Men, Mobility, and Missions to Joseon

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Map 4.1. Key locations in the wider East Asian region where evangelizing activities involving Koreans were documented in Europe’s seventeenth century. Map created by the author from the Open Historical Map Project (openhistoricalmap.org).
FOLLOWING THE JAPANESE invasions, contemporary documentation records the movement of both Korean women and men beyond the borders of the Joseon kingdom. The fifty-three-year-old wife of Kawasakiya Suke’emon no Jō, born in Korea, came to Japan in 1599 as a nine- or ten-year-old. Eleven years later she was in Nagasaki where she was sold as part of the slave trade to Macao. It was there that she became a Christian. Five years later, she returned to Nagasaki where she remained at the period in which she documented her experiences for the ward register of the local Japanese authorities. Another Korean-born individual, the Portuguese-speaking “Gaspar of Korea,” baptized at Nagasaki, was sold at thirteen and later sold again in Manila to a Portuguese trader. Antonio, purchased at Nagasaki, travelled with the Florentine merchant Francesco Carletti, to Goa and eventually to Rome, carrying with him for at least part of the journey two copper images of a crucified Christ and an Ecce Homo. These individuals formed part of a largely untraceable diaspora of Koreans, only some of whom were evangelized. This chapter explores how gender shaped evangelized Koreans’ mobility, primarily in the Asian region, as Christians. What opportunities did their faith afford them to move in the region? How was this agency shaped, as it was narrated in the Christian archive, by assumptions and realities of their differently gendered bodies, and their capacity for knowledge, for communication, and for attracting violence? As Christianity came to be progressively repressed in Japan under successive leaders, how did it shape the prospects of evangelized Korean women and men to live their beliefs? Christian authors, as analysed in Chapter 2, had documented the different ways Korean women and men had been involved in evangelizing among their social networks in Japan. This chapter explores how the Christian archive adopted or adapted these into mission strategies as evangelized Koreans moved in the region.


3 Carletti, Ragionamenti, 324. See Schrader, Stephanie, and Jessie Park, “Gukgyeongeul neomeo, saeroun gyeinggyereul geurimyeo rubenseu hanbong ibeun namjaui maengnakjeong gochal.” 국경을 넘어, 새로운 경계를 그리며 루벤스 한복 입은 남자의 백악적 고찰 [Crossing borders, drawing boundaries contextualizing Rubens’s man in Korean costume] and Weststein and Gesterkamp, “A New Identity for Rubens’s ‘Korean Man.’”
Men, Mobility, and Missions to Joseon

Within a decade of the withdrawal of Japanese troops from Joseon in 1598, diplomatic communications between their respective leaders had been reinstated. These exchanges brought elite and educated men to Japan on behalf of the Joseon king and suggested to Jesuit writers a new opportunity for interaction with the people of this kingdom and others beyond. In March 1606, for example, the Portuguese Jesuit João Rodrigues Giram observed to the General of the Order, Claudio Acquaviva, “when an ambassador of the king of Korea came this year to Japan he was accompanied by a monk, a great scholar of the sects of China which are almost the same as those of Japan.”

Buddhist monks had provided an important communication network through the East Asian region as well as produced converts to Christianity, such as the Korean Gayo. Giram reported how his colleagues had sought to use intellectual pathways to open a conduit to wider communication, sending the monk participating in the diplomatic mission a critical analysis of local religions. Giram claimed that the “Korean scholar was amazed by what he read and, very much praising the style and eloquence, and even more so the depth of thought, replied that he never thought that in Japan was a person who knew so much of the sects.”

Moreover, according to Giram, he concurred with the Society’s conclusions, “sending this reply in writing to the Brother, which was shown to many others, a great service in bringing down the monks and uncovering their tricks.” These intellectual manoeuvres offered optimism that demonstrations of learning and careful argumentation presented to educated Korean men could create for the Jesuits a path to further Christian conversions in Joseon and perhaps beyond.

At the same time, Giram’s report suggested a more substantial pathway to Joseon, at least numerically. This was the repatriation of Koreans, supported by Joseon

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5 Nagasaki, March 10, 1606, ARSI, JapSin 55, fol. 278r: “huem bahxador del Rey da Corea, trouxe em sua Companhia hum bonzo grande letrado nas seitas da China que são quasi as mesmas que as de Japam.”

6 ARSI, JapSin 55, fol. 278r: “Ficouo Corea letrado parmado do que leo e louuando muyto o estillo e eloquentia e muyto mays a profundeza das cousas, respondeo que elle nunca cuidara que em japam ouuesse pessoa que tanto alcancasse do amego das Seitas.”

7 ARSI, JapSin 55, fol. 278r: “mandando ao Irmao esta riposta por escrito, aqual mostrada a outrois muitos servio grandement pera sicarem abatidas as cousas dos bonzos e descubertos seusingenos.”

8 The numbers are debated, but may have been less than ten thousand individuals, see Sousa, *The Portuguese Slave Trade*, 94. On the volume of repatriations, see Son Seungcheol 孫承喆, “17segi yasojongmune daehan Joseonui insikgwa daeeung.” 17세기 耶穌宗門에 대한 朝鮮의 인식과 대응 [Joseon’s awareness and response to the Yaso sect in the seventeenth century].
diplomatic missions that encouraged those from the kingdom to return home. Among those returning were, suggested Jesuit authors, evangelized Christians. Whether evangelized women were in a position to return home in the same numbers as their menfolk, however, is doubtful. Kim Moon-Ja has examined the different opportunities and contexts in which Korean women and men could participate in repatriation endeavours. Gender ideologies shaped women's opportunities to return to their homelands, which were limited by both practical and conceptual challenges, including the sexual and reproductive employment of their bodies since arriving in Japan. The neo-Confucian moral codes that underpinned Joseon society placed a high value on women's chastity, and contemporary texts celebrated women who chose death rather than surviving sexual violation. Repatriating women who had been captured in the

9 On repatriation experiences, see Choi Gwan 정관, Ilbonwa imjinwaeran 일본과 임진왜란 [Japan and the Imjin War], 103–28; Min, Deak-Kee 민덕기, “Imjinwaeran napchidoen joseoninui gwiwangwa jallyuroui gi” 임진왜란에 남치된 조선인의 귀환과 잔류로의 길 [The Korean captives during the Imjin War: Repatriation to Korea and settlement in Japan]; Yoneti Hitoshi 米谷均, “Senshinyakugo ni okeru hiryonin no hongoku sōkan ni tsuite.” 鮮侵略後における被虜人の本国送還について [Repatriation of POWS after the Invasion of Korea], in Jinshin sensō: jōrakusei nitōchō no kokusai sensō 壬辰戦争: 16 世紀日・朝・中の国際戦争 [Imjin war: international war of Japan–Korea–China in the sixteenth century], ed. Chung, Doo Hee 鄭杜熙 and Gyeong-Soon Lee 李鎔姸, 103–28. My focus here is upon the claims of Christian authors regarding Koreans who were said to be carrying Catholicism to the Joseon kingdom. The reality of whether this occurred has been debated. Son Seungcheol observes an absence of discussion of Catholicism in Joseon records before 1638, see “17세기 이순정문에 대한 조선의 인식과 대응 [Joseon’s awareness and response to the Yaso sect in the seventeenth century], 864–65. Pierre-Emmanuel Roux argues, however, that the diplomatic channel opened between Joseon and Japan at this time provided awareness of Christianity, indeed that “the Catholic issue became a significant vehicle in the enhancement of diplomatic relations between Korea and Japan in the aftermath of the Imjin War” in “The Prohibited Sect of Yaso,” 119–21, here 120.


invasions to Joseon therefore presented considerable problems beyond the matter of their faith alone.

By contrast, some evangelized men were perceived to present opportunities for mission work. Giram described how “an honourable Christian Korean by birth, who with many others went from Japan to Korea in the company of an ambassador who had come from Korea to Japan” secured a copy of the catechism from a Kirishitan, “written in the Chinese language and characters.” After copying it, he said “that with this he could preach the law of the Christians in Korea, since for now he could not take a Father, as much as he wished to.” As had Jesuit authors upon the arrival of captive Koreans in Japan, these examples once again emphasized the importance of texts, Chinese characters, and male intellectual pathways as a conduit to Christian conversion in the region. Through such means, western knowledge broadly may have made some impact in Joseon at this time. Writing in Europe’s late eighteenth century, the Joseon scholar An Cheong-bok, who was no friend to Catholicism, reflected that western scholarship was known in the Joseon kingdom from the period after the invasions.

There is neither a high official nor an eminent scholar who did not read them. These books are considered in the same way as the writings of classical thinkers, Daoism and Buddhism, and they are kept as ornaments of libraries.

During this period, the leadership of Joseon also gained a growing awareness of Christianity more particularly from the communications of their reinstated diplomatic partners in Japan, for Japanese letters regularly provided warnings of the dangers of what was termed “the sect of Yaso.” Pierre-Emmanuel Roux has argued that Japanese diplomatic strategy employed Christianity as a common foreign foe against which both it and the Joseon kingdom could unite. Knowledge of Christianity therefore entered Joseon at this time within two very different, and oppositional, frameworks.

In the second decade of Europe’s seventeenth century, Francesco Boldrino took up the mantle as a vocal and insistent advocate within the Society for a dedicated mission to a series of regional territories that had not as yet been contacted directly by the Jesuits, including the Joseon kingdom. Boldrino knew the evangelized Korean community from his time in Japan and perhaps also in his new position at the College of São Paolo in Macao, near what may have been a Korean enclave there. In 1612,
he presented a moral argument to the General of the Order, Acquaviva, that since the Gospel was not known there, it was “necessary and a matter of scruple to go and sow the Gospel.” In December 1614, Boldrino again addressed the General from Macao, reminding him in a postscript addition: “Last year I proposed to Your Paternity to make some new missions again to Korea [...] into which news of the Christian faith has not yet penetrated.” He deftly alluded to the failures of epistolary communication as a reason to renew his request: “I am proposing the same again now, in case last year’s letter did not arrive,” insisting upon his devotion to do “everything possible to open up knowledge to these people.” By the end of 1617, it was to a new General, Muzio Vitelleschi, that Boldrino, now again in Japan, made his pitch, recapitulating his previous communications with Vitelleschi’s predecessor: “I wrote these last years to our Father Claudio Acquaviva that it would be of great service to God to open new missions, such as to Korea.” He voiced fears that lack of funds might preclude what could be done “if there were zeal and fervour.” Sophisticated in his rhetorical address to his recipient, Boldrino escalated his appeal to an even higher temporal authority: “the Pope ought to help with what is needed since the Gospel has never been sown in these abovementioned places.”

By contrast, Giacomo Antonio Giannone, a former colleague of Boldrino at the College of São Paulo, pitched his argument in 1616 to Francesco Pavone, an enthusiastic supporter of the Society’s global mission work who was responsible for the development of robust training at the Jesuit College in Naples. Giannone noted the recent successes for the Society in Cochinchina under the leadership of Francesco Buzomi. Like his compatriots, he identified the lack of funds as a key stumbling block; but he also suggested that cultural and racial similarities between the populations of Korea, the Ryukyu islands and mainland Japan warranted their prioritization, as they were “all white people and of good understanding, like the Japanese.” Another compatriot, Francesco Eugenio, wrote in December 1617 from Nagasaki, to the General, reprising many of the arguments that had built the case for a dedicated Korean mission in the Jesuit archive over what was now an almost fifty-year period:

19 Macao, December 30, 1612, ARSI, JapSin 34, fol. 133v: “leuangelio ne ha notitia nessuna diquelle [...] se e necessario e materia de scrupulo ne andarla a seminare l’evangelio.”

20 Macao, December 26, 1614, ARSI, JapSin 34, fol. 138v: “l’anno passato propose a VP che se potriano fare alcune missioni di nouo alla Corea [...] as quais partes in sino hora non penetro la notitio della fede christiania.”

21 ARSI, JapSin 34, fol. 138v: “il medesimo tornò a proporre adesso se perentura la lettera del anno passato, non arrivò,” “tutto il possibile per aprire il conoscimento a questi genti.”

22 Japan, November 9, 1617, ARSI, JapSin 34, fol. 144v: “lescritti l’anni passati al nostro padre Claudio Acquaviva che seria di grande seruitio di dio aprire alcune missioni noue come alla Corea.”

23 ARSI, JapSin 34, fol. 144v: “se havesse fervor e zelo e il papa deu socorrere con il necessario pois che in queste parti sossadette gia mai fu seminato levangelio.”

24 Macao, January 24, 1616, ARSI, JapSin 35, fol. 203r.

Your Paternity will know that Korea is a kingdom close to Japan, so much so that sailing with good wind it is reached in two days. It is a much larger kingdom than Japan, subject to only one king. The people are of very good understanding and disposition to understand our holy Law, as we find here with the Korean Christians (of whom there are very many in Japan among those who were captured in the war these past years). [...] Therefore, if you make a mission to Korea, the fruit will be great. And now in this province, there is no shortage of Fathers, of whom masses have been driven out of Japan, and from China, unemployed in Macao, and while the devil seeks to lock the door in some parts, it would not be bad to go uncover other paths. From Japan, as I say, it seems you could get there by boat going to trade, as they usually do. In the future it seems they will go even more, because this year they have sent an embassy from Korea to renew friendship with the lord of Japan.26

Eugenio, like others before him, wanted to be tasked with the mission himself: “If the Lord brings me to Macao, I will propose this to the Father Visitor and also offer myself for the work.”27 The Society, however, had other plans for Eugenio and his Korean mission faded from view after he left Japan at the end of 1617.

Evangelized Korean men, as well as Society men, were critical to a mission planned for the Joseon kingdom in 1612. João Rodrigues Giram later recounted the involvement of the Korean Vicente as a dōjuku working with Giovanni Battista Zola at that time: “The superiors, desiring to open the doors in the kingdom of Korea to the Holy Gospel, decided to send him there with a priest. It was not possible, however much they did, to open it up via Japan.”28 By the 1610s, the punishment of Christians had taken on a more urgent rhythm. A letter from the Provincial, Francisco Pacheco, to the General, Vitelleschi, in November 1625, endorsed by eight colleagues, tried to make clear to their Roman recipients the challenges that they currently faced simply in maintaining their activities in the hostile environment of Japan alone without those “around Japan,

26 Nagasaki, December 12, 1617, ARSI, JapSin 17, fol. 112: “V.P. saprà, che il Cōrai é un regno uicino al Giappone, tanto che nauigando com bom uento vi giungono en doi giorni é regno molto maggiore del Giappone, soggetto ad’un Ré solamente. la gente é di molto buono intendimento, e disposizione per intendere le cose della nostra S. legge, come qui esperimentiamo nelli Cōraijin Cristiani (de quali ui sono moltissimi nel Giappone, di quelli che furono cattiuati nella guerra de gli anni passati). [...] Per il che si se facere alcuna mission al Corai, per che saria grande il frutto. e adesso a questa provincia non mancano Padri, de quali mole scacciati del Giappone, e dalla cina stanno disoccupatì in Macao e gia che il demonio procura rerrare la porta in diuersi parti, non saria male andar discoporendo altri camini. Dal Giappone, come dico, pare che si ui potra entrare, con alcuna occasione d’imbarcatione che la ua a mercanteggiare, come di ordinario uanno, e per l’auuenire pare, che u’anderanno piu, per ché questo anno hanno del Corai mandato un’imbasciatore per rivinovare l’amicitia con il signore del Giappone.”

27 ARSI, JapSin 17, fol. 112: “Se Il Signore me leuar a Macao, proporreì questo al P. Visitatore et anche m’offerrei a ciò.”

28 Macao, March 24, 1627, ARSI, JapSin 61, fol. 122v: “Desjando os superiores de abrir porta no Reino da Corea ao sagrado evangelion, o determinarão pera ir lá come hum padre. Não foi possiuel, por mais que se fez, abrrila por uia de japão.”
Ryūkyū, Korea and Ezo, missions that Your Paternity so highly recommends.”

The small number of Jesuits who remained in Japan to operationalize new missionary endeavours was reduced further when in 1626 even more members of the Society were put to death, including both Pacheco and Vicente. Pedro Morejón, writing from Macao in 1627, lamented that all these efforts to reach Joseon had thus far been in vain, and that “people of great ability and intelligence, gentle, docile and of natural beauty,” should remain “so closed to all commerce with foreigners that no matter how many steps have been take to enter, it has not been possible.”

The claimed docility and good natured disposition of the Koreans towards Christianity that made the Joseon kingdom such an attractive target for future mission activities shaped not only Jesuit accounts; in 1659, the Franciscan Antonio de Santa Maria similarly identified these as reason to mount a dedicated Franciscan mission for Koreans.

Whilst the Society’s men in the region negotiated their own capacity to commit a dedicated mission, the reports to be found in the Jesuit archive explicitly foregrounded the possible role of Korean men as prized mediators of Christian missionary activities to the Joseon kingdom. Morejón reflected in 1627 on an earlier time when the Society men had considered a direct mission to Joseon and “the Fathers made great efforts to go to Korea, taking our Vicente and another for guides and interpreters, but [...] it was impossible.” Another Korean man who seemed to offer such a possibility was Tomás upon whose activities Jesuit authors were keeping a close eye. Mateo de Couros wrote to the General in October 1618 of the man “whom we brought up and supported for many years in our house.”

However, Tomás was, by then, in Manila. Further, Tomás was perceived by more than
the Jesuits as a potential conduit to a new mission site in Joseon. Reported Couros, “the Dominicans persuaded him into signing an oath that he would take to Korea no religious of another order but their own.”

By that time, a series of men from other religious orders had made their way to Japan, Dominicans, Franciscans, and Augustinians among them, presumably delighted by the prospect of increased communication from Japan to Joseon as a result of the new diplomatic relations and associated repatriations. Tomás’s story, in which, for Couros at least, Tomás appeared rather a passive pawn of the Dominicans, was presented in very different dimensions in near-contemporary Dominican sources, such as the history produced by Diego Aduarte. The friar had long been involved in missionary work in the Philippines, but this had never been the extent of his ambitions for the Dominicans in the region. Now, here was “a young man, the son of noble parents, who from the despondent state of slave, came to reach the height of divine knowledge and in baptism was called Thomas.” In Manila, like others, he attended Christian activities, and in particular, he knew the religious of Santo Domingo, perhaps through the confraternity of the Holy Rosary, to which many natives and slaves came.”

In the recovery of the Joseon kingdom in the years after the invasions, Aduarte recounted, “Thomas’s father grew so high that he became Secretary to the King, which is to say the best position, and the second person in the government and command,” from which position he was able to contact his son in Manila by letter. In Aduarte’s account, it was the Korean who took the initiative to consider a mission to Joseon:

Thomas showed these letters to the Fathers of Santo Domingo, as well as the interior of his soul, that although he desired his country, his father, and his wealth, he esteemed much more than all this taking some Religious, to sustain him in his lands, where all were pagans, to preserve him in the holy faith, which he had received.

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35 ARSI, JapSin 35, fol. 89r: “Vindo isto a notiçia dos Religiosos de S. Domingo, fazendo lhe mimos opersudião que lhes desse hum assinado come iuram ento de não leuar a Coria Religiosos de outra ordem sernão da sua.”

36 Aduarte, Historia de la provincia del Santo Rosario, 1:471: “vn mancebo, hijo de Padres nobles, que con ocasion del abatido estado e esclavo, vino à alcançar al alreça del conocimiento Divino, y en el Baptismo se llamó Thomas.”

37 Aduarte, Historia de la provincia del Santo Rosario, 1:471: “en Manila acudia como otros à los exercicios de Christiano, y en particular tuvo conocimiento con los Religiosos de Sâto Domingo, quiçà por la Confradria del Santo Rosario, à que acuden muchos naturales, y esclavos.”

38 Aduarte, Historia de la provincia del Santo Rosario, 1:471: “el Padre de Thomas creciò tanto, que llegó à ser Secretario del Rey, que es dezir su major Privado, y la segunda persona en el govierno, y mando.”

39 Aduarte, Historia de la provincia del Santo Rosario, 1:471: “Mostrò Thomas estas cartas à los Padres de Santo Domingo, y juntamente lo interior de su alma, que si bien desseava su patria, su Padre, y sus riqueças, estimava mucho mas, que todo esto à su tierra, toda de Infeles, sin llevar algunos Religiosos, que le sustentassen, y conservassen en la Santa Fè, que avia recibido.”
Tomás was narrated as the active organizer of the Dominicans’ endeavours related to Korea: “he came to offer to take Religious to his land and keep them in it with the protection of his Father, and protection of the King, which could easily be expected.”

The Jesuit Couros expressed frustration about Tomás’s activities, because of the “promise that he had made to the Dominicans,” when “he always suggested to us that he intended to take others of his nation.” Couros cast doubt on the Dominicans’ chances of reaching Joseon: “humanly speaking, it is impossible for foreigners to enter the country.” To avoid the usual checks on foreigners entering Joseon, Tomás and his Dominican accomplices had devised a secret route to reach Joseon directly, but these plans came to the attention of the authorities in Nagasaki. The divisions between Christian mission communities were revealed in Couros’s conclusion to these events: “as their superior Fray Francisco de Morales has always shown little affection for our Society, imagining that his intentions were frustrated by us, he sent me a heartfelt tirade.” Couros may have explicitly highlighted the Dominican Superior’s fears of Society interference in their mission affairs, but his own report also suggested that these divisions were worthy of note to his superiors.

Whatever evangelized Koreans repatriating to their homeland were able to achieve locally, Jesuit writers were not able to document confidently any evidence of the beginnings of a new missionary endeavour. However, the regular return of Koreans to Joseon over these years kept open hopes in the Jesuit archives of a welcoming groundswell among the Joseon population for their message. Writing from Macao, in 1624, the Portuguese Jesuit João Rodrigues Tçuzu, whose diplomatic and linguistic roles for the Society were encapsulated in the epithet Tçuzu (from the Japanese tsūji, communicator/translator), presented a series of claims that were hard to verify in their details but reflected the live prospect that Society men countenanced for a Joseon mission. He suggested that “many thousands of Koreans made Christians in Japan, from which many have returned home keeping their Christian faith.” Further, Tçuzu described a “kingdom of Korea of which religious of the Society have already taken possession through two or three missions, going there from Japan.”

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40 Aduarte, Historia de la provincia del Santo Rosario, 1:471: “vino à ofrecer se à llevar Religiosos à su tierra, y conservarlos en ella com el amparo de su Padre, y protección des Rey, que ofrecia, y se podia facilmente esperar, pues siento él tan aficionado à la fé, Io avia de alcanzar de su padre, y su Padre del Rey.”

41 Nagasaki, October 8, 1618, ARSI, JapSin 35, fol. 89r: “Tambem o Thomas possa promeces que tinha fóies aos Religiosos de S. Domingo sempre nos emcobrio que pretendia levandos e assi elle com outros de sua naçao.”

42 ARSI, JapSin 35, fol. 89r: “como so seu superior chamado Frei Francisco de Morales sempre se mechou pouco afeiçoado a Companhia imaginando que por nossa via sairrão frustrados seus intentos, me momandou hum tirado muy sentido.”

43 Macao, 1624, BRAH, MS Jes Leg. 21, fols. 317–323v, here 323v: “de muyto milhares de Corais feitos christãos em Japan donde mutoys latornaram perseveram christãos.”

44 BRAH, MS Jes Leg. 21, fol. 323v: “o Reyno de Coraj, deque ja tem tomado posse com duas o tres missioes quae os Religiosos da Companhia que la passeram de Japam.”
archive contains proposals for various plans of this kind over this period. It was the turn of the Italian Giacomo Antonio Giannone to write to the General Vitelleschi in March 1628, whose call to launch a dedicated mission to Joseon was pointedly framed in the context of the activities of other orders in the region.

These past years I wrote to Your Paternity to charge the Father Visitor of these parts to try to open it to a mission for the kingdom of Korea. Now I remind Y.P. of it again, because I hear it said that the Friars are seeking it, and that they may have already entered, according to what I was told the other day. He, like Eugenio, explicitly noted his attempts to make his arguments with varied authority figures in the Society, not only in Rome but also in the region:

In what I am now writing to the Father Visitor I strongly recommend it, since many of our people are idle in the College of Macao, for this door to Japan is now so closed that it seems the Lord wants the door into that kingdom to be opened from Korea, where there are many Christians who have returned from Japan to their own kingdom. Giannone’s proposal that, as the door to Japan appeared to be closing, another in Joseon might be opening was echoed in the later writings of Gaspar de Amaral. In April 1642, he wrote from Macao with a similar idea to establish a hub in Joseon from which a mission to Japan might in time be relaunched.

There were evidently persistent hopes expressed in the Jesuit archive and beyond it that the return of Koreans to their homeland had implanted Christianity there, ready to be activated by missionizing men if, and when, they could reach it themselves. Rumours about a Christian Joseon from Nagasaki in the mid-1660s were reported by a captain who had returned from the Japanese port to Binondoc in the Philippines. His views were recorded by a Dominican religious to the Provincial of the Philippines, Juan de los Angeles, that “in the kingdom of Korea there is a very beautiful church and many Christians, with European Fathers, who cannot be other than those from the Society.” Japanese authorities also appeared to fear that evangelized Koreans might seek to return to Japan to instigate mission work. When the Joseon scholar Yi Chi-Hang recorded his
interrogation after being shipwrecked off the coast of Japan during 1636, the questions drawn up by the Governor of Matsumae included: “Are any of you Christians and do you preach this religion?” The prospect of a flourishing Christian community in Korea, however uncertain the reality, continued to galvanise hopes and fears in the region through the period.

Europe’s seventeenth century opened to offer Jesuit writers new hope of conversion possibilities with the return of Koreans to their homeland. Their communications continued to cast the Joseon population as an opportunity awaiting the Society, individual men successively emphasizing the urgency with which the Society’s leadership ought to commit resources to such a mission. Each had his own vision of how best it could be conducted and increasingly, they diversified their requests through the Society’s hierarchy. But more explicit still was the persuasive exploitation of concerns about the actions of other Christian orders looking to Joseon. If it was not to be the Society’s own men who could mount a mission to Joseon, they looked to the Korean men they had trained in Japan to return ahead of the Fathers. The best advance mediators of the Christian message, in Jesuit writers’ eyes, were educated men who ideally held elite status that could be activated in Joseon. Korean women, absent from this discussion among the Society’s men, appeared to be perceived to have no forms of status either in Japan or in their homelands that could be valuable to such endeavours. Evangelized Korean women did not form a noteworthy part of the vision articulated in the archive of the Jesuits’ mission strategies for Joseon society.

Exile as Gendered Opportunity

The Jesuit archive attested to the ways that evangelized Korean men such as Tomás not only moved across the region within Christian texts but also physically. Korean men were documented as mobile in the region, including as they conducted Christian pastoral and mission activities. In 1644, Pedro Marques wrote from Macao to the General about another Korean man also known as Tomás who had long been serving a Kirishitan community based in Cambodia. Marques explained how Tomás aimed to travel to Japan where he could support the work of the Jesuit fathers who were operating under the severe risk of punishment imposed by Japan’s authorities. Tomás departed in the company of a Polish Jesuit, Albert Metinski, first to Manila, and then on to Macao, and eventually to Japan via an island within the district of Satsuma. However, the group were arrested by the Japanese authorities, tortured, and eventually executed.

While only men could be documented as deploying the Society’s institutional hierarchy to move about the region, exile could enable forms of mobility that transferred both Korean women and men and Christian teachings to new locales. The