

The Descendants of Xavier Speak: A Surprising Untold Story, And the Mystery of the Gods of the Mountain

Precisely because there was a need to hide, materials and literature pertaining to Japanese Christian culture are few. There are many mysteries and much speculation. Taketa was known as the Holy Land of Christians. The story that a descendant of Francisco Xavier told us was very convincing. The carbonated spring of Naoiri was an essential part of Christian missionary work in Japan. Also, there was a mysterious thing called the Gods of the Mountain that existed only in Naoiri.

Usually the places where Christian missionary work occurred had sea ports, gold or silver mines but since Kutami had none of these. Why could Taketa become one of the eight great missionaries in Japan? At first thought, I thought it was because there was a hot spring there. But I wasn't sure because there were so many hot springs in other parts of Japan as well. When I was reading the following description in a book, I hit on an assumption. "Missionaries gave the water to sick men. Many diseases were cured through the drinking of what they called holy water." My assumption is perhaps the missionaries knew that the carbonated water of Naoiri was good for curing diseases just like holy water. In those days, however people seldom drank carbonated water in Japan. So I needed some supporting evidence for my assumption.

Then, a serendipitous encounter took place. I was able to meet with Mr. Luis Fontes, a former professor at Sophia University and now Jesuit priest who was also a descendant of St. Francisco Xavier, the man who brought Christianity to Japan. I asked him about the mystery of the Naoiri holy water and he explained as follows: "From a long time ago, it is a fact that in Europe, and especially Germany, priests often gave sick Christians carbonated spring water to drink as a cure. The missionaries mixed carbonated water with wine and preyed to make it holy water. Therefore, the reason why missionaries stayed in Kutami was no doubt to replenish their holy water." My assumption of the main component of holy water to be carbonated spring water was true. Thanks to the spring water, exchange with Germany has been lasting over 400 years since then. Moreover, the carbonated spring water that was used in the holy water has evolved into a hot spring health care system for the first time in Japan. This is something we can be proud of. There are many hot springs in Japan but only the carbonated spring water of Naoiri can be holy water. It's one and only.

Next, allow me to introduce some mysterious things that are in Naoiri. These are the Gods of the Mountain. They are stone statues of a male and female god made in the shape of birds. At the top of both of their heads there is a cockscomb-like shape, and there are wings on their backs from their shoulders down. The male god has three eyes while the female has one, and both have very large mouths. Additionally, the male has his arms, which end in three-fingered hands, folded across his chest just above his legs, while the female is crossing hers above her belly. Interestingly, there is a picture that was found in Ibaraki City in Osaka that depicts an angel in a similar pose. The picture, called Tenshi Sangyozu (photo 2), has similar features to that of the Gods of the Mountain, including the wings sprouting from the back, and hands crossing in an X shape. The hidden Christians regarded the X shape as the cross of Jesus and is a common symbol throughout the whole country. The day of the festival of the Gods of the mountain was held on or around December 20th and on that day people were not allowed to enter into the mountains. Therefore, it was very convenient for hidden Christians. It's also interesting that this day is so close to Christmas.

In Naoiri, there are many similar mysterious stone statues but the God of the mountain are outstanding in Japan. Based on the fact that the National Folk Museum in Chiba Prefecture made a replica of this in 1984, it is reasonable to say that it is very valuable. The Kutami area in Naoiri has many Christian relics, including the tombstone with the INRI markings, holy water, and many Christian graves. The Gods of the Mountain may also be Christian relics. Who made for what? Kutami in Naoiri is truly mysterious place.



① The mountain god of Nagano, Naoiri Town. Left: God, Right: Goddess



③ Luis Fontes, who stands in front of Tono-machi cave chapel.



④ The mountain god of Niida, Naoiri Town.



⑤ A drawing with angels looking into heaven, found in Ibaraki, Osaka.