Evangelizing Korean Women and Gender in the Early Modern World

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Chapter 2

COMMUNITY

IN THE LAST years of Europe’s sixteenth century, evangelized Koreans began to form a specific cohort in Japan. The distinctive features of this group were of interest to Christian writers, both from the Society of Jesus and from the mendicant orders that began a more fully fledged mission campaign in Japan after 1600. The mission strategies of these orders varied considerably, including in terms of whom they targeted, leading to some distinctions in their reports about Koreans; but, on the whole, whether from their vantage points in Japan or as observers and collectors of circulating information from nodes in Macao and Manila, the Christian archive broadly discerned and made differences in the spiritual experiences of Korean women and men. These works underlined particular understandings of evangelized Korean masculinities and femininities, which shaped the way writers assumed and described participation and contributions of Korean women and men to Christian practice, and how they could further mission activities. The Christian archive revealed some of the potential meanings of Korean identity and of Korean networks in Japan as well as community members’ complicated notions of, and desire for, belonging that they negotiated with the Christian orders. Moreover, it revealed the perceived importance and power of the gendered body, as the site of affective expression, for interpreting Korean spiritual experience.

Becoming Christian: Gender, the Body, and Affectivity

In implicit contrast to the warrior barbarianism that characterized the way Koreans (more specifically, Korean men) had been described before the Japanese invasions, subsequently, Catholic authors repeatedly emphasized contrasting characteristics of the Korean people whom they encountered outside the kingdom. In 1627, the Spanish Jesuit Pedro Morejón praised Koreans as “gentle, docile, and naturally beautiful.”¹ As they came increasingly into contact with captive Koreans, Jesuit writers revised and refined their impressions of the characteristics of people from the Joseon kingdom and the distinctive forms of masculinities and femininities that they perceived to be performed by them. These displays of gender-distinct behaviours were often related to faith-oriented affective expressions.² Such gendered expressions that Society men saw in Korean women and men formed part of their narratives of how Koreans were engaged by Christian teachings and practised their faith. They also shaped the archive of knowledge circulating among Jesuits about how the Joseon kingdom might one day be approached with a dedicated mission.

¹ Macao, May 31, 1627, BRAH MS Jesuitas 9/2666, fol. 462r: “blandos, dociles y de lindos naturales.”
² For recent analysis of emotions in Jesuit practice, see Haskell and Garrod, eds, Changing Hearts.
Reports about evangelized Koreans emphasized their fervour and devotion to their new faith. As early as 1594, when the first invasion had already removed many women and men from the Joseon kingdom to Japan, Francesco Pasio, Superior of the Jesuit residence at Sakai, was able to report his impressions of these people “of great natural intelligence and capacity for our holy faith,” as well as those of the attending Japanese brothers who were “amazed to see what good understanding they have,” “saying that Koreans are in no way inferior to the Japanese when it comes to receiving our holy faith.”3 Such reports were perhaps unsurprising since Jesuit authors were enthusiastic about these opportunities for evangelization, but they had a particular resonance in a context in which violence profoundly shaped the encounter of Koreans with Christianity in Japan. Luís Fróis, ever optimistic, wrote encouragingly to the General of the Order, Claudio Acquaviva, of his initial impressions of Koreans: “people of good understanding and sincerity, and they give signs of being in no way inferior to the Japanese.”4 Indeed, he continued with his conviction from “clear experience that they are people very well disposed to receive our holy faith. They are very affectionate, are baptized with joy and no less consolation to see themselves Christians.”5 In his history of the mission work in the region, especially in the Philippines where most of his own activities were concentrated, the Dominican friar Diego Aduarte opined that the Joseon character “shares with Japan some of the courage without the ferocity, with which they remain in a more praiseworthy middle ground, much more accommodated to receive and await our Holy Law.”6 How Aduarte formed his opinion is less clear. He may have met captive Koreans in the Philippines, but it is also possible that his information came from one of the foremost biographers of Christians in Japan, the Jesuit and fellow Spaniard Pedro Morejón, who also spent time in Manila.

Notably, Christian authors emphasized qualities such as sincerity among Koreans’ praiseworthy characteristics. Koreans were, Aduarte thought, “people of a very good nature, very plain, without duplicity or deceit.”7 Such claims for their character as

3 1594, ARSI, JapSin 45, fol. 196r: “grande numero de corayes losquals fueron captivados de los Japones es esta guerra que con ellos tienan, y por que son naturalmente de buen ingenio, y capacidad para las cosas de nuestra santa fee,” “admirados de uere quan buen entendimiento tienen,” “diciendo que en nada son inferiores los corays a los japones quanto es para recibir nuestra santa fee.”
4 December 3, 1596, ARSI, JapSin 52, fol. 203v: “tiene esta gente buen entendimiento a con paria do con simplicidad y dan tales muestra deses que nada parecenser inferiores a los Japones.”
5 ARSI, JapSin 52, fol. 203v: “experiencia clara que es gente muy dispuesta por recibir nossa Santa fee. Son muy amorosos, bautizarze con alegría y no menos consolacão de uerse Cristianos.”
6 Aduarte, Historia de la provincia del Santo Rosario, 1:470–71: “del Iapon participan algo del valor sin la ferocidad, con que quedan en vna medianaia mas loable, y mucho mas acomodada para recibir, y aguardar nuestra Ley Santa.” An analysis of the Dominicans in Japan is provided by Boxer, “The Dominican Mission in Japan.”
7 Aduarte, Historia de la provincia del Santo Rosario, 1:470: “cuya gente es de muy buen natural, muy llana, sin doblez ni engaños.”
well as the visible display of pious qualities were important for missionizing men interacting with a group with whom they had only partial linguistic access, via Chinese scripts and those Koreans who had learned some Japanese. Fróis perhaps hoped to head off such concerns by insisting that “most of them pick up the language of Japan so easily that almost none need to confess through an interpreter.” The Jesuits also sought to demonstrate the full commitment and understanding of Joseon people to Christianity by reading their bodies. Actions would form a significant mechanism through which Koreans’ spiritual lives and commitment could be demonstrated, in the eyes of Jesuit writers. Some authors emphasized Koreans’ embrace of Christian practices and rituals. Fernão Guerreiro, for example, related the last words of a dying Korean woman in his expansive five-volume account of global Jesuit missions, whom he described as “very weak in her body but strong in spirit.” Guerreiro’s narrative cited the woman’s words, which highlighted her faith in terms of her knowledge of Christian devotional practice to the attending priest seeking to confess her: “I, Father, am called Ursula, and since I am a Christian of just a few years, and of this age which you see, I was over fifty years, yet I know the prayers, and by the grace of God I was baptized [...] every day I pray the rosary many times.”

João Rodrigues Giram’s account of Vicente, on the other hand, emphasized that he was “much given to penance and mortification, seeking these out in many ways.” Bernardino de Ávila Girón was a Spanish merchant who was eye-witness to missionary endeavours during the more than twenty years he spent in Japan. His *Relación del reyno del Nippon al que llaman corruptamente Jappon*, providing important documentation about missionaries’ activities, became part of the Jesuit and other Christian archives. He described how a Korean man known as Hachikan Joaquín “lived with such devotion and good conduct that he seemed more like a Christian of long standing than one baptized four days ago. He came to church often, heard mass with great devotion, gave his alms, and visited the Fathers.”

The annual letter of 1610 composed by Giram offered compelling evidence of just such devotion, recording that in Nagasaki

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8 December 3, 1596, ARSI, JapSin 52, fol. 203v: “la mayor parte dellos toma la lengua de Japão con tanta facilidad que quasi ninguns tiene necessidad de fe confessar per interprete.”

9 Also noted by Wong, “Jesuits, Korean Catholics, and the State,” 59.

10 Guerreiro, *Relação anual*, 3:157: “muito fraca no corpo, mas forte no espírito [...] ‘Eu, padre, me chamo Úrsula; e, pôsto-que sou cristã de poucos anos e desta idade, que vedes, que passava já de cinqilenta anos, sei todavia as orações, e pela graça de Deus estou como me baptizei; [...] cada dia rezo muitas vezes o rosário.’”

11 Macao, March 24, 1627, ARSI, JapSin 61, fol. 122v: “muito dado apenitencia e mortificação procurando por muitos modos.”

12 On Girón, see the recent analysis by Martín Santo, “‘Cosas de tierras extrañas.’”

13 Nagasaki, 1613, ARSI, JapSin 58, fol. 198v: “procedia en su vida con tanta deuocion, y edificacion que mas parecia un antiquisimo christano que hombre baptizado de quatro dias acudia a la Iglesia muy a menudo oya sus missas con grande deuocion daua sus limosnas visitava los padres.”
there are many Christians Korean by birth in this city, who, with fervour and devotion, decided to have their own particular church and in it their confraternity. [...] Its dedication was celebrated with solemnity, by themselves and the Japanese, coming all day to visit this chapel, greatly edified by the piety and devotion of the Korean Christians and their concord and unity for salvation, not held back by their great poverty, but purely for the service of God our Lord and his saint [Lawrence, to whom the church was dedicated], and for the spiritual good of their souls, plan such a holy work and so much beyond their resources. 

In these sources, the physical reality of the Saint Lawrence church in Nagasaki seemed to provide a sign of evangelized Koreans’ meaningful engagement with Christianity. It may also have hinted at a need within that cohort for their own dedicated Christian space and community that was not sufficiently catered to within those existing ones that had established for Japanese or European groups and activities. Several years later, in 1617, the Italian Jesuit Francesco Eugenio addressed the General, observing that even the Japanese “confess that the Koreans surpass them in devotion.” This was not only the view of the Japanese. Writing from Nagasaki, he made his own comparisons between cultural communities, “here, where we have many Christians, both Chinese and Korean, the Koreans in devotion and ability, are as much superior as gold is to silver.”

The Jesuit archive associated becoming Christian with control of the body and heterosexual expression for evangelized Korean of both sexes. This took the form of renunciation of marital sexual activity in the biographies of evangelized Korean men, and accounts of women frequently emphasized their chaste or virginal status. Procurator Carlo Spinola noted that Miguel, who married in Japan, slept separately from his wife, at his request. Marina’s biographer, Francisco Colín, reported that at her death in 1636, Marina died as she had lived, a “blessed Virgin.” For Julia, the protection of her chastity was a reason, Morejón recorded, why she had fled to a Kirishitan household, and it remained a feature of her Christian practice worthy of particular note in the many accounts of her activities.

14 ARSI, JapSin 57, fols. 5v–6r: “ha nesta Cidade muitos christãos Coreas de naçam, os quaes entrado em feruor e deuaçam determinarão de ter sua propria e particular Igreja e nella sua confraria. [...] Celebrouse sua dedicacão com solennidade e concurso assi delles como dos Japoens, que por todo aquelle dia concorreram em grande numero a visitar adita capella edificados grandeme dapiedade e deuaçao dos christãos Coreas, e de sua unison e concordia para as cousas da saluação, os quaes sem respertar a sua muita pobreza mais que puramente ao serviço, que nesto Japiam a Deos.N. Senhor e a seu santo, e tambem as proueito espiritual de suas almas intentuauam tam santa obra e tanto sobre suas forças.” Schütte, Joseph. “Nagasaki no sōritsu to hatten ni okeru Iezusu no ‘konpania’.” [The Jesuit company in the founding and development of Nagasaki], 31.

15 Nagasaki, December 12, 1617, ARSI, JapSin 17, fol. 112r: “confessano, che li Coraijini gli leuano uantaggio nella divotione,” “visso che qui, dove ci sono molto Chini, e Coraijini Christian: li coraijini nella divotione, e capacità gli tengono tanto uantaggio, quanto sormonta l’oro all’argento.”

16 Nagasaki, March 18, 1615, ARSI, JapSin 58, fol. 76r–v.

17 Colín, Labor evangélica, 3:503: “dichosa Virgen”
Korean converts also used their bodies to signal their faith in other ways reported by Jesuit authors. At the court of the local lord in Arima, reported Sebastián Vieira in 1614, Máxima “dressed in poor clothes, living in poverty, and busy in the exercise of virtue, as example and edification.” Some evangelized Koreans had accumulated considerable worldly goods, as had Marina, who combined her vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, with the donation of what was described by Colín as her “estate,” to be used by the community of religious women she had joined. Julia, a person of interest to more than the Jesuits, was also described as keen to divest herself of worldly goods. A letter of the Franciscan Alonso Muñoz to the Father Provincial of the Franciscans of the Province of San Gregorio in the Philippines recorded that in 1606, upon hearing rumours of new violence towards Christians in Edo (today’s Tokyo), Julia “frequented the church, went to Confession and Communion with fervour; made a will and disposed of many things, distributing money and rice and other things to the poor. She said the first who ought to confess was her.” Unsurprisingly, abnegation of worldly resources for a life of poverty was a key demonstration of Christian faith open to converts of both sexes. In practice, many evangelized Koreans must had had little material wealth to repudiate, another reason why their bodily labour and sexual behaviours were significant indicators for Christian authors of their fervour.

Affect too was a key tool for Jesuit interpretation of Korean Christian experience. Christian writers’ reports about the character of evangelized Koreans distinguished specific qualities that they perceived to be displayed by male and female members of the Christian community. A distinctive form of Korean masculinity emerged from Jesuit authors’ pens, one that was characterized by modesty, docility, humility, and even by beauty. Morejón depicted Vicente as “a virtuous young man of good grace and qualities,” “like an angel.” In later life, he infantilized Vicente as “always a virtuous, humble and hard-working youth,” despite the fact that Vicente spent over thirty years as an adult working for the Society and died in his forties. João Rodrigues Giram’s account of Vicente emphasized that he was “very humble and devout, and above all patient.” Of the convert and captive, Miguel, Spinola emphasized that “he behaved

18 Nagasaki, March 16, 1614, ARSI, JapSin 57, fol. 269r: “vestidose de vestidos pobres vive pobre, e ocupada em exercícios de virtude como muito exemplo, e edificação.”
19 Colín, Labor evangélica, 3:504: “su hazienda”
20 Osaka, February 1607, BL, MS Harley 3570, fol. 390v: “frequentando la yglesia y los Sacramentos con mucho Spiritu, y mulgo e hizo Testamento y dispuso de muchas cosas repartiendo plata y Arroz y otras cosas con los Christianos pobres. Diziendo Laprimera que se avia de publicar era ella.”
21 Macao, March 31, 1627, BRAH, MS Jesuitas 9/2666, fols. 463r, 462v: “era mancebo virtuoso y de buena gracia y parte,” “era como un Angel.”
22 BRAH, MS Jesuitas 9/2666, fol. 463r: “fue siempre mancebo virtuoso humilde y trabajador.”
23 Macao, March 24, 1627, ARSI, JapSin 61, fol. 122v: “era muito humilde e devoto, e sobre modo paciente.”
with such modesty.”

Giram’s description of a Korean man known as Cosme, who had arrived in Japan as an eleven-year-old, praised his docility: “he never grumbled.”

These characteristics were not exclusively performed by evangelized Koreans but appeared to be racialized perceptions about the role that Jesuits believed that East Asian men could perform in Christian life. Hankan, baptized Léon, the Japanese companion of Céspedes during his time in Joseon, was similarly described as “always an example, humble and very poor.”

These characteristics, frequently associated with evangelized Korean men, were strikingly different to the descriptions of Korean warrior masculinity (or society, as it was claimed) that had previously been presented in the Jesuit archive.

Not only were Korean men described in terms of their virtues of modesty and humility, but their practice of faith was described as expressive, visible, and interpretable to their European eyewitnesses. Another convert, Manoel from Suruga, the son of Korean-born parents, was a young man living with auditory and verbal impairment. His religiosity could, however, be read by the Jesuits through non-verbal signs, including his acts of charity and his affective displays. João Rodrigues Giram described in 1617 to the General, Muzzio Vitelleschi, how Manoel had received his baptism “with signs of joy and devotion.”

Precisely what these signs were on this occasion was not clear, but Manoel’s tears were to provide the Jesuits useful cues. As Christopher Wong has argued, “while they could not read the interior reaches of Manuel’s consciousness, the Jesuits saw Manuel’s tears as signs of that interior life.”

Giram, for example, wrote of how Manoel “spends a good deal of time in mental prayer, and especially when he is before the sacred images of the Ecce Homo or the Crucifixion he is often seen bathed in tears.”

What these tears actually indicated about Manoel’s understanding of Christianity, however, was not explicit. A compassionate engagement with his faith community was more obviously claimed, though, in Giram’s description of Manoel’s response to seeing fellow Christians who had been the subject of state violence, when he shed “many tears of compassion.”

Jesuit writers may have been at pains to dispel earlier, more negative, impressions about the hostility of Korean people, in order to emphasize the strong likelihood of success of a dedicated Korean mission. Yet they did not directly acknowledge the subordinated status of converts many of whom were captives in the land in which Jesuits now encountered

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24 Nagasaki, March 18, 1615, ARSI, JapSin 58, fol. 76r: “sempre procedeo com tanto resguardo em sua vida, que era tido de todos por christão exemplar.”
26 ARSI, JapsSin 46, fol. 327r–v: “sempre muiço exemplar, humilde, e muiço pobre.”
27 Macao, November 1617, ARSI, JapSin 58, fol. 401v: “com mostras de alegria e deuçaam.”
28 See the analysis within a theological and missionary perspective in Wong, “Jesuits, Korean Catholics, and the State,” 51–70, this case discussed on 62–63.
29 Macao, November 1617, ARSI, JapSin 58, fol. 403r: “Contam tambem deste Manoel que gasta bons pedaços de tempo em oração mental, e que especialmente, quando se poem diante das sagradas imagens do Eccehomo, ou Crucifixo, o vem muitas vezes banharse em lagrimas.”
30 ARSI, JapSin 58, fol. 402v: “muitas lagrimas de compaixoam.”
them, as a factor shaping how they presented to Christian missionaries. The features of evangelized Korean masculinity that were foregrounded by Jesuit writers likely reflected the largely subordinated circumstances faced by men who were operating in a foreign land and society, rather than in their Joseon homeland.

It was unclear how much Christian authors perceived the affective qualities of Korean Christian masculinity as pre-existing their conversion (thus supporting an argument that Korean men were especially well disposed to Christianity), or as shaped by contact with Christianity. For Korean women, however, the transformative possibilities appeared more obvious to writers. Jesuit authors described how it could be Christianity itself that could temper the rather fiery character of Korean women once they were adherents, much as it had the disposition and behaviour of Kirishitan Japanese lords during the invasions of Joseon. João Rodrigues Giram recounted in 1607 how a previously “very hot-tempered and ill natured” captured Korean woman became after her baptism, “a meek lamb.” Giram reported that she was

so patient and devout that besides fasting in Lent and on the other fast days of the Church and undertaking many other devotions, she made it her duty to go each morning to the church to say her prayers [...] saying that she might be a poor slave, but she meant to show her good will as well as she could, and win some merit. Finally, since becoming a Christian she was so transformed that she never answered back again nor said anything disagreeable, that she was an example to everyone to admire the effect that the grace of holy baptism had had on her.  

While the affective performances of Christianity perceived to be displayed by both Korean men and women matched long-standing tropes, the transformative effect of Christianity in producing these behaviours appeared somewhat different between men and women.

On the other hand, sometimes the perceived fieriness of Korean women appeared to be less transformed than re-directed towards benefits for the Christian community. While evangelized Korean men were characterized by Jesuit writers in terms of their humility, the same authors were struck by the intense, even violent, expressions of zeal of Korean women. In 1614, Sebastián Vieira described to the General the dramatic behaviour of the convert Máxima residing the local lord’s household in Arima. Confronted by a Buddhist monk attempting to distribute “Buddhist rosaries,” “Máxima, full of zeal, took them and threw them in the face of the monk.”

31 Nagasaki, February 25, 1608, ARSI, JapSin 55, fol. 405v: “era tam agastade & de maa condição,” “huma mansa cordeira,” “tam paciente & deuota, que alem de leiumar a Quaresma & outros jeiuns da Igreja & fazer outras muitas devaçoens [...] que ja que era pobre & catiuia pello menos como que podia queria mostrar sua boa Vontade & ganhar algum merecimento: finalmente ficou tam mudada depois de christãa que nuncamais se lhe ouuio hua roim reposta nemhuma pallaura desentonada tanto que a todos le hum exemplo admirandose grandemente do effeito que nella fez agraca do santo Baptismo.”

32 Nagasaki, March 16, 1614, ARSI, JapSin 57, fol. 268v: “a quem deu o zelo tomando as atirou e deu com ellas no rosto do bonzo.” Pedro Morejón reproduces this story as the actions of women and children without mentioning individuals in his Relacion de la persecucion, 27.
determination of Julia to practise her faith in Ieyasu’s household, by hiding an oratory there.\textsuperscript{33} He had described how

this virtuous woman spends a large part of the night in her spiritual books and praying, which she cannot do by day because of the duties of her service in the palace, as well as because she is in the midst of gentiles averse to our holy Law as are the Kubō and his women.\textsuperscript{34}

When Julia left the residence and came for confession and communion, Giram wrote, it was “with such devotion and feeling that she comforts all who see her.”\textsuperscript{35} Four years later, he continued to report her fervour in new terms. Although based in Ieyasu’s household, Julia, preferring “freedom to devote herself to her salvation more than all the world’s favours, wishes for an illness in order to get out of there and go to live among Christians.”\textsuperscript{36} It conveyed a dramatic expression of faith and of desire to belong in a community of shared values.

Christian authors also reported how the intensity of Korean women’s faith expressions drove them to be seen and heard in the streets of their communities. Several Jesuit authors, for example, described Korean women’s mobility in seeking out Christian teachings. Mateo de Courros recounted the activities of one young woman, “a servant in the house of a pagan” who resisted her master’s attempt to have her apostatize. To do so, she sought out a wider Christian community to support her: “On Sundays she went secretly to the house of a certain Christian woman, where she commended herself to Our Lord, and engaged in matters of God.”\textsuperscript{37} Giram described how Julia too sought a like-minded community, “often leaving the palace, with permission, to visit acquaintances, which she does, otherwise not being able to come to confession and communion.”\textsuperscript{38}

Writing from Manila, Francisco Colín recorded how when Pak Marina was being paraded through Miyako (today’s Kyoto) as a punishment by Japanese state officials for refusing to abjure her faith, “she proclaimed through the streets, in her half Japanese (which, being Korean, she did not speak well), that she remained firm and constant in

\textsuperscript{33} March 10, 1606, ARSI, JapSin 55, fol. 283v.

\textsuperscript{34} ARSI, JapSin 55, fol. 283v: “Gasta esta virtuosa molher grande parte da noite em ser liuros espirituaes e rozar suas deuaçones o que dedia não pode fazer assi polla obrigação do seruico do paço como tambe*m* por estar em meio de gentios tam auersos anossa santa ley como he o Cubõ e suas molheres.”

\textsuperscript{35} ARSI, JapSin 55, fol. 283v: “com tanto sentimento e deuaçam que consola muyto aqem a ve.”

\textsuperscript{36} Nagasaki, March 14, 1609, ARSI, JapSin 56, fol. 13v: “e como desaja mais aliberdado pera se dar mais de proposito as cousas da saluçam que ordas as priuanças do mundo desaja que lhe venha huma doença perase sair dali, e ir viuer enere christãos.”

\textsuperscript{37} Nagasaki, October 6, 1603, ARSI, JapSin 54, fol. 210v: “Viva a li huma moça, Corea de nação, aqual esteua dous annos seruindo em casa de hum gentio,” “Aos Domingos secretamente se hia a casa do certa christãa, aonde se encommendaaua a N. Senhor, e trataua dos cousas de deus.”

\textsuperscript{38} March 10, 1606, ARSI, JapSin 55, fol. 283v: “muytas vezes sanido com licença do paço com achage deir a visitor suas conhecidas, como a faz por doutra maneira não poder, seddem a confessar e commugar.”
the faith of Jesus Christ, for whom she was prepared to die.”

Similarly, Christian authors recorded the mobility of evangelized Korean women in the practice of their faith. In a letter he compiled from Mexico in 1614, the Spanish envoy Sebastián Vizcaíno described a meeting with Julia whom he encountered in 1611 in Suruga, in an inn, “where we found a servant, or rather one of the ladies of the palace of the said emperor, named Julia, a Christian, on her way to visit the ambassador and to hear mass.” Vizcaíno reported how he “gave her some trinkets and other things, she was more interested in pictures, rosaries and pious objects, for they say she is a good Christian.”

Although positive, Vizcaíno’s portrait did not provide further details of Julia’s religiosity as were seen in the accounts of contemporary religious authors, perhaps shaped by his encounter with her outside of a spiritual setting. Julia continued her work in the communities and streets of Japan’s cities, where she was later investigated for teaching Christian doctrine to children in Nagasaki.

The Dominican author José de San Jacinto noted nonetheless that “Julia, a Korean, very devout to the Rosary and promoter of the Holy Confraternity, always persevered in this, for which she has been thrown out of her house and on to the streets a few times, and now she has none but goes from one house to another at the mercy of God.” In subsequent years, Christian sources suggest that Julia was supported by donations in a Christian network that extended beyond the Jesuits and even beyond Japan. The Dominican Father Francisco Morales was in Japan as part of the first missionary endeavours conducted by the Dominican order. He recorded in a letter that he had given Julia alms that had been donated by the Spanish admiral of the Philippines, Juan Ruiz de Icoaga:

The 400 reales which you kindly sent the first time to doña Julia, and the 200 you sent the second time, I know for certain that she received them. But as the Christians are experiencing such a hard time, I have not had any letter from her that she received them, but I had it from the lady through whom you asked me to send the said alms.

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39 Colín, Labor evangélica, 3:504: “Y quando las boluieron a entrar en la Ciudad de Meaco metidas en ellos, con su media lengua lapona (que por ser Corea, no la hablaua bien) pregonaua por las calles, que boluia firme, y constante en la Fé de Iesu Christo, por quien deseaua morir.”

40 Mexico, 1614, BNE, MS 3046, fol. 96v: “do hallamos una criada a por mexor dizir de las damas de palacio del dito empero que se llama Julia cristiana, auissitar a lembaxa do r y oir missa.”

41 BNE, MS 3046, fol. 96v: “algunos juguetes de bidrios y otras cosas quella mas atendia a ymagens rrossarios y cossas de deuoçion por que dizen que es buena christiana.”

42 See Ruiz-de-Medina for a construction of her biography, “History and Fiction of Ota Julia.”

43 [Nagasaki] March 25, 1620, San Jacinto, “Relación breve,” 26–27: “La una, llamada Julia, de nación corea, muy devota del Rosario y gran favorecedora de la santa Confradia; siempre perseveraba en esto, por lo cual, la han egado algunas veces de su casa y calle, y agora no la tiene, sino que anda de una casa en otra a la Misericordia de Dios.”

By 1622, Julia was living in Osaka where the Provincial Francisco Pacheco wrote of his attempts to assist her: “The Korean Ota Julia, banished for the faith, is now in Osaka. I have helped her, and am helping her, as I can.” Julia had become herself the subject of charity, supported by a broad network of women and men, of many nationalities and professional engagements, who conveyed alms and information about her between them.

Christian authors also identified potentially problematic aspects of evangelized Korean women’s experiences in Japan. In particular, they were concerned about women’s ability to control their bodies from sexual slander and accusations of misconduct. The assertion of female agency described in these contexts demanded dual attention to protection of women’s chastity and their Christian faith. As noted in Chapter 1, Julia’s control of her body was a key element of her conversion narrative. The anonymous annotator of her letter wrote that her conversion had occurred after being “taken to Japan; to defend her modesty from her tono she fled to a Christian tono.” Giram even marvelled at Julia’s chastity while residing in Ieyasu’s household, in ways that highlighted conventional assumptions about women’s sexual behaviours:

Of all her virtues what is most surprising is that being a young girl and in the flower of her youth and above all, very good looking, in the midst of so many opportunities, she remains like a rose among thorns, determined to lose her life rather than her soul.

Additionally, accounts of Julia noted attempts to impugn her sexual morality. Within Ieyasu’s household, wrote Mateo de Couros, those who could not convince Julia to recant then suggested that “she had often sneaked out of the palace, which was a clear sign of her disorderly life.” An investigation was ordered, but Couros assured his readers that Julia’s reputation was cleared and her sexual honour remained intact: “she had gone out to confess, receive communion and hear mass in our church.” While serving in Ieyasu’s household, Christian authors continued to emphasize Julia’s need to protect her chastity from pagan powers. The Franciscan Muñoz highlighted Julia’s fear that she might be the Emperor’s [sic] concubine, as are the other ladies whom he keeps at court, calling them to him as and when he pleases, [Julia] said, if the Emperor called her to his apartments, as he usually calls the other ladies, that she would excuse herself,

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45 February 15, 1622, ARSI, JapSin 38, fol. 87v: “A córaiijn Vota Julia desterrada por fide esta agera em ozaca, eu a ajudei, e ajudo com oque posso.”
46 APECESJ, Abt. 43, Nr. 53, fol. 22r: “captiva in Japonia delata, ad tuenda pudictia a dono suo perfugit ad tono Christianus.”
47 Nagasaki, March 10, 1606, ARSI, JapSin 55, fol. 283v: “mas o que de suas virtudes espanta mais he que sendo anida moça e na flor da idade e sobre tudo de muito boas partes naturaes no meo de tantas occasioens, se consorua como rosa entre as espinhas determinada e apostada aperder antes a vida que não char sua alma.”
48 Nagasaki, January 12, 1613, ARSI, JapSin 57, fol. 244v: “dizendo que muitas vezes tinha saido fora do paço às escondidas, o que era manifesto sinal de andar desconcertada na vida.”
49 ARSI, JapSin 57, fol. 244v: “e nam acharam mais que saira a se confessar, commungar, e ouuir missa emnossa Igreja.”
which she could very easily do. And if this was not enough, she would rather let them cut her into a thousand pieces than consent to it.  

This account, which foregrounded Julia’s assertion of agency, even to the point of bodily defilement, reinforced the evangelized Korean’s exceptionality against other women’s apparently more typical acquiescence to sexual importuning.

Articulating Christian Belonging

The general emphasis in these Christian accounts was on bodily expressions and practices of faith, with very few detailed records of how Korean Christians understood or articulated tenets of their belief. State-sanctioned torture and execution became occasions when the thoughts and commitment of mainly Korean men to their faith were recorded, for only a handful of Korean women were subject to comparable forms of violence, as will be explored in the following chapter. In this context, descriptions of evangelized Koreans’ dreams and visions that were recorded by Christian authors provide significant insights, albeit mediated, into Korean understandings of Christian belonging.

Both Giram and Morejón relayed accounts about the series of dreams and visions that Gayo had experienced. He had been a Buddhist monk in Japan before his conversion to Christianity. His dreams appeared to support a narrative about his pre-destination for Christian adherence that would eventually entail his death. Giram’s account, for example, suggested how animals could sense Gayo’s particular and inherent spiritual purity. He recounted how, while Gayo was living as a hermit in a cave in Joseon before the invasion, “one day a tiger (or wolf) came to the cave where he was, and lying down beside him for some time, got up and went without doing him harm.” Giram reasoned, “God our Lord was keeping the crown [of martyrdom] for him.”  

Later, Morejón wrote, “he told us in Osaka that while a pagan in his land he had had insights and inspirations that he could not help but understand as there being a Lord of the whole world who was greater than his idols.” Among these was “a dream in which a venerable old man told him that this year he would cross the seas with great trouble and

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50 Osaka, February 1607, BL, MS Harley 3570, fol. 390v: “el temor de qué seria manjaba del Emperador como lo son laso tias Damas de quien se apruechaua enbiando las allamar como y quandole da gusto dixo que si el Emperador lallomase su aposento como suele llamr alas otras damas que es escusaria loqual podia hazer muy façilm en te quando esto nobastase dejaria hazer mill pedaços antes que consenter enello.”

51 Macao, March 15, 1626, ARSI, JapSin 61, fol. 16r: “vir huex hum Tigre, ou Lobo a dita Coua a on desstaua, e deitandose junto delle por algum espaço, se Leuautou, e fui sem lhe fazer mal,” “Como Deos Nossor a guardaua pera a Coroa”

52 Macao, March 31, 1627, BRAH, MS Jesuitas 9/2666, fol. 462r: “el qual nos dezia en ozaca que tuuo en su gentilidad y tierra algunos luezes u inspiraciones de que no podia a dexar de auer un senor universal del Mundo mayor que sus Idolos.”