings) exemplifies a process of sanctifying an individual family which includes ‘creating sacred times, places, and meaning at home by setting aside times for home-based religious activities’ (Dollahite/Marks 2009:380).

This community meal entails the consecration of the gifts (rice and *sake*) and a prayer that asks God to transform the ‘offered rice’ into the body of Christ and the *sake* into the blood of Christ (see Figure 4). I do not call this a version of the Catholic celebration of the Eucharist in its strict sense, but the parallels are evident. The age-old *Ohatsuhôage* ritual constitutes a form of social facilitation which strengthens the religious attitudes of the Kakure Kirishitan survivors. There is substantive evidence that they really need such ritually-prepared communal meals and prayer rooms to partly guarantee freedom of conscience and ensure continuity with the past. The motivations and emotions of Kakure Kirishitan survivors and their understanding of ancestors in faith are essentially assumed to be the same. Traditionally, Kakure Kirishitan survivors have subscribed to the belief that their predecessors are always acting as psychological and spiritual protectors against the hardships of life and the reality of death, and provide a blissful atmosphere of prayer so individual members could be aided in their survival through continued contact with their ancestors in faith. That is why their ritually prepared-communal meal of *Ohatsuhôage* carries in itself all the symbolic weight of communion.

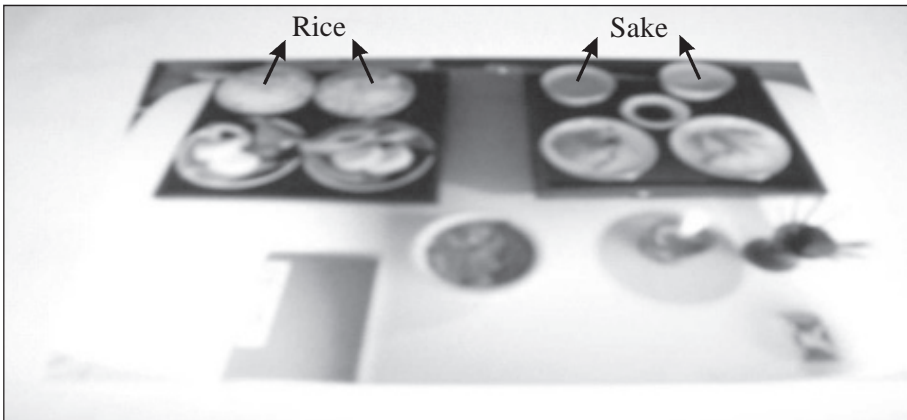


Figure 4 Table set as an altar for the *Ohatsuhôage* Ritual
(Murakami community in Shimo-Kurosaki)
Photo by the author, 5 November 2014

Much more can be said on these matters, but for the purposes of the present analysis two features in particular stand out. The first is that KakureKirishitan survivors hold religious ideals that point to the same understanding: living, sharing, and preserving the most basic tenets of the tradition left behind by their ancestors in faith. These prominent spiritual figures are seen as representing their 'specific sacred/spiritual space' (Standaert 2009:ix).

The second feature relates to behavioral patterns. The correlation between relic ownership and *Ohatsuhôage* underlines the continuing retention of the spiritual beliefs, religious practices and ideals of Kakure Kirishitan communities in urban settings. Individual Kakure Kirishitan families have created a kind of 'collectivist equilibrium' whereby closure of community boundaries and collectivist beliefs are mutually reinforced. Like the highly religious families reported by Dollahite and Marks (2009:389), they have long provided, 'an initial bridge between religious contexts and better family outcomes.' Collective and individual prayers (covering sacred processes and purposes) always provide among the individual Kakure Kirishitan families the basic means for remembering, religious vitality, and affirmation. Taken as whole, this ethnographic consideration is certainly consistent with the suggestion that the benefit of religiosity is linked to increased subjective well-being, a domain of the quality of life.

As things stand today, I am quite sure that these unprecedented religious experiences and collective religious rituals in decidedly urban settings will ultimately create more room for natural interfaith gatherings in the coming years, yielding at the same time novel scientific inquiries.

7. Keeping alive the KakureKirishitan Spirit

The present-day remnants of the Kakure Kirishitan could be seen as forever condemned to be the inheritors of the deep-rooted, long-standing religious culture and tradition passed down to them, with all its gaps and erasures and rewritings. From this perspective, the only hope for them is to acknowledge and cling to the existing minority Kakure Kirishitan communities. It may perhaps be suggested here that the Kakure Kirishitan religion greatly helps to provide the psychological security given by the whole community structure.

A further feature of the Kakure Kirishitan survivors particularly involves coping with urban patterns, while maintaining the spiritual side of the Kakure Kirishitan faith. Among other things, this means that, mediated by the social and physical constraints within their specific environments, the small groups of Kakure Kirishitan have particularly displayed an awareness of social expecta-

tions and emphasized elements of the self to achieve specific religious ends. This reminds us the assumption that “religion functions as astonishingly flexible regulatory mechanism, nimbly managing both negative and positive emotions in the service of maintaining religious identity” (Burris/Petrican’s 2014:114).

Kakure Kirishitan survivors recall how the prayers of their deceased predecessors served as the paramount foundation for dealing with the suffering and tragedy of all victims of persecution—those near and far. Similarly, they remember how the former ‘Kirishitan communities’ served as sources of security, inspiration and strength. Kakure Kirishitan survivors and their deceased predecessors belong to the larger community, whose origins and history are often explained through narratives, fond memories, and the existing unpublished spiritual writing such as “The Beginning of Heaven and Earth”—*TenchiHajimari no Koto* (Whelan 1996), which have been passed down over generations.

This ideology of the Kakure Kirishitan survivors has been a construct, a derivative of the gradual and heterogeneous process of acculturation and syncretism. A great number of Kakure Kirishitan sources of information either ‘accidentally’ or consciously converted to Buddhism, yet still actively practiced (at home) the Kakure Kirishitan faith that has long defined their specific spiritual path and determined their destiny.

Deeply embedded in individual Kakure Kirishitans’ consciousness is an awareness of the need to continually do justice to their deceased predecessors by keeping alive the Kakure Kirishitan spirit. This is seen in the community currently named *KarematsuJinjawoMamorukai* [Karematsu Shrine Preservation Society] found in Shimo-Kurosaki. Since its establishment in 1998, this community headed by Takaharu Matsukawa has emphasized the longstanding spiritual nature of the Karematsu Shrine’s facilities and hence does its utmost to preserve the sanctity of both the Karematsu Shrine and the surrounding area, which is occupied mainly by a large grove for prayers (*inori no iwa*), old and new graves of individual Kakure Kirishitans, and pockets of trees. Members of this community have, since the year 2002, been actively participating in the annual Karematsu shrine festival. We also find Kakure Kirishitan families and individuals in Kashiyama, Hirado, and Ikitsuki districts who converted to Buddhism but still enact daily the most basic tenets of the Kakure Kirishitan faith.

Viewed from the public domain, there is a certain irony in this that these religiously engaged individuals may seek to preserve their own separate religious culture of the Kakure Kirishitan while seeking in an instrumental way to

benefit from regional socio-religious circumstances and cultural policy opportunities. To say this, however, does not mean that there are no difficulties for them in finding an appropriate religious position in Japanese society as a whole. Whatever the case, it might be interesting and useful in the future to examine faith endpoints such as certain differences in faith or between faith and life experiences of all these apparently 'Buddhist-like individual Kakure Kirishitans' (as well as those of non-temple going religiously committed Kakure Kirishitan). Such a portrayal of the place of a subjective Kakure Kirishitan religion in the structure of personality of these Buddhist-like individual Kakure Kirishitans may, from a naturalistic approach, open inquiries of great interest.

The current decline in membership does not necessarily mean the end of the Kakure Kirishitan religion. It may represent 'transformation' rather than 'decline,' particularly when Kakure Kirishitan survivors think that faith should be more about personal spirituality than 'objective beliefs.' There is clearly much more to be said for this view from historical, psycho-religious, sociological, psychological, and anthropological perspectives. It can be asked whether subjective spirituality will be a step towards the overall decline in religious identity or whether it will represent a new form of the religious identity of the Kakure Kirishitan survivors. There does appear to be a considerable area of argument about the place of the Kakure Kirishitan religion in Japanese society and the continued existence of the individual Kakure Kirishitan faith in urban areas.

Perhaps a new kind of Kakure Kirishitan religion based upon this individual Kakure Kirishitan faith is already evolving in Nagasaki settings and elsewhere. This, I think, presents limitless opportunities to carry on the Kakure Kirishitan faith, though the struggle appears to be proceeding on two fronts. On the one hand, individual Kakure Kirishitan faith fights against those who show insufficient appreciation of the virtues of the numerically few Kakure Kirishitans. On the other hand, it fights against the substantial minority of local Catholic authorities and laypersons who keep on demanding that the Kakure Kirishitan survivors think of a possible 'conversion' to Catholicism. The latter group advances the argument that both parties (Catholics and the Kakure Kirishitan survivors) all have common historical Christian roots in Japan, at least in Nagasaki prefecture.

Ironically, it can be said that the kind of Kakure Kirishitan spirituality I have gradually observed mainly in various parts of Nagasaki fits into the spectrum of modern spirituality which is, 'to some extent, independent of religious traditions and institutions and constitutes an individualized approach to reli-

gious, existential, and ethical issues. However, the two constructs share (1) the inclusion of the dimension of the shared and transcendence in life, and (2) the experience of being interconnected to a large community or to the world as a whole' (Saroglou et al. (2008:167).

There is, however, another important point, which requires more specific knowledge of the ethnography of the Kakure Kirishitan survivors. Our analysis has shown that the seemingly integrated minority communities of Kakure Kirishitan display a kind of subculture with symbols, style, forms, religious practices, and related social aspects. The reality is that, unlike many other subcultures, membership in Kakure Kirishitan communities is held to be ascriptive. This is most obvious in the cases of Kakure Kirishitan communities found in Kurosaki and Wakamatsu, where the socio-cultural patterns play a part in the maintenance of the uniqueness of Kakure Kirishitan culture, keeping up at the same time the morale of community members.

My sense from the field is that Kakure Kirishitan culture constitutes an undeniable reality in which community members have been immersed, and from which they often claim to derive a strong sense of differentiation from other believers (mainly Catholics, Buddhists and Shintoists) in the region. The imperative of 'overcoming' appears to be the chief implication of the response of the surviving Kakure Kirishitan communities to the threats and opportunities of their changing social world. Previously, I identified some survival strategies of adaptation, flexibility, and openness to inter-faith marriages and converts from other religions as being relatively long-term contributing factors in such survival (Munsi2011; 2012; 2014a).

8. Religious Adjustment and Survivals

To what extent are these effects of positive emotions the religion and spirituality of the individual Kakure Kirishitans determined by cultural factors? A field of emotion seems to arise when the individual Kakure Kirishitan believers gather together, during the *Ohatsuhôage*, for the special purpose of praying and offering rice and *sake* to God, Jesus, Blessed Mary, saints, and those deceased predecessors who have shaped and fostered their community and family conditions. This is evidently based on good accounts and fond memories of the past, or on what we can call, borrowing Marea Teski's well-noted term, a series of 'memory repertoires' that constitute a 'binding force in their communities and a way of passing on social memories endowed with meaning' (Climbo & Cattell 2002: ix).

Religious practices here provide the present-day remnants of Kakure-

Kirishitan not only with unity and sustenance but also with emotional support and individual identity. I suspect that without such religious emotions and values Kakure Kirishitan informants in my sample study, and in the many other communities not examined in this article, would not be able to build a system of faith around them, and survive as religious minorities in their present localities.

Our analysis has shown that the religious/spiritual writings and venerating relic (see Figure 5.1; Figure 5.2; Figure 5.3), narratives or oral accounts and psycho-religious and spiritual beliefs play a vital role in enhancing the positive psycho-religious emotions of Kakure Kirishitan survivors. It is interesting to note in line with the theoretical perspectives of material culture (Tilley and Keane et al, 2006) that the items pertaining to material forms also act here as essential vehicles for the (conscious or unconscious) ‘self-realization of the identities’ of Kakure Kirishitan survivors. This is merely because ‘they produce a fundamental non-discursive mode of communication’. The force of positive psycho-religious and spiritual emotions particularly threatens Kakure Kirishitan formal leaders’ equilibrium between community members and their precious relics. In so doing, Kakure Kirishitan leaders form a kind of ‘clearing space’ around their ‘precious materials’ and expand, in a variety of circumstances, their vision into their conscious and intentional perception. It transpires that the motivational underpinnings of their religiosity and identity may be understood on the basis of this consciousness.

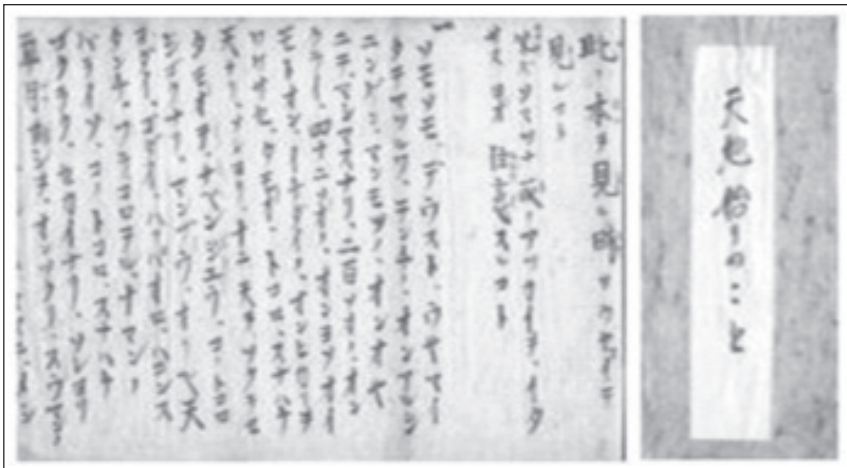


Figure 5.1 *Extract of the TenchiHajimari no Koto*
 (Murakami Community in Shimo-Kurosaki)
 Photo by the Author, 19 July 2004

Figure 5.2 Sacred Wood of Bastian (Murakami Community)
Photo by the Author,
19 July 2004.
(For the whole story about this sacred item, see Munsu 2011: 169-170)



Figure 5.3
Camouflaged statue of Jesus,
old medals, and rosaries
(Fukaura community)

Photo by the author,
14 May 2008

One of the most vivid examples of the innovation or formation of a new habit by a Kakure Kirishitan leader for spiritual purposes is found in the Murakami community (Kurosaki). During my interview (3 Nov. 2014) with Murakami Shigenori, the current formal Kakure Kirishitan leader, he kindly showed me three new different statues of the Blessed Mary (commonly known as *Maria-Kannon*) painted in blue, gray and white (see Figure 6). He indicated that they were made for about 100,000 Yen by a Japanese artist named Matsumoto Tomoyuki in April 2014. Made with a Japanese woman's face, these three wood carvings have reportedly been used by the Murakami community for different purposes: The one painted blue (*Yuki no Maria*) has been believed to protect households, the gray one has been specifically used during the offering of the highly centered collective religious ritual of *Ohatsuhôage*, and the white one has been used for funerals.



Figure 6 Wood carvings of the Virgin Mary painted blue, gray, and white
(Murakami Community) Photo by the Author, 3 November 2014
Photo by the author, 3 November 2014
Photo by Author, 3 November 2014

On close examination, these kinds of religious experiences and struggles (including many other partial changes I recently observed in the same community) can be summarized as re-inventions of the material culture of the Kakure Kirishitan in urban settings. This finding should not be surprising. It is partly because of the acknowledgement that ‘in some cases, individuals create new sacred objects: new representations of gods, demons, saints, and so on, and those may eventually be consecrated by a group and become the focus of collective sentiments’ (Riis & Woodhead 2012:8).

Individual Kakure Kirishitan families strongly hold an ever-present fear that they would betray their ancestors in faith by giving up the Kakure Kirishitan faith, especially when they are still active physically. It transpires that those who promptly obeyed this principle of preserving the Kakure Kirishitan faith would make things easier for themselves both in this and the next world. One thing is clear from this: ‘Because their religion particularly defines who they are, to change religions, for most remnants of Kakure Kirishitan, means to give up their identity and the support and security that are embodied in it’ (Munsi 2014a:40).

Though multiple situational constraints (such as the changing array of environmental factors in Nagasaki districts) have gradually threatened their religious experiences and struggles, from the perspective of urban ethnography and history the presence of Kakure Kirishitan survivors in the landscape of Nagasaki prefecture is an incredible story. What is particularly intriguing, and worthy of further research, is the way they negotiate social and personal changes within their specific environments.

It is generally assumed that religious rituals (chants, sermons, symbols, prayer, ritual acts, reading spiritual/sacred texts, venerating relics) play a significant role ‘in activating not only intellectually but also emotionally religious/spiritual motivations, projects, and decisions’ (Van Cappellen/Saroglou 2012:11). The recitation or chanting of *Orasho* and the age-old collective ritual of *Ohatsuhôage* clearly play a central and crucial, albeit indirect, role in the religious consciousness and the survival of the subjects under study. Kakure Kirishitan survivors usually find that pervasive ritualism kindles a shared experience of emotions—reportedly more positive experiences and emotions than negative ones. Prayers, communal singing and musical hymns expressed with great feeling can be strong binding factors, but they are also regarded, at pivotal moments in the lives of some Kakure Kirishitan survivors, as a source of energy and of spiritual and physical therapy or healing of mind and body. Most individual Kakure Kirishitan survivors who have been healed through intensive

prayer have been reluctant to reveal this except to their close friends and relatives. However, I was fortunate to come across some fascinating anecdotes on this. It transpired that all of these Kakure Kirishitan informants remained convinced even years later that they went through the most profound experience of their religious lives.

Kakure Kirishitan survivors have been very conscious of the bleak reality of going into a long period of minimal survival. Because of this, they have striven not only to fulfill the sacred purposes suggested by their faith, but also to be visible and viable in urban settings. They have regionally developed and now display a strong faith-based sense of identity and, more interestingly, a strong positive image of the future. 'Images of the future can provide focus, simplicity, breadth, and direction in an effort to create the future of religious life. Images greatly affect what is desired, what is hoped for, what is called realistic and what persons are willing to strive for' (Fitz/Cada 1975:714). On the whole, it is glaringly evident, when considering the basis of shared collective experiences of individual communities (Thompson 2009 [1978]), that the persistently salient components touched upon in our present ethnographic analysis have been of extreme importance to the Kakure Kirishitan survivors as a means of preserving their common heritage of culture (including all its various components), religious faith, spirituality, identity, and ideology (with its fundamental ethical system and core values) in Nagasaki settings.

9. Conclusion

Our overall discussion has been consistent with the basic objective of looking at the present-day remnants of Kakure Kirishitan communities from inside and outside a little more systematically. This synthesis has substantively demonstrated that Kakure Kirishitan survivors have been intrinsically and extrinsically characterized by remarkable spiritual motivation and persistence, psycho-religious experiences, and emotions, as well as vivid historical, Christian, and moral references to their deceased predecessors or righteous ancestors in faith. Even more significant was the aim to seek, particularly through Kirishitan shrine festivals, the visibility and viability of their religious beliefs and practices in the public sphere, while privately forming and reaffirming suitable images of community, including member bonds, secrecy, fond memories, and sacred relic veneration – the most basic tenets of their religion and ideology. In general, therefore, it seems that all these consistent core components significantly create, sustain and limit not only the historical unfolding of Kakure Kirishitan communities but also the shaping and re-defining of the individual

Kakure Kirishitans' religious identities and consciousness in social settings. This is clearly an area which is both ready for, and inviting, further research.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Albera, D. & Couroucli, M., eds. (2012), *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Albera, D. (2012), "Crossing the Frontiers between the Monotheistic Religions, an Anthropological Approach," In: Albera & Couroucli, 219-44.
- Bloch, M. (1989), *Ritual, History and Power. Selected Papers in Anthropology*, London & Atlantic Highlands: The Athlone Press.
- Bowman, G. (2012), "Identification and Identity Formations around Shared Shrines in West Bank Palestine and Western Macedonia," In: Albera & Couroucli, 10-28.
- Buris, C.T. & Petrican, R. (2014), "Religion, Negative Emotions, and Regulation," In Saroglou, V. (ed.), *Religion, personality, and Social Behavior*, New York and London: Psychology Press, 96-122.
- Climbo, J.J. and M. G. Cattell, ed. (2002), *Social Memory and History*, New York: Altamira.
- Couroucli, M. (2012), "Sharing Sacred Places: A Mediterranean Tradition," In: Albera and Couroucli, 1-9.
- Davie, C. (2012), "Thinking Sociologically About Religion," In: *Review of Religious Research* 54: 273-89.
- Dollahite, D.C. (1998), "Fathering, Faith, and Spirituality," In: *J. Men's Studies* 7:3-15.
- Dollahite, D.C. & Marks, L.D. (2009), "A Conceptual Model of Family and Religious Process in Highly Religious Families," In: *Review of Religious Research* 50:373-91.
- Fitz, R.L. & Cada, L.J. (1975), "The Recovery of Religious Life," In: *Review for Religious* 34:690-718.
- Greenfield, E.A., G.E. Vaillant, and N.F. Marks. (2009), "Do Formal Religious Participation and Spiritual Perceptions Have Independent Linkages with Diverse Dimensions of Psychological Well-Being?" In: *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 50:196-212.
- Haruko, N.W. (2005), "The Christian "Nuns" of Early Modern Japan," In: *Portuguese Studies Review* 13: 411-48.

- Minagawa T. (1981), *Orashokikô: taidan to zuisô*, Tokyo: Nihon KirisutoKyôdanShuppanyoku.
- Minagawa T. (2004), *Yôgakutoraikô: Kirishitanongaku no eikô to zasetsu*, Tokyo: Nihon KirisutoKyôdanShuppanyoku.
- Munsi, Roger V. (2011), "Conversion Experiences among the KakureKirishitan," In: *The Japan Mission Journal* 65:162-83
- Munsi, Roger V. (2012), "Japanese Hidden Christians in Contemporary Settings," In: *SwedishMissiological Themes* 100:351-90.
- Munsi, Roger V. (2014a), "KakureKirishitan in Urban Contexts: An Ethnographic Analysis of the Survival Strategies," In: *The Japan Mission Journal* 68:39-57.
- Munsi, Roger V. (2014b), "KakureKirishitan Survivors: A Study of the Socio-Cultural, Psycho-Religious and Spiritual Constructs," In: *Swedish Missiological Themes* 1002/4: 351-390.
- Munsi, Roger V. (2015), "KakureKirishitan Survivors," In: *Japan Mission Journal* 69/4 (2015), 267-280.
- Nosco, P. (1993), "Secrecy and Transmission of Tradition: Issues in the Study of the 'Underground Christians'," " In: *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 20:1:3-29.
- Pinxten, R. & Dikomitis, L. (eds.) (2012), *When God Comes to Town: Religious Traditions in Urban Contexts*, New York: Berghahn Books.
- Riis, O. & Woodhead, L. (2012), *A Sociology of Religious Emotions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Saroglou, Vassilis, et al. (eds.) (2008), "Positive Emotions as Leading to Religion and Spirituality," In: *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 3:165-73.
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P. & Larkin, M. (2012), *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*, London: Sage.
- Standaert, B. (2009 [2003]), *Sharing Sacred Space: Interreligious Dialogue as Spiritual Encounter*, Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press.
- Thompson, P. (2009 [1978]), *The Voice of the Past. Oral History*, 3rd Edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tilley, Chris, et al. (ed.) (2006), *Handbook of Material Culture*, Los Angeles/ London: Sage Publications.
- Turner, V. (1967), *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Van Cappellen, Patty, and Vassilis Saroglou (2012), "Awe Activates Religious

and Spiritual Feelings and Behavioral Intentions,” In: *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 4:223-36.

Whelan, C. (ed. and trans.) (1996), *The Beginning of Heaven and Earth: The Sacred Book of Japan's KakureKirishitan*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.