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Spatial Structures of Japanese Hidden Christian Organizations on Hirado Island

A Comparative Study of Three Villages and Ikitsuki Island

Northwestern Kyushu is the most notable region in Japan for its dense distribution of former Hidden Christians. The spatial structures of its religious organizations have been classified into several types. However, this classification procedure and the formation principles of such organizations need further examination. This article reexamines the spatial structures of these organizations and their formation principles from a social geographical perspective, focusing on three villages on Hirado Island and comparing them with Ikitsuki Island, Nagasaki Prefecture. We reveal the basic units and subunits that constitute one or two components of the organizations in the case study villages on Hirado as compared with the three components, including alliance units, found on Ikitsuki. Within the same region, different structural patterns were observed among the villages, each subject to their own geographical conditions, such as physical environment, settlement morphological pattern, and population size, as well as existing neighborhood relationships or kinships and the administrative units within and over the village.

KEYWORDS: Hidden Christians—confrere group—Japanese village community—social geography—Hirado and Ikitsuki Islands—Gotō Islands

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THE BELIEFS of Hidden Christians in northwestern Kyushu are a principal component of Japanese religions that acculturated as a result of the encounters between Japanese folk religious elements and foreign religions (HORI 1968, 15–16).¹ After the withdrawal and eradication of European and Japanese Christian missionaries in early seventeenth-century Japan, Hidden Christians in rural areas preserved their religion, without any priests, by sustaining secret lay organizations within village communities and conducting various rituals themselves, adapted into the Japanese Shinto style (MIYAZAKI 2014, 54–128). However, most of these organizations had dissolved by the late twentieth century (MIYAZAKI 2014, 218).

Generally, from a religious studies perspective, the Hidden Christian communities in Nagasaki Prefecture are classified into either the Hirado-Ikitsuki 平戸・生月 type or the Sotome-Gotō-Nagasaki 外海・五島・長崎 type (TAGITA 1954, 7–8; KATAOKA 1967, 102–12) (FIGURE 1). NAKAZONO (2015, 18) revised these names into the Ikitsuki-Hirado 生月・平戸 type and the Sotome-Urakami 外海・浦上 (including the Gotō Islands) type.² He distinguished the two types more clearly by focusing on the managing organizations, sacred items, religious sites and rituals, and historical backgrounds during the periods of missionary and Christian prohibition in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (NAKAZONO 2012, 4–12). Based primarily on a detailed report of both types of Hidden Christians (NAGASAKI PREFECTURAL BOARD OF EDUCATION 1999) and his original

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1. The belief of Japanese Hidden Christians can be regarded as both a mixed religion transformed into a Japanese folk religion (MIYAZAKI 2014, 160–64) and an indigenized or Japanized Christianity (FILUS 2003, 98; MUNSI 2014, 39–40). In my opinion, these apparently contrasting opinions are merely both sides of one coin.

2. Some scholars writing in English refer to general profiles such as the rituals and organization of the two types of Hidden Christians in Nagasaki Prefecture (WHELAN 1992; NOSCO 1993; HARRINGTON 1993; TURNBULL 1998). Although their research introduced details of the Japanese Hidden Christians to English-speaking readers, most of their descriptions depend highly on the work of Japanese scholars, including TAGITA (1954), FURUNO (1966), KATAOKA (1967; 1974), and MIYAZAKI (1996), complemented by a few original field studies. However, some recent scholars writing in English primarily depend on their own intensive fieldwork (FILUS 2003; MUNSI 2011; 2014).



FIGURE 1. Area of study.

research, NAKAZONO (2010, 95–96; 2013, 14) classified the spatial structures of Hidden Christian organizations in Nagasaki Prefecture into four types, which he later modified into six types including the Amakusa Islands 天草諸島 in Kumamoto Prefecture. However, these classifications need to be partially reexamined, especially from the understanding of detailed spatial patterns, as well as the characteristics and historical origin of each group inside an organization.

Moreover, in discussions of the Hidden Christian organizations, as NAKAZONO (2013, 12–14) outlined, small groups divided within a village community have received particular focus in order to elucidate how the Hidden Christian communities steadfastly maintained their beliefs through the early modern and

modern periods (FURUNO 1966, 37; ŌHASHI 2014, 160–61).³ However, few case studies have demonstratively shown how principles function in the divisions of such small groups, how the groups spatially cover specific households, and how they relate with other social organizations within a community. An exception is a report based on a restoration method by the social geographer NOZAKI (1988, 125–45), who proposed that neighborhood principles originally affected the formation of such small groups on Ikitsuki Island.⁴

Japanese rural social geography focuses primarily on the patterns of spatial distributions and multiple scales of various groups for social life, such as self-administration, agricultural irrigation, and religious activities within and over a village (HAMATANI 1988, 41–114). Social geography conducted in Japan reveals the detailed situations and theoretical principles of households' communal networks under different geographical conditions, such as physical environments, settlement morphological patterns, and population size of a village and among villages. It also identifies the basic unit of social life not only in a Japanese village, but also every region of the world (SUIZU 1980). Originally, such basic units (*kisochi'iki* 基礎地域) were the smallest integrated areas of various communal networks for (re)production and self-governance in a region—typically a Japanese rural village (SUIZU 1980, 34–74). A social geographical perspective that focuses on the spatial structures of rural organizations including the basic units is applicable to the analysis of Japanese Hidden Christian communities.

This article thus examines the detailed spatial structures of Hidden Christian organizations including the small inner groups and their formation principles based on various neighborhood and kinship networks, highlighting geographical conditions that induce differences in the spatial structures among villages. The goal of this study is to rethink the existing perspectives on Japanese Hidden Christian organizations from a social geographical perspective. Three different villages on Hirado Island are used for this case study: Neshiko 根獅子, Kasuga 春日, and Aburamizu 油水, in addition to the neighboring Ikitsuki Island for comparison within the same type (Ikitsuki-Hirado type) of Hidden Christian communities (see FIGURE 1).⁵ As distinct from most Hidden Christian regions in Nagasaki and Kumamoto Prefectures (ŌHASHI 2014, 165–66), most of Hirado's Hidden Christian villages have been occupied solely by Hidden

3. In contrast, MUNSI (2012; 2014) focuses on key persons rather than ritual organizations themselves in order to elucidate the contemporary survival strategies of Hidden Christians in the Sotome region, such as leadership succession and public appeals through the media.

4. However, FURUNO (1973, 290) insisted that the small groups of Hidden Christians on Ikitsuki Island are based on neither neighborhood relationships nor kinships.

5. Although the formal address of these villages is currently *chō* 町 (town), this article uses the term “village” to acknowledge their rural landscapes and traditional styles of community self-management.

Christian believers. Therefore, we can easily examine these Hidden Christian organizations and compare them with the other social organizations within the same village without considering any influences by non-Hidden Christians.

On Hirado Island, most villages are separated into small valleys by continuous wooded hills. Among the villages, Neshiko village has been regarded as typical of the Hirado Hidden Christian villages (MIYAZAKI 1998, 205–33; NAKAZONO 2013, 14). In contrast, Kasuga village is far smaller and the composition of its community differs from that of large-sized Neshiko, although NAKAZONO (2013, 14) classifies the Kasuga Hidden Christian organization into the same type as Neshiko's. Aburamizu is a unique village within Hirado Island, whose ancestors migrated from the Gotō Islands (MIYAZAKI 1998, 202).

The principal data sources of this article are interviews with residents, including executive officials of self-governing organizations, as well as observations of landscapes and religious rituals, complemented by previous works. As a detailed report of the Hidden Christian organizational structure in Neshiko has already been published (HIRADO CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION 2009, 331–41), this study supplements it with other works and the author's fieldwork. Fieldwork for this article was conducted from 2010 to 2014.⁶ A retrospective perspective was adopted, as all of Hirado Island's Hidden Christian organizations have dissolved.

Neshiko Village

Neshiko village is an agglomerated settlement resting in a relatively open valley on the western coastline of Hirado Island. The number of households has gradually increased from approximately one hundred fifty to two hundred twenty through the modern period (FURUNO 1966, 167) and was one hundred ninety one (population: 599) in 2010. In 1563, missionaries of the Society of Jesus erected a cross on Neshiko as a mission symbol of Christianity (MURAKAMI and YANAGIYA 1968, 308).⁷ From that time, the Hidden Christian organization in Neshiko survived until 1992 (NAGANUMA 1928, 935; MIYAZAKI 1998, 204–205), although its member households gradually decreased (FURUNO 1966, 167), falling to about half of the village households at its dissolution (MIYAZAKI 1998, 205).

The Neshiko people have arranged various shrines within the village, such as a Hachiman 八幡 (the village tutelary of Shinto), a Kannon 観音 (the Buddhist deity of mercy), *ushigami* 牛神 (a guardian god of agricultural cattle), and two Konpira 金毘羅 (a god of fishing and maritime transport), as well as sacred symbols for Christian martyrs during the early modern period. Thus, they

6. Fieldwork was conducted with either Mr. Hagiwara Hirofumi, Mr. Matsuda Takaya, or Mr. Ueno Kenji of the Hirado City Government.

7. It is presumed that the name "Vuyxyuaqui" (Ōishiwaki 大石脇) village in this missionary report of the Society of Jesus specifically refers to Neshiko village (IMAZATO 2015, 160).

practiced not only Christianity, but also Shinto, Buddhist, and traditional folk religions, just as with most Hidden Christian villages on Hirado Island. Neshiko is divided into four administrative districts (*ku* 区), traditionally called Matsu-yama 松山, Nakaban 中番, Mino 美野, and Saki 崎, each of which consists of about forty to fifty households. Each district has a head official (*kuchō* 区長), from which the village representative (*sōdai* 惣代) is elected for self-government.

The Hidden Christian organization in Neshiko consisted of three components. First, as many researchers have reported in detail (MAKI 1972, 125–28; MIYAZAKI 1998, 205–207; HIRADO CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION 2009, 331–34), the comprehensive group in the village was systematically organized: the hereditary leader (*tsujimoto-sama* 辻本様 or *tsuji no yaku* 辻の役, god keeper official),⁸ seven baptizers as petitioners (*sanjuwan-sama* サンジュワン様 or *mizu no yaku* 水の役, officials treating sacred water), the last baptizer as the advisor (*senyaku* 先役, the most recent official), and four ritual assistants (*tsuji no koyaku* 辻の小役, steward officers for religion). It is assumed that these seven baptizers are the vestiges of misericordia officers (*jihī no yaku* 慈悲の役), which originated from the seven deacons of early Christianity (KAWAMURA 2003, 121–23) and were introduced to some Hirado villages by the Society of Jesus in the late sixteenth century (HIRADO CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION 2009, 337–38).

The seven baptizers were selected in twos from each district, except for Matsu-yama, from which a single baptizer was selected because of the relatively fewer number of households before the modern period. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, the hereditary leader *tsujimoto* and three individuals specially selected from among the seven baptizers each served as a religious leader of the four districts (FURUNO 1966, 167). They held about ten annual rituals in similar style to Shinto rituals, most of which were conducted in the leader's home (*tsumoto* 津元, god keeper's home),⁹ where their gods (*nandogami* 納戸神) were secreted in a closet (KATAOKA 1967, 195; MAKI 1972, 126; MIYAZAKI 1998, 208–14).¹⁰ Their rituals were secretly conducted only by the executive and assistant officials, but held as formal ceremonies of the village community (MAKI 1972, 125–28; MIYAZAKI 1998, 205–207).

Second, the Neshiko people maintained small groups, called *nandogami no honbunke* 納戸神の本分家 (a head family and branch families for secret gods in a closet), until least at the beginning of the 1970s. Each of these groups consisted of approximately five to fifteen households, although relationships between the

8. Etymologically, the word *tsujimoto* 辻本 originates from the keeper of a Buddhist articles closet, *zushimoto* 厨子元 (MORIOKA 2005, 12).

9. The word *tsumoto* 津元 is shortened from and retains the same meaning as *tsujimoto* 辻本, the god's home (MAKI 1972, 131; MIYAZAKI 1996, 50).

10. In traditional rural Japan, the closet room (*nando* 納戸) has been often used as the bedroom, the most secret space in a house.

head and branches did not always coincide with actual kinship at the beginning of the 1970s (MAKI 1972, 128–29). They recited a prayer for Ave Maria before a secret god in the head family's home twice a year. It can be surmised that the set of these groups was originally established as *confraria* (confrere) for belief in Saint Mary (KAWAMURA 2003, 302–305).

Third was the other variety of small groups, called *jihī-nakama* 慈悲仲間 (misericordia brotherhoods),¹¹ each of which was composed of approximately two to eight households based on kinship that rotationally gathered in a member's home in February (FURUNO 1966, 167–68; KATAOKA 1967, 111–12; MAKI 1972, 129; MIYAZAKI 1998, 207–208). At this meeting, the attendants, including all of the families' members, drew one of sixteen wooden cards that originated from the fifteen principle scenes (*jūgogengi* 十五玄義) of the story of Jesus and Mary (TAGITA 1954, 269–72) and an additional card of Mary. For the attendants, these cards are the same as the *omikujī* 御神籤 fortune papers drawn by lot at Japanese Shinto shrines (MAKI 1972, 129).¹² The sets of cards were kept in only four households within the village, which we can assume were the homes of the religious leaders of each district, and were lent out to small groups (TAGITA 1954, 259). These groups were not divisions of—and were irrelevant to—the *nandogami no honbunke* groups (MAKI 1972, 129). However, the *jihī-nakama* groups disappeared during the 1970s (MIYAZAKI 1998, 208) and the *nandogami no honbunke* groups are presumed to have dissolved during that time as well.

Kasuga Village

Kasuga village is a moderately dispersed settlement on the northwestern tip of Hirado Island. It has independently maintained an administrative district. The number of households was approximately twenty-five to thirty through the modern period, decreasing to nineteen (population: 73) in 2010. It is therefore much smaller than Neshiko. Christian missions from the Society of Jesus arrived in Kasuga in 1558 (FRÓIS 1978, 189) and all of the residents converted to Christianity in 1561 (MATSUDA and TŌKŌ 1997, 379–80). Although the Kasuga people maintained Hidden Christian beliefs through the early modern and modern periods (TATEHIRA 1981, 32–38; MIYAZAKI 1998, 234–37), their rituals finally ceased in approximately 2007 (IMAZATO 2015, 140).

11. Another name for these groups was *atosama-nakama* あとさま仲間, whose etymology can be surmised as the group praying for *antō-sama* アント様, the Japanese martyr António (baptismal name in Portuguese) in Ikitsuki history. He was venerated by the Hidden Christians on Ikitsuki and Hirado Islands, including Neshiko village (MIYAZAKI 1999, 79).

12. The sets of these sixteen cards, which are observed only on Ikitsuki and Hirado Islands, were originally for religious education within Hidden Christian communities, but transformed to *omikujī* lot cards in the Japanese folk style (MIYAZAKI 1996, 210–13).

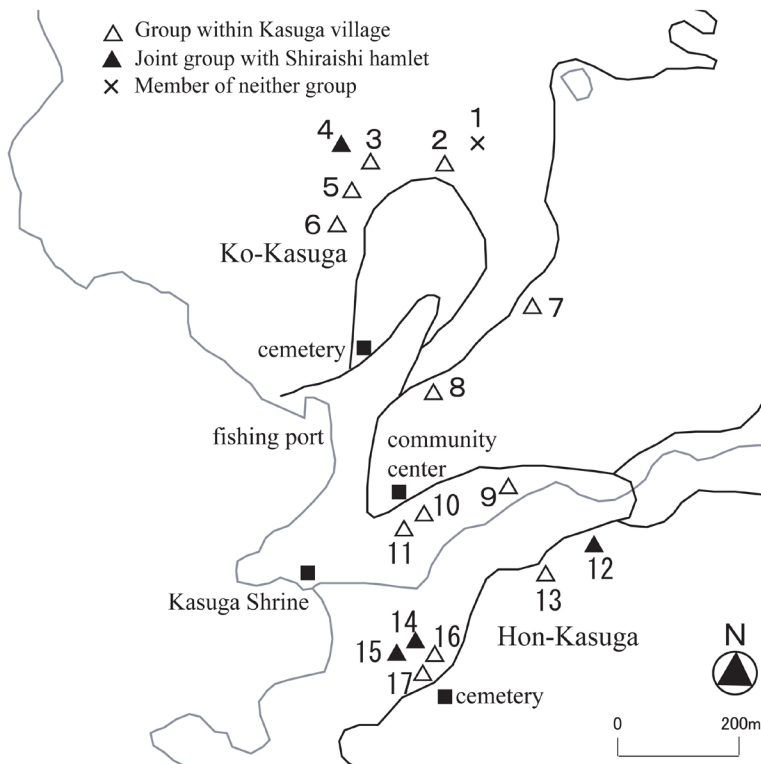


FIGURE 2. Member households of former Hidden Christian groups in Kasuga village.

Note: This figure shows only present households. The household numbers correspond to those of TABLE 1.

Source: Interviews with residents, observations, and topographic maps.

The Kasuga homes are split into either a narrow, but larger, valley called Hon-Kasuga 本春日 (main settlement) or a smaller valley called Ko-Kasuga 小春日 (small settlement) (FIGURE 2). In keeping with Hidden Christian belief, the Kasuga people have concurrently been Shinto parishioners of Kasuga Shrine 春日神社 located within the village and Buddhist supporters of Myōkanji 妙観寺 of the Shingon School located beyond a mountain in Yamanaka 山中 village. As in Neshiko, there are various Shinto, Buddhist, and folk religion shrines and religious sites, such as a Kannon shrine 観音堂 and *kawa no kami* 川の神 (gods of water) (IMAZATO 2012, 26). Details of the original system of the Hidden Christian organization in Kasuga are unknown. We know at least that the last person who served in the role of “petitioner” in Kasuga, who was also the last baptizer,

died in 1978 (TATEHIRA 1981, 36), although it is unknown whether he was a hereditary leader like Neshiko's *tsujimoto-sama*.

The Kasuga people originally maintained a single group (*kirishitan-kō* キリシタン講, Christian group) jointly with the households in Shiraishi 白石, located over a hill pass (KATAOKA 1967, 110). Shiraishi is the northern next hamlet in Shūshi 主師 village and is included in an administrative district with a Catholic Yamano 山野 settlement (see FIGURE 1). Some of the Kasuga households' ancestors came from Shiraishi, and the Shiraishi people have kept paddy fields within the Kasuga territory and joined in an agricultural ritual on a hill called Maruoyama 丸尾山 (IMAZATO 2012, 30–32). However, they later split into two small *kirishitan-kō* groups (TATEHIRA 1981, 34; MIYAZAKI 1998, 234). One was composed of some of the Kasuga households and all of the Shiraishi households, with the other comprised of the remaining Kasuga households. The former group dissolved in approximately 1970 (MIYAZAKI 1998, 234), while the latter continued until around 2007. They gathered in the on-duty member's home twice a year, dwindling to once a year in the final period (TATEHIRA 1981, 35; MIYAZAKI 1998, 234). At the rituals, attendants prayed before sacred items, such as a statue of Saint Mary and a medal (*nandogami* 納戸神), and enjoyed choosing by lot from the sixteen wooden cards—the lucky one of *ofukuro-san* 御袋さん (Mother Mary) and the fifteen numbered cards (TATEHIRA 1981, 33; MIYAZAKI 1998, 235).¹³

The question remains, by what principle were the Kasuga people divided into these two groups? Looking at the distribution of the member households of the two groups shown in FIGURE 2, it is clear that the groups were not divided according to any neighborhood principles. TABLE 1 provides further profiles of all households presently in Kasuga.¹⁴ Each household worshiped at various folk god shrines on the house grounds or within the home while still believing in Hidden Christianity. TABLE 1 also shows that Kasuga has five lineage groups: A, Ba (including family names E and F), Bb (including family name D), Ca, and Cb.¹⁵ The lineage B households (Ba, Bb, and Bc) originally migrated from Shiraishi. Some Kasuga households jointly worship before a small lineage god shrine, such as *ji no kami* 地の神 (a god of the ground) and *Inari* 稲荷 (a god of agriculture and fishing), within the village.

As shown in TABLE 1, households nos. 1–8 live in the Ko-Kasuga settlement, whereas households nos. 9–17 are in the Hon-Kasuga settlement. The two settlements respectively function as a neighborhood group (*han* 班) as sub-

13. The author observed these items and a set of sixteen wooden cards in a Kasuga household in May 2011.

14. A small discord between the formally registered number of households and the number of socially recognized households within a village is common in rural Japan.

15. These capital letters (A–G) are fictitious names.

TABLE 1. Household profiles of Kasuga village

NO.	FAMILY NAMES	GENEALOGY	LINEAGE GOD	SMALL GROUPS				HOUSEHOLD GODS				
				NEIGHBORHOOD	AGRICULTURE	BUDDHISM	HIDDEN CHRISTIANITY	I	II	III	IV	V
1	G	employee of no.2		X	P	◇	X	○	○	○	○	○
2	Bb	branch of no.13		X	P	◇	△	○	○	○	○	○
3	F	relative of no.6	◇	X	P	◆	△	○				
4	A	branch of no.15	★	X	P	◆	▲	○	○			
5	E	branch of no.17		X	P	◆	△	○	○	○	○	○
6	Ba	branch of no.17	◇	X	P	◆	△	○				○
7	Bc	branch of Shiraishi		X	Q	◇	△	○	○	○		
8	Ca	branch of no.10		X	Q	◆	△	○	○	○	○	○
9	Cb	head of lineage Cb		Y	R	◇	△	○				
10	Ca	head of lineage Ca	☆	Y	R	◇	△	○	○	○	○	○
11	Ca	branch of no.10	☆	Y	R	◇	△	○	○	○	○	○
12	A	head of lineage A		Y	S	◆ (◆)	▲ (▲)	○	○	○	○	○
13	D	head of lineage Bb		Y	S	◆	△	○	○	○	○	○
14	A	branch of no.15	★	Y	T	◆	▲	○	○	○	○	○
15	A	branch of no.12	★	Y	T	◆	▲	○	○	○	○	○
16	Cb	branch of no.9		Y	T	◇	△	○	○	○	○	○
17	Ba	head of lineage Ba		Y	T	◆	△	○	○	○	○	○

Note: Upper-case letters (A-G) indicate family names; lower-case letters (a-c) indicate lineages within the same family name. For lineage gods and small groups, alphabet symbols or figure symbols denote the member households of the same group. The household gods are: i. *Kōjin* 荒神 (a god of fire); ii. *Ji no kami* (a god of the ground); iii. *Inari* (a god of agriculture and fishing); iv. *Kawa no kami* 川の神 (a god of water); and v. *Ike no kami* 池の神 (a god of agricultural ponds). Household no. 12 has moved to near the Hirado urban district, while keeping its house within Kasuga. Source: Interviews with residents.

units for self-government. In addition, agricultural groups, common owners of a small pool for rice seed germination (*tanaike* 種池), also functioned as a *rinpo-han* 隣保班 (neighborhood group) that was established by the national government under the Second World War regime.¹⁶ These agricultural and *rinpo-han* groups no longer operate. Moreover, the Kasuga households are divided into two Buddhist groups organized for females (*onago-kō* 女講) and for males (*otoko-kō* 男講), respectively. The female groups formerly held rituals in the on-duty member's home twice a year, but now only once in January. The male groups gathered in a member's home four times a year, but these groups are now dissolved. Although the groupings of female and male groups are the same (see TABLE 1), they appear to not be based on neighborhood relationships or kinships.

In contrast, the division of the two Hidden Christian groups was based on lineage kinships within the village and not on any other social groups. One group was comprised of lineage A (households nos. 4, 12, 14, and 15) and the Shiraishi households. The last baptizer household (no. 4) belonged to this group. However, Kasuga residents have stated that the households of lineage A did not originally join any Hidden Christian groups. During the Edo period, the head family (no. 12) of this lineage served in rotation with the other household as the regional and village head officials (*daikan* 代官 and *shōya* 庄屋), one of whose formal duties was surveillance over the activities of the Hidden Christians.¹⁷ In short, later believers joined with people outside of Kasuga. The other group consisted of the remaining lineages Ba, Bb, Ca, and Cb, in addition to household no. 7 (lineage Bc), which came directly from Shiraishi. Household no. 1, which was originally settled as an employee family of a Kasuga household during the modern period, did not join any group.

Aburamizu Village

Aburamizu village is a highly dispersed settlement at the end of the northern small peninsula of Hirado Island. The peak number of households was about fifty in the modern period, but decreased to thirty-seven (population: 70) in 2010. Many households left the island, including to distant Osaka, in the 1960s. The homes are dispersed, clinging to a steep slope of the peninsula where a pasture for military horses managed by the Hirado Domain 平戸藩 was expanded in the Edo period (MITSUMA 1936, 59). These households are descendants of Hidden Christian migrants from the Gotō Islands, especially from the northern peninsula

16. Only household no. 7 independently kept its own pool for rice seeds. Agricultural groups, including group Q, had more households at that time (see TABLE 1).

17. This other household, whose ancestor came from Shiraishi and later prospered as the largest landlord in Kasuga, collapsed and migrated to Ikitsuki in the late nineteenth- or early-twentieth century.

of Nakadōri Island 中通島, from the mid-Meiji period (the late nineteenth century) to just after the end of the Second World War (see FIGURE 1). Moreover, these Gotō Hidden Christians migrated from the Sotome region of the Kyushu mainland from the late eighteenth century (KATAOKA 1967, 98–100). In other words, the Aburamizu ancestors migrated at least twice throughout the one-hundred-year period from the late eighteenth to the late nineteenth centuries from Sotome through Gotō to Hirado. Aburamizu village, as an administrative district, is divided into three neighborhood groups, each of which is numbered first through third from the north to the south with a common name: Tsubasaki 椿崎, Nakano 中野, and Kawamukō 川向.

In present-day Aburamizu, Shinto and Catholic households coexist, and the gravestones of Shinto and Catholic households stand together in one cemetery. Some of the Hidden Christian migrants from Gotō maintained their religion in Aburamizu, but also formally belonged as Shinto parishioners of Kameoka Shrine 亀岡神社. This shrine, located in Hirado's central urban district, is the principle shrine of the northern region of the island. The remaining Hidden Christian households converted (returned) to Catholicism in the Kōzaki Church 神崎教会 (presently the Kami-Kōzaki Church 上神崎教会) located in a neighboring village (IMAZATO 2015, 145–46). The Hidden Christians of Aburamizu were not supporters of any Buddhist temples in either Hirado or Gotō, which is typical of the Gotō Hidden Christians (FURUNO 1966, 200; MIYAZAKI 1998, 247).

Aburamizu's Hidden Christian organization dissolved in approximately 1956. At that point, the member households separated into either Shinto parishioners of Kameoka Shrine, asking the Shinto priest to perform funeral and memorial services, or converted to Catholicism at Kōzaki Church. Currently, the Shinto parishioners elect a representative who only attends a few principal rituals, such as the Grand Ceremony (*Reitaisai* 例大祭) at Kameoka Shrine. Starkly differing from Neshiko and Kasuga, the Aburamizu Shinto people (former Hidden Christians) have not established any Shinto or folk religion sites within the village.¹⁸

The Hidden Christian groups of Aburamizu respectively maintained a leader, who kept their gods (*nandogami*, closet gods), as well as conducted rituals based on an old church calendar and such life events as baptisms and funerals, accompanied by an assistant for rituals (MIYAZAKI 1998, 246–51). The people gathered at each leader's home on Sundays and at rituals, including Christmas and the *San'ya-sama* 三夜様 gathering on September 23 (FIGURE 3).¹⁹ The *San'ya-sama*

18. A Buddhist repose stone of *sangai-banrei* 三界万霊 (prayers for all souls in the Buddhist three worlds) in northern Aburamizu was erected by a representative of the Hirado urban district (HISAURA and HAGIWARA 1998, 611) but it had little connection to the Aburamizu people.

19. This list is based on a report by MIYAZAKI (1998, 249) and the author's interviews.

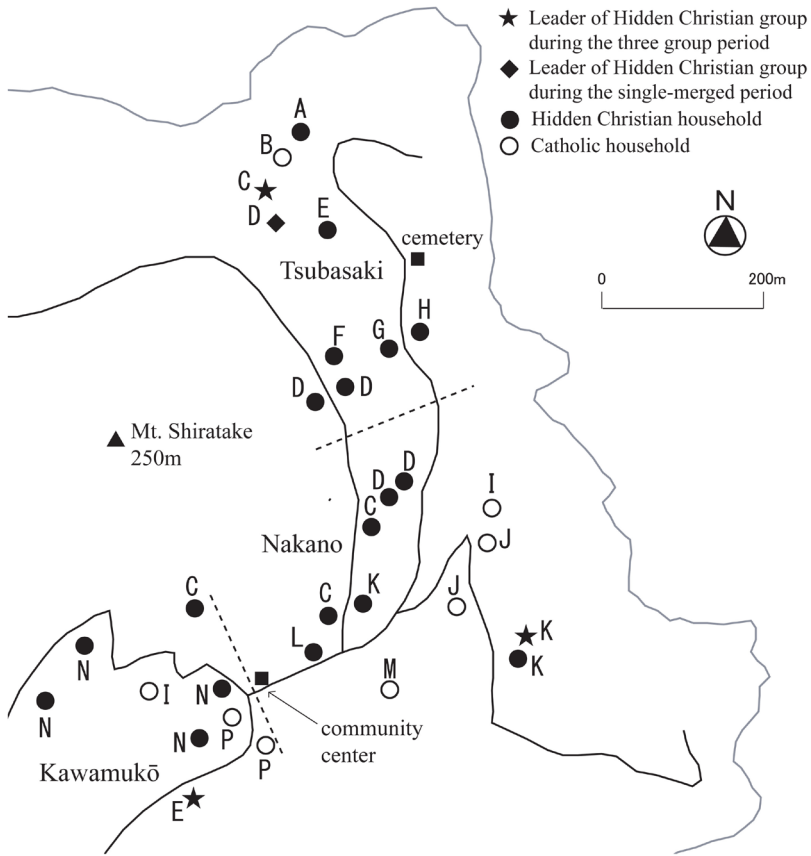


FIGURE 3. Distributions of former Hidden Christians and Catholics in Aburamizu village. Note: This figure shows only present-day households. Each alphabet refers to a family name. Source: Interviews with residents, observations, and topographic maps.

rituals are generally called *nijūsan'ya-machi* 二十三夜待 in Japan, waiting for the rising of the moon on the twenty-third day of each month. These rituals have been observed not only by the Hidden Christians, but also non-Hidden Christians (Shinto-Buddhists) on Hirado Island (MAKI 1972, 138) and on the northern peninsula of Nakadōri Island (SHIN-UONOME TOWN 1986, 734), which is the home of immigrant ancestors of the Aburamizu people. At the *San'ya-sama* rituals, the Hidden Christians of the Gotō Islands compared the moon to Ignacio López de Loyola of the Society of Jesus, who the Gotō Hidden Christians believed died on the twenty-third day of a month (FURUNO 1966, 228).

What principle of networks, then, operated in the Aburamizu Hidden Christian

organization? FIGURE 3 shows the distributions of former Hidden Christians and Catholics in present-day Aburamizu. Households of the same family name, most of which maintain kinships, belong together to either the Hidden Christians or the Catholics. FIGURE 3 demonstrates, therefore, that each household determined whether to remain Hidden Christians or convert to Catholicism by following their kinship networks. For example, the households of lineages I, J, and P, as well as household B in Tsubasaki, which is related to household M in Nakano, decided to convert to Catholicism. Although all the Catholic households belonged to the single Kōzaki Church, the Hidden Christians were divided into three groups that corresponded with the neighborhood groups for self-government.

It appears that the grouping of the Aburamizu Hidden Christians was entirely based on the neighborhood principle; households of the same lineage were often dispersed into different groups. In addition, some believers who had kinships with the Aburamizu villagers, but lived in southern neighborhood villages, joined the Kawamukō group located on the southern end of Aburamizu. Just before the dissolution of the Hidden Christian organization, the three groups merged into a single group that covered all of Aburamizu and whose leader's home was in Tsubasaki in the northern part of Aburamizu.

Findings on the Three Villages

Next, we summarize some findings on the spatial structures and formation principles of Hidden Christian organizations in the three villages from social geographical perspective (FIGURE 4). Generally, the Japanese Hidden Christian organizations were comprised of laymen, without any priests, and established three officials: the leader, who kept sacred items and conducted regular rituals; baptizers, who treated sacred water; and assistants for rituals and clerical jobs (MIYAZAKI 2014, 57).

The Neshiko people maintained these three offices until the late twentieth century, although the baptizers decreased to only three and no ritual assistants were utilized just prior to the organization's dissolution (MIYAZAKI 1998, 205). They organized a systematic group overseeing the entire village linked with the four administrative districts. This group was the basic unit of their Hidden Christian belief in Neshiko. Their large population made it possible to sustain their organization much later, although the two varieties of small groups as sub-units dissolved earlier than Kasuga's small groups.

With Kasuga, we have no detailed information on the comprehensive group functioning as the basic unit covering both the Kasuga village, which forms a single administrative district, and the adjacent Shiraishi hamlet. The Kasuga village adopted a strategy of combining with a small Hidden Christian community in nearby Shiraishi with which it maintained close relations. This combined

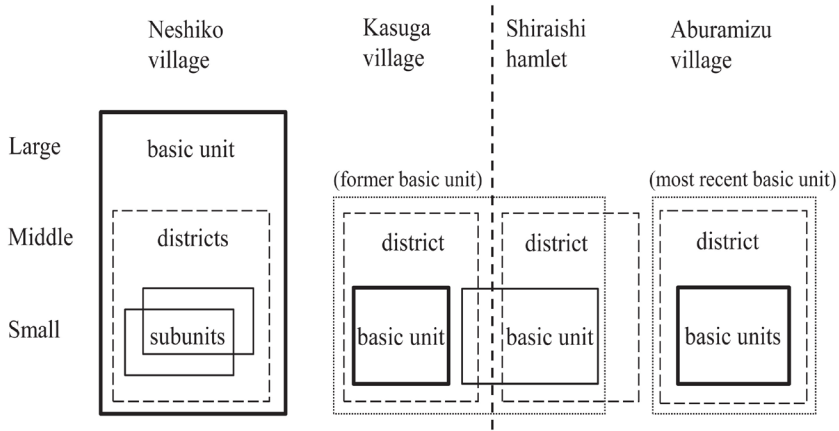


FIGURE 4. Spatial structures of Hidden Christian organizations in the case study villages. Note: Boxes bordered by heavy lines show groups that have survived to the final periods of each village organization.

basic unit later split into two small groups based on lineage in Kasuga, although it is unclear when and why such division occurred. Kasuga's small groups do not correspond to any other social groups in Kasuga. For the Kasuga people, at least in recent years, such small groups of Hidden Christians were merely one of several religious groups, such as the Buddhist group. Considering the ritual content, they are comparable to the misericordia brotherhoods (*jihī-nakama*) in Neshiko and *compan'ya* コンパンヤ (originally from the Portuguese “*companhia*”) groups on Ikitsuki Island (FURUNO 1966, 148–53). However, we can opine that Kasuga's small groups are not subunits but basic units split from the original comprehensive group acting as the former basic unit (see FIGURE 4).

The culture of Aburamizu Hidden Christians is similar to the Sotome-Urakami (including the Gotō Islands) type in the following manner: preserving copies of a church calendar from the early seventeenth century; fewer annual rituals; no religious sites and sacred places (even the village tutelary of Shinto) except for a cemetery; and weak relationships with Shinto and Buddhism (NAKAZONO 2012, 5–11; 2015, 47–49). The Aburamizu Hidden Christians added the duties of a baptizer to that of the leader of each group.²⁰ They had no comprehensive village group, except for the most recent merged group (see FIGURE 4). Aburamizu's small groups were based on a neighborhood principle, corresponding with subunits for village self-government, whereas those of Neshiko and Kasuga were based on kinship principles and did not correspond with self-government

20. This is more similar to the Sotome style rather than the Gotō style that does not permit a leader to also perform baptizing duties (KATAOKA 1967, 106–107).

neighborhood groups. They are also different from those of Neshiko and Kasuga in the content of the rituals. Rather, they are essentially the basic units and equivalent to Neshiko's comprehensive group over the village. In Aburamizu, such simplified groups for benefiting migrant people (NAKAZONO 2010, 99) were fundamental for sustaining their faith. This Aburamizu style is more similar to Gotō's villages (NAKAZONO 2010, 99) than Hirado's villages.

Based on these findings, we proceed with general considerations of the spatial structures of Japanese Hidden Christian organizations. Many scholars have supposed that small groups as subdivisions of the Japanese Hidden Christian communities originated from the *misericordia* (compassion), the *confraria* (confrere), or the *companhia* (company) brotherhood systems established by missionaries of the Society of Jesus in the 1550s or the 1560s (TAGITA 1954, 256; KATAOKA 1967, 26–29; MAKI 1972, 130; NOMURA 1988, 418–24; MIYAZAKI 1998, 208; KAWAMURA 2003, 123; COSTA 2007, 75–76). Although these scholars did not conceptually distinguish among the three groups, NAKAZONO (2010; 2013; 2015, 25–29), based on the Ikitsuki cases, clearly separated these groups, which partially correspond to the scaled groups delineated by the missionary Jerónimo Rodrigues in the early seventeenth century:²¹ the large group (*ōgumi* 大組) based on the *misericordia* brotherhood corresponding with a village community; the middle-sized group (*nakagumi* 中組) later introduced as the *confraria* within a village; and the small group (*kogumi* 小組) divided as the *companhia* under the large group of a village (FIGURE 5).²²

However, Rodrigues conceptually bundled these groups into the single term *confraria* (GONOI 2006, 3). In addition, some religious scholars have pointed out that the *confraria* and *misericordia* brotherhood labels are synonymous or that the *misericordia* brotherhood is a type of *confraria* (KAWAMURA 2003, 65–70, 123, 182; GONOI 2012, 217). NAKAZONO (2013, 14) further classified the Hidden Christian organizations in Nagasaki and Kumamoto Prefectures into six types by combining the three concepts of scaled groups. He surmised that differences among the six types historically originate from differences in the time and form of adaptation of the three groups (*misericordia*, *confraria*, and *companhia*) at that time in each region (NAKAZONO 2013, 20; 2015, 29, 49). In his schema, Neshiko and Kasuga are included in the same type of complex of large and small groups

21. The classification of three-scaled—regional (*sōgumi* 惣組), large (*ōgumi* 大組), and small (*kogumi* 小組)—groups regulated by Rodrigues should be regarded as a target criterion for the Japanese Hidden Christians who lost their missionary priests rather than as the actual condition at that time. Rodrigues withdrew from Japan during the Christian prohibition and wrote this regulation document in 1618 in Macao (GONOI 2006, 1–4).

22. This article considers the approximate numbers of households in each group on the three following scales: the large groups are 100 to 200; the middle-sized ones are 30 to 60; and the small ones are 5 to 15, even if some exceptions are observed.

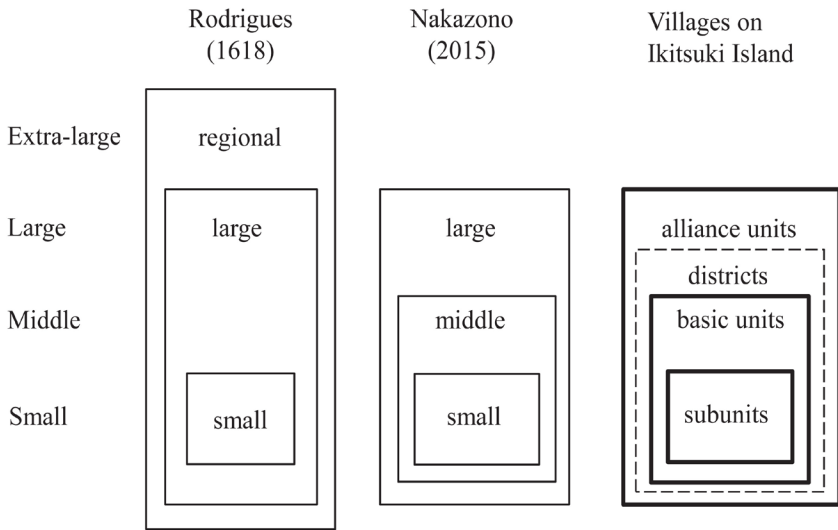


FIGURE 5. Spatial structures of Hidden Christian organizations appearing in prior works. Note: The Ikitsuki structure is based on the present study. Boxes bordered by heavy lines refer to groups surviving to the present.

(NAKAZONO 2013, 14), yet the patterns of spatial structure in the two villages are fairly different; Neshiko is comprised of both the basic unit and subunits, while Kasuga is composed of only the basic unit or units, including the adjacent Shiraishi hamlet (see FIGURE 4). However, both of Neshiko's and Kasuga's small groups can be presumed to adhere to a style of confrere groups (*confraria* in Rodrigues' original schema) of the sixteenth century.

Comparison with Ikitsuki Island

In order to further explore this topic of the spatial structures of Hidden Christian organizations, we also compared our findings on Hirado with neighboring Ikitsuki Island, based on the existing literature. This examination contains certain unavoidable limitations as it is not based on the author's fieldwork on Ikitsuki Island. On Ikitsuki, Hidden Christians and non-Hidden Christians (Shinto-Buddhists and Catholics) have coexisted haphazardly on a vast terraced plateau, like an inclined continuous plate, although the Hidden Christians have gradually decreased, at least over the past century (NOZAKI 1988, 133; SAKAI 1990, 129). Previous studies (SHIBATA 1951, 141; TAGITA 1954, 255–59, 299–300; FURUNO 1966, 124–25; 1973, 261–67; KATAOKA 1967, 112; MIYAZAKI 1996, 50–68; TURNBULL 1998, 62–71; NAKAZONO 2015, 24–25) pointed out that the typical structure of the Ikitsuki Hidden Christian organizations consists of the following

three scales and their corresponding offices: a large group integrated by a baptizer (*sazuke-yaku* 授け役 or *oji-yaku* オジ役, the role of uncle, or *oji'i-yaku* オジイ役, the role of grandfather, which is a corrupted rendering) as the supreme leader; a middle-sized *kakiuchi* 垣内 (enclosed settlement) group directed by a hereditary or rotation master (*goban-yaku* 御番役 or *oyaji-yaku* オヤジ役, the role of father), whose home is called *tsumoto* (god's home); and a small *conpan'ya* (company) group headed by a rotational assistant official (*mideshi* 御弟子 or *yakuchū* 役中).

The social geographer NOZAKI (1988, 128–36) pointed out that most of the large groups encompass a traditional village (*fure* 触) or villages and the middle-sized *kakiuchi* groups are organized within a traditional neighborhood group (*kumi* 組).²³ Traditional villages on Ikitsuki do not always correspond with contemporary administrative districts (NOZAKI 1988, 129), differing from the general villages on Hirado Island. In 1976, the number of households in each *kakiuchi* group was approximately ten to forty and, in each *conpan'ya* group, was three to twelve (NOZAKI 1988, 137–38).

By critically investigating the above discussions, we should point out two important facts. First, the large group is not integrated by a baptizer and he is not the supreme leader in a Hidden Christian organization. In fact, almost all of the Ikitsuki Hidden Christians have recognized that the hereditary master (*oyaji-yaku*) holds a higher position than the baptizer (*oji-yaku*) (MIYAZAKI 1996, 52). In addition, SHIBATA (1951, 141) reported that the hereditary master is the equivalent of the priest (*padre* in Portuguese) and the baptizer corresponds to the monk (*irmão*). Furthermore, the Ikitsuki people have not held any annual rituals by gathering in the home of a baptizer; almost all annual rituals are held as *kakiuchi* group events in the *tsumoto* home of a hereditary master (TAGITA 1954, 285–86; SAKAI 1990, 137; MIYAZAKI 1996, 108–11). Because most believers have been unwilling to serve as baptizer, to which various religious precepts are strictly imposed, it has been consistently difficult to find persons well-suited for this position (FURUNO 1966, 126–29; MIYAZAKI 1996, 52–60).²⁴ The baptizers on Ikitsuki, therefore, have to cover several *kakiuchi* groups within their village and sometimes over an entire

23. SAKAI (1990, 125), however, reported that a large group covers a larger traditional administrative unit (*men* 免) and that a middle-sized group corresponds with a village. This larger unit originates from the Hirado domain's ruling system during the Edo period. The unit generally contains two or three villages, which usually further involve one or two administrative districts (*ku*), in present-day Ikitsuki (NOZAKI 1988, 128–29).

24. Throughout Ikitsuki, the baptizers decreased to only eight in 1988, whereas the total number of Hidden Christian households was 310 (SAKAI 1990, 129). This ratio is almost equivalent to the latest Neshiko organization, in which there are only three baptizers for roughly one hundred believer households.

village.²⁵ Such selections and requests of baptizers have been conducted within and not beyond the traditional village (TAGITA 1954, 257–58; MIYAZAKI 1996, 64–65).

Second, not all of the large groups, such as Ichibu 壱部, Yamada 山田, Motofure 元触, and Sakaime 堺目, correspond to a traditional village (see FIGURE 1). For example, the Ichibu officials with their own closet gods have gathered in the *Rokkasho-yori* 六ヶ所寄り (gathering of six settlements) ritual once a year in the larger traditional administrative unit rather than the two traditional villages in Ichibu (NAGASAKI PREFECTURAL BOARD OF EDUCATION 1999, 121–23). Also, in Yamada, for the larger administrative unit and not a traditional village, the executive officials gathered in a home (rotationally decided) for four important yearly rituals called *mifure-yori* 三触寄り (gatherings of three villages) (KATAOKA 1974, 104–105; NAGASAKI PREFECTURAL BOARD OF EDUCATION 1999, 185–89).²⁶ In contrast, in Motofure village, all the officials of three middle-sized *kakiuchi* groups gathered as a large group for ten rituals including the *Sankasho-hatsuyoriai* 三ヶ所初寄り合い (the first gathering of three settlements) ritual every year (NAGASAKI PREFECTURAL BOARD OF EDUCATION 1999, 162–63). Also, in Sakaime village, the officials of three *kakiuchi* groups acted jointly as a large group to hold the *Osejo-matsuri* 御世情祭 (a part of the Easter ritual) by bringing their closet gods (TAGITA 1954, 286–91; NAGASAKI PREFECTURAL BOARD OF EDUCATION 1999, 145–46).

These two facts demonstrate that the large groups on Ikitsuki are seen as alliance units (FIGURE 5), which are not substantial groups and provide no general leader, except for the limited principal rituals and baptizers' responsibilities. The scale of these large groups correspond with either a traditional village or a larger administrative unit. Therefore, we can opine that the Ikitsuki Hidden Christians maintained the following three-scaled units: the large alliance unit; the middle-sized *kakiuchi* as the basic unit; and the small *conpan'ya* as a sub-unit. From the perspective of social geography, the most typical morphological pattern among Japanese villages is the agglomerated settlement (*shūson* 集村), in which the basic community corresponds with the village as the large unit in this study (ISHIHARA 1965, 38–39; HAMATANI 1988, 18–20). However, the basic communities within a village in some Japanese regions are the middle-sized *kakiuchi* or *kaito* 垣内 (enclosed settlement) groups in general, rather than the village itself. These phenomena are observed especially within a moderately

25. This situation is the same as that in a village of the Sotome region (TAGITA 1954, 61).

26. These rituals were attended by the executive officials of the middle-sized *kakiuchi* groups in the three villages of Yamada. One of the four rituals is the *Doyonaka-yori* 土用中寄り (gathering in midsummer), which was held at least until the early Showa period (the early twentieth century) for establishing the dates for the next year's principal rituals for all the Hidden Christian believers on Ikitsuki Island. It was, therefore, attended also by a liaison from Motofure (Sato 里) or Sakaime for announcing the dates to the villages outside of Yamada (TAGITA 1954, 292–96).

dispersed settlement (*sokaison* 疎塊村), as typically seen on Ikitsuki Island,²⁷ and a settlement composed of multiple hamlets (*shōson* 小村) (ISHIHARA 1964, 215–16). Therefore, the middle-sized *kakiuchi* as the basic unit in Hidden Christian organizations corresponds with the basic village community, especially in the Ikitsuki case.

Conclusions

The focal points of this study were the spatial structures of Hidden Christian organizations, their formation principles based on neighborhood or kinship networks, and geographical conditions that produce differences in the spatial structures among villages. From a social geographical perspective, Japanese rural residents have usually divided and subdivided themselves into various scaled groups within a village community, sometimes uniting with other village communities for different purposes under specific geographical conditions, such as physical environment, settlement morphological pattern, and population size, as well as in historical contexts (HAMATANI 1988; NOZAKI 1988). In addition, various small religious groups (*kō* 講) that are composed of approximately five to fifteen households have been generally organized within the village community (WAKAMORI 1958, 276–83; MATSUI 2003, 163–76).

Therefore, it can be concluded that Hidden Christian organizations, including the small inner groups, are just one of several social groups based on existing neighborhood relationships or kinships and administrative units (one of the neighborhood relationships), such as village and district, under various geographical conditions. Neshiko village, which has retained a large population (around two hundred households) and an agglomerated settlement, maintained the comprehensive basic unit by combining four middle-sized administrative districts and concurrently organizing two kinds of subunits based on kinships (see FIGURE 4). Kasuga village, which is a small and moderately dispersed settlement, joined with the neighboring hamlet outside of the village and barely retained the small basic units based on lineage kinships. Aburamizu village, which is a middle-sized, highly dispersed settlement and a relatively new community established by migrants, preserved basic units based on neighborhood relationships, while keeping the simple Sotome-Urakami (including the Gotō Islands) style beneficial to migrants.

However, the three villages differ from the usual villages on Ikitsuki Island, each of which has maintained the large alliance unit, middle-sized basic units, and multiple subunits originally based on neighborhood relationships, which

27. Aerial photographs of Ikitsuki Island by the Geographical Information Authority of Japan clearly show this morphological pattern (<http://mapps.gsi.go.jp/maplibSearch.do#1>; accessed 18 September 2016).

spread out in the area that is composed of continuous moderately dispersed settlements (see FIGURE 5). In short, we found the alliance units, which lack general leaders, only in the Ikitsuki villages, whereas we did not find such large units on Hirado Island. Because most villages on Hirado are separated into small valleys surrounded by hills, they have generally lacked the opportunities for alliances with other Hidden Christians outside the village (except for the small Kasuga village and Shiraishi hamlet). They are not the same as the Ikitsuki Hidden Christians, who have lived on a continuous plateau from which people easily come and go.

On the other hand, villages on Hirado Island have (or had) maintained the same basic units as Ikitsuki Island's villages. However, different structures appear among Hirado's case study villages in that a large Neshiko village retained not only the basic unit but also two varieties of subgroups, whereas the middle-sized Aburamizu and small Kasuga villages retained only the basic units. Within the same region, including Ikitsuki Island, different patterns of spatial structure for the Hidden Christian organizations are observed among the villages, each of which has not only their own history, but also unique geography. In discussions on the classification of Hidden Christian organizations, differences in the spatial structure should be considered from not only historical origins and backgrounds (such as the establishment of *confraria* groups in Rodrigues' original schema), but also various geographical conditions.

Moreover, this article has applied the key concept of the "basic unit" in a rural society, which has been emphasized in Japanese social geography, but not in religious studies, as the most fundamental unit for Hidden Christians' religious life. From our findings, this corresponds with every scale in a village: large, middle-sized, and small. Adopting this key concept, we can discern which is the principal unit among multi-scaled groups within an organization without being confused by population size (the number of member households) of each group and organization. Hereafter, we need to investigate other Hidden Christian regions, such as Sotome and Gotō, from a social geographical perspective and compare it with the findings in this article in order to understand more comprehensively and insightfully the beliefs of the Japanese Hidden Christians.

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