

The Ban on Christianity and the Secret Transmission of the Faith

Japanese Forms of Faith Based on Tradition and Local Social Customs

Despite the severity of the repression, Hidden Christians existed throughout Japan until the mid-seventeenth century. However, a series of campaigns of detection and persecution in the 1650s and 1660s in Kōri (Nagasaki), Bungo (Ōita), and Nōbi (Gifu/Aichi prefectures) left the Hidden Christian population limited principally to the Nagasaki region.

Under the guidance of lay leaders and in line with the church calendar, the Hidden Christians observed feast days and penitential days and conducted rites such as baptisms and funerals. Since they had no churches, they would gather secretly in the houses of religious leaders known as *chōkata* (“official of the book”) and *mizukata* (“water official”) and conduct prayers and rituals, while venerating the places where their ancestors had been martyred or were buried.

While the faith was maintained, it was gradually influenced by native Japanese traditions. The pronunciation of the Latin and Portuguese prayers (*oratio*) that had been brought to Japan in the sixteenth century became garbled, and certain prayers and ceremonies were altered by the influence of folk religions as they were transmitted from generation to generation.