



## Transformative coping and spirituality: The case of the *Kakure Kirishitan* during the Tokugawa period

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** This study explores the historical experiences and psychological resilience of the *Kakure Kirishitan* (Hidden Christians) during the Tokugawa period of Japan, focusing on their coping strategies during religious persecution. The research aims to (1) understand the nature and impact of the Tokugawa regime's suppression of Christianity and (2) analyse how the *Kakure Kirishitan* cope with the stress of oppression to preserve their faith by using the Transformative Coping Model (TCM). **Methods:** This study applies qualitative historical analysis by synthesising scholarly literature, primary accounts, and theoretical perspectives, especially those related to stress-coping, spirituality, and resilience. The geographical and historical focus is Japan between the 17th and 19th centuries, during which Christianity was outlawed. **Findings:** Findings reveal that the *Kakure Kirishitan* employed various creative and spiritual coping mechanisms, including religious syncretism, oral transmission, symbolic secrecy, and ritual innovation. These strategies allowed them to maintain both their religious identity and communal cohesion in secret. Their use of encoded rituals and adapted theology illustrates how adversity was transformed into spiritual growth and cultural preservation. Despite psychological burdens such as fear and trauma, the *Kakure Kirishitan* interpreted suffering as divine testing, reinforcing their endurance across generations. **Conclusion:** This study concludes that the *Kakure Kirishitan*'s survival reflects the core principles of transformative coping—meaning-making, creativity, and collective resilience—as they shaped a unique spiritual identity under prolonged oppression. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** This study offers a novel contribution by linking the historical experience of the *Kakure Kirishitan* with the Transformative Coping Model (TCM), a framework rarely applied in historical religious studies.

**KEYWORDS:** *Kakure Kirishitan*; religious persecution; transformative coping; spirituality.

### 1. Introduction

Christianity was first brought to Japan by Francis Xavier some time at the conclusion of the rule of Toyotomi Hideyoshi (Nippon Communications Foundation, 2015). Taida (2020) noted how Xavier learned the Japanese language, translated the Catholic Catechism into Japanese, and studied the Japanese people keenly in order to bring the knowledge of Christianity to them. Through the efforts of Francis Xavier, Christianity gradually gained popularity in Japan and many daimyos and quite a number of peasants converted to Christianity. As increasing number of people were exposed to Christianity, Hideyoshi disapproved to its expansion, and proclaimed an edict to ban Christian activities, including the Sunday services and, in particular, proselytization. Hideyoshi perceived the spread of

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Christianity as a political threat to his rule (Boscaro, 1973). Under such hostile political position, Christians in Japan faced increased persecution, suffering physically and psychologically (Harding, 2023). Hideyoshi's anti-Christian policy persisted for the next two hundred years, throughout the rule of Tokugawa Ieyasu (Spae, 1963).

In the Meiji Era, the edict was suspended, such that Christianity experienced a brief revival (Nippon.com, 2019). Yet, the some 200-year persecution during the Tokugawa Period (1603–1867) sent a significant number of Christians into hiding and they became the *Kakure Kirishitan*, which can be directly translated as "Hidden Christians." They concealed their religious identity in the face of severe political persecution during this challenging era, when the government employed various methods of suppression against Christians and Christian practices (Hagemann, 1942). Under the pressing condition, the Christians in hiding developed various coping mechanisms to help them endure the challenges of political oppression.

Before this, the subject of *Kakure Kirishitan* had often been studied under the disciplines of history, anthropology, sociology, and culture. This study takes an alternative approach to examine the coping mechanism of the *Kakure Kirishitan* from the angle of psychological science to explain the stress-coping process in the face of adversity. Specifically, this study explores how the *Kakure Kirishitan* in the seventeenth-century Japan cope with the stress of persecution in order to preserve their religious belief with special reference to the Transformative Coping Model (TCM).

### 1.1 Research problem, objectives, and questions

The remarkable resilience of the *Kakure Kirishitan* under the harsh persecution of the Tokugawa shogunate is a subject of interest in this study. These Christians endured the political suppression to preserve their religious belief and also the trust and confidentiality among themselves through family networks and closely knitted communities against the threat of cultural destruction. The coping strategies employed by the *Kakure Kirishitan* to withstand persecution and preserve their beliefs are the problem in focus in this study. The experiences of the *Kakure Kirishitan* are demonstrations of how marginalized communities survived external pressures in the form of a passive resistance against a hostile ruling class.

The research questions for this study are (1) "How was the religious persecution faced by the *Kakure Kirishitan* during the Tokugawa Period?" and (2) "How did the *Kakure Kirishitan* cope with the stress of severe persecution under the Tokugawa Regime to preserve their religious belief?" Related to these question, the study will achieve the following objectives: (1) "To understand the religious persecutions that the *Kakure Kirishitan* faced during the Tokugawa Period;" and (2) "To explain how the *Kakure Kirishitan* managed to cope with the stress of severe persecution under the Tokugawa Regime to preserve their religious belief."

### 1.2 The significance of the study

The study of the *Kakure Kirishitan* and their experiences helps us to understand the dynamics of cultural adaptation in the context of religion and society. It highlights the unique ways in which people uphold their religious convictions and customs. It exposes the potential of creative spiritual adaptation in the body and mind as an effective vehicle for eventful evolution in the efforts to cope with external pressures in the broader community. The analysis of the coping strategies adopted by the *Kakure Kirishitan* shows how creative spirituality could provide emotional support and companionship within a marginalised community. The *Kakure Kirishitan*'s capacity to innovate as they face the hard reality of oppression is a vivid illustration of creative spirituality of a people who was determined to hold on to their belief and identity under the challenging conditions in life. In terms of methodology, this study takes on an interdisciplinary approach to examine the case of the *Kakure Kirishitan*. While the experiences of the *Kakure Kirishitan* is studied as a historical and sociological interest like most researches on this subject, this study also attempts to

apply scientific theory of psychology to explain how the *Kakure Kirishitan* managed to cope with the suffering they faced as they endured persecution.

## 2. Methods

This study employed interpretive method through a constructivist approach to explore the relationship between creativity, spirituality, and coping according to the framework of the Transformative Coping Model (TCM). Interpretive method is suited for understanding historical and cultural phenomena because it allows detailed analysis of subjective experiences and the underlying meaning in the historical materials. Through the use of constructive approach, this study acknowledges that understanding is constructed through individual and collective interpretations of cultural, social, and historical contexts.

The study focuses on the analysis of historical materials, including journal articles, news, religious texts, documents associated with the subject of *Kakure Kirishitan*, as well as the previous researches on TCM and its elements. These materials serve as the foundation to examine how creativity and spirituality have combined as coping mechanisms throughout history. Special efforts are devoted to identify recurring subjects and patterns within the historical materials in order to reveal deeper insights to how creativity and spirituality are intertwined into the ways of coping. For instance, religious symbols are evaluated not only for their religious value but for their mental effects on both perspectives of personal and community. Creative rituals such as music and art are also observed for their role in bringing resilience and psychological healing during difficult times.

Due to constraints in time and space, data collection in this study focused mainly on secondary resources which includes materials from previous studies related to the topic of this research. This is done in two directions. First, the study of historical materials related the *Kakure Kirishitan*, which include various aspects of the experiences and life of the *Kakure Kirishitan* under the severe persecution during the Tokugawa Ruling Period. Attention is given to the circumstances leading to the emergence of the phenomenon of the *Kakure Kirishitan*, the type of persecution that they suffered under the Tokugawa regime, and how they manage to cope and survive.

Second, examination of the research and the significance of the Theory of Transformative Coping in the psychological science, leading to the proposition of the Transformative Coping Model (TCM). TCM, introduced by Corry et al. (2013), provides a practical framework to comprehend the ways of coping by the *Kakure Kirishitan* through the severe persecution under the Tokugawa authorities. This theory states that humans are capable to combine creativity and spirituality to reinterpret stressful situations they faced in order to cope with oppressive circumstances. The outcomes from the study of the *Kakure Kirishitan* are brought into interaction with the framework of TCM to arrive at a preliminary conclusion about how the *Kakure Kirishitan* had employed creativity and spirituality to cope with the stress of persecution, and eventually build up a new identity with a renewed meaning of their religious beliefs.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 The emergence of the *Kakure Kirishitan*

This section contains results obtained by the author during the research. Culturally, the term *Kakure Kirishitan* is used today to refer to the members of a religious group in Japan who continued the religious practice which was developed among the Christians in hiding since the seventeenth century when Christianity was severely suppressed by the ruling class in Japan (Nagasaki Prefectural Culture Advancement and World Heritage Division, 2018). In this paper, the term *Kakure Kirishitan* is used to denote the Christians who suffered the oppression of the Tokugawa regime during those challenging years of the seventeenth century,

Through analysis of correspondences and documents revolving around the anti-Christian political moves in Japan in the sixteenth century, Bascaro (1973) concluded that the opposition of Toyotomi Hideyoshi against Christianity was not only social and religious in nature, but definitely also a reaction to the perceived threat of foreign advances. Screech (2012) agreed with Bascaro's (1973) contention that fear of invasion was one of the main factors of the anti-Christian campaigns in Japan in the sixteenth century, apart from the discrediting internal rivalry between the Western countries and missionary groups in Japan, and the mismatch of Christianity as a religion to the local culture.

Hagemann (1942) noted that the anti-Christian actions in Japan, particularly during the years from 1639 to 1658, was a political measure against Western influence (specifically Portuguese and Spanish). He referred to *Kirishito-ki*, a manual written by Inouye Chikugonoo-kami, the first appointed chief inquisitor against Christians who took the office from 1640 to 1658 (Hagemann, 1842). Anesaki (1938) observed that Inouye may be himself be an apostate since he was so experienced in dealing with Christians.

In *Kirishito-ki*, Inouye recorded the methods he had employed to deal with the Christians and the results of his work during his term as the chief inquisitor (Hagemann, 1942). First, there were concerted efforts to stop Christian missionaries, religious writings, and sacred objects from entering Japan. Foreigners and any form of Christian items were no longer admitted, and death penalty was accorded to those who were caught smuggling them into Japan, including all those who were found on the offending ships. In addition, all Japanese persons were forbidden to leave the country in case the Christians attempt to communicate with the Christian world outside the soil of Japan (Hagemann, 1942). This is the step to hinder the spread and practice of Christianity in the country.

Christians in hiding or possession of Christian writings and sacred objects were to be reported. Inouye offered reward for informants, so the risk of exposure was high for both missionaries (whether those who were still in Japan or those who smuggled in) and Christians in hiding. Yet, Inouye admitted in *Kirishito* that the success of this step is short-lived, as the price of the reward had to be increased over the years. In Inouye's words: "(initially,) Christians had confessed immediately without concealing anything; later, however, they endeavored to conceal everything, as far as possible." (Hagemann, 1942).

In early January each year, the *Shumon-aratame-yaku* (anti-Christian inquisition) would be held in the temple for the common people, and in a fortress for the *samurai* (warrior). The *e-fumi* (the treading of a Christian picture under foot) ceremony would be conducted before the chief magistrate. All who were present would be required to put their foot on a Christian sacred picture while the chief magistrate and his officials would observe if there was any who hesitated. Inouye wrote from his experience: "in the *e-fumi*, Christian women showed signs of great excitement, heavily and breaking out into perspiration; at times, even if they trod on the picture, they endeavored secretly to show it reverence" (Hagemann, 1942). It is tough to escape detection as neighboring families were called to the *e-fumi* ceremony together, and their statements would have to hold together (Hagemann, 1942).

Another method to expose Christians was by house-searches for Christian sacred objects and images. Christian noblemen often engrave sacred images on their sword guards. Christians hid them in cushions, incense-boats, and herbs. In some provinces, the owners of the houses under search were required to take an oath in the name of the Christian and also Japanese gods, which, by itself, may have exposed the Christians: "the one taking the oath had to call on the God of the Christians and the Japanese gods to strengthen his assertion that he was not a Christian. For a Christian this would have been apostasy. Should anyone refuse, his religious faith was immediately suspected." (Hagemann, 1942). There were also extreme measures to detect Christians such as the digging up corpses to examine if there were Christian marks on the dead bodies (Hagemann, 1942).

Severe torments and tortures were inflicted on suspects and apostates of Christianity when necessary. Inouye noted in *Kirishito-ki*: "The infliction of torments was radical means of extirpating Christianity. Those Christians who did apostatize and who were detected in the *Shumon-aratame* were subjected to excruciating tortures, protracted till death or

apostacy ensued." (Hagemann, 1942). Boxer (1951) described a method of torture known as *anatsurushi* ("hanging in the pit"), said to be most effective for inducing apostasy:

*"The victim was tightly bound around the body as high as the breast (one hand left free to give the sign of recantation) and then hung downwards from a gallows into a pit which usually contained excreta and other filth, the top of the pit being level with his knees. In order to give the blood some vent, the forehead was lightly slashed with a knife. Some of the stronger martyrs live for more than a week in this position, but the majority did not survive more than a day or two"* (Boxer, 1951).

Inouye, however, did not employ force mindlessly. Hagemann (1942) observed that his method was "tempered by psychology," aiming for apostates and not martyrs. Hagemann (1942) observed Inouye's comments that, during inquiry, the officials should endeavor to understand the sentiments of Christians and sympathize with them, and that apostasy may be induced by a rational approach: "(to challenge) the Christians to ask God for a miracle; as they believed miracles, and since no miracle would occur, their faith would then be shaken."

Inouye was even recorded as being successful in getting missionaries to apostasize. In earlier years, missionaries continue to come to Japan although they were subjected to severe tortures. Two years before the inquisition was set up, in 1638, four missionaries were captured and brought to Edo (now Tokyo) before the Shogun himself. Having no success in dealing with them, the missionaries were delivered to Inouye, who claimed that he was successful in bringing two of the missionaries to apostasy (Hagemann, 1942). In 1643, Inouye recorded another success of having ten missionaries apostasized (Hagemann, 1942). Hagemann (1942) took note that there were missionaries who apostasized and took on a Japanese religion in later years.

In the acclaimed Japanese classic novel *Silence*, Shusaku Endo dramatized the helpless situation of the missionaries rather well. In the episode of the torture of Father Garrpe, his inquisitor persuaded him to apostasize in order to save the lives of Japanese Christians who were being tortured: "If you are a father possessed of true Christian mercy, you ought to have pity for these three unfortunates wrapped around with straw coats. You shouldn't stand by idle and see them killed." (Endo, 2016). The leading characters in *Silence*, Father Fereira and Father Rodriguez both eventually apostasized under the pressure and took on Japanese culture to live in Japan.

Despite the reported results of his efforts, Inouye found that the goal of complete obliteration of Christians from Japan was still far from achievement. In 1657, six hundred hidden Christians were captured in an attempt to fetter a potential Christian uprising (Hagemann, 1942). Although Christianity was hit hard during those challenging years, it seemed to have continued to exist, being discovered and punished from time to time. Under such pressing condition, the Christians in Japan went into deep hiding and became the *Kakure Kirishitan*.

More than two hundred years later, Christianity returned to Japan after the signing of the Treaty of Peace and Amity with Commodore Perry of the United States of America in 1854. An article entitled "The Discovery of the Hidden Christians: Where is the Statue of the Virgin Mary?" published on the web portal of the Japan Tourism Agency (<https://www.mlit.go.jp/tagengo-db/common/001561260.pdf>) recounted the incident of the re-discovery of the *Kakure Kirishitan* in 1865. This happened when a group of fourteen or fifteen from Ukima met Father Bernard Petitjean at the then newly built Oura Cathedral (Spae, 1963). In the words of Father Bernard Petitjean:

*"A woman of about 40 or 50 years old approached me and, with her hands pressed to her breast, said, 'Our hearts are the same as yours. . . . Where is the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary?' At the sacred name of the Virgin, all my doubts left me. I knew that I was in the presence of the descendants of the ancient Christians of Japan."* (Letter of Father Bernard Petitjean, 18 March 1865)

Under the harsh condition of oppression and persecution, it is intriguing how the *Kakure Kirishitan* cope with the immense stress to uphold their religious belief. The understanding of their psychological mechanism of stress-coping would be valuable for all who are living under hostile condition due to differences in cultural, religious, and, even, sociopolitical ideals.

### 3.2 The survival of the *Kakure Kirishitan*

In the earlier section about the emergence of the *Kakure Kirishitan*, the challenging experience of the Christians in Japan during the seventeenth century was expounded. the public executions and displays of punishment of Christians during this period were meant to instil fear amongst the people so that the non-Christians stay away from Christianity and the Christians may give up their religious belief for the fear of death, either by hanging in the pit or slowly boiled to death. However, despite these horrifying threats, there are still a significant number who refused to recant. These individuals—most of them were peasants, farmers, or even small-scale merchants—went into hiding as a new community of *Kakure Kirishitan* (Hidden Christians). They chose to practise their faith in secret in remote villages and even on isolated islands to distant themselves from the authorities. They adapt themselves into a new reality where every act of worship was carried out with creativity so as to escape the eyes and ears of the majority others around them, and yet retain the spiritual significance. They devise their own unique methods of resistance which are grounded in secrecy, symbolism, and community solidarity. They transform themselves to become “invisible” to the state, and thus coping with the enormous sociopolitical stress.

#### 3.2.1 Creative syncretism of the *Kakure Kirishitan*

One method of survival practiced by the *Kakure Kirishitan* was creative religious syncretism. This is done by blending or adapting Buddhist practices (occasionally Shinto practice as well) together with Christian practices, symbols, rituals, and also terminologies. With this, not only that they disguise themselves from the Tokugawa authorities, but their religious beliefs and practices had also evolved in such a way to allow them to hold on to their faith in a hostile living environment. The *Kakure Kirishitan* had creatively innovated the beliefs of Christianity in the context of the majority religious practices in Japan such as Buddhism and Shintoism, even the indigenous animistic spiritualism of Japan. Whelan (1992) observed that the survival of the *Kakure Kirishitan* in those challenging years depends on their adaptability to the dominant cultural environment. Using this strategy, the community of *Kakure Kirishitan* had successfully maintain and sustain their underground religious identity without being persecuted by the shogunate.

For example, instead of building churches which will be a dangerous act, the *Kakure Kirishitan* would modify the Buddhist altars or temples into a dual-purpose site for the worship of both religions. Nosco (2007) noted that, as required by the state's religious policy, the hidden Christians would register themselves with the local Buddhist temples and “master the role of being nominally Buddhist as required, and secretly something forbidden.”

Another syncretic strategy of the *Kakure Kirishitan* is to disguise the statue of the sacred Virgin Mary as Kannon, the bodhisattva of compassion, one of the female deities in Buddhist beliefs (Whelan, 1992). Harrington (1980) deliberated on six categories of *nandogami* (closet gods) which enshrined sacred images and objects in Christian beliefs such as cross, picture of Christ, holy water, and so on—rather like the various kinds of Shinto household shrines in Japan—which was upheld in the practices of the *Kakure Kirishitan* in Ikitsuki. Another important practice which was transformed and adopted by the *Kakure Kirishitan* were prayers in “a garbled but recognizable Latin” (Spae, 1963), recited as a ritual, later modified into Japanese phonetics which resembles Buddhist chants to mask and hide their original traits of Christianity. The variation of the *Ave Maria* prayer used by the *Kakure*

*Kirishitan* in Ikitsuki and the Goto Islands presented by Nosco (1993) against its Latin original is an interesting example of these “transformed” chants.

### 3.2.2 Oral traditions and symbolic secrecy

Symbolic secrecy and oral transmissions are commonly practised in the community of the *Kakure Kirishitan*. They used encoded symbols as secretly shared code that only they can understand, thus concealing their religious identity from being detected by the authorities. Some symbols that were used includes fish and cross were hidden within embroidery patterns and carved into the household objects (Hagemann, 1942). These hidden and encoded symbols could be recognized as transformative rituals where people in a situation of adversity used to establish a brand new and meaningful state that will enhance their resilience and unity.

Other than encoded symbols, there was also the secret transmission of their texts. In the situation where written Christian scriptures are absent or prohibited, the memory of the texts became sacred. The community of *Kakure Kirishitan* has an organized way to ensure that sacred religious knowledge is effectively transmitted to the new generation. It may be through night-time storytelling and also through ritual prayers in the community. Harrington (1980) explained how groups of believers were organized in units of *compania*, each led by a *mideshi* (“disciple”) who organize monthly meetings of the *compania* like for a Buddhist lecture meeting or for members of a religious group in medieval Japan. These meetings were probably the community setting in which religious lessons were transmitted, and community bonds were strengthened.

The oral traditions such as prayers, religious songs or hymns, and other sacred images were also transformed into encoded symbols in the form of narratives or stories from the Bible. In written forms, some important Christian terms (in Latin) were retained in its Japanese variant, while other terms were either localised or euphemized until they may not convey the original meaning. For example, Nosco (1993) noted that, in a Japanese variant of the story of Noah and the ark, the term *Deusu* (from Latin *Deus* for “God”) was preserved, but Noah was named *Papa-Maruji* (Pope-martyr) and the story extensively modified beyond the biblical narrative.

### 3.3 Introducing transformative coping model

Various theories had been proposed to explain the stress-coping processes of human. The Transformative Coping Model (TCM) strives to provide information about the psychological process of how people deal with adversity. Corry et al. (2013) referred to the Theory of Transformative Coping proposed earlier by Corry, Mallet, and Lewis, which argued that positive transformation and personal growth can take place through the combined application of creativity and spirituality. They developed the Creative Coping Scale and the Spiritual Coping Scale to test the theory. Creative coping is the mechanism by which individuals engage creativity in order to cope with stress. Spiritual coping is the mechanism by which individuals engage religious and spiritual means to cope with stress. By using the Creative Coping Scale and the Spiritual Coping Scale, they discovered strong positive correlations between creative coping and spiritual coping, and that both creativity and spirituality were applied in coping. Their findings are consistent with the proposition of the Theory of Transformative Coping.

Building on this idea, Corry et al. (2014) offer a theoretical framework for maximizing the positive impacts of the creativity-spirituality construct on mental health through the use of transformative coping. In this paper, they reinforced the Theory of Transformative Coping, stating that “the personal capacities of creativity and spirituality form a construct which, when applied as a positive and pro-active coping strategy, provides individuals with the combined and amplified mental health benefits of both concepts, thereby leading to positive transformation and more effective long-term coping.” They argued that every

individual has the potential to be creative and spiritual. Integrating creativity and spirituality, TCM is dynamic and has the capacity to significantly alter an individual's life.

In another study in applying the TCM, Corry et al. (2015) found an effective and intricate relationship between spirituality and creativity in the process of coping and that there is transforming power in both of them. Their qualitative research indicates that individuals who engage in creative endeavours often exhibit increased levels of personal growth and spiritual connectedness. This observation suggests that in addition to problem-solving, creativity fosters emotional healing and self-discovery. Creative practices like writing, music, and painting can be effective tools for transformative change. People can examine existential questions and express their emotions through these creative endeavours. In addition, the collaborative nature of some artistic endeavours, such as group art therapy, promotes social support and community formation. This multifaceted approach aligns with TCM's emphasis on all-encompassing coping strategies that consider the psychological, emotional, and social aspects of adversity.

According to TCM, the integration of spirituality and creativity is a comprehensive approach to coping. The combination of creativity and spirituality enables people to transcend limitations of traditional coping mechanisms, fostering resilience and personal development. For instance, by encouraging emotional restraint and concentration, spiritual disciplines like prayer and meditation can boost creativity. On the other hand, creative activities can enrich spiritual experiences by providing concrete expressions of faith and purpose. The connection between spirituality and creativity in a TCM process helps people reinterpret hardship as a chance for transformation. People can discover new opportunities and growth paths by approaching problems from a creative-spiritual perspective. This perspective reduces the detrimental impacts of stress while also enhancing overall wellbeing (Corry et al., 2014).

Application of TCM is observed in psychotherapy treatments, community projects, and personal coping. According to Leira, Lee, Smith, Quin, and Maul (2023), culturally sensitive approaches that respect people's creative and spiritual qualities are important. Treatment can be more effective and relevant for those with strong spiritual beliefs if religious teachings and symbols are incorporated into it. Johnson et al. (2014) emphasize the potential for neuroscience-informed therapies that maximize the emotional and cognitive effects of religious symbols. By understanding the brain mechanisms that support transformative coping, practitioners can develop targeted strategies to maximize its benefits. For instance, guided visualization exercises based on religious symbols may be very helpful for those going through extremely stressful or traumatic situations. Corry et al. (2015) found that group-based creative activities, such as cooperative art projects or community storytelling, can boost the transformational advantages of TCM.

The TCM is a viable framework to deal with the existential, emotional, and psychological challenges in the face of adversity. It offers a comprehensive coping strategy that promotes resilience, development, and well-being by the integration of creativity and spirituality. It is observed that the creativity and spirituality elements are appropriate in the situation of the *Kakure Kirishitan* who encountered sociopolitical tension due to their religious belief. Perhaps TCM is relevant to explain how the *Kakure Kirishitan* overcome their challenges to preserve their religious belief for hundreds of years.

### 3.4 Applying transformative coping model on the *Kakure Kirishitan*

This study attempts to apply TCM—which emphasises the roles of spirituality and creativity—to examine how the *Kakure Kirishitan* survived centuries of persecution during the Tokugawa era. Based on TCM, there is a dynamic relationship between creativity and spirituality in producing transformative effects which will aid the process of stress-coping. This section combines the understanding of the situation of the *Kakure Kirishitan* in seventeenth-century Japan and the conceptual framework of TCM in order to observe how religious resilience supported by adaptive innovation could have been the crucial survival

strategies for the *Kakure Kirishitan* to cope with the oppressive sociopolitical conditions and preserve their religious identity.

### 3.4.1 Spirituality as the core of faith

The foundation of *Kakure Kirishitan*'s resilience in the face of religious persecution was their spirituality. According to Corry et al. (2013), spirituality gives people mental strength and a sense of purpose in times of crisis. For the *Kakure Kirishitan*, their religious faith was an essential component of who they were and a source of hope for their continual existence. Despite the Tokugawa shogunate's anti-Christian decrees, the *Kakure Kirishitan* maintained their faith by practicing their beliefs in secret, fostering a hidden religious culture. They live their day-to-day life on the disguise of being Buddhists and practice their religion in secret (Nosco, 2007). Their faith was kept strong by religious symbols hidden in secret such as embroidered or engraved crosses in obscured spots and the Virgin Mary disguised as the Buddhist deity Kannon (Hagemann, 1942; Whelan, 1992). Their prayers and rituals were modified after the fashion of the majority religious practices in their context, so that their spiritual connection with God could be sustained inconspicuously (Nosco, 1993; Spaë, 1963). Furthermore, spirituality served as a unifying factor to foster a feeling of purpose among the *Kakure Kirishitan*. Even in times of danger and isolation, they had organized their community in small groups for secret worship, prayers, and religious education (Harrington, 1980).

### 3.4.2 Creativity as an adaptive strategy

The *Kakure Kirishitan*'s ability to innovate and overcome repressive circumstances was equally essential to their existence. According to Corry et al. (2015), creativity enables people to reinterpret problems and come up with solutions, especially in challenging situations. In the community of the *Kakure Kirishitan* of the seventeenth century, creativity in both material and immaterial forms were observed.

In material form, they blended Christian symbols and customs with aspects of Japanese culture—adapted Christian images in Japanese embroidery and engraving, and producing the sacred Virgin in the image of Kannon, the Buddhist deity (Hagemann, 1942; Whelan, 1992). In the family, the *Kakure Kirishitan* creatively designed shrine-like *nandogami* (closet gods) for their Christian sacred objects such as cross, picture of Christ, holy water, and so on (Harrington, 1980).

In immaterial form, oral traditions—which were used to preserve religious teachings—were often presented like Japanese folktale in the *Kakure Kirishitan* community to hide their original contents, like the modified story of Noah and the ark mentioned by Nosco (1993). Not having access to official clergy or literature, they emulated the local religious community and devised structures of small groups to ensure that the essential elements of their faith were passed down through the generations (Harrington, 1980). These innovations made it possible for the *Kakure Kirishitan* to secretly practise Christianity while appearing to conform to the mainstream religious standards of the day.

### 3.4.3 The transformative coping process of the *Kakure Kirishitan*

In the preceding subsections, it is observed that the coping strategy of the *Kakure Kirishitan* under persecution during the Tokugawa period depicted the characteristics which apparently aligns with the Theory of Transformative Coping. The Theory of Transformative Coping stipulates a process of stress-coping where an adverse situation is re-evaluated to derive new, empowering meanings (Corry et al., 2013). The *Kakure Kirishitan* of the seventeenth century Japan seemed to have demonstrated such traits as they cope with the stress of aggressive suppression. Instead of passively accepting the adversity befalling them, they creatively amended and adapted their religious expressions

in a meaningful way so that they can reconcile their spiritual identity as Christians with the existential challenges.

Through the transformative efforts of reconstructing their religious being, they had maintained their connection to their God and also facilitated the transmission of their faith to the subsequent generations of their community. They have achieved this by creative religious syncretism and the use of oral traditions and symbolic secrets. Through the creative act of adopting the forms of some local religious practices, the *Kakure Kirishitan* were able to secure cultural acceptance. By the persistent and resolute efforts to uphold their spiritual and religious tenets, albeit modified to a new and even unconventional form, they managed to preserve their unique religious identity, and even helped them to maintain a sense of mental sanity in the face of such cognitive disturbance. This is, indeed, a demonstration of effective transformative coping (Corry et al., 2013). Figure 1 is a schematic illustration of the process of transformative coping undertaken by the *Kakure Kirishitan* to maintain their religious identity via spiritual faith supported by creativity as an adaptive strategy.

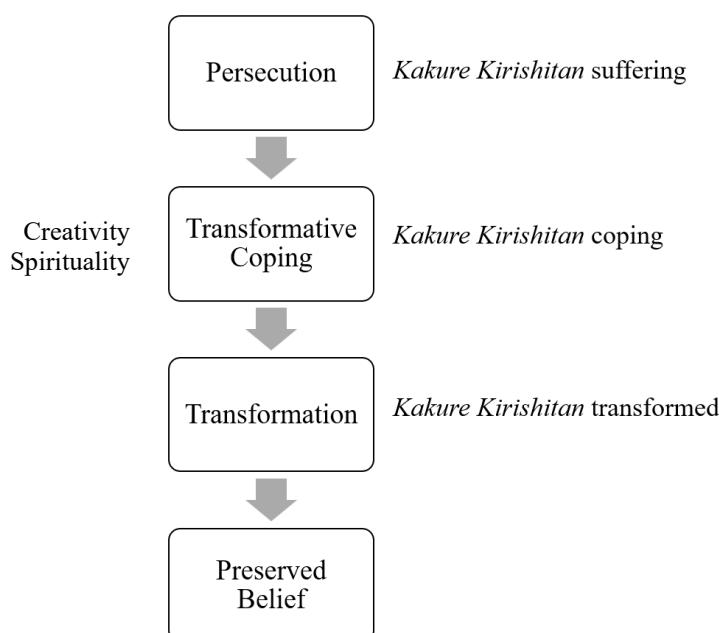


Fig. 1. Schematic illustration of the process of transformative coping

#### 4. Conclusions

This study illustrates an interdisciplinary effort to understand how individuals and communities re-evaluate hardships through the process of meaning-making that promote growth and resilience. The subject of the *Kakure Kirishitan* of Japan had often been a research interest in historical, anthropological, sociological, and archaeological studies. This study, however, attempts to apply the Transformative Coping Model (TCM)—a theory of the psychological science—to explain the stress-coping mechanism of the *Kakure Kirishitan* during their most challenging years.

Christians in Japan were under severe oppression by the Tokugawa regime in the seventeenth century. Those who went into hiding during those challenging years became the *Kakure Kirishitan* (Hidden Christians). In hiding, they survived two centuries of hostile condition for the Christians in Japan. Applying the Theory of Transformative Coping in the situation of the *Kakure Kirishitan*, it is observed that they could have adopted some forms of transformative coping tactics to cope with the persecution they were facing. These transformative coping tactics involved the dynamic combination of creativity and spirituality in the process of deriving new meaning in an adverse situation. Facing life-

threatening stress, the *Kakure Kirishitan* improvised their religious practices and rituals, and had eventually been successful in preserving their religious belief.

The story of the *Kakure Kirishitan* provides important insights into the psychological process of stress-coping, particularly related to the stress under systematic persecution. The resolute religiosity and versatile innovation demonstrated by the *Kakure Kirishitan* in their religious life illustrated how spirituality and creativity can be integrated to bring about a transformative coping mechanism in their stressful souls. The Theory of Transformative Coping, applied through the TCM proposed by Corry, Mallett, Lewis, and Abdel-Khalek in 2013 is reasonably adequate to explain the success of the *Kakure Kirishitan* in their stress-coping efforts. The observed experiences of the *Kakure Kirishitan* aligned with the conceptual framework of TCM. Under extreme persecution, the *Kakure Kirishitan* went through a psychological transformation by drawing upon creative and spiritual resources. Their strategies not only preserved their religious identity but also cultivated a new form of religious expression which is deeply embedded in both religious and cultural context.

Through the application of TCM in the historical case of the *Kakure Kirishitan*, this study bridges historical analysis with psychological theory. The understanding of how the *Kakure Kirishitan* succeeded to preserve their religious belief and identity by transformative coping is a valuable insight. This insight serves as an encouragement for religious communities under persecution, assuring them that internal transformation could be the mean for survival leading to innovative expressions of faith and collective identity.

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## Author Contribution

Conceptualization, X.C.; Methodology, X.C; Software, N.A.; Validation, K.K; Formal Analysis, N.A.; Investigation, X.C; Resources, X.C; Data Curation, X.C; Writing – Original Draft Preparation, X.C; Writing – Review & Editing, S.F.C; Visualization, X.C; Supervision, K.K; Project Administration, K.K; and Funding Acquisition, X.C.

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## Declaration of Generative AI Use

During the preparation of this work, the authors used Grammarly to assist in improving grammar, clarity, and academic tone of the manuscript. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and took full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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