

Landscape in Hirado revealing the secrets of Hidden Christians' life-world: National and global policies in cultural heritage protection

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Abstract

The landscape in Hirado on the northwestern tip of Nagasaki Prefecture was recently designated as one of Japan's "important cultural landscapes". Its significance is in the environment that has preserved the remnants of the earliest Catholic mission in the 16th century through the lifeways and beliefs of the hidden Christian communities. Their villages and sacred sites that speak of the coexistence of Christianity with Shintō and Buddhism were by the national and local authorities nominated for the inclusion on the UNESCO Tentative List. Based on extensive fieldwork in the Hirado area between 2008 and 2016, I will discuss how, in the process of heritization, new representations of the Hidden Christians through "cultural landscape" have changed the perception of the Christian heritage in Japan. I argue that the designation of the Hidden Christians' religious tradition as an "important cultural landscape" provided a wider framework for the people living in Hirado to (re)embrace this "multi-religious tradition" as their own heritage.

KEYWORDS: cultural heritage protection, religious coexistence, Hidden Christians, *Kakure Kirishitan*, *Senpuku Kirishitan*, cultural landscape

Introduction

The landscape in Hirado on the northwestern tip of Nagasaki Prefecture was recently designated as one of Japan's "important cultural landscapes". Because of its geographical proximity to the Asian mainland, Hirado holds many secrets concerning the origins of Japanese culture. Moreover, it was in Hirado harbor that one of the first Portuguese vessels entered Japan during the 16th century, attracting the Jesuit missionary, St. Francis Xavier, to Hirado and making it a mosaic of Western and Japanese cultures. The most famous view of Hirado consists of the Roman Catholic church and Buddhist temples standing closely together. However, this former Japanese gateway of cultural and economic exchange with the outside world has seemingly remained "closed" to the rest of the world, not only during Japan's period of isolation but even until today. Young people have been leaving it for a

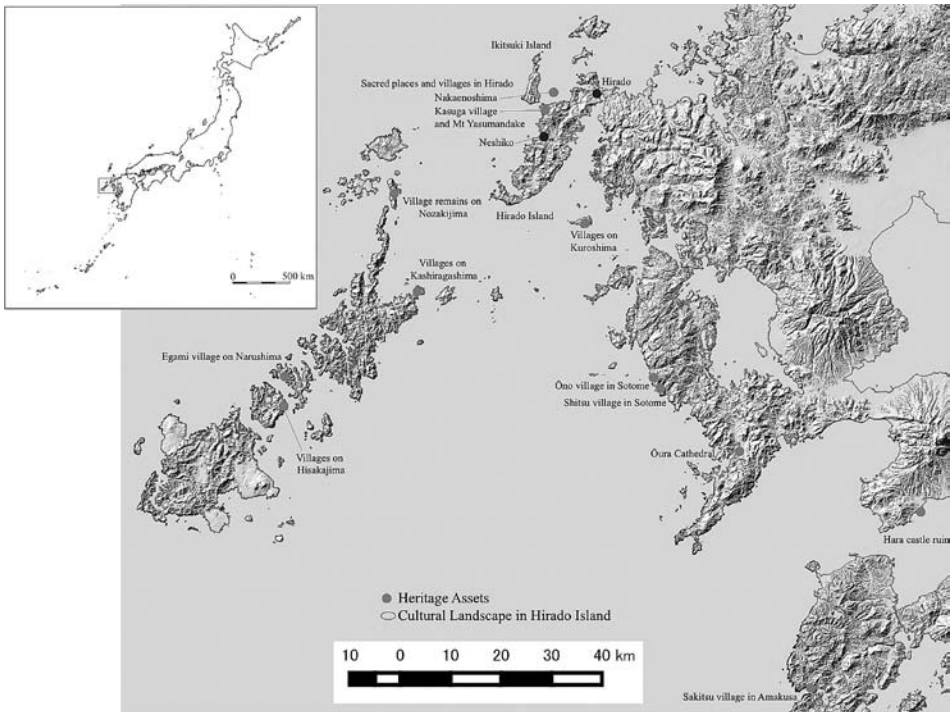
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more comfortable life and work in bigger cities such as Sasebo, and Fukuoka, while Hirado, despite its rich history, remained unnoticed even by tourists, Japanese and foreign alike.

This article deals with Hirado's designation as a part of the heritization process which has led to the inclusion of the "Churches and Christian Sites in Nagasaki" on the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List in 2007, and which has entailed the shifting of focus away from the tangible heritage of churches to the intangible heritage of *Senpuku Kirishitan* ("secret/underground Christians"). In August 2016, Japan decided to withdraw its proposal entitled "Churches and Christian Sites in Nagasaki" and issued a new proposal under the title "Hidden Christian Sites in the Nagasaki Region" (*Nagasaki to Amakusa chihō no Senpuku Kirishitan kanren isan*).



Map 1: Sites in the official proposal of 'Hidden Christian Sites in the Nagasaki Region' (*Nagasaki to Amakusa chihō no Senpuku Kirishitan kanren isan*) submitted to UNESCO in January 2017 (Nagasaki Prefecture Press Conference, 20. January 2017, https://www.pref.nagasaki.jp/s_isan/about/)

After the severe persecution of Christianity in Japan and the execution of the last missionary in 1644, the Christians were forced into hiding. The largest population of the *Senpuku Kirishitan* "discovered" in the 19th and 20th centuries lived for the most part in poor farming and fishing villages in Nagasaki Prefecture, on Ikitsuki and Hirado Islands

off the northwest coast of Kyushu, on the Gotō Archipelago, Sotome near the Nagasaki city, Amakusa Islands of Kumamoto Prefecture and Imamura in Fukuoka Prefecture. They preserved their Christian practices and beliefs without religious specialists after the missionaries and priests were forced to leave the country, or died as martyrs in Japan.

The term Senpuku Kirishitan is translated as ‘secret Christians’ (Turnbull 2016: 2, 135) or ‘underground *Kirishitan*’ (preferred by Miyazaki 2003) and it applies to all Japanese Christians (*Kirishitan*) who experienced the prohibition in Tokugawa period. *Kirishitan* comes from the Portuguese word *Christão* and referred to the Roman Catholic religion or the followers of this religion after Francis Xavier’s arrival in Japan until the government’s prohibition of the *Kirishitan* religion was abolished in 1873 (Miyazaki 2003: 5). While those Senpuku *Kirishitan*, who reunited with the Catholic Church once it became legal for them to do so, are called *Katorikku* (Catholics), the *Kirishitan*, who did not reunite and continued to observe the tradition of their ancestors, are referred to as *Kakure Kirishitan* (“Hidden Christians”) (see Figure 1). At present, those still belonging to the *Kakure Kirishitan* communities live along the Gotō Archipelago, as well as the area of Sotome and Ikitsuki Island. On Hirado Island (Neshiko) and in Nagasaki some organisations existed until 1990s (Miyazaki 2003: 22).

The Nomination File for UNESCO WL,¹ which is being prepared by the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs, concerns only the “historical” Senpuku *Kirishitan*, while the national designation of the *Kirishitan* villages as “cultural landscapes” refers to the living *Kakure Kirishitan*. In this article, I use Hidden Christians referring to both the historical Senpuku *Kirishitan* and their descendants of *Kakure Kirishitan* (including those who have individually kept *Kakure* beliefs and practices after their organisations were disbanded).

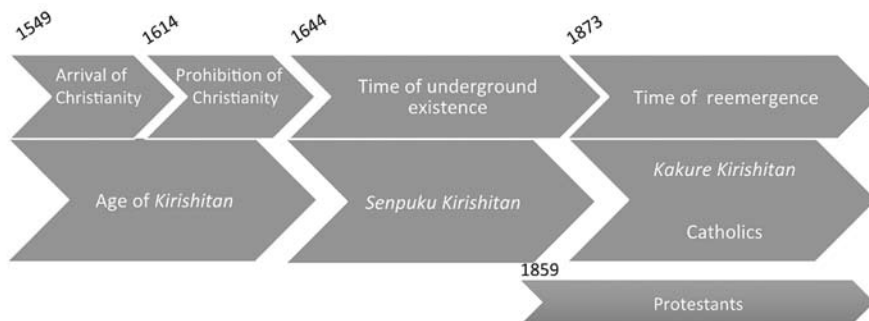


Figure 1: Historical development of Christianity in Japan (adapted from Miyazaki 2001: 19)

During several hundred years of persecution, the *Kirishitan* passed down their way of life through secret lay *confrarias* (brotherhoods) and by praying *orasho* (derived from

¹ I refer to UNESCO World Heritage List and UNESCO Tentative List (see <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/>), not the ICH Representative List, although the shift towards more intangible aspect of the Christian heritage is discussed in the article.

the Latin word *oratio* “prayer”² in front of Christian images depicted on hanging scrolls hidden in their closets. Instead of churches, the places where their ancestors were martyred and other sacred sites, such as Mt. Yasumandake and Nakaenoshima Island, became the focus of their worship and thus helped to sustain their way of life.

Based on extensive fieldwork in the Hirado area between 2008 and 2016, I will discuss how, in the process of heritization, new representations of the Hidden Christians through “cultural landscape” have changed the perception of the Christian heritage in Japan. I argue that the designation of the Hidden Christians’ religious tradition as an “important cultural landscape” provided a wider framework for the people living in Hirado to represent and re-embrace this “multi-religious tradition” as their heritage.

The cultural landscape approach to the *Senpuku Kirishitan*

The Catholic churches that were inscribed in the initial Tentative List of the 2007 had previously been designated as Japanese historical landmarks as part of tangible heritage. However, to inscribe the intangible cultural heritage – the *Senpuku Kirishitan* – in the Tentative List, according to the UNESCO Convention, Japan had to first designate them as heritage at the national level. In 2010, for the first time, they became designated by the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs as part of the “Cultural landscape in Hirado Island”.

It is a paradox that this process began by recovering the discounted past of the Hidden Christians in the history of Japan and Christianity and resulted in a contest over their heritage between the two parties, i.e. the Japanese government and the Catholic Church. However, the issue of ‘dissonant’ (Tunbridge & Ashworth 1996: 20) and ‘contested cultural heritage’ (Silverman 2011) in this particular heritage process has yet to be sufficiently understood and assessed.

I will focus here on how, during the creation of the Hidden Christians’ heritage in terms of “cultural landscape”, their “environment” became “a site of representation” (Moore & Whelan 2007). Peter Fowler, a World Heritage Advisor, has pointed out that “cultural landscape” is the result of interaction of people with their environment. He chose ‘folk’ to explain this sense by saying that while culture means the lifeways, including the artefacts, of a group of people, the essence of ‘folk’ – as in ‘folk-life’ – is not just people but the result of their interaction with their environment over a period of time (Akagawa & Sirisrisak 2008: 180). Hence, representing Hidden Christians through “cultural landscape” privileges their interaction with the environment. Thus, in the heritization process, not only the “formal” religious practices and beliefs that result in building churches, but also the everyday occupations, such as cultivating rice fields, using water, cutting trees, and everyday spaces like the home, became equally significant practices. I address how this shift from the representation of the tangible Churches to the intangible Hidden Christians in their “cultural landscape” influences the perception of the Hidden Christian (or the Christian) heritage in Japan and the subsequent (re)construction of regional identities. Based on the changing perceptions, I explore some potential effects that this process might have for the protection of the Hidden Christian heritage.

² Orasho are the prayers and hymns originally taught by the Jesuit missionaries and passed down orally.

I ask, firstly, why and how have the Christians in Japan been presented in relation to their “cultural landscape”; secondly, in what ways were the Hidden Christians’ everyday practices described as relating to “landscape”?; thirdly, how this new, official representation of Hidden Christians as part of the so-called “cultural landscape” might have affected existing hidden beliefs and practices that are part of their environment; and finally, how the administrative process of reinventing “Christian hidden heritage” as part of the Hidden Christians’ “cultural landscape” might influence their descendants, i.e. those who have kept the Senpuku Kirishitan tradition, such as the Kakure Kirishitan, as well as Hirado’s other non-Kirishitan inhabitants, and their self-identification in terms of their “religious” feelings and practices.

The disputed position of the Hidden Christians

While the Hidden Christians’ position in the Japanese history and the history of Christianity in Japan has been regularly debated and still remains ambiguous, a dispute over their heritage was triggered by the inclusion of the Nagasaki church group and Christian-related sites on the World Heritage Tentative List in 2007 and even more so when ICOMOS International Council on Monuments and Sites (UNESCO) suggested including Hidden Christians and making them the main focus of the bid.

In the following section I will provide a short historical background and describe in more detail, how the Hidden Christians have been described by researchers. Christianity was introduced to Japan in 1549 through the efforts of Jesuit priests, led by Francis Xavier. Soon after the rapid conversions of Japanese to Christianity, in 1597, the *shogun* Toyotomi Hideyoshi banned Christian missionaries, because in the eyes of the shogunate (*bakufu*), the Christians posed a threat.³ However, the overall number of Christian believers continued to increase.

In 1614, a general ban of Christianity across the whole of Japan under pain of death was declared by the shogun, Ieyasu Tokugawa, and the last missionary priest, Mantio Konishi, was executed in 1644. After that, Japanese Christians remained without official priests. The nobles quickly renounced Christianity to preserve their political and economic interests and a large number of ordinary people also renounced their faith, frequently because they followed the example of their masters. Yet, a considerable number of people did not abandon their faith and many were killed for adhering to it. A system of mandatory temple affiliation (*terauke seido*) was introduced to uproot Christianity, whereby the entire Japanese population was required to officially become Buddhist. Those, who kept their Christian faith (the Senpuku Kirishitan) and continued to secretly perform rituals, had to publicly renounce Christianity and show their devotion to Buddhism.

The era of severe persecution lasted for over 230 years, and it was not until the end of Tokugawa period (1865), that the Senpuku Kirishitan re-established their contact

³ The Christian threat was twofold: firstly, there was the fear of the “colonisation” of Japan by the military forces of Portugal and Spain, and secondly, there was fear of populist Christian rebellion. At the beginning, the prohibition aimed at *beteren* (missionaries and Christians of the warrior class), while from the Shimabara Rebellion onwards, it turned towards the general populace (Breen & Williams 1996: 90).

with European priests. Even after the end of Tokugawa shogunate the new Meiji government initially kept the old laws concerning Christians. The ban was finally lifted in 1873 because of the government's desire to gain better negotiating positions with the (Christian) foreign powers. Although there was no further need for people to hide their Christian beliefs, about 35,000 of the former underground Christians refused the teachings of the newly arrived Catholic missionaries. They remained apart and kept 'practicing what they believed to be the true faith as communicated to their ancestors between 1549 and 1639' (Harrington 1980: 318). They were called *Kakure Kirishitan*, the "Hidden Christians", while the Roman Catholic Church called them *Hanare Kirishitan* ("distanced" or "separated" Christians) or simply classified them as heretics (Miyazaki 1996: 31–2).⁴ Although some researchers claim that the contemporary *Kakure Kirishitan* are, in fact, the historical *Senpuku Kirishitan* (Nakazono 2009), the demarcation between the two seems to linger on in the heritization process what this paper shows (see Figure 1).

Hence, researchers, when discussing reasons for the refusal by the *Kakure Kirishitan* to rejoin the Church, tend to emphasise the content of their hidden Christianity which appeared to have become completely merged with Japanese folk religion. Drawing on extensive research, Miyazaki contends that today's *Kakure Kirishitan* can no longer be regarded as Christians, because their faith has fused completely with Buddhism, Shintō and a variety of other religions into a folk religion called *Kakure Kirishitan*:

A simple reason why the *Kakure Kirishitan* can or will not become Catholic is the fact that their faith became Japanese through and through, mixing with the traditional religions of Japan and thus became estranged from Christianity (Miyazaki 2001: 283).

Veneration of ancestors – a key to sustainability

Several studies have showed that *Kakure Kirishitan* (or also *Kakure*) cannot be studied in isolation from its historical and social contexts. Turnbull explains that the *Kakure* religious world is itself only part of a much larger spirit world, which the *Kakure* share with Japanese religion. Here, the spirits of the dead play a crucial role, both in their demands to be venerated and the firm belief in the need to maintain the form of the *Kakure* faith in respect for their traditions (Turnbull 2016: 192). Problems regarding the funerals and treating the dead were to prove decisive in the split between the Catholic and *Kakure* (ibid.: 192). Among the *Kakure* dead relatives were seen as joining the *Kakure* pantheon as ancestors. Such a belief reflects Japanese ancestor veneration (*senzo sūhai*), where the spirits of the dead are venerated by their family members in order to become ancestral *kami* (deities).⁵ In Japan,

⁴ According to Miyazaki, it is difficult to estimate the exact number of modern hidden Christians without a clear definition of their faith. 'As a result of the drastic decrease in the population of hidden Christians, there are no more than 300 or 400 families who continue to maintain the traditional customs, faith and organization. There may be another 2,000 or 3,000 individuals who are no longer members of active groups but continue to believe in the religion of their ancestors' (Miyazaki 2015).

⁵ Beings, which are called *kami*, may include everything from the divine spirits who realized the production of heaven and earth, the great ancestors of men, to all things in the universe, even plants, rocks, birds, beasts, and fish (*The Encyclopedia of Shintō*, Kokugakuin University).

this process is carried out by Buddhist rituals through which the spirit of the dead (*shirei*) becomes Buddha (*hotoke*) and, after several years, an ancestor (*senzo*) and then, finally, a kami as part of collective spirits of the locality (Miyake & Sekimori 2005).

Turnbull explains that the missionaries did nothing to diminish the indigenous Japanese beliefs that the dead were important for their worldview. They merely diverted ancestor worship into Church-approved forms, such as prayers for the souls in Purgatory, which enhanced the social ties between the living and the dead (Turnbull 2016). When the Church went underground, the persistent belief in ancestor worship, hallowed by the missionaries' apparent encouragement, provided the precise mechanism for memorialization that the secret believers needed (*ibid.*: 199). The ancestral kami are 'moral representatives for society as a whole' (Plath 1964: 303). They remain eternally in the land, and continue to work for its prosperity and that of the kami's family.

The martyred Christians form a particular category of ancestral *kami* since they fall into a category of wandering spirits known as *muenbotoke* (Buddhas of no affiliation), who are victims of violent death, and thus 'remain possessed by the worldly passion in which they died' (Smith 1974: 41; Rowe 2011). Therefore, the fear of *muenbotoke* would have ensured that performance of religious rites on their behalf was also welcomed by non-Kirishitan; the martyrs would need to receive more treatment than other kami. Some prominent martyrs became remembered as individuals (like the *uji-gami* in Shintō), others became anonymous once they passed out of living memory, and are honored as a collectivity such as the six martyrs venerated as Orokunin-sama in Neshiko. Turnbull describes how the Kakure venerated their martyrs by preserving the gravesite (often identified only by an anonymous tree), depicting them in the *gozensama*,⁶ treasuring a mythology, and through making shrine visit – all of which may be shared with local non-Kakure (Turnbull 2016: 200). Hence, I argue that the Kakure Kirishitan not only *believe* (the "faith") but also *live* and *embody* the lives inherited from their ancestors.

Since this compromise in order to accommodate Japanese beliefs (ancestor worship) in their funeral services was shaped by indigenous Buddhist beliefs and practices (Goodwin 1989), the Catholic Church was unwilling officially to give its approval and this was one reason for its persecution. The Japanese government (*bakufu*), too, was not ready to accept any compromise. However, by providing rituals for the dead as prayers for the souls in Purgatory, the Jesuits facilitated a compromise that did not, in practice, contradict the Christian faith of Kirishitan (*ibid.*: 204–5).

In the World Heritage registration movement the discussion about Kakure Kirishitan identity, religious practice and organization generated contesting narratives concerning Christian heritage in Japan. My intention here is not to address this discussion but to build on the meaning of some important religious emotions expressed by the Kakure Kirishitan believers when asked about their refusal to return to the Catholic Church. I found the issues concerning their ancestors of extreme importance also during my interviews with members of *Kakure Kirishitan* in Ikitsuki. They explained that they could not renounce

⁶ *Gozensama* resembled objects given to the early converts by the missionaries, such as molten images of Mary and woodblock prints of Christ on the cross. In Ikitsuki, for example, a hanging scroll depicting Jesus, Mary, saints or martyrs have been venerated as the highest deity (*kamisama*) and treated with the utmost reverence.

the faith that their ancestors had guarded with their lives (Delakorda 2003). Kakure Kirishitan believe the ancestral kami can influence the living ‘they believe that abandoning the sacred objects they have received from their ancestors would infuriate the *kami* and cause them misfortune (*tatari*)’ (Miyazaki 2001: 28–9). The power of this belief is vivid in the treatment of their sacred objects when a certain Kakure Kirishitan organization is disbanded and finding an appropriate place for the objects becomes their main concern. Even though many Kakure Kirishitan organizations in Hirado dissolved about twenty years ago, it seems important in the current heritization process to consider their strong feelings concerning their moral obligation toward their ancestors about transferring their ancestral legacy to the next generation.

“More-than-cultural” landscape

This moral obligation involves not only the sacred objects (*gozensama*) Kakure Kirishitan received from their ancestors, but also the sacred land and places where the spirits of their ancestors dwell and continue to work for the prosperity of their descendants. ‘One of most important reasons for a kami to send *tatari* is the neglect or discretion of its shrine (throughout Japan). Even where the kami’s identity has long been forgotten, fresh flowers are often found’ (Turnbull 2016: 182). However, there appear to be certain differences between a Shintō shrine and a Kakure sacred place. Shintō shrines are places where kami are enshrined, while *Kakure* sacred places are locations where people are buried (a martyr’s grave).⁷ Nevertheless, there are three unique cases where Shintō shrines have been raised over a Christian grave and Turnbull argues that a similar unifying process has actually occurred at all the Kakure martyrs’ sites, bringing the two concepts of grave and shrine together (*ibid.*: 112–3).

The ancestors of the Kakure Kirishitan have unconsciously imitated Christians from 16th century Catholic Spain by making the grave of a martyr a focus for religious activity (*ibid.*: 114). (In fact, martyrs’ graves became the first objects of pilgrimage in the Christian West, see Thompson 2000: 113). In the case of the Japanese Christians, no splendid basilica was raised over the grave; the martyr was buried beneath the roots of a pine tree or a tree was planted. The underground Church in Japan thus started a process opposite to the Early Church which was cutting down trees held sacred by pagans and replacing them by churches. In times of persecution, there was certainly no identifying sign except for the trees, but later shrines and other buildings were added at several places. The shrines are simple structures of natural stone arranged to make the shape of an “open-fronted box” (Figure 2), before which candles may be lit and offerings made. Memorialization is carried out by the preservation of the site as a shrine, common to all the communities and shared with the non-Kakure of the locality (*ibid.*: 115). The complex veneration of the Christian dead is said to be much more than a simple process of memorialization and includes the baleful effects, which will occur if the veneration is disturbed. Thus, the Kakure continuously take actions to restore the state of harmony (*ibid.*: 183).

⁷ There are many cases in Shintō where the enshrined kami was once a living human being. However, due to a very strict separation between Shintō and the *kegare* (impurity or pollution, it was thought that when it adhered to the individual it also brought calamity to society. As a result, the person enshrined was likely to be buried elsewhere (Turnbull 2016: 113).



Figure 2: A Kakure Kirishitan shrine on the top of Mt. Yasumandake⁸

In the case of the former *Kirishitan* village, Kasuga, in Hirado, the distinctive expressions of the Hidden Christian's beliefs found in the "landscape" can be seen in the ritual places located within the villagers' private spaces. These are the stone monuments built of stones from the field, as well as the sacred objects and *nandogami* ("the *kami* of the storeroom" also called *gozensama* – "the honorable presence"), which are usually located within Shintō and Buddhist altars. During the prohibition of Christianity, Senpuku Kirishitan performed their rituals inside houses so that usually places, such as the living room or the immediate garden, were used for rituals and prayers. Thus, the living room in the village's main building (*omoya*) turned into a church-like place for the Senpuku Kirishitan rituals (Ueno & Inoue 2012: 191).

Another distinctive feature is the ritual space found in places and routes concerned with the Hidden Christians' everyday occupations. According to villagers, the stone monument enshrined on the top of Mt. Maruo for instance, acted as the pivotal point for the annual traditional ceremony called *mushiokuri* performed in the village to ward off harmful insects from the paddy rice fields that encircle it. However, the actual sacred place

⁸ Following the prohibition of Christianity, the highest peak of Hirado Mt. Yasumandake became very important to the Hidden Christians. The mountain is 536 meters high and visible from Hirado, Ikitsuki and even Gotō islands. Because the mountain faces the ocean, it served as a signpost for seafarers since ancient times, and it was worshipped to bring safety to maritime routes. A Buddhist temple and Shintō shrine with a stone pagoda from China were built on the mountain, while the Hidden Christians worshipped it as the Yasumadake *Okunoin-sama* (lit. "Mt. Yasumandake's inner sanctuary").



Map 2: Distribution of ritual places in the residential areas of the Kasuga village

laid hidden in a nearby rice field. Mapping the ritual routes between the Mt. Maruo and the rice fields it became clear that the ritual routes led to a graveyard from the 16th century, which was recently discovered in the rice paddy.⁹ We learned from our interviews with villagers that this place was mentioned in their prayers.

The Hidden Christian environment involves the spiritual and sacred world of their ancestral kami. Thus, their “landscape” is more than “cultural”. While the concept of “cultural landscape” resonates with this environment’s aesthetic, cultural and administrative features, the Hidden Christian environment spatialises the spiritual and sacred world of their ancestral kami or “it is” their ancestral kami. Therefore, throughout this text I differentiate between the administrative, “cultural landscape” imposed by the Agency for Cultural Affairs and UNESCO (United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization), and the “hidden Christian environment”, lived and embodied by Hidden Christians.

Registration on the World Heritage Tentative List

Twenty years after the declaration of the World Heritage Convention by UNESCO, between 1993 and 2016 the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs obtained World Heritage designations for twenty cultural and natural sites in Japan. Ten more sites have also been added to the Tentative World Heritage list and are awaiting review.¹⁰ Among them is the candidate, the “Churches

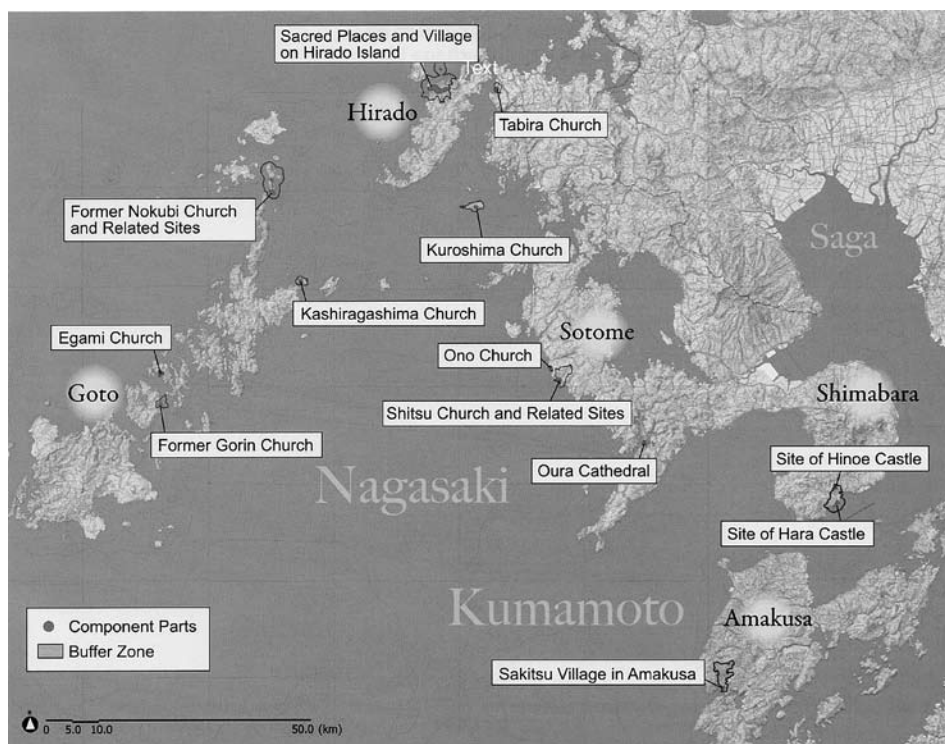
⁹ Hirado City Education Board conducted archaeological research throughout Hirado area (*Hirado shi kyōikuinkai* 2009).

¹⁰ See whc.unesco.org for a complete list of the criteria for natural and cultural properties under the 1972 World Heritage Convention, a current list of all World Heritage properties and the relevant UNESCO documents discussed below.

and Christian Sites in Nagasaki”, which was given a new name “Hidden Christian Sites in the Nagasaki Region” (Nagasaki to Amakusa *chihō no Senpuku Kirishitan kanren isan*). The new message on the Nagasaki Prefecture official website says that they are aiming for:

the World Heritage Site designation by proposing twelve parts of a distinctive cultural tradition related to religion that was cherished by *Senpuku Kirishitan* who maintained their faith in secret during prohibition of Christianity. Nagasaki Prefectural World Heritage Registration Promotion Division (2011).

Among the actors involved in the World Heritage registration movement researchers distinguish between the so-called (1) producers: Nagasaki Prefectural Government and local city administrations, tourism industry, well-informed people, NPO, the mass media, other associations, and Catholics, (2) hosts (or residents): Catholics, local people, and (3) guests (or consumers): pilgrims, tourists (Endo 2005; Matsui 2006). These actors have significantly influenced the heritization process since the inclusion of the site on the Tentative List. However, the initial World Heritage registration promotion was not commenced by the Nagasaki Prefecture and its tourism strategy, nor did it aim at regional economic benefit. It emerged from the bottom-up, i.e. those who wanted to preserve the waning Catholic churches in remote villages of Nagasaki (Yamanaka 2007: 2).



Map 3: Component parts in the initial proposal “Churches and Christian Sites in Nagasaki”

On 15 September 2001 in Nagasaki they established a voluntary Association for Declaring the Nagasaki Church Group a World Heritage (called the World Heritage Association below). The association included people from churches, local companies, the mass media, and local government, and had approximately 80 members. In the beginning, the government took a reserved stance toward this religious-like movement. However, upon their successful inscription of churches and Christian sites in Nagasaki on the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List in 2007, the prefectural, regional, and local governments became fully engaged in the promotion campaign, and the way for local municipalities was opened to link their respective cultural and natural resources to the World Heritage registration (Yamanaka 2012; Matsui 2006).

The shift from tangible to intangible heritage

In the initial proposal of the churches and Christian sites based on arguments of the volunteer World Heritage Association, the emphasis was placed on the tangible aspects of the Christian heritage, i.e. the architectural value of nineteen Catholic churches in Nagasaki Prefecture. These were acceptable as Japan's candidates for UNESCO because they had been already listed as designated national treasure (1), important cultural heritage (7), historic landmarks (3), Nagasaki prefecture-designated tangible heritage (buildings) (6), and historic landmark (1). In addition to these designated properties, the proposal included one property (church remains) not yet designated. Later, the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs reduced this number to thirteen churches and Christian-related (or rather "church-related") sites.

Aiming at the conservation of churches, the nomination file focused on the symbolic meaning of Catholic churches and the revival of Christianity in Japan (UNESCO World Heritage Centre 2007).

The change in the promotion strategy became evident a few years later when the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs added one 'cultural landscape' into the Nomination File which now had fourteen listed component parts. By including this site, not only churches, but also Hidden Christians' sacred sites and villages became included in the File as 'Sacred places and villages in Hirado' (Map 3).

Although in 1965, the 'Customs of the "Hidden Christians" in Nagasaki' (Nagasaki "Kakure Kirishitan" shūzoku) were already designated as Japan's intangible folk cultural property (*Bunkachō* 1997).¹¹

Cultural landscape conservation system

What triggered the decision to include Hidden Christians as a "cultural landscape"?

Since 1992, UNESCO has recognized as "cultural landscape" sites that combine its two previous categories of "natural" and "cultural" properties. This new category was stimulated by the increasing awareness within organizations, such as UNESCO and the World Wildlife Fund, that the majority of the world's surviving healthy forests and mountain landscapes were considered "sacred" by their local inhabitants. Japanese mythology

¹¹ See *Bunkachō*, Kunishitei bunkazai database (*Bunkachō* 1997).

for example, sees the mountains as abodes of the dead. There are numerous mountains (known as *reizan*) throughout Japan that are regarded in popular lore as places where the spirits of the dead gather or as places of spiritual power (Reader & Swanson 1997: 235). Hence, UNESCO has reconsidered the importance of cultural factors in land conservation (Hay-Edie 2000:11) and has mobilized this 'sacredness-culture-biodiversity triptych' (ibid.: 10) in its promotion of the 'cultural landscape' category of World Heritage (McGuire 2013: 160–1; UNESCO 2001, 2002). In 1992, the concept of "cultural landscape" was introduced into the amendments of the 1972 World Heritage Convention.

In 2005 the Japanese government established its own "cultural landscape" conservation scheme, claiming them as 'Japanese important assets, inherited from our ancestors who long maintained a harmonious lifestyle with nature' (Edani 2012).¹² This initiative was driven by two major movements. One came from outside Japan involving UNESCO, while the other involved a nationwide movement to reassess the value of local natural settings, including rice terraces and *satoyama* (managed woodlands and grasslands near human settlements), and to conserve the original landscapes of individual areas.

In Nagasaki, the World Heritage Association from the beginning of its campaign emphasized the value of the landscapes and the environment surrounding the designated churches and the difficulty in conserving them. They referred to the decline in rural occupations including agriculture, and decreasing population, which makes the maintenance of the cultural landscapes extremely difficult, especially in island villages such as Hirado and Gotō (Matsui 2014: 166). However, despite this bleak prognosis, they focused on the so-called "living churches" and villages where the churches were located (Kimura 2007).

The local government was also aware of this challenging situation. Increasingly, calls were made by officials to revitalize the rural environment, communities, and economies, and there was a growing awareness of the potential for developing eco-tourism in these areas. However, it was not until the suggestion from UNESCO's International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) during its on-the-ground investigation to include Hidden Christians as intangible cultural heritage that the World Heritage registration movement in Japan reoriented its focus. The earlier focus on the churches was replaced by an emphasis on the Hidden Christians' villages and their sacred sites, which were now designated as a Japanese "cultural landscape".

The new proposal for the World List

Including Kirishitan villages into the Japanese government's proposal required a considerable rewriting of the official narrative concerning Christianity in the heritization process. The narrative about the revival of Christianity and the living church was changed in order to depict the people, who had maintained it for 230 years in hiding. However, there was an imbalance caused by including only one Kirishitan village in Nomination File of 2016, which probably resulted in the ICOMOS' decision to postpone the submission of this nominated candidate to UNESCO for examination:

¹² As of April 1, 2016, 50 areas across the country were selected as important "cultural landscapes" (Agency for Cultural Affairs 2016).

In summer 2016 the decision should have been taken on the description by the World Heritage Committee. However, in a notification to Japan on January 18, 2016 the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) said the government failed to adequately explain how the individual sites contributed to the overall value of the proposal, and how they meet the criteria of World Heritage sites, according to people familiar with the panel's findings (The Japan Times 2016).

Thus, in August 2016, Japan decided to withdraw its proposal all together and issued a new proposal under the title *Hidden Christian Sites in the Nagasaki Region*. According to the Nagasaki Prefectural World Heritage Registration Promotion Division, this decision was taken on the advice of outside experts and a scientific committee. The title was changed as a result and the component parts were renamed so that they could better express the value of the proposal. Their newest proposal for the World List now consists of twelve component parts (Map 1).

Representation of *Senpuku Kirishitan* through “cultural landscape”

Following the ICOMOS suggestion about including heritage that would better connect the past with the present, the Agency for Cultural Affairs firstly aimed to include all Kirishitan villages which had worship objects (*goshintai*) received from the missionaries. Later, they reduced their selection radically by focusing only on one village in Hirado, the Kasuga village. Finally, as mentioned, several other villages became included in the list.¹³

A relatively extensive research of Kirishitan villages was also conducted by archeologists, historians, geographers, and town planners and published by the Nagasaki Prefecture as *Nagasaki chihō no Kirishitan shūroku ga keiseisuru bunkateki keikan* (*Cultural landscape formed by various Kirishitan villages in Nagasaki area*) (Nagasaki Prefecture 2013). The research included numerous *Kirishitan* villages on the western coast of Nagasaki; from Hirado Island to Amakusa peninsula and Gotō Archipelago.

The considerable shift from churches to *Kirishitan* villages and the rewriting of the official narrative based on new data had a major impact on the representation and recognition of Hidden Christians in Japan. As Yamanaka explains, ‘based on the outside “universal” re-evaluation of the world heritage standards the shift occurred from Catholic revival to recognition of folk customs and the unique shape of the Kakure Kirishitan faith’ (2015: 603). Yet, while the World Heritage registration movement, according to the new title, now places the utmost value of the bid on the historical *Senpuku Kirishitan*, their descendants who continued the “Christian faith” as Kakure Kirishitan remain “excluded” from the proposal for the World List (see the official pamphlet introducing the candidate,

¹³ See Bunkachō, Kunishitei bunkazai database (Bunkachō 2017). During 2010–2012, the Agency for Cultural Affairs nominated secret Christians in the category of several “cultural landscapes” (Cultural landscape in Hirado Island, Cultural landscape of the Ojika islands, Cultural landscape of Hisaka Island in Gotō, Cultural landscape of Kuroshima Island in Sasebo, Landscape with terraces retained by stonework at Sotome, Cultural landscape of Kitauonome in Shinkamigotō).

issued by Nagasaki Prefecture, 2017)¹⁴. That is very unfortunate, not only because their living customs are a ‘rare amalgamation of a foreign religion into the native culture of Japan’ (Miyazaki 2016), but also because their living members as well as the Kakure descendants throughout Nagasaki and Kumamoto regions could act as leading actors in the preservation of existing “cultural landscapes”.

The Japanese Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties and the Hidden Christians’ relation to their environment in Hirado

In this section I will explain how the “cultural landscape” is defined by the national Agency for Cultural Affairs and how the agency represents the Hidden Christians. Hiroko Edani of the Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties explains that the protection system of “cultural landscapes” targets only tangible elements, but the value of such tangible elements is created and sustained by the intangible activities of local residents. Therefore, it is essential to identify the residents’ practices that sustain such elements. This is particularly the case in Japan, since the definition of “cultural landscape” in Japanese law differs from the World Heritage Convention, which includes the landscapes of the past (i.e. relic/fossil landscapes), where nobody currently maintains the modes of life or livelihood activities related to these landscapes (see Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention 2016: 73, Category (ii) of the “cultural landscape”).

Importantly, the Japanese Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties (Article 2, Paragraph 1, Item 5) includes only the continuing landscapes, where local people continue to engage in the livelihood and daily life activities related to the evolution of the landscapes. In order to conserve such cultural landscapes, the Law stipulates the need to protect and sustain the entire system, comprising the natural environment and the modes of life or livelihoods of the people, since these elements are essential for conserving cultural landscapes (Edani 2012). Thus, to justify the important “cultural landscape” in Hirado, they had to clarify the “hidden efforts” of the living Kakure Kirishitan, which have until now supported the “tangible” landscape.

The Agency for Cultural Affairs described Hirado as ‘a unique cultural landscape comprised of terraced rice fields and pastureland, the living space of people who shaped it by continuous land cultivation and occupational activity carried out under the limited conditions of the island’ (Nagasaki ken 2016)

This official description proceeds to mention the distinctive features of the Hirado landscape, including specific villages, locations, and practices related to the Christian tradition as follows:

The distinctive landscape of terraced rice fields, pastureland, *ishigaki* stone-walls and horse fences have been preserved by the villages of Hirado (Shushi, Kasuga, Takagoshi, Ira, Hoki, Tazaki, Kamijima, Himosaki, Shishi, Neshiko, and Yamada). Most of these villages’ names were mentioned in letters sent

¹⁴ The newest Nomination File states that after the ban on prohibition of Christians was lifted in 1868, the *Senpuku Kirishitan* vanished from history.

by the Jesuits during the propagation and persecution of Catholicism in the mid-16th and early 17th century.

The text describes the *Kakure Kirishitan* relation to the ‘landscape’ in terms of ‘the distinctive features of the sacred mountain, the island of the sacred water, and the sacred places of their martyrs (i.e. martyred ancestors).’ It continues:

According to extracts of 1803 based on Kiyoshi Tabata’s records from 1656, one can see that the Kasuga area and the scope of rice fields remained almost unchanged from the early Edo period. Also, the distribution of the cultivated land, the residential areas, and the routes remained almost the same on the maps of 1866 and 1872. All constituting elements – the traditional houses that form the residential area, stonewalls, Buddhist temples and Shintō shrines, peoples’ occupation indicated in terrace rice fields, the meaning of sacred places preserved in Mt. Yasumandake and Nakaenoshima Island – have continued with integrity to shape the cultural landscape supported by various intangible customs (Bunkachō 2017).



Figure 3: The Kasuga village. The most representative scenery of the important cultural landscape in Hirado is the paddy rice fields of Kasuga that stretch from the sea right up to the mountains (Hirado shi kyōikuinkai 2013)

This engagement of the *Kakure Kirishitan* with their environment brings our attention closer to their everyday environment. In its significant upkeep from the middle Tokugawa period, we can recognize the indomitable spirit of their secret faith.

What Hidden Christians' practices have left unique visible markers in this environment? The geographical research undertaken by Kenji Ueno and Noriko Inoue in defense of Hirado's "cultural landscape" shows the relationships between the visible markers and the invisible hidden religious activities in the landscape (Ueno & Inoue 2012). The study was stimulated by the 2011 *Cultural Landscape Forum*, where the Hirado city administration received advice from professors and foreign experts. They suggested looking for the various signatures left in the landscape of Hidden Christians' villages of Hirado – signatures that reveal how the people pursued their lives from the encounters between the East and West during the 16th century up to the present. It was also suggested that the "cultural landscape" along the western coast of Hirado Island had the value of "associative cultural landscape" and "organically evolved cultural landscape" in the category of the World Heritage (Ueno & Inoue 2012: 192). During my personal correspondence with Mr. Ueno from the Hirado City Educational Board he explained that Kasuga village passed UNESCO's tests of integrity and authenticity for "associative cultural landscape" and "organically evolved cultural landscape", because there was a clear link between the ritual places that were established in the 16th century and residents' practices maintaining these places as sacred.

This shows that in making *Kirishitan* villages a national "cultural landscape", officials heavily based their evaluations on the UNESCO criteria. Thus, to find and disentangle the signatures, Ueno noted that they chose Kasuga village among several other *Kirishitan* villages on the western coast of Hirado, because it kept old topographical maps and written records going back to the first Jesuit missionaries (Ueno & Inoue 2012: 192). Importantly, the Board also obtained interviews with Kasuga residents about their life occupations and their recognition of sanctuaries in the Kasuga area.

The analysis of Kasuga topographical maps since the early Tokugawa period confirmed that the residential area and cultivated land had hardly changed during the last four hundred years. Furthermore, the examination of the links between the tangible landscape and the intangible practices of the residents revealed that 1) the places for rituals overlap with the places of settlements/the dwelling space (traditional wooden houses containing *Kirishitan* objects of worship *nandogami*), and that 2) with the passing centuries the sacred mountain had become overgrown by forest (*ibid.*).

This paper not only analyses the intertwining tangible and intangible aspects of the "cultural landscape", but it also explains the Hidden Christians' relation to their environment where their mundane and ritual practices along with the sacred places are spatialised. After the official persecution and prohibition, the Christian symbols, such as the cross and the church, have disappeared from the paddy rice fields in Kasuga, and publicly invisible sacred space was formed and has been preserved until today. Because they concealed their *Kirishitan* beliefs and practices in their everyday lives, their sacred practices became even more strongly embedded in their environment. In choreographing these sacred and profane practices and rituals that have been emplaced in a sacred, "secret" landscape, the Hidden Christians have managed to sustain their *Kirishitan* way of life.

The Hidden Christian life-world brings together their sacred and profane practices, *kamisama*, their ancestors' spirits and ancestral *kami*, the mountains, rice paddies, trees, water, routes, and islands. In short, their life-world is a product and producer of their environment or their cosmology. While officials carefully considered the connections between the Hidden Christians' intangible practices and the tangible environment, to Hidden Christians, these so-called "intangible" practices are actually "tangible", since they are part of their life and their ancestral *kami*. Yet, when global and national heritage policies categorized their environment as part of "cultural landscape", their practices and sacred sites were no longer hidden; they had become disentangled from their life-world and their cosmology.

Preserving the Kirishitan landscape and religious coexistence

The Hidden Christians have maintained their practices and rituals in the privacy of their households, without any written doctrine and any visible signs that might disclose their faith and practices to the authorities. This has happened for over four hundred years through religious practices and prayers, which focused on the main house in the village, as well as the places of martyrdom and symbols in nature beyond the village. However, a few decades ago the official organizations of believers disintegrated because there were no young people to continue them. Yet, although today's residents have forgotten the meaning of Kirishitan faith and rituals, they do remember and revere the special places. The older residents say that only a few decades ago they still took off their shoes before entering them. Now, these sites have been administratively recognized as "their" important "cultural landscape" inherited from their ancestors. This recognition has raised awareness concerning the important role played by their landscape in protecting the Hirado inhabitants' unique Kirishitan heritage and this awareness might encourage them to sustain their active landscape.¹⁵

Conclusion

The study of the links between the visible elements, which indicate the working environment, and invisible elements, i.e. the worship spaces, has proved to be 'of great significance in clarifying the character of the land' (Ueno & Inoue 2012:1). Thus, for the living descendants of this Kirishitan village the local landscape represents the values cherished by their ancestors. In designating Hirado as "important cultural landscape", the officials emphasized the value of the 'multi-layered spirituality' with its folk, *Shintō*, Buddhist and Christian origins as the core of the Hirado people's identity. This means that both the *Kakure Kirishitan*, who have maintained their community organizations, and those who have dissolved their Kirishitan organizations and rejoined the Catholic Church or just remained Buddhists, could see the maintenance of their landscape as a new opportunity to "grasp their roots" again and continue to honour their Kirishitan ancestors.

For a proper understanding of Kirishitan heritage one needs to appreciate the traditional houses, stone monuments, rice fields, natural forest, mountains, islands and water

¹⁵ Edani argues that on the back of this enhanced awareness a new system to promote the conservation of the landscape must be established, where local residents act as leading players (2012: 2).

where their heritage was kept secret. The new representations of cultural heritage discussed above have made us think about Japanese Christian heritage in terms of communities living in “hidden” Kirishitan villages. Here they lived in harmony with the wider (spiritual, social) environment and nature, which has, in turn, preserved the memory of them. To provide future protection for the Hidden Christian heritage of Hirado as part of the UNESCO bid “Hidden Christian Sites in the Nagasaki Region”, it thus seems essential to acknowledge their understanding of their environment where heritage is not only related to their memory and their past but is also a part of the Kakure Kirishitan life-world.

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Povzetek

Pokrajina v Hiradu na severozahodu prefekture Nagasaki je bila nedavno razglašena za "pomembno kulturno krajino" Japonske. Njena posebnost je okolje, ki je skozi način življenja in verovanja skritih krščanskih skupnosti ohranilo sledi prvega katoliškega misijona iz 16. stoletja. Državne in lokalne oblasti se že deset let potegujejo za vpis njihovih vasi in svetih krajev, ki pričajo o sožitju krščanstva z japonskim šintoizmom in budizmom, na seznam UNESCO-ve svetovne dediščine. Na podlagi poglobljenega terenskega dela v širšem območju Hirada med leti 2008 in 2016 vsebina članka pokaže, kako so nove reprezentacije t.i. Skritih kristjanov skozi "kulturno krajino" spremenile način dojemanja krščanske dediščine na Japonskem. Članek trdi, da je razglasitev verske tradicije Skritih kristjanov kot "pomembne kulturne krajine" ustvarila širši okvir, ki današnjim prebivalcem Hirada omogoča ponovni stik s to "več-religiozno tradicijo" kot lastno dediščino.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: zaščita kulturne dediščine, kulturna krajina, Skriti kristjani, *Kakure Kirishitan*, versko sožitje

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