

FROM PURE LAND TO HELL

Introducing four culturally hybrid UNESCO World Heritage sites in the Gotō Archipelago

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ABSTRACT: The islands in the Gotō region off Kyushu Island were refuges, mountains providing both terraces for growing potatoes and rice; and hideaways for clandestine religious practices; seas and bays providing fish and seaweed. Religious refugees arrived here in the 18th and 19th centuries, but had to contend with a harsh winter climate, the strong prejudices of indigenous inhabitants, and the long arms of the Nagasaki magistrate. This article locates a migrant people known variously as the *senpuku*, the *kakure*, *kirishitan*, or Hidden Christians (HC), and their descendants who acknowledge the natural world's imprint on them: their characteristics and cultural heritage are shaped by the interstitial spaces of the islands in which they subsided. World Heritage Cultural listings in 2018 included sites on the islands and were rightly acclaimed. Yet, here, as in other places, the World Heritage campaign was at times driven by shallow motivations reflecting exotic and unfounded prejudices and tourist-related economic aspirations. Even in the nomenclature, the World Heritage listing mentions the HC, but this group of people are not singular, and require more careful definition. This article seeks to demonstrate how by examining new sources of oral history, we stand to enrich our knowledge by a 'deep' engagement, taking account of both human and non-human processes, practices and awareness of place. Secondly, by focusing on this region we may re-orient our understanding of Japanese and East Asian History in a wider context than often understood, and inclusive of this coastal and marginal place. An analysis of four of the sites of World Heritage ascribed by UNESCO on the Gotō Archipelago off Nagasaki Prefecture Japan alongside the historic documents and supported by oral history reveals a religious cultural hybridity integrated into a severe environment.

KEYWORDS: Gotō Archipelago, World Heritage, oral history, environmental history, tourism

Introduction

The 2018 UNESCO World Heritage listing of twelve "Hidden Christian sites in the Nagasaki region" in Japan and on the Gotō archipelago¹ was acclaimed with fanfare in the Nagasaki region. Here heavenly images of exotic Christian churches built into fishing villages de-emphasise the fraught and fracturing history. The story of four of the sites found among

¹ The Japanese word for archipelago, *rettō*, is distinct from the English, which derives originally from Greek (Royle and Brinklow, 2018: 10). The Japanese characters, derived from Chinese influences, mean a chain, or procession of islands. Gotō means literally five islands, as there are five main islands among the group.

the islands demonstrates the narration of a migrant-people who arrived on the islands a marginalised minority, lacking in political clout, and whose experiences were both traumatic and limited in agency and resource.² Yet there is more to be chronicled about the history of this people group, especially of their diversity. In many configurations, they have proven both highly resilient and continually adaptive.

The World Heritage sites, which have ‘universal value’ according to UNESCO, provide a located starting point for understanding the experiences of at least some of the ‘Hidden Christians’ (also known as *kirishitan*), Catholics, apostates and *kakure* from the 1850s-1900. My work in oral history in nearby Nagasaki city alerted me to significant connections to the islands for both Catholic and non-Catholic interviewees related within this article, demonstrating the legacy of these sites for the present-day community in the wider region. Islands are by definition understood as ‘bounded’, and purportedly more easily controlled or managed, but these islands were historically places of liberation, allowing at least a partial freedom (Baldacchino, 2018, p. xxv). The sites continue to exert value for the local people of today, and for the nation of Japan.

Those who migrated to the islands as so-called ‘Hidden Christians’ (referred to hence as HC) constituted what I designate a *culturally hybrid* society by material and oral tradition.³ Here, the scholar must be attentive to interpenetrations, accommodations, uses of the material and the symbolic and the range of identities expressed within the hybrid (Puri, 2005, p. 25). Peter Burke writes that hybridity as botanical metaphor may be better understood by considering other definitions used interchangeably in the body of literature devoted to describing this term. Appropriation, accommodation, translation, oicotype⁴ and ecotype, for example, also express hybridity in varied fields (Burke, 2013, p. 52-58). Avoiding hegemonic knowledge and governance and the denial of the natural world, a new study of the Gotō should embrace local and post-colonial knowledge of the environment. Employing a post-colonial (after European/US and Japanese colonial periods) framework involves an acknowledgement of the hybridity of knowledge held ambiguously in time and space between multiple and diverse actors – seeking a third space outside of dichotomous epistemologies of the other and the self (Maclean, 2015, p. 1).

An equally important aspect of methodology for this developing project is in the nexus between environment and culture; the omnipresent connection between the human and the natural world, even as descriptions of World Heritage sites indicate the located-ness and importance of place, in a more-than-human world. Multiple environmental studies include little reference to the human habitants of this region. Such studies include measurements of tidal turbulence intensity (Novo and Kyojuka, 2017; Waldman et.al, 2017), a beach litter study (Kako et.al, 2011), a study of a species of firefly (Ohba, Numata and Kawano, 2020), efforts to find evidence of a tsunami caused by the collapse of a caldera

² As noted by Jakobina Arch, most histories of Japan are bounded by the shoreline, ignoring coastal peoples and fishing villages. A bias is evident among scholars, with its roots in the Japanese school system, which tends to put at the centre farming peoples and rice growing at the expense of fisheries and coastal groups. A study of the HC populace in the Gotō, who could not rely on rice as a staple, will contribute to the restoration of such histories (Arch, 2018: 12).

³ By this definition, I avoid the use of the term syncretistic, often used as a derogatory reference within religious writings.

⁴ An oicotype is a term originally used by C.W. von Sydow, borrowed from biology and applied as a text-type of folklore folktales and ballads, frequently adapted within a locality or a cultural group (McCormick et.al, 2010, pp. 925-26).

some 7000 years ago (Winckler, 2020) and similar projects. Researchers have investigated how locals understood natural resources and non-human entities and Mayumi Itoh has studied what she terms a “culture of mourning whales”, including residents of these islands (2018) (See Figure 1). The results of the above studies may be enriched by the addition of localised human knowledge. For the islanders, non-human neighbours, climate and micro-local conditions of topography, surrounding sea and arable soil are all of vital importance for cultural heritage and life.



Figure 1 – ‘Goto kujira tsuki’, Hokusai Katsushika, c 1831-33 (CCO Public Domain).

UNESCO registered twelve components in 2018 as HC sites across the regions of Nagasaki and Amakusa, including ten villages, the remains of a castle and one cathedral. Out of these, the 8th-11th are found on the Gotō Islands, two including the sites of ruined villages and two villages that are still settled today. In this article, I focus on these four sites, including one church site, and intersperse the descriptions of these sites with three interviewee discussions. The four locations constitute HC sites which hold an important legacy in the 21st Century – drawing our attention to shared understandings of Buddhist, Shinto, HC, and Catholic traditions and an evident cultural hybridity, by which groups share features of religious traditions. Depending on location, the cultural hybridity was formed by differing traditions, as this article will discuss in detail. A 2017 International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) report to UNESCO relates in some depth the evidence of the HC traditions, their relics and the building of churches following the lifting of the ban on Christianity. The ICOMOS report also notes that “the continuing presence of actively-worshipping Christians, the continuing use of the agricultural lands and ongoing worship at shrines, and within church buildings... contribute to the Hidden Christian narrative” (117). ICOMOS recommended that “oral history projects which record the beliefs and memories of current generations of local people’ would assist in conserving our knowledge about the overall cultural world heritage of the region” (120). The “State Party” in the associated ICOMOS report described a considerable collection of folkloric, religious and historical studies of HC customs and traditions that are currently restricted to the Japanese language.

ICOMOS's report underscores the need for an urgent and collaborative oral history project alongside study of the extant literature and primary documents, which may be helpfully translated into other languages. The urgency of this historical work is due to the gradual disappearance of community members whose experiences go back to the pre-war, Imperial times. Oral history supports a shared communal approach, acknowledging the ownership and guidance of the local people in collation and narration. Amy Starecheski (2017) argues in relation to Michael Frisch's well-known work, 'A Shared Authority' that oral history is a key method for public history. The HC have had few opportunities to write their own history, given their secretive social stance, and a long-term lack of access to education. What exists today on the written record is largely either from the Catholic historic record or from scholarly study, including anthropology and history studies, of the HC or *kakure* of the 20th Century. A new study will ably support what we know about this history, according to ICOMOS, which is of Outstanding Universal Value due to its unique testimony to the history of people and their communities who secretly transmitted their faith spanning more than two centuries. A "distinctive religious tradition that was seemingly vernacular yet which maintained the essence of Christianity" was established and survived (2017, p. 116). ICOMOS noted the surveyors' concern that there was a "growing disconnection between the place and stories of the descendants of the Hidden Christians" (ibid). An under-explored link to be considered here is to be found in the continuing connections between the experiences of the modern-day Catholic populace and the older stories of the HC.

Defining 'Hidden Christian'

Defining the HC is not nearly as simple as it might at first seem. The World Heritage listing nominates "Hidden Christians" as a catch-all phrase, in fact inadequate in describing heterogeneous populations. In Japanese, the World Heritage title was translated as *Nagasaki to Amakusa chiho no sempuku kirishitan kanren isan* ('The Nagasaki and Amakusa region's "Sempuku Kirishitan" sites'), a hint to the inadequacy of the English translation. *Kirishitan* was the term for Christians used from the earlier mission period of roughly 1550 to 1613 (as distinct from *Kirisutokyoin* today). The word used in the World Heritage listing specifically refers to the time of persecution itself, *sempuku* (concealed, latent or dormant), in the period known by historians as the *sempuku jidai* (Underground era, ~1640-1873).⁵ Later, from 1873, some became Catholics, no longer HC. Another term, *kakure*, was applied to various communities of former 'secret' Christians who remained separated from the Catholics after the Christian ban was lifted post-1873. Turnbull chose to apply the term *kakure* to the cult groups that continued in culturally hybrid practices even after the end of the secluded period, following Kataoka Yakichi and later Miyazaki Kentarō (Turnbull, 1998; Higashibaba, 1999, p. 29).⁶ Media articles assert that the *kakure* group are gradually disappearing, or gone, though a small remnant are still in existence. In this article, I refer to the groups as HC, or *sempuku* or *kakure*, recognising they are not monocultural, but diverse.

The *sempuku* who were migrants here were themselves not a homogenous group. There were multiple groups of *sempuku*, each with their own practices, calendars, and icons, of

⁵ Historians also call this period, *Sakoku*, or 'closed country', as trade between Japan and other countries was severely limited, apart from Korea, China and Holland.

⁶ Kawashima writes that 35 000 of the "Hidden Christians" refused to join the Catholic faith after 1873 (2017: 92).

whom some became *kakure*. Anthropologist Christal Whelan studied the 20th Century communities of *kakure kirishitan* of the Gotō islands and published the results of her research from 1994 onwards, focusing on the island of Narushima. The communities she described did not return to Catholicism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In an article in *Monumenta Nipponica*, Whelan articulated the *kakure* social situation in the Gotō islands. Even on one island, she writes that, from one village to another, *kakure kirishitan* practices varied, including their dating, for example, of the birth of Christ, known variously as *Otaiya* or *Gotanjo* (Whelan, 1992, 372).

World Heritage designation has important political and social implications in relationship to stratified societies and has an influence on tourism. The islands of the archipelago were a refuge for migrating HC, and subsequently a location of trauma due to persecutions. Stephen Shaw, writing about an urban context of tourism in “ethnic sectors” argues for a foregrounding of power relationships, and alliances among stakeholders in consideration of “inter-cultural” tourism (2013, p. 344). ‘Participatory’ governance, and ‘intercultural’ tourism increases agency for ‘quieter’ voices, and expands the benefits of World Heritage listing while appropriately interpreting the visual landscape. Japan as a nation-state has an imagined collective history built upon centralised hierarchies, in which the HC legacy, or Christian legacy, is an exoticised, marginal and regional narrative, and the World Heritage listing must negotiate this endowment. A truncated narrative included on the Japanese World Cultural Heritage site, embraces visuals of cathedrals and churches, suggesting that HC cooperated with pre-existing communities and re-joined the Catholic Church on mass after a ban on Christianity was lifted (UNESCO, 2018). Certainly one of the sites discussed in this article also incorporates a church. On the UNESCO website, the new World Heritage Sites listed in 2018 are described as “Hidden Christian Sites in the Nagasaki Region”, which “reflect the era of prohibition of the Christian faith, as well as the revitalization of Christian communities after the official lifting of the prohibition in 1873.” To some extent this is true, but the narrative benefits from further nuance and description, for both tourists and locals. Whelan’s work shows how approaching Gotō with an internal perspective, from the point of view of the inhabitants, rather than as an external observer, transforms such narratives (Warrington and Milne, 2018, p. 174). Not all HC rejoined the church after 1873 and the relationship between those who became Catholic and those who remained as HC was fractious at times. Participatory research will allow Catholic, *kakure*, *sempuku* and apostate voices to co-narrate history about the shared HC narratives.

‘Pure Land’ or Hell?

The HC narrative from the 17th-19th centuries is avowedly plurivocal not singular, including tales of migration, adaptation, accommodation and hybridity. Off the coast of Kyushu, Japan, the isolated islands called the Gotō Archipelago acted as a partial refuge for those trying to hide their religious practices, well out of reach of Shogun, Daimyo, Nagasaki magistrate. Simultaneously, these groups were for hundreds of years, out of the reach of Rome.

There are approximately one hundred and forty islands in the Gotō islands group, including the five main islands, Fukue, Hisaka, Naru, Wakamatsu and Nakadori (as seen in Figure 2). End to end, the islands approximate 85 kilometres in length. Tsushima island is a much larger landmass to the north, that is still contested by the states of Japan and South Korea, while around 100 kilometres to the east is the port of Nagasaki city. Of the twelve UNESCO sites, the four in the Gotō include the whole of Hisaka, a segment of Naru and the

smaller islands of Kashiragashima and Nozaki (Figure 2). During the early modern period, relevant to the HC, the Gotō Islands were a part of a busy trading and fishing network, with Chinese and Dutch boats frequently arriving in their straits on the way to Nagasaki (Arch, 2018, p. 28).



Figure 2 - The Four World Heritage sites (map modified from Pekachu, CC BY-SA 3.0 - Wikimedia Commons⁷).

A locally well-known Catholic historian from Nagasaki city, Kataoka Yakichi reported an oicotype or song about the refugees that circulated about the Gotō Islands from a *kirishitan* or HC tradition, relating the migration that occurred in the late 18th Century from Omura on the mainland to the islands, in translation:

Everyone wants to go to Gotō. To the kindly earth of the Gotō. Everyone wants to go to the Gotō and see the eri (a collar worn by the kirishitan) of the countryside.

Everyone wants to go to Gotō. Gotō is the Pure Land, but when you arrive it is hell. Gotō, the Pure Land and when you see it, it is hell. Gotō islands, where you don't go a second time (Nagasaki Bunkensha [author's translation], 2013 p. 41; Kato, 2015, p. 7).

⁷ https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Got%C5%8D_Islands#/media/File:Gotō_Islands_Nagasaki_Ja.svg - accessed 10 November, 2020.

The HC used the Buddhist term for the Pure Land indicating heaven or paradise, imagining the islands as an idealised environment free of persecution. However, when they arrived there as the song indicates they found *jigoku* (hell) for reasons ranging from the difficult environment and climate, to their new neighbours and the persecutions that followed them.⁸ The islands continued to be a difficult place in which to eke out an existence into the 20th Century. Nakao Kan, from the outcaste community near Urakami in northern Nagasaki, went to teach at the islands and reported of the Catholic children he taught that they had no electricity, nor water pipes (Takayama, 2016). Soon after World War II, in 1950, a geographer agreed with the assessment of the song. Yoshimasa Yamashina wrote in an article “that the daily life of the inhabitants is a continuation of struggles against natural environment and they remain in miserable and defeated circumstances” (Yamashina, 1950, p. 141). Yamashina’s assessment and the folk-song are from very different eras of history, but both testify to the ambiguities of the migrations – the HC envisaged a Pure Land paradise, which turned out nothing like it – as they migrated here.

The Four World Heritage Sites on the Archipelago

The locations, the topography and the difficult terrain divulge how the environment was intrinsically a part of a story of struggle. Yet, the environment itself enabled the preservation of a number of evolving close-knit communities. In the following section I integrate a geographical introduction of the four sites, the features of the land, vegetation, shelter and sea access, which are all important to the different groups. Elaborating on the four World Heritage listed locations, I will introduce two interlocutors from my previous oral history work, plus an islander who discussed his memories, revealing salient aspects of a culturally hybrid history.

Site 1 - Nozaki Island

Many HC accommodated themselves to either Buddhist or Shinto traditions and communities. The first site is the furthest north, comprising the remains of villages on Nozaki Island where HC from Sotome migrated and affiliated themselves with the Okinokojima Shinto Shrine. Nozaki Island was a place of refuge in a largely unoccupied space, open for newcomers – but not an easy place to occupy nor to live. The HC migrated to the Nokubi area in the central part of the island (establishing Nokubi Village), and to the Funamori area at the southern tip of the island; neither area inhabited prior to the migration.⁹ The new migrants were forbidden to collect wood (Shinto priests who inhabited the island prosecuted this rule), but they worked to make the difficult slopes usable, and develop small plots of flat land by building stone retaining walls for both cultivation and residences, and to grow potatoes and wheat.

⁸ Pure Land teachings are especially important in sects like Jodō-shu and Jodō Shinshu.

⁹ Nokubi is mentioned in another oicotype, a whaling song mentioned by Greenland (2017, p. 179).



Figure 3 - Nozaki Island, 1st January, 2010 (Wikimedia Commons).¹⁰

The HC landscape had physical implications, but also spiritual and sacred. Other researchers have noted how for the HC, martyrs' graves tended to be marked by trees and shrines (Kawashima, 2017, p. 94), a likely hybrid influence of Shintoist understandings (Turnbull, 1994, p. 159). At this first site, the Okinokojima Shinto Shrine is found on the northern part of Nozaki Island, which falls away to cliffs at the shore. There are two major volcanic stone structures found behind the shrine, and on top, the Oeishi Stone, which is 5.3 metres in length, 3 metres in width and 1.2 metres tall. The Oeishi stone and shrine were revered as a guardian of maritime safety for the fishing communities of the Gotō. On Nozaki Island, sacred place and symbolic environment were integrated into the HC cosmology. Connections between *sempuku* martyrs' sites and Shintoist belief support Turnbull's argument that the Shinto link to the HC has been neglected in comparison to the Buddhist ones (169). Perhaps this is due to a misunderstanding that all HC had common practices and beliefs. The arriving HC occupied the Nokubi area in the centre of the island and Funamori at the southern tip. From the 1850s and 1860s, European and United States traders and sailors arrived in Nagasaki City, including some French missionaries. Consequently, in 1865, five *sempuku* of Nokubi visited the newly built Oura Cathedral (Figure 4) in Nagasaki where they were duly baptised by French missionaries, before a new wave of persecutions directed by the Nagasaki Magistrate.

Petoro of Ebukuro Village

The migration of the HC involved push-factors from the mainland and environmental and human pressures upon arrival on the islands. Directly south of Nokubi is Nakadōri-jima, where HC moved seeking richer and more accommodating environs. Tagawa Motonori, a photographer from an island close to the mainland, recently published in *Fukuzatsu Kikō* magazine an oral history (in Japanese) about his interviewee, 'Petoro' Onōe Isamu who originates from Nakadori-jima, to the south of Nozaki Island (Tagawa, 2020). Petoro (Peter) was born in 1930 (he is 90 years old) and is a member of a small Catholic community numbering today some 26 households. Petoro's oral history illuminates the

¹⁰ https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nozaki_Island2010A.jpg



Figure 4 - Oura Cathedral, originally built to minister solely to the foreign legate in Nagasaki, Nagasaki Harbour (xiquinhosilva, 2018 Flickr.)

migration history of the HC, and although his village is not one of the sites World Heritage listed, the cultural hybrid heritage here is evident from his interview.

The settlement of Ebukuro is traced back to the migration of the HC, originating from Sotome on the mainland of Kyushu, some five generations ago in around 1820 (migrations began in approximately 1797). The first *sempuku*, including Petoro's ancestors, arrived in the 18th Century. Groups of *sempuku* fled from the region of Omura on the mainland to the Gotō islands, where they established small communities. The context for HC in the Omura region had been extreme in the 17th Century, when the Omura persecution of 1657 occurred and approximately 400 Christians were executed. The Omura-han officials instituted a population control, and instructed the killing of all children apart from the eldest. Scholars believe this drove HC to migrate. Peter Nosco studied the early texts and history of the HC from the 17th Century (Nosco, 1993). Nosco's writing on the 1797 Christians who migrated to Gotō to escape persecution in Kurosaki explains how one migration evaded repression (Nosco, 2007, p. 85). When they first arrived at the Gotō in the 18th Century, the indigenous inhabitants, known as *jige*, or *jigemon*, did not welcome the *sempuku*. Instead, they drove them from the fishing villages into the more barren and isolated parts of the islands (Whelan, 1992, p. 383). The *kakure*, who Whelan described in her anthropological work at a much later stage in the late 20th Century, were still known as newcomers to the islands because their roots only stretched back 200 years at the time of her writing (1992, p. 382).

Despite a shift to Catholicism of the inhabitants of Ebukuro, the legacy of the HC remains significant. Petoro explained to Tagawa that his grandmother and grandfather told him a couple named *jiidon* were the founders of Ebukuro Village and so he was taken to their

forest grave when he was a child at New Year's and Obon festival time to visit and to honour their memory (Tagawa, 2020).

The indigenous *jige* attempted to control the HC arrivals. To adapt, the HC had to eke out sources of food, made more difficult by restrictions placed on them by the *jige*. While he referred to a much later time, Petoro discussed the food he ate as a child in his interview, hinting of discriminatory treatment which lingered on until at least the end of World War II. He said:

We ate oats, and our main food was sweet potato. We had a few rice paddies, but it wasn't our main diet. We would just eat rice on special days, like Christmas, or New Years... but we could have fish. We could go out to sea and fish. My ancestors were able to find fish from the bay right out in front [of the settlement]. But when I was a small child, we were not allowed to catch sea molluscs, abalone, seaweed, red algae, hijiki or ogonori seaweeds, because they were expensive. (Author's translation, Tagawa, 2020)

The HC history shows that although both rice cultivation and consumption of fish is often considered the norm in Japan, it was not ubiquitous, even in coastal regions. Excluding the Ebukuro villagers, the Buddhist village to the south of Ebukuro fished the seas, while the Catholics were disallowed, according to Petoro. The Buddhist settlement leased land to *kirishitan* immigrants, where they were allowed to grow sweet potatoes. Despite such arrangements, the HC and later Catholics found loopholes in order to utilise the rich resources of the sea. The community not only kept their faith quiet – they fished surreptitiously, said Petoro, consuming privately what they caught.



Figure 5 - Hisaka Island, largest of the four nominated sites, Gotō Archipelago (1 October 2015, Kyushu Air Lines).

Site 2 - Hisaka Island

Whereas Nozaki Islander HC interacted with the local Shinto culture, on Hisaka Island (Figure 5), it was a Buddhist hybridity that emerged. The second World Heritage site I introduce here included multiple villages on the larger Hisaka Island, where immigrants arrived from Sotome on the mainland. Protected among the hills (Figure 2), in this location the people built rice paddies. HC migrants originally built villages on the periphery of Buddhist villages or in isolated locations – but here they gradually began to work together with Buddhist communities, assisting in both fishing and farming. Drawing on religious iconography, the HC of Eiri Village revered a white porcelain statue originating from Chinese sources of the Buddhist Bodhisattva Kannon, in a continuation of a tradition of honouring the Virgin Mary. Such traditions were also present on the mainland, and I have written previously about the importance of Mary for Catholics who survived the atomic bombing of Nagasaki (McClelland, 2017). After missionary contact occurred and the Oura Cathedral was built in Nagasaki in 1865, Hisaka Islanders showed a Catholic faith in public, and new persecutions were implemented by shogunal and later Imperial officials. The region became a major centre of persecution during the Gotō *kuzure* (Nagasaki magistrate crackdown) of 1868, and is therefore a significant place of memory for Catholics today. Many died in imprisonment crammed into a tiny cell on the island.

While the Meiji government freed more than three thousand Urakami HC in 1873 (and missionaries began to operate freely after this time), the World Heritage narrative neglects to mention that persecutions continued on the more remote Gotō Islands. Petoro explained:

The Meiji government rescinded the prohibition on religion in 1873 (Meiji 3rd year), but the Ebukuro persecution happened after that. At the time, my great-grandparents carried my grandparents on their back up to the mountains. Our crops were taken, our home was devastated, our clothes were stolen and our tools broken. (Author's translation, Tagawa, 2020: online).

Refugees Once More: 1945

The pattern of seeking fertile land on the islands in order to escape difficult situations was repeated through history. Even in the post-war, after the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, the Gotō Islands were again highly attractive to the descendants of the HC. In 2016 a Catholic interviewee and *hibakusha* (bomb survivor) in his 70s discussed with me how his father chartered a boat to go back to his birthplace, in order to escape the 'atomic field' after the bombing of Nagasaki. Nakamura Kazutoshi, eleven years old in 1945, suffered the bombing, but was saved as he was just over the hill when it occurred. He related that after the bombing, there was no food in Nagasaki. His family were part of a new wave of refugees who returned to the islands in the post-war period.

The community sought refuge wherever they could and Nakamura explained that all of the remaining members of his family escaped to the Gotō, where his own HC ancestors came from. The Gotō provided food for his family, but as time wore on, he became aware it also stole away from him his ability to gain an education.

My Dad had a friend with a boat, about 80 kilometres West of Nagasaki city, I think. On the Gotō Archipelago there is Gotō city. And this was where my

father was born. And there were a few fields that he kept even after he had moved to Nagasaki city. And so anyway, in order for my father, to feed his children for the next few years, we ended up moving back there. So we chartered that boat and moved back... at the time we understood that the war had been lost and had finished and so in order to live we went there, my brothers (elder) came back from the navy and helped my father plant the fields and make food so we could eat. We were on those islands for definitely seven or eight years... As a result of living on a small island, even if I wanted to go on to [secondary] school, I could not.

Site 3 - Naru Island and Egami Church

To the north of Hisaka island is the third World Heritage site found in the Gotō Archipelago, on Naru-shima, the island where anthropologist Christal Whelan had lived among *kakure*. Reportedly, HC in the 18th Century initially migrated first to an uninhabited island Kazura, and then moved to Naru Island, where they settled in Nagahae, Tsubakihara and Nankoshi villages. Here the communities found tiny alluvial plains, like those on Hisaka Island, but isolated from other Buddhist villages, where they could establish residences, open up rice paddies and build on the slopes. Around thirty-five years after the ban on Christianity was lifted, in 1918, the Catholic-converted community built Egami Church on a terrace (Figure 6), using funds gathered from their herring fishing activities. In building the church, the people took account of the environment, lifting its floor level off the ground, to avoid the high humidity of a nearby spring. The design reflects the forms and designs of the houses in the village, allowing ventilation for the interior and simultaneously expressing the westernised architecture of conventional Catholic churches.



Figure 6 - Egami Church, Higurashi Yuichi, Nagasaki Prefecture¹¹

¹¹ <https://web.archive.org/web/20200923135055/https://whc.unesco.org/en/documents/166087/>

Churches such as Egami were enlisted to support the World Heritage claims and tourist development. Exotic images of island churches are projected on posters at the Nagasaki main train station and souvenirs may be purchased inside the building including *Kurusu Chocolates* ('Cross Chocolates'), marketing the Christian heritage of the region to tourists as a commodity for edible consumption (Figure 7), reflecting the manner in which:

Islands present themselves, or find themselves presented, as locales of unfettered desire, as tantalising platforms of paradise, as habitual sites of fascination, emotional offloading or religious pilgrimage (Graci and Maher, 2018, p. 247).



Figure 7 - Kurusu Crunch Chocolates, Nagasaki Souvenir, Nagasaki station (author's photo, 2016).

Originally, many more churches like Egami Church found around the Gotō Archipelago were slated to be a major part of the World Heritage listing but were subsequently withdrawn (Kawashima, 2017, 88). A souvenir tea towel (Figure 7), displayed at the World Heritage office at Nagasaki Harbour, showed the location of thirteen churches or cathedrals in the region, and included a map for perspective. By 2018, the only two church buildings included in the final World Heritage listing by UNESCO were Oura Cathedral (Figure 4), the large white building at the bottom centre and Egami, the smaller white building second from the top centre.



Figure 8 – A teatowel showing churches: the pathway to a Word Heritage listing (Egami Church is the central church) (author’s photo, 2019).

Meanwhile, in wider Nagasaki, identity through HC roots was denied and stigmatised, even during the post-war period.¹² The avoidance of discussion about past oppression in new generations after traumatic experiences is a feature noted in other studies. Scholar Mary Chamberlain writes of the diasporic memories in the Caribbean which “voided” slavery and oppression experienced in the past. Those she interviewed emphasise other aspects of their ancestry, playing up their white ancestors, and avoiding the discussion of slavery. Chamberlain writes, it “is the memory that dare not say its name” (2009, p. 182)

In my own interviews in Nagasaki in 2016, Matsuzono Kichijirō¹³, the son of an *hibakusha* (atomic bomb survivor), explained that his father, Gorō was born (circ. 1925) on Naru-shima. Gorō avoided at all costs mentioning his family’s *kakure* ancestry. Matsuzono said to me:

My father came from a small island, Naru-shima, of the Gotō islands. Therefore his ancestors were the Kakure kirishitan (hidden Christians) of Naru-shima, so basically I am a descendant of the Kakure Kirishitan!

¹² Christal Whelan describes the lowly position of the *kakure* in Naru-shima. She did a significant amount of work on Naru-shima with the hidden Christian community there in the 1990s. The adherents of this community refused to re-join the Catholic church in the Meiji era. (Whelan, 1992)

¹³ A pseudonym.

But Matsuzono's father elided his birthplace, which would give away his HC connections, to avoid potential discrimination. His father did not return to Catholicism nor did he wish to remain in contact with the *Kakure Kirishitan* groups who continued to practise their religious traditions into the post-war period. People in Nagasaki had no idea about his *kirishitan* heritage, said Matsuzono.

The significance of Gorō's birthplace on the islands for Matsuzono is his religious *kakure* or hidden Christian roots. As well, his grandmother had, Matsuzono said, some Russian heritage. In the interview, Matsuzono introduced himself, his father and grandmother as follows:

My name is Matsuzono Kichijirō. I was born in 1965... My grandmother [Naka] was born of a Russian and a Nagasaki lady... And I don't know who the husband of my grandmother was ... So we don't know who [my father's] father was.

There are missing (masculine) figures in Matsuzono's family tree: his grandfather and a mysterious Russian great-grandfather. Links and liaisons between Japanese and Western citizens in the Nagasaki region were decried from time to time in history.¹⁴ Matsuzono's narrative of his family line shows, through his unknown European great-grandfather, a connection to Russian arrivals, probably in the late 19th Century. Ironically, despite his silence about the religion of his ancestors, Matsuzono's father Gorō suffered significant discrimination due to his 'foreigner's' features (of his Russian heritage) and his residence at home in Chinatown, Nagasaki, where his stepfather was a Chinese man.

Site 4 - Kashiragashima Island

The fourth and final World Heritage listed site in the Gotō was a quarantine island from the middle of the 19th Century, bringing to mind other historic islands such as Lazaretto in the Venetian Lagoon, Kamau Taurua in Aotearoa/New Zealand and Mokola'i in Hawai'i (Royle and Brinklow, 2018, p. 16). A HC population arrived here last among the four sites. Kashiragashima Island, due to rumours of disease, was feared and shunned by other communities, making this an ideal place for seclusion. The island is physically separated from neighbouring Nakadori Island by a 150-metre strait, which experiences dangerous tidal flows. Like Nozaki island, the edges of this mountainous island are generally steep cliffs and difficult to approach, while there is a small beach on the northern coast of the island.

Here, the local HC colluded with Buddhist authorities on Kashiragashima. For the islanders of Kamigoto, the hidden away outwardly Buddhist Kashiragashima Island was reported to them as heaven itself (*tengoku demo aru ka no you ni iihayashi*) and more and more *kirishitan* immigrated there, beginning in 1858. Settling at Shirahama beach, the HC constructed terraces with stone walls and grew potatoes from the beach to the mountains (Figure 8). Later, they settled the southern coastal Tajiri and Hamadomari on the west. Just ten years later, in 1868, severe persecution began (Nagasaki Shimbum, 2019).

¹⁴ For example, in 1636, the 13th year of the Kan'ei era – an Act stated that, "Children born of the Nanban people (Spaniards or Portuguese) in Nagasaki and people adopting these Nanban children into their families shall be put to death." (Takekoshi, 1930, p. 129).



Figure 8 - Nokubi church built up a terraced hill on Kashiragashima, (photo by Indiana Jo, Wikimedia¹⁵)

Having introduced four World Heritage sites on the Gotō in 2018, and described instances of cultural hybridity that included both Buddhist and Shinto-influenced practices and traditions, let us return to re-consider the overall narrative and some implications for the collation of a new oral history here.

The World Heritage Narrative

To ratify the World Heritage nature of the sites, including the Gotō Island sites, a team of experts travelled to Nagasaki. In September 2017, ICOMOS sent a mission to evaluate the 'Hidden Christian Sites in the Nagasaki Region (Japan)', including attributes such as villages, houses, cemeteries, landscapes, churches, places of secret worship, coastal scenery, forests, topographical features (mountains), continuing use of agricultural lands and ongoing worship at sacred places. The team then constructed the following meta-narrative about the twelve chosen sites summarising four stages in historical heritage that are now listed on the UNESCO World Heritage website:

1. An event that triggered a ban on Christianity;
2. The development of the HC religious tradition;
3. Migration strategies adopted to maintain their communities;
4. An event triggering a new phase and transition for the religious tradition (ICOMOS 2017, pp. 113-114).

¹⁵ https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kashiragashima_Church_3.JPG

While the World Heritage narrative defines the HC tradition as unitary, in fact, there were multiple traditions. The variability of HC in its culturally hybrid Shinto and Buddhist forms and in its adaptation to diverse environs needs to be more clearly highlighted. By better defining the variations of HC, incorporating not only *sempuku*, but also *kakure*, Catholic, and apostate, we stand to better understand how their traditions were adaptive and drew upon memory. It is also vital to understand how they integrated with locals including Indigenous inhabitants, fishing communities, Shinto and Buddhist communities and practitioners. The environment of the Gotō Islands was significant for developing and maintaining the communities. Egami village on Naru Island does show how at least some of the Christians eventually emerged from hiding from the authorities. The inclusion of Petoro's story in this article demonstrates how World Heritage sites provide but a starting point for understanding cultural heritage and public history here. The multiple 'sacred' sites of significance show there is much more to study in terms of communal memory and adaptation to and awareness of the environment. In short, the chosen sites do show how the HC tradition developed (factor 2, above), but there is more to be explicated about how Catholic tradition developed and was influenced by the HC heritage, in varied ways depending on the geographic location, missionary influences and so on.

In the case of the Gotō Islands, questions about cultural heritage are entangled in "local to global geopolitics, cultural diplomacy, investment and economics," intersecting with public memory and politics of identity and recognition (Ireland and Schofield, 2015, p. 3). The HC were not indigenous but refugees, and not only did they need to avert from the attentions of the shogunal and later Imperial authorities by their escape to this place, they negotiated and responded to new situations once on the islands. Although successful for lengths of time in hiding, they also experienced distrust, prejudicial treatment and even punishment for their practices.

To properly understand the cultural legacy of the HC, evidence of an ongoing intergenerational trauma pointed to by Matsuzono's understanding of his father's hidden legacy should be examined carefully. Adding to the oral record, as exemplified by Petoro's oral narration, holds important implications for the present and future. This introduction of the four sites indicates how the story of the HC of the Archipelago and Nagasaki region is considerably more complicated than the World Heritage-ascribed narrative, and is impacted by silences and contestation. More than one third of 'HC' did not become Catholics between 1873 and 1945 but continued in practices influenced by Shintoism, Buddhism and their oral tradition influenced by the earlier (Portuguese and Spanish) phase of Catholic mission (Kawashima 2017, 90).¹⁶

Within this article, I have complicated the concept of who the 'HC' were and who they represent today. A danger exists that World Heritage sites will be commodified and their narration simplified in the case of the 2018 HC sites, presenting an image of post-HC churches, rather than grappling with a more complicated cultural hybridity - the result of interactions, human adaptation and memory. When Petoro was asked by Tagawa about how prejudices and discrimination were dispelled for his community, he referenced the recent World Heritage listing, answering as follows:

Really, it has been in the last 20 or 30 years, I think. This area is in the countryside with no income, distinct clothing, and attitude to life and so in the

¹⁶ I have focused in this article on the four Gotō Island sites among the World Heritage listing. Tinka Delakorda Kawashima has analysed the Hirado sites. (Kawashima, 2017)

past we were looked down upon. But now Gotō churches have been made World Heritage. People are coming in on pilgrimages from Tokyo and [from] especially far away. (2020, online)

How will the arrival of new tourists on ‘pilgrimages’ alter economy, culture, or even the inhabitants’ own understanding of their identity? The urgent collection of oral history narratives will ensure those who reside there can add to the narrative from the ground up, so the story of the HC may be told more effectively in conjunction with World Heritage status.

Conclusion

Thomas More wrote in *Utopia* (1516) that islands offer happiness and well-being (Kearns and Coleman, 2018, p. 279). The HC certainly found at least some form of liberation in the islands, but they also experienced imprisonment and persecution. The adaptation of the HC to an environment that appears harsh, in a social setting even harsher, testifies to a deep knowledge and ongoing relationship with the land, the soil, and the sea. The *sempuku* as migrants and their Catholic and *kakure* descendants adapted to the land within burdensome parameters, and developed new ways to live, responding locally, and adeptly on particular islands, with motley circumstances. The new 2018 World Heritage sites provide a starting point, supporting the case for a new and timely study of the Gotō Archipelago, drawing on consultative and participatory community resources. The World Heritage sites demonstrate ongoing pressure for absorption into a commodified economy of tourism, with the danger they afford only shallow narratives applauding exotic churches and mystical, imagined HC. Tracing cultural heritage with an eye to post-colonial histories and difficult memory is a complex task but in the Gotō Archipelago, a teasing out of the story of the ‘HC’ will describe a rich heterogeneous cultural heritage, making sense out of how this legacy may be understood going forward.

A new oral history of the Gotō stands to offer insights for Japanese society and Asian history more broadly. Historian Miyazaki Kentaro has written that the *Kakure Kirishitan* “can or will not become Catholic” as “their faith became Japanese through and through, mixing with the traditional religions of Japan and thus became estranged from Christianity” (2001, p. 283). Rather than an essentialist reading, however, culturally hybrid groupings are by nature porous. The descendants of *sempuku* like Petoro and Matsuzono remember their ancestors and yet recreate an identity in Christianity. For apostates, for those today involved in Shintoist or Buddhist traditions, or even the Catholics, influences and historical impacts result from connections with both Asian (e.g. China and Korea) and non-Asian regions (e.g. France, Russia). Cultural hybridity, adaptation and accommodation demonstrate an ongoing fluidity, between, within and beyond the communities of the Gotō Archipelago.

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