

Preserving the “shell” and Regenerating the spirit
- Case Study of Christian churches in islands in the southern Japan -

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Abstract. This paper discusses a sustainable management of a

place by regenerating the spirit, integrating new uses and generating new social value. Catholic churches in remote areas in Japan are discussed mainly in the paper. A case study in the urban setting is also described as one of the worthwhile example to refer to.

1. Objectives

It is often inevitable that the original spirit of a place disappears as social situation changes. Keeping a “shell” of a place physically without any spirit is not just meaningless but also very difficult to maintain and manage without any spirit and active involvement of people. One of possible solutions this paper discusses is the integration of the new uses into a place by which spirit of the place can possibly be regenerated and enhanced, and could eventually lead to sustainable management of a place.

2. Historical Backgrounds of Christian Churches and Villages

2.1 BRIEF HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY IN JAPAN

The first Christian mission delegation to Japan landed in 1549 A.D. in Kagoshima in Kyushu Island located in the southern Japan(Higashibara 2001). The Jesuits began their evangelical works soon after their arrival. The Catholicism spread quickly in many areas in Kyushu Island, and Nagasaki became the core of the Christian missions in Japan in the 16th century. Not a few churches were built in Nagasaki and other areas in the 16th century. However, as early as in 1587, the Toyotomi shogunate set the anti-Christian policy(Higashibara 2001). The policy was succeeded and even developed by the next Tokugawa shogunate in the 17th century. This official prohibition of Christianity caused a series of persecutions and martyrdom of missionaries as well as laity Christian followers. Japanese Christianity practice however wasn't vanished but entered into the period of “underground practice” for the next 250 years. In 1889, when the anti-Christian Policy was removed officially and

various Christians missions came back to Japan, many of Christian followers, who had been in the underground since 16th century, re-confessed their Christian belief. However, some people didn't go back to the Catholicism since their practices and belief had become something very different from the Catholicism after over two centuries of underground practicing. Today Nagasaki still remains as the center of Catholicism in Japan. And especially because of the existing Churches with the unique style of Western/Japanese eclectic architecture (Misawa 2000), Nagasaki is getting to attract tourists and visitors from large area.

2.2 CHURCHES IN THE GOTO ISLANDS

The Goto Islands is part of Nagasaki Prefecture and is a very remote area consisting of many little islands.



Figure 1. Goto Islands and Churches

The land on right is the main island of Kyushu.
 Google Earth image edited by author

During the underground period, many Christians moved or escaped to Goto. Since there were already a number of Buddhist people living in Goto Islands, Christian people, as new comers, had to settle down in leftover places which were in most of cases extremely inconvenient and hard to live. Nevertheless, Christians

managed to survive by farming and fishing in such harsh environment and even built churches by themselves. The cultural landscape which Christian people cultivated in the past several centuries is significant as it embodies not only the important part of Christianity history in Japan but also the spirit of Japanese Christians under different circumstances.

Nowadays, 20 churches are existing in Goto City which is the southern half of the Goto Islands. These were all built after the removal of the anti-Christian policy. The oldest existing church dates

back to 1881(the old Gorin Church). It means that existing churches can represent only the recent 130 years of the overall Japanese Christian history of nearly 500 years.

3. Issues in Maintenance and Management

3.1 CURRENT STATUS AND ISSUES

3.1.1 *Depopulation and Abandonment*

The total population of Goto City in 2008 is about 44,000 and keeps decreasing. The current population is 48% of the number in 1955 which was about 91,000(Goto City 2008, 16). This depopulation is mainly due to lack of industries which provide locals with cash incomes. Major industries of Goto are fishing and farming. There is also no university or any other higher educational institute, so almost all the young people leave the island when they reach 18 years. Not a few villages were abandoned or almost abandoned for this reason. Christian villages are especially suffering from depopulation as those villages have the historical contexts of having been set particularly in remote and inconvenient areas as explained in Chapter 2.2.

3.1.2 *Disappearing Christianity and Associated Culture*

Churches are no doubt meant to be built as religious and spiritual places and not cultural properties or any other use. Therefore, some of Churches were officially closed by the Diocese. After closure, some structures were taken down or collapsed due to the depopulation of followers.



Figure.2 Tachiya Church

Structures of Tachiya Church, built around 1879, and Zazare Church, built in 1921, had both collapsed due to deterioration and no maintenance after their closure. Now the site of the church is commemorated as in Fig. 2.

Egami Church, built in 1918, and Shigejiki Church, whose existing structure was built in 1974, might be the next ones

to be terminating their religious functions. Both churches have only 1 family each in the village as of 2008. Until few years ago, people who



looked after Egami Church were discussing that they should take down Egami Church because they won't be able to maintain it physically once no one would go to mass there. The followers say that, once they become incapable to maintain it properly, it is their responsibility to take down the church structure rather than leaving it alone until it collapses(Personal Interview 2008).

Figure 3. Egami Church

3.2 PRESERVING “SHELLS”

3.2.1 Government-owned “cultural property”

Some churches became the “cultural property” designated by the municipal, prefectural or central government in order to physically conserve “shells”. One of the advantages of the designation is provision of subsidies for conservation works.



Figure 4. Dozaki Church and Surroundings

Dozaki Church, built in 1908, still has a relatively large Christian community but it is one of the earliest churches which became the cultural property in 1974 and a tourism destination although mass is still carried out once a month. Consequently

Dozaki became the most frequently visited church in Goto Islands. As a result, the local community is suffering from various problems caused by tourism.

Old Gorin Church became a cultural property designated by the central government in 1999. When the new church was erected in 1985 next to the old Gorin Church, the old one was about to be



Figure 5. Old Gorin Church
(the 3rd from right) and the village

demolished due to the decay. After designation, old church is physically well protected by the government but doesn't have the religious function any more although its daily maintenance is still done by local followers.

3.2.2 World Heritage nomination

In 2006, churches and sites associated with Christianity in Nagasaki were included in the national World Heritage tentative list which includes some areas in Goto. As of 2008, the Government is planning to nominate the sites as cultural landscape consisting of churches, villages and their surroundings. In 2007, Nagasaki Prefecture has launched various surveys needed for the nomination which the government is planning to submit in 2010.

Egami Church, once planned to be taken down by the followers, became the nationally designated cultural property in the early 2008 as to make it a component of the World Heritage nomination site. The local followers were very much upset with this designation since they were not only informed and consulted properly in advance, but also the national designation makes local followers unable to keep carrying self-maintenance and restoration works in such a way they have been doing in the past 90 years (Personal Interview 2008). Besides, when the central government plans to conduct a restoration work of the designated church, the owner of is required to share the restoration cost according to the government policy. The local Christian community is afraid that they won't be able to share such a big amount of cost. Another thing which local followers are afraid is that, by not being allowed to do self-maintenance practices in themselves, the younger followers would lose the sense of ownership and attachment to the church which the followers have built up through participating in the church maintenance works as part of their duty and

religious practice. The local members of the sub-Diocese followers' committee made their request officially in early 2008, supported by about 2/3 of the members, to the Bishop that Egami Church should be excluded from the tentative WH site as the local community is not capable to manage (Personal Interview 2008). However, this petition is not powerful and influential enough because it is the Bishop of Nagasaki Diocese but not local followers to make a final decision of which church is to be included in the World Heritage nomination site.

Mizunoura Church, built in 1938, still has a strong Christian community. The community as well as the pastor clearly expresses that they don't want their church to be designated as they don't want to be disturbed by the tourists more than present.

These cases indicate that designation and intervention by the government would protect physical “shell” of churches, but on the other hand might unconsciously disturb and even vanish the spirit and senses of ownership and belonging.

4 New Uses and Regeneration of “Spirit”

4.1 CULTURAL EVENTS AT CHURCHES

Recently, in some churches, we can see new uses which are basically different from the original uses of the churches. The authors don't use the term “adaptive re-use” because the new use we refer here does not always exclude the original use but rather add and integrate a new use into the existing uses in a coexisting way.



Figure 6. The Concert at Dozaki Church, Dec. 2007

The church concerts are the most typical and frequently seen new use. In Goto City, church concerts have been organized at churches of Dozaki, Mizunoura, Fukue, and Urashira. In a classic concert held at Dozaki Church in 2007, local chorus groups performed together with professional musicians. Many of those concerts are organized by the

local government in collaboration with the local church committees. Many local non-Christian people also joined and enjoyed these events.

4.2 PILGRIMAGE

In 2008, a ferry company in Goto launched a “pilgrimage tour” for the general tourists to visit some churches in a remote area. The president of the company is a Christian follower.

Beside this company, many other travel agencies have organized “pilgrimage tours” to Goto. Some pilgrimages are organized by a church or a Diocese of another area in Japan. There are also some individual pilgrimages.

4.3 SUSTAINABILITY OF NEW USES

The example of Chap. 4.1 indicates the possibility to make a church as “community heritage” which is used by the larger community members including non-Christian people. This use may not be applicable to all churches especially those located in extreme remote.

The second example of pilgrimage is a sort of cultural tourism. However, spiritual depth of “pilgrimages” is quite diverse. Some pilgrimages are very seriously carried out for purely spiritual purpose although some others have no big difference from an ordinary tour without much spiritual purpose.

It should be noted that these new uses don’t automatically guarantee sustainability. The software, meaning a network of stakeholders, to make the new use working is the most important factor in order to truly regenerate the spirit.

5 Regeneration of Spirit: Minoshima Pastoral Center

Although the setting is quite different from that in remote islands, there is another type of use worth observing in the urban setting in Kyushu. Minoshima Pastoral Center, former Minoshima Catholic Church, in the Fukuoka Diocese is used as a place to provide various social welfare supports to the underprivileged. Originally the Minoshima Catholic Church was established in 1952, however in

1993, the church was closed and reformed into the Minoshima Pastoral Center which provides various social welfare supports mainly for immigrants and foreign workers in Fukuoka area. Later on, other



services were brought in at the Pastoral Center such as a shelter and supports for drug addicted people and providing homeless people with food and clothes, all run by NGO/NPOs. It should also be noticed that although the Church doesn't practice masses officially, they are still carrying out masses to foreigners, mainly immigrants from South America, informally. After 15 years of dedications to those underprivileged, the Minoshima Pastoral Center has become an important core for the underprivileged which no other organization can replace in the Fukuoka area, and the Center acquired a new layer of social and spiritual values. The community in Minoshima area also supports the activities of the Pastoral Center. Even though the Pastoral Center still has a financial difficulty, it is undeniable that this place gained a new meaning and reason for existence. What we also need to pay attention is that the original use is still co-existing with new uses and, moreover, these new and old uses work complementally with each other.

6 Conclusions

The case studies in the previous chapters show that some new uses brought new problems to the local Christian communities, but some other new uses brought new inspiring ideas for community design for the future. In Goto, as the entire city is losing population, local people/government have to seriously find a way for themselves to sustain lives. If churches are open only for the Christian followers as they used to be traditionally, it is clear that any churches won't be able to survive and will lose both of shell and spirit eventually.

When the original spirit can't survive, it could be a better option to

conserve a shell with a new spirit rather than a shell without any spirit for the purpose of sustainable conservation. One of the possible solutions is the innovation and integration of new use into the church as introduced in the previous chapters. Minoshima Church has literally revived by accommodating an entirely new and challenging use and tasks for larger community. Dozaki and some other churches in Goto are on their ways to gain their new meanings for the larger community including non-Christians. When a church is used and loved by the larger community, there is a possibility that the church could obtain greater supports by those new stakeholders as Minoshima case demonstrates.

In order to properly accommodate the new use, it will be a key to the successful integration of new use to prepare a management plan, especially how to organize and maintain a network of stakeholders/supporters. Otherwise, the new use will bring predictable and unpredictable problems and conflicts, and can harm both of shell and spirit as well as the community itself rather than making it better.

The World Heritage nomination should not come as the first and highest priority agenda for a vulnerable community because the listing obviously brings the highest possible tourism development pressure to the communities. If communities are not ready to deal with it, they will be overwhelmed and only shells will remain with no spirit. The World Heritage nomination should be discussed only when the local community clearly defines their way to go for the future.

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