Evangelizing Korean Women and Gender in the Early Modern World
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THE YEARS THAT had seen Korean women and men discover Christian teachings in Japan were also those during which the position of Christianity had grown increasingly fraught there. By the end of 1614, the Tokugawa leadership had proscribed the Christian faith, issuing a decree to expel missionaries and their local supporters, sending some Christians into hiding in Japan and others to new lands. Significant political changes in the years following, including the death of the military dictator Tokugawa Ieyasu, the abdication of his successor, Hidetada, and the rise to power of Iemitsu, did not alter the trajectory of intensification of state-sanctioned violence against Christians. However,

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in the Jesuit archive as well as in wider Catholic textual traditions, violence offered new forms of spiritual expression for evangelized Koreans, just as it did for Kirishitans and Society men. Chief among these forms, Christian authors proposed, was the opportunity to participate in the most exclusive of communities, that of the Christian martyrs. Suffering as Christians could be understood as spiritually, and personally, productive. This chapter explores how authors conceptualized the gendered nature of the violence against the Christian community in Japan, an experience that had different contours for Korean-born women and men, and offered distinct meanings for expression of their faith identities and for those who beheld it, as eyewitnesses, authors, and readers.

**Korean Women and Psychic Violence**

The works of Christian authors attested to a wide range of measures undertaken by Japanese authorities to eradicate the possibility of their faith practices, both at the level of the community and for specific individuals. Destruction of the material culture of Christianity, for example, was described as a source of great communal suffering. Over the course of 1620, the governor of Nagasaki, Hasegawa Gonroku, ordered the destruction of key spiritual sites of the Christian community. Christian churches, including that of the Korean community, Saint Lawrence, were demolished. No services had been performed in these buildings since the edict of 1614, but Mateo de Couros, writing from Nagasaki, identified these sites’ intense affective meaning for the local community, “which just by seeing the faithful of this city were consoled.” Almshouses and leper houses were also disbanded, leaving their former inhabitants to find support in more personalized relationships. Those buried in the three Christian cemeteries of the city were exhumed. Couros described how “for several days there was nothing but tears and cries,” as the faithful sought to move these remains, including those of Society men, to the Christian cemetery outside the city, San Miguel. Couros’s report balanced the terrible destruction of Nagasaki’s Christian material culture with a powerful message about the ongoing commitment of Christians to survive as a community.

Although not specifically targeted by such measures, evangelized Koreans were certainly affected by them. From 1614, their experiences formed part of the growing

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4 March 20, 1620, ARSI, JapSin 35, fol. 138r: “que só com a uereem os fieis desta Cidade se consolauão.”

5 ARSI, JapSin 35, fol. 138r: “por algunos dias não auia senão Pranto, e lagrimas pellas Casas.”
Jesuit archive of Christian suffering in Japan. However, natal identity could shape how evangelized Koreans experienced the increasing violence. In Ieyasu’s household, the Korean adherent Julia came under increasing pressure to renounce her faith. Jesuit writers emphasized the intense emotions that they suggested characterized her personal relationship with Ieyasu. Of the Christian women in his residence, wrote Couros,

the foremost of these three was Julia, a maiden Korean by nation, a person of singular prudence and discretion, and as such esteemed by the king and respected by his household, and so, knowing how resolute they were, full of anger and fury, he said that he cared little that Lucia and Clara would recant but that it was insufferable that Julia did not want to obey his commands, and that in this she showed herself to be ungrateful and without judgment.6

Julia’s ingratitude was directly connected to her identity as a Korean, as articulated by Ieyasu in these Jesuit accounts, and he employed it to create a particular psychic pressure upon her, telling Julia

that she had to remember the many and great favours that she had received from him, and that being a poor foreigner, taken captive in the Korean war, she had risen so high as to be a lady of the palace of the Lord of Tenka [all under heaven; i.e. Japan], more than others, one of those he trusted the most, always taking her with him wherever he went, and she deserved to be whipped for such great ingratitude and stubbornness.7

Julia’s status as an outsider upon whom generous gifts had been bestowed constituted a potential vulnerability. The affective dimensions that Jesuit writers seemed to have hoped might encourage an interest in Ieyasu for Christianity now took on very different and problematic resonances for an evangelized Korean woman.

Julia replied, with prudent restraint, that she never denied having received many favours from the king, whom she had always wanted to serve as these merited. However, she had a much greater obligation to God, from whom she had not only received life, but his divine Majesty had bestowed upon her such singular mercy that, being born in the midst of paganism in Korea, he had taken her from there and given her news of himself and of his most holy law, in which alone salvation consisted.8

6 Nagasaki, January 12, 1613, ARSI, JapSin 57, fols. 243v–244r: “A principal das três era Julia, huma Donzela Corea denaçam, pessoa de singular auiso e discriçam, e como tal estimada do Rey, e acatada dos de casa por onde sabendo da resoluçam em que estauam, cheyo de ira e furor, disse que pouco lhe daua de nam tornarem atrás Luzia e Clara, mas nam querer Julia obedeçer a seu mandado, era cousa insofríuel, e que nisso mostraua ser huma ingrata, e sem juizo.”

7 ARSI, JapSin 57, fol. 244r: “que deuera de selembrar das muitas e avatajadas merces que delle tinha recebido, e que sendo ella huma pobre estrangeira catiuã na guerra de Corea, veo amontar tanto, que chegou a ser Donzela do paço do senhor da Tenca de Japam. E nam qual quer, senam das principais de quem mais fiaua, leuandoa sempre consigo onde quer que fosse, que em todo caso merecia ser castigada por tam grande ingratidam e contumaciam.”

8 ARSI, JapSin 57, fol. 244r: “Aoque Julia com hum prudente comedimento respondeo, que nam negaria nunca auer recebido Delrey muitas merces, âsquais sempre desejava seruir como ellas mereçiam: porem que em muito mor obrigaçam estaua a Deos, do qual alem deter recebido o ser, usara S diuina Magestade come ella de tam singular misericordia, que com ser naçida no meyo da infidelidade da Corea, de lá atirara, e [...] onde lhe dera notícia de sy, e de sua Santissima ley, naqual só consistia a saluaçam.”
Couros’s account suggested that Julia had been punished more than others because she had been in the inner circle of power and indeed part of the social and emotional life of Ieyasu himself. Moreover, as in the case of Arizō Pedro discussed in Chapter 2, her identity as a Korean could be activated by court ladies to isolate her from others. They “called her a barbaric foreigner, who clearly showed she had neither breeding nor education, all of which she heard but suffered in silence.”

For several authors, Julia’s subsequent banishment from Ieyasu’s residence was framed in terms of loss of both her influential status and material goods. The Spanish merchant and long-time resident in Japan, Bernadino de Ávila Girón, whose accounts now form part of the Jesuit archives, contrasted Julia’s former life of luxury with her banishment to the obscure island of Ōshima, noting how “she did not carry with her the precious kimonos she wore in the palace, for she confided that she would not need them in the wilderness she was going to.” Instead, she celebrated the “special kindness God our Lord gave her; the great wealth she had because they had let her take pictures, a rosary and other Christian things.” Thus she expressed it as a far greater spiritual suffering, these accounts reported, when her access to Christian material culture become restricted. An anonymous Jesuit author noted that, exiled to Kōzushima, Julia could not have mass or confession, and she had asked for a table to be painted with accoutrements in order to imagine the mass. Couros likewise reported that, in her letters, Julia requested “some books with the life of the Apostles, Martyrs and Holy Virgins, an hourglass, a bell and two mass candles.”

Another Korean woman endured psychic torture carried out by the misuse of spiritual material culture. This is consistent with Haruko Nawata Ward’s observation that “Jesuit texts and VOC captains’ diaries show that inquisitors knew how important such objects as crosses, rosaries, reliquaries, and images were for Kirishitan identity, and that they continued to confiscate these to weaken the Kirishitan movement.” Sebastián Vieira recounted to the General in 1614 how the wife of a powerful lord in Arima had invited a Buddhist monk to their court, with the aim to have her Christian attendants

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9 ARSI, JapSin 57, fol. 244r: “Ihe chamauam estrangeira barbar, e sem primor; que bemmostraum nam ter sangue nem criaças, o que tudo elle ouuia calando com sofrimento.”
10 Nagasaki c. 1615, ARSI, JapSin 58, fol. 219r: “nollevo consigo bizarros quemonos que usarva em palácio como quem confidencia queno los avia menester pera el yermo donde ira.”
11 ARSI, JapSin 57, fol. 244v: “auendo que era mimo particular que Deos N. S. lhe fazia; e que hia mui rica, pois lhe deixavam leuar as imagens, contas e outras cousas de que usam os christãos.” On the importance of the rosary to Kirishitan devotion, see discussion in Ward, “Kirishitan Veneration of the Saints,” 61–62.
12 December 1613, APECESJ, Abt. 43, Nr. 53, fol. 22r: “petijt In tabula depicta sacerdote sacrificarte, et campanila ut missa fibi representaret.”
13 Nagasaki, January 12, 1613, ARSI, JapSin 57, fol. 245v: “algum liuro que contenha as vidas dos Apostolos, dos Martyres e das Santas Virgens, hum Relogio de area, huma campainha, e duas velas da missa.”
abjure their faith. The monk was to distribute Buddhist accoutrements to Christian men and ladies. Vieira noted the Christians’ resistance, for “even if they were put into their hands, they would drop them straightaway.” Most notable was the response of the evangelized Korean Máxima, who “full of zeal, picked them up and threw them in the monk’s face.” The devotional objects of the Christians were confiscated from them and Máxima was ordered to “be locked in a tower, tied with ropes to a column so that she could not move, and given no food or drink, so that she would either quickly die or stop being a Christian.” These kinds of violence were described by Jesuit authors as providing Korean women such as Julia and Máxima who were living in the residences of powerful Japanese lords, with new opportunities to attest to their commitment to the Christian faith, by rejecting the security and protection that an elite household offered them in Japan.

**The Threat of Sexual Violence**

Jesuit authors’ narratives also made clear that sexual violence was an ever-present aspect of Korean women’s experiences of violence inflicted because of their Christian faith. This was a delicate topic. None of the accounts suggested that an evangelized Korean woman had been violated, but they did voice significant concerns about their bodily integrity. Sexual violence of various kinds not only affected Korean women, nor indeed only women. Kirishitan women were threatened with being sold to brothels if they did not recant, and in 1616, twelve women were.

Descriptions of Korean women’s experiences suggest that acts to renounce the sexual dimensions conveyed by their bodies were central to their acceptance of Christian identity in moments of confrontation. Sebastián Vizcaíno, writing from Mexico in 1614, described how when Julia was cast out from Ieyasu’s residence for refusing to abjure her faith, “the good lady […] cut off her hair rather than give up her faith and do the emperor’s will.” Similarly, Vieira’s report about the experiences of Máxima within another elite household, described how “persevering always in her initial constancy, the

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15 Nagasaki, March 16, 1614, ARSI, JapSin 57, fol. 268v: “E ainda que lhas metião nas mãos adeixauão logo cair.”

16 ARSI, JapSin 57, fol. 268v: “a quem deu o zelo tomando as atirou e deu com ellas no rosto do bonzo.”

17 ARSI, JapSin 57, fol. 269r: “a mandou meter em huma torre, ordenando que con cordas a atassem a huma coluna de modo que se não podesse menear, e lhe não dessem de comer, nem de beber pera que assi ou acabasse a vida de pressa, ou deixasse de ser Christãa.”


19 Mexico, 1614, BNE, MS 3046, fol. 110v: “la buena señora […] corta do los cauellos que dejar la fee in hazer la voluntad de lemparador.”