



Tradition in Japanese Sendai's Christian cemetery and its external influences

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Abstract

Cemeteries have different types in every ethnicity due to the differences in the tradition and belief since cemeteries could reflect the philosophy of life and of death the community has. Therefore, the changes in tradition or belief system would cause the changes in types of cemetery or of their instruments. The changes are usually based on old traditions which are influenced by new traditions. This paper is concerned with the Japanese Christian cemetery in Kitayama, Sendai. It is aimed to find out Christian elements. It is also aimed to find out the traditional elements which are probably contrary to Christian thoughts in which both traditional and Christian elements exist in the cemetery. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to show the models of the unity of the two different traditions.

Keywords: cemetery, traditional, christianity, influences

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

A culture of a certain country usually changes, along with the change of the times; therefore, preservation should be done. Pawiro et.al. argued. the research and documentation can be used as evidence for protective purposes such as safeguarding or preservation and conservation in the current perspective ^[1]. Cemetery is a product of mutual cooperation and Sibarani pointed out that mutual cooperation is very useful to develop human resources ^[2]. It is created by a certain nation or a certain community, but the created culture is usually terminated at the time it is created. However, it is not uncommon that it keeps exist beyond the time it was created and can be used in the next generation and is continuously existing. It can also used by the other nations; therefore, acculturation can exist and influence to one another ^[3].

Japan is known as a homogeneous country. This homogeneity was sponsored by the leaders of that country during the pre-modern period or the period before it. The myths of *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* as well as the other literary works also established the homogeneity in Japan. Then, the effort to be *sakoku* (secluded) in the period of Tokugawa is often made as the hypothesis for the establishment of homogeneity in Japan.

Christian ideology came into Japan in the first phase at the period of Azuchi Momoyama (1549) when Fransisco Zabier stopped briefly in Kagoshima and carried out evangelization until into Yamaguchi and Hirado ^[4]. But later, with the victory of Tokugawa in the Sekigahara war in 1600, Tokugawa created Sakokuyang politics which caused communication with the outside world to be obstructed and prohibited Christianity in Japan. Therefore, some of the Christians who had settled in Japan had to adapt to the Japanese traditional religion and had their names, such as *Kakure kirisutan* ^[5].

During the period of Meiji with Meiji Restoration in 1868, Japan began to communicate with foreign countries so that it

made the opportunity for Christianity to come to Japan, along with the Meiji policy to learn from European countries. After the end of World War II, the Japanese proclaimed the freedom of being followers of religion for the Japanese. This freedom had induced the meeting between Christianity and Japanese tradition.

However, the characteristics of the Japanese community concerning having a religion is that today a Japanese can follow more than one religions at the same time so there is only 1% of Christians in Japan. The Christian community establishes churches in various ideologies. They worked together in setting up Christian cemetery in Sendai (*Sendai Kitayama Kurisuchan Bochi*) in 1975. In this research, I would explore the mixed richness between traditional and external elements in the Christian cemetery in Kitayama. The mixture model is seen in the Japanese Christian cemetery having element differences both in the traditional shapes and in the external shapes (the external shapes are dominantly influenced by Christianity).

1.2 Problems

In Japan, a cemetery belongs to *Ie no haka* (family grave). In Suzuki Iwayumi it is said that in Japan. when a baby is still 31 days old, it is brought by hatsumode to jinja or temple, and when it dies 90% of the corpse is buried in Buddhism; when he gets married 65% of the ceremonies are held in the church ^[6]. Therefore, many Japanese follow more than one religions in his whole life. Recently, burying corpses under the *doshō* (ground) is prohibited in Japan. The funeral has to be through *kashō* (cremation), the skins and bones (carcass) are put into an earthenware jug, and it is put into the tomb. Therefore, a family only needs one cemetery which can accommodate numerous earthenware jugs which contain skeletons of the whole family members, whereas not all family members have the same religion. The research problems are: what

equipments are used in the Christian graveyard or in the cemetery plot at Sendai Bochi and do such equipments reflect the belief of each family member? The assumption is that Japanese can choose any religion they want to follow and a Japanese may have more than one religions so that the instruments become the mixture between the equipments of Japanese traditional cemetery and the equipments of Christian symbols.

What the models I mean are: (i) the model with traditional and Christian characteristics at the same time, (ii) the model only with Christian characteristics, (iii) the model only with traditional characteristics eventhough the deceased is Christian, (iv) a combination model with Christian and traditional characteristics, and (v) the model having neither Christian nor traditional characteristics.

2. Methodology

The research uses descriptive qualitative method to find out the combination patterns between traditional and Christian elements at the Japanese Christian cemetery. The data were taken from Kurisuchan Kitayama, Sendai Bochi. First of all, I began to gather traditional elements at the Christian graveyard in Kitayama such as *karo* or *osenko* (cremation), *shizenishi* (natural stones), *kamyo* (family names), etc. They could be used as the data for traditional characteristics. Then, I also collected data indicating Christian characteristics such as the making or drawing the cross, writing the Scriptures, Christian hymn, or the use of imported stones, etc.; all should be relevant to the research proposal. Last, I would compare and explain the combination patterns between the Japanese traditional elements and the Christian symbols.

I chose Japanese Kitayama Kurisuchan Bochi, Sendai as research location and the research was held from June 23 to July 23, 2016; in Indonesia, and the research was conducted at the Department of Japanese Literature, Faculty of Cultural Science, University of Sumatera Utara, Medan, from August 2016 to August, 2017. The research procedure and data gathering might include books or writings which were relevant to the title of the research, recording the writings on the tombstones in the graveyard, taking photos, asking for questions, classifying data, and carrying out field research after the fund from the sponsor was received.

The data gathering included traditional data in the graveyard such as *shizen ishi* (natural stone), *karou* (the place for burning incense), *kamon* (family logo), *gorinto* (stupa), and *kamyo* (family name), and the Christianity or non-traditional data such as Cross, Scriptural verses, the Gospel, hymn/songs, and imported stones. The data analysis was focused on textual data, data on the funeral in the graveyard, and data on the grave equipment. Data validation may include reading experts' writings, reading the data in the graveyard of Kitayama Kurisuchan, Sendai Bochi, and discussing with the lecturers at the Religious Studies Department, Tohoku University.

3. Results and Discussion

Death is a natural condition which has to be experienced by all living things. However, after a human being dies, culture plays an important role in arranging his corpse. Human beings usually perform funerals according to their belief and the

custom of their communities. Therefore, the Japanese recognizes several types of funerals such as funeral in the fire / *kasou*火葬, funeral on water / *suisou*水葬, funeral on the ground / *dosou*土葬, funeral on the air/*kusou*空葬, funeral in the plants / *rinsou*林葬, and funeral in animals / *doubutusou*動物葬. *Ie* is Japanese traditional family, there is an altar in the *ie* which has a cemetery and *kakun* and *kamyo* (family's names). In the old days, the Japanese performed their funeral on the ground, but today they perform funerals in the fire; the skeleton was then kept in the tomb or in the ground so that it was usually called two burial systems.

When someone dies, his corpse has to be cremated at least 12 hours after he dies. After he is cremated in *Kasoba* (crematorium), his skeleton is put into a *kotsutsubo* (earthenware jug). The *kotsutsubo* is taken to the house and put beside the *kamidana* (altar) in 7 x 7 days with the total of 49 days. In various countries, all Christian graves have crosses on them, but not all Christian graves in Japan have crosses. Many of them even do not have crosses. Then, it is brought to the cemetery to be buried along with the *kotsutsubo* of the other members of the family who already died. Therefore, Japanese cemeteries become the places for keeping numerous *kotsutsubo* of one family so that it is called *leno haka* (family cemetery).

History of Cemetery and Funeral in Japan

The history of funerals in Japan has changed, along with the change of times. Fujii pointed out that in the early period in Japan, a corpse was buried far on the mountain or it was thrown away into the *Tanima jigoku* (inferno valley) ^[7]. It was because there was an opinion which said that death could be contagious, or a corpse was something which was very contaminated. Therefore, it was considered as something which was very frightening. At that time reincarnation was not yet known (Mori, 2000: 34).

However, after Buddhism was introduced in the 7th century, Japanese started to recognize reincarnation. Thus, they believe in giving offerings to the deceased. *Kuyo* (offering) introduces the system of 2 cemeteries to the Japanese. The first one is profane cemetery which is usually built far from the village, while the second one is the sacred cemetery having no corpse in it; it is only used as the place for giving *kuyo*.

The system of two cemeteries is known because there is an opinion about profanity and sacredness. The traditional Shinto believes that something which is profane or not holy is blood and corpse, while something which is sacred is spirit or soul. The Japanese look on the relationship between the profanity and the sacredness as follows: when a human being dies, his soul will leave or come out of the body, and it is profane so that it needs to be cleaned up or purified in order that it will get peacefulness.

Tsuboi Youbumi explains there is at least one soul in a human body ^[8]. This soul comes from the soul of the ancestor which has been purified, but when a human being is born, the soul is polluted with blood of its mother. The soul is profane and unstable and dangerous, and thus it has to be purified with various rituals. By these rituals and by the passing time, the soul will be pure. As the soul becomes pure and peaceful, the person who owns the soul is able to enter his society. When

this person dies, the soul will come out of his body and become contaminated and unstable again. Death rituals are needed to be performed to make it peaceful. After it is pure, it will enter the body of that person's young generation. Tsuboi describes the stages of birth to death ritual and death ritual to a scared soul until it becomes a god as shown in Fig. 1.

the use of *kamon* in this research was considered as an

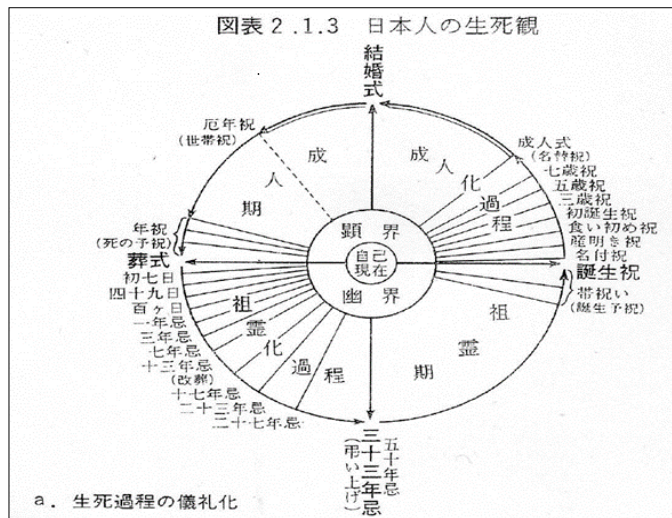


Fig 1: Soul in Reincarnation

Kitayama Kurisuchan Bochi

Christian Kitayama cemetery was established in December 11, 1975 [9, 10]. The reason for establishing the cemetery was that many Christians in Japan did not know how to bury corpses and perform Christian funeral. Morioka (1976:202-206) pointed out that especially in the year of Meiji 5 (1873), the Meiji Administration prohibited any funeral except Shinto and Buddha funerals [11]. But after the year of Meiji 17 (1885), people could perform their funerals according to their beliefs. Nevertheless, the Christians still had difficulty in performing their funerals. Besides that, funerals were only performed by *Jinja* (Temple) and *Jiin* (Otera) so that the Christians did not have any opportunity to perform their funerals. Fortunately, the Christians in Sendai were granted a plot of land for Christian graveyard in the early 1970s. The total area of the Christian graveyard was 1970 *tsubo* (± 3,000 meters) as the result of collaboration of five churches – *Hosana*, *Sendai Higashikyokai*, *Seikoukai*, and *Sendai Hirosekahankyoukai* which made an agreement with *Rinnouji* (Temple). There were 273 graves which were family graves and 7 shared graves. What it meant by shared graves is that some people agree to make a shared grave.

Traditional and Christian elements at Kurisuchan Sendai Bochi cemetery

i) Traditional cemetery

a. Kamon (家紋)

In Japan, *kamon* is a symbol of *Ie* (traditional family). Each family has their own family cemetery which means that it is traditional for a family to have one *kamon ie* in a graveyard. However, since the custom for using *kamon ie* is on the wane nowadays, its use in the graveyard becomes less and less [12]. Christianity does not recognize the use of *kamon*; therefore,

awareness of *ie* even though its use has been on the wane in Japan since the Second World War. Of the 273 graves, 132 of them (about 48,35%) had *kamon* in Kitayama Kurisuchan Bochi graveyard.

b. Karou (香炉)

Karou is the place where incense is burned up. The custom of burning up incense began to appear when it was intended to prevent from the unpleasant odor of corpses [13]. Recently, it has been a tradition in Buddhism to have the function as offerings or purification. Of the 273 graves in the graveyard of Kitayama Kurisuchan Bochi, Sendai, 80 of them (29.30%) had *karou* (the place of burning up incense). If the number of *kamon* is compared with the number of *karou* in the Kitayama Christian graveyard, there are more graves which have *kamon*. It indicates that *kamon* is the symbol of *ie* (family), while *karou* is the symbol of worshipping ancestors' spirits. Therefore, there are more *kamon* in the Katayama Christian graveyard than *karou* because *karou* is considered as worshipping ancestors' spirits which is prohibited in Christianity.

c. Boukei (墓型)

According to Suzuki, the type of traditional cemetery in Japan is traditional; its tombstone is square (four sided) and round and its altar and area are made of natural stones [14]. But in this research, the shape of the Kitayama Christian cemetery in Sendai had two types: European and Japanese models. European model means that the cemetery is made of cement

or ceramics and its function is not to worship ancestors' spirits. The different types of the cemetery found in Kitayama Kurisuchan Bochi graveyard are as follows: 95 graves (34.80%) have Japanese traditional type, 119 graves (43.59%) have European (imported) type, 7 graves are the shared graves, and 6 graves were unknown.

ii) Christian elements in Sendai's Kitayama Christian cemetery

a. Jujika (十字架)

Jujika (cross) is the symbol of Jesus crucifixion. Christian cemeteries in various countries have crosses on them. Some of them have the real crosses put on the graves, but some others have only the pictures or drawing of cross on them. In this research, not all Christian graves in Sendai have crosses. Of the 273 graves in the Christian graves at Kitayama Kurisuchan Bochi, 135 of them (49.63%) have crosses indicating Christian graveyard or those were Christians who were buried there; less than 50% of the graves have crosses.

b. Scriptural verse writing

Christian cemeteries in various countries often have Scriptural verses on the tombstones. Some Christians write the Scriptural verses, but some others only write the content of the verses without mentioning the quotations. In the Kitayama Christian graveyard, Sendai, of the 273 graves, 80 of them (29,30%) have Scriptural verses on the tombstones. 46 graves have clear verses (Old testament 13 graves and New testament 33graves), and 34 graves only have the texts of the Scriptural verses.

Table 1: Graves with scriptural verses from Old Testament

1	詩篇/Psalms23 : 1—2	3基
2	伝道の書/Ecclesiastes12:1	1基
3	黙示録/Revelation2:10 [2基]	2基
4	詩篇/Psalms115 : 1	2基
5	伝道の書/Ecclesiastes12:1	1基
7	詩篇/Psalms51:10	2基
8	詩篇/Psalms103 : 2	1基
9	黙示録/Revelation14:13	1基

Total:13基 13/273 X100% = 4,76%

Table 2: Graves with scriptural verses from the New Testament

1	マチア伝/Matthew 6:9	1
2	ヨハネ/John 11:23	3
3	ヨハネ/John 1:4-8	2
4	ヨハネ伝/1 John 3:36	1
5	ヨブ/Yob 1:20	1
6	1 テサロニケ/1 Tesalonika 5:16	1
7	ローマ書/Romans 1:16	1
8	ローマ書/Romans 10:13	1
9	コリント/後書Corinthians 4:16	1
10	マチア伝/Matthew 1:24	1
12	ルカ伝/Luke 10:42	1
13	ヘブレ/Heber 11:4	1
14	ヨハネ伝/John 4:14	1
15	ローマRomans 14: 8	1
16	テモテ後書/Timothy 4:8	1

17	1 コリント/1 Corinthians 15:20-22	2
18	ヨハネ/John 3:36	1
19	ヨハネ/John 14:1-2	1
20	ローマ/Romans 1:17	1
21	ヨハネ伝/1 John 21:4	1
22	マテア伝/Matthew 1:23	1
23	ローマ書/Romans 11:23	1
23	ヨハネ伝/1 John 14:6	1
25	1ヨハネ伝/1 John 12:24	1
26	1 コリントと/1 Corinthians 4:20	1
27	ピリピ ² /Philippians 3:20	3

Total 33基 33/273X100% = 12,08%

Table 3: Scriptural texts without verses

1	我は復活なり生命なり	2基
2	天より声ありて	1基
3	我が国籍は天国にあり	2基
4	私はよみ歸りであり命であり	6基
5	イエス言い給う、我は復活なり生命なり我を信ずるものは我とも生きて、我を信ずるものは永遠に死なざるべし	1基
6	いつまで存続するものは信仰と希望と愛とこの三つで	1基
7	「幸なるかな心貧しき人」我もまた心貧しからんとつとめし	1基
8	我は復活なり生命なり、我を信ずるものは死ぬるとて生かしべし	1基
9	我は復活なり命なり我を信ずるものは死ぬるとも生きん	1基
10	常に喜べ絶えず祈れ凡てのこと感謝せよ	1基
11	主の御名によって来る者に祝福あれ	1基
12	神は愛なり	2基
13	この村に死せし者皆葬りたる墓は日照りのどかにぞ見ゆ	1基
14	幸福なるかな心の貧しき者天国はその人のものあり	1基
15	草は枯れ花は落つされど主の御言は永遠に保つなり	1基
16	心をつくして主に信頼せよ	1基
17	主にありて死ぬる人は幸福な	1基
18	やすらかに眠りし君ぞ今ここに天に招かれて神のしもべぞ (夫より言葉)	1基
19	主が与え主が取られたのだ主のみ名はほむべきかな	1基
20	我喜き戦闘を戦い、走るべき道程を早たし、信仰を守れり	1基
21	主よ永遠の安息を興えたまえ絶えざる御光をもって照らし給う	1基
22	主に在りて死ぬる (ママ) 死人は福なり	1基
23	天地は過ぎゆかん燃れど我が言は過ぎ行くことなし	1基
24	求めよさらば興えられん	1基
25	御国が来ますように	1基
26	やさしさ謙遜な心すなおな信仰それは浅くても尊い。	1基

Total 34基 34/273X100% = 12,45%

General Total = 1+2+3 = 80/273X100% = 29,30%

The percentages of models possessing *kamon*, *karou*, and traditional cemetery amount to 132/273 X 100% = 48,35%, 80/273 X 100% = 29,30%, and 95/273 X 100% = 34,79% respectively. The cemeteries having Cross and scriptural verses are indicated by 135/273X100% = 49,63% and 80/273X100% = 29,30% respectively. While, the models possessing European/imported cemetery are 119/273X100% = 43,58%.

4. Conclusions

It is concluded the number of *kamons* as identity equals to the percentage of the number of crosses in the cemeteries. The percentage of *karou* and the Scriptural verses as belief is also equal. It indicates that Christian identity is not always

followed by all Christians in Japan. The same is true to the traditional identity in which not all people use it but not all people forget about it. Therefore, the Japanese Christians are those who do not want to indicate their identities clearly, or they do not want to show their identities straight forwardly. This is in accordance with the Japanese belief in being the followers of more than one religion or creed (*aremo koremo*), not one religion (*are ka kore ka*) even though they are Christians. The number of cemeteries using *karou* is equal to using Bible/Scriptural verses. This is a very contradictive way of thinking in which *karou* is used to express the belief in worshiping ancestral spirits while scriptural verses are used to the belief in Christianity. The traditional cemetery model is equal to the European/ imported model and this may

demonstrate balance in fanaticism to tradition and value from aboard.

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