

Christian Sorcerers on Trial. Records of the 1827 Osaka Incident. Translated and with an introduction by Fumiko MIYAZAKI, Kate Wildman NAKAI, and Mark TEEUWEN. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020. xlv, 364 pp. ISBN 978-0-231-19690-1.

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It is a weird and engrossing story that unfolds in *Christian Sorcerers on Trial*. A woman called Sano is arrested for swindling. Before long, the dynamic *yoriki* of the *Higashi bugyōsho* in Osaka, Ōshio Heihachirō (1793–1837), discovers that she is not just a medium and fortune teller, but a *Christian* medium and fortune teller. The investigations spread to Kyoto and come to involve a huge number of people. Nearly three years later, in the final month of Bunsei 12 (1829), the six main culprits are crucified, three of them in person and three, as pickled corpses.

In essence, the book is an annotated translation of the complete file of the whole procedure, from the first inquiries in Osaka (Part I: Testimonies) till the final deliberations of the *Hyōjōsho* and the final verdicts of the *Rōjū* in Edo (Part II: The Judicial Review Process). This translation is followed by three translations from contemporary literature: the anonymous *Ukiyo no arisama*, Matura Seizan's *Kasshi yawa*, and the anonymous *Ōshio Heihachirō denki: Kinko jitsuroku* (Part III: Rumors and retellings). These texts pertain to the same incident; the idea is that they show, what *outsiders* knew (could know) of the case.

The translation is based on two, largely parallel dossiers (p. xxxvii), one of which, *Jashūmon ikken kakitome* 邪宗門一件書留, is in the possession of Keiō University. The other one, *Jashūmon ginnisho* 吟味書, is available as a microfilm, at the Faculty of Law of the University of Tokyo. A third, inferior copy of the dossier is in the possession of Seishin Joshi Daigaku, also in Tokyo (for details, see p. 341, and Appendix 3: “Manuscript Versions of the Keihan Kirishitan Incident Dossier”).

The dossiers tell the story in the order in which it unfolded itself to the investigators in the course of their investigations. They begin with the aforementioned Sano, work their way up to her teacher Kinu, and from Kinu, up to the one who initiated her – a third woman, Toyoda Mitsugi. Mitsugi, in her turn, was initiated by a man called Mizuno Gunki, whom she met at the house of one Itoya Wasa in the tenth month of 1810. Her initiation took

place in the course of 1811, after Mitsugi had proven herself worthy of it through water austerities and sexual abstinence. To the world, the three women acted as *Yijing* diviners and Inari mediums, but they knew that they had been initiated into the forbidden Christian religion.

Gunki, who died in 1824, also had two male disciples. One was Fujii Umon, who was initiated in 1805, and the other was Takamiya Heizō, initiated in 1818. Both had worked as *Yijing* diviners, and both had an interest in medicine. The sixth person to be crucified in 1829 was a doctor, Fujita Kenkō. He had no relation with Gunki at all, but his name was mentioned to the investigators by Umon as someone who “possessed books of the Jesus creed” (details on p. 85).

The first question, which remains unanswered in the dossiers, is, where Gunki picked up his knowledge of Christianity. The second, related question is, why the officials were so sure that they really were confronted with Christian believers.

The accusation was based, first, on a scroll painting that Gunki showed to Mitsugi, Kinu, Umon, and Heizō. It is described by all four as representing “a woman who holds a child in her left hand, and a sword in her right.” The figure, they were told, represented *Tentei nyorai* 天帝如来. By way of initiation, Gunki’s disciples were made to cut their finger and drip blood on the painting. At the same time, they were also taught the *mantra* “*zensu maru paraizo*” (“Jesus, Maria, Paradise”).

Both the name *Tentei nyorai* and the *mantra* earlier appeared in a book entitled *Kirishitan-shūmon raichō jikki* 切支丹宗門来朝実記, the oldest manuscripts of which date from the 18th century (Hōreki, Meiwa and An’ei era’s); for a brief summary, see George Elison, *Deus destroyed*, pp. 214–16. Hence, the authors suppose that Gunki’s source of inspiration was *Raichō jikki* (p. xxii). Influence of *kakure kirishitan* in Kyushu can be discounted as Gunki visited Kyushu only in 1820–22.

The other thing Gunki may have picked up from *Raichō jikki* is the idea that Christians work magic. Apparently, Gunki himself was good at sorcery. His tricks included extinguishing candles from a distance and conjuring up dead people. The investigators never saw him do it, but had to rely on the stories told by Gunki’s disciples; see the testimony of Mitsugi (pp. 57–58) and of Heizō (p. 93). However, working magic was not a Christian prerogative. *Yijing* diviners, who foretold the future, and Inari mediums, who expelled spirits, did the same. And so did followers of the cult associated with Kangiten: “A Buddhist divinity whose antecedents lie in the Hindu deity Gaṇeśa. It combines both destructive and protective characteristics and is

associated with rites to ensure prosperity and guard against disaster” (see p. 83; p. 310, n. 1). In fact, Gunki claims he always told outsiders that the deity he was worshipping was Kangiten (p. 83).

The most damning part of the testimonies may have been, that Gunki explained Christian texts (see Umon’s and Heizō’s testimony; resp. p. 85, and pp. 91–92). Mentioned by title are Matteo Ricci’s *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主実義 (1603) and *Jiren shipian* 畸人十篇 (1608). Amongst Gunki’s papers was also found a partial copy of *Pixieji* 關邪集, which is a collection of late Ming anti-Christian writings compiled by the monk Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 (1599–1655). This put Gunki well above the ranks of common sorcerers.

Attempts to find out about Gunki’s background and the remainder of his network led to nothing. One of the reasons was that the investigators could not question members of the *kuge* houses that had employed Gunki as a scribe, and had dismissed him because of financial malfeasance (pp. xxi–xxii, xxxi). After Gunki’s death, his papers had gone to a male acquaintance, Tsuchiya Shōni, who made a floor mat out of them. He only kept the diaries (p. 103). The investigators had a look at the diaries and letters, but apart from the copy of *Pixieji*, they saw “nothing of any significance” (p. 103).

The investigators never saw the painting on which Mitsugi, Kinu, Unmon, and Heizō had dripped blood. In the fourth month of 1819, it had been pawned to another of Gunki’s friends, the pawnbroker Nakamura Shintarō, and Shintarō’s son burned it when he became aware of the ongoing investigation into Gunki’s associates (pp. 114–17). In the end, the investigators had to conclude that “we extended our investigation to try to uncover the line of transmission to Gunki of Kirishitan practices and the origin of the drawing of the Lord of Heaven, but we found no answers.” (p. 127)

There was no proof that the sixth suspect, Fujita Kenzō, ever had been an acolyte of Gunki’s at all. However, when searched, it turned out he owned a number of forbidden, Christian books. He claimed that he needed those for his study of Western medicine. Because of his possession of these books, the investigators decided to ask their superiors, whether Kenzō should be included in the case (pp. 128–31). The *Hyōjōsho* eventually decided that Kenzō was a “Kirishitan devotee” and that he should be executed with the others, without pronouncing itself explicitly on the question, whether he could be regarded as a disciple of Gunki (p. 185).

As the translators say in the Acknowledgments, the attraction of the dossiers is the wealth of detail they contain about any number of aspects of early modern state and society. The first thing that draws attention is the judicial

system itself, which required confessions, signed testimonies, and review by higher ranks in the *bakufu* hierarchy (an outline of the procedure is given pp. xxviii–xxxv). In these dossiers, we really see it at work.

A second thing, which I found highly intriguing, is, why the *Osaka machibugyōsho* decided to frame its inquiry as an investigation into Christianity. Five of the six suspects occupied the acknowledged social *niches* of *Yijing* diviners, Inari mediums, or worshiper of Kangiten, and foretelling the future or conjuring up the spirits of the dead were not forbidden, either. (One form of sorcery was forbidden, though; this was *kitsune-tsukai* or “fox witchery”; see p. xxx.) The sixth, Kenzō, was a practicing physician. Nor were the prescribed ascetic practices typically Christian; water austerities, sexual abstinence, recitation of *mantra*, and the cultivation of an unwavering mind were part of many creeds. And a typical Christian rite like baptism was lacking (p. xxix). (Or was it at the root of the water austerities Gunki prescribed to his followers?)

In the first instance, the *Hyōjōsho* pointed out the same: “If it is a matter of using strange arts to startle people with extraordinary things, devotees of the Kirishitan sect are not the only ones to do so” (p. 146, 156). Another problem was posed by Sano’s trip to Nagasaki, which she said herself she had made with the express intent to see (and tread on) a *fumie*. The argument was that, “... were her account to be accepted at face value, it would upend the presumption that one who showed no qualms in stepping on a *fumie* could not be *Kirishitan* and undermine the established mechanism for testing those who might be hiding such inclinations” (p. 147). Consequently, the *Hyōjōsho* proposed that Sano and the others were not really Christians, and suggested that the *Rōjū* would remand the case to Osaka with instructions to do the investigation again. The *rōjū*, however, in the person of Mizuno Tadaakira (1762–1834), refused to comply. Instead, he instructed the *Hyōjōsho* to ignore Sano’s testimony, as it was uncorroborated, and strike it from the dossier. (pp. 147–49).

The problem that the *Hyōjōsho* had to settle next was the appropriate punishment. Here, the problem was that the two judicial manuals of the bakufu, *Kujikata o-sadamegaki* 公事方御定書 and *O-shioki reirui shū* 御仕置例類集, did not recognize Christianity as a special category and did not provide for specific punishments for Christians. The criminal practices in the religious field that were mentioned in the manuals either referred to various offshoots of the *Fujufuse-ha*, or to “deviant practices and strange acts” in general (p. 144). When, in 1790 and 1805 in Kyushu, suspected *kakure kirishitan* were investigated, the persecutors had eventually decided to settle for

the formula “adherence to a ‘deviant creed’ (*ishū* 異宗)” (p. xvi, p. 147), and dropped “Christianity” from the charges.

Once it had received its instructions, of course the *Hyōjōsho* managed to formulate a refined juridical argument and proposed crucifixion as the due punishment of the six principals. Its judgment was accepted by the *Rōjū* (pp. 149–52). Nevertheless, one wonders what caused the investigators, and later on the *rōjū*, to attach so much importance to proving that the accused really were *Kirishitan*. As the authors remark in this context, “how Ōshio’s personality and convictions may have shaped the investigation’s direction remains a pending question” (p. xvii).

If one sees how the investigators dealt with Kenzo’s library, one cannot but conclude that their knowledge of Christianity and of Dutch Studies was minimal. Even writings by Shizuki Tadao (1760–1806) and Maeno Ryōtaku (1723–1803) were labelled as “inviting suspicion” (p. 287–88: App. 2: Disposition of the Proscribed Books). Kenzō’s “own summation of what he had learned about Christianity” (*Nensairoku kō* 燃犀録稿) was burned with the rest. It is a pity, for it might have given some indication of what *he* had made of it.

There are many other points of interest that are raised by these dossiers. One of them is the concept of family. What one sees in the evidence is a bewildering array of marriages, divorces, adoptions, and successions; people changing their names, changing their residences, and changing their family affiliation. It goes against all standard assumptions about family.

Another thing is the importance the authorities attached to mutual social responsibility. Once the investigators had decided and the *rōjū* had concurred that the accused really were Christians, not only their family members were arrested and interrogated, but also the heads of the *goningumi* and the priests of the temples to which the accused were or had been affiliated, were investigated and punished for failing to notice that their flock or neighbours had been Christians. The temples clearly had been amiss, for the *terauke* system had been established for the express purpose of eliminating Christianity. They should have paid attention, but apparently did not. To what extent could they realistically have been expected to do so?

It is also interesting to see that there were certain *niches* of society where the investigations could not reach. Those were the *kuge* families in Kyoto. Gunki had been employed, first, by the Nijō House and then by the Kan’in no Miya 閑院宮, and Mitsugi, as a nominal *Yijing* diviner, had been licensed by the Tsuchimikado House (p. xxiii). Gunki even boasted to Heizō, “how

his unwavering mind had allowed him to cope with being incarcerated at the Kan'in princely mansion" (p. 91). The Nijō and the Kan'in certainly knew more about Gunki, and the Tsuchimikado had clearly been less than careful in their supervision, but they could not be questioned.

In short, apart from information about the practices that were the investigation's main target, the testimonies as a whole, of the principal as well as the secondary figures, offer a remarkable set of vignettes of late Edo urban life, related by people from a social tier whose individual voices are only rarely represented in the historical record. The text is a rich source, that has relevance to many fields of religious, social, and political history.

Finally, two notes of criticism. First, in the end a translation is just another form of commentary. There is little reason to doubt the accuracy of the present translation; it makes a reliable impression, and the quality of the scholars who have made the translation is beyond suspicion. Nevertheless, I would propose that, as a matter of principle, it is incumbent on all translators to see to it that the original of the text they have translated is (made) available. In the present case, this is only marginally so. Unless one lives in Tokyo, the only copy one can access is a facsimile copy of the *Jashūmon ikken kakitome*, which has been put online by the Shiryō Hensanjo; it counts 422 frames, and cannot be downloaded.¹

The second thing that irked me was that all technical terms, from *rōjū* 老中 and *machi-bugyō* 町奉行 to *shōya* 庄屋 and *yōjutsu* 妖術, have been translated. For readers who do not know Japanese, this may be convenient, but for those who do, it is annoying. I may guess that a "senior councilor" is a *rōjū*, and that the "Deliberative Council" is the *Hyōjōsho* 評定所, but why not use these terms from the beginning? As it is, the Japanese terms and appellations are banished to a Glossary, together with the characters. I would propose that, when one writes a text for the general public, one uses translations, but adds the Japanese term or word the first time it occurs in the text and also puts it into the Index. If the text is intended for specialists, one should use the Japanese term throughout, and add the characters and a translation at first occurrence and in the Index. In this way, it becomes possible to pursue the term, word, name, or title in the Japanese reference works.

Of course, one can quarrel about the question whether the present book is addressed to a lay public, or intended for specialists, but in either case, the present Glossary is insufficient.

¹ <https://clioimg.hi.u-tokyo.ac.jp/viewer/list/idata/200/2019/10/1/?m=limit>.