

A Dangerous Confession; the End of the Hidden Era

News of the “Discovery of the Hidden Christians” in 1865 quickly reached Kuroshima. Some of the island’s Hidden Christians secretly sailed to Nagasaki to see for themselves what was happening. At Oura Cathedral, they revealed their faith to the missionaries and informed them that a further 600 Hidden Christians were living on Kuroshima. This was a dangerous confession to make, because only two months had passed since the “Discovery of the Hidden Christians,” and the ban on Christianity was still in force.

The missionaries provided them with fresh instruction, and in 1872, one year before the ban on Christianity was lifted, all of Kuroshima’s Hidden Christians returned to the official Catholic faith.

At first, they used two of the houses of community leaders from the Hidden era as temporary churches. Eventually, momentum grew for a new church, and the first Kuroshima Church was constructed in 1879. It was situated in the center of the island, accessible to the inhabitants of all the local villages. With the Christian population expanding, a plan to rebuild the church was launched. Thanks to the money the Christian islanders donated and the free labor they provided, the Kuroshima Church you see today was completed in 1902. Even today, memories of the time when Christianity was banned live on, with the prayer to atone for trampling on religious images being recited every week.

The Whole Island Is a World Cultural Heritage Property

There are six villages around Kuroshima that originated with the Hidden Christian settlers who migrated here in the nineteenth century. The sites of the community leaders’ houses, graveyards, and the agricultural landscape remain largely unchanged. In addition, Kozenji Temple, (where the Hidden Christians secretly prayed to Maria Kannon), the site of the village headman’s house (where *efumi* took place), and the site of the first church to be built after the lifting of the ban have all been well preserved.

All these sites provide a rich, textured picture of the Hidden Christians’ strategy of maintaining their own religion and its structures by migrating and working to harmoniously coexist with the established social mores and religion. The whole island of Kuroshima, with its eight villages showing the relationship between the Hidden Christians and Buddhists under the ban on Christianity, is one component of the World Cultural Heritage Property of Hidden Christian sites in the Nagasaki Region.