

# The Three Christian Children of Yonaguni: An Island Folktale

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## Abstract

In November 2013, the Tokyo Yonagunians' Association performed a local folktale, in the Yonagunian language, on stage: the story of Mutu Miyara, the first Christian in the Yaeyamas, and his martyrdom at the hands of the Satsuma regime. His children were banished to outlying islands, including Yonaguni. The tale will be translated from the Yonagunian language (*Dunanmunui*) here.

## 1. Christianity in the Yaeyamas

The background to the story begins in 1624, when Father Juan de Los Angeles Rueda arrived on Ishigaki island (Tamashiro 2014a: §3, and 2014b: 1-13).

Rueda, a native of Burgos, Spain and based in the Philippines, had previously attempted to spread Christianity in Kyūshū, at first openly in the early 1600s, then in secret as the Edo *bakufu*'s persecution increased. Mentally and physically exhausted from his years in caves and mountain huts, he returned to Manila by way of Nagasaki in 1620.

In August 1624, two Japanese Christians, Jacopo Tomonaga Gorōbē (ハコボ朝長五郎兵衛) and Thomas Nishi Rokuzemon, or Tomas de San Jacinto (トマス西六左衛門) arrived at Manila and reinvigorated Father Rueda's desire to preach in Japan. On August 15, 1624, he set out for the Ryūkyū Islands. Reaching Ishigaki, he met the island's leader, Yeishō Ishigaki (石垣永将)<sup>1</sup>, known locally as Mutu Miyara (元宮良 or 本宮良). Rueda stayed with Mutu Miyara for twenty days and taught the Gospels to him and his family, eventually baptizing them.

When Satsuma officials learned of the interactions and the baptisms, they banished Mutu Miyara to distant Tonaki and Fr. Rueda to Aguni, both small islands located west of the main Okinawan island. While claiming that he was being moved to yet another island, the Satsuma put Fr. Rueda to death on the open sea near Aguni. Jacopo and Thomas, having returned to Kyūshū, were also put to the flames, as were several more members of Mutu Miyara's family back on Ishigaki. In 1633, his home and property were entirely confiscated by the Satsuma and repurposed as a warehouse (the Kuramoto 蔵元) to hold taxes extracted from the islanders. Mutu Miyara himself was burned at the stake while in exile as the Satsuma strengthened their control of the islands.

While the tragic tale of Mutu Miyara (Yeishō Ishigaki) is well-known, the fate of his children is less so, and we shall see what happened to them in this folk tale from Yonaguni.

The text was prepared by Mr. Takenobu Nosoko, a native speaker of Yonagunian born in 1949, and was performed on stage at the Tokyo Yonagunians' Association gathering in November 2013. Sections are divided based on when one speaker traded positions with another.<sup>2</sup>

The romanization mirrors that of James Hepburn for Common Japanese (CJ), with three

<sup>1</sup> The standard Japanese pronunciation of 永将 today is *Eishō*, but people from Yonaguni and the Yaeyamas consistently pronounced it *Yeishō*, distinguishing *e* from *ye* as Japanese no longer does.

<sup>2</sup> On the stage, the present author read sections 1, 6, 8, and 11.

additions: *ng* represents [ŋ], and unaspirated *t* is distinguished from its aspirated counterpart by placing a left apostrophe for the aspirated version and a right (closing) apostrophe for the unaspirated one. Where no mark appears, [t] is pronounced indifferently without regard for aspiration. In addition, while long vowels are not generally contrastive in the Yonagunian language, they have been marked with macrons in cases where speakers uttered them.

Because Yonagunian word order is so close to that of CJ, the Japanese gloss can be read as it is without an additional line of translation. In cases where semi-archaic or dialectal Japanese was closer to the Yonagunian word, that form was selected when it did not impede readability.

## 2. The story

The story of the Christian graves on Yonaguni island

*Dunan chima ni aru Kirishitan nu haga nu hanashi*

Yonaguni island LOC Christian POSS grave POSS story

与那国 島 にある キリシタン の 墓 の 話

1. This is a story from long ago; 380 years ago. Please listen to it!<sup>3</sup>

*Nkachi nkachi, sambyagu hatidu nin mai nu hanashi anggā; t'i turashi wārei!*

past REDUP 380 years ago POSS talk CONJ listen try to POL  
昔 昔 三百八十年 前 の 話 あるが 聞いて 見て 下され

2. On Yaeyama (Ishigaki) island, there was a Shuri official named Mutu-Miyara.

*Dama nu chima ni, Shuri Ūfu nu dagusa "Mutu Miyara" ndi ndu t'u*

Yaeyama POSS island LOC Shuri gov't POSS official [personal name] called person

八重山 の 島 に 首里王府 の 役者 元宮良 と言う 人

*nga watan di n dou.*

TOP was-POL REPT EMPH

が おられた と ぞ

3. At that time on the Yamato [mainland Japanese] islands, Christianity was forbidden, and the province of Satsuma, which controlled Okinawa, issued an order saying that Christians on the [Okinawan] islands, were to be apprehended.

*Unu manguru nu Damatu nu chima ya, Kirishitan kinshi naibui ti,*

that time POSS Yamato POSS island TOP Christian forbid become

<sup>3</sup> The pronunciation of *wārei*, a polite suffix appended to imperative verbs, varied amongst speakers between *wārei* [wa:rei] and *wāri* [wa:ri:], with the former having very strong rising intonation at the end.

その とき の 大和 の 島 は、キリシタン 禁止 なりおり

*Unna nu chima usami butaru Satsuma nu kuni ga Shuri Ūfu ki*

Okinawa POSS island control was-ATTR Satsuma POSS countryTOP Shuri gov't to  
 沖縄 の 島 治め おったる 薩摩 の 国 が 首里王府 へ<sup>4</sup>

*meirei kiti, chima du Kirishitan turi shimai kiri ndi du naibuta ndi ndu.*

order do island POSS Christians capture do REP be-PAST is said  
 命令 して 島 ぞ キリシタン とりしまい し と なりおった という

4. The Shuri regime official on Ishigaki island, Mutu-Miyara, worshipped Christ in secret. Another official discovered that he was a “hidden Christian” and informed on him to the regime. The Satsuma ordered that he be killed. And they ordered that his children be sent away to other islands.<sup>5</sup>

*Dama nu chima nu Shuri Ūfu nu dagusa Mutu Miyara ya kaguriti Kirisuto*

Yaeyama POSS island POSS Shuri gov't POSS official Mutu Miyara TOP hide-and Christ  
 八重山 の 島 の 首里王府 の 役者 元宮良 は 隠れて キリスト

*du ungami butan ga du fuga nu dagusa nga mikkoku kiru tashi*

OBJ worship was EMPH-OBJ other POSS official TOP inform do  
 ぞ 拜め おった がぞ 他 の 役者 が 密告 する

*Mutu Miyara ya Satsuma nu kuni gara chi shi, datikuru ndi.*

Mutu Miyara TOP Satsuma POSS country from flame do kill REPT  
 元宮良 や 薩摩 の 国 から 火 し、 殺す と

*Mata, agami nta ya chimanagashi kiri ndi nu meirei du atan tu nā.*

and child PL TOP exile do REPT POSS order TOP was REPT  
 また 子 たちは 島流し しろ と の 命令 ぞ あった とな

5. As directed by the Satsuma, the Shuri court put Mutu-Miyara to the flames, killing him. His children were banished to Yonaguni, Miyako, and Hateruma.

<sup>4</sup> The postposition *nki* corresponds with Shuri Okinawan *nkai ~ ngkai*, which has been traced to CJ *no ka e* の処へ by Basil Chamberlain in his groundbreaking 1893-95 study of Shuri for the Asiatic Society of Japan, but will here be translated with modern CJ *e* へ.

<sup>5</sup> The word *dagusa* corresponds to CJ *yakusha* 役者, but in Japanese the more common word for such an official is *yakunin* 役人.

*Unna nu Shuri Ūfu ya Satsuma nu tūri, Mutu Miyara du chi shi, datikuru*  
 Okinawa POSS Shuri gov't TOP Satsuma POSS way Mutu Miyara OBJ flamedo kill  
 沖縄 の 首里王府 は 薩摩 の とおり 元宮良 ぞ 火 し 殺した

*shi. Agami nta ya, Dunan, Myāgu, Hateruma nki chimanagashi kitan tuna.*  
 do child PL TOP Yonaguni Miyako Hateruma to exile did REPT  
 し 子 たち は 与那国 宮古 波照間 へ 島流し した とな

6. Three of the children, it is said, were sent to Yonaguni.

*Dunan-chima nki chimanagashi kyarū agami ya mitaintu du ataru ndi ndu nsai.*  
 Yonaguni Island to exile do-PS children TOP 3 people EMPH total said REPT  
 与那国島 へ 島流し される 子 は 三人の人 ぞ 当たる という

7. The farmers and other islanders on Yonaguni welcomed the children, treating them warmly as the children grew up and lived out their entire lives.

*Dunan nu hyagusu-nta, chimantu ya, unu agami-nta nga fudui nniruta*  
 Yonaguni POSS farmers-PL islanders TOP those children-PL TOP grow until death  
 与那国 の 百姓たち 島の人 は その 子たち が 成長し 死ぬまで

*mutinashi turimuti kita ndi ndō.*  
 take care of manage did REPT EMPH  
 もてなし 取り持った した と ぞ

8. The grave of these three people is in a place called Damatu-baru.

*Unu mit'aint'u nu haga ya Damatu-baru ndi ndu duguru ni an sai.*  
 those 3 people POSS grave TOP Damatu-baru REPT TOP place LOC exists REPT  
 その 三人の人 の 墓 は 大和原 と 言う 所 に ある

9. Until after the war, a woman named Urasata nu Kana led everyone in prayer [for their souls] there during the Shimi festival.<sup>6</sup>

*Ikusa nu atu ya, Shimi ni ya Urasata nu Kana ndi ndu tun ga uya nai*  
 war POSS after TOP Ch'ing Ming in TOP Urasata nu Kana called wife TOP minder become

<sup>6</sup> *Uya* (CJ *oya*) means “parent” in both languages, but in this case it refers to minding and taking care of the grave. *Shimi* is the Chinese festival (*Ch'ing-ming* 清明 in Chinese), usually observed around April 5, in which people visit their ancestors' graves to tend to them. *Urasata* is a local family name deriving from *Urasati* (< *Urasaki* 浦崎) plus *-ya* (“house” 屋).

戦 の 後 は 清明 には 浦崎のカナ という 妻 が 親 なり

*būru shi ungami butan tu na.*

all together pray was REPT

全員で 拝み おった とな

10. The “Damatu-baru” that appears at the beginning of the song “Famous Places on Yonaguni” is this one, where these three rest.<sup>7</sup>

*“Dunan chima meisō meguri” di ndu uta nu nagiin hadimi ni t’undi kun*

Yonaguni island site tour called song POSS start LOC come

与那国 島 名所 巡り と言う 歌 の 始め に 飛んで来る

*suga “Damatu-baru” ndi ndu duguru nki naiburu.*

TOP Damatu-baru called place to is

のが 大和原 と言う 所 に なりおる

11. Why could this be?

*Nundi ka yā?*

why Q

なんで かな

### Abbreviations:

ATTR: attributive

CONJ: conjunction

EMPH: emphatic particle

LOC: location particle

OBJ: object marker

PAST: past tense

PL: plural

POL: polite suffix

POSS: possessive marker

PS: passive

Q: question

REDUP: reduplication

REPT: reported speech marker

TOP: topic marker

### Bibliography:

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<sup>7</sup> During practice, speakers varied between a flat falling intonation, in which the word *naiburu* was pronounced [naiburu] or [najburu], and a very strong rising intonation in which the final *u* moved toward *o*, making [najburow] or even [najburōw]. This may be a hypercorrection on the part of the speaker.

玉城 功一 (2014b) 月刊やいま 2014 年 12 月号 1-13 頁「八重山キリシタン事件とカトリック石垣教会」Yaima Monthly, Dec. 2014, pp. 1-13 “The Yaeyama Christian Incidents and the Ishigaki Catholic Church”.

## 与那国の民話：キリシタンの子供たち

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### 要旨

2013 年 11 月、東京与那国郷友会が地元の民話を与那国語で演じた。これは八重山諸島のキリシタン、本宮良とその殉教であった。本宮良は焚刑となったが、子供は島流しされ、三人が与那国で暮らすことになった。本作は、与那国語からの翻訳の試みとなる。

(ローザ マーク)