

LIVING KIRISHITAN ICONS OF EARLY MODERN JAPAN

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In

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by

Ema Kubo Thomas

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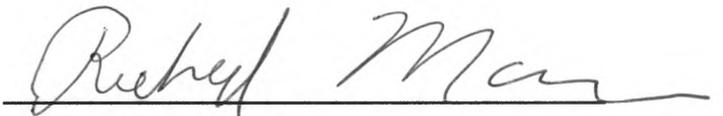
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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

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# LIVING KIRISHITAN ICONS OF EARLY MODERN JAPAN

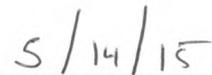
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2015

The period of underground Christianity in Japan from 1639-1873 produced a distinctly Japanese sect of the Catholic religion. The icons produced during period reflect the Japanese Christian believers' deep Buddhist roots. Most scholarship focuses on the European Jesuit and Japanese primary textual sources, and Christian paintings from this period have largely been dismissed as folk art. An examination of the Buddhist practices and iconography that influenced the underground Japanese Christians reveals aspects of their belief that has yet to be addressed. The Buddhist and Catholic parallels in belief and practice were key factors in the continuation of the underground Christians, who creatively redefined their beliefs within a Buddhist pictorial language.

I certify that the abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.



Chair, Thesis Committee



Date

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## Introduction

In Japan, imagery has played a central role in the history of Christianity, and more broadly, in Japanese religious culture as a whole. Recent studies highlight the importance of material culture within Japanese Buddhist practice after the introduction of the religion to Japan during the eighth century. Likewise, the Jesuits missionaries who brought Christianity were equipped to introduce the religion with devotional images. Then after close to a century of European and Japanese interaction, Japan entered into a period of seclusion for over 200 years. The Christian imagery transformed over time and those variations reflect the changes of Christianity in Japan. A Japanese statue of Christ as the Buddha produced a century after the Europeans' arrival in Japan, for example, reiterates how far images evolved from the European models.

Not until many years after Japan opened its ports again in the nineteenth century, a group from Ikitsuki Island, north of Nagasaki, revealed their secret Christian traditions they had passed on from generation to generation. Records are few since Christianity was prohibited and found images were destroyed, but 42 paintings from Ikitsuki Island remain as the largest body of primary sources. Despite the significant formal differences from the Italian Renaissance style, scroll paintings of the Virgin "Maria" wearing a kimono reveal that the physical presence of religious images was fundamental to Christianity in Japan. Devotional objects and images stayed at the forefront of religious practice. Over time, the rituals in which the images were used fused Catholic tradition and Buddhist practice.

The paintings produced by Japanese artists trained in the Jesuit painting school in Japan in the late sixteenth century have attracted much scholarly attention. These few remaining paintings, in the sixteenth century Italian painting style, were intended for use in the Jesuit seminary and in surrounding churches. The images were largely unseen by most Japanese Christians. What then did the material culture look like outside of the seminary? The devotional objects of lay Japanese, who made up most of the Christian population in the first several centuries of Christianity in Japan, is largely unaccounted for. Objects such as devotional tablets, medallions, and containers for consecrated water are only explained briefly. Yet the status and importance of material culture in the eyes of Japanese Christians is not addressed. If they painted a cross symbol with holy water on a ritual object, what was the status of that object, and how did they interact with it due to the transformed status? These questions are crucial to accurately analyzing the early Japanese Christians and will be addressed in subsequent chapters.

In Chapter One, I set the stage and provide the background of how art was used by the Jesuits and Japanese during the first hundred years of Christianity in Japan starting in 1549. I describe the relationship between the Jesuits and Japanese leaders as well as with commoners, and the crucial role of art in the various stages of Christianity in Japan, including how it was used against the Christians during the period of persecution.

Chapter Two will analyze how devotional images were displayed and used for contemplation in both Buddhist and Jesuit traditions. The display of paintings in Christian home altars came from a parallel practice in Buddhism. The Buddhist home

altar was adapted to the Japanese Christian private worship and housed Christian rather than Buddhist icons.

Chapter Three further discusses how the paintings were perceived in the worship context due to the ritual transformation of an icon to a living deity. The Japanese Christians believed their icons embodied the spirit of the divine. The background and parallel traditions of Buddhism that were adopted resulted in a syncretic, distinct system of beliefs.

Chapter Four explains the hidden icons in the context of secrecy in religion. The Japanese Christians adapted the hidden icon tradition from Buddhism. Images, though not always visible, were perceived as powerful and sacred because they were hidden. Through the Buddhist pictorial language, the Japanese Christians secretly expressed their beliefs about God.

The existing scholarship on the paintings of Japan's hidden Christians is limited especially in relation to the impact of the popular religion of Pure Land Buddhism. The evidence of how icons were used in Pure Land Buddhism gives insight to how the Japanese Christian paintings functioned in the underground church. More significantly, this analysis of paintings produced during the longest continuous period of religious persecution in history will shed light on how the Japanese Christians syncretized beliefs with existing Buddhist practice, thus developing their own distinct expression while maintaining Christian beliefs.

## Chapter One

### Historical Context: From Exchange to Persecution

The history of the Catholic mission in Japan demonstrates the unique ability of art to bridge cultures and maintain traditions. While the role of art shifted in each phase of the mission, from the first European contact through the long period of the underground church, visual objects remained central. In 1543, Portuguese merchants arrived in Japan and began a century of bustling exchange between Europe and Japan. Soon after the trade began, Jesuit missionaries arrived in 1549 and spread Christianity throughout Japan. This period, known as, “the Christian century,” came to a halt in 1639 when the shogun closed Japan’s borders from foreign contact in order to solidify control over the nation. This policy of isolation continued for over two hundred years, during which time Christianity was prohibited and Buddhism was established as the state religion. Many *Kirishitan* (transliterated from Portuguese, referring to Early Modern Japanese Christian) continued their Catholic practices in secret and formed communities of underground Christianity, known as *Kakure Kirishitan* (“hidden Christian”).

Though the focus of my thesis is primarily on the influence of Buddhism on the *Kirishitan*, the crucial role of imagery as an integral part of the Catholic mission to Japan must first be understood. In this chapter I will explain how the Jesuits used art and religious objects to spread Christianity. Additionally, I will describe the political and religious change during the underground period when the hidden Christian paintings were produced.

An idealized image of beauty in sixteenth century European painting describing each feature using chiaroscuro technique was vastly different than the outlined, rounded jawline and narrow-eyed features of a beauty in Japanese painting. Yet by tracing the history of Catholic images in Japan, these stylistic differences seem to dissolve. Both the Jesuits and the Japanese Buddhists, regardless of their distinctly European or Japanese style, shared the visual appeal of a beautiful object.

Prior to the first missionaries' arrival in Japan, Portuguese merchants introduced Christian crosses to the Japanese. These crosses were accepted as gifts, and people living in the Kagoshima province, the southern-most province of Japan where the merchants first arrived, used them to ward off evil spirits.<sup>1</sup> The Jesuit missionaries who came soon after studied the Japanese culture and understood the importance of gift giving. They also recognized the strong historical connection and influence of China on Japan and used similar methods to build relationships in Japan. Since the missionaries had successfully built relationships starting with aristocracy in China, likewise in Japan they first met with the political leaders.

The missionaries thus gave both religious and non-religious European objects to establish good relations with political figures in Japan. Saint Francis Xavier, the first missionary in Japan, brought a Madonna and Child painting to the daimyō (feudal lord) when he arrived. This daimyō of the prominent Satsuma province, Shimazu Takahisa, was pleased with the painting and desired to acquire more Western goods though he had

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<sup>1</sup> Tasuku Tanaka, *Nihon Kirishitan Monogatari*. (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1967), 27.

no interest in the Christian religion.<sup>2</sup> When Oda Nobunaga rose to prominence as the de-facto ruler in Japan after 1560, the Jesuits brought him gifts to request permission for their mission venture: In 1569, missionary Luis Frois met Nobunaga in the Nijō Castle and was granted permission to continue missionary activities.<sup>3</sup> In 1579, Visitor to the mission, Alexander Valignano, also brought many gifts to Nobunaga.<sup>4</sup> Some of the non-religious gifts included velvet cloth, cut glassware, leather from Cordoba, a clock, a garment made of otter hide, a scarlet robe, and gold-ornamented chairs.<sup>5</sup> Nobunaga was impressed by these European gifts and in return gave Valignano a painted Japanese folding screen. Once the missionaries received permission from Nobunaga, they continued to meet daimyō of other provinces in southern Japan.

The first Christian daimyō, Ōmura Sumitada, dramatically changed the course of the mission with his enthusiastic support. The missionaries gave their new patron many gifts including gold crosses, wine, a ring with expensive jewels, a cloak, and a hat.<sup>6</sup> Missionary Almeida described Sumitada wearing expensive robes with “IESUS” in beautiful green letters on a white globe-shaped embellishment below the shoulder, as well as having a cross and rosary beads around his neck. He negotiated with the missionaries to make his domain, Nagasaki, the center of trade with Portuguese

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<sup>2</sup> Frances Hioki, “The Shape of Conversation: the Aesthetics of Jesuit Folding Screens in Momoyama and Early Tokugawa Japan (1549-1639).” (PhD diss., Graduate Theological Union, 2009), 195.

<sup>3</sup> George Elison, *Deus Destroyed: the Image of Christianity in Early Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 26.

<sup>4</sup> Elison, *Deus Destroyed*, ix.

<sup>5</sup> Tanaka, *Nihon Kirishitan Monogatari*, 61.

<sup>6</sup> Tanaka, 66.

merchants. In return he made Nagasaki a Christian city, and built a large cross in the center. The cross was later destroyed during the period of persecution, but it is known that it was large and prominent enough to be visible from a long distance and became a symbol of the city. With Sumitada's permission, the Jesuits built Christian churches, schools, seminaries, and hospitals. The missionaries urged Portuguese ships to stop only at ports where the daimyō was Christian or gave the church permission to set up their institutions on their land.<sup>7</sup>

European ships continued to arrive in Nagasaki and the city became the center of trade. Nagasaki was known at this time as “the Door to the West.” Forging relationships with the Portuguese missionaries was important for many daimyō, who hoped to gain power and profit through strong ties with the West. Many other daimyō converted and built churches to welcome the missionaries. Following the daimyō, there were mass conversions of thousands of commoners who resided in the *Kirishitan* daimyōs' provinces.<sup>8</sup>

Several Christian daimyō constructed Japanese-style churches as recorded by Luis Frois in *History of Japan [História de Japam]* in 1574. He described a magnificent church built by Jorge Yuiki Yaheiji around the region of the capital with a tiled roof and 100-tatami mat interior, and another by the lord of Takayama-Hida, who built a costly large

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<sup>7</sup> Christal Whelan, *The Beginning of Heaven and Earth: The Sacred Book of Japan's Hidden Christians* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996), 5.

<sup>8</sup>These commoners professed to be *Kirishitan* to please their daimyō, yet considering the mass apostasies that followed subsequent persecution, they had minimal understanding of said “conversions.”

church using only unused wooden boards for construction. He surrounded his Japanese-style church with trees and flowers, and a pond with fish, as well as an ornamental garden, like in Japanese monasteries.<sup>9</sup> The adaption of a public Buddhist temple space in the early years of Christianity later extended to the private devotional context when Christianity went underground.

Some of the churches in the converted daimyō's domains were spectacular constructions of European design, which attracted masses of Japanese people. A non-Christian Japanese observer noted that the Christian church of Kyoto appeared to be vision of paradise.<sup>10</sup> The building was compared to the Western Paradise, or the Pure Land paradise in Buddhism believed to be in the west. The church in Kyoto, erected around 1576, attracted people from distant provinces.<sup>11</sup> Due to the outbreak of persecution, the church was destroyed in 1614 and the only remaining part is the cast iron bell, engraved with the date 1577 and Jesuit IHS emblem.<sup>12</sup> In a letter dated 12 December 1584, Valignano writes that the director of the Kyoto area was too generous in spending money on architecture and various other projects.<sup>13</sup> The *Nambanji* (church) in Kyoto included both Japanese and European style architecture and motifs- a syncretic, unique

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<sup>9</sup> Ignatia Rumiko Kataoka, "The Adaption of the Sacraments to Japanese Culture During the Christian Era" in *Christianity and Cultures: Japan and China in Comparison 1543-1644* (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2009), 115.

<sup>10</sup>Hioki, 179.

<sup>11</sup>Hioki, 181.

<sup>12</sup>Joseph Dahlman S.J., *Christianity in Japanese Art: Seven Ancient Screen Paintings*, Art and Archaeology Volume XIII January-June, 1922. Art and Archaeology Press, Inc.; affiliated with Archaeological Institute of America, 178.

<sup>13</sup>Ayako Nakai, *Jesuit Missionaries and the Earliest contact Between European and Japanese Cultures*, Burger, Glenn, ed., *Making contact: Maps, Identity, and Travel*, 104.

style of building that neither Jesuits nor Japanese had seen before. The building is depicted from a distance in a fan painting from the late sixteenth century, showing a unique temple design (fig. 1). The style and materials were similar to Japanese architecture, but the three-story building with a residence above a place of worship was not the norm in Japan.<sup>14</sup>

The syncretic architectural style may have been similar to St. Paul's Church in Macau, built in the seventeenth century starting in 1601 by Japanese Christian artists who had been expelled from Japan and Chinese artists from Macau. Inside there were altar vessels and chalices; Chinese and Japanese porcelain was used alongside European and Japanese silver objects, Oriental hanging carpets and fabrics, embroideries from Japan and India, and statues and paintings from Europe. St. Paul's Baroque exterior was similar to that of Jesuit churches in Rome and Coimbra but there was clear influence of Chinese and Japanese architectural elements: there were Chinese mythical beasts, carvings of Chinese and Japanese-style faces, and Chinese plants including a Chinese rose, a chrysanthemum, and a lychee. The Japanese motifs included the baby Jesus surrounded by a chrysanthemum design on the second level of sculptures.<sup>15</sup> The construction of the church in Macau took approximately forty years and was likely more elaborately decorated than any church in Japan built in a shorter period, but the *Nambanji* in Kyoto

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<sup>14</sup> Rie Arimura, "The Catholic Architecture of Early Modern Japan: Between Adaptation and Christian Identity," *Japan Review* No. 27, 2014. International Research Centre for Japanese Studies, National Institute for the Humanities, 66.

<sup>15</sup> Mo Xiaoye, "Artistic Exchanges Between Macau and Japan," in *Christianity and Cultures: Japan & China in Comparison 1543-1644*, 224.

also must have been distinctive to elucidate an awe-inspiring response from viewers and sizable to house a large bell for a bell tower.

The Jesuits clearly appreciated art not only as a didactic tool, but also for the experience of visual pleasure. In this practice of experiencing art, a free and open exchange of aesthetics could take shape. Several prominent Jesuit figures recorded their enjoyment of Japanese aesthetics. Luis Frois, a missionary in Japan for 34 years, recollected his experience in *Historia de Japam*. He carefully explained the beauty of Buddhist arts and practices. Upon seeing a large temple in Kyoto, *Sanjiusangen-do*, he wrote that the statues of Amida<sup>16</sup> and Kannon<sup>17</sup> reminded him of the angelic hierarchy of heaven.<sup>18</sup> In Rome, his writing was heavily edited and censored because of his appreciation of non-Christian traditions. Missionary Almeida shared Frois's appreciation and wrote about the Matsunaga castle, describing it as so beautiful he wondered if he were entering paradise.<sup>19</sup> It is interesting to note that there was a mutual attraction and association with paradise upon seeing religious buildings. Several Jesuit missionaries marveled at Japanese temples, comparing them to paradise, while the Japanese seemed to have a similar response to the Western-style churches such as the *Nambanji* in Kyoto.

Art and religious images and objects were essential tools for teaching because of the language barrier between the Jesuits and the Japanese. In addition to the difficulty of learning Japanese, terms that would accurately translate Christian concepts did not exist

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<sup>16</sup> Amida Buddha, of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism

<sup>17</sup> Bodhisattva of compassion, often depicted accompanying Amida Buddha

<sup>18</sup> Hioki, 175.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 179.

in Japanese. Thus theological concepts were explained through Buddhist terminology and transliterated Latin and Portuguese words into Japanese. For example *Kirishitan* was transliterated from *Cristão*-- “Christian” in Portuguese. The numbers continued to grow-- in 1553, there were already at least 4,000 converts with only five missionaries in Japan; by 1569, there were 100,000 converts served by only fifty-five missionaries.<sup>20</sup> The numbers of conversions were surprisingly high, especially where missionaries resided. In the Ōmura domain at the center of Nagasaki, where there were four padres and nine *Irmãos* (brothers), most of the twenty thousand *Kirishitan* in the domain came to make their confessions regularly.<sup>21</sup> By 1613, Christianity reached its height at an estimated 800,000 Christians throughout Japan.<sup>22</sup>

The missionaries’ culturally adaptive policies had an effect as well on the large numbers of conversions- notably by Visitor Alessandro Valignano.<sup>23</sup> Much of the acceptance and growth of the Jesuit mission has been credited to his policies. When he first arrived in Japan in 1579, he wrote, “as the lifestyle as well as the social norms and proper manners related to the customs and formalities of the Japanese are opposite to our own, we must adapt them...” To begin this process he resolved to make the missionaries use customs and formalities used by Buddhist monks. He insisted everything be done in a Japanese fashion, so that by giving up the external the missionaries could capture the

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<sup>20</sup> Whelan, *The Beginning of Heaven and Earth*, 6.

<sup>21</sup> Josef Franz Schütte, Valignano’s Mission Principles for Japan, Vol.1 From His Appointment as Visitor until His Departure from Japan (1573-1582), Part II The Solution (1580-1582) (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Resources, 1985), 106. (Higashibaba, 42)

<sup>22</sup> Hidesaburo Suzuki, *Crypto-Kirishitan Relics in Japan*, (Kyoto, 1961), 17.

<sup>23</sup> Kataoka explains that the existing adaptations by daimyō influenced the Jesuit policy of adaptation, implemented later on.

internal. The members of the clergy should “follow the patterns of behavior adopted by monks of every branch of Buddhism in Japan.”<sup>24</sup> The Europeans thus built Japanese style living quarters, and adopted manners, diet, and even hospitality by requiring rooms in Jesuit buildings to be built specifically for the Japanese tea ceremony.<sup>25</sup>

When an embassy of Japanese boys visited Europe and took with them a folding screen, a gift from Nobunaga, Valignano wrote a letter to the Pope asking for folding screens to be painted and brought back in return as a gift from the Vatican. He instructed them to be painted “to the Japanese taste” and the designs be approved by the Japanese embassy.<sup>26</sup> Beyond lifestyle and cultural assimilation, Valignano’s adaption policy extended to aesthetics because he understood the unique ability of art to establish relationships. Art was the common ground - the point of contact that mediated the distinctive cultures. Rather than imposing European aesthetics, Valignano gave specific instructions with the intention of being sensitive to the aesthetic taste of the Japanese.

As a result of the phenomenon of mass conversions, the demand for religious art objects grew beyond the capacity of imports. Since Christian images were integral to personal devotion and ritual practice, the demand of the growing number of converts was not being met. In response to this need, Giovanni Niccolo, an Italian painter, was sent from Europe and arrived in 1583 to set up an art school in Japan. By 1591 he opened his painting school that was part of the existing Jesuit seminary in Japan. The school had two parts: the seminary workshop, which produced religious images, and the local workshop,

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<sup>24</sup> Kataoka, 117.

<sup>25</sup> Elison, *Deus Destroyed*, 56, 60.

<sup>26</sup> Hioki, “Shape of Conversation,” 25.

which produced secular images such as folding screens painted in a European style. While other objects such as Western musical instruments and clocks were also made in the school, the primary output was devotional art and engraved images for prints. The school also had a printing press to publish Christian documents.<sup>27</sup> The hybrid style of the images produced in the painting school (fig. 2) was a visible manifestation of the culturally adaptive policies of the Jesuit missionaries.

While perhaps there was a common and mutual visual appreciation between Buddhists and Jesuits, once relationships were established with local leaders, the primary function of the imported art was for teaching. Over time, the Jesuits learned the language and translated teaching materials into Japanese. The missionaries brought printing presses from their well-established mission school in Macao and began printing Christian pamphlets in Japan by 1590. The pamphlets were then distributed throughout both the southern and Kanto regions. By 1591, the missionaries had printed Japanese translations of Christian Doctrines, a condensed version of the *Spiritual Exercises*, and the gospels.<sup>28</sup> After the first text-only editions were printed, subsequent editions included images of engraved prints (fig. 3). The missionary painter, Giovanni Niccolo, trained Japanese artists in his school to copy European engravings for these publications. Teaching and art were integrated from the early period of the Jesuit mission in Japan, starting with imported European paintings and developing into mass publications.

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<sup>27</sup> Gauvin Bailey, *Art on the Jesuit Mission in Asia and Latin America, 1542-1773*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 1999,14.

<sup>28</sup> Johannes Laures, S.J., *Kirishitan Bunko: A Manual of Books and Documents on the Early Christian Mission in Japan*, (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1957), 99.

By the end of the sixteenth century, the Christian images and small religious objects from missionaries were widespread in Japan among both Christians and non-Christians alike.<sup>29</sup> The new religious images were often considered added protection to the Buddhist and Shinto spirits because in the highly superstitious Japanese culture, religious objects regardless of specific denomination were often associated with good fortune. Missionaries recorded stories recounting miracles of healing through incantations using crosses or rosary beads. Japanese people typically put Buddhist scriptures and *omamori* (charms for luck or protection) in their garments for safety and good fortune. When the Christian documents and prayers were published, these too were added to the personal collections. Small medallions from European missionaries were also sought after for their supernatural associations. Many Japanese added the Christian images into their existing Buddhist and Shinto practices without renouncing their former beliefs. Christianity was at times misunderstood as a branch of Buddhism stemming from India.

This belief in the supernatural power of symbols and images was manifest on a large scale in the Shimabara rebellion, a peasant revolt from 1637 to 1638. The revolt was significant as the linchpin in the final seclusion policy when the Japanese government closed itself off from foreign influence, especially from countries propagating Christianity. Thirty-five thousand peasants revolted against an oppressive daimyō's over-taxation and cruel treatment of his subjects during a famine. Innumerable Christian images were prominently featured in this revolt, which was itself led by a

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<sup>29</sup> Hioki, 189.

Christian. Padre João Rodrigues described the Shimabara Rebellion, writing, “so many crosses, [images of] Jesus and *Santiagos* on the flags, tents, and other marital insignia which the Japanese use in their encampments, that this must have made Ieyasu<sup>30</sup> sick to his stomach.”<sup>31</sup> The Christian religion’s association with the revolt implied loyalty to Christianity rather than to their government, reinstating the shogun’s perceived threat of Christianity. After the local government struggled to squash the rebellion even with reinforcements, Ieyasu feared the strong association to foreign religion and potential threat of European nations. Though the Jesuits never condoned rebellion, the Christian imagery and charismatic Christian leader posed a threat to the government of possible future upheaval if the religion was not controlled early on.

Other factors that moved the government toward isolation included the European colonization of other countries in Asia, rivalry between missionary groups, and the instability of a recently unified Japanese government. In addition to closing off the country’s borders from external threats, many policies were changed internally. The government issued a series of anti-Christian policies beginning in 1587 with the missionary expulsion edict, gradually increasing in severity until the final seclusion edict in 1639. Printed publications, objects with Christian symbols, Christian art, and books were confiscated and burned.<sup>32</sup> *Kirishitan* daimyō had to recant their faith or be banished from the country and thousands of *Kirishitan* apostatized. On the surface, the

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<sup>30</sup> Tokugawa Ieyasu, first Japanese shogun

<sup>31</sup> Elison, 3.

<sup>32</sup> Laures, *Kirishitan Bunko*, 93.

government's control appeared successful. After the seclusion edict of 1639, the number of *Kirishitan* dropped to an estimated 150,000.

The Office of the Inquisition (*Shūmon Aratame Yaku*) was established in 1640 to seek out any *Kirishitan* in hiding.<sup>33</sup> In the initial phase, the shogun recognized the *Kirishitan*'s willingness, and even eagerness to die an honorable death as martyrs in the hope of eternal glory, and employed different tactics, making execution a last resort. The torture and execution methods included drowning, being hung upside down in a pit of excrement, scalding the skin repeatedly to near death in hot springs, and watching the family members be executed as punishment. The worst torture method, recorded in both Japanese and European missionary sources, was *tsurushi*, hanging upside down continuously in a dark pit for days until they renounced their religion or died (fig. 14).<sup>34</sup> There were over 2000 executions by 1650, and several systematic persecutions of groups of *Kirishitan* as late as 1873.<sup>35</sup>

One of the tactics employed by the Office of the Inquisition was a yearly ceremony of stepping on a Catholic icon to prove one's commitment to Buddhism rather than Christianity.<sup>36</sup> The images used for the picture-stepping ceremony were confiscated engravings and medallions previously held by *Kirishitan* for protection and good fortune (fig. 4).

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<sup>33</sup> Elison, *Deus Destroyed*, xi.

<sup>34</sup> Hubert Cieslik, "The Case of Christovão Ferreira," *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Spring, 1974), Tokyo: Sophia University, 15.

<sup>35</sup> Ann Harrington, *Japan's Hidden Christians* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1993), 107.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

Another edict called *Gonin Gumi* was implemented from 1640, in which all families were grouped in fives households and held collectively responsible for the good conduct of other members.<sup>37</sup> If one family broke the law, for instance by practicing *Kirishitan* traditions, the other families would also be considered guilty. Families were reported to authorities so that the other families in the grouping would not be held collectively responsible. Government officials showed up unannounced to search homes that were under suspicion of being *Kakure Kirishitan*. As early as 1597, the first of many edicts was issued in Ikitsuki Island to keep watch for *Kirishitan* in hiding by looking for Christian symbols and peeking through neighbors' windows to see if people were gathering.<sup>38</sup> Consequently it was vital to be conspicuously Buddhist even in private in the case of possible sightings by Buddhist neighbors. The communities were closely knit, so the five-household system worked to preserve *Kirishitan* communities in Ikitsuki Island where many *Kirishitan* families were in the same grouping.

By 1659 Buddhism was firmly established as the common religion by the recently centralized government that required each member of society to register at the local Buddhist temple, pay dues, and attend important ceremonies such as weddings and funerary rites.<sup>39</sup> The daimyōs enforced the central government's policies in order to maintain their status and power by proving their allegiance. It is important to mention the government's tight control on most aspects of people's lives during the Edo period

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<sup>37</sup> Whelan, 9.

<sup>38</sup> Kentari Miyazaki, *Kakure Kirishitan no Shinkou Sekai* ("Kakure-Kirishitan": Christianity as a Folk-Religion in Modern Japan) (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1996), 24.

<sup>39</sup> Harrington, 27.

(1603-1868). Such regulations were extensive, including class structure, land allotment, and sword-bearing rights. Even details as specific as hairstyles and types of fabric allowed for clothing were regulated.

During the country's isolation period, the *Kirishitan* lived in a perpetual state of uncertainty, knowing they could be discovered and tortured, and even executed. Punishment by execution if discovered to be practicing Christianity continued through the nineteenth century. In an environment of constant scrutiny and danger, it would seem that a simple solution to preserve their religion in secret would have been to worship without using images or figures that would put their lives in jeopardy. There were safety precautions taken such as orally transmitting *Kirishitan* prayers and teachings, including their Bible narrative, *Tenchi Hajimari no Koto* ("The Beginning of Heaven and Earth"). Why was it necessary to keep and continue to use *Kirishitan* paintings in their practices? The images and religious objects were inextricable from the faith since the beginning of the Jesuit mission in Japan; thus the *Kirishitan* thought it necessary to continue to use physical images to practice their hidden religion.

Along with the shift to the underground church after missionaries were expelled and Buddhism was enforced, the *Kirishitan* art had to change. Since most Christian images were confiscated, the *Kirishitan* produced their own. During this phase, the effect of Buddhist beliefs on *Kirishitan* ritual practice must be accounted for to understand the secret Christian art. In subsequent chapters I will consider the central role of their scroll paintings within the culturally Buddhist context to reveal why the images were necessary

despite the risk of revealing the community's *Kirishitan* identity during the underground period.

## Chapter Two Contemplation and Home Altar Worship

Ikitsuki Island is known for its large population of underground *Kirishitan*. At the Shima no Yakata Museum on Ikitsuki Island there is a permanent exhibit of many remaining *Kirishitan* artifacts. Like the *Kirishitan* themselves, this museum sits in a remote area of Japan. To see these rare treasures firsthand, I flew from Tokyo to Nagasaki, and then took three buses and a taxi, amounting to an additional four hours, to finally arrive at the museum. Tucked away in the corner of the exhibit, past the display of paintings and artifacts, there was a recreated home altar with a Madonna and Child scroll painting dimly illuminated by candlelight. It made the rest of the exhibition come to life. Differing from typical framed museum displays, this last display was life-like, as if I walked into a *Kirishitan* home on Ikitsuki Island in the seventeenth century. It enabled me to understand the spatial significance of the altar and how the scroll paintings, and other objects would have been used in the ritual practices of the *Kirishitan*.

Studying the Ikitsuki *Kirishitan* paintings through the lens of their Buddhist culture is crucial to understanding the Ikitsuki *Kirishitan* community. While the culture and traditions are well studied, the discussion of the context and purpose of *Kirishitan* scroll paintings, such as the paintings in the museum exhibit, has been left open. By examining *Kirishitan* practices and art, I argue that Japanese Buddhist beliefs are manifest within the *Kirishitan* traditions. The practice of contemplation with art on display reveals the influence of existing Japanese Buddhist beliefs. Though there were many areas of potential interaction of beliefs and practices between the popular Buddhist

culture and Christianity, my focus for this chapter will be the religious practice of contemplation that was enhanced by the display of *Kirishitan* paintings in home altars. Home altar rituals are informative of the development of a syncretic religious practice and the significant impact of Buddhism on daily life. Additionally, it is important to understand the traditions and objects of contemplation from a Japanese Buddhist framework, in order to understand how the *Kirishitan* developed their art and underground worship for over two hundred years. The parallels between Buddhism in Japan and Jesuit beliefs regarding contemplation, visualization, and domestic worship, will provide further insight on how *Kirishitan* paintings were employed in a Buddhist environment.

### *Syncretic Religion in Japan*

Before Christianity was introduced, the popular religion of sixteenth century Japan was a syncretic amalgamation of Shinto (the native Japanese animistic religion) and Pure Land Buddhism. After Buddhism spread throughout Japan, the major Shinto *kami* (deities) were known as local incarnations of the Buddhist divinities.<sup>40</sup> Though introduced from China through Korea, Buddhism in Japan differed from its origin. Japanese Buddhists venerated native Shinto deities alongside central figures of Buddhism, and practiced traditions from both religions.<sup>41</sup> When the Jesuit missionaries

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<sup>40</sup> Sherman Lee, *Reflections of Reality in Japanese Art* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1983), 110.

<sup>41</sup> Masaharu Anesaki, *Buddhist Art in its Relation to Buddhist Ideals* (London: John Murray, 1916), 48.

entered this religiously syncretic scene, they interpreted the widespread acceptance of Christian images and rituals not as Japanese religious syncretism, but as conversions.

Since the fourteenth century, the most widespread sect of Buddhism in Japan was Pure Land Buddhism. A simplified form of Buddhism, the sect laid emphasis on personal faith in the Amida Buddha who would take his followers to his paradisiacal home, the Pure Land, after death. The sect's popularity stemmed from commoners finding comfort in the approachable Amida Buddha and hope of a better future. The unstable political environment and demands such as heavy taxation and strict regulations implemented by daimyō made the promise of Paradise even more appealing. Amida Buddha, the central figure in the art of Pure Land Buddhism, is presented as a divine savior.<sup>42</sup> He is most often represented with two attendants, the bodhisattva Kannon and Seishi. This triad is depicted as descending from heaven riding clouds, crossing mountains, or flying through the wind in order to take the souls of the dead to heaven (fig. 5).<sup>43</sup> The attendant Kannon was known for her compassion. She listened, sympathized, and helped sentient beings in need, thus adding to the draw of Pure Land Buddhism. By contrast to Pure Land Buddhism, the esoteric sects of Buddhism, such as Zen Buddhism, were for the educated elite who could devote their lives to monastic living. The commoners in the agriculturally based society of Japan could not meet the high demands of esoteric Buddhism, and were drawn to the accessibility of Pure Land Buddhism. The Buddhist temples dedicated to

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<sup>42</sup> Nobuo Haneda, "What is Amida Buddha?" *The Dharma Breeze*, (January 2007), accessed May 5, 2014, <http://www.livingdharma.org/Living.Dharma.Articles/WhatIsAmida-Haneda.html>.

<sup>43</sup> "Buddhist Art and Amida Raigo Triads," Kyoto National Museum, accessed April 23, 2014, <http://www.kyohaku.go.jp/eng/dictio/data/choukoku/amida.htm>.

Pure Land Buddhism functioned as community centers and were the sites of festivals as well as the regular place of worship for all members of society. During the underground period, the *Kirishitan* appearing as practicing Buddhists were required to attend these temple events and participate in ritual practices.

### *Jesuits and Visualization*

The first missionary to Japan, Saint Francis Xavier, was also one of the founding members of the Society of Jesus, founded in 1534. The beliefs that were at the foundation of both the Society of Jesus and Pure Land Buddhism inform how images functioned in *Kirishitan* practice. The coming of Christianity to Japan was simultaneous to a change of emphasis in Catholic teaching during the Counter Reformation, a period of European Catholic revival (1545-1648). This time period corresponds with the “Christian century” in Japan (1549-1639), when Christianity was introduced, spread, and eventually banned. During the Counter Reformation in Europe, the Jesuits were the greatest patrons of arts. Similarly, the high art in Japanese society was traditionally of Buddhist patronage. Both religious groups commissioned much of the art produced during this period.

Through the practices of meditation and visualization, Catholicism developed an increased emphasis on personal faith and spirituality. *Spiritual Exercises*, a 30-day set of meditations to encourage devotion, was a principal devotional text written

by Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), the founder of the Society of Jesus.<sup>44</sup> It was written to help Catholics with contemplation through visualization. For the first exercise, he writes,

Here it is to be noted that, in a visible contemplation or meditation— as, for instance, when one contemplates Christ our Lord, Who is visible— composition will be to see with the sight of the imagination the corporeal place where the thing is found which I want to contemplate...in an invisible contemplation or meditation—as here on the Sins—the composition will be to see with the sight of the imagination and consider that my soul is imprisoned in this corruptible body...<sup>45</sup>

Meditation, specifically forming images of Christ in the mind, could directly influence the soul. In addition to imaginative visualizations, illustrations accompanying the texts were thought to give life to spiritual ideas written in the text. Illustrations in devotional texts such as the *Spiritual Exercises* were thus not decorative, but rather theological, philosophical, and ideological symbols.<sup>46</sup> The illustrations functioned as launching points that helped the practitioners imagine the setting of that meditation and visualize themselves within it.

#### *Function of Contemplation—Kirishitan Art in Ritual Context*

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<sup>44</sup>Shinzo Kawamura, S.J., “A Comparison of Illustrated Devotional Books Printed in Japan and their Original European Editions,” in *The History of Early Modern Printing and Jesuit Illustrated Books*, 87.

<sup>45</sup> Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, English Translation. (London: Charles Dolman, 1847).

<sup>46</sup> Kawamura, “A Comparison of Illustrated Devotional Books,” 82.

Pure Land Buddhist beliefs and devotional rituals would primarily come to influence the function of *Kirishitan* paintings. In both beliefs images were neither decorative nor didactic; they were used for devotional meditation and contemplation. Both the founders of the Society of Jesus and of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan laid emphasis on visual contemplation. Though the content of contemplation significantly differed, the core of believing in the power of images, both imagined and concrete, to influence the soul is a common starting point for the founders of both religions.

Genshin (942-1017), one of the founders of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan, taught the importance of visualization in contemplation.<sup>47</sup> One of the three primary Pure Land Buddhist texts was the Contemplation Sutra, which primarily consists of thirteen meditations and the recitation of Amida's name. The meditations are specific visualizations such as a setting sun, water, jeweled trees, the appearance of the image of Amida, and images of Amida with the two bodhisattvas Kannon and Seishi.<sup>48</sup> The visualization of a physical space or scenario was believed to be effective practice for the practitioner to be consistently mindful of the Amida Buddha, thus resulting in increased faith to be taken to the Pure Land after death.

In addition to visualization techniques through the sutra, Genshin believed in visual aids for contemplation, so the Japanese common people had a practice of looking at devotional images and icons. In Pure Land tradition, "*hensōzu* (pictures of

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<sup>47</sup> Lisa Grumbach, "Nenbutsu and Meditation: Problems with the Categories of Contemplation, Devotion, Meditation, and Faith," *Pacific World, Third Series*, vol. 7, 2005, 94.

<sup>48</sup> Hisao Inagaki, trans. Stewart, Harold. *The Three Pure Land Sutras*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research), 2003.

transformed vision), are visual transformations of doctrinal themes or legends and the interpretation of literary themes in pictorial terms,” in a naturalistic space unlike esoteric Buddhist mandala paintings composed in geometric configurations.<sup>49</sup> In “The Development of Amida Raigō Painting,” Fusae Kanda explains how devotional paintings functioned. First, they were the visual embodiment of significant Pure Land Buddhist teachings. Second, they were visual aids for the contemplative *nenbutsu* practices taught and practiced by Genshin.<sup>50</sup> The repetition of *nenbutsu*, repeating aloud the name of Amida Buddha (“*Namu Amida Butsu*”), showed a total reliance upon his compassion and was the only requirement for salvation to the Pure Land.<sup>51</sup> Kanda writes that the shōju raigō paintings, which developed only after Genshin’s influence in Pure Land Buddhism, were a visual focus for prayer and Buddhist service as a result of Genshin’s teaching to dwell on the welcoming descent of Amida as the simplest form of contemplative *nenbutsu*:

If there are those who are incapable of contemplating the Buddha-marks, while dwelling on taking refuge in Him, on His coming to welcome them, or their own rebirth, they should single-mindedly call and reflect on the Buddha.<sup>52</sup>

Amida’s descent (raigōzu) and depictions of Pure Land such as *Taima Mandara* (fig. 6), and temple construction including Byōdōin at Uji were influenced by

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<sup>49</sup> Fusae Kanda, “The Development of Amida Raigo Painting: Style, Concept, and Landscape” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2002), 75.

<sup>50</sup> Kanda, 74.

<sup>51</sup> James Dobbins, “Genshin’s Deathbed Nembutsu Ritual in Pure Land Buddhism,” in *Religions of Japan in Practice*, ed. George Tanabe (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 166.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

visualization as part of contemplative practice.<sup>53</sup> *Nenbutsu* was the central practice for Pure Land Buddhist followers of all classes in regular devotional practice until the moment of death at deathbed rituals to ensure rebirth in the Pure Land. Genshin taught,

“...when you are about to die...settle your body and heart, face the west, and putting your whole heart into it, contemplate Amida Buddha. With heart and mouth in accord call and call without ceasing”<sup>54</sup>

The raigō paintings were produced in response to the new demand for tangible images for meditating on the Amida Buddha.<sup>55</sup>

In Japan images were given greater distribution after the missionaries brought the printing press and began printing Latin texts, such as the 1596 *De Imitatione Christ*. They followed this with a Japanese woodblock print edition in a second translation published in 1610. According to William J. Farge, “the abbreviated second edition suggests that the editors had considered a partial translation more useful in reaching an expanded readership. The very fact that it was printed in the characters of the Japanese syllabary rather than in roman letters made it more accessible to Japanese Christian converts.”<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, Jesuit Diogo de Mesquita wrote in a letter dated 6 October 1613 about the Japanese translation of *Contemptus mundi*, saying “this book is the book that most pleases the Japanese, though it is so difficult to follow. One thousand three hundred

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<sup>53</sup> Grumbach, 95.

<sup>54</sup> Kanda, 69.

<sup>55</sup> Kanda, 74.

<sup>56</sup> William J. Farge, “Translating Religious Experience Across Cultures,” in *Christianity and Cultures: Japan & China in Comparison 1543-1644*, (Rome: Institutum Historicum S.I., 2009), 87.

copies are now being printed, and each day our press turns out one thousand three hundred pages.” The printed images were similar to the European originals, but drawn by Japanese artists from the Jesuit art school similar (fig. 3).

Ignatius of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises* was also translated and printed with illustrations. Concise versions of the Life of Christ and the Passion of Christ, the second and third weeks of meditations, respectively, were published in *Spiritual Shugyō* (Spiritual Exercises) in Nagasaki in 1607.<sup>57</sup> The texts encouraged visual contemplation on the image of Christ and likely gained a foothold in Japan because of the parallel of contemplating Amida Buddha with a visual aid that was an already established practice in Japanese Pure Land Buddhism. Since this foundation of contemplating images existed, when the Jesuits came with visual aids, despite the unfamiliar subject matter, the Japanese valued images as part of a spiritual practice.

### *Jesuits and Ritual Practice*

Throughout the mission in Japan, the Jesuits frequently reported to Rome regarding details of the mission activities and responses of the Japanese. In a letter by the missionary Padre Gnecci-Soldo Organtino, dated September 29, 1577, he writes, “Our experience shows that we will receive Japanese converts by millions, if we can promote the worship of Deus by ritual. If we have choirs and musical instruments such as organs,

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<sup>57</sup> Kawamura, 83.

all the people in Miyako and Sakai will undoubtedly become *Kirishitan* within a year.”<sup>58</sup> According to Organtino, the numbers of converts seemed directly correlated with those participating in Christian rituals. After the missionaries were expelled and the *Kirishitan* were forced underground they continued to use objects and images for devotion. To survive and not be hunted down for their Christian faith the *Kirishitan* adapted Christian imagery to look like they were being used for Japanese Buddhist rituals. This would not have been a difficult process considering the similarity of purpose of these images in both religions.

#### *Home Altars and Consecration Rituals*

Prior to the period of persecution, the *Kirishitan* congregated in Jesuit-built churches and temples in public.<sup>59</sup> After the final anti-Christian edict was enforced in 1639, the worship became secretive. When Christianity went underground, it would seem as though there was a significant shift from public to private devotion. However, a proper understanding of the private religious context in the Edo period home will reveal the apparent shift to be much less dramatic.

The political context is a key factor in the widespread private worship in the Edo period. In John Nelson’s overview of the origin of *butsudan*, or Buddhist home altar, he writes that after the anti-Christian edicts by the Tokugawa regime, the households had to

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<sup>58</sup> Ikuo Higashibaba, “Historiographical Issues in the Studies of the “Christian Century” in Japan,” in *Japan’s Hidden Christians 1549-1999: Volume 1: Open Christianity in Japan 1549-1639*, ed. Stephen Turnbull (Tokyo: Edition Synapse, 2000), 42.

<sup>59</sup> Elison, *Deus Destroyed*, ix.

avoid suspicion of practicing Christianity.<sup>60</sup> Toward this end the home altar would have been a tangible demonstration of a family's affiliation with Buddhism and conformity to the Tokugawa regime. Undoubtedly related to the government's emphasis on Buddhism, throughout Japan there was a temple and shrine building boom during the Genroku period (1688-1704) that corresponds with the timing of *butsudan* coming into commoners' homes.<sup>61</sup>

The *butsudan* in a Japanese home resembled a miniature temple. There was a sacred space housing the icon that remained untouched, and a lower level, the point of contact where the practitioner placed offerings (fig. 7). A local priest consecrated the *butsudan* and the icon within it before either could be used for worship.<sup>62</sup> The home altar ceremony is similar to the community eye-opening rituals at temples for large icons, which began as early as the eighth century.<sup>63</sup> The local priest consecrated the central

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<sup>60</sup> Regarding the origins of *butsudan*, Fabio Rambelli notes, "another possible historical thread, which has not yet been studied adequately, is the influence of Christian (Catholic) cult objects. Missionaries who went to Japan in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries brought with them portable, box-like altars."<sup>60</sup> His hypothesis seems plausible since the exact date is uncertain for when home altars were widespread in Japan but it does roughly correspond with the influx of European culture. Before *butsudan* became commonplace in all levels of society, some aristocratic residences since the Muromachi period (1336-1573) had an altar or a portable shrine to show their devotion to Buddhism. However, among these aristocratic homes, it is unknown if the converted daimyō adapted their home altar since there are no records stating either such from the early years of Christianity in Japan.

<sup>61</sup> John Nelson, "Household Altars in Contemporary Japan: Rectifying Buddhist "Ancestor Worship" with Home Décor and Consumer Choice." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 35, no. 2 (2008): 311.

<sup>62</sup> It can also be called "infusion of the sacred spirit," "infusion of the life source," or "ceremony of the infusion of the buddha." *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>63</sup> Charles Lachman, "Buddhism: Image as Icon, Image as Art," Chapter 27, in *Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts*, ed. Frank Burch Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014),

image with purified water and painted the pupils to animate the icon.<sup>64</sup> For both the temple and private ceremonies, at the point of consecration the icon was believed to be alive and infused with the spirit of Buddha. Buddhists believed that the soul entered the statue or painting when the priest symbolically painted the pupils to animate the icon.<sup>65</sup> When the eyes were symbolically opened, the practitioner was able to have direct contact with the deity by meeting the icon's gaze. Just as the practice for temple icons, in the case of renovation or movement of a *butsudan*, a priest also conducted an eye-closing ritual before disturbing the icon.

The *butsudan* was placed in a tatami room used only by the family in the home, rather than in a public space meant to entertain guests. Though the icon had its own "room in the *butsudan*, it was placed in the communal space for the deity to be part of the family. The doors of the *butsudan* remained closed, and were opened only during use because it was seen as the Pure Land where Buddha dwells, and should not be constantly disturbed.<sup>66</sup> While in the common domestic space, the *butsudan* was a sacred space where living beings could come to meet the Buddha. Horton explains, the physical appearance of a statue is often inconsequential and the importance is beyond its physical form. Similar to speaking of a person, the icon's identity is not limited to its physical

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371. The earliest eye-opening ceremony recorded was in 752 for the Buddha at Todaiji in Nara. Thousands gathered for this important cultural and religious event.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Robert Sharf, "The Scripture on the Production of Buddha Images," in *Religions of China in Practice*, ed. Donald Lopez, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 261.

<sup>66</sup> Sarah Horton, *Living Buddhist Statues in Early Medieval and Modern Japan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 163.

appearance but its identity and presence.<sup>67</sup> As displayed in the Shima no Yakata museum exhibition, a typical *Kirishitan* home altar was tucked away in the back corner of a small room, acting as an intimate temple space (fig. 9). There was a cushion to kneel on in front of a small table holding ritual objects with a hanging scroll painting above it (fig. 10). There were incense holders and candles lit that just barely illuminated the altar area enough to see the painting. This room on display in the museum had no natural light from windows, likely in order to maintain secrecy.

*Kirishitan* adapted Buddhist customs and developed a similar practice to the Buddhist eye-opening tradition. To inaugurate an image for use in the home altar, the leader of the Christian community performed a soul-entering ceremony on the icon, much like the Buddhist eye-opening ceremony. Just as the Buddhist priests symbolically painted the eyes of the deity to animate the icon, the Japanese Christian leader made a form of a cross for the deity's soul to enter the icon. The doors of the home altar, normally kept closed, were opened only during prayer offerings and rituals (fig. 8). Equally significant, when a painting was weathered and no longer suitable for ceremonial use, the *Kirishitan* leader performed a soul-extracting ceremony parallel to the Buddhist eye-closing ceremony for icons.

### *Content of Contemplation*

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 190, 192.

In addition to the private context and devotional space of a home altar, the form of Buddhist imagery was adapted also within the *Kirishitan* paintings. While the subject matter of holy figures such as God the Father and the Virgin Mary reflect *Kirishitan* beliefs, the form reflects Buddhist paintings. The hierarchical triad composition in Pure Land Buddhist images was a form that was not seen in Catholic imagery in Japan during the early period of Christianity. Yet the *Kirishitan* were familiar with this holy Buddhist iconography from involvement with Buddhist traditions, and disguised as Buddhists during the underground period, they adapted this form to their paintings. The Buddhist paintings and statues, as those used in Pure Land Buddhist temples centered the viewer's mind on the subject of devotion, particularly on the moment of salvation. Thus the triad descending to save sentient beings was a prevalent image both tangibly in painting to aid contemplation, and cognitively in contemplating the Amida Buddha to attain salvation by his mercy.

A few examples of many *Kirishitan* paintings in a triad composition include: the Annunciation with God the Father, the Angel Gabriel, and the Virgin Mary (fig. 11), the Virgin Mary, Loyola, and Xavier (fig. 12), and a martyred mother, father, and son from Ikitsuki (fig. 13). By adapting the Catholic teaching into the existing Japanese religious visual language, the *Kirishitan* reconceptualized the Catholic beliefs. The composition within the paintings reiterated the devotional context of the home altar – a space that would be incomplete without the images as the anchoring point of devotional practice.

The Pure Land Buddhist teaching focusing on contemplation and valuing imagery to effect the soul was an important component of the context into which the Jesuits, who held similar convictions about the power of images, arrived. Though the government regulations of Buddhist practice throughout Japan caused the widespread custom of *butsudan* in each home, the same *butsudan* form was then used by *Kirishitan* to sustain their beliefs. Just as the *butsudan* functioned for the Buddhist devotee, the *Kirishitan* home altar also provided a devotional context and reminder of faith. The *butsudan*, both in its role as an intimate temple space, and the related iconography of a hierarchical triad, must be acknowledged as influential on the function of *Kirishitan* imagery throughout the underground period. The Jesuits' culturally adaptive methods gave them a right to speak because of the respect they displayed, but the existing parallels in Japanese religious culture allowed for the new beliefs to take root during the "Christian century." More significantly, the parallels in belief and practice were key factors in the continuation of underground *Kirishitan*, maintaining their faith on their own terms.

### Chapter Three *Kirishitan* Images as Living Icons

As explained in the previous chapter, where there was typically a Buddhist icon in the home altar, the *Kirishitan* from Ikitsuki Island hung *Kirishitan* devotional images resembling Buddhist paintings. I propose that maintaining Japanese Buddhist practices as a cover for their ongoing Christian practices influenced the underground Christian beliefs about the ontological nature of their Christian icons. The historical context and iconological clues within the Ikitsuki paintings reveal an aspect of underground Christian belief in devotional icons that has yet to be addressed. Differing from European Catholicism due to the influence of Buddhism, the Ikitsuki *Kirishitan* believed that their devotional icons were not mere symbols, but rather contained the presence of the divine.

Leading historian on hidden Christians in Japan, Anesaki Masaharu “observed that the objects used in Japanese religious ceremonies were believed *to have divine and magical efficacy*” (emphasis mine).<sup>68</sup> While Masaharu addressed their perceived supernatural capacities, the reason the objects were believed to contain magical power was not discussed. Likewise, Kentaro Miyazaki provides critical background information through a religious and anthropological study of the *Kirishitan* in Ikitsuki. However, in describing *Kirishitan* ritual practices, Miyazaki does not explain Buddhist influence on the *Kirishitan* belief of divine presence in icons. Rather, he concludes that *Kirishitan* religion departed far from its Catholic origins to become a distinct religion dependent on

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<sup>68</sup> Harrington, 39.

the fetishism of the icon.<sup>69</sup> While agreeing in part about *Kirishitan* material culture, I will use Ikitsuki paintings within their ritual context to argue, one, that this belief was adapted from Buddhism through ritual practice and, two, that *Kirishitan* believed the icon itself *was divine* beyond merely having divine efficacy.

The Buddhist belief about divine presence, as evidenced in ritual “spirit-infusing” practices, is significant for my analysis of *Kirishitan* paintings within their ritual context. Western scholars of Buddhism have begun to broaden the understanding of Buddhist images beyond formal qualities to the practitioner’s belief of a divine presence in Buddhist icon by studying the icons within their ritual context.<sup>70</sup> Robert Sharf, a leading scholar of Buddhism in the West, states:

Japanese Buddhist images were frequently treated, by elite monastic and unschooled laypersons alike, as more than mere didactic symbols, representations, or commemorations of divine figures or saints. Japanese Buddhist icons were regarded, more often than not, as living presences with considerable apotropaic and salvific power. This conclusion is simply inescapable: it is reiterated in historical documents, in liturgical and ritual materials, in biographies, hagiographies, and mythology, and is fully countenanced by scripture and commentary.<sup>71</sup>

By examining the *Kirishitan* narrative and ritual practice, it is possible to see how the lay *Kirishitan* regarded their icons. Furthermore, an iconographical analysis will be key to distinguishing distinct Buddhist and Catholic influence within the paintings.

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<sup>69</sup> 呪物崇拜 (*jūbutsusūhai*, a belief in the magical power of fetishes).

<sup>70</sup> In addition to rituals, these scholars are looking to Buddhist texts, which record miracles concerning Buddhist statues and paintings.

<sup>71</sup> Robert Sharf, Introduction: Prolegomenon to the Study of Japanese Buddhist Icons, in *Living Images: Japanese Buddhist Icons in Context*, ed. Robert Sharf and Elizabeth Horton Sharf, 2001, (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 7.

*Legends of Living Temple Icons*

Some of the temples where the *Kirishitan* were forced to register were popular due to the miraculous tales recounting supernatural capabilities of the temple icons. One such well-known story was of the first Buddhist statue in Japan at the Zenkōji temple; according to temple legend, the icon floated from Paekche (modern day Korea) to Japan in 552.<sup>72</sup> Many other miraculous legends became widespread, and pilgrimages became popular during the Edo period. In a popular Buddhist pilgrimage called Saikoku Kannon Pilgrimage, each of the thirty-three temples had an accompanying miraculous narrative of an event in the life of the icon. The devotees participating in the Saikoku Pilgrimage increased in numbers during the Edo period, and pilgrimage guidebooks were published with descriptions of each icon. In 1773, 17,774 people were recorded at the temple at Chikubushima, and in 1801, at least 30,000 pilgrims traveled to Nachidera, also on the pilgrimage route.<sup>73</sup>

A legend of the icon at number ten of the thirty-three temples, Mimurotoji, illustrates the interrelated power of chanting with animating an icon. A low-ranking, illiterate monk could not remember any Buddhist teachings, but remembered Kannon's promise of salvation and continuously repeated Kannon's name. He had a vision to find the true Kannon in a rock pool, and traveled to the edge of the pond where the statue was supposed to be. Though he saw the icon at the bottom of the pond, he could not reach it, and after chanting Kannon's name over and over he said, "Come up here so I can get

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<sup>72</sup> Mark MacWilliams, "Living Icons: "Reizō" Myths of the Saikoku Kannon Pilgrimage," Vol. 59, No. 1 (Spring 2004), *Monumenta Nipponica*, Sophia University, 52.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

you!” Then the Kannon icon flew through the water and landed on the monk’s sleeve.<sup>74</sup> The icon in the story was present as a living deity and responded to the monk’s calling. As described by MacWilliams, such miracle tales “give a detailed narrative picture of the individual icons’ esoteric forms, origins, powers, history, the sacred geography in which they are enshrined, and the devotional practices done before them.” Each icon had its own miraculous history and was treated as a living being that shared the very nature of the deity it represented. It was part of the common belief that when traveling to see such powerful images, the devotee would be in the presence of the divine. It would be this understanding of the icon that would influence the same understanding of the *Kirishitan* paintings as living images.

#### *Distinction between Pure Land Buddhism and Catholicism in Japan*

From a superficial standpoint, there were many comparable aspects between Pure Land Buddhism and Catholicism.<sup>75</sup> Repeatedly reciting *Ave Maria* was not unlike the practice of *nenbutsu*. Both prayers were evidence of faith, which was the common criterion for salvation and entry into the Pure Land for Buddhism or to heaven for the Christian. Yet the distinction was understood since in early years of the mission Catholic

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>75</sup> In theology, there were similarities such as the Buddhist triad and the Christian Trinity. Both believe in salvation by faith, and the existence of Paradise or heaven, and hell. The primary figures of Amida Buddha and Kannon are often compared to Catholic figures, God the Father and Mary. The practices of Buddhism and Catholicism contain many parallels such as visualization in the *Contemplation Sutra*, and imagining in the *Spiritual Exercises*. Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, wrote the *Spiritual Exercises*. The cofounder of the Jesuits, Francis Xavier, was the first missionary to Japan arriving in 1549. From then on, the Jesuits were the dominant missionary presence in Japan.

missionaries debated theology with monks and over 2000 *Kirishitan* martyrs testified their distinct beliefs during a thirty-year time span after 1614.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, the government's anti-Christian policies speak to the fear of the religion's associated allegiance to foreign power that could threaten control of Japan.

The distinction between Christianity and Buddhism was understood at all levels from the educated monks, government authorities, to lay Christians, but in practice, the distinction was not as straightforward. The exclusivity of the Christian religion was not immediately understood in the syncretic Japanese religious environment where Shinto and Buddhism overlapped and were practiced simultaneously. Since the ratio of Catholic priests to *Kirishitan* in Japan at the peak of Christianity in 1614 was one to 3601, there was limited time spent with priests to address existing Buddhist beliefs within the *Kirishitan* community.<sup>77</sup> Many Japanese continued their Buddhist rituals alongside Christian teachings until priests instructed them otherwise. Due to a lack of trained clergy and later the necessary disguise behind Buddhism, many Christian rituals fused with Pure Land Buddhist practices, such as the previously discussed eye-opening ceremony.

### *Sacred Presence In The Home*

Just as the devotees sought to be in the presence of powerful icons through pilgrimages to various temples, the presence of the icon in the home altar context was important. Since Buddhist practices were required in every household, the *Ikitsuki*

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<sup>76</sup> Laures, 241, 245.

<sup>77</sup> Harrington, 20.

*Kirishitan* adapted the *butsudan* to house their Catholic deities in place of Buddhist icons. Along with the home altar, the *Kirishitan* rituals adopted Buddhist ritual form and were not immediately recognizable from the outside. The paintings were limited to Ikitsuki but on the other surrounding islands including Hirado, Amakusa, and Sotome, the prevalent icons were small statues of Kannon with hidden Christian symbols, later known as “Maria-Kannon” (fig. 17).

The *Kirishitan* soul-entering ceremony involved prayers and symbolically painting a cross shape on the painting with holy water from Nakaenoshima, a small uninhabited land mass measuring four hundred meters long and fifty meters across (fig. 15). During the early years of persecution, many *Kirishitan* were executed at Nakaenoshima by beheading or drowning off of the coast in a bag. The island became known as *Sanjuwan-sama* (transliterated Saint John from Portuguese), a holy land. The water flowing between rocks from this island was considered holy water and was used in many *Kirishitan* rituals. Just as the Buddhist priests symbolically painted the eyes of the deity to animate the icon, the local *Kirishitan* leader dipped a small wooden rod into a ceramic jar containing the holy water, made the form of a cross twice over the painting for the deity’s soul to enter the icon (fig. 16). Due to Buddhist influence rather than missionary teaching, without these traditional rituals the *Kirishitan* icons were seen as lifeless.<sup>78</sup> Miyazaki differentiates sacred items not perceived as living gods, including

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<sup>78</sup> あくまでも神様とみなされるには「御魂入れ」がなされていることが絶対条件なのではなかろうか…「御前様」はキリストやマリヤの姿等を描いたものを、掛け軸に仕立てたものであるが、誰かが描いたものを祭壇に飾るだけでは神様とは見なされない…御前

*Kirishitan* ceremonial objects such as rosary beads, medallions, and crosses, and *Ozensama*, or consecrated scroll paintings, which were considered to be living deities.<sup>79</sup> The consecration ceremony was the key difference between ritual memorial objects and living icons.

After the ceremony, the painting was considered a god with a living *anima*, or soul, adapted in Japanese from Latin.<sup>80</sup> Though in form the consecration ceremony appeared Buddhist, the distinct Latin terminology reiterates the underlying *Kirishitan* belief that was expressed through a Buddhist ritual. The spirit in the icon was not the Buddhist deity's *tamashii* (soul), but the Christian God's *anima*. When a painting was weathered and no longer of ceremonial use, the *Kirishitan* leader performed a soul-extracting ceremony parallel to the Buddhist eye-closing ceremony. From the time of the soul-entering ceremony until after the soul-extracting ceremony, the consecrated image was considered alive.

Significantly, the exact "soul-entering" ceremony was conducted on *Kirishitan* to officially join the community once they had come of age. The same holy water used for

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様は御魂入れが行われなければならない。[It is thought that the spirit-infusing ceremony is an absolute requirement to be considered a god... while *Ozensama* are painted images of Christ, Mary, and others made into hanging scrolls, they are not considered to be a god by their mere display on the altar... The *Ozensama* must have the spirit-infusing ceremony performed on it.] Miyazaki, "Kakure Kirishitan no Shinkou Sekai," 204, 215, 219, 220.

<sup>79</sup> 御前様、お水、オテンペシャ、オマブリとは異なって生きた神様とは受け取られていないように思われる。[Unlike *Ozensama*, *omizu*, *otenpensha*, and *omaburi*, they are not considered living gods.] Ibid., 215.

<sup>80</sup> この儀式が行われてはじめて掛絵は御魂の入った御前様として、生きたアニマを有する神となるのである。[Only after this ceremony has been performed, the scroll painting becomes an *Ozensama* with a soul and thus a god with a living *anima*.] Ibid., 219.

consecrating the paintings was used for *Kirishitan* confirmation, also called a soul-entering ceremony. The holy water from Nakaenoshima was sprinkled on the *Kirishitan* both for the purposes of purification and infusing the person with the *anima*. The *Kirishitan* learned the confirmation tradition from the Catholic missionaries but adapted it through the familiar Buddhist ritual of the eye-opening ceremony. At the point of consecration, the new member was considered to have new life. The shared end follows the shared beginning: both the end of the icon's life and the end of the *Kirishitan*'s life were marked by the soul-extracting ceremony.

Both for the icon consecration and for *Kirishitan* confirmation, the members recited *Orasho* prayers. These same prayers were recited regularly every time the home altar was opened and used. The *Orasho*, from Latin *oratio*, were transliterated Latin prayers, not intelligible in Japanese. The incomprehensible prayer as a key component to rituals is similar to the Chinese sutras and incantations recited in Japanese Buddhist practice. Miyazaki writes that the original Latin text became an incantation, and the incantations were believed to have supernatural, mysterious power.<sup>81</sup> The miraculous power of words in relation to a physical image was widespread in popular culture as explained in the story of the Kannon icon from the Saikoku Pilgrimage that emerged from the water in response to the monk's faithful incantation. The *Kirishitan Orasho* were printed in Japan in several documents, notably in the *Dochirina Kirishitan* ("Christian Doctrines"), a compilation of basic Catholic teachings and prayers including

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 85.

Pater Noster, Ave Maria, Salve Regina, and Credo (Apostle's Creed). Among the prayers in Oratio, "Ave Maria" (Ave Maria) and "Sarube Rejina" (Salve Regina) were recited most often.<sup>82</sup> It was first printed in 1592, and again in 1600 in Japanese letters.<sup>83</sup> This use of Japanese *kana* (alphabet) was unusual because in Buddhism, religious doctrinal documents were rarely printed in Japanese letters. Buddhist documents were written in Chinese characters and only used by the educated elite. While most of the Christian documents from this period were destroyed, prayers such as Ave Maria are recorded in part of the *Kirishitan* oral narrative, called *Tenchi Hajimari no Koto*. Thus we know that commoners were familiar with the content of *Dochirina Kirishitan*, and these prayers were recited in the ritual context when *Kirishitan* gathered around the home altars at the local leader's home. In the presence of the living deity in the *Kirishitan* home altar, those prayers were heard and could be answered.

As a living icon, the deity's gaze played an important role in worship. The presence of the soul and the direct gaze in icons was key to the importance of the physical presence of icons in *Kirishitan* ritual. The viewer was able to have a direct relationship with the consecrated icon by receiving its gaze. In *The Annunciation* (fig. 11), depicting the angel Gabriel telling the Virgin Mary that she will be the mother of Jesus, God's gaze in the center of the image looks directly toward the viewer, as was the custom of the central icons in Buddhist temples. In contrast to his outward gaze, Mary and Gabriel, the two other figures completing the holy triad formation, are looking at

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<sup>82</sup> Genichi Hiiragi, *Kirishitan Bungaku Ronshū (Essays on Kirishitan Literature)*, (Tokyo: Kyobunkan, 2009), 201.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

each other. Elements in *The Annunciation* show the Buddhist-influenced visual interpretation of a traditional Catholic theme. The Holy Spirit is not present, as reflected in the Kirishitan narrative, *Tenchi Hajimari no Koto*, as the Holy Spirit and Mary are considered to be one entity. To further show the *Kirishitan* adaption of the scene to Japanese influence, the garments worn by Gabriel and Mary are Japanese style kimonos. Buddhist painting tradition is also apparent, since Mary is holding a child who would not yet have been present in this scene. This prefiguration technique was not unusual in Buddhist painting.<sup>84</sup> The *Kirishitan* artist depicted Mary in her future role as the mother of Jesus so she could be easily identified.

The clouds in *The Annunciation* have Buddhist origin, similar to those seen in images of Amida descending over the mountains, or descending from the clouds to save souls. Through this painting, the *Kirishitan* practitioner is welcomed into the scene of the Annunciation and enters into a heavenly space. They were not only in the presence of the divine, but just as the altar acted as a divine space for the deity, the setting of the painting reiterates the heavenly realm that both the deity and worshippers shared. The triad configuration and clouds surrounding a deity possibly descending may appear to be a Buddhist image. Yet the iconography was distinct for the *Kirishitan*, who knew the figures' true identities. The *Kirishitan* appeared to be kneeling in front of and praying to Buddhist deities just like their Buddhist neighbors, but in fact they were reciting their prayers in the presence of a divine Christian power.

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<sup>84</sup> Prefiguration is a common technique in Buddhist art in which stories of Buddha's life are depicted with Buddha in his future enlightened form rather than his human form as Sakyamuni.

*E-Fumi And Contrition*

In addition to the ritual practices surrounding *Kirishitan* images, the government's response of violent iconoclasm indicates the perceived power of religious objects during this time period. Since religious objects having a soul was embedded in Japanese Buddhism, the officials may have viewed religious objects through that lens. As Rambelli explains regarding Buddhist materiality, "a schematic representation of human life is projected onto the inanimate objects...such a humanizing treatment of nonsentient entities has a long history in Japanese Buddhism, dating back at least to tenth century..."<sup>85</sup> The government officials were practicing Buddhists, and regardless of the sincerity of their practice, they were part of a culture that regarded objects as living beings. They confiscated *Kirishitan* images, and recognizing their significance within the *Kirishitan* communities they did not destroy them but instead reused them to find hiding practitioners.

In order to systematically find and stamp out all remaining *Kirishitan*, when members of the community attended annual New Year celebrations, all were required to take part in "*e-fumi*," or picture-stepping ceremony. Each person was required to step on the confiscated Catholic icon medallions and metal plates in front of government officials (fig. 18). By stepping on the icon, it would prove one's submission to the government as a Buddhist rather than a Christian.<sup>86</sup> The *Kirishitan* developed an annual ritual of participating in the icon-stepping ceremony and returning home and conducting harsh

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<sup>85</sup> Rambelli, *Buddhist Materiality*, 223.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

punishment on themselves through *Konchirisan no ryaku* (Act of Contrition) including prayers and flogging (fig. 19). *Konchirisan no ryaku* was considered necessary to obtain forgiveness in the absence of a priest at other times as well. For example, the *Kirishitan* practiced contrition after attending the Buddhist funerals of members of their community. Since the *Kirishitan* were in public effectively denying their faith on a daily basis by conforming to Buddhism, why did only the funeral and *e-fumi* acts require significant contrition? This, I argue, was due to the spirit-infusing rituals involved in both deathbed rituals and image consecration. Both funeral rites and icon-stepping relate to that which was consecrated – the soul-entering ceremony for the body at the point of conversion, and the eye-opening ceremony for an icon. It is significant that the self-inflicted punishments were necessary after sacrilege against what they believed to be spirit-infused entities. If the icons the *Kirishitan* tread on were merely symbols, the punishment of flagellation would seem unnecessarily exaggerated. But because the *Kirishitan* believed their icons were living spirits, they were effectively stepping on a living deity, or at a Buddhist funeral, they were not properly treating the soul of the deceased by releasing it from the body; these were significant deeds requiring acts of contrition. The contextual clues of the government's iconoclasm and use of icons to discover hidden Christians and the *Kirishitan*'s response indicate the elevated status of images as living embodiments of Christian spirits.

### *Conclusion*

The pervasive belief of the living presence in icons was widespread in early modern Japan due to the influence of the Buddhist belief in living icons. The ritual practice of consecration was adapted to *Kirishitan* icons, and furthermore to *Kirishitan* practices when the practitioner was infused with *anima* and considered spiritually alive. The deity's presence in the icon was crucial to the efficacy of prayers, thus when the *Kirishitan* gathered in secret around the local leader's home altar it was to be in the presence of the divine icon. The belief that the deity's soul resided in the icon, stemming from Buddhist practice and the eye-opening ceremony, sheds light on the vital role of living icons in *Kirishitan* faith and the difficulty of their forced participation in the annual icon-stepping ceremony. The *butsudan* rituals including the display of icons for ritual use were not merely to communicate the symbolism of the deity. Instead, the paintings, believed to contain the deity's soul, were essential for maintaining the *Kirishitan* faith by providing direct communion with the deity.

## Chapter Four Secrecy in Iconography and Narrative

For the insider, the secrets are indeed glimpses of a divine higher truth. For the outsider, however, it is clear that the machinery that surrounds the secrets is often out of proportion to their contents, and deserves an analysis in its own terms.<sup>87</sup>

The secrecy of the underground Christian religion during the late sixteenth to the late nineteenth century can be interpreted primarily as a survival mechanism due to oppressive government restrictions on religion. While the government regulations were an undeniable factor - as the records of questioning, torture, and martyrdom give evidence to - there is, however, a broader historical and cultural context of hidden religious practices. During this period and even from several centuries prior, there was a custom of icons kept hidden from public display in Japan. By considering the context of hidden icons in Buddhist practice which was familiar to the underground *Kirishitan* and examining how secrecy was manifest through hidden symbols and covert practice, I argue that the secrecy in *Kirishitan* practice was not only for camouflage but to help sustain their belief.

### *Secret Icons and Kirishitan Identity*

If the *Kirishitan* icons were kept hidden, why was the Buddhist style of painting and iconography necessary? The common understanding of *Kirishitan* icons is that the

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<sup>87</sup> Mark Teeuwen, "Japan's Culture of Secrecy from a Comparative Perspective," in *The Culture of Secrecy in Japanese Religion*, ed. Bernhard Scheid and Mark Teeuwen (New York: Routledge, 2006), 5.

Buddhist iconography was used to conceal their true identity. Yet in many of the images, the Christian crosses are blatantly obvious as a repeated motif throughout the painting (fig. 20). The recognizable *Kirishitan* iconography suggests there must be an alternate explanation for their appearance other than mere disguise.

Understanding the meaning of hidden icons in Buddhism is key to uncovering the *Kirishitan* perspective through their icons. There are many layers of secrecy in *Kirishitan* paintings - not only was Catholic imagery imbedded in Buddhist iconography but these paintings were actually used in covert ways in *Kirishitan* ritual. For accurate insight into the *Kirishitan* art these layers must be uncovered. The phenomenon of secrecy in religious practice is an important aspect to consider of Japanese religious practices. Indeed, the culture of secrecy was pervasive throughout Japanese culture, and many scholars including Mark Teeuwen, Fabio Rambelli, and Kadoya Atsushi have studied the phenomenon at length. In this chapter I will focus on secrecy within Buddhism in Japan, and how it influenced the *Kirishitan* during the underground period.

The paintings represent the reality of the *Kirishitan* identity as outwardly Buddhist with concealed Catholic convictions - a visible manifestation of how the *Kirishitan* functioned in society. On the surface the paintings were overtly Buddhist in style, yet their meaning was deeply Catholic. The *Kirishitan* were in fact hiding, but their secrecy has greater meaning than expected, ranging between compulsion and volition.

*Secret Buddhist Icons (Hibutsu)*

Buddhist icons called *hibutsu* are icons kept hidden, revealed only for special occasions. Certain icons are believed to be especially powerful, and thus have to be covered and carefully maintained by priests. The myths about supernatural abilities, sacred materials for carving, divine origins, and spiritual benefits associated with the icons contribute to the icons' perceived power.<sup>88</sup> Most of the hidden icons are periodically revealed to the public for icon-viewing ceremonies called *gokaicho*. The frequency of *gokaicho* depends on the icon, and ranges from as often as once a month to once every generation. There are even certain icons that are hidden and will *never* be revealed to the public. Notably, one of the most famous *hibutsu* is the Zenkōji Buddha, which is supposedly the first Buddha statue ever to be brought to Japan. Every six years in the spring, there is a ceremony in which the replica of the statue is shown publicly, but the original icon will never be displayed. Another icon that was once public but later kept hidden is known as “Kannon for Washing” (*Arai Kannon*). According to legend, if devotees touched a specific part of the statue that corresponded to part of their body that was injured or ill, they would miraculously recover. Thus the icon acquired its nickname, and after four centuries of use, the icons' features were rubbed away. The temple commissioned a replica of the statue, and after consecrating the new image to be publicly

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<sup>88</sup> MacWilliams, 49-73.

visible in 1999, the original was secreted away. The replicated statue is believed to retain the power of its original image.<sup>89</sup>

Yet other icons are available only to a select few or under special circumstances. The practice of displaying secret icons and other temple treasures to the public – but only to those who paid an admission fee – became widespread during the Edo period (1603-1868). *Gokaicho* ceremonies were recorded as early as the ninth century in China and had also taken place in Japan from the Kamakura period (1185-1333). By viewing the sacred images in person, which were often kept hidden from sight, visitors could establish a spiritual connection with the deities. As explained in chapter three, it was widely believed that deities inhabited their images and that by viewing the icon with their own eyes the practitioner could be blessed by the deities' divine powers. Since the physical connection was important, lay practitioners made pilgrimages throughout Japan to be in the presence of certain powerful icons.

From a Western perspective, the use of religious images, hiding and periodically displaying an icon would seem counterproductive, since images often serve a more didactic purpose or function to encourage devotion. Thus it is important to stress the distinct function of images within Buddhism. While there were Buddhist paintings that functioned as teaching devices for the lay practitioner, the icons used in the ritual context were not primarily didactic. Even images that were continuously on display in temples

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<sup>89</sup> Patricia J. Graham, *Faith and Power in Japanese Buddhist Art, 1600-2005*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 121-122.

were often barely visible due to their minimal illumination by candlelight. The details of the images need not be clearly visible since they are not meant to teach doctrine but rather to evoke reverence and a spiritual connection by its presence.

Furthermore, such secrecy and invisibility was actually an intrinsic part of Buddhist beliefs. In his analysis of secret Buddha images in Japan, Rambelli explains that *hibutsu*, remaining invisible but still present, “display the very concept of Buddhahood – omnipresent but out of sight.”<sup>90</sup> In the Buddhist understanding of reality, physical bodies are only temporary and once Buddhahood is achieved the physical will no longer be necessary. Therefore once one reaches Buddhahood, neither the Buddhist icon nor the practitioner’s body, will be necessary even though the person still exists on a different level. The *hibutsu* symbolized the concept of a present but not visible Buddha. The Buddhist practitioner sought to be in the presence of the Buddha, but because the icon was hidden, further concentration and devotion were necessary to feel a connection.

### *Kirishitan Images as Hidden Icons*

The parallels between the hidden nature of Buddhist *hibutsu* and *Kirishitan* icons allow me to draw from research on the *hibutsu* images and theorize how the latter functioned in a ritual context of secrecy. By first recognizing and interpreting the function of hidden icons in Japanese Buddhism, it is possible to understand how

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<sup>90</sup> Fabio Rambelli, “Secret Buddhas: The Limits of Buddhist Representation.” *Monumenta Nipponica* 57/3, 271-306.

*Kirishitan* hidden icons functioned. These parallels include criteria for *hibutsu* within Buddhism and *Kirishitan* paintings during the underground period:

Criteria of <i>hibutsu</i> in Buddhism	Criteria of underground <i>Kirishitan</i> paintings
1. Intended for ritual use	1. Intended for ritual use
2. Limited visibility	2. Limited visibility
3. Visibility prescribed by Buddhist authority	3. Visibility prescribed by <i>Kirishitan</i> authority
4. Images are sacred and considered powerful	4. Images are sacred and considered powerful
5. Worthy of special pilgrimage visits	5. Short pilgrimage to leader's home

These parallels are indeed present and warrant *Kirishitan* paintings be seen not as folk art as they are commonly dismissed, but as hidden icons. As summarized in the table above, the *Kirishitan* icons were always hidden except for ritual use, similar to *hibutsu*. They were kept at the local *Kirishitan* leader's home and were only seen during ritual ceremonies. The *Kirishitan* community gathered weekly for their regular community worship, and the icons that were normally hidden away were displayed only during the service. The *Kirishitan* leader was in charge of maintaining the icons, as were the Buddhist priests for the temple *hibutsu*. Just as the legend of the "Kannon for Washing," there are numerous legends of the miraculous healing powers of *Kirishitan* icons.

In *Kirishitan* practice, the icon was kept only at the *Kirishitan* leader's home, which acted as a temple or church where the local practitioners gathered. *Kirishitan* had to travel to see the icon for their ritual practice, in effect a short pilgrimage to the worship site. It was a short but dangerous pilgrimage to see the *Kirishitan* icon and attend the worship service since the community activities were under the scrutiny of the local government. Both Buddhist and *Kirishitan* travel to be in the presence of icons required much risk since the Buddhist pilgrim could encounter various dangers including harsh weather, injury or burglary, while the underground *Kirishitan* was in danger of both personal and community exposure.

Just as when Buddhist images were weathered and replicated as a new icon, such as the “Kannon for Washing” explained earlier, *Kirishitan* images underwent similar processes of replication. When an image was worn from use, the *Kirishitan* washed the icons with holy water from Nakaenoshima, and made another image in its place. This practice was called *osentaku*, in which the icon was replicated and maintained much of the same composition and subject, yet was slightly changed each time. Since icons were used for a long period of time until they were worn, by the time a new icon was needed, it had been passed down to the next generation. Different artists produced the replicas, but strove to follow the iconographic model of the original because the correct representation of the deity assured the efficacy of the replica.<sup>91</sup> The new image was consecrated as explained in chapter three and viewed as a powerful sacred deity. The older icon was

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<sup>91</sup> Graham, 31.

called *Goinkyosama* (the retired master) and stored away with care.<sup>92</sup> Similarly to “Kannon for Washing,” the original *Kirishitan* icon was also preserved and hidden away no longer to be used in ritual practice.

### *Secrecy within Kirishitan Communities*

The close relationship between myth and icon is evident in Buddhism in early modern Japan. Likewise, the *Kirishitan* narrative can reveal important details about *Kirishitan* practice, resulting in a richer interpretation of their iconography. *Kirishitan* communities around Nagasaki and Gotō Islands, west of the Nagasaki peninsula, passed down stories taught by the Catholic missionaries. The narratives that were compiled from these stories were later published as a printed text titled, *Tenchi Hajimari no Koto* (The Beginning of Heaven and Earth). *Tenchi* (as referred to the narrative from hereon) is an amalgam of Bible stories, Japanese folklore, and Christian legends passed down in the *Kirishitan* community by the local leaders. The stories include creation, Adam and Eve, the Virgin Mary, Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection, as well as stories from extra-biblical literature. The short stories were likely told separately and in a random order rather than as a chronological narrative starting with creation and ending with the last judgment.

The *Kirishitan* beliefs were passed down orally for centuries during the underground period, and finally recorded in writing in the late nineteenth century. Oral

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<sup>92</sup> Miyazaki, 219.

transmission was common from the time of the missionaries' preaching activities. The missionaries' stories from the Old and New Testaments were the main source of content for the stories *Kirishitan* shared. Similarly in the Buddhist tradition there were travelling, story-telling monks who went from village to village to tell stories about the Buddha. In each village, the travelling monk gathered the townspeople and through animated storytelling taught parables about how to live as a devout Buddhist. Even before the missionaries arrived, a familiar parallel existed within Japanese culture upon which the Jesuits built their practice.

The secrecy required in transmitting the *Kirishitan* stories was also a key component of their beliefs. The leader had to exercise discretion and be selective in who he could tell the stories to, so as not to risk revealing his identity. Since the formally educated priests were executed or expelled and the government confiscated and destroyed most of the Christian documents, there were few resources remaining for the underground *Kirishitan*. The only ones were *Doctrina Christiana* and *Konchirisan no Ryaku*; the former taught basic Christian doctrines, and the latter was a guide to penance without a priest. Many prayers from these documents were threaded throughout the *Tenchi* narrative.

In introducing her English translation and commentary of the *Tenchi*, Christal Whelan states that “the present commentary with its notes on the *Tenchi* is an attempt to disclose as much as possible of Buddhist theology, Japanese customs, and Catholic traditions and legends in the way that they might have been practiced by the Japanese in

the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.”<sup>93</sup> Similarly, I intend to reveal *Kirishitan* beliefs within images, building on her research of *Tenchi* as evidence to substantiate my claims about the Ikitsuki Island *Kirishitan* paintings.<sup>94</sup>

The *Tenchi* narrative clearly describes Catholic principles through a Buddhist religious language and rhetorical logic. In a similar way, the Ikitsuki paintings are not merely adapted forms of sacred symbols from Buddhism. Rather, they are evidence of a *Kirishitan* belief-system, perhaps hidden on the surface that was formed within the context of Buddhist practices. It is unproductive to analyze *Tenchi* word-for-word to extrapolate *Kirishitan* theology since theological analysis was not its original use. Rather the stories were told to delight the listeners and pass on Christian teachings more like parables such as the *Jataka* (stories of the previous lives of the Buddha) tales. The narrative was the *Kirishitan*'s main link to the Catholic priests' teaching, and was key to the survival of the underground faith for centuries. Scholars have mentioned the evident Buddhist and Catholic syncretism separately within the *Tenchi* narrative and the *Kirishitan* paintings, but I will bring the narrative and paintings together for an accurate

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<sup>93</sup> Whelan, 31.

<sup>94</sup> Whelan states that since manuscripts were from an area south of Ikitsuki, *Tenchi* is a distinguishing feature that separates the *Kirishitan* of Ikitsuki and Hirado from those closer to the Nagasaki peninsula and Gotō islands. She spent close to a year in the Gotō islands conducting research on the *Kirishitan* of that community and has revealed valuable knowledge of *Kirishitan* traditions such as how rituals were conducted and she compares the transmitted prayers to their original Latin form. After studying the paintings from Ikitsuki, I argue differing from Whelan's conclusion, that rather than having entirely distinct traditions in each island, there is in fact much similar content present in the paintings. While the rise of different traditions is inevitable because of the geographical locations, *Tenchi* is evidence of similarities between the distant communities.

iconographical analysis of the Ikitsuki paintings. By first looking at the narrative, the hidden nature of Christian beliefs behind Buddhist terminology will be more evident, and will inform how to identify the less conspicuous beliefs within the paintings.

### *Catholic Beliefs in Tenchi*

Initially for the purpose of camouflage, the layers of secrecy are pervasive in every form of *Kirishitan* practice from home altars, living icons, narrative, and iconography within paintings. Likewise, from the beginning of the *Tenchi* narrative, the terminology of Buddhist expression is apparent. God is described as having 42 manifestations. Adam, the first man God created, has 33 manifestations, and Lucifer has 32 manifestations. The concept of manifestations was not part of Catholic teaching, yet in the *Kirishitan* mind through a Buddhist value system, they ranked God the Creator as higher than Adam, and Adam as higher than Lucifer, who rebelled against God. Though overtly Buddhist in its concept of a powerful being having many manifestations, the Christian hierarchy is represented through a system of Buddhist ranking.

During this time since Pure Land Buddhism was widespread among commoners, sentient beings needing salvation was already part of the Buddhist worldview. While the concept of salvation was similar to Catholic teaching, the key differences were the savior's identity and destination of the saved individual. In Pure Land Buddhist belief, Amida Buddha, or one of his attendants such as Kannon, descended to the earthly realm to save sentient beings. For the *Kirishitan*, their narrative states that the Holy One (Jesus)

is the savior: Jesus promises to save Saint Veronica and a thief who was crucified with him. At the end of time, *Tenchi* records that for those who are saved, “it is guaranteed that they will all become buddhas (or be enlightened) and know unlimited fulfillment for eternity.”<sup>95</sup> Upon reading this initially it seems as though Catholic teaching has been displaced by a Buddhist understanding of becoming enlightened after death. However upon further analysis, the underlying *Kirishitan* beliefs appear. First, the concept of salvation through Jesus differed from salvation through Amida. Second, being saved to go to heaven for eternity was unlike Pure Land Buddhism, in which the practitioner moves from this realm to the Western Pure Land - only a step toward buddhahood but not an eternal paradise. Like the central concept of salvation was concealed in Buddhist terms as becoming a buddha, the underlying *Kirishitan* belief of eternity in paradise after death was concealed behind Amida Buddha’s Western Paradise. These double meanings were then translated into *Kirishitan* paintings.

#### *Catholic Beliefs in Kirishitan Paintings*

As *Kirishitan* expressed their understanding of Catholic teaching after the missionaries and Western art were removed from their surroundings, they painted their hidden beliefs through a pictorial language that appeared Buddhist. The paintings represent concepts instead of detailed formal theology. The practice of expressing their true belief in hidden components of objects was pervasive throughout the underground

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<sup>95</sup> Whelan, 66.

period not limited to paintings, but other common objects and statues as well. In his personal collection of underground *Kirishitan* relics, Hidesaburo Suzuki compiled images of hidden symbols such as a sword with compartments that opened to reveal a cross, a Buddhist mortuary tablet with Amida Buddha's name on the front and concealed doors in the rear with a crucifix, a removable Buddhist statue hiding a crucifix, and many other deities with hidden Christian symbols (fig. 21a-d).

In *The Annunciation* (fig. 11) briefly explained earlier, God the Father is at the top of the painting, and on his left and right, forming a triangular composition, are the angel Gabriel and the Virgin Mary. Since his head is significantly larger than that of the other two figures, the image of God stands out both in his large scale and bold features. He has thick, curled eyebrows, a furrow in his forehead, bulging eyes, an unusually wide nose, and strong cheekbones. Maintaining the same interpretative framework as with *Tenchi*, the point behind the figure is not to look for meaning in each and every feature but rather, recognizing the presence of the Christian God.

The features of God, who was rarely depicted in *Kirishitan* paintings, are immediately reminiscent of the guardian deities (*Kongō Rikishi*) outside of Buddhist temples (fig. 22). The guardian deities were seen especially in temples of the Pure Land Buddhist sect. These figures were always in pairs, one with a closed mouth on the right side of the gate, and one with an open mouth on the left side. The God depicted in the *Annunciation* has the exact features of the *Ungyō* (closed-mouth) guardian deity (fig. 22). They share the same square face shape with a wide jaw clenched as if withholding

strength, deeply furrowed, thick eyebrows highlighting the bulging eyes, and an intimidating gaze that is directed out towards the viewer. They both have a strong and wide nose with a thick bridge, and the nostrils are flared as if snarling. The lips of both figures are pursed and curled down.

The complete contrast to any other Buddhist figure makes the reference to the guardian deities undeniable. Without the background of Buddhist iconography and deity representation, it would seem that the *Kirishitan* God was an intimidating figure that evoked fear. However, the guardian deity in Buddhism, *Kongō rikishi*, was in fact a benevolent deity that appeared intimidating because of his specific role. He was the guardian of the Buddha against evil spirits and demons. His snarling expression and frightening stance was intended for protection, thus the faithful practitioner had nothing to fear. The lay practitioner visiting the temple was ensured safety from evil spirits because of these powerful figures. Strong and protective was also the character of the Christian God. The *Kirishitan* borrowed features of the *Kongō rikishi* when they set about depicting their god because of their shared character. According to the *Tenchi* narrative, their concept of God was a powerful and merciful creator in heaven, whose character corresponded with their understanding of Buddhist guardian deities. Similar to those deities, the Christian God as described in the *Tenchi* punishes demons but is merciful and generous to faithful believers. This correspondence of character would explain why the *Kongō rikishi* was selected for the form of the *Kirishitan*'s representation of God. Finding this visual correspondence also lends support to the idea of the shared belief in the power

of the hidden image, for they would not only be borrowing forms from Buddhism but also central values like enlightenment and secrecy.

### *Conclusion*

During the Christian century, Christianity was publically proclaimed and practiced, but after persecution began, the shift to private practice out of necessity for survival resulted in a creative process of redefining beliefs. The culture of secrecy as exemplified in the phenomenon of *hibutsu* was expressed throughout the *Kirishitan* practice. Though the icon may be removed from sight, even at times in the form of a cross that was carved into a wall never to be seen, knowing the presence of the icon was more important than its visibility. Because written evidence of *Kirishitan* practice is limited an investigation into the similarity of form and practices of Buddhism is required. A closer look at their secret rituals, narrative, icons, and iconography, reveal that like in Buddhism the essence of the object was often hidden, and this hidden nature of *Kirishitan* icons was not something they were ashamed of. Instead, secrecy was part of the spiritual meaning of the icon and informed its private and hidden ritual use. Having opened up the meaning of the hidden icon beyond being shaped by fear of discovery this chapter has shown that the *Kirishitan* were not victims of oppression, but rather were defining and expressing their exclusive identity by using a visual language they shared with Buddhism.

## Conclusion

This thesis has explained the syncretic Buddhist and Christian beliefs in early modern Japan through analyzing Christian paintings from Ikitsuki Island. In the absence of documentary evidence, considering the oral traditions alongside the paintings provides key insight to how the images were used. The astounding proximity between Buddhist practice and Japanese Christian tradition such as the home altar worship format, the icon consecration ceremony, or hidden icons, is often interpreted as Christianity disappearing into Buddhist tradition, or *Kirishitan* hiding for fear of persecution. To a degree, both interpretations may be true.

First, Christianity, as introduced by the European missionaries in the sixteenth century, did in fact significantly change to the point where it could be argued that it was barely recognizable. Yet the change must not be perceived as a loss, but instead a redefining of faith within their particular historical context in Japan. The fundamental beliefs in the Christian God remained, though expressed in different terms.

Second, it was absolutely necessary for the *Kirishitan* to remain inconspicuous for survival because of consequences if they were not active members of the Buddhist community, as deliberated by the Japanese government. The shifts in outward expression however, are evidence of the absorption of Christian beliefs by the *Kirishitan*. The change in appearance of their divine figures is not unlike the Italian Renaissance oil paintings of the Virgin Mary with light skin and Iberian features. The European version of the Virgin Mary is rarely depicted according to her historic ethnicity as a Jewish

woman. Likewise, the Japanese paintings show the *Kirishitan* relating to their divine figures of Mary as a Japanese woman in a kimono, or God the Father as a protector god seen in Buddhist temples.

The material culture helped the *Kirishitan* both define and preserve their Christian traditions. The paintings from Ikitsuki Island were central in providing a space for the practitioner to be in the presence of the deity, thus encouraging their faith in a time of persecution. The status of their hidden icons, only viewed on special occasions, accompanied their beliefs about the image being a set apart, living presence that was worthy of veneration. The specific implications of the deity's gaze, the effect of secrecy within the *Kirishitan* community, and an iconographical analysis of each painting in its ritual and Buddhist aesthetic context, are avenues of further exploration that would reveal much more of the perspective of the *Kirishitan* that has yet to be uncovered.

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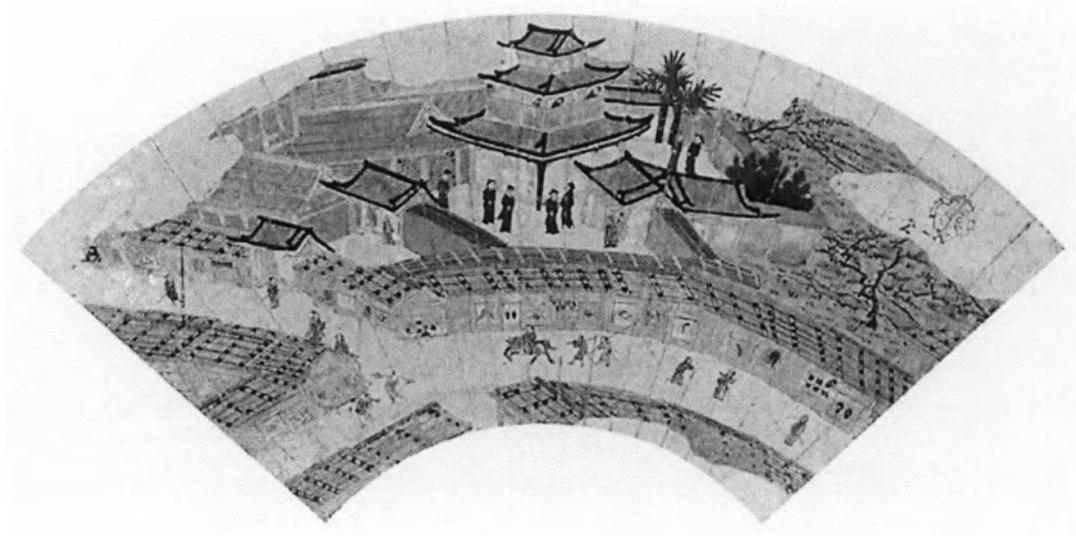
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**Figure 1**

*Miyako no nanbandera* 都の南蛮寺 (Namban Temple in Capital)

Kano Soshu c. 1578-87

Kobe City Museum



**Figure 2**

*Madonna of the Snow*  
Seminary of Painters, Japan  
17<sup>th</sup> Century



Figure 3

Cover of *Spiritual Shugyō* スピリツアル修行 (Spiritual Exercises)  
 Printed at Jesuit College in Nagasaki, 1607



**Figure 4**

*Fumi-e* 踏み絵 (Stepping-on Picture)  
Image used for Picture-Stepping Ceremony  
Edo Period (1603-1868)



**Figure 5**

*Yamagoe Amida* 山越阿弥陀図 (Descent of Amida Over the Mountain)  
Hanging Scroll. Color on silk. National Treasure of Japan.  
Kamakura Era, Treasure of Zenrin-ji Temple, Kyoto



**Figure 6**

*Taima Mandala* 当麻曼荼羅 (Mandala in Japanese Pure Land Buddhism)

Kamakura Period, 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> century

Unidentified artist, Japan

Hanging scroll, ink, color and gold on silk; 36 1/8 x 28 5/8"

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



**Figure 7**

Edo period (1603-1868) home with *butsudan* alcove



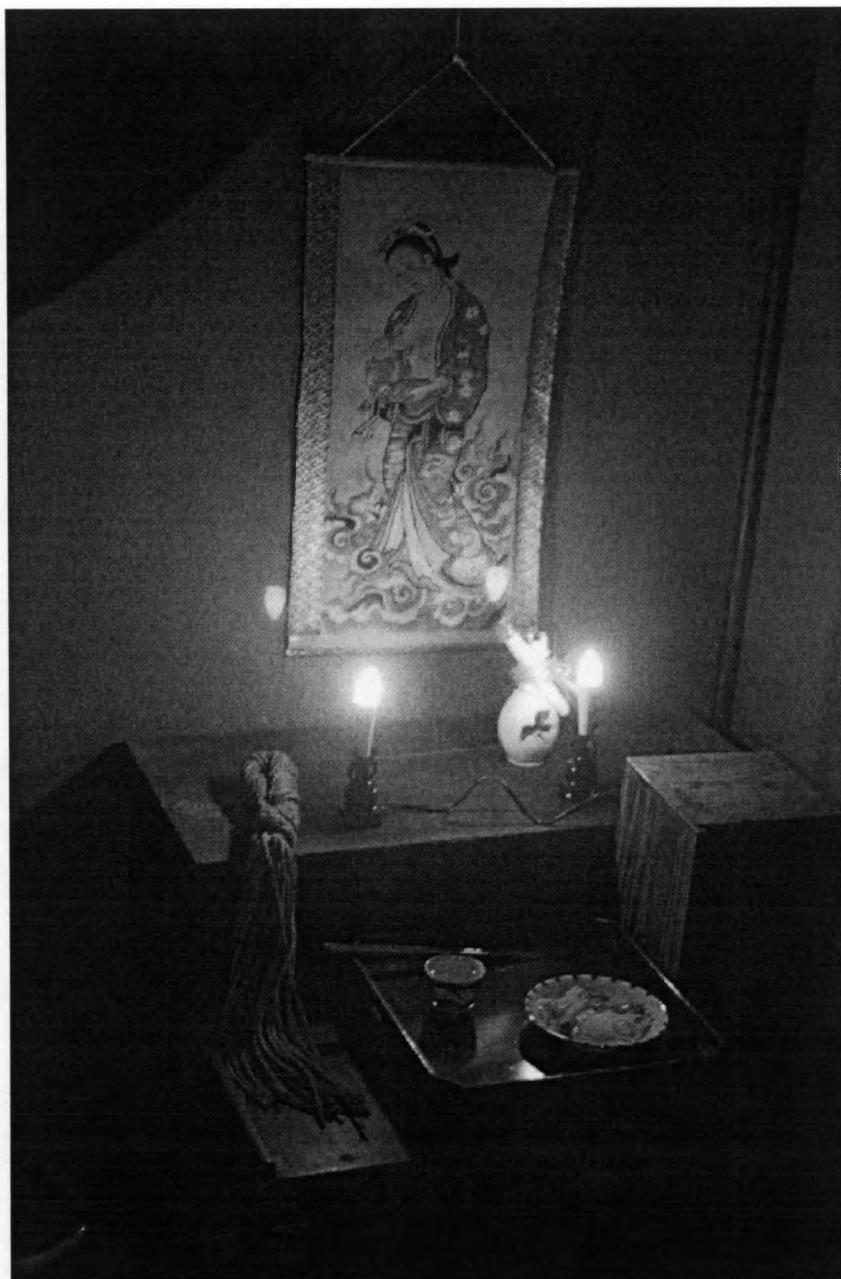
**Figure 8**

*Kirishitan* home altar display  
Kirishitan Shiryōkan, Hirado, Japan



**Figure 9**

Room with *Kirishitan* home altar  
Shima no Yakata Museum, Ikitsuki, Japan



**Figure 10**

*Kirishitan* home altar display  
Shima no Yakata Museum, Ikitsuki, Japan



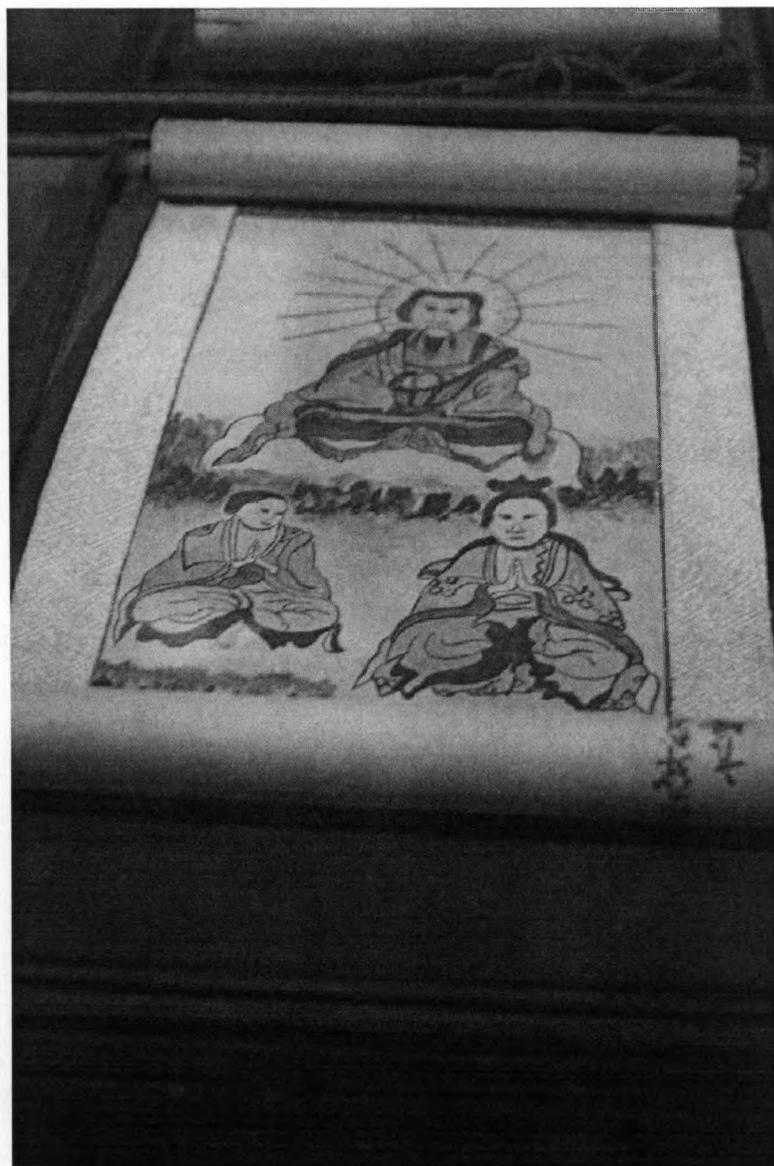
**Figure 11**

*The Annunciation*  
Unknown artist  
Ikitsuki Island, Japan



**Figure 12**

*Virgin Mary and Two Saints (Xavier and Loyola)*  
Unknown artist  
Ikitsuki, Japan  
Edo period (1603-1868)



**Figure 13**

*Danjiku-sama* ダンジク様 (Martyred family from Ikitsuki)

Unknown artist

Ikitsuki, Japan

Edo period (1603-1868)

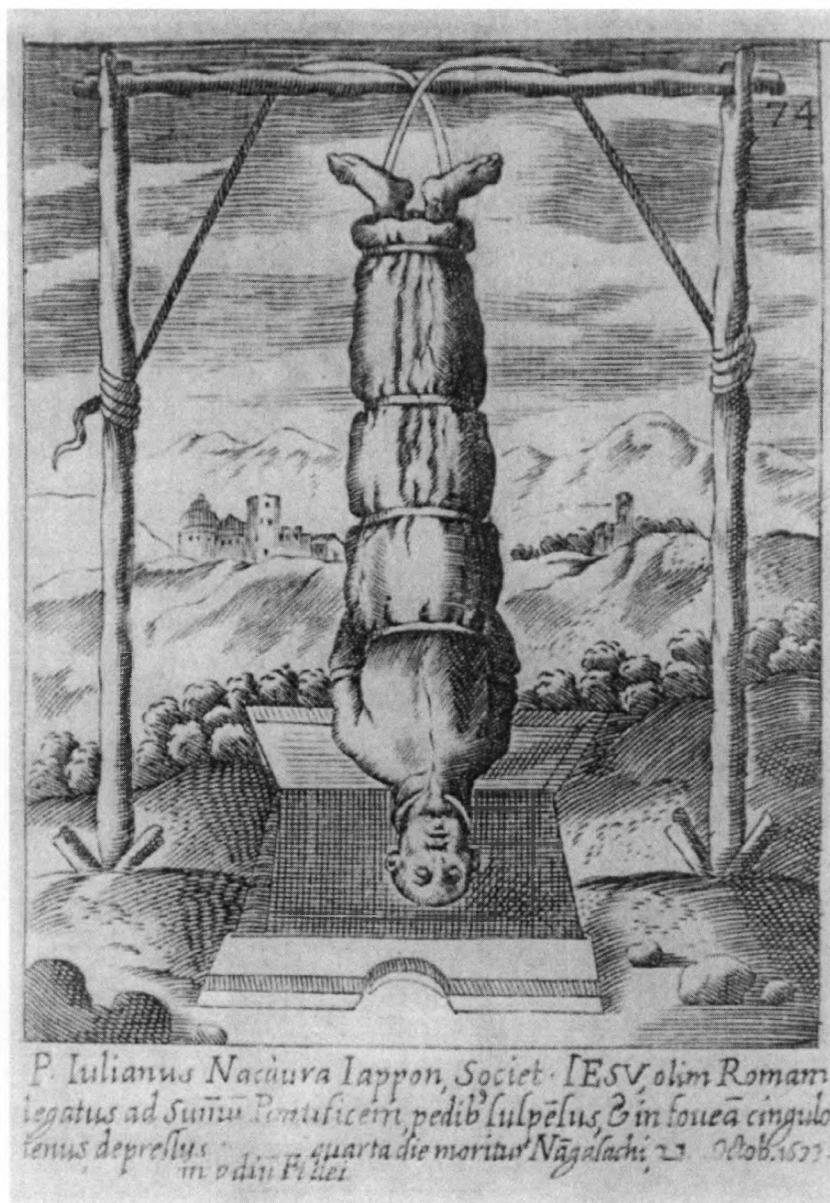


Figure 14

European depiction of martyrdom of Julian Nakaura, suspended over a pit (*ana-tsurushi*)  
 Antonio Francisco Cardim, S.J. Fasciculus e Iapponicis Floribus, Rome, 1646



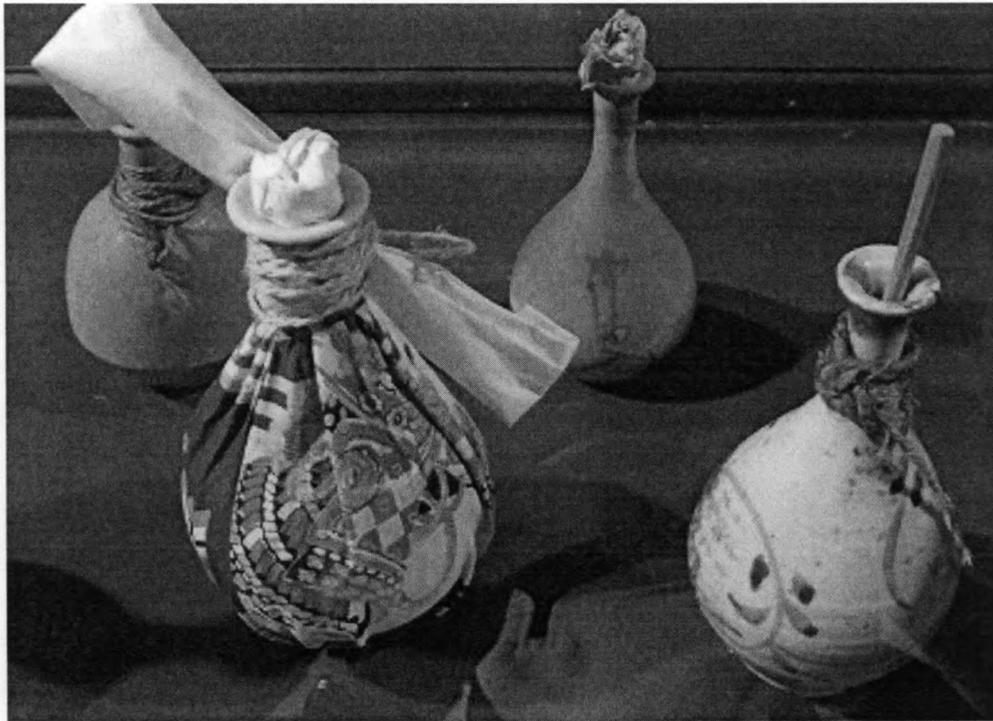
**Figure 15a**

Nakaenoshima, east of Ikitsuki Island



**Figure 15b**

Modern-day Kirishitan practitioners praying for holy water from a rock at Nakaenoshima



**Figure 16**

*Izuppo* (wooden rod) for consecration and ceramic jars for holy water  
Edo period (1603-1868)



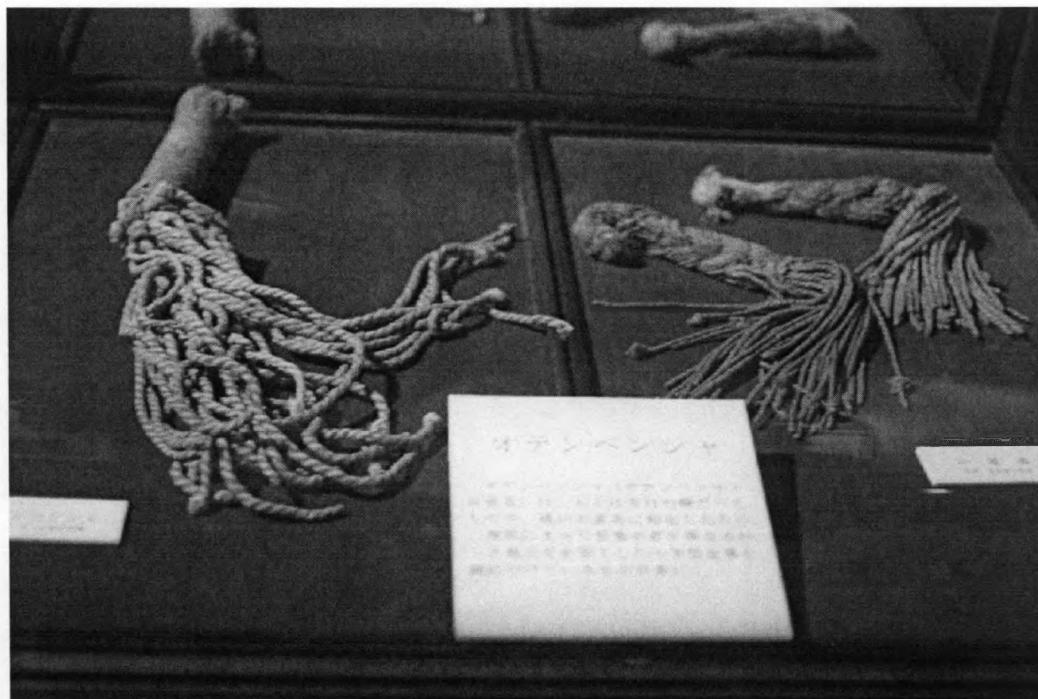
Figure 17

*Maria-Kannon* マリア観音  
Secret *Kirishitan* icon  
Edo period (1603-1868)



**Figure 18**

*Fumi-e* 踏み絵 (Stepping-on picture)  
Image used for Picture-Stepping Ceremony  
Edo period (1603-1868)

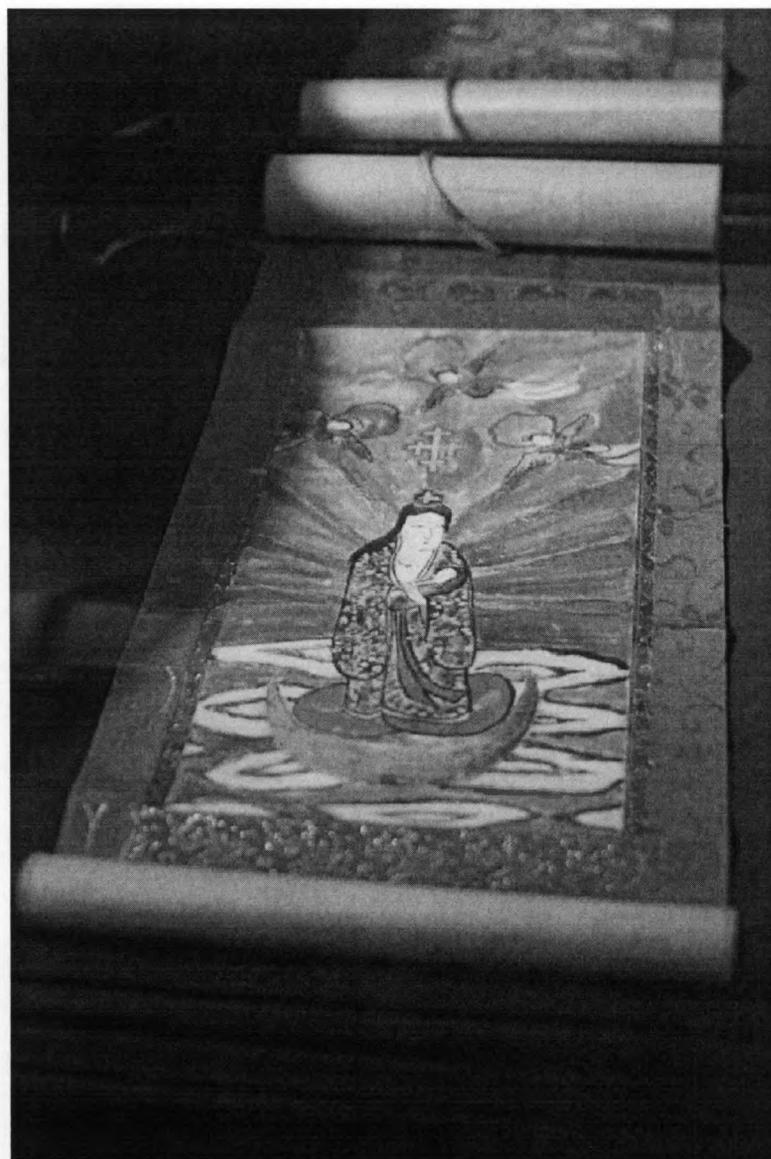


**Figure 19**

*Otenpensia* オテンペンシヤ (Penance)

Ropes used for self-flagellation for *Konchirisan no ryaku* (Act of Contrition)

Edo period (1603-1868)

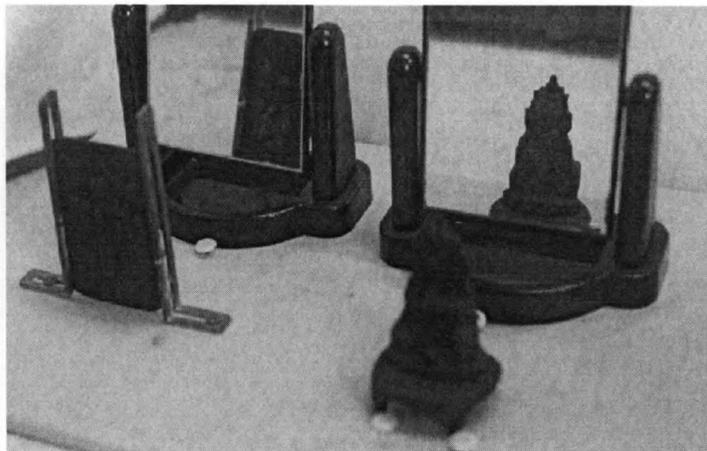


**Figure 20**

*Virgin Mary*

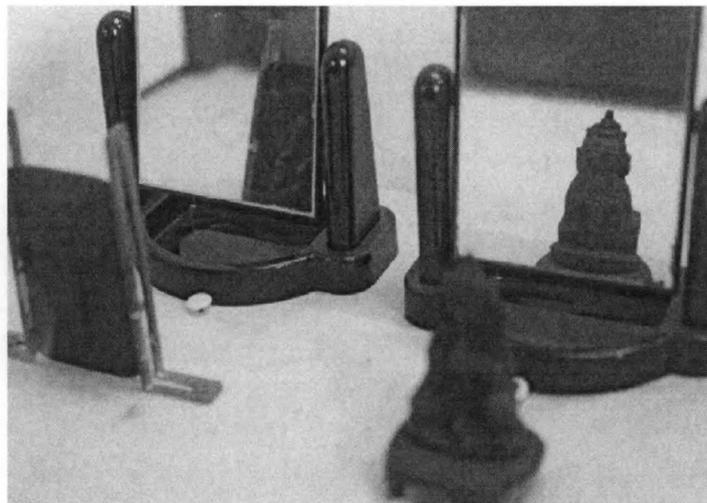
Unknown artist, Ikitsuki, Japan

Edo period (1603-1868)



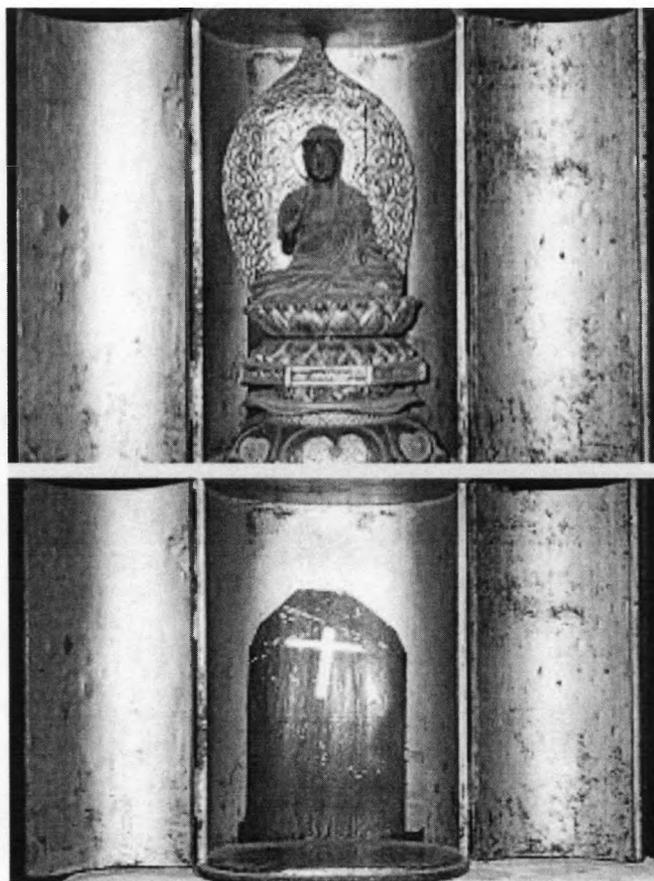
**Figure 21a**

Hidden bodhisattva icon, front view  
Edo period (1603-1868)



**Figure 21b**

Hidden bodhisattva icon, back view with crucifix reflected in mirror



**Figure 21c**

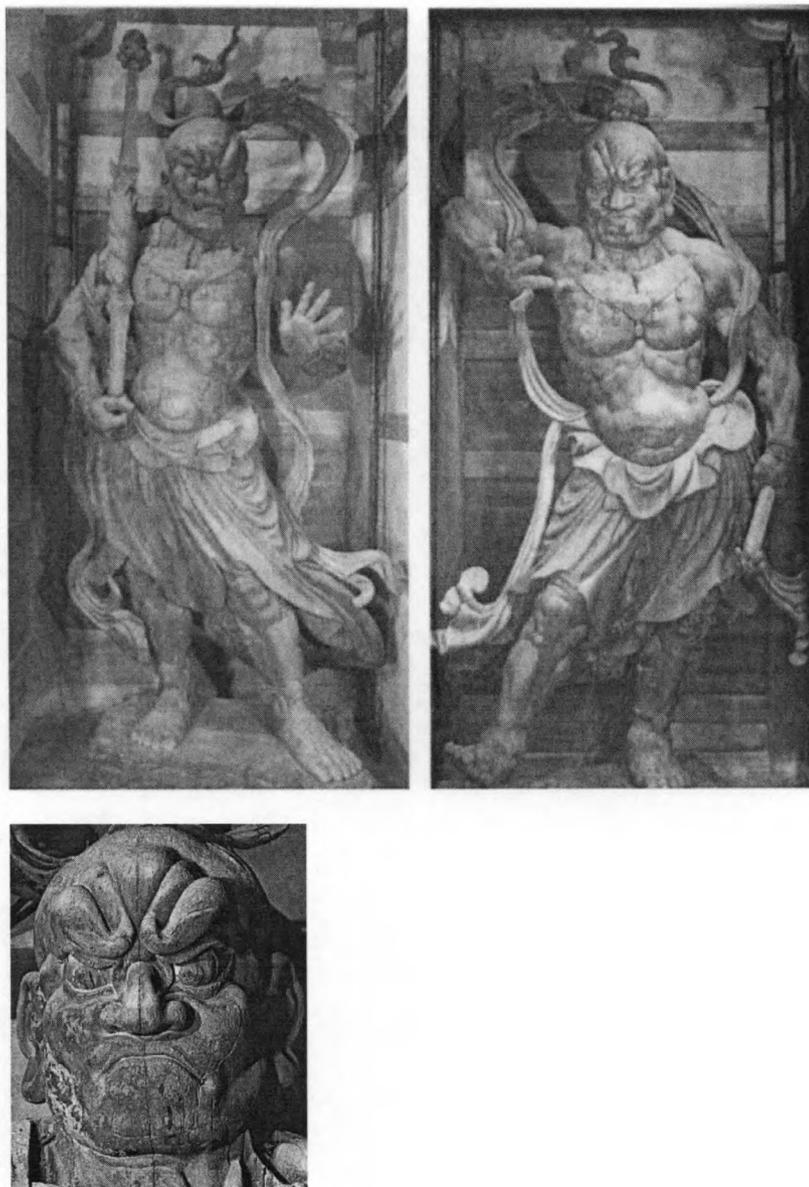
Hidden icon behind Buddha

Buddha icon in portable shrine with cross-inscribed back



**Figure 21d**

*Senju-Kannon* 千手観音 (Thousand-armed Kannon) hidden icon  
Icon with cross-inscribed back



**Figure 22**

*Kongō Rikishi* 金剛力士 (Guardian deities)

Above: L= Agyō 阿形 (mouth open) R= Ungyō 吽形 (mouth closed)

Below: Close-up of Ungyō

1203, Tōdaiji 東大寺, Nara