Evangelizing Korean Women and Gender in the Early Modern World

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provided occasional evidence of Koreans moving between different identities and roles. In March 1621, Mateo de Couros recorded a tale of apostasy of a Japanese Franciscan tertiary, Tanda Domingo. He narrated how a Korean man “who had been brought up from childhood in our house,” had approached a Korean friend, who was then working as an executioner for the Governor of Nagasaki, Hasegawa Gonroku, to secure him Tanda’s rosary from the pyre. As Tanda apostatized, the Korean executioner concluded that the item could not be considered a relic, and took it to give to his Korean friend. The focus of Couros’s account concerned the fragility of the Japanese tertiary’s faith and the strength of that of the Jesuit-educated Korean, who reputedly later threw the object away in a fire, but his narrative revealed lines of communication and community that continued beyond the faith positions that individuals upheld.

**Belonging and the Christian Orders**

Studies of the mission strategies of the Society of Jesus in the Asian region have identified how Jesuits employed some local social structures and systems that might support Christian practice and community. With regards to Korean women and men, however, Jesuits and other orders did not adapt their approach to their knowledge, limited in any case, of Joseon society. They met Koreans largely as part of a diaspora spread across the region. In Japan, evangelized Koreans operated within structures that had initially been designed for local Japanese cohorts. Over time, however, Koreans began to create structures attendant to their own needs. These included the establishment of their own site of worship, Saint Lawrence, in Nagasaki. The same annual letter by Giram in 1610 that reported its creation also noted the Korean community’s development of its own confraternity and how “even though they are poor, they gather alms among themselves.”

At the same time, the Christian orders, with their different approaches to mission, offered alternative social structures for the evangelized Korean community. While Christian authors may have been concerned with the distinctions between them, there is less evidence that Koreans identified strictly with individual orders and some evidence that they moved between Christian groups that offered the spiritual experiences and support that they desired. Korean women and men, for example, appeared to be members of a range of confraternities. The Dominican San Jacinto described the Korean

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105 March 15, 1621, ARSI, JapSin 37, fol. 185r: “hum Christão de sua naçam, seu amigo, que se crieue desde minino en nossa Casa.”

106 See, for example, on China, Standaert, “Jesuits in China,” 172.

107 Annual Letter, 1610, ARSI, JapSin 57, fols. 5v–6r: “ainda que pobres, aiuntarão suas esmolas entresi.”

108 See, for example, the oath written by the Japanese Paulo Hitomi on behalf of the community at Takatsuki in 1595 that swore their exclusive allegiance to the Jesuits, Anesaki and Sakurai, “Two Kirishitan Documents,” and Hesselink, “Document of the Rosario Brotherhood of Nagasaki.” On the activities of such confraternities, see Cieslik, “Laienarbeit in der alten Japan-Mission,” 176–83; Oliveira e Costa, “The Misericórdias among Japanese Christian Communities”; Gono, “The Jesuit Mission and Jihi no Kumi (Confraria de Misericórdia),” who also mentions the involvement of evangelized Koreans at 133.
adherent Julia, for example, as “very devout to the Rosary and a promoter of the Holy Confraternity.” Arizō Pedro was a member of the Dominican confraternity of the Rosary (Rozario no Kumi) and, as noted above, later in Edo a steward of the Franciscan brotherhood of the Cord (Kurudan no Kumi). Hachikan Joachin too was a steward of the brotherhood of the Cord. Although only Korean men were recorded in official roles within such groups, women too were included within them. The Korean couple, Takeya Inés and Cosme, were both members of the confraternity of the Rosary. In Nagasaki, Ichibō Juan and his Korean wife were both members of Augustinian third order. These organizations offered social and care practices, charitable support and, later, as Christianity was increasingly repressed by Japanese authorities, protected Christians in their homes and supported those in prison.

The biographies of evangelized Koreans provided in Christian records revealed the different ways that their authors understood the contributions of women and men to the Christian community. However, when it came to the Society of Jesus itself, only a select group of Korean men could officially become members in some form. The precise roles available to local Asian men had been the topic of rigorous debate among the Society through the sixteenth century, before the General, Claudio Acquaviva, confirmed in 1610 that they might be admitted, albeit not with the same opportunities as other cohorts. Moreover, the Society’s demand that its members knew Latin excluded many. Only a small number of Korean men therefore were recorded as recognized assistants known as dōjuku, including Gayo, the former monk, who performed this role in Nagasaki. The activities of these men appeared critical in reaching out to the Korean community across language and cultural barriers. Morejón recorded how Gayo “for many years helped in our houses by his good example and his talks on the Catechism to his compatriots, and after he had learned the language, to the Japanese. […] In Nagasaki he read them spiritual books and gave talks.” Vicente too followed this path into the Jesuit community. According to Morejón, “he turned out a good teacher of catechism,” not only among his Korean compatriots, but having “a like influence on the Japanese as well.”

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110 Sousa, The Portuguese Slave Trade, 155.

111 Sousa, The Portuguese Slave Trade, 125.

112 Sousa, The Portuguese Slave Trade, 122.

113 Sousa, The Portuguese Slave Trade, 165.


115 Macao, March 31, 1627, BRAH, MS Jesuitas 9/2666, fol. 462r–v: “y siruio en nuestras casas muchos años con buen exemplo y con los sermones del cathecismo a sus naturales y despues de saber la lengua a los Japones. […] en Nangasaqui les leya libros espirituales platicaua.”

116 BRAH, MS Jesuitas 9/2666, fol. 462v: “salio buen predicador del Cathecismo,” “Yo lo mismo hazia con los Japones.”
both men served a wider Christian community than that of the Koreans alone, a critical role in the development of the Church in Japan undertaken by celibate men connected with a specific religious order. Women could catechize informally, but they could not become dōjukus or be recognized in official apostolic roles.  

Some Korean men trained as dōjukus but stepped away upon marriage. Among them was “a Korean Christian called Martinho who was our dojuco and now is married,” wrote Morejón in the annual letter of 1626. He was examined by officers of the governor of Nagasaki in 1626 and his home searched: “saying, among other things, that he was a Brother. He replied that he was not, for he had a wife and children.” Martinho may not have been a Brother, but the Society’s men in Japan corresponded with Rome about the possibility of admitting appropriate Korean men, receiving approval to admit them under the same conditions as for Japanese and Chinese in December 1608. Gayo’s activities as a catechist eventually came to the attention of the authorities in Nagasaki. He spent eighteen months in prison, during which time he requested entry to the Society; he was accepted just before his death.

Women had no place performing these assistant roles within the Society of Jesus. As Haruko Nawata Ward has observed, even the much-lauded Miyako no bikuni group, led by the elite Japanese woman, Naitō Julia, was never officially recognized as part of the Society. Although they could not take part in the official roles of the Christian apostolate in Japan, Korean women, like the Japanese women studied by Ward and Kataoka, could contribute to their membership in other ways. They ensured, for example, a stream of boys to support Christian activities and to become dōjukus in their turn, in acts of spiritual abandonment. Muñoz described how Julia gave to the Church where there was need, a twelve-year-old boy as a dōjuku whom she had adopted as her son, and another twelve-year-old, brother of our Brother Leon […] He is a beautiful and graceful boy called Augustin. He went with another brother to paint and gild the palaces of Casindono, who is the tyrant-lord of Fingo.

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118 Annual letter, 1626, ARSI, JapSin 63, fol. 73v: “hum Christão Corea chamado Martinho, que foi nosso dojuco, e agora he Casado.”

119 ARSI, JapSin 63, fol. 73v: “dizendo he a lem doutras cousas que era Irmão. Respondes lhe que onão era pois tinha molher, e filhos.”

120 ARSI, JapSin 58, fol. 198r and Ruiz-de-Medina, The Catholic Church in Korea, 90.

121 Ruiz-de-Medina, The Catholic Church in Korea, 126–27.

122 Though it was recognized as affiliated to it, see Ward, “Kirishtan Veneration of the Saints,” 54.

123 Osaka, February 1607, BL, MS Harley 3570, fol. 390v: “y dio para la yglesia por dezir que abria nescesidad aun ninõ de doze años para Dojico, el cual auia adoptado por hijo suyo, y otro muchacho de doze años hermanito de nuestro hermano Leon […] esmuy hermoso ya graciado llama se Augustin, fue con otro su hermano apintar y dorar los palacios de Casindono, el qual tirano es Señor de Fingo.”
Just as Jesuit writers accepted that forced movement might be the pathway that exposed Koreans to Christianity, they in turn depicted Julia’s Christianity as practised and demonstrated by her control of the fate of other vulnerable children.

Moreover, evangelized Korean women could serve the Society and Christian missionaries more broadly as powerful role models of mission possibilities, who existed in the controlled space of the Jesuit archive, their stories and letters mediated by men, either directly or through the transcription of their letters and the paratextual information with which they were contextualised. The Society was by no means the only Christian order that sought contact with Koreans or which reported the activities of evangelized Korean women whom Jesuits encountered or heard about, as this chapter has demonstrated. Although most authors showed no concerted effort to emphasize Koreans among the cohort of Christians in Japan, and the Korean identity of such women was rarely the focus of their appearance in such texts, nevertheless, this was noted as a part of these women’s identity. In such ways, Korean adherents travelled the globe. Clara’s vision, for example, as it was relayed in Giram’s report from Japan, in its translation into Italian, and its inclusion by Guerreiro in his five-volume publication, became a statement of faith for more than Clara alone. It offered edification to many readers across Europe as it was printed and circulated in multiple languages. This individual’s highly individualized vision became part of the communal culture of Catholic Christianity in these new contexts. Not only did it demonstrate the strength of the Church in Japan, but Christian authors utilized such narratives to demonstrate the power and potential of missionary endeavours to the Joseon kingdom. With this objective, the inclusion of speeches and texts attributed to Korean women such as Julia, Clara, Ursula, and Marina played a vital role in seemingly confirming Christian authors’ claims about the fervour and other positive features of character that they identified with Korean women, and Korean people more broadly, which made them attractive subjects for proselytizing strategies.

Conclusions

Christian authors articulated the participation of Koreans as a community, within the wider Christian cohort and in relation to its specific orders. They saw different roles for women and men in all three, and different ways in which women and men could demonstrate their faith. Their texts naturally foregrounded what they thought mattered or was right, but they could also embed alternative ideas and practices held by Korean women and men themselves. The Christian archive, unsurprisingly, provided strong evidence to support claims that Korean women and men were driven by their own desires for an active apostolate, but Christian writers saw gender as a key determinant that shaped how women and men experienced and participated in the Christian community that they had joined, as did local Japanese authorities. Belonging was complicated for Koreans,