

Cultural Anxiety in East Asian Clouded by “Tradition” and “Modernity”—Based on Chinese Scholars’ Studies on Religion Mixture in Akutagawa Ryūnosuke’s Kirishitanmono

Ling Qin

Department of Literature, University of Nankai, China

Email: qinling0307@163.com

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Abstract—In Akutagawa Ryūnosuke’s series of Christian-themed works, known as “Kirishitanmono”, the conflicts between Buddhism and Christianity can be seen everywhere. Some Chinese scholars believed that Akutagawa broke down under the burden of the unbelievable speed of westernization in modern Japan because he was closer to the Japanese tradition. The aim of this paper is to revise the problem of this statement. By sorting out the history of both Buddhism and Christianity and using ‘perspective’ stated by Kojin Karatani, it can be revealed that this belief is actually a conceptual misalignment under the East Asian modern perspective, which contains the equivalence between local religion and tradition, as well as Christianity and modernity. Chinese scholars live in similar social and cultural environment as Akutagawa, thus such interpretation was just a repetition of their own perspective rather than an interpretation of Akutagawa’s work. By organizing all the Kirishitanmono of his, Akutagawa’s attitudes towards mixing religions can be shown: at first, he managed to accept foreign culture, only to find that it would leave the root of Japanese culture hanging; later he tried to domesticated foreign religions, finding that this would cause the modernity which the introduction of Christianity brought about dissolute. This paper focuses on this conceptual misalignment in Chinese scholars’ studies, reveals Akutagawa’s real struggle and constructs a new way interpreting the ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ in Japanese culture.

Keywords—Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, culture anxiety in East Asian, mixed religions in modern Japan, perspective, tradition and modernity

I. INTRODUCTION

Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (hereafter Akutagawa) was an essential figure in the history of modern Japanese literature [1]. Since the 16th century, when Catholicism was introduced to Japan, almost all modern Japanese writers have been influenced by Christianity. Akutagawa was no exception, producing a series of Christian-themed works known as “Kirishitanmono”. According to Chinese scholar Wang Peng, Akutagawa’s Kirishitanmono encompasses twenty works [2]. From the first one *Tobacco and the Devil* to the last one *The Man from the West, The Sequel*, Akutagawa wrote at least one ‘Kirishitanmono’ every year, and it can be said that those work have been there throughout his entire life.

In addition to his works, Akutagawa’s life reflected his confusion and uncertainty about his religion and beliefs. He once said, ‘I have never read a Taoist book, nor have I read a Buddhist book’ [3]. When talking about Christianity, he also said that he only ‘fell in love with Christianity from an artistic point of view’ [3], but the writer’s words and actions were inconsistent. Akutagawa left a Bible under his pillow at the

time of his death, and in his suicide note to his friends, he mentioned that he would like to be buried by the traditional Japanese Buddhist rites [3]. Akutagawa’s way of religion and beliefs was indeed a way full of search and struggle.

However, few studies have mentioned the mixing characteristic of all the religions in his work. The only paper mentioned the religion mixture contributed Akutagawa’s death to ‘lost between tradition and modernity’. But is this the real problem and had Akutagawa really done nothing to face his loss? This article hopes to reflect on the problems behind the metaphorical analysis of ‘Buddhism represents tradition and Christianity represents modernity’ in the previous studies of Akutagawa’s Christian works, and further discuss Akutagawa’s actual struggles in his works while facing the cultural crisis caused by the mixture of religions in modern Japan.

II. THE ‘FAILURE’ OF STRONG TOLERANCE OF JAPANESE CULTURE: MIXTURE OF RELIGIONS IN KIRISHITANMONO

The research on Akutagawa’s religion-related works in China started quite late, beginning with Zou Bo’s “Akutagawa Ryūnosuke’s Religious Thought”, published in 1998 [4]. Subsequent studies on Christianity and Buddhism in Akutagawa’s works began to appear, but most of them were scattered, with separate explanations of the writer’s thoughts towards Christianity or Buddhism. Both or more of the religions were rarely explained at the same time in one study. However, in Akutagawa’s Kirishitanmono works, Christianity does not appear in isolation but is often entangled or even in conflict with indigenous religions such as Buddhism and Bushido. Therefore, it is difficult to explore the whole picture of Akutagawa’s Kirishitanmono by focusing only on Christianity or one of the indigenous religions.

A. Strong Tolerance in Japanese Culture

The article *Smiles of Gods* showed a lively picture of the mixture of religions in Japan at that time [5]. In the article, the priest Volgandino, while praying, said: “Namo Kagura, the Lord of Heavenly Mercy!” Hoping to save the land, he had several strange dreams, each one telling of some ‘traditional ghosts’ in the native Japanese: Amaterasu was worried about being replaced by a foreign deity (meaning God). However, when she came out from behind the rock, the sky became wonderfully bright, and the other gods were laughing, saying, ‘As far as the eye can see, there are your mountains and your rivers everywhere ... and there are no new gods at all, all of them are your servants’ [3]. In this strange dream world,

Japan still belonged to the Shinto religion of Amaterasu. In another dream, 'an old man' lead the priest to look back at the ancient Japanese literary process using Chinese characters but says, "Instead of conquering us, Chinese characters have been conquered by us... A poet named Kakinomoto no Hitomaro composed the waka concerned with Qixi festival, which is still passed down from generation to generation in this country... It was not about the story of the cowherd and the weaving maiden but the love between Hikoboshi and Tanabatatsume" [3]. This reflects a cultural characteristic unique to Japan: an extremely strong ability to domesticate other cultures and a cultural core which is externally acceptable. Although the old man in the article said that such ability is "not our unique strength", the strength of domesticating and the depth of incorporation of foreign culture into the core of local culture do make Japan unique in the history, both in literature and religion.

Ruth Benedict once said, 'The Japanese are, to the highest degree, both aggressive and unaggressive, both insolent and polite, submissive and resentful of being pushed around, loyal and treacherous. brave and timid, conservative and hospitable to new ways' [6]. This is another reflection of Japan's extremely strong power of absorption: Japanese literature was dominated by both kanshi and waka from the very beginning, and Japanese classical literature can be said to be filled with shades of Chinese literature. Even after the rise of waka literature, Han poetry and Han literature did not fade away but became an integral part of Japanese literature. In addition to continuing the unique Japanese aesthetic interest, classical Chinese culture's influence also retains in Wa literature. As Akutagawa describes, "Kūkai, Michikaze, I often approached them quietly and saw that all the calligraphy in their hands was Chinese style. But gradually, a new kind of beauty was born from their own writing" [3]. These influences, like the changes in Buddhism over the centuries, have been constantly changing and, with such a process, have been internalized into Japan's traditions. The strong power of absorption of Japanese culture for foreign cultures is evident.

B. The Failure of Strong Tolerance in Modern Era

Japan, which has embraced numerous foreign cultures throughout the ages, should have continued to exert its strong capacity for acceptance in the face of Western cultures in the modern era. However, in Akutagawa's "Kirishitanmono" series, many characters got confused in religion mixture. It seems that the strong capacity for absorption has failed in the particular context of modern times. For example, the character of a mother, *Oshino*, is depicted twice by the Akutagawa. The article *Dr. Ogata Ryosa: Memorandum*, published in 1917, and *Oshino*, published in March 1923, were quite alike. The former told the story from the point of view of a doctor: Oshino, a Catholic widow whose only child was dying of an acute illness, was forced to renounce her Catholicism at the doctor's request. When the doctor told her that her daughter was beyond saving, she fainted from the pain of regret. When the mother woke up, she returned to the priest and confessed her sins, and her daughter was miraculously healed [3]. In contrast, *Oshino*, published six years later, told the story from the perspective of a priest: Oshino begged the priest to save her child, saying that she

would be willing to serve Christianity for the rest of her life if her only son could be saved. After listening to the priest's moving account of Christ's life, she decided that the tearful Jesus was not a "loving" man but rather a coward who tore easily, and Oshino choked, "Instead of giving him the medicine prescribed by cowards, he should commit suicide" [3]. After saying that, she left as if she was hiding from a plague. Japanese scholar Haga once concluded that the essence of 'Bushido' is to pay attention to honor and when it is necessary, one should kill oneself rather than be humiliated [7]. Oshino and her son were obviously influenced by the spirit of Bushido when they chose to die. It can be seen that, in Akutagawa's view, Christianity and the native religion have never been perfectly integrated but always appeared in a state of hostility.

The Bushido spirit practiced by *Oshino* was also reflected in *The Diary of Maid*. *The Diary of Maid* was published in January 1924. In this article, Mrs. who lived in syūrin court prayed daily, but confused Buddhism with Christianity. She bowed to "Madonna Avalokitesvara" and warned her subordinates, "Your destination is the path to the afterlife, but there are many obstacles. If you are foolish and do not convert to God, you will go to that hell called 'inferno' in the future" [3]. She refused to surrender to the enemy or to offer captivity, and chose to commit suicide by hara-kiri. In the Christian doctrine, suicide is not allowed, but rather, "Bushido is the way of pursuing of death" [8], thus Mrs.'s suicide is the result of some random or more than one belief. Therefore, Christians in Akutagawa's works were often imprinted with multiple cultures, except Oshino, the first mother who was once defected and then returned to Christianity. The rest of the characters all fell into a trap which led to destruction. It seems to show the religion mixture that Japan faced in that time: the strong power of absorption in the native culture failed at the turn of the modern era. Christianity and native religions became incompatible or even antagonistic. This was reflected in the characters' repetitive behavior and schizophrenia, eventually leading to their unresolved demise.

Pan Guimin was the first Chinese scholar who explored the issue of religion hybridity in Akutagawa's works. He proposed that "Akutagawa fell in the vortex of tradition and modernity ... He was close to Buddhism ... But at the time of 'modernity', he was forced to pay attention to the approaching Western Christianity, and eventually got lost and caught between the East and the West" [9]. It is true that Akutagawa, who lived in the Taisho period, witnessed the process of rapid absorption of western culture in Japan and shortly after the Taisho period the national anxiety of Japan, which was brought about by the strong invasion of new foreign cultures, manifested itself in the form of aggressive expansion towards other countries. However, is "lost between the East and the West" the same as "falling in the vortex of tradition and modernity"? Whether Akutagawa's attempts to confront the mixed religions were limited to "being close to Buddhism but being forced to pay attention to the approaching western Christianity"? They are both questions that require further exploration and clarification.

III. DISLOCATED CONCEPTION UNDER THE MODERN PERSPECTIVE: ANXIETY OBSCURED BY “TRADITION” AND “MODERNITY”

As mentioned above, when exploring the religions mixture in Akutagawa Ryūnosuke’s Kirishitanmono group, many Chinese scholars have referred to Akutagawa’s particular living era as one in which the vortex of “tradition and modernity” was prevailed. However, interpreting “Buddhism” and “Christianity” in the text as “tradition” and “modern” is not a self-evident proposition. But few Chinese scholars have argued for this. In fact, only the fact that Christianity was a foreign culture is a historical fact that does not need to be discussed, while the direct equation of Buddhism and Christianity as tradition and modern is open to reconsideration.

A. *Christianity: on Its Way towards Tradition*

First of all, it is true that Buddhism was introduced to Japan much earlier than Christianity, and the level of acceptance of Buddhism among Japanese was much higher. But the definition of tradition does not rely simply on the time of introduction. Buddhism was introduced to Japan around the 6th century through China and Baekje, and the Japanese at that time accepted the beliefs of Buddhism on the same level as the ‘Kami’ and localized them to make Buddhism evolve into what it is like today [10]. In other words, the native Japanese Buddhist faith has not remained static since its introduction but has likewise changed and adapted to the local culture over time. We can see that the process giving birth to Madonna Avalokitesvara through Madonna’s union with Avalokitesvara was also a process of localization of foreign culture just like this: it tried to blend in the Japanese tradition through its fusion with Buddhism, which had already taken root in Japan for centuries. But at the same time, it cannot be ignored that Buddhism had also gone through a similar path 1000 years ago, by resonating with the theory of Shinto and integrating more smoothly into the local cultural soil of Japan through the local Shintoism beliefs. The only difference is that Christianity in Akutagawa’s era has not reached the final step Buddhism had taken thousands of years ago. Therefore, the fact that Buddhism has become a ‘tradition’ is the result of the strong ability of absorption in Japan during its history, not an a priori proposition that existed in the first place.

In Akutagawa Ryūnosuke’s *Heresy*, a novel serialized between October and December 1918, he described the situation when Christianity was first introduced to Japan. “The cleric who preached ‘Manichaeism’ was wearing a gold cross amulet”, and from the viewpoint of the public, “the main deity of this religion was said to be a female bodhisattva (Avalokitesvara) whom people were not familiar with”, “The lazy figure with a naked baby in her arms simply resembles a vixen who devours human flesh” [3]. From these descriptions, it is easy to see that “Manichaeism” was full of Christianity characteristics, yet there was still a mixture of “Bodhisattva (Avalokitesvara)” from Buddhist and “Kami” from Japanese Shinto. From this point of view, the intermingling of Christianity with Buddhism in the early days of introduction of Christianity was similar to the combination process of Buddhism and Shintoism before. Thus when new culture came in, domestication and transformation took place by

interacting with the cultural beliefs which were already accepted by the local community.

B. *Modern East Asian Perspective: “Local” as “Traditional” and “Foreign” as “Modern”*

Nagasaki Vignette is a short essay written by Akutagawa during his stay in Nagasaki in 1922. In the text, the Dutchman painted by Sima Jianghan in the window fell in love with the Dutchwoman on the porcelain plate, and the tooth-carved Christ asked Madonna Avalokitesvara to help the Dutchman to set him up with the Dutchwomen, but instead they met with the Dutchwoman’s contempt and mockery: “Your looks are far from our Virgin Mary in the Netherlands, let alone him”, “A thing like ‘Neither fish’ nor fowl concocted by the painter here, even more terrible than the black man” [3]. In the eyes of the Dutchwoman, either the Dutchman painted by Sima Jianghan or the local Madonna Avalokitesvara, were just the local countryside characters which can be described as “Neither fish nor fowl”. But a few moments later, some Japanese guests who came to visit said, “This is a southern barbarian woman, right? This is much more beautiful than the woman on the Dutch porcelain plate! ... in the end, the Japanese made the southern barbarian porcelain, and there is a unique taste which the Western porcelains have not...this “Japanese taste”, and today’s culture, will produce an even greater culture in the future” [3]. From this description, it was clear that Akutagawa seemed to be in support of Japanese local tradition. As Japanese scholar Furuya Yasuo says, Japan has never given up its national traditional ideas in the face of the wave of Western culture [11]. But in fact, Akutagawa’s words have revealed his true purpose, which was to find and divorce the native part from the mixed religions culture and to attribute the new change to Japanese traditions. Although Akutagawa’s expression did not explain where the ‘national essence’ lies directly, since neither ‘southern barbarian porcelain’ nor Madonna Avalokitesvara was a product of original Japan. Rather, they were the results of culture mixture in a particular time era. This leads to a paradox: Akutagawa Ryūnosuke wanted to emphasize that today’s new hybrid culture in Japan was born out of the power of Japanese traditional culture, but the objects he used to refer to and emphasize the ‘Japanese taste’ were indeed the products of a typical mixture of several religion cultures.

When it comes to tradition and modernity, Kojin Karatani once discussed about the conception of “perspective” as to who gives birth to whom. The term ‘perspective’ means that “everything that corresponds to this perspective at a certain moment will be projected onto the mesh of coordinates, and an objective decision will be made in relation to each other” [12]. So, when Akutagawa Ryūnosuke tried to find the “original Japan”, he was also looking through the perspective at the turn of the modern era. “Just as the way sinologist would intend to imagine what Japanese literature was like before the introduction of Han literature, one only did so because he had already had a sense of Han literature” [12]. Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, who saw the current situation of the religion mixture in modern Japan, had already had a perspective of the modern time. Therefore, the “tradition” he saw was already a specific perspective or rather, an imaginary “tradition”. Moreover, if the two points of

“foreign” and “modern” are to coincide in a perspective, they can only be seen this way from the perspective of an oriental country facing an invasion, whether by force or otherwise. Therefore, the definition of foreign or Western as modern is not an interpretation of the text but a restatement of the perspective of East Asian scholars. Akutagawa Ryūnosuke himself called out his faith that Japan’s culture today was still born of “Japanese taste” meant he also showed his questions towards the direct collusion between the two concepts: western and modern. But again, if the writer’s praise of “Japanese taste” was taken by scholars as the writer praising “tradition”, they would be making a mistake equating the concepts of “local” and “tradition”, which means they would still be falling into the same trap of perspective in modern times.

Therefore, the author of this paper believes that an analysis of Akutagawa from the perspective of the allegory of equaling Christianity with Western modernity, Buddhism with Eastern traditions, can shed light on the problem of the nation-state in Akutagawa’s time. However, if one attribute Akutagawa Ryūnosuke’s collapse to ‘being close to tradition and forced into the vortex of modernity,’ one has more or less ignored the impact of our own East Asian perspective on the study, as well as the writer’s various attempts and struggles during the development of modern Japanese culture. Therefore, it is believed that an analysis of the struggles Akutagawa underwent should go back to where it first began, starting with the writer’s changing attitudes and attempts toward foreign and local religions.

IV. CULTURE INVASION AND RELIGION DOMESTICATION: A DILEMMA WHEN FACING CULTURE ANXIETY

As mentioned above, it was only after the formation of a modern perspective can people consciously search for tradition, and when it came to local religions, foreign religions played a similar role. Only when foreign religions and cultures were introduced did Akutagawa Ryūnosuke’s attempt to infuse traditional religions with freshness and power become more acute. His attitudes toward Christianity in his works were somewhat transformed amid these developments. Japanese scholar Junichiro Sago has divided Akutagawa’s attitude towards Christian into multiple stages [13].

A. *Early Attitude: Attempts to Accept and Study*

In Akutagawa’s early Kirishitanmono works, he often confronted Christianity culture with direct affirmation. For example, *The Death of a Disciple* was published in 1918. At the end of *The Death of a Disciple*, Lorenzo, who was charged of “raping a young girl”, died in a fire to save a baby, only to prove his innocence: she is actually a woman. In order not to expose the lie that the umbrella store’s daughter had made accusing ‘him’ of adultery with her, Lorenzo was silent and expelled from the church and put on the street, and in the end of the story, she gave up her life to save the woman’s baby, so that the umbrella store’s daughter could finally tell the truth and had her spirit saved [3]. The figure of Lorenzo in *The Death of a Disciple*, written in the early days of Akutagawa’s life, reflected Akutagawa’s affirmation and celebration of devotional faith, or at least showed a positive depiction of Christianity culture. Of course, the thinking and

understanding of foreign religions of the writer did not stop at the transmission and re-creation of the righteous and God but went further to portray new and contradictory images that contain more modern meanings.

In *Ogin*, published in 1922, in which the character Ogin, whose parents died when she was a child, was adopted by a Christian couple and had remained devout and pure ever since, but renounced her faith before facing the sentence of death by fire. She explained that her biological parents were already in hell, “If I am the only one to enter the gates of heaven now, don’t I feel sorry for them?” [3]. Akutagawa confronts Ogin’s behavior with the question, “Can this be attributed to the triumph of the devil, and worth of such glee?” [3]. The contradictory images portrayed by Akutagawa were not limited to human beings either; the image of Madonna in Kirishitanmono also had experienced complex changes and developments. *Black Madonna*, published in *Writing Club* in 1920, is an exception to Akutagawa’s “Kirishitanmono”. In the article, Madonna is ‘wrapped in an ebony do-robe, still with a perpetual grim and unkind scorn on her beautiful ivory face’ [3]. The grandmother in the article prayed to Black Madonna and wished her to keep the sick grandson Shusaku alive before she died. Madonna Avalokitesvara kept this promise, allowing Shusaku to stop breathing less than ten minutes after his grandmother’s death.

Ogin’s decision to follow her biological parents out of love and salvation comes at the cost of her descent into hell with her adoptive parents, and the image of Black Madonna change from her loving Christian image, she seemed to have fulfilled her grandmother’s prays, but the end of the story was more like a curse. The question of whether Ogin’s actions as a Christian, who had met with disaster because of her alien faith among the villagers of the native religion, were pious or descent; whether Black Madonna’s image of Madonna as a fusion of Madonna and an ebony statue functioned as a salvation or a curse, are both questions of modernity in the context of religion mixture that Akutagawa brought to the fore. The most obvious symptom was the blurring of the line between kind and evil. He once wrote to a friend: “If one loves anything good, one can also love something evil. Reading Baudelaire’s prose poems, I see anything good or evil as one” [3]. It was clear that the original dichotomy of the good and evil had been dissolved under the impact of modernity [14]. For Ogin, she claimed to have abandoned her religion, but she was not at all descent, for her eyes shone with ‘not only the innocent heart of a virgin but also the “exiled child of Eve, and she has the heart of humanity as a whole” [3]. In this way, Akutagawa’s portrayal of salvation took a personal turn from Lorenzo-like martyrdom to the modern context of Ogin. This dissolution reflected modernity triggered by the status of religion hybridity brought about by the introduction of Christianity.

B. *Later Attitude: Attempts to Localize and Domesticate*

Examples above show that the introduction of Christianity in Akutagawa’s works do bring a certain degree of modernity, which is why many East Asian scholars use the concept of modernity to refer to Christianity in their studies on Akutagawa. Ogin’s ultimate choice of apostasy at least expressed the writer’s anxiety: even if introducing foreign

religions brought about new things like modernity, it was unnecessary to achieve salvation by complete westernization. The wholesale acceptance of foreign religions is anxiety-provoking because modern Japan had been westernized faster than he had ever imagined. The culture invasion was so rapid that the roots of Japanese culture seemed to be wavering amid the turmoil. Then Akutagawa moved on to the second stage as he tried to localize and domesticate the foreign religions. As a result, he produced many works that intentionally affirmed the local religion culture subsequently. Akutagawa's portrayal of Mrs. in *The Diary of Maid* mentioned above, as well as the praise of the "Japanese taste" in *Nagasaki Vignette*, all showed a return to a reliance on native religions. This return did not come from Akutagawa's "closeness to Buddhism" but from the anxiety mentioned above.

There is an essential contradiction in the narrative of *Nagasaki Vignette* that raises a question: How could Akutagawa say that "today's culture" was born out of "Japanese taste" when at that time Japan was actually westernizing rapidly? As discussed in the previous article, the praise of "apanese taste" cannot simply be interpreted as Akutagawa's return to "tradition". It can be found that the Dutchwoman on the porcelain plate insulting Madonna Avalokitesvara as something "Neither fish nor fowl" from a countryside suggested that Japan's current culture presents a nature of mixture. Moreover, the travelers emphasized the "unique taste" of the southern barbarian porcelain to avoid the "Neither fish nor fowl" problem raised by the Dutchwoman. By praising the local characteristics of the mixed culture, Akutagawa was trying to "domesticate" the Dutch porcelain plate by using the local religion culture. However, it avoids the problem that the hybridity of Japan's "present-day culture" was indeed brought about by foreign religions from the West. Akutagawa was not unaware of this because if we look deeper into the origin of "present-day culture", it was precisely developed from the 'Neither fish nor fowl' situation that the extraneous religion had developed. Therefore, what Akutagawa deliberately pursued was not the authentic traditional Japanese culture (which, as already discussed, cannot be traced from a modern perspective) but an imaginary "Japanese tradition" created to alleviate the threat of foreign culture from the West put to cut down the roots of Japanese native culture. This re-creation of tradition was more of an expression of the inner culture anxiety of the writer. Therefore, in Akutagawa's expression, the rapidly westernizing Japan was born out of the "Japanese taste".

Akutagawa emphasized the "original Japanese stuff" and tried to domesticate the foreign religion into the local religion culture. The old man in *Smiles of Gods* once said, "By our power, I don't mean the power to destroy, but the power to transform [3]". This was undoubtedly due to the anxiety mentioned before. 'The problem is that the local natives see Dainichi Shakyamuni and Dainichi Rudra as the same deity. So, is this a victory of Dainichi Shakira? Or is it the victory of Dainichi Kṛṣṇa? [3]' The old man's question was intended to be rhetorical, but it seems to us that it is just as much a question that needs to be faced head-on. When Akutagawa was faced with the foreign culture with modernity brought about by Christianity, he was anxious about the wavering roots of the local culture, so he turned to try to domesticate

the foreign religion, only to find that he was forced to ignore the mixed religions situation brought about by foreign Christianity, which leads to the dissolution of the modernity it had brought. In this way, Akutagawa fell into a miserable maze of culture anxiety, in which he was unable to find a way out and eventually committed suicide in his 30 s.

V. CONCLUSION

Japanese scholar Watanabe believed that only religions could save Akutagawa, and the writer himself once agreed with him before death [15]. The debate on whether Akutagawa's inner self was a Christian or a Buddhist does not touch the essence of Akutagawa's problem from the perspective provided by this paper. However, it is actually a contradictory state of Akutagawa's hope and concern due to his culture anxiety towards foreign religions in modern Japan, which is in the environment of mixed religions, that really matters. If one considers the mixture of Eastern (or so-called Japanese "tradition") religion culture and Christianity culture in his works as a straightforward struggle between tradition and modernity or an emphasis on Japanese tradition, then, like Akutagawa, one is merely trying to recreate the imaginary Japanese tradition and would simply fall into a state of pretentious hue and cry.

Akutagawa was caught in a dilemma when confronted with the mixture of religions at the turn of the modern era. On one hand, Akutagawa hoped that Christianity would bring new vitality to Japanese culture. However, it was concerned that the invasion of foreign cultures would cause Japan to lose its cultural roots. On the other hand, he wished to domesticate foreign Christianity with the local religion, but this might lead to the dismantling of the modern element in Christianity; This had led to his "Kirishitanmono" series to be full of conflicts between different religions. What these kind of conflicts reflect was not so much the writer's overwhelming burden while facing of modernity but actually the inner culture anxiety of the writer himself. This anxiety had led the writer to commit suicide after a struggle of a lifetime. This is not only a tragedy of Akutagawa, but also the tragedy of modernity.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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