

‘Hidden Christian World Heritage in the Gotō’ as part of the website *Japan Past & Present*, Gwyn McClelland

<https://japanpastandpresent.org/en/projects/hidden-christian-world-heritage-in-the-goto/about>

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‘Hidden Christian World Heritage in the Gotō’ focuses on oral history methodology, incorporating five interviews with descendants of Japan’s Hidden Christians to educate on an important yet significantly lesser-known part of Japan’s religious history. The project centres around five interviews with descendants of the Gotō Islands’s Hidden Christians. The interviews themselves are excerpts taken from a larger project being developed by Dr Gwyn McClelland, whose previous research has centred around preserving the testimonies of Catholic survivors of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki.

The term ‘Hidden Christian’ refers to followers of the Catholic faith who, as a result of the strict and violent repression of Christianity by the Tokugawa Shogunate in 1638, took their faith and went underground. When the ban was lifted in 1873, many Catholics returned to their faith, while others did not – these are the Hidden Christians (In Japanese: 隠れクリシタン, *kakure kurishiran*), many of whom relocated to the Gotō Islands, situated off the coast of Nagasaki Prefecture. The significance of this work is highlighted by the ongoing discrimination against the Hidden Christians, as discussed in the interviews – even with the recognition of some religiously significant sites as UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Rather than a traditional paper publication, ‘Hidden Christian World Heritage in the Gotō’ is part of *Japan Past & Present*, an online repository of Japanese history and culture, newly launched in March 2024. The website targets the tertiary education sector, promoting research and teaching through open-access resources that ensure equitable access to educational materials in both Japanese and English. The *Hidden Christian* project is among the lessons available on the website, which span various humanities disciplines. Although the site is new and most lessons are currently incomplete, McClelland’s Hidden Christian project appears fully developed, offering aural recordings, reading lists, images, a comprehensive Japanese–English vocabulary list and detailed lesson plans to support scholarly instruction.

The project’s interviews are accompanied by photographs and interview transcripts in both Japanese and English. These interviews provide diverse perspectives on the discrimination and martyrdom experienced by the Hidden Christians, and the associated lesson plans provide analytical lenses to explore these issues comprehensively. The first interview is with Miyamoto Fujie and Miyamoto Jitsuo who talk about intergenerational trauma and trauma memory when discussing the Rōya no Sako (Narrow Jail) incident of 1868. The second with Urakami Sachiko discusses the discrimination faced by the Hidden Christians who migrated to the Gotō and provides a gendered perspective on the experiences. The third interview with Ozaki Natsuki addresses, among other things, the discriminatory and at times derogatory names given to the Hidden Christians and the empowerment derived from historical discrimination. The fourth interview, with Father Nakamura Mitsuru, delves further into the Rōya no Sako incident. The final interview is with Kakimori Kazutoshi and highlights his efforts to preserve the



Figure 1 Urakami Sachiko at the Hidden Christian Museum on Naru Island. Photograph by Gwyn McClelland, 2022.

history of Hidden Christians and to obtain UNESCO designation for significant sites in the Gotō Islands.

Each interview is supplemented by a lesson plan that includes learning objectives, further readings, background information and context on the interviewee, and discussion questions, facilitating a deeper understanding of the topic and the scholarly discipline of oral history more broadly. The work that is put into the project is evident, and McClelland has done a fantastic job of bringing awareness to a marginalised and historically persecuted group of people. However, at times the project assumes a certain level of user knowledge, which may hinder accessibility. In this reviewer's opinion, a primary shortcoming lies in the assumption of user knowledge and the occasional lack of context for historical events. For example, the project has a very comprehensive explanation of the background of how the Hidden Christians came to be in the Gotō Islands, but it often mentions events such as the 'persecution period' without explaining the extent and reasons behind the persecution of Japan's Catholics. As the project is intended to be used for educational purposes, providing a more comprehensive background of Christianity and Catholicism in Japan more broadly would offer valuable context to the end user. The interviews and content themselves are fascinating and important, so from a pedagogical perspective, addressing minor technical issues such as small, non-scalable maps and better alignment of discussion questions with educational materials could further improve their educational value.

The project is commendable and significantly contributes to the preservation and dissemination of the oral history of Japan's Hidden Christians. Its rich, insightful content can play a crucial role in better understanding this unique aspect of Japanese history. McClelland's work not only raises awareness of a marginalised and historically persecuted group, but also offers valuable educational resources for scholars and students alike.