

Religious Tourism and the World Heritage Registration Movement in Nagasaki, Japan

MATSUI Keisuke

Graduate School of Life and Environmental Sciences, University of Tsukuba, Tsukuba
305-8572, Japan, jiji@geoenv.tsukuba.ac.jp

Abstract

This paper analysed discourses on World Heritage sites to consider the politics involved in the commodification of sacred places in local city, Japan. The identification of the value of World Heritage sites can significantly affect the society and economy of the region, thus, directly affecting the commodification of sacred places in terms of the creation of a tourism industry. Therefore, this paper considered religious and tourism issues with reference to arguments on the universal value of the Nagasaki Church Group and with respect to how sacred places undergo the heritagization process in discourses on the Nagasaki Church Group and Christian Related Cultural Assets, which was registered on the World Heritage Tentative List in 2007. The concept and philosophy of World Heritage sites may be part of human wisdom, but the more strongly the heritage is connected to a region, the broader the influence of being registered as a World Heritage site will have on that region.

Key words: Nagasaki Church Group, World Heritage, tourism, pilgrimage, actor, commodification

Introduction: Sacred Heritage sites

A significant phenomenon, which could be called a ‘World Heritage site boom’, has occurred in recent years in Japan. There are great expectations for positive impacts on the regional economy to occur from World Heritage site registration, with some people regarding it as a trump card in their regional rehabilitation via the promotion of tourism. Registration as a World Heritage site significantly increases the information available globally on a site from a variety of media, including tourist magazines and guidebooks, TV, the Internet, etc.; thus, the expectation that an increase in tourists will occur in association with the registration. The expectations of the tourist industry for an increase in tourists, and of local municipalities and economic organizations wishing to use it to trigger promotion of their region has led to a movement of more and more World Heritage site registrations.

Commodification of places considered sacred is not a contingent phenomenon. In modern Japan, attempts have been made to commodify sacred places with ulterior motives through the activities of actors that include administrations and other related organizations, mainly with a political, economic, or social context, and in connection with regional revitalization, tourism promotion, etc. How then are such attempts conducted, and are there any problems that arise in the sacred places which are consumed?’ Figure 1 shows the distribution of the World Heritage sites in Japan, 2010.



Figure 1 Distribution of the World Heritage sites in Japan, 2010.

Source: UNESCO

In this paper, the focus will be on the World Heritage movement involved in attempts to register sacred places and the tasks involved in the cultural heritagization of sacred places, which is closely related to the World Heritage movement and tourism commodification. This paper takes these approaches from the two points of view stated below.

The focus will first be on the actors that are promoting the heritagization of cultural landscapes, including sacred places. The problem of the politics involved in the promotion of heritagization is considered from the point of view of the ulterior motives of the actors concerned and the movement for the realization. The creation of a ‘locality’ is an important technique frequently used in World Heritage movements related to sacred places. The heritagization of sacred places can be seen as a move to place value on the uniqueness of the place, the lives of the people that live there, and the climate and history behind them, and not the actual religious facilities or subject of worship themselves; hence, these movements will be considered using specific examples. Secondly, in the link between the heritagization of sacred places where their value is ‘discovered’ or sometimes ‘created’ and tourism is

considered, along with ways in which the commodification of sacred places can affect the lives of the people who look after them.

Identifying the value of World Heritage sites can significantly affect the society and economy of the region; thus, directly affecting the commodification of sacred places in terms of the creation of a tourism industry. Therefore, this paper will consider religious and tourism issues with reference to arguments on the universal value of the Nagasaki Church Group and with respect to how sacred places undergo the heritagization process in the discourses on the ‘Nagasaki Church Group and Christian Related Cultural Assets’ (hereinafter referred to as the Nagasaki Church Group), which was registered on the World Heritage Tentative List in 2007. Figure 2 shows the distribution of candidate for World Cultural Heritage in Nagasaki Church Group, having twenty-six churches and Christian heritage sites.

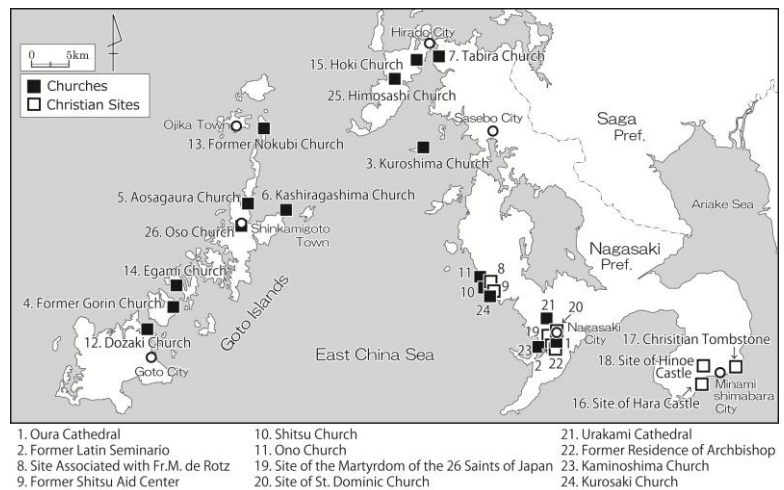


Figure 2 Distribution of candidates for World Heritage in Nagasaki Church Group.

Source: Matsui 2010

Movement of actors promoting heritagization

Every region aiming for registration as a World Heritage site has to struggle to specify the ‘universality’, ‘value’, and ‘uniqueness’ of its composition assets. I will consider the Nagasaki Church Group as a candidate, which is currently on the tentative registration list, and aims to be registered next, by focusing on the actors that are playing a major role in that the process.

When the Nagasaki Church Group was recommended as a candidate for a World Heritage site, many people were involved the movement, with the World Heritage Association playing a particularly important role. The World Heritage Association, which currently has about 80 members, is an organization that volunteers, including people affiliated with the churches,

local corporations, mass media, and administrators, established in September 15, 2001, with the aim of registering the group of churches in Nagasaki as a World Heritage site. The association has been involved in steady efforts such as academic research and study about the architectural value of the group of churches in Nagasaki and the historical and cultural background particular to the region, including the hidden Christians, and enlightenment activities to disseminate the cultural heritage through symposiums and the promotion of international exchanges.

The World Heritage Association regards the group of churches as representative of the local history, with World heritagization being positioned as a means of promoting wide publication and communication on them. However, compared with World Heritage sites related to Christianity already registered throughout the world, the group of churches in Nagasaki falls into a situation where it is difficult to assert their value in terms of size, history, and magnificence. The unique history of Nagasaki is therefore being strongly emphasized and the existence of the group of churches is representative of this historic landscape.

Exactly what value does the Nagasaki Church Group have as a World Heritage site? The World Heritage Association is appealing the following three points as the value of the group of churches in Nagasaki in light of the standards of the World Heritage Committee. The first point is their historic value. The churches in Nagasaki have a four hundred and sixty year long history of Christianity, starting from when St. Francisco Xavier first landed in Hirado in 1550, that can be identified with the history of Christianity in Japan. Christianity, which was first introduced in Japan by St. Xavier, has a checkered history: an initial oppression because Christianity was prohibited, a time of latency during the Edo Period, and a subsequent resurrection when the official prohibition was lifted in the Meiji Era (1873). About half of the existing churches in Japan built before World War II can be found in Nagasaki prefecture. The churches in Nagasaki include many buildings constructed by Japanese masters and the labour of Christian followers using the design and instructions of foreign missionaries. The building of the churches was a symbol of a resurrection of the faith of the followers, which had been passed down by their ancestors and is thus a living witness of the local history. As stated above, the group of churches in Nagasaki can be considered to be a scenic representation of history that has no other comparison in the world in terms of the introduction, acceptance, oppression, latency, and resurrection of Christianity. This history has been supported in Nagasaki, the region where the Catholic faith is most firmly rooted in Japan.

Nagasaki had a well-known culture of hidden Christians, which has been passed down over

time from the latent period, but currently only remains alive in some parts of Nagasaki. Furthermore, many sites where martyrdom occurred and related historic sites remain, including the Delegation of Tensho Young Envoys, which is part of the recent history of Christianity in Japan, and the ruins of Hara Castle, where Christian peasants entrenched themselves in the castle during the Shimabara Uprising. Consequently, various types of value can be seen in the uniqueness of Christianity in Nagasaki, where unique cultures related to Christianity originated.

The second point is the aesthetic and artistic value of the church buildings. Of the churches in Nagasaki, many characteristic buildings still remain that show a merger of western architecture, brought there by foreign missionaries, and traditional Japanese techniques. Built from the beginning of the Meiji through to the Taisho Period, in particular, the red brick and stone churches are known for their appearance that is often expressed as 'exotic' or 'romantic'. An emphasis is placed on the churches' fusion of western architecture and traditional Japanese techniques. The fruit both of eastern and western cultures, they represent very unique church buildings. The master carpenter typically referred to when discussing the church buildings is Yosuke Tetsukawa. Tetsukawa, who was born in 1889 in Nagasaki into a family of master carpenters, was involved in constructing many of the church buildings, although mainly in Nagasaki prefecture, from the end of the Meiji to the beginning of the Showa Era. His style was affected by such foreign missionaries as Father Pelu and Father Do'Ro, and is a fusion of the building cultures of both the east and west. Of the churches he was involved in constructing, some of his churches have been registered as important cultural heritage sites by the state.

The third point is the cultural landscape value that has been nurtured by the climate of the region. The World Heritage Association values the environment in which the churches are located as being part of a cultural landscape where humans and nature have existed in harmony and asserts that it has been difficult to maintain that type of cultural landscape where the churches are located, due to a decline in basic employment, including agriculture, a decrease in the birth rate, an increasingly aging population, and population decreases caused by many people leaving the villages. As stated above, the high value placed upon the landscape, including the environment surrounding the churches, and the difficulty in preserving them, are both highlighted as part of this point.

The above three points reveal that the World Heritage Association is emphasizing that the group of churches in Nagasaki is representative of the local history and is rooted in the climate. The local history is a special part of the history of Christianity in Japan, which has no

other comparison in global history. It recognizes the aesthetic and artistic value of the group of churches as being representative of the local history and believes that registering them as a World Heritage site is the best means for their protection and promotion.

World Heritage site registration necessitates that the public widely recognizes the group of churches in Nagasaki as a precious cultural heritage and then reaches a consensus on that point. The World Heritage Association is therefore promoting the registration of the churches and their related cultural heritage facilities. As of November 2010, they included one National Treasure, seven Important Cultural Heritages, as designated by the state, and seven tangible heritages, as designated by the prefecture.

However, the World Heritage Association does not regard the group of churches in Nagasaki to be part of a cultural heritage, but only regards them as relics. The Association has the objective of identifying the value of the group of churches as ‘living churches’ to avoid losing them. Some of the churches have been damaged by natural disasters, including typhoons, etc., and are difficult to maintain due to a decrease in the number of believers as a result of depopulation, and require urgent measures. At present, maintenance has been inadequate due to the financial situation of the municipalities and the principle of separation of religion and the state. The World Heritage Association recognizes that ‘it is necessary to position them as precious cultural heritage sites while maintaining the function and sacredness of the churches as religious facilities, which have been a focus of spirituality in the lives of the people’, and also states that ‘although it is important to maintain the point of view of actively utilizing cultural heritages for a variety of purposes in protecting them, it is also necessary to pay attention to the possibility of easy conversions and use, which would impair their inherent functions, and could lead to the destruction of their cultural value and atmosphere’. Academic research and enlightenment activities the World Heritage Association has conducted to date position the churches as living religious spaces with true meaning. They are carrying out their activities with a strong consciousness of the crisis that the churches and history forming their background could disappear if no action is taken.

The motivation for registering the group of churches in Nagasaki as a World Heritage site is not only to preserve ‘wonderful, valuable’ churches but also to make them more widely known to people. There has also been a constant focus on the modern task of ensuring harmonious tourism. The World Heritage Association has, from its very beginning, retained the need for harmony between the conservation and exhibition of the churches and their tourism. The World Heritage Association materials state that the group of churches are attractive and could possibly be used as tourism resources since ‘the environments of the

churches and their surroundings are of a very precious attractiveness and have value as “healing spaces where people recover their balance of minds”, particularly those living busy lives in cities, and regardless of whether the person has faith or not, while they could also be used to trigger regional reactivation’. It also clearly states the ‘registration of the group of church buildings as a World Heritage site will naturally open them up to an external interactive population, which then gives rise to the issue of how they can be balanced with tourism’. It also asserts that ‘tourism and the conservation of the group of churches might appear to be a contradiction in terms, thus making it necessary that careful attention is paid to creating a harmony between them while also noting that any roads for tourists, parking space improvements, new shops, etc. could be factors leading to disruption of the landscape and cultural heritage and the environment being wrecked’.

The apparent contradictory nature of conservation and making a heritage site a tourism resource is an issue related to the fundamental concept of the World Heritage Convention. The spirit of the World Heritage Convention involves preserving and managing heritage sites of significant universal value in every part of the world and revitalizing regions through tourism by simultaneously adding economic value.

Creation of pilgrimages to sacred places

Corresponding with the surge in the World Heritage movement, the numbers of pilgrims and tourists that regard the faith-related facilities in Nagasaki as sacred places have increased. The movement towards making a pilgrimage to the sacred places is not a phenomenon that has occurred incidentally, but rather through the design of the prefecture and municipality administrations and tourist federations that have churches and martyrdom sites that are regarded as sacred.

In Nagasaki prefecture, efforts to promote tourism using its history and culture are being made as part of the ‘Project of Discovery and Transmission of History in Nagasaki’, which commenced in 2005. The project concerns the creation of stories associated with many of the historic cultural heritage sites that exist in the prefecture as a new charming attractive point to tempt people to visit them, a special characteristic being that the education board and tourism department of Nagasaki prefecture are promoting them together. Based on a historic theme that was set at a ‘Promotion Meeting’

composed of business people and well-informed persons from both in and outside Nagasaki, historic cultural heritage stories are created at a ‘Special Meeting to Create Stories’, and distinctive local resources and historic culture then are connected to the promotion of tourism. The intention here is the creation of a historical Nagasaki brand of Nagasaki. The first issue of the many historical themes that was covered was Christian culture. This was because the Christian culture is peculiar to Nagasaki prefecture and is a powerful theme for use abroad. It resulted in the issuing of ‘Travelling and Studying Nagasaki’. In these books, the history and noted places of the Christian culture in Nagasaki are explained using the themes of the arrival of Francis Xavier at Hirado, the Christian daimyo of Nagasaki, the Delegation of Tensho Young Envoys, the Martyrdom of the 26 saints, the Shimabara Rebellion, and the hidden Christians in the Edo era, and they act as a guidebook.

The Nagasaki Prefectural Tourist Federation also places importance on ‘Christianity’ in the tourism strategy of Nagasaki prefecture. In the tourism strategy of the prefecture, how best to promote theme-type tourism was positioned as an important issue. One concrete product development was the Nagasaki Christian Travel. The Nagasaki Prefectural Tourist Federation created five-hundred thousand booklets within which the prefecture is divided into five parts, with model routes for touring the churches provided. The federation also created a booklet where special points of the ecclesiastical architecture are explained with the help of the Catholic Archdiocese of Nagasaki, and adopted the positive use of church tours to aid tourism. Furthermore, they explain matters requiring attention when visiting churches and explain the manners expected of tourists in churches; hence, in this way, they thoroughly take took Christian sensibility into consideration.

The concept of ‘Christian Travel’ is both ‘high-class-oriented and high-value-added’, and targets the baby-boomer generation. It provides guest-oriented travel in small groups with a guide. It was created to involve comfortable travel, although the charges are high, and aims to satisfy the tourists’ need to learn about history and culture. People who wish

to take advantage of this type of heritage tourism include people who have already travelled in Japan and abroad many times and have a curiosity for unknown places such as isolated islands.

Sacred places as consumer items and the actors involved

The move to promote church tours as a pilgrimage to sacred places has also occurred within the Catholic Church. In 2005, the ‘Guide to Pilgrimage Sites and Churches in Nagasaki’ was issued under the supervision of the Catholic Archdiocese of Nagasaki and is a guidebook to the Catholic churches in Nagasaki. In addition to introducing the ecclesiastical architecture and the history of the churches, the churches are numbered to promote a tour of them as a pilgrimage. Furthermore, as a guidebook to the sites that commemorate martyrs, martyrdom sites, and monuments, the last half of the book concerns graveyards and tombstones and the ruins of the *Seminario* etc., which are also introduced as part of the pilgrimage to sacred places. Through this publication, the Catholic Church has also responded to tourism and has provided a pilgrimage to the Church Group and sacred places that are the sites of martyrdom as a way of appealing to non-Christians in such a way that the religious aspects of Christian life of Mass and ceremonial occasions will not be affected.

The move to use the pilgrimages to sacred places for Christians in Nagasaki shown here not only has a religious intention but also aims to present the historic cultural heritage of the area in order to promote tourism, an initiative heightened even more after the designation of the Church Group on the tentative list in 2007. The Nagasaki Prefectural Tourist Federation immediately came out with a plan to utilize their tourism resources entitled the ‘Establishment of “Nagasaki Pilgrimage”, Creation of a New Cultural Entity’. Its objectives were to review the tangible and intangible Christianity-related assets that exist in each region of Nagasaki prefecture and to create an official ‘Pilgrimage Route in Nagasaki’ after consultation with the Catholic Archdiocese of Nagasaki. The central aims were to create a new pilgrimage route that

had been authorized by the Catholic Church and contribute to the promotion of tourism in Nagasaki. As a concrete action policy, the need to select 'pilgrimage sites' in cooperation with the Catholic Archdiocese of Nagasaki, publicize pilgrimage manners, and create official guides, create a 'Nagasaki Pilgrim Map', and disseminate information through events or media were all pointed out. The Nagasaki Pilgrimage was modelled on the Camino, and the goal in the future is to attract one million tourists each year. In response to this plan, the Catholic Archdiocese of Nagasaki opened the 'Nagasaki Pilgrimage Centre', which they provided with staff in May 2007. They divided 390 pilgrimage and pilgrimage-related sites in Nagasaki prefecture into six parts, and introduced them as a model pilgrimage course. In addition, they began dispatching pilgrimage guides who had specialized in the history of the Catholic Church.

Since the needs of the consumers can diversify and there may be changes in the value of existing tourism resources, the Nagasaki Prefectural Tourist Federation positioned the creation of the 'Nagasaki Pilgrimage' not merely as the creation of a tourism resource, but rather as the creation of a new cultural entity. In other words, they created a cultural entity that provides tourists with the chance to look back on their lives while in contact with the history and culture of the area, thus promoting a sense of peace and comfort. The expectation is that the spread of the 'Nagasaki Pilgrimage' will lead to more interchanges taking place between people, the succession and creation of the historic culture in the area, and contributions to the development of a historic culture around Nagasaki prefecture, with tourism expected to be the driving force.

In this way the 'Nagasaki Pilgrimage' could be said to have created a route for a tour of existing churches and sacred martyrdom sites, but behind this are various other elements. It involves not only the political and economic requests of the local municipalities that expect an increase in the number of tourists visiting due to the development of the pilgrimage, but also religious philosophy and the propagation strategy of the Catholic Church, the social and religious situation (for example, the spiritual boom), the surge in interest in cultural heritage tourism of baby boomers

approaching retirement, etc., and also the effort to socially create sacred places.

As seen above, the Nagasaki Church Group and its surrounding cultural landscape is now being commodified as part of the Nagasaki Pilgrimage by two main actors: local administration and the Catholic Church. However, it is also impossible to create such a new pilgrimage without the authenticity of these churches and Christian-related sites. Both actors understand this point well, and they are paying careful attention not to hurt their value and making an effort to create a sustainable relationship between tourism development and preservation. As a result, the commodification of the Nagasaki Church Group and its surrounding rural landscape has gradually been promoted.

Conclusion: Expectations and concerns about registration as a World Heritage site

These movements to promote tours around the churches as a pilgrimage to sacred places have also occurred within the Catholic Church itself. The ‘Guide to Pilgrimage Sites and Churches in Nagasaki’ was issued under the supervision of the Catholic Archdiocese of Nagasaki, and is a guidebook on the Catholic churches in Nagasaki. In addition to introducing the ecclesiastical architecture and history of the churches, it also introduces martyrdom sites, sites commemorating martyrs, graveyards and tombstones, and the ruins of the Seminary, etc. as part of a sacred pilgrimage. Consequently, the Catholic Church can also be seen as having responded to tourism and has provided a pilgrimage of the Church Group and sacred places that are the sites of martyrdom as a way of appealing to non-Christians that will not affect the religious aspects of Christian life such as Masses and ceremonial occasions.

The move to utilizing a Christian pilgrimage to sacred places not only for religious purposes but also as a historical and cultural asset of the community as well as a measure to promote tourism in Nagasaki began to grow even more when the ‘Nagasaki Church Group and Christian Related Cultural Assets’ were included on the Japanese tentative list of World Cultural Heritage sites in January 2007. The Nagasaki Prefectural Tourist Federation immediately came up with a plan for utilizing their tourism resources, entitled ‘Establishment of a “Nagasaki Pilgrimage”, Creation of a New Cultural Entity’. Its objectives were to review tangible and intangible Christianity-related assets that exist in each region of Nagasaki prefecture and then create an official ‘Pilgrimage Route in Nagasaki’ after consulting the Catholic Archdiocese of Nagasaki. The central aims were to create a new pilgrimage route

that had been authorized by the Catholic Church, and thus contributed to the promotion of tourism in Nagasaki. The proposed specific action policy includes the need to select 'pilgrimage sites' in cooperation with the Catholic Archdiocese of Nagasaki, publicize pilgrimage rules, create official guides, create a Nagasaki Pilgrim Map', etc. and disseminate information through events or the mass media. An outcome of this project was the pilgrimage guidebook 'Nagasaki Pilgrimage as a Walk with Xavier', which was issued as an official Nagasaki Pilgrimage guidebook in March 2008.

The Catholic Archdiocese of Nagasaki opened the 'Nagasaki Pilgrimage Centre' and assigned some staff in May 2007. They have already begun using various measures that include dividing the 212 pilgrimage sites in Nagasaki prefecture into seven districts, the introduction of model pilgrimage courses in those districts, and the dispatch of pilgrimage guides who are familiar with the details of Catholic culture.

There are various different factors in the background of the 'Nagasaki Pilgrimage' movement. Political and economic demands from local municipalities expecting a growth in tourists resulting from the pilgrimage development, religious ideals and propaganda of the Catholic church, the social background of the spirituality boom, the growing interest in cultural property tourism in the baby-boomer generation as they reach retirement age, and so forth are often considered to be part of the movement. Most of all, however, there can be no doubt that the inclusion of the Nagasaki Church Group in the tentative list of World Heritage sites is serving as a large driving force.

The group of churches represents an expression of the history of Christian acceptance, repression (hiding), and revival over 450 years since Christianity was first introduced in Hirado by Francis Xavier. While all of these are important historical and cultural properties, they are also places of faith and life for Christians at the same time. They are living religious spaces, not just historical relics. However, it is difficult for just the Christians to maintain the churches, where there is a rapidly declining birth rate and aging population. Damage to the church structures, which have withstood many years of wind and rain, is readily apparent, with some of them actually being on the verge of collapsing. Many people involved with the churches expect that the valuable religious facilities, including the churches, will be protected as cultural properties with financial support from the national and local governments if they are registered as World Cultural Heritage sites.

However, other people have voiced concerns on registration of the churches as World Cultural Heritage Sites. It is well-known that World Heritage movements are closely related to the external social and economic environment. It is expected that the number of tourists

will dramatically increase if they are registered as World Heritage sites in the future. Tourism consumption has been steadily stagnating in Nagasaki prefecture since the collapse of the bubble economy. The expectations for the Church Group are high as a last resort in promoting tourism, while there are also glimpses of the expectations of local municipalities and tourism-related industries that wish to promote tourism. Will the places of faith be violated by tourists? Will a show be made of their cherished faith that they inherited from their ancestors? We cannot deny the risk of changing the nature of a religious space as places to pray and the lives of the people involved if the movement to develop the churches as tourism resources grows.

However, the dream of being registered as World Heritage sites has encouraged the island residents to be proud of their islands and to love them even more. I still remember hearing the following when I was interviewing Christians on Nagasaki: 'It would be our greatest pleasure if the churches were to become World Heritage sites. Having our churches, which are properties inherited from our ancestors who suffered so much through the period of hiding, evaluated so highly would a great delight to me as well'.

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