

## In Search of Japan's Hidden Christians: A Story of Suppression, Secrecy and Survival

**John Dougill**

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*These pages are sure to ignite plentiful curiosity toward a community not often afforded much historical attention.*

Oxford-educated John Dougill takes readers on an unconventional tour of Japan, tracing its shadowy Christian past. From early missionaries to contemporary monuments, Dougill puts a Japanese religious minority in its historical context with fascinating results.

*In Search of Japan's Hidden Christians* is a history, but it is equally a travelogue. In service of deepening his stories, Dougill visits the Japanese locales where missionaries first landed, and seeks the remnants of their impacts. The work starts off by connecting contemporary Japan to that distant past, and the result is thrilling: that beach, that stretch of rocks. That's where it began.

Dougill's gift for turning religious history and folklore into an adventure, one with both a high body count and a reverence for culture, makes for fascinating reading, particularly since his subject is one not often explored. He puts guns and doctrine into the hands of the islanders who first encountered foreign ships, bringing into relief both their interest in the new visitors and their curious first interactions with monotheism.

The awkwardness of translating the story of Christ into a difficult language, and for an audience well versed in Buddhist worldviews, comes across well on Dougill's pages. It becomes striking that converts were made at all; it becomes unsurprising that leaders interested in trade used conversion to their advantage. A brief interlude of peaceful religious mixing during the sixteenth century found its end in suspicion and suppression, though. Dougill proves equally deft at detailing how poor converts maintained their new religious identities even when under tremendous threats.

Martyrs pepper these pages, as does the meeting of disparate cultures. Hundreds of years of practicing in secret led to a Japanese Christianity not wholly aligned to Europe's Christianity, and Dougill's accounts of religious developments lead to some fascinating theological questions. These pages are sure to ignite plentiful curiosity toward a community not often afforded much historical attention. *In Search of Japan's Hidden Christians* is a sure hit amongst those interested in global Christianity.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (Winter 2016)

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