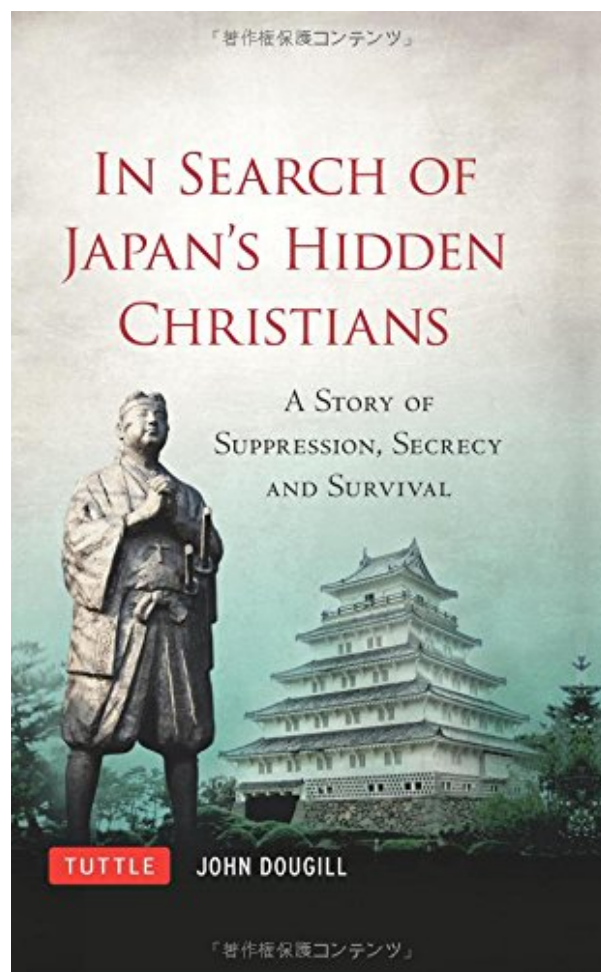


# IN SEARCH OF JAPAN'S HIDDEN CHRISTIANS: A STORY OF SUPPRESSION, SECRECY AND SURVIVAL BY JOHN DOUGILL



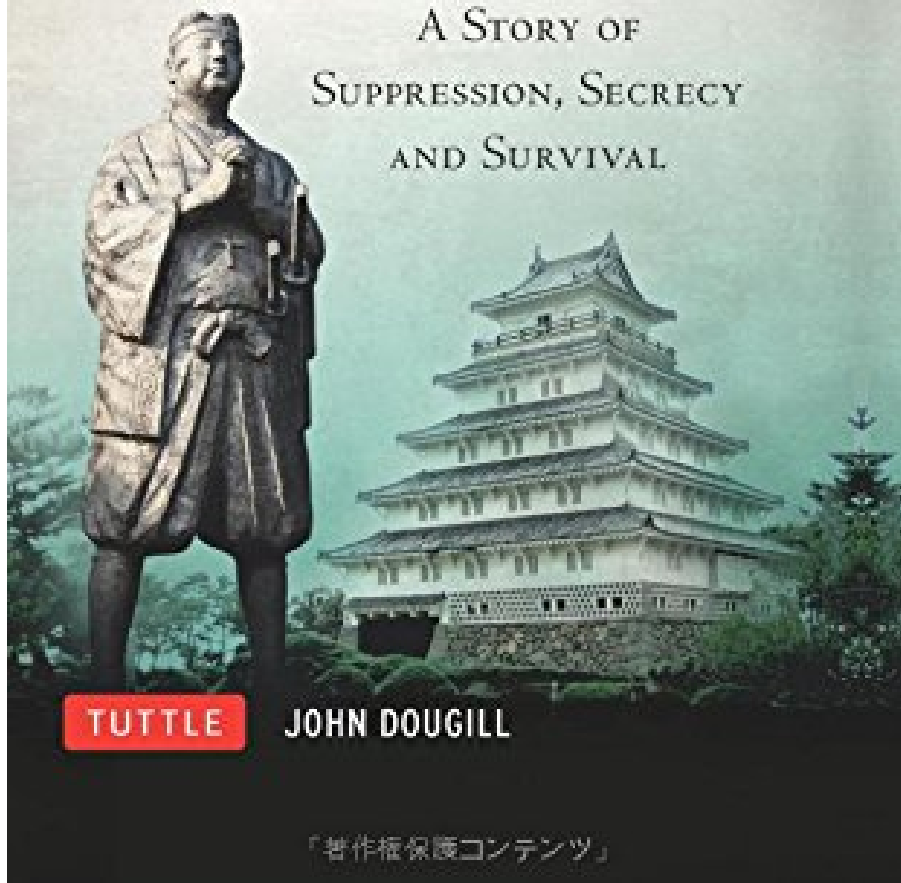
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# IN SEARCH OF JAPAN'S HIDDEN CHRISTIANS

A STORY OF  
SUPPRESSION, SECRECY  
AND SURVIVAL



TUTTLE

JOHN DOUGILL

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## Review

"British-born professor Dougill, who teaches British studies in Kyoto, seems to embody the very culture clash that intrigues him. In this book, he peels back layers of Japanese culture as he explores the history of the Kakure Kirishitan (Hidden Christians). ... And even those who stumble over the Japanese terminology will understand the importance of a book detailing a dwindling subculture now fading into history." —Publishers Weekly

"The most original and beneficial contribution of this book is Dougill's narrative of his travels around southern Japan visiting historical sites. His travelogue offers glimpses of how modern Japanese address their country's Christian past, whether memorializing martyrdoms, exploiting a semi-foreign faith for tourism, or simply forgetting it was ever there. As for the Hidden Christians themselves, they are hard to find, having become sparse, elderly, and again hidden to evade bothersome journalists and anthropologists. In all, this is a historically sound, well-related introduction to a significant subject in Asian Christianity." —Catholic Library World

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The story of Japan's hidden Christians is the subject of a major motion picture by director Martin Scorsese, based on Shusaku Endo's famous novel, *Silence*.

From the time the first Christian missionary arrived in Japan in 1549 to when a nationwide ban was issued in 1614, over 300,000 Japanese were converted to Christianity. A vicious campaign of persecution forced the faithful to go underground. For seven generations, Hidden Christians—or Kirishitan—preserved a faith that was strictly forbidden on pain of death. Illiterate peasants handed down the Catholicism that had been taught to their ancestors despite having no Bible or contact with the outside world.

Just as remarkably, descendants of the Hidden Christians continue to this day to practice their own religion, refusing to rejoin the Catholic Church. Why? And what is it about Christianity that is so antagonistic to Japanese culture? *In Search of Japan's Hidden Christians* is an attempt to answer these questions. A journey in both space and time, *In Search of Japan's Hidden Christians* recounts a clash of civilizations—of East and West—that resonates to this day, and offers insights about the tenacity of belief and unchanging aspects of Japanese culture.

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## Most helpful customer reviews

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A good book that could have used a touch more empathy about its subject

By Peter S. Bradley

This is a fascinating and informative book, but the author seemed to be at pains to demonstrate a lack of empathy for his subject.

The writing of the author, John Dougill, is first rate. The story works as a kind of history by way of a travelogue. Dougill is obviously in love with his adopted country of Japan. He writes movingly of the natural beauty of Japan as he explores the sites that played a role in the Christian history of Japan. Thus the story begins in Japan's southern Tateshima Island several "Southern Barbarians" merchants - Portuguese so-called because they came from Macao - entered Japan in 1543. The merchants were followed up by Jesuits, who after making a false start in their translation of God into Buddhist terminology, did amazing anthropological work in understanding the Japanese language and culture. The focus moves to Nagasaki and other locations in Japan where the Jesuits set up schools and seminaries, and enter into diplomatic relations with Japanese Daimyos, where they attract interest in Christianity by providing Portuguese and military connections. Christianity began making substantial inroads into Christianity, having obtained converts Daimyos, Samurai and peasants.

In 1587, there began a sea change when Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the successor to the military leader who had finally unified Japan, Oda Nobunaga, issued an order expelling the Jesuit "bateran" (padres) from Japan, while pointedly not expelling Portuguese merchants. Nobunaga and Hideyoshi had initially shown some support for Christianity, but it seems that there were reservations. The reservations for Hideyoshi may have been the realization that Christianity had the effect of causing his Japanese subordinates to place their loyalty in a higher power. Dougill offers the example of the samurai Ukon:

//But Ukon showed strong principles. At Nobunaga's funeral he refused to light an incense stick or say the prayers because they were Buddhist. Hideyoshi wanted to test his loyalty, so he ordered Ukon to give up his faith. When he refused, it proved that his loyalty to Hideyoshi wasn't absolute, so he was stripped of his lands.// (p. 63.)

The expulsion order was the opening salvo. Although some Jesuit institutions were taken away, and some Jesuits left Japan, others went into hiding and carried on their mission. In addition, Franciscans had arrived in Japan who were able to openly proselytize.

Hideyoshi's paranoia was not satisfied. He had been informed that Christianity was a ploy used to subvert and conquer other lands. In 1587, one of Hideyoshi's edicts was put into effect as 24 Christians were arrested, had their right ear cut off, paraded through Kyoto, and then forced to walk 450 miles back to Nagasaki, where they were crucified. (p. 80.) The peasants selected for martyrdom lived up to the standards of the ancient martyrs. They seemed to be joyful about imitating Christ. (p. 82.) Two volunteers - including



one 12 year old - came to comfort the afflicted, and they were also crucified - making the number the "26 Martyrs." An unknown person named Mathias offered himself in place of the Mathias on the wanted list. (p. 80.)

The courage of these martyrs - and thousands thereafter - encouraged a belief in the Japanese that there was something about Christianity that made it worth embracing. The example of the martyrs also inspired in their descendants a deep reverence and nearly unshakeable commitment not to dishonor their sacrifice by apostatizing.

It was during the Tokugawa Shogunate that Christianity became an illegal religion and Christians had to go into hiding. The decision of Tokugawa Ieyasu to proscribe Christianity may have been the result of the influence of the William Adams, an Englishman who shipwrecked in Japan in 1600, "went native" and became a samurai, and, eventually, the lead character in James Clavell's novel *Shogun*. (p. 91.) As an Englishman, Adams was a source of stories about the perfidious Jesuits and their vast plots to undermine established governments (p. 993) (and perhaps he shared information about the Pope had declared that Queen Elizabeth's Catholic subjects did not owe her loyalty.) In 1612, Ieyasu received information that a priest told a crowd of Japanese that obedience to the Church overrode obedience to the Daimyo, and a bribery scandal involving two Christians suggested that Christian loyalty to each other was more important than their loyalty to the Shogun. (p. 93.)

In 1614, the Shogun issued an edict declaring that Japan was the "land of the gods." (p. 93.) Converts were ordered to give up their faith. When they did not they were mass-murdered, unless they apostatized. (p. 94.) The numbers of Catholics executed by the Japanese far exceeded the number of Catholics executed by the Spanish Inquisition. (See p. 94, 96 - 97.)

The Japanese Christian priests initially went underground, but eventually they were caught and were executed and at some point Japan was written off. However, the peasant Christian communities remained alive. They went to extreme rural areas and developed tight-knit communities, usually marrying within the community. Without priests and the bible, Kakure Kirishitan (Hidden Christians), could only keep alive so much of the Christianity that their ancestors had too little time to absorb. The prime rite was baptism, and prayers were rote memorized pidgeon-latin prayers of the missionary era. Dougill delights in pointing out how the Hidden Christians incorporated Shinto and Buddhist forms into their Christianity, which is hardly surprising under the circumstances.

Eventually, however, Japan was re-opened to the world. Many Hidden Christians revealed themselves to the new Catholic Churches that were established in the late 19th century, and then they had to undergo a final round of horrific persecutions. After the persecutions ended, around 50% of the Hidden Christians joined the Catholic Church. The remainder stayed with their mutated religion - which was may be a new religion and not a kind of Christianity - out of the same loyalty to their ancestors which had allowed them to endure the centuries. Hidden Christianity is dying out now as the younger generation has left the rural areas and the traditions have not been passed down.

All in all this is a fine history and a good telling, but I have to issue a warning. I found the author to indulge in the occasional anti-Catholicism, and it became pretty clear to me that his involvement in Shintoism has created something of an antipathy toward Christianity which made him not really able to understand the subject he was pursuing. The historian Robert Louis Wilken observed in *John Chrysostom and the Jews : Rhetoric and Reality in the Late 4th Century* that "'Every act of historical understanding is an act of empathy"; I got a definite feeling that there was an act of empathy.

For example, in discussing the 26 Martyrs - who are, after all, Catholic saints - Dougill observes:

*//When the prisoners reached the site of the execution, they embraced their crosses with joy as if welcoming their fate. The executioner was puzzled by the fervor, and reading Diego Yuuki's account, frankly so was I. For anyone who treasures the gift of life, who sees it as a miracle in itself, the death desire is hard to fathom without an unswerving certainty in the afterlife. Even then it begs the question: why would God create human life if his greatest wish is for people to sacrifice it? Why indeed create the earth at all?// (p. 82.)*

Is this really a place for theology? Even if it is, it would be a good moment to try to empathize with the martyrs. Really, what was it that motivated them to die for their new religion in the face of all the power in their world? Dougill gestures at the answer repeatedly - the Christian message gave these peasants a message that their life was worth something extremely valuable. Dougill writes at one point - in connection with the Shimabura Uprising, a peasant uprising that sealed the fate of Christianity under the Shogunate - that:

*//The young rebel leader's real name had been Masuda Shiro Tokisada. According to local lore, he came to prominence through preaching of equality and dignity on the island of Oyano. "Why do we have to be treated like horses and cows?" he asked the congregation. "We do not ask for rice or even our life, but we insist on being treated as equal human beings." It was a revolutionary message for the downtrodden peasants, unused to being accorded respect or dignity.// (p. 124.)*

In another place Dougill recounts a conversation with one of the few Hidden Christians he spoke to:

*//The missionaries then were more successful than the contemporary Church," he said. "We should respect them. They had few resources but a lot of dedication. People saw the work they did, so they listened to their message. When they first appeared, they were strange beings with special powers and hidden knowledge. People called them Indians. They spoke of love and equality: can you imagine? To the villagers it was like the smell of fresh air."// (p. 218.)*

Compare that with the place of the peasant in Japanese culture:

*//Summary execution was normal practice, even for trivial crimes and the sight of corpses was commonplace. They were used by samurai to test the sharpness of their swords, and bodies were sometimes piled up to five high to see if swords could cut through the layered navels. Francesco Carletti reported seeing a lord sever a body in half and then calmly inspect the blade to make sure it had suffered no damage (the sword's value was judged accordingly). Afterwards, his followers tested their own swords on different parts of the body, leaving chunks of human flesh scattered all over the ground. The whole thing is carried out as a pastime, without turning a hair, very much as with us the anatomy of dead bodies is carried out in the interests of medical science," he concludes.// (p. 101.)*

Similarly, compare the Christian idea that there is a core of dignity in the human soul with the Japanese culture where lords could order subordinates to commit suicide, and expect their orders to be carried out, except with Christians:

*//An incident involving the samurai called Zensho Shichiemon illustrates the point. Though Christianity was forbidden on pain of death, he chose to convert and even the priest who baptized him warned of the dire consequences. When brought before his daimyo, he remained adamant in his refusal to recant. "I would obey in any other matter," he declared, "but I cannot accept any order that is opposed to my eternal salvation." He was beheaded, just four months after his baptism; loyalty to a heavenly lord had overridden loyalty his worldly lord. Feudal loyalty was given special emphasis under Tokugawa neo-Confucianism, in which*

allegiance to one's superior was made into a supreme virtue. In this clash of Christian and Confucian, there would be little room of compromise.// (p. 107.)

That is an excellent observation on the part of Dougill. In many ways, despite his orientation toward Shinto over Christianity, his presentation supports the arguments of Rodney Stark in *How the West Won: The Neglected Story of the Triumph of Modernity* about Christianity's radical orientation in the direction of individual rights and dignity. Clearly, the Shoguns were threatened by Christianity.

As for the casual anti-Catholicism, the one that caught my eye initially was Dougill's reference to Ignatius Loyola's dictum that "we should always be prepared so as to never err to believe that which appears white is really black, if the hierarchy of the Church so decides" with the observation "It's an extraordinary remark, and one that shed light on later developments. (p. 12.) Putting aside that Dougill offers no context for the statement, he also never show how this statement played any role in Japanese-Christian relations, particularly since Franciscans and Augustinians were also persecuted. It seems to be a casual bit of anti-Catholicism lobbed in for no purpose.

Not precisely anti-Catholic, but part of a stock mischaracterization of European culture - on page 18, Dougill advises that Europeans considered bathing to be "unnatural and unhygienic," (p. 18), which is total nonsense. Soap was invented in Europe

//Nor was Gothic progress limited to copying the Romans. Consider that neither the Romans nor the Greeks had soap; it was invented by the northern "barbarians." 62//

Stark, Rodney (2014-03-17). *How the West Won: The Neglected Story of the Triumph of Modernity* (Kindle Locations 1267-1268). Intercollegiate Studies Institute. Kindle Edition.

Likewise, European towns had bath houses where people took baths.

Dougill also seems to buy into the stereotype of Jesuits that he adverted to earlier in his book.

//One is used to scheming Jesuits in portrayals of Elizabethan England: here on the other side of world similar plots were being hatched.// (p. 65.)

Then there is this weird non-parallel:

//Oddly, the situation paralleled that of Europe, where the Catholic Church was itself turning the screws on its enemies (Galileo was put on trial in 1633.) // (p. 96.)

Except that Galileo wasn't tortured, he was given a trial, he was put under house arrest, and he always remained a faithful Catholic. So?

And then there is this:

//Before departing, Xavier was asked for a method of healing (Japanese were used to getting "worldly benefits" from their religion), and he left Miguel with a scourge, telling him to cure the sick by applying five mild blows to the infected area while invoking Jesus and Mary. Catholic superstition had entered rural Japan.// (p. 26.)

"Catholic superstition"? Really? Maybe Xavier was improvising. Perhaps he was relying on of the analgesic

effect of striking the skin to reduce pain. But given the fact that this practice has never been mentioned elsewhere in the history of Catholicism, indulging in casual prejudice about "Catholic superstition" was off-putting.

I would have liked to have seen more information and/or interviews with the Hidden Christians themselves - Dougill interacted with two or three at most - but insofar as this book was "in search of," then, perhaps, the core of the book is about the search and not the discovery. The actual Hidden Christians don't emerge until 3/4 of the way through the books and are often simply referred to by Dougill's interlocutors with a waive of the hand as someone gestures at houses and says "they live over there."

An unintentional point revealed by the book: I had no idea how anti-Christian the Japanese were. Dougill repeatedly notes that Christianity has never made substantial inroads into Japan, but it also seems that for 400 years, Japan engaged in a stereotyping and demonization of Christianity that might explain the cruel and callous treatment meted out to Europeans during World War II. It is a subject worth considering.

Another unintentional bit of Japanese history that was unveiled was the Japanese propensity toward brainwashing. Dougill points out that at some point the Japanese decided that creating martyrs wasn't working, and began a program of torture and pressure to convert Christians into Shinto worshippers. The biggest catch in this regard was the a Jesuit provincial named Christovao Ferreira, who, after torture, renounced Christianity, embraced Shinto and provided his expertise for brainwashing later Christians. In this episode - which forms the basis of Endo Shusaku's novel *Silence*, we see something akin to the effort put into brainwashing American soldiers during the Korean War, which caused a great deal of scandal in America when a handful of soldiers turned against America. Is this something inherent in Asian culture? Does this willingness to reshape the soul have something to do with a failure to understand or appreciate the existence the soul or human dignity in Shinto culture? Those are, perhaps, questions for another book.

I was put off by these aspects of the book, but on the whole I had to conclude that this was a fair introduction to an interesting subject.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

Fine Journey into Japan

By Paul C.

I highly recommend *In Search of Japan's Hidden Christians* to anyone with an interest in Japan. Of course the focus is on the hidden Christians and their fascinating story, but this book will also give the reader a glimpse into Japanese society. The story of Christianity in Japan spans almost 600 years. The Jesuits quickly overcame some initial problems and the new religion spread quickly. Some of the most powerful men in society embraced it. About 40 years after its arrival the powerful ruler, Hideyoshi, felt that it was not conducive to Japanese society. More or less, from that time forward being a Christian was a great risk to one's life. The author, John Dougill, carries the reader clearly through these first steps with interesting vignettes on the main characters. He also takes us on a journey to the locations where the story of Christianity unfolded.

The core of this story is, however, the next 400 years, from 1600 to the present. The great mystery is how the Hidden Christians, against all odds, were able to continue their traditions. The reader is offered stories and interviews, some moving some amusing, on solving the puzzle of how this religion could survive. Once again, we go on a journey with the author to the secret places where this religion was protected and cherished.

The story has all the elements of a great tale. Powerful political leaders at first accepting and using the

religion for their advantage, another generation of leaders feeling threatened by the foreign and uncompromising nature of the religion, and finally, the faithful, risking their lives handing down sacred prayers; an act which was a duty not only to the Christian God but also their ancestors.

The narrative moves chronologically from the arrival of the Christians in the mid 16th century to the present day. The story is ultimately bittersweet. Although the hidden Christians have protected their traditions against all odds, the number of hidden Christians is dwindling rapidly.

In Search Japan's Hidden Christians is a warm and understanding look at a fascinating part of Japanese history. I could not imagine a more dramatic tale for a great movie.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

Hidden and Now Found.

By Amazon Customer

In 1549, a Portuguese boat landed in the most southern part of the Japanese islands, a place called Tanegashima. Christianity gained a foothold in Japan. The years that followed were disastrous and bloody, as new leadership and civil war tore Japan apart. During this time, hidden Christians, or kakure kirishitan, concealed themselves among their Japanese neighbors, worshiping in secret. John Dougill takes an in-depth look at why Christianity has been hidden in the deeps of the Japanese culture. Kirishitians created their own religion, and even today, they refuse to rejoin the Catholic Church.

The best part of this book is that it is a secular look at Christianity in Japan. The first couple of chapters provide great background for the rest of Dougill's thesis. A great part focuses on Tanegashima, known for its iron work. Tanegashima, because of its first contact, was the first place in Japan to buy gunpowder weaponry. He is able to perfectly blend modern-day evidence with historical first accounts to paint a pretty accurate picture of sixteenth-century Japan. The narrative is engaging, as Dougill's perspective is both instructive and playful. This is one of the best books out there about this subject of east meeting west.

\*Originally published for San Francisco/Sacramento Book Review\*

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# **IN SEARCH OF JAPAN'S HIDDEN CHRISTIANS: A STORY OF SUPPRESSION, SECRECY AND SURVIVAL BY JOHN DOUGILL PDF**

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## Review

"British-born professor Dougill, who teaches British studies in Kyoto, seems to embody the very culture clash that intrigues him. In this book, he peels back layers of Japanese culture as he explores the history of the Kakure Kirishitan (Hidden Christians). ... And even those who stumble over the Japanese terminology will understand the importance of a book detailing a dwindling subculture now fading into history." —Publishers Weekly

"The most original and beneficial contribution of this book is Dougill's narrative of his travels around southern Japan visiting historical sites. His travelogue offers glimpses of how modern Japanese address their country's Christian past, whether memorializing martyrdoms, exploiting a semi-foreign faith for tourism, or simply forgetting it was ever there. As for the Hidden Christians themselves, they are hard to find, having become sparse, elderly, and again hidden to evade bothersome journalists and anthropologists. In all, this is a historically sound, well-related introduction to a significant subject in Asian Christianity." —Catholic Library World

"A nonfiction work about devotion, the book is also a lively travelogue. And Dougill is a tireless journeyman and sleuth, going to wherever there is a story or lead. He tracks down descendants of hidden Christians on the island clusters of Amakusa, Goto and Ikitsuki, meets with curators, historians in Shimabara and Nagasaki, engages fisher folk in conversations about history." —Stephen Mansfield, columnist, Japan Times

"John Dougill's *In Search of Japan's Hidden Christians* is one of the most compelling and important books on Japan in recent years. The story of Japan's Hidden Christians is one of the least known and most interesting aspects of Japanese history, and Dougill brings the story to life brilliantly." —Chris Rowthorn, author of *Lonely Planet Japan* and *Lonely Planet Kyoto*

"Eloquently written, with surprises around every corner, *Hidden Christians* is an engaging read. Dougill's personal touch to the narrative makes the book lively and highly readable." —Amy Chavez, columnist, Japan

Times

"In Search of Japan's Hidden Christians: A Story of Suppression, Secrecy and Survival is the best non-fiction work I've read in the past three years." —Bookish.asia

"This book is a moving and personal meditation on the history and present situation of Japan's Kakure Kirishitan. The combination of individual testimonies and reflections based on sound research paints a rounded and up-to-date picture of these remarkable communities." —Stephen Turnbull, author of Samurai Swordsman

"The narrative is engaging, as Dougill's perspective is both instructive and playful. This is one of the best books out there about this subject of east meeting west." —San Francisco Book Review

From the Back Cover

"One of the most compelling and important books on Japan in recent years. Dougill brings the story to life brilliantly. The parallels he draws with the spread of Christianity, as well as his own personal observations, add tremendously to this already fascinating account. "

ùChris Rowthorn, Lonely Planet Japan and Lonely Planet Kyoto guidebook author

"Eloquently written, with surprises around every corner, Hidden Christians is an engaging read. DougillÆs personal touch to the narrative makes the book lively and highly readable."

ùAmy Chavez, columnist, Japan Times

"A knowledgeable, thorough, and lively survey of Christianity in Japan and its intriguing legacies." ùDavid Mitchell, Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet

"A moving and personal meditation on the history and present situation of Japan's Kakure Kirishitan. The combination of individual testimonies and reflections based on sound research paints a rounded and up-to-date picture of these remarkable communities."

ùStephen Turnbull, author of Samurai Swordsman

About the Author

John Dougill has lived in Japan for over twenty years and is professor at a Buddhist university in the heart of Kyoto. He is an associate editor for Japanese Religions and co-author of a guide to Shinto Shrines. Educated at Leeds and Oxford Universities, he taught for three years in the Middle East before spending ten months traveling around the world. As well as following the path of early Christians around Kyushu, he has journeyed from Lake Baikal to Lake Biwa in search of Japan's shamanistic roots and traversed the country researching Japan's World Heritage Sites. Amongst his hobbies are chess, the GreenShinto blog, and bird-spotting on the Kamogawa River.

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solutions to take. Reserve *In Search Of Japan's Hidden Christians: A Story Of Suppression, Secrecy And Survival* By John Dougill will provide you the ideal source as well as point to get inspirations. It is not only regarding the tasks for politic company, management, economics, and other. Some got works to make some fiction works likewise require motivations to get over the job. As just what you need, this *In Search Of Japan's Hidden Christians: A Story Of Suppression, Secrecy And Survival* By John Dougill will most likely be your option.