

Iyo's Kakure Christians A Hidden History

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(Received June 29, 2014)

The authors first introduce some present-day evidence pointing to the existence of Crypto-Christians in Ehime Prefecture. They then discuss the here-to-date literature dealing with the subject, and then lay out the need for future research. Note: in the main text, the authors refer to themselves separately by their initials: DRB and YF, respectively. Also, unless noted otherwise, pictures were taken by DRB. We would also like to thank Professors Gui-min Zhang and Ruth Vergin from Ehime University, and Prof. Manabu Sumioka from Matsuyama University for their help and suggestions.

1.INTRODUCTION

In 1559 (late Muromachi period), Father Gaspar Vilela arrived on a beach in Horie accompanied by monks.

It is said that this was the first time Christian missionaries landed on Shikoku.

This is a rough translation of a sign describing a small Kakure (Hidden) Christian gravesite located on a small rise on the outskirts of Matsuyama close to the Seto Inland Sea coast.

a.Horie Gravesite

Recently, an acquaintance of DRB informed him that there was a small poster about a Kakure Christian gravesite in Horie. The poster was one of a number of such posters on display on the back wall of the recently opened *Umiterasu Umi no Eki* ("Umiterasu" Station of the Sea) situated where the old Horie Ferry Port building once stood. Horie is now a district of Matsuyama, located on the Seto Inland Sea to the north of the city center and which has had a long tradition as a port community.

Figure 1 shows the wall where the posters are displayed along with an inserted picture of the bus stop sign which stands in front of the port building, and Figure 2 is a picture taken of the poster itself. Note that there were some artifacts in the form of glare due to the reflections coming off the laminated

paper, but the pictures below, taken by DRB, of the actual sign and stones provide a clearer view.



Fig.1 : Wall display in Horie Ume no Eki



Fig.2: Poster showing tombstones and location

A cursory translation of the poster reads:

Name: Tomb of Hidden Christians (Tomb of Christians)

Location: Fukuzumi Matsuo

Current <=>Time of Discovery

1975: Discovered.

1559 (Late Muromachi Period): Christian missionaries landed for the first time in Horie on Shikoku.

1564 (Late Muromachi Period): Birth of Christianity on Shikoku

Horie District Town Development Community Council: Regional Development and Maintenance Division

There was no one in the station to ask directions, so, after several unsuccessful attempts, DRB finally located the gravesite shown on the poster. It was found on the southeast side of a small hill actually quite close to the main highway bypass coming into Matsuyama from the north, along the coast. On the other side of the hill, the north side, there is also a typical, small Japanese cemetery.

In Figure 3, we see the sign in front of the tomb. A rough English translation (by DRB) would be:

Tomb of hidden Christians

In 1559 (late Muromachi period), Father Gaspar Vilela arrived on a beach in Horie accompanied by monks.

It is said that this was the first time Christian missionaries landed on Shikoku.

Five years later, while Father Luis Fróis' party was (staying) in Horie, six residents were baptized, marking the birth of Christianity on Shikoku.

Later, when the persecution of Christians became increasingly severe, the missionaries and their followers faced cruel punishment.

However, the devout believers continued in their faith in secret, and came to be called "Hidden Christians".

This tomb was discovered in 1975.

The stone monuments are neatly arranged in a set of three, with the stone cross in the middle, a "church" stone on the left, and "five-ringed tower" (in Japanese, Gorinto) on the right.

Horie Community Center Matsuyama



Fig 3: Sign at actual site

The sign faces the row of stones themselves.



Fig 4: Actual tombstones

Compare their condition now with that of when they were first uncovered nearly 40 years ago, as seen in Figure 5.



Fig 5: Stones at time of discovery (from poster)

The next picture provides a closeup of the middle "Maria Kannon" stone taken by DRB quite recently. A lot of erosion and weathering has taken place, but the features are still apparent.



Fig 6: Middle Stone.

Finally, in Figures 7 and 8, respectively, you can see the gravesite as seen from the highway and a map showing the locations for both the gravesite and the Umi no Eki.



Fig7: View of gravesite from highway



Fig 8: Map showing Umi no Eki and Gravesite (Google Maps)

As DRB was leaving on his bike from taking the pictures, a woman who was cleaning vegetables in front of her house just below the site struck up a conversation with him. When asked whether anyone in the neighborhood knew anything about the site and its history, she said she did not think anyone from around there did, but she suggested contacting the nearby elementary school. In fact, the Horie Elementary School does have a webpage mentioning the grave, so that will provide a starting point to find out more about it. Also, the community center mentioned on the sign is another place to start.

b.Enmyo-ji in Wake

Enmyo-ji is Temple #53 of the 88 temples of the Shikoku Pilgrimage. It is located in Wake, a district just west of Horie, which is also on the coast of the Inland Sea. As you enter the temple grounds, there is a slightly rusted sign in Japanese (Figure 9) on the left informing the visitor that there is a "Christian Stone Lantern" behind it in the back.

Navigating your way along a narrow path to the back, you will find another sign (Figure 10), which is also only in Japanese, roughly translating



Fig 9: Sign near entrance to Enmyo-ji



Fig 10: Sign near entrance to Enmyo-ji

as:

Christian Stone Lantern
"Cross-shaped Lantern"

A 40-cm tall stature, said by some to be carved to look like Maria with her hands clasped in prayer, and used by hidden christians in the practice of their faith.

While the sign at entrance and the title of this inner sign use the word "Christian", it has been pointed out (CBCJ) that the wording "said by some" and "look like" is quite revealing, and suggests that one need not blindly accept such an interpretation.

In order to protect themselves from persecution, the Kakure Christians had to render their faith "essentially invisible" in various ways. (Filus) One of the ways was to disguise "objects of worship, such as statues of Jesus and Virgin Mary as the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy, Kannon, or as mountain deities, *Yama no kami*." A problem with such camouflaging is that, without corroboration, it can very difficult to determine whether such an object is a disguised Kakure object or whether it has nothing to do with Christianity.

Not only the Japanese wording, but also the fact that it is only in Japanese is also interesting. The signs for the Buddhist portions of the temple complex have English translations, but not the Kakure section. Aside from having the sign near the entrance, the display is quite low-keyed, especially given that this is typically the first place people in Matsuyama point out when asked about Kakure Christians.

2.PREVIOUS WORK

While there is a plethora of research which has been conducted on Kakure Christians as a whole, the vast majority of it deals with hidden Christians from the area in and around Nagasaki. There is plenty of academic literature, documentary movies, and even a museum dealing with the subject.

When it comes to Ehime, however, we see a completely different situation. Other than personal blogs or elementary school webpages, and the like, we were able to find three academic works on the subject: books by Hino (2000) and Konuma (1990), and a senior research thesis by a student from the Education for International Understanding Course in the Faculty of Education of Ehime University (Yamaguchi: 2002). We will briefly discuss each of these works below.

Daihachi Konuma, in the forward to Ikuko Hino's book, notes that one of the biggest hurdles in conducting research is the paucity of literature on

the subject, and that, in particular in the case of the Kakure Christians of Iyo (Ehime), almost no records remain.

a.Hino

The Hino book is essentially a pictorial collection, with some commentary, that covers all three regions of Ehime: Southern Ehime (Nanyo) with pictures from Yawatahama, Ozu, and Uchiko; Central Ehime (Chuyo) with material from Futami, and Matsuyama, Nakajima, and Hojo; and Eastern Ehime (Toyo) with shots from Kikuma, Onishi, Namikata, Imabari, Tamagawa, Asakura, Toyoshi, Tambara, Komatsu, and Saijo.

If it appears that she concentrates somewhat on relics from the Eastern Ehime region, it should be noted that she is from that area. In the forward, Konuma points out that the relics can be divided into two groups: those which come from the area around Mt. Takanawa, a region which includes Matsuyama and Imabari, and those from the southern region, in what was once the Ozu feudal domain.

b.Konuma

Of the three works here, Konuma's is the longest and goes into the most detail, and he does cover Kakure Christians in Ehime. However, a major portion of the book concerns Kakure Christianity in general in order to provide a backdrop. It is in Chapter 6 that we see him beginning to concentrate more on the Kakure Christians of Iyo (Ehime).

The beginning of Chapter 6 provides a brief history of the first Christian contacts with Ehime. At the time, the area of Jesuit penetration into Japan was divided into three major regions: *Shimo* (Nagasaki and its environs in western Kyushu), *Funai* (the Bungo area in eastern Kyushu), and *Miyako* (the Go-kinai area around Nara). Iyo was right on the sea route between the latter two, and, quite early on, missionaries found themselves stopping there to await favorable tides and winds.

Konuma relates the same incident described on the sign, mentioned in the introduction, in which first contact occurred in 1559 when Father Gaspar Vilela, on his way to *Miyako*, spent 10 days in Horie,

no doubt waiting for favorable sailing conditions. The next contact he goes on to mention is when Father Fróis and some monks stopped in Horie and how surprised they were to encounter some Christians there who had already received baptism in the *Miyako* region. (*"odoroita koto ni, karera ga tachiyotta toki, soko ni wa sudeni, moto Miyako de jusen shita sūnin no kirishitan ga ita to iu"*)

The sign at the gravesite (in the introduction) relates how the birth of Christianity in Ehime occurred when six residents were baptized during Father Luis Fróis' time in Horie, (*"5-nen-go, Ruisu Furoisu shinpu ikkō ga Horie ni taizai shita toki, jūmin 6-meī ga senrei o ukete Shikoku de saisho no kirishitan ga tanjō shita."*)

There are no sources given on the sign, but this description of the incident, related by Fróis himself, would appear to be the source, for Konuma goes on to tell how, upon listening to the religious discussions (sermons), six people ended up receiving baptism during Fróis' eight-day stay in Horie. Konuma's reference gives the source for this as Fróis' own History of Japan, and he may have gotten it from Matsuda and Kawasaki's (1977-1980) translation of the manuscript. The original manuscript has a rather complicated history, and copies of it did not reach Europe until the mid-18th century, but the original would have had to have been completed before Fróis died in 1597.

A few pages later, Konuma (p. 96) continues to describe the early presence of Christians in Iyo by providing a reproduction of a map of the Jesuit sphere of influence in Japan, a map which had been drawn up in Rome in 1643. Not only does the map show Dongo (present-day Dogo, a district of Matsuyama famous for its hot spring spas), but the captioning (in Latin) also notes that there was a church and rectory there.

Konuma again laments the scarcity of materials, but we know from the reports written by Jesuit missionaries, which mention Ehime place names such as Horie, Masaki, Matsuyama, Itajima (present-day Uwajima), and Toshima, that they had a close connection with Iyo.

In any case, this portion of the book does provide evidence of a Christian presence in Ehime that dates back to early times in the history of

Christianity in Japan.

c. Yamaguchi

Yamaguchi, in the course of her data-gathering for her graduation thesis, traveled by herself to the Hojo area at the foot of Mt. Takanawa. She asked around about Kakure Christians and was led to some stone monuments that her guide informed her were from Kakure Christians. It should be noted here that she was led to them under the condition that she reveal their location to no one, not even her advisor, YF. When asked recently about the location or who to ask about the location, she could not recall where exactly she had gotten the information. Unfortunately, too much time had passed. The search must begin anew.

3. CONCLUSION

It should come as no surprise that there should be "sightings" or rumors of Kakure Christians in Ehime, and numerous Christian monuments have been confirmed within the prefecture (CBCJ). Going back to the days of the Heike (end of the 12th century) and warriors from the period of the Northern and Southern Courts (Nanboku-cho period of the 14th century), Ehime, and Shikoku, have long had a reputation as being a haven for refugees. Its geographic and political "off the beaten path" status lends itself to being a destination for refugees seeking a place to disappear.

A problem with the relics lies stems from the lack of evidence that they are, in fact, Christian. In other areas, especially those in the Nagasaki region, material in the form of tradition, folklore, rituals and the like, are relatively plentiful, and there is even a museum devoted to the Kakure Christians, but in Ehime, this is noticeably scarce. In order to verify the presence of Kakure Christians and to learn more about their history, traditions, current state, etc., more research, especially in the form of interviews, is called for.

At first blush, it might seem a bit odd that the authors have taken an interest in this particular area, especially given their respective fields of expertise. Both authors specialize in some aspect of

language: DRB with a linguistics background, and YF in literature, in particular, classical literature. However, both are keenly aware that language and culture are intertwined and, because of this, have an intense interest in various aspects of culture. In particular, YF spent a number of years in Ehime on the faculty of Ehime University, and although he is now living and working in Tokyo, he continues his efforts to locate and preserve cultural property and heritage of Ehime Prefecture.

Parallels between language and religion are readily evident and they both give us particular insight into how the mind, and, in a broader sense, culture operates. In a similar vein, the fate of endangered religions dovetails to an unfortunate degree with what has been happening with endangered languages around the world. One recalls the massive effort to preserve the American Indian languages in the early 20th century led by structural linguists such as Boaz, Bloomfield, and Sapir, among others. Graduate students were sent out in droves to transcribe languages before the last native speaker passed away. This push towards preserving the Amerind languages continues to the present-day.

The very term "endangered" tells us that there are religions that there are in danger of being lost. For example, The Lost and Endangered Religions Project (LERP) is working to record, and thereby preserve, Wicca, the oral traditions of the Naxi in China, and the temple rites of the Araiyaars in India, among others. While they are not mentioned on the webpage, hidden, or secret, religions, such as Crypto-Judaism and the Kakure Christians discussed here also deserve attention.

We lose these and we lose a part of ourselves.

Religion parallels language in other ways. When a group of speakers of a language becomes isolated from those in the mainstream, we see a dialect come into being. Such dialects--for example, Appalachian English--can be found to be quite conservative, preserving relics of the language which have disappeared in other dialects. On the other hand, dialects can also be very innovative, borrowing from the languages spoken around them. Note, for example, the native American and Spanish influences on American English.

In the same way, Kakure-Christianity evidences both a high degree of preservation of the rites and observances taught to them by missionaries centuries ago and indigenization through a melding of Catholic and Buddhist/Shinto practices.

Gathering data will not be easy and will, in any case, require a high degree of delicacy. Japan has a reputation for having isolationistic tendencies, but Japanese from other areas sometimes comment on how closed Ehime can be, even to other Japanese. In this way, Kakure Christians here could have preserved facets of the religion that were lost in other regions and also have developed their own flavor or a religion which is not seen elsewhere. They may be seen in family customs and rituals that have Christian roots in the same way that Crypto-Jews from outwardly Catholic families on the Iberian Peninsula and in the New World have preserved certain practices that come from Judaism.

In general, Kakure Christians are bound to be shy with regard to opening up about their religion. Even after Japan supposedly was beginning to open up, they faced persecution by the authorities.

A famous, or rather infamous, incident took place in the latter half of the 1860s. Foreign missionaries were again allowed back in the country. In 1865, a group of Kakure Christians approached and introduced themselves to the French priest, Father Bernard-Thadée Petitjean, just after the Oura Cathedral was dedicated in Nagasaki. (Meiji Showa)

Unfortunately, they had jumped the gun. The edicts banning Christianity were still in effect and the authorities again began persecuting the Kakure Christians in 1867. According to Nosco (1993), "more than 3600 Urakami villagers were banished and 650 of them died."

Regardless of any difficulties in retrieving data, it is still a very worthwhile venture. Yamaguchi points out that religion proved to be the medium through which the Japanese were first introduced to western culture, and the politics and economics revolving around religion colored that first meeting. We should make every effort to examine the history of Christianity in Japan in order to better understand the relationship between Japan and the western world. Kakure Christianity plays an

important part in that history.

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