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SECRECY AND KAKURE KIRISHISTAN

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Introduction

This paper is based on extensive field research in the small rural town of Sotome, situated some 30 kilometers northwest of Nagasaki, where I conducted research for a total of nine months over a period of 16 years. The area has traditionally been called Sotome. However, the town of Sotome was formed in 1955 through the amalgamation of the three villages of Konoura, Shitsu and Kurosaki (see maps, pp. 110-111). In 1563, Omura Sumitada, lord of the domain (han) in which Sotome was situated, became the first daimyo (feudal lord) to convert to Christianity. This was followed by the Christianization of Sotome, a conversion of the populace completed by 1577. After Christianity was proscribed in 1614, in order to avoid persecution, Christians went underground. They practiced their religion in concealment and without missionary supervision for over 250 years, and hence became known as Hidden Christians, or Kakure Kirishitan. Upon the return of Western missionaries to Japan in the second half of the 19th century, many Kakure Kirishitan converted to Catholicism. However, some rejected Catholicism, for reasons which will be discussed, and continue to practice Kakure Kirishitanism to the present day. Throughout the centuries, this religion has undergone a process of indigenization, becoming an eclectic amalgamation of Christian, Buddhist, Shinto and, most importantly, folk beliefs. The fact that the Kakure Kirishitan community is drawn from a social class of economically, socially, geographically and politically deprived peasants and fishermen also played an important role in shaping the religion.

1. Persecution, concealment and survival of Christianity

Because the religion of Kakure Kirishitan was practiced in secrecy in the isolated mountain and island communities surrounding Nagasaki, the beliefs, rites, and organization vary. It is therefore difficult to talk about the religion of Kakure Kirishitan in general. Although some authors, such as
Stephen Turnbull\(^1\) have attempted to do this, the result is a rather confusing account. Christal Whelan\(^2\) refers to regional differences in beliefs and rites as ‘sectarianism,’ arguing that variations were created by the original proselytizers, namely different Christian orders, such as the Jesuits, Franciscans, or Dominicans, who came to Japan in the 16\(^{th}\) and 17\(^{th}\) centuries. However, I think there are reasons to believe that sectarian differences are not major influences on the diversity of Kakure Kirishitan practices. Rather, the main reason for different beliefs and practices lies primarily in the differing length of time that missionaries and Japanese catechizers were active, and therefore giving instruction, in various areas. As Sotome was one of the first places where mass conversion took place, actual contact with missionaries and catechizers continued for almost a century. Therefore the Catholic flavor of the religion in Sotome, compared to other parts of Kyushu, is evident even now.

Most studies of Kakure Kirishitan are based on research carried out on Ikitsuki Island, as Kakure Kirishitan of Ikitsuki do not hide their religion and allow non-believers to participate in their religious rites and ceremonies. Researchers therefore find it easy to collect data there. The religion is also well preserved in Ikitsuki, though it is influenced by Japanese folk religion to a much greater extent than in Sotome. As the whole island of Ikitsuki has been basically Kirishitan, historically there has been no need to hide one’s religion from one’s neighbors. This is in opposition to Sotome. At the time of the 1614 edict proscribing Christianity, the entire area of Sotome was Christian. However, in the years immediately following approximately half of the region’s Christians apostatized, converting to Buddhism. History has shown that the apostates proved to be the worst persecutors. The area had a well established spy system and witnessed many incidents of persecution and martyrdom. Thus the need for concealment of Christianity was very strong in Sotome.

The 1614 edict was followed by bloodshed. It is difficult to ascertain the number of people who gave their lives for Christianity. Cooper\(^3\) states that some 3000 were martyred, apart from those who died in prison or in exile. Boxer\(^4\) estimates that two to five thousand martyrs, including seventy-one Europeans, died between the years 1614 and 1643, when the last European missionary was executed. Kataoka\(^5\) who discusses a few sources, concludes

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that approximately 4000 Christians were martyred. These are deaths as they are documented in either missionaries’ letters to their superiors or in local records. However, many records of the region were lost, or are unreliable. For example, documents regarding the Kori Kuzure (Persecution in Kori village of Omura domain near Nagasaki) in 1657 were mostly destroyed by the Omura authorities, to conceal possible incrimination. Officially, 608 Christians were arrested in Omura, Nagasaki, Saga, Hirado and Shimabara. Of these, 411 were beheaded, 78 died in prison, and 20 were sentenced to life in prison. Boxer argues that the number of arrests was much higher. The presence of Christian communities, in spite of the prohibition, was an embarrassment to the Omura authorities, as it proved their inefficiency. Three successive lords of Omura domain were Christian, so there was a special pressure on the son and grand-son of Omura Sumitada to apostatize and prove to the bakufu (Tokugawa government) that Christianity had been eliminated in the Omura fiefdom.

Thus it seems that Christian secrecy was widespread at different levels of social stratification and administration. Christians hid their religion not only from the authorities and non-believers, but also from their young children, and this manner of concealment occurs even today. Many Kakure Kirishitan told me that it was often only at their grand-parents’ funeral that they realized for the first time that their parents were Kakure Kirishitan. Local officials and Buddhist monks were also complicit in keeping the existence of Christians secret. If Christians were discovered by domain authorities, local officials would be deprived of their incomes, jobs and social status. The same was true for the daimyo, who could be dispossessed and dishonored by the bakufu. Discovery of Christians challenged the authority of officials at any level. Nosco argues that it was not until the 1660s that the policies controlling religious affiliation stabilized. However, by that time persecuted Christians were already underground and officials were only able to control their actions, not their beliefs. He further argues that, in a way, ‘the bakuhan officials charged with enforcement [of religious policies] were already aware of this fact and invited the persecuted to dissemble in the form of nominal compliance’. Thus secrecy was a form of defense used by both Christians and officials.

Religious policies included the introduction of the terauke seido, or system of temple registration, which required every Japanese household to

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register at their local Buddhist temple, and receive a terauke-jo (a Buddhist conversion certificate). Through this compulsory registration, the government controlled the entire population as well as the temples. The shogunate also introduced *fumie*, a tablet inscribed with Christian figures or a crucifix, to be trodden on to prove oneself to be a non-Christian, and the systems of *zaitaku kyunin* (resident spies), *gonin-gumi* (collective responsibility), and *sogo-kanshi* (mutual observation). Surveys of religious affiliation (*shumon aratame-cho*) were conducted every year.\(^9\) Another measure taken by the *bakufu* to put an end to foreign (mainly Spanish and Portuguese) influences, both religious and political, and to divest the Christian *dainyo* of Kyushu of gains from their relationships with foreign missionaries and traders was the policy of *sakoku* (national seclusion) of 1639. Enforcement of this policy was influenced by the Shimabara Uprising of 1637-38. Mainly Christians participated in this rebellion, which had clear Christian millenarian overtones.

Under such severe measures, Christians of Sotome nominally apostatized, affiliated themselves with local Buddhist temples, and rendered their religion essentially invisible. They recited their prayers in silence, and disguised their 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*. More obvious Christian objects of worship, such as rosaries, crucifixes, and holy pictures were hidden in the roofs and walls of their houses. During Mass they consumed *sashimi*, rice and *sake* instead of host and wine. Contacts with the outside world were avoided. This was aided by the fact that they lived in remote mountainous areas. They tended to marry close relatives, and if the bride or groom happened to be non-Kirishitan, he or she converted to Kakure Kirishitanism upon marriage.

Because of the long history of secrecy and concealment, collecting data among the Kakure Kirishitan of Sotome is especially complicated. A researcher is often treated as a spy, and at best as an intruder. Patience, persistence and humility are required. I was sometimes refused an interview in an abrupt way and had to forget my pride and go back for information later on. The informants occasionally deliberately confused me. When asked the same question four times, I received different answers each time. When an informant did not want to talk, he feigned total ignorance.

When I arrived in Sotome with the goal to study religious conflict, I was informed that the Japanese do not like the word 'conflict,' and that I should avoid using it. In order not to antagonize my informants, I changed the official topic of my research to ‘The Coexistence of Religions in a

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Japanese Community.’ My informants took to the idea of coexistence, which symbolizes harmony and peace in the community. Feeling secure that we were talking about coexistence, they gradually started to inform me about various problems and conflicts. However, when I began to inquire about the conflicts in greater detail, some Kakure Kirishitan became suspicious. I heard opinions, personally and from my host family, that at the beginning Kakure Kirishitan thought that I was a spy sent by the Catholic authorities to bring the Kakure Kirishitan back to the Catholic Church, and later, when I began to gather more detailed data on social inequality, they became convinced that I must have been working for the Japanese government. Some Kakure Kirishitan were suspicious about my collecting information on issues other than religion. To them, the study of religion meant studying prayers, religious experience, annual religious events, religious activities, etc. Even though I explained the sociological approach, some were not convinced, and refused to answer questions which they thought had nothing to do with religion, or considered too personal.

For a foreign researcher, and thus a non-member of the community, it is a painstaking process of being first tolerated, and then trusted enough to be informed of antagonisms and conflicts. Living in the community for a prolonged period of time exposes the researcher to a variety of conflicts. Only gradually does a realistic picture of the community emerge. Possibly the best informed Kakure Kirishitan are elderly residents who were born in the village. They are also the most socialized into the community and hence the most uncooperative informants in my attempts to discover conflict. They sought to protect the group, and schisms and conflicts were kept secret not only from outsiders, but even from their own children. The best informants turned out to be those who were not full members of the community, who had been discriminated against by full members. This group included women who came into the village by marriage, and men who, although born in the village, had worked outside Sotome and only returned to Sotome after their retirement. They talked about religious conflict more openly.

2. Indigenization of Christianity as a form of concealment

There are various reasons for the survival of Christianity in Sotome. Portions of Sotome became the property of the lord Nabeshima of Saga domain at the end of the 16th century, and it is mainly in these Saga hamlets of Sotome that Christianity survived. These communities were some 80 km away from central Saga. Because they were small, poor and isolated (known as tobichi, or detached estates), Saga authorities were not greatly concerned with them. In this sense political, geographical and economic factors con-
tributed to the preservation of Christianity. However, the most important factor is its indigenization, i.e., the adaptation of Christianity to Japanese conditions and to the necessity of concealment, and amalgamation with folk religion based on Buddhist and Shinto beliefs and rites. In the process of concealment, Buddhist and Shinto practices, originally used as camouflage, became part of Kakure Kirishitanism and now are inseparable.

For example, ancestors in Japan are commonly referred to as _hotoke_, or Buddhas. Each person receives a posthumous Buddhist name, which denotes his or her status in the afterlife; the more expensive the posthumous name, the higher the status. Kakure Kirishitan do not need to buy posthumous names for their ancestors, as the dead Kakure Kirishitan’s Christian name, which they called _arima_ in distorted Latin (from _anima_, the soul), received at the baptism ceremony, serves in this capacity. After one’s death, the title San or Santa (Portuguese/Spanish ‘saint’ for the male or female respectively) is attached to the deceased person’s Christian name. For example, Basuchan (Sebastian) and Kachirina (Catherine) are posthumously addressed as San Basuchan and Santa Kachirina. Thus all Kakure Kirishitan dead not only go to heaven, but all become Saints.

Objects of worship, particularly the relics of the martyrs – pieces of martyrs’ clothes stained with their blood, old crucifixes, medallions, rosaries, holy pictures, images of saints, etc. – are venerated as _kami_ and are believed to possess supernatural properties, such as healing powers. Like Shinto _kami_ which are hidden in the main hall of a Shinto shrine, these objects are usually hidden in the roofs or walls of Kakure Kirishitan houses. During some important holy days they are taken out, put on a tray and held up to the believers’ foreheads so that the spiritual properties of these objects can be absorbed into the believers’ bodies. Kakure Kirishitan apply these objects to affected body parts for curing illness. These objects were not shown to me by practicing Kakure Kirishitan, but only by those who had given up the religion. The faithful believe that these objects lose their powers and healing properties when revealed to non-believers, and that heavenly punishment will be incurred (_bachi kaburu_).

Some natural objects such as rocks, stones and trees, are believed to have divine properties. The Kakure Kirishitan from Kurosaki when sick or in trouble visit Karematsu Jinja, a shrine built over the tomb of San Jiwan, an unidentified foreign priest who was active in the area after the prohibition of Christianity. There they rub their bodies with small stones which are in the shrine, or take a stone home as a charm. Informants told me that during the Second World War almost all the stones disappeared from the Karematsu Shrine, as they were taken either by the Kakure Kirishitan soldiers or by their wives and mothers to serve as protection amulets for the men.
The spot has been a sacred place for Kakure Kirishitan since the death of San Jiwan in the early 17th century. In the vicinity of the tomb there is a big rock under which Kakure Kirishitan used to study their secret Latin prayers, especially during Lent. As the place is on a hill far from the village of Kurosaki, they were not in danger of being overheard. It was not until 1937 that a shrine was erected there, and because Shinto was by then the Japanese state religion, this was a *jinja*, i.e., a Shinto shrine. Apparently a non-Kirishitan local shaman (*kitoshi*) ordered the shrine to be built to appease San Jiwan’s spirit, which had allegedly become a *muen-botoke* (literally a Buddha with no relatives). It is believed in Japan that those who die an untimely death and have no families to pray for them and care for their graves become *muen-botoke*. As such persons’ lives were in some sense not completed and they had unresolved problems in this world, their souls are believed to be still attached to this world. Such spirits may become malevolent and cause harm to the living.\(^{11}\) San Jiwan, the foreign missionary who died young in tragic circumstances, with no descendants to pray for his ascendance to heaven, allegedly became such a Buddha.

The Kakure Kirishitan of Sotome also had a sacred tree, which they relate to the legend of Basuchan, the most celebrated leader of Kakure Kirishitan in Sotome. Basuchan learned his priestly skills as a disciple of San Jiwan, and acted as a substitute priest in the Sotome area after San Jiwan’s death. Basuchan was arrested in 1657, during the Kori Persecution, was imprisoned for three years, tortured and finally beheaded.\(^ {12}\) He is said to have carved a cross on the trunk of a *tsubaki no ki* (camellia or Japanese rose). Local authorities learned of the tree and decided to cut it down in 1790 during a persecution known as the Urakami Ichiban Kuzure (The First Persecution at Urakami), yet they were forestalled by the local Kakure Kirishitan, who felled the tree at night and divided it among themselves. Pieces of the tree are venerated as household treasures (*takara-mono*), and chips of it are still put in head-bands placed on the deceased to protect them in the afterlife.

Kakure Kirishitan, like other Japanese, abhor blood and death. A deceased Kakure Kirishitan must be buried in a white robe. In the village of Shitsu, the local leader’s wife prepares the robe. However, his mother will prepare the robe if the wife is still young, because of the possibility of menstrual contamination. In Kurosaki it is believed that the more women sew the robe, the happier the deceased will be. However, pregnant, menstru-

\(^{11}\) Hori (1968: pp. 111-127).

ating and divorced women are excluded. The Kakure Kirishitan leader avoids contact with the body of the deceased, but must pray for the departed for a period of one week. He does this in the room next to where the body lies in state, or in his own house. The leader never walks to the cemetery with the mourners.

One exception is the leader of a Kakure Kirishitan group from Kurosaki, Murakami Shigeru, who broke with this tradition and began to walk to the cemetery in 1984 (he became the leader in 1983), following the Catholic custom. However, Murakami is rather unusual, since at heart he is a Catholic who does not wish to officially convert to Catholicism. During the walk to the cemetery he also recites Kakure Kirishitan prayers out loud using a microphone, another innovation. Kakure Kirishitan traditionally recite prayers in silence.

The abhorrence of polluting phenomena and preoccupation with purification is also evident in Kakure Kirishitan baptism rituals. For a week prior to baptism, the leader may not touch a night-soil bucket or cattle. Neither may he work or have sexual relations. He bathes before the ceremony. In the past, if the leader was on his way to the baptism ceremony and happened to meet a ‘polluting’ non-Kirishitan (a person symbolizing sin), he was required to return home and bathe again. The ritual has been rationalized, and nowadays the leader bathes at the place of baptism.

Yet another example of indigenization of Christian ritual is in Holy Communion during the Kakure Kirishitan mass, wherein *sashimi* is substituted for the host, and *sake* for the wine. On the other hand, 16th century Catholic observances, which are no longer adhered to by many contemporary Catholics, are still revered by the Kakure Kirishitan. Fasting, abstinence from certain foods and from work on certain days remain an important part of Kakure Kirishitanism. Thus Kakure Kirishitan abstain, on pain of sin, from consuming meat, including eggs, every Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, and during the 46-day Lent, which they call a ‘period of sorrows’ (*kanashimi no kan*). In the past when meat (with the exception of fish and whale) was eaten rarely in Japan and in Kakure Kirishitan communities of farmers and fishermen, this restriction did not cause much friction. After World War II, however, the Japanese diet changed, and foods such as meat and products of Western cuisine made of eggs such as cakes, mayonnaise, etc., have become a part of the Japanese diet. Consequently, the old taboos have become a real burden. Some older Kakure Kirishitan refuse to be hospitalized even when very ill, because in hospital they cannot observe the diet restrictions.

On Sundays, feast-days and on the so-called sawari no hi (days of ‘impediment’ or ‘ill effect’) all work, even needlework, is taboo. These taboo days are observed on the 20th and 23rd day of each month, commemorating the day when Basuchan was respectively arrested and beheaded. I heard criticism from Buddhists that the major reason for the poverty of the Kakure Kirishitan is that they have so many holy days when they do not work, and that they use religion as an excuse for their laziness.

3. Schisms in Kakure Kirishitan and Secrecy

I turn now to an investigation of schisms within Kakure Kirishitan groups. Throughout the Edo period (1600-1868) the Kakure Kirishitan of Sotome managed to preserve their faith, camouflaged as parishioners of Buddhist temples. After the arrival of Catholic missionaries in Nagasaki in the 1860s a number of schisms arose which have served to divide the Kakure Kirishitan communities. As Kakure Kirishitan traditionally lived in close-knit communities in order to guard their secrecy, disintegration of their social bonds brought about a great deal of friction, leading to violence and ostracism.

The first schism, known as the Nonaka Incident, occurred in 1867, and was caused by the so-called ‘revival of Christians’ who revealed themselves to French missionaries in 1865, first in Nagasaki and then in Shitsu. In central Shitsu two hundred Kakure Kirishitan households (77 percent) converted to Catholicism, while sixty households (23 percent) remained Kakure Kirishitan. The most affluent and powerful Kakure Kirishitan – those who possessed religious, economic and political authority – rejected Catholicism. Their subordinates and relatives followed them in this. It seems only fitting that the most prominent among Kakure Kirishitan should reject Catholicism, as they were the ones who had the most to lose by such a conversion.

The headman and other village officials who were the executors of the government’s policies feared that they would be in danger if Christians were discovered in their village, and even more if they themselves were discovered to be Christians. They were in danger of losing their office, income, possessions, authority, and even their lives. After all, a ban on Christianity was still in effect and a new wave of persecution known as the Urakami Yon-ban Kuzure (The Fourth Persecution at Urakami) has just erupted in Nagasaki in 1867. Shitsu’s authorities attempted to suppress the activities of the local Catholics, who were exposing the whole village to the danger of persecution. However, Catholics resisted, resulting in a violent riot involving
knives, which led to mutual hatred which is felt even today, and in a permanent schism between Kakure Kirishitan and Catholics.\textsuperscript{14}

Repressive measures against new converts to Catholicism taken by the central government soon after the Nonaka Incident included setting up rotating groups of thirty Catholics to perform hard labor on embankments for rivers, and in the Takashima mine near Nagasaki. Some 300 Catholics from Shitsu were sentenced to forced labor at this mine. In 1870 interrogations began; a number of Shitsu Catholics were imprisoned and tortured, and their houses were demolished.\textsuperscript{15} Kakure Kirishitan were spared from this wave of official punishment, illustrating once again that secrecy and concealment proved to be the best defense against persecution.

Another reason for resistance to converting to Catholicism was the religious intolerance of the missionaries, their ignorance and lack of respect for the Kakure Kirishitan tradition, beliefs, prayers, rites and objects of worship. Objects of worship such as Mariya-Kannon statues, i.e., the Virgin Mary disguised as the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy, Kannon, or Jesus and Mary disguised as the local mountain deities (Yama no kami) were seen by missionaries as heathen idolatry, and converts to Catholicism were instructed to destroy them. In retaliation to these acts, some Kakure Kirishitan profaned Catholic objects of worship.\textsuperscript{16} The Kakure Kirishitan leaders were the descendents of martyrs, and were in possession of the most important and the greatest number of relics, particularly the objects belonging to their ancestors, such as pieces of martyrs’ clothes stained with their blood, or holy pictures, crucifixes, medallions, rosaries and other objects of worship. They feared losing all these and the prestige and authority these relics brought them.

Among the Kakure Kirishitan of Kurosaki the first schism occurred when some 45 percent of Kakure Kirishitan converted to Catholicism in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century. Converts to Catholicism occupied lower socio-economic positions with in the community and Kakure Kirishitan stood higher economically and socially until the early Showa period. Since then, Catholics have been ascendant.\textsuperscript{17} The second schism took place in the 1920s, when some Kakure Kirishitan refused to pay monetary tributes to the local Soto Zen temple. The formal reason for the schism was an alleged disagreement between two leaders of Kurosaki over the interpretation of the Kirishitan calendar. It seems, however, that the real conflict was over money and power.

\textsuperscript{14} Hirano (1974: pp. 407-413).
\textsuperscript{15} Hirano (1974: pp. 421-422).
\textsuperscript{17} Tagita (1978: pp. 463-466).
Shinto had become the state religion in 1868 and all Japanese were required to become Shinto parishioners. Because of the resulting widespread persecution of Buddhism in Japan, anti-temple sentiments spread also among some Kakure Kirishitan. Shinto affiliation was seen as being able to offer better protection from possible persecution. From the viewpoint of some Kakure Kirishitan it was a waste of money to support the Buddhist temple. Moreover, supporting three religions – Kakure Kirishitanism, Buddhism and Shinto – was too heavy a financial burden. It was in this atmosphere that the leader Murakami Kimpachi decided to separate from the Buddhist temple. His decision was influenced by the conflict between himself, another Kakure Kirishitan leader of Kurosaki and an influential Kakure Kirishitan who acted as a mediator and caretaker (sewa-yaku) of the Soto Zen Buddhist temple. The temple mediator apparently tried to unite the two groups under one leadership. This attempt, however, proved to be a mistake, as Murakami Kimpachi and forty of his followers rejected the mediator’s authority and refused to pay contributions to the temple, choosing instead to establish the *tera-banare* (anti Buddhist temple) faction.¹⁸

Yet another schism occurred in Shitsu in 1972. Japan underwent a severe economic crisis at this time, which climaxed in the autumn of 1973 as the ‘oil shock.’ The instigator of this religious conflict, Kinoshita Denkichi, a casual laborer with no pension, returned to Shitsu after retirement, having spent many years living and working away from Shitsu. His strained financial circumstances may have been the inspiration for his initiation of a campaign against contributions to the local Soto Zen Buddhist temple. He argued that there was no need for Buddhist camouflage because of the postwar constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion. He won over the former leader of Shitsu Kakure Kirishitan, Kimura Gen’ichi, as well as his own and the former leader’s relatives. Thus ten households, constituting twenty percent of the Shitsu Kakure Kirishitan, refused to pay monetary tributes to the temple.

The conflict was aggravated by a power struggle between the leaders of the schism and the leader of Shitsu Kakure Kirishitan, Nakayama Shichizo, who was also a headman of the Shitsu ward. Nakayama convened a secret meeting three days prior to the memorial service for Kinoshita’s mother, which was to be held March 1. At that meeting he ordered that no one should attend the memorial service for Kinoshita’s mother. Nakayama also ordered that the group refusing to pay contributions to the temple be ostracized, a proclamation known as *mura hachibu*. Interestingly, only those Kakure

Kirishitan who were born and raised in the village were invited to the secret meeting; for example, women who came to Shitsu as brides, though they were baptized before their wedding, were not invited. Nakayama threatened his fellow Kakure Kirishitan that he would resign from the leadership unless they follow his decision. The breakaway group consequently cut official ties with the temple and established themselves as an anti-Buddhist-temple faction (tera-banare). It is said that Kinoshita aspired to become a leader of Shitsu Kakure Kirishitan, and that his associate Kimura, once a leader, presumably desired more power.

Though Nakayama Shichizo’s faction followed his orders, he became unpopular as a result. The policy of mura hachibu meant that all connections between the tera-banare (separated from the Buddhist temple) and the tera-tsuki (affiliated with the Buddhist temple) groups were severed. As all Kakure Kirishitan of Shitsu are related to each other, mura hachibu caused domestic problems, such as conflicts between parents belonging to one faction and their children married to members of the other. Relatives and friends from the opposing faction could no longer attend the same funerals, memorial services, weddings, and other ceremonies. At the ward election of 1973 following the conflict, Nakayama lost office. His single term in office (two years) is very unusual in Sotome, indicative of his loss of support among the Kakure Kirishitan. He initially wanted to stand for the town assembly, but, realizing that he was unlikely to get support from the ward, decided against it. The three major players in this affair (Kimura, Kinoshita and Nakayama) died within seven years of the schism. However, the split and dissent continues until the present.19

After Nakayama Shichizo’s death, his cousin Nakayama Rikio became leader of the tera-tsuki group. When he died in 1999, his assistant Murakami Haruyoshi reluctantly served as leader for three years, resigning from the post at the New Year meeting in January 2003. Murakami is an advocate of conversion to Buddhism. However, many of the Kakure Kirishitan wish to maintain their faith, and some of them suggested that they may ask the leader of the tera banare group, Kimura Tomoyoshi, to perform funerals and memorial services. However, antagonism between the two factions remains very strong. The two major figures who oppose reunification are the widows of Kimura Gen’ichi (Emi) and Nakayama Shichizo (Yoshi). Kimura Emi is a sister of Murakami Haruyoshi and she has not been on speaking terms with her brother for thirty years. It seems that as long as two widows are alive unification is unlikely. When I last interviewed Tomoyoshi, son of Kimura

Emi, the present leader of the *tera-banare* group in December 2002, he told me that the group would most likely convert to Catholicism. Additionally, his sister had already married a Catholic and converted.

Some twenty years ago another major schism occurred in Kurosaki, when the leader of the *tera-tsuki* faction affiliated with the Buddhist temple died in 1979 with no successor. The priest of the Soto Zen temple took advantage of this situation and used this opportunity to convert Kakure Kirishitan residents to Buddhism. He visited all Kakure Kirishitan households and asked for donations to renovate the temple and his living quarters. Over the generations, Kakure Kirishitan have developed a cunning method for decreasing the amount of mandatory contributions to the temple. Only the head families (*honke*) registered at the Buddhist temple as parishioners. However the stem families (*bunke*) were not free from the obligation of making contributions. They paid their share not to the temple, but to the Kakure Kirishitan community in order to ease the head families of their burden. Thus the head families were paying less than required by the temple, and still some money could be saved for the community’s needs. The same method was used by the Kakure Kirishitan of Shitsu. In 1979, the priest of the Soto Zen temple asked that all Kakure Kirishitan families, both the head and branch families, declare whether they wanted to be listed as parishioners. They were free to renounce their affiliation with the temple, but those who decided to remain loyal to the temple were asked to reveal their names, and new lists were prepared. Despite the rather high contribution of 170,000 yen per household, the number of parishioners of the Soto Zen temple increased from 180 households in 1978 to 240 in 1986. Deprived of their leader and pressured by the Zen priest, by the mid-1980s the majority of Kakure Kirishitan decided to give up their traditional religion and convert to Soto Zen Buddhism. The Zen priest started proselytizing by organizing Buddhism study classes a few times a month which he continued for a period of a few years.

In the past, Kakure Kirishitan were exclusively self-employed farmers and fishermen, and contacts with the outside world were rare. Nowadays, however, many Kakure Kirishitan work outside their community, for firms in Nagasaki and other cities, or for the local town office and schools. In interviews, Kakure Kirishitan described feelings of embarrassment when friends and delegates from their workplace come to funerals which are performed using unfamiliar rites. They admit to being uneasy about publicly revealing their allegiance to a minor, ‘alien’ religion. Not sharing the same religion, values, customs and rituals with the wider society leads Kakure Kirishitan to feel socially isolated. They feel it is required that they join a religion which integrates them into mainstream society. Buddhism, which functions in the
role of a ‘national church’ in Japan, is this mainstream religion. Therefore Kakure Kirishitan believe that becoming Buddhist is an important step in achieving acceptance and higher social status in Japanese society. Wealth is the most efficient vehicle for altering one’s identity and demonstrating status. As soon as younger Kakure Kirishitan can ‘afford’ Buddhism, many renounce their religion. Renouncing Kakure Kirishitan tradition is thus a rational escape from prejudice, social stigma, humiliation, injustice and inequality. However, when I visited Sotome in December 2002, older Kakure Kirishitan told me that they regretted their decision to convert to Buddhism, and expressed their wish for a Kirishitan leader so that they could continue their religious tradition.

Conclusion

For the purpose of concealing their religion, Kakure Kirishitan camouflaged themselves as Buddhists, and later as Shintoists, and rendered their religion basically invisible. Researchers and outsiders often wonder why Kakure Kirishitan are still in hiding in the era of religious freedom, and some joke that they are hiding from Catholics. It seems that concealment and secrecy became part of their religious tradition, as well as part of all other aspects of their community. One of my Kakure Kirishitan informants told me that the main feature of the Kakure Kirishitan is *himitsu-shugi* or the ‘ideology of secrecy.’ Not only religious matters, but issues of private or community life are secret as well.

During the period of prohibition of Christianity in Japan, secrecy obviously had a rational basis, as exposure of the Kakure Kirishitan faith to non-believers resulted in waves of persecution, bloodshed and discrimination. Preservation of secrecy thus ensured safety and peace. In the process of concealing the religion, secrecy took on symbolic religious meaning, where the act of revealing the religion to non-believers came to be associated with sin and curse. This type of esotericism came to imbue Kakure Kirishitanism with symbolic power. Kakure Kirishitan incant their prayers in distorted version of Latin. The fact that they do not understand the text is of no consequence to the practitioners; in a way, the unintelligible prayers are believed to possess greater spiritual and magical power, and they are believed to act as charms. The Kakure Kirishitan faith has offered psychological compensation through feelings of moral superiority and a heaven affordable to the economically deprived. Kakure Kirishitan believe that they will all go to heaven after death, if they perform their rites correctly and shun non-believers. This faith has given hope and consolation to its practitioners...
in their daily hardships. In spite of the social stigma of belonging to this marginal religion, in the eyes of its believers, Kakure Kirishitanism is the most supreme and efficient guarantee of entrance to heaven after death. It is also the highest form of veneration of the ancestors, whose worship ensures the protection and prosperity of the living. The imposed secrecy of the Christian faith in Japan thus became the source of Kakure Kirishitanism’s secret power.

Secrecy gave the believers not only political and social security, but also economic advantages. As explained above, only honke, head families, were registered with the Buddhist temple and consequently only they were required by the temple to pay monetary tributes. I came across a Kakure Kirishitan document from 1945 which stated the percentage of the required contribution to the Buddhist temple, ranging from 10 to 100 percent, each household ought to contribute, depending on its economic circumstances. Thus everybody had to pay, but the less privileged paid less. In this way Kakure Kirishitan were able to negotiate discounts for the less well off. Because Kakure Kirishitan paid a lump sum to the temple for all registered households, they were in fact able to save some money each year for their communal needs.

Kakure Kirishitanism is a community religion. Religious and personal matters are therefore not easily separated. Behind each schism lie struggles over money and power, interpersonal conflicts and family feuds, conflicts caused by forbidden love, illegitimate children, even suicide and imprisonment. In order that the privacy of the involved Kakure Kirishitan is protected, not all of these secret matters can be revealed or discussed. Essentially, all of the religion’s schisms and innovations – the conversion of Kakure Kirishitan to Catholicism or Buddhism, the refusal to pay tribute to Buddhist temples and resulting separatist movements, and the audible recitation of prayers – were introduced or instigated by outsiders, such as Catholic or Buddhist priests, or leaders who had lived outside the Kakure Kirishitan community for a prolonged period of time. Change has always come from outside. Orthodox Kakure Kirishitan, who never left the community, particularly the women, fear the outside world and want to keep their religion secret because, as Nosco argues, ‘the secrecy itself has become a self-sufficient source of meaning’.

For generations, Kakure Kirishitan risked their lives in order to preserve their faith, because they believed in the superiority of their religion. Even now many are convinced that their religion is the ‘true’ Christianity which they were taught by the first missionaries to arrive in Japan, and

reintroduced Catholicism and Protestantism, brought to Japan in the 19th century, are merely new religions. Catholics have consistently denigrated Kakure Kirishitan’s beliefs, prayers and rites and their ignorance of Catholic doctrine, and Japanese authorities and neighbors of Kakure Kirishitan, have persecuted Kakure Kirishitan for being different, for having different values, customs and religious beliefs, and for being poor. This opposition has resulted in an inferiority complex among younger Kakure Kirishitan, who have consequently lost pride and faith in their religious tradition. Thus it may be said that secrecy and concealment have acted as defensive factors giving Kakure Kirishitan safety and strength to survive. On the other hand, exposure of the religion to outsiders resulted in its persecution, disintegration, and perhaps in its gradual extinction.

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MAP 1
LOCATION OF SOTOME
MAP 2
SOTOME AND ITS DISTRICTS
Abstract

This paper discusses the Kakure Kirishitan of the Sotome area in Nagasaki Prefecture where hiding and secrecy are still the prevailing characteristics of the religion. Persecution, isolation and secrecy have contributed to the distinctiveness of the religion. Schisms within the Kakure Kirishitan community and related feuds and ostracisms, kept secret from non-believers, are analyzed. Secret objects of worship and accompanying secret rites and ceremonies are also examined. During the period of prohibition of Christianity in Japan secrecy obviously had a rational basis as exposure of Kakure Kirishitan faith to non-believers resulted in waves of persecution, bloodshed and discrimination. Preservation of secrecy thus ensured safety and peace. However, in the process of concealing the religion, secrecy took on a symbolic significance and religious meaning. The forcefully imposed secrecy of Christian faith in Japan thus became its secret power.

Resumo

Este artigo trata dos Kakure Kirishitan da região de Sotome, na prefeitura de Nagasaki, onde o sigilo e o segredo ainda são características da religião praticada. A perseguição, o isolamento e o sigilo, contribuíram para assegurar a sua singularidade. Neste estudo analisam-se as divisões existentes na comunidade dos Kakure Kirishitan, com os seus líticos e proscrições, que sempre foram mantidas em segredo do mundo exterior. Examinam-se, igualmente, os objectos de culto secretos, bem como os correspondentes ritos e cerimónias. Durante o período de proibição do Cristianismo no Japão o sigilo tinha uma base racional, visto que a revelação da fé dos Kakure Kirishitan resultava em ondas de perseguição, violência e discriminação. Deste modo, a manutenção do sigilo assegurava paz e segurança. Todavia, ao longo deste processo, o sigilo adquiriu uma importância simbólica e um significado religioso. Esta prática secreta da fé cristã no Japão, acabou por se tornar no seu poder secreto.
要約

本論文は、長崎県外海地方の隠れキリシタンについて論じたものである。この地方では、隠れと秘密主義とが、依然として宗教上の主要な特徴をなしている。迫害や孤立、秘密主義といった要因のゆえに、キリシタン信仰は他とは異なる側面をもっている。隠れキリシタン内部の分派、それに関連する数々の争いや村八分、信仰以外の人々には秘密とされたが、そうした面についても、分析を試みた。秘密裏に行われる礼拝の対象物、それに関連するさまざまな儀式についても検討を行った。日本でのキリスト教禁止時代においては、秘密裏に行うということは、明らかにある種の合理性を伴っていた。なぜならば隠れキリシタン信仰を信者以外の者に知られるということは、迫害や流血、差別につながることを意味していたからである。かくて秘密を守るということは、身の安全と平穏な生活を確保することであった。しかしながら秘密主義自体が、やがて象徴的な意義と宗教的な意味をもつようになった。かくて日本でキリシタン信仰力ずくで課せられた秘密主義は、それ自体が秘密の力を持つようになった。