Agency and Oppression in Chosŏn Religious Women’s Lives: An Analysis of Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-century Catholic Virgins in Korea

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Abstract

This dissertation explores Korean female virgins’ practice of autonomy and their ability to confront oppression that was present in Confucian society and the Catholic Church during the late 18th and 19th centuries in Chosŏn, Korea. The adoption of the Catholic notion of virginity and the establishment of the nascent Catholic Church in Chosŏn, Korea allowed Korean women to escape the demands of forced arranged marriages during the late 18th century. Korean Catholic women confronted opposition from their families and persecution from society for choosing a religious life of perpetual virginity. Another challenge began when French missionaries from the Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris (hereafter MEP) arrived in 1836 and attempted to control Korean virgins by prohibiting them from practicing perpetual virginity autonomously and imposing strict regulations. As a result, Korean virgins developed new forms of subjectivity by valuing the development and realization of the self and practicing renunciation based on Catholic teachings. Therefore, they considered themselves to be Christian virgins without the approval or recognition of the Church. Although it seemed that they were subordinate to the authority of the Church and clergy, in reality, Korean virgins resisted their authority and achieved freedom by practicing Foucauldian ethical subjectivity. Korean virgins’ resistance and agency were ignored by Korean historians throughout the 20th century. The general understanding was that Korean virgins were part of the modernization (i.e., women’s liberation and gender equality) that Catholicism brought to Chosŏn, Korea throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. However, this dissertation challenges this line of thinking and suggests that the Catholic Church did not liberate Korean women from patriarchal oppression or create gender equity for Korean women before the 20th century. Instead, their resistance to clerical controls and the development of a new form of
subjectivity shows that Korean Catholic women replaced Confucian patriarchy with Catholic patriarchy, thus emphasizing the authority of the Church and its priests.
Lay Summary

This dissertation rebukes the previous research that concluded that the Catholic Church of Chosŏn Korea had liberated Korean women from Confucian patriarchy and brought gender equality to Korea before the twentieth century. Contradicting this point, this research argues that the Catholic Church of Chosŏn Korea attempted to directly import Catholic patriarchy from the West instead of liberating Korean women from any form of patriarchy. I, in this dissertation, also argue that the French missionaries imposed stricter controls on Korean female virgins rather than allow freedom for them and discouraged their choice of life as consecrated virgins rather than encourage their decisions. Nevertheless, overcoming the new restrictions imposed by the Church, Korean female virgins had successfully formed a new form of subjectivity to achieve self-realization by arduous practice of renunciation and resisting clerical control throughout the nineteenth century.
Preface

This is an original and intellectual product of the author, Jee-Yeon Song. A version of 3/4 of Chapter 3 (Sections 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4) has been published in Tongbang hakchi 동방학지 [The Journal of Korean Studies], Vol.169 (2015. 3): 33-73. (in Korean)
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Dedication

To my parents, Ho-yeol Song and Yong-hui Kim,

To Patricia Crowe,

To Father Didier t’Serstevens

And

To Boogy Song, my cat
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research Objectives: Overcoming the Limitations of Previous Research

1.1.1 A Galvanization: Debates on Women’s Oppression by Confucianism in China and Korea

In the field of Korean history overall, women’s history has always been one of the least explored areas. This dissertation is designed to explore to what degree Korean women actively maneuvered their lives through diverse actions and reactions, dealing with the impact of, and changes resulting from, two different religions in Chosŏn Korea from the fourteenth to nineteenth centuries: Confucianism and Catholicism. Most of all, my dissertation has two primary aims: galvanizing arguments on women’s oppression in Confucian societies in the field of East Asian women’s history, and challenging the established conclusion in the field of Korean history that Catholicism liberated Korean women and contributed to destroying the patriarchy in Chosŏn Korea.

Here, I need to clarify the definition of “patriarchy” for further discussions in this research, because it is not a monolithic concept in that it has been utilized in different ways to control gender issues of societies based on diverse ideologies and goals. The complicated dimensions of patriarchy have provoked diverse controversies and complicated connotations in different times and spaces in world history. As my discussion later will demonstrate, patriarchy shows different forms and mechanisms of operation in the western and eastern societies.

Patriarchy of Confucian societies is different from that of the Catholic societies in that the authority to constitute the social system and control the members was given to the patriarch and the monarch. In contrast, Catholic societies were placed under the stronger controls of the
Church and the clergy alongside the authority of the patriarch. Although it has many diversified forms of the operations, I will use the term of the “patriarchy” to focus on its common skeleton throughout the temporal and spatial differences in the world history: promotion of “male privilege” by being male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centered.¹

My first goal through this research is to revive dormant debates over what lies at the core of the oppression of East Asian women, which includes social, economic, and legal disadvantages and unequal kinship in the family, by scrutinizing the religious nature of Confucianism. Those working in the field of Chinese women’s history have for quite some time challenged previous suggestions that Chinese women’s oppression had been constituted by Confucianism. Such accusations are coming to be viewed as the legacy of Western Orientalism, the May-Fourth Movement, and Communism, which arose in the late nineteenth century, and should be refuted.² Therefore, rebuffing those previous claims about the oppressive nature of Confucianism toward Chinese women, the academe of Chinese Studies have created a new

¹ Allan G. Johnson, The Gender Know: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy, Revised and Updated Edition (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), p.5. Allan Johnson saw that patriarchy is male dominated in that positions of authority – political, economic, legal, religious, educational, military, domestic – are generally reserved for men and heads of all tend to be male under patriarchy. Also, he points out that patriarchal societies are male identified in that core cultural ideas about what is considered good, desirable, preferable, or normal are associated with how we think about men and masculinity. In addition, he discusses that patriarchy is male centered, which means that the focus of attention is primarily on men and what they do. Moreover, he argues that the essential element of patriarchy is the obsession with control to maintain male privilege by controlling women and anyone else who might threaten it. (Allan G. Johnson, The Gender Know: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy, Revised and Updated Edition (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), p.5-15).

² See the introduction of Dorothy Ko’s Teachers of the Inner Chambers for more detailed discussion that the Chinese women’s oppressions by Confucianism is a false and unfair accusation: Dorothy Ko, Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 1-26.
hybrid monster: Confucian feminism, which proclaims that Confucian teachings share similarities with feminist ethics, and thus that Confucianism is compatible with feminism.\textsuperscript{3}

It is true that there are unfair accusations regarding the relationship of Confucianism and Chinese women by Western and Chinese intellectuals. However, that does not mean that Chinese women’s oppression by Confucianism—women’s lower status, female infanticide, etc.—should be either minimized or denied. Currently the academe has gone quiet, with more emphasis placed on the potential compatibility between Confucianism and feminism based on superficial commonalities. I hope that my dissertation will be able to stimulate the realization that simple philosophical similarities cannot be the grounds for a suggestion that Confucianism could be defined as feminism. Also, I aim at suggesting that scholars pay attention to the religious roles and functions of Confucianism for rituals in China and Korea by considering gender. The relationship of Korean women and Confucian religiosity for orthopraxy in this research demonstrates that Confucianism was strongly related to women’s sufferings, not only in their daily experience during their lifetimes, but also in their understanding of their afterlives.

In contrast to their counterparts in the field of Chinese women’s history, those working in the field of Korean women’s history seem also to have reached unanimous agreement: Confucianism, without any doubt, was the fundamental oppressor of Korean women since the

late fourteenth century. These scholars point out that the Chosŏn dynasty’s reconstitution of the whole society based on Confucian teachings caused a radical deterioration of women’s social, political, legal, and financial status throughout the five hundred years of history of Chosŏn Korea. In fact, I agree that this conclusion is correct. But I also believe that there should be much deeper examinations of what was the base of legitimacy in Confucianism such that society should or could treat women poorly and take advantage of them socially, legally, and financially. Accordingly, I pay special attention to the religious side of Confucianism by taking gender into account, in the hopes that my research will invigorate further debates in the field of Korean women’s history.

Therefore, through this dissertation, I aim at stimulating further and deeper debates on the oppression of women in East Asia and its relationship with Confucianism by pointing out that the core of women’s oppression lies in the religious nature of Confucianism, which emphasizes patrilineal orthodoxy and orthopraxy. My goal is also to point out that patrilineal orthopraxy was imposed on women’s role in Confucianism as a family religion, especially ancestral rituals. I will

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examine how the emphasis on patrilineal orthopraxy caused women’s spatial switch in patrilocal marriage, enhanced the importance of the (re)production of male heirs, and excluded women’s-side kin and unmarried women from the Confucian orthopraxy in order to protect the patriarchal order, which functioned as oppression over women in Confucian societies.

Moreover, paying attention to the fact that Confucian literati in Chosŏn Korea accused women of being the source of impurity in family rituals with the aim of building and sustaining the Confucian patriarchy, this research also aims at revealing two facts. The first is that the emphasis on patrilineal orthopraxy ironically brought anxiety over ritual purity in Confucian patriarchy. And the second is that the efforts to protect patrilineal orthopraxy caused the endless struggles between Confucian orthopraxy and heteropraxy by women in individual households. I believe that this case study of Korean women’s past experiences with the gender oppression in Confucian societies will enrich the field of women’s history of China as well by stimulating comparative and/or collaborative research on similar topics.

1.1.2 A Challenge: Breaking the Myth that Catholicism Brought Gender Equality and Women’s Liberation to Late Chosŏn Korea

The next objective of this dissertation is challenging the established claims that Catholicism brought modernization to the women of Chosŏn Korea in the late eighteenth century. The current academia of Korean Studies mainly refers to two factors, when it comes to

5 Yi Tŏg-mu’s Sasojŏ demonstrates that it was women who insisted to replace ancestral rituals of Confucian orthopraxy with heteropraxy by Shamanism whenever serious diseases broke out in the family. (Yi Tŏg-mu, Sasojŏ: Sŏnbi Chib ’an ŭi Yejŏl [Elementary Matters of Etiquette for Scholar Families], ed. Yi Tong-hŭ (Sŏul, Korea: Chŏnt’ong Munhw’a Yŏn’guso, 2013), p.180-181.) Therefore, women were often accused of contaminating ritual purity of ancestral rituals.
their discussions on modernization for women of Chosŏn Korea by Catholicism: gender equality and liberation of women from the patriarchy. Therefore, this research will also deal with the discussions on the “modernization” for Korean women by Catholicism narrowly focusing contradiction of the invitation of those two elements by Catholicism.

By proving that this assertion is a production of groundless assumptions without scrutiny of accounts in the primary sources, this research aims at separating the history of Catholic women of Chosŏn Korea from the fields of national history and church history. Placing the history of Catholic women as one of the areas of Korean women’s history, I aim at revealing the concealed and neglected lives of Korean Catholic female virgins beneath the hegemonic discourse of “modernization” since the early twentieth century.

Here, “modernization” implies the “Western modernization” that Japan successfully adopted in the mid nineteenth century and used to achieve the colonization of Korea in the early twentieth century. Korean historians in the post-liberation era began decolonizing Korea’s past, which had been distorted by Japanese rule as being so stagnant and backward that it was unable to develop its own history by itself. They endeavored to find the evidence of immanent factors for

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6 This discussion are elaborated well in Yu Hong-nyŏl’s research: Yu Hong-nyŏl, Han’guk Chŏnju Kyoheosa [A History of Catholic Church in Korea] (Sŏul, Korea: K’at’olik Ch’ulp’ansa, 1962); Yi Wŏn-sun, Chosŏn Sŏhaksa Yŏn’gu [A Study on History of Western Learning in Chosŏn] (Sŏul, Korea: Ilchisa, 1986); Cho Kwang, Chosŏn Hugi Ch’ŏnjugyosa Yŏn’gu [A Study on the History of Catholicism in the Late Chosŏn Society] (Sŏul, Korea: Kodae Minjok Munhwa Yŏn’guso Ch’ulp’anbu, 1988); Kang Chae-ŏn, Chosŏn ŭi Sŏhaks [A History of Western Learning in Chosŏn] (Sŏul, Korea: Min’umsa, 1996).

development—drawn from the Western model of political, social, and economic modernization—inside Korean history and claimed to have found the “seed” of modernization in the history of eighteenth-century Chosŏn. Particularly, several groups of Confucian literati who strayed from mainstream Confucianism were distinguished as scholars of the Sirhak (Practical Learning). Connections between Catholicism and modernization were also claimed in these discussions, because most of the early Catholic converts and Church leaders came from those who were believed to be the Sirhak scholars, though that grouping has been strongly challenged by Donald Baker.8

It was Pak Yong-ok who first added the Catholic women of Chosŏn Korea in the established claims of the national history, asserting the long-lasting false myth that Catholicism brought modernization to Korean Catholic women starting from the late eighteenth century. Assuming that Korean women also progressed toward modernization along with their male counterparts, she proclaims that she found in the history of Catholic women of the Chosŏn dynasty the seed which flourished later as modernization.9 However, Pak’s proclamation was made without deep scrutiny of primary sources and was an assumption produced by simply adding the case of women to the already existing hegemonic discourse on the indigenous roots of modernization in Korean history.


9 Pak Yong-ok, “Han’guk Yŏsŏng Kaehwasa Sŏsŏl” [Introductory Discussion on the History of Korean Women’s Enlightenment],” in Yu Hong-Nyŏl Paksa Hwagap Kinyŏm Sahak Nonch’ong [A Compilation of Essayes for Celebrating Dr. Yu Hong-Nyŏl’s Sixtieth Birthday], ed. Yu Hong-nyŏl Paksa Hwagap Kinyŏm Saŏp Wiwŏnhoe P’yŏnjip Wiwŏnhoe (Sŏul, Korea: T’amgudang, 1971), 403–21.
Once Pak Yong-ok articulated her conclusion, later scholars developed it further and made it somewhat more sophisticated without questioning the plausibility of Pak’s initial claim. They also added the “modernizing impact of Catholicism, which promoted gender equality and the spread of liberation of women” to the established interpretations of Korean history from the late 1970s. Pak Yong-ok used only the term kaehwa (enlightenment) to refer to the modernization among Catholic women in Chosŏn Korea in her discussion in 1971, but began mixing it with kūndaehwa (modernization) in her book published in 1975. The new discourse

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11 Pak Yong-ok, Han’guk Yŏsŏng Kūndaesa [Modernization of Korean Women’s Modernization] (Sŏul, Korea: Chŏng’ŭmsa, 1975).
of modernization was completely replaced by kũndaehwa from Kim Yŏng-sun’s MA thesis in 1976. This discourse is still being used to refer to Catholic women’s history in Chosŏn Korea today without losing its authority as an established knowledge claim.

This knowledge claim from national history has also been integrated into the history of the Catholic Church with the purpose of promoting favorable attitudes toward the Church in order to win the competition with Protestantism regarding who first brought modernization to Korea. In the history of the Korean Catholic Church, it is claimed there were two areas of modernization brought by Catholicism: modernization in the li realm, which means theological or spiritual modernization; modernization in the ki realm, which means technological or material modernization. Scholars of Catholicism in Korea point out that the material side of modernization failed to flourish in Korea, because the Chosŏn dynasty banned and refused to accept Catholicism. However, the spiritual side of modernization survived through its teaching on equality of social status and gender, which successfully brought Korean women’s liberation from the oppression of Confucian patriarchy.

These scholars have paid special attention to new marriage practices among Catholic converts in Korea, and young Catholic women’s collective refusal of marriage in favor of perpetual virginity, claiming that they symbolize Catholic modernization in Chosŏn Korea. It is true that Catholic converts in Korea abandoned Confucian marriage as a family ritual and

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12 Kim Yŏng-sun, “Han’guk Ch’ŏnjugyo e Itŏsŏŭi Yŏsŏng Kyoyuk” [Women’s Education by Catholic Church in Korea] (Master’s thesis, Graduate School of Education Kyŏnghŭi University, 1976).

13 The dichotomy of the ki (material) realm and li (spiritual) realm is based on the traditional categorization for the Western Learning, used by Li Zhizao (1517-1630) when they published Tianshe chuhan (An Introductory Collection of Works on Heavenly Learning) in the early seventeenth century. Yi Wŏn-sun also adopted these terms in his book in 1986 in contemporary Korea (Yi Wŏn-sun, Chosŏn Sŏhaksa Yŏn’gu [A Study on History of Western Learning in Chosŏn] (Sŏul, Korea: Ilchisa, 1986), p.17-18).
adopted Catholic marriage practice as a sacrament, which requires baptism and priestly authority. Also, from the beginning of the history of the Catholic Church in Korea in the late eighteenth century, quite a large number of Catholic girls refused marriage and chose to consecrate their virginity for dedication to God. These new movements among Korean Catholic converts, particularly those by women, were misinterpreted as resistance to Confucianism based on the assumption that everything related to Catholicism is modernization from the West, and thus the polar opposite of Confucianism.

The biggest problem is that faith in this misinterpretation resulted in failure to see the truth and missed chances to correct the mistakes of previous research reinforced by biased misreading of diverse primary sources. With deeper scrutiny of the primary sources, a group of scholars of Church history have begun noticing discrepancies between the established discussions on modernization introduced by the Catholic Church and Korean women’s liberation. It was Kim Ok-hŭi who first observed a contradiction in the previous research and accounts in the primary sources in the 1980s. She noticed that consecrated Korean female virgins did not resist oppression by the Confucian patriarchy or move to obtain gender equality in pre-twentieth century Korea.14 Also, she points out that married Catholic women showed obedience to their husbands that is similar to their contemporary Confucian counterparts, and female virgins radically disappeared from the documents after the mid 1840s.15


However, since her faith in the myth of Catholic modernization is too deep to break, she simply concludes that the Korean Catholic Church made more conservative moves under Bishop Simeon Berneux’s guidance and explains that this was the reason for the increase in the numbers of married women and the decrease in female Catholic virgins after the 1840s.\(^\text{16}\) Instead of examining further or challenging the established discussions, she ended her exploration of what the contents of the conservative turn of Catholic Church were and why Bishop Berneux had to push the Church in a more conservative direction when it came to women in the Church, particularly virgins.

Pang Sang-gún also agrees with Kim’s observation that trends among both married and virgin women in the Korean Catholic Church contradict the previous discussions which assumed that modernization was brought by Catholicism to Chosŏn Korea.\(^\text{17}\) Nevertheless, he rebuffs Kim Ok-hŭi’s argument that the Catholic Church of Korea never abandoned upholding gender equality as its major premise but had to apply it flexibly due to the very complicated situation the Church was confronting: the dominance of Confucianism and its persistent influence on Korean Catholics, and the Church’s need to obtain freedom for its mission under constant persecution.\(^\text{18}\) Thus, the myth of gender equity and Korean women’s liberation by Catholicism has been unchallenged so far, still maintaining its status as orthodox in the field not only of the history of the Church in Korea but of Korean history in general.


This dissertation thus aims at placing the history of Catholic women in the field of Korean women’s history by delving into Confucianism and Catholicism, women’s actions, and reactions between these two religions from China and the West, respectively. I pay particular attention to the hidden struggles between French missionaries and Korean female virgins, which have been ignored by historians of Korean history thus far. Delving into Korean women’s religious agency by revealing the religiosity at the core of Confucian patriarchy, I will also reevaluate the different meanings of Korean Catholic women’s practice of perpetual virginity within Confucian society and the Catholic Church, respectively, both of which commonly enforced marriage as the only life choice for women. By doing so, I intend to draw their voices, hitherto hidden in the lines of documents, out of obscurity.

1.2 Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation consists of three mains parts: an introduction, six main chapters and a conclusion. In Chapter 2, I will discuss the beginning of the history of Catholicism and the Catholic Church in Chosôn Korea and their influence on Korean women from the late eighteenth century. This chapter will pay special attention to Kang Wan-suk (1761-1801), a female leader in the nascent Catholic Church in Chosôn, discussing her contribution to the Church and misinterpretation of her activities by contemporary scholars of Korean history. In this chapter, I will argue against the misinterpretation that Catholicism brought modern marriage with freedom of spousal choice based on love, divorce, and remarriage, which promoted equality between partners. By doing so, I will point out that the new marriage, practiced by Korean Catholic converts of Chosôn Korea was not the practice of love marriage with equality but Catholic
matrimony, one of the Holy Sacraments under strong regulation by the Canon Law and priestly authority.

Chapter 3 will examine how young female Catholics in Korea had adopted, practiced and transformed the Catholic notion of perpetual virginity in Chosŏn Korea under the continuous bloody persecutions from 1784 to 1839. This chapter will demonstrate how consecrated female virgins of Chosŏn Korea had developed consciousness of their own identity as Catholic virgins and articulated it differently over generations, confronting Confucian society, which considered them to be abnormal, disturbing, and dangerous.

In Chapter 4, I will discuss how and why choosing abstinence could empower women under the patriarchal social environments. This chapter is dedicated to examinations of the meaning of engaging in sex for women themselves and how women subverted the imperative of prenuptial sexual purity, an original device of the patriarchy to control women’s sexuality, as a means to create their subjectivity. Also, this chapter will delve into how women’s refusal to surrender their virginity by relying on religious institutions provided them limited empowerment by focusing on the case of Catholic virginity as an example.

In Chapter 5, I will turn the focus of the discussion to Confucianism, focusing on its religious nature related with spirits and the afterlife, particularly of women of Chosŏn Korea. By doing so, I will show Confucianism is indeed a religion based on ritual performance defined by family-oriented orthopraxy and discuss how the religious nature of Confucianism required women to switch their religious space into the domestic sphere. I will argue that this dovetailed with women’s overall oppression throughout the Chosŏn dynasty and that women of Chosŏn actively developed their own religious world. Also, I will connect this discussion with the reasons why women in Confucian societies were constantly identified as a source of ritual
impurity. This will explain why the Confucian literati were destined to fail to completely eradicate heteropraxy in their families and had to protect ritual purity in the family by identifying (only) the women as a source of potential danger to ritual purity.

In chapter 6, I will explore the traditional understanding of women’s virginity and the lives and deaths of unmarried women in Chosŏn Korea. This chapter will examine the state efforts to control women’s virginity through regulations forcing them to marry and banning them from joining the Buddhist sangha. Also, paying special attention to virgin ghosts and posthumous marriage, performed mostly in the Confucian cultural societies, I will argue that the reason for the prevalence of female virgin ghosts in Chosŏn Korea was the exclusion of unmarried women from Confucian orthopraxy. In this respect, I will point out that Korean Catholic girls’ desire for virgin martyrdom shows that a tremendous paradigm shift occurred among Koreans.

In chapter 7, I will discuss how the French missionaries attempted to control Korean virgins by prohibiting them from voluntarily choosing a life of perpetual virginity, and how female virgins in Chosŏn Korea had developed and exercised their subjectivity against the missionaries’ control. Specifically, I will analyze female Catholic virgins’ ways of practicing their subjectivity and resistance to the Catholic Church that differed from those of their predecessors, who had to confront the Confucian society. By doing so, I aim to demonstrate why their dramatic disappearance from documents should not be read as their surrender to the authority of the missionaries. I also aim to show what form of subjectivity they had developed, in contrast to the concept of autonomy in the discourse of modernization.

Finally, the conclusion will briefly discuss how the first Western convents came to be established in Korea and how the hidden Korean female virgins emerged from obscurity in order
to join the newly built nunnery. It will demonstrate that Korean female virgins continuously practiced perpetual virginity on their own in spite of strong priestly efforts to discourage them.

1.3 Theoretical Frameworks of the Dissertation

1.3.1 Analyses of Primary Sources

Scholars of women’s history have inevitably faced a common obstacle: a lack of documents on women as well as a lack of women’s voices in the extant records. This dissertation shares the same problem, because there are few primary sources to explore not only the lives of women outside the Catholic Church under the influence of the Confucian majority, but also the lives of women in the Catholic Church, who were a minority in Chosŏn society. Most of the documents on women were written by men: officials, Confucian literati, French missionaries, or male Catholics. They commonly do not contain women’s direct voices in that they were not written by women themselves. They thus reflect a male point of view. Although some testimonies of victims of persecutions contain voices of female witnesses and martyrs, they are not sufficient to scrutinize women’s lives in the Church. That is because the stories are too simple, focusing on descriptions of the moment of the victims’ executions, and the narratives are also embellished by religious eulogy to praise the religious zeal for martyrdom.

Nevertheless, as this research is fundamentally a thesis in the field of history, the first and major methodology I will use for this dissertation is analysis of primary sources. The primary sources used in this dissertation encompass the official history records as well as government documents of the Chosŏn dynasty, Confucian texts, interrogation records of arrested Catholic converts, French missionaries’ letters and reports, and witnesses’ testimonies on female martyrs.
Even though women’s voices are still scarce in these records, they are still the most useful sources to excavate their hidden voices, if we read them against the grain.

I also use literature created by and for women to find the voices of those excluded from the historical records. Particularly, I employ the genre of *kyubang kasa* (*A Song from the Inner Chamber*) and *sijip sari norae* (*A Song about A Life of Patrilocal Marriage*) to read the real-life contexts of women. These genres of songs began to be sung by high class and lower-class women from the eighteenth century, when Chosŏn Korean society had become completely Confucianized.¹⁹

That the authors and singers of these songs were women gives us direct access to voices excluded from the historical sources.

1.3.2 Analyses of Secondary Sources

The second methodology I will use for this dissertation is examination of secondary sources, such as articles or books by contemporary scholars written in Korean, English, and French. The history of Catholicism and the Church in Korea is a little explored field in North America and most of the research has been published in Korean. Therefore, scrutinizing the articles and books published in Korea and in Korean is a major tool for this dissertation research. Also, I will examine articles and books written by contemporary scholars in English. These include research on Catholicism and the Church in China, conducted by contemporary scholars in North America. The academe in North America has long studied Catholicism in China, and

¹⁹ The genre of *sijip sari norae* has not been introduced in English yet. However, Sonja Häußler introduced the genre of *kyubang kasa* in English. For more detailed discussions, see: Sonja Häußler, “Kyubang Kasa: Women’s Writings from the Late Chosŏn,” in *Creative Women of Korea: The Fifteenth Through the Twenties Centuries*, ed. Young-key Kim-Renaud (New York: Routledge, 2004), 142–62.
thus has produced and accumulated abundant research results. Such research results are also useful sources for comparative research for the case of Catholicism and the Catholic Church in Korea. I will also use research on the history of women in the West, particularly nuns and female Catholic virgins. The field of women’s history in the West has analyzed the multi-dimensions of women’s relationship with the Catholic Church under its long-lasting domination for more than a thousand years. These are also very useful sources for comparative research applied to the case of Korean women in the Catholic Church.

1.3.3 Comparative research

I will also use the methods of comparative research to overcome the difficulties caused by the lack of primary sources and enhance the quality of the research. Firstly, this dissertation will explore the common situation that women Chosŏn Korea faced under Confucian domination from the late fourteenth century. Showing the features of their post-nuptial lives that Korean women shared with their Chinese counterparts, I will discuss the impact on Korean women’s lives brought by the adoption of Confucianism and the subsequent social reconstitution based on Confucian teachings.

Secondly, this dissertation will compare the research on Catholic Virgins in China and Korea under control of the French missionaries from the Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris (hereafter M.E.P.). The French missionaries from the M.E.P. controlled missions in East Asia from the mid eighteenth century, establishing their base in Hong Kong. Most of the M.E.P. missionaries sent to Korea had once engaged in missions in China or followed the decisions made by M.E.P. missionaries in China. Thus, comparative research on the M.E.P. missionaries’ policies and activities both in China and Korea is a prerequisite for research on the Catholic
Church in Korea after the beginning of their mission in the 1830s. Particularly, comparison of those missionaries’ treatment of Chinese female virgins and their Korean counterparts will be crucial to reveal the unheard voices of Korean female virgins related to their sudden disappearance from the records under the mission by the M.E.P. in Korea in contrast to the constant activities of their Chinese counterparts. Comparative research will also be utilized to identify the common patterns and meanings of women’s utilization of religious sexual renunciation under the diverse patriarchies confronted by Buddhist and Catholic women and by Catholic virgins in the West and East, which can be helpful for overcoming the limitations caused by the lack of written sources.

1.3.4 Theoretical Framework for Chapter 4 and Chapter 7

1.3.4.1 Staying in the Church: Saba Mahmood’s Discussions on Women’s Subjectivity in Traditional Religions (Chapter 4 and Chapter 7)

In Chapter 4 and Chapter 7, I will utilize Saba Mahmood’s reconceptualization of women’s subjectivity in the traditional religions and Michel Foucault’s ethical subject. These theories will be applied to scrutinize how Korean female virgins practiced their agency differently to confront the prohibition of their spontaneous choice of perpetual virginity by the Catholic Church or the Confucian society and how their responses could be also viewed as a practice of their agency. Also, I will examine how the women’s actions reacted differently toward the Catholic Church and the Confucian society despite their common enforcement of marriage.

Women’s agency has been understood as the ability of a female agent “to act without constraint in the world” based on their free will to achieve universal freedom and equality.
Scholars of social science and Western feminism commonly regard these as shared interests among all women regardless of time, space, or cultural diversity. This definition of women’s agency is helpful to analyze Korean female virgins’ overt defiance towards the Confucian society. However, it becomes an obstacle to articulating their covert disobedience to the prohibition of voluntary choice of consecrated virginity by the Catholic Church, in that they did not intend to change the Church’s policy or were eager to obtain the Church’s permission. Therefore, I will use two theories which are useful to read primary documents against the grain.

The first theory I will use is Saba Mahmood’s different conceptualization of the difference of women’s agency from Western feminism. Saba Mahmood raises the question of the problems caused by universal application of the aforementioned conventional definition of female agency by Western feminism to her research on the Muslim women’s participation in and support of the piety movement in Egypt. The piety movement is part of the larger project of Islamic world revival with the purpose of bringing religious principles into the daily lives of the world’s Muslims including in Cairo, Egypt since at least the 1970s.

A large number of women have participated in this movement, gathering to hold public meetings in mosques and teaching Islamic doctrine to one another for the first time in the history of Egypt. However, this movement was structured to promote and support traditional Islamic norms and practices which have imposed subordination upon Muslim women, such as wearing the veil (hijab) and “feminine virtues”—i.e. shyness, modesty, and humility, and obedience to male authority. Liberalist feminism has understood that female agency mostly refers to those

who resist or revolt for autonomy, and ignores situations in which the women “may be socially, ethically, or politically indifferent to the goal of opposing hegemonic norms.”

Thus, in her book, *Politics of Piety*, Mahmood points out that the female participants of the Piety Movement can be seen to lack agency or be subordinate to the patriarchal norms, if the conventional definition of female agency is applied.

The first element that I will utilize from Mahmood’s research is that agency can be exerted to work within the system. I believe that this argument is also applicable to my discussion on female virgins in the West and East including Korean virgins, who commonly wanted to stay within the Catholic Church by obeying Christian teachings, when the Church became the field of their struggles. In the first section of Chapter 7, I will argue that Korean female virgins endeavored to use their agency to follow and stick to the Church and Christian teachings for self-realization. Their conflicts with Confucian society may compatible with the argument of liberal ideology in that they tried to leave the society. However, Mahmood’s discussion is helpful to understand why the virgins endeavored to remain under the Church’s authority and set themselves up as a better example of a “good Catholic girl.” I believe that her argument is helpful for discussing women’s lives before the advance of the modern concept of “feminist consciousness” after the twentieth century, such as the case of Korean female virgins and their subjectivity.

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1.3.4.2 Michel Foucault’s Ethical Subject (Chapter 7)

The second theory I will use for chapter 7 is Michel Foucault’s notion of the ethical subject, which is interconnected with Saba Mahmood’s theorization of female agency through subjectification of women themselves as the agents of self-realization.\(^{23}\) One of the important key themes of Mahmood’s research in *The Politics of Piety* is “ethical self-formation,” or how ethical action is connected to individual freedom and agency when developing the virtuous self.\(^{24}\) These notions of ethical self-formation and ethical subject are applicable to argue the subject formation and practice of subjectivity of Korean female virgins by using the Foucauldian notion of ethics, which emphasizes outward behaviour based on the idea that virtue is derived from action. Although Mahmood does not elaborate upon her discussion to the extent of arguing for the possibility of Muslim women’s resistance within the mosque, I will utilize this concept to articulate Korean virgins’ indirect resistance against the French missionaries through self-realization as ethical subjects.

This notion of the ethical subject is the least known of Michel Foucault’s theories, which he discussed for several years from the early 1980s until his death in 1984. Although Foucault delved for most of his life into how the modern subject is constituted by power and knowledge, he admitted that his earlier research insistence on the formation of subjectivity by knowledge and power outside of the subject was too much.\(^{25}\) Maintaining the core of his previous argument that


a subject is fundamentally a thing to be constituted, he turned his search to the dynamics of the subject formation inside of the subject.

Turning his focus to different ways of subject formations during the Hellenistic Greek, Imperial Roman, and early Christian periods before the domination of Christianity in the history of Western culture, he named it the care of the self.26 Here, the ethics denote that “the intentional work of an individual on itself in order to subject itself to a set of moral recommendations for conduct and, as a result of this self-forming activity or ‘subjectivation,’ constitute its own moral being.”27 The most important thing, according to Foucault, is that this subjectivation cannot be simply achieve “self-awareness” but should be done by self-formation as an ethical subject by a series of practices.28

By applying the Foucauldian notion of the ethical subject, I will argue that Korean Catholic virgins constituted themselves as ethical subjects who governed themselves and believed they could display their connectedness with God by practicing asceticism and Catholic teachings. Also, this process of subjectivation as the ethical subject provided them the dynamic to resist the

26 The works on the notion of the ethical subject are less known than Foucault’s other theories, because they were published around the time of his death in 1984. The major discussions are in the History of Sexuality Volumes 2 and 3, but more detailed explanations by Foucault are scattered in his interviews and lectures. The essential concepts are arranged very well in Bob Robinson’s online article at https://www.iep.utm.edu/fouc-eth/.


28 Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure, trans. Robert Hurley, vol. 2 (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), p.28: (…), for an action to be “moral,” it must not be reducible to an act or a series of acts conforming to a rule, a law, or a value. Of course, all moral action involves a relationship with the reality in which it is carried out, and a relationship with the self. The latter is not simply “self-awareness” but self-formation as an “ethical subject,” a process in which the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relatives to the precept he will follow, and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal. And this requires him to act upon himself, to monitor, test, improve, and transform himself.
control of the French missionaries, who refused to recognize them as Christian virgins through
the example of Yi Theresa discussed in Chapter 7.
Chapter 2: Korean Women’s Encounter with Catholicism

2.1 Introduction of Catholicism in Korea

Women’s roles had been clearly crucial for the establishment, development, and survival of the Catholic Church in Korea throughout the history of Chosŏn dynasty for one century from the late eighteenth century to the late nineteenth century. However, the acceptance of Catholicism occurred by male Confucian scholars of Korea who first had encountered it as a field of scholarship called Sŏhak (Western Learning) in the early seventeenth century. Thus, women’s conversion to Catholicism might have happened after their male counterparts had elevated their academic passion into religious zeal through their scrutiny of Catholic theology for one century.

Korea’s encounter with Catholicism and the establishment of the Catholic Church in Korea are unexpected fruits in the history of the Christian missions in Asia since their start in the fifteenth century. Acceptance occurred by Koreans’ voluntary embrace of the new faith even in the absence of missionaries, through reading Jesuit publications in Chinese. Moreover, they even built the Catholic Church in Korea on their own first, and then made repeated efforts to invite missionaries in the midst of bloody persecutions which persisted for almost a century. The Catholic Church had long hesitated to send missionaries to Korea to seek converts. There were several unrealized plans to establish missions in Korea among Jesuits in China as well as by
Franciscans, but Korean converts themselves pioneered the ways to open the Catholic missions in Korea.

As mentioned above, Korea’s first encounter with Catholicism in the early seventeenth century occurred as a by-product of the Jesuit mission in China. Overcoming upheavals in Europe brought by the Reformation of the early sixteenth century, the Catholic Church had engaged in missions outside Europe as an endeavor to rehabilitate its waning authority due to the division of Christendom by the Protestants in Europe. Instead of recovering its lost power inside Europe, the Catholic Church began its foreign missions, particularly in Asia, along with Spanish and the Portuguese quests for both gold and God. The Jesuits, members of what was formally known as the Society of Jesus, took the roles of pioneers and became the spearhead to broaden the frontlines of the mission.

The Jesuit mission in East Asia had begun with the Jesuits’ arrival in Japan and southern China in the sixteenth century. It was Francis Xavier S.J. (1506-1552) who contributed to opening the Jesuits’ East Asian mission, successfully entering Japan in 1549. However, he also began another effort to pioneer a new mission in China, believing that success from the evangelization of China would also elevate the effectiveness of Japanese missions due to China’s influence on Japan. Although he died on the way to China in 1552, his successors, particularly

Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), reached southern China and achieved huge success in evangelization in the country.\textsuperscript{30}

The success of the Jesuit mission in East Asia can be seen from their accommodation policy, which aimed to integrate native culture and tradition to evangelize Christian messages for the foreign mission. Matteo Ricci and the Jesuits in China strategically adopted Confucian terms and knowledge to proselytize Catholic teachings in China and published books on diverse topics such as theology, science, and cartography in Chinese. Those publications were highly valued among Chinese literati and contributed to spreading Christianity and obtaining prominent Chinese converts including Li Zhizao (1517-1630), Xu Guangqui (1562-1633), and Yang Tingyun (1562-1627), the so-called three pillars of Chinese Catholicism.\textsuperscript{31}

The Jesuits’ accommodation policy also attracted Korean literati, stimulating their curiosity and fascination with the new knowledge from the West via China, and motivated them to delve into it. Even though Jesuits had never actually carried out direct missions in Korea, the publications of Jesuit missionaries resulted in indirectly introducing Catholicism to Korean literati. Sharing Confucian knowledge and rhetoric and the Chinese writing system with their Chinese counterparts, Korean literati also learned new knowledge through those books.

This new knowledge created a passion for and a boom in this “Western learning” among Korean literati, who wanted to find a different path to study Confucianism in the early and mid-eighteenth century. Therefore, the regular and special envoys to Beijing soon became an


essential vein to obtain more Jesuit publications and interact with missionaries directly in China. At first, Korean literati were attracted more to the Western sciences such as astronomy, mathematics, geography and cartography, as well as weaponry. However, it did not take long for them to expand their curiosity to Catholic theology and ethics.32

The most influential Jesuit catechism for Korean literati to learn Catholic theology was Matteo Ricci’s Ch’ŏnju sirŭi (Ch. Tianzhu shiyi, The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven). This book was introduced to Korean literati almost as soon as it was published in China in 1603, and circulated widely among Korean literati. Prominent Confucian scholars in Korea such as Yi Sukwang (1563-1628) and Yi-Ik (1681-1763) wrote their own analyses of Ricci’s book.33

In addition, later Catholic converts in Korea also confessed that they learned Catholic faith from this book and its influence was tremendous for their conversions to Catholicism. Moreover, other Jesuit publications such as Kyoyo sŏron (Jiaoyao jielüe, Essential Teachings of the Church Briefly Explained) and Ch’ŏnhak ch’oham (Tianxue chuhan, An Introductory Collection of Works on Heavenly Learning) were also soon introduced in Korea and provoked scholarly curiosity, attracting a wide range of readership among the Korean literati.34

As knowledge of Western Learning increased, there were two contrasting reactions among Korean literati: rejection and acceptance. Both reactions were more visible among

32 Yi Chang-u, “Chosŏn kwa Ch’ŏnjugyo ŭi Mannam” [Encounter between Chosŏn Korea and Catholicism], in Han’guk Ch’ŏnju Kyohoesa [History of Korean Catholic Church], vol. 1 (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 2009), 106–28, p.127-124.

33 Yi Chang-u, “Chosŏn Hugi Sŏhak ŭi Suyong kwa Ch’ŏnju Kyohoe ŭi Sŏllip” [Acceptance of Western Learning and Establishment of Catholic Church in the Late Chosŏn Period], in Han’guk Ch’ŏnju Kyohoesa [History of Korean Catholic Church], vol. 1 (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 2009), 140–225, p.166-169.

34 Yi Chang-u, “Chosŏn Hugi Sŏhak ŭi Suyong kwa Ch’ŏnju Kyohoe ŭi Sŏllip” [Acceptance of Western Learning and Establishment of Catholic Church in the Late Chosŏn Period], in Han’guk Ch’ŏnju Kyohoesa, vol. 1 (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 2009), 140–225, p.169-171.
disciples of the aforementioned Yi Ik, who had an ambivalent attitude towards Western Learning. Yi Ik found that Catholic creeds indeed contained valuable philosophical claims to complement Neo-Confucian teachings. However, in contrast to his high evaluation of Western technologies, he disagreed with most of the theology of Catholic teachings. His disciples divided into those who considered that Catholic theology could be a new resource for complementing Neo-Confucianism and those who totally rejected its values and stigmatized it as a heterodox.

As a result, Yi Ik’s disciples, politically associated with the Southerner party among many political factions, came to be split into pro- and anti-Western Learning sides, based on their contrasting attitudes toward Catholicism. Moreover, the major anti-Catholic polemicists, such as An Chŏng-bok (1712-1791) and Sin Hu-dam (1702-1761) and the early Catholic converts such as Kwon Ch’ŏl-sin (1736-1801), are all linked to Yi Ik.

Particularly, the first Catholic converts and Church leaders came from a group of students of Kwon Ch’ŏl-sin called the Nog’am school (Kwon Ch’ŏl-sin’s literary name) in the second half of the eighteenth century. After the deaths of Yi Ik and Yi Pyŏng-hyu (1710-1776), Kwŏn Ch’ŏl-sin became a leader of intellectual discussions among Yi’s former disciples. It is unclear exactly when the scholars of the Nog’am school actually transformed their knowledge of Catholicism into Catholic faith. It seems clear that Kwŏn eventually turned his attention to


36 Ch’a Ki-jin, Chosŏn Hugi úi Sŏhak kwa Ch’ŏksaron Yŏn’gu [A Study on the Western Learning and Discussions for Ostracizing Catholicism in the Late Chosŏn Korea] (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 2002), p.103-107, p.127-131.
Catholicism after 1780 and the scholars of the Nog’am school joined Kwôn’s intellectual journey among Neo-Confucianism, Wang Yangming’s Confucianism, and Catholic theology, forming the school around 1776. In the midst of the journey, it seems they had religious epiphanies one by one and came to develop their faith in Catholicism around at the end of the eighteenth century.

The meetings at Chu’ŏ Temple in 1777 or Ch’ŏnjin Hermitage in 1779 have been discussed as the important turning point for the development of faith among scholars of the Nog’am school. Since there are several different sources on the times and places of this gathering, it is unclear whether it occurred only once or multiple times. Nevertheless, it seems certain that Kwôn Ch’ŏl-sin and his students from the Nog’am school gathered for intellectual discussions, once either at Chu’ŏ Temple in 1777 or Ch’ŏnjin Hermitage in 1779, or twice at Chu’ŏ Temple in 1777 or Ch’ŏnjin Hermitage in 1779. Another possibility is that there was one meeting at the Ch’ŏnjin Hermitage at Chu’ŏ Temple in 1777, as Charles Dallet records in his *Histoire de l’Église de Corea* (History of the Korean Catholic Church), written in 1874. According to Dallet’s account, most of attendees at the meeting(s) such as Kwôn Ch’ŏl-sin, Chŏng Yak-young, Chŏng Yak-chong, and Yi Pyŏk became Catholic converts and church leaders several years later.

37 Ch’a Ki-jin, *Chosŏn Hugi ū Sŏhak kwa Ch’ŏksaron Yŏn’gu [A Study on the Western Learning and Discussions for Ostracizing Catholicism in the Late Chosŏn Korea]* (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 2002), p. 128-129.

38 Chŏng Yak-yong, one of the attendees, wrote in the eulogy for Kwôn Ch’ŏl-sin that they had a gathering in 1779 and criticism toward them happened seven years from the day of the gathering, which presumably means that in the incident they were caught by the police from the Ministry of Punishments in 1785. Several different scholarly opinions have arisen about this gathering, since these records provide different years and places for the meeting.

Despite currently ongoing controversies on the purposes of this meeting and whether it was a Catholic or a Confucian gathering,\(^{40}\) most of the important leaders of the Korean Catholic Church came from among the participants. They were eager to learn more about Catholicism and attempted to reach Western missionaries with the religious purpose of learning about the Catholic Church from them for the first time almost a century after Korea’s first encounter with Catholicism.

Yi Sŭng-hun’s baptism in Beijing in 1784, which was the first time in history a Korean adult living in Korea had been baptized, became the watershed moment in the history of Korea’s Catholic Church. Yi Sŭng-hun was one of the participants of the meeting(s) at Chu’ŏ Temple and went to China in 1783 following his father, who had been appointed as an envoy. Actually, it was Yi Pyŏk (1754-1785), who strongly insisted that Yi Sŭng-hun meet Western missionaries in Beijing and receive baptism from them. Yi Pyŏk was also one of participants of the meeting at Chu’ŏ Temple and had enthusiastically studied Catholicism on his own. Since Yi Sŭng-hun’s knowledge of Catholicism was not that deep, Yi Pyŏk taught him before his departure to Beijing.\(^{41}\) Despite concerns and opposition based on his lack of knowledge of the religion, he was baptized with the name Peter by Jean-Joseph de Grammont S.J. (1736-1812?) at the

\(^{40}\) The controversies over the nature of the gathering arose because two primary sources are reporting the participants read different books and discussed different topics in the meeting. Dallet claims that the participants read only Catholic books and debated Catholicism (Charles Dallet, *Han'guk Ch’ŏnju Kyohoesa [Histoire de l’église de Corée]*, trans. An Ŭng-nyŏl and Ch’oe Sŏg-u, vol. 1 (Kyŏngbuk Ch’ilgok-kun Waegwan-ŭp: Pundo Ch’ulp’ansa, 1979), p.300-302). However, the writings by Chŏng Yak-yong, the brother of one of the participants of the meetings say that these meetings were all about Confucian self-cultivation rather than the worship of the Catholic God or even the reading of Catholic publications. (Donald Baker, *Catholics and Anti-Catholicism in Chosŏn Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2017), p.65)

\(^{41}\) Hwang Sayŏng, *Silk Letter*, lines 43 and 44.
Northern Cathedral in Beijing in 1784. Fr. Grammont gave him baptism with the wish that he would be the foundation for the Catholic Church in Korea.

Yi Sŭng-hun returned to Korea in 1874 with diverse Catechist books such as Sŏngnyŏn kwang’ik (Sheng nian guang yi, Wide Spread of the Sacred Century), Koyo sóron (Jiao yao xu lun, Brief Introduction to the Essential Teaching on Catholicism), Sŏnggyŏng chikhae (Sheng jing zhi jie, Direct Explication of the Scriptures), and Sujin ilgwa (Xiu zhen ri ke, Pocket-size Guide to Daily Timetable), which were soon translated into Korean, for Catholic converts’ daily religious practices. It seemed the depth of understanding of the Catholic creed could go beyond the knowledge in Ch’ŏnhak ch’oham which Koreans had before Yi Sŭng-hun’s baptism.\(^\text{42}\) These books contributed to broadening and deepening Catholic converts’ knowledge through self-learning.

Returning to Korea in 1784, Yi Sŭng-hun established the Catholic Church in Korea by baptizing ten people who had learned Catholicism from Yi Pyŏk. The books Yi Sŭng-hun took to Korea contributed to deepening Yi Pyŏk’s Catholic faith. He successfully evangelized his friends and relatives such as Chŏng Yak-chŏn, Chŏng Yak-yong, and Kwŏn Il-sin by teaching them Catholicism as a religion. Also, he proselytized Kim Pŏm-u (? - 1786), a man of the Chung-in (technical expert) class, who would contribute to spreading Catholic faith to others of his rank. Moreover, Yi Pyŏk provided his house as place for the first baptism by Yi Sŭng-hun in 1784. Yi Sŭng-hun baptized ten people including Yi Pyŏk, Kwŏn Il-sin, and Kim Pŏm-u. Those who were baptized there also spread the Catholic faith to their families, friends, and neighbours. Kwŏn Il-

\(^{42}\) Cho Han-gŏn, “Chugyo Yoji Wa Han’yŏk Sŏhaksŏ ûi Kwan’gye [Relations between Chugo Yoji and Other Books on Western Learnings in Chinese Translation],” Kyohoesa Yŏn’gu 26 (2006): 5–74, p.11-12.
sin evangelized Yi Chon-ch’ang, Yu Hang-gŏm (1756-1801) and Yun Yu-il, and Kim Pŏm-u proselytized to Ch’oi In-gil (1765-1795), Chi Hwang (1767-1795), and Yun Chi-ch’ung (1759-1791). They all became important leaders as well as catechists for the newly established Church.

The nascent Catholic Church was soon detected by the government and caused turmoil in the society of Chosŏn Korea, which solely promoted Confucian orthodoxy. The Ministry of Punishments uncovered the regular gatherings of Catholic converts by accident in 1785, which caused the death of the aforementioned Kim Pŏm-u, a Catholic the Chung-in (technical expert) class. This incident also resulted in the loss of its major leaders, particularly yangban. Yi Pyŏk was forced to leave the church by his family and died of illness in 1785. Yi Sŭng-hun, two of the Chŏng brothers (Chŏng Yak-jŏn, and Chŏng Yak-yong), and other converts from the yangban class also had to keep their distance from the church and write statements that they disapproved of Catholicism to prove they were not converts.

Nevertheless, the Catholic Church in Korea swiftly overcame the first crisis and began flourishing rather than waning. Despite the absence of yangban converts, Catholics of the technical expert class as well as the lower class began their proselytization activities outside Seoul. Also, the major yangban converts including Yi Sŭng-hun came back to the Church and resumed their roles in around 1786. Their return contributed to the fast recovery of the nascent Church from the impact of the incident and secured its foundation.

Yi Sŭng-hun set up an ecclesiastical hierarchy in 1786 based on his memory of what he had seen and heard at the Northern Cathedral in Beijing, and it stayed in place until 1787,

because the increase of converts required a more systematic organization. Church leaders including Yi Sŭng-hun felt they needed a systematized ecclesiastical organization to perform Catholic rituals such as baptism, Confirmation, Mass, Confession and so on for the increasing number of converts. Based on his memories in the Northern Cathedral in Beijing, Yi Sŭng-hun organized the clerical organization by appointing himself and ten devoted and respected converts as priests. However, one of the priests raised a problem after reading a catechism in 1787, which said that only the Church had the authority to appoint priests. As soon as they realized they were violating church regulations, they stopped practicing all Catholic rituals and dismissed the ecclesiastical hierarchy in 1787.

At last, leaders realized they needed to invite priests for orthodox rituals based on Church laws and sent Yun Yu-il to Beijing in 1789 to request priests to be sent to Korea. Yun Yu-il arrived at Beijing with the envoy to China disguised as a merchant in order to inquire of the missionaries whether they had committed blasphemy by creating an unauthorized priesthood. Learning the news of the establishment of the Catholic Church in Korea, Alexander De Gouvea (1571-1808), the Bishop of Beijing Diocese, handed Yun Yu-il a pastoral letter with instructions on how to practice the Catholic faith properly. Through the letter, Korean Catholics learned that they had indeed violated Church law and yearned to have a real priest even more, sending Yun Yu-il several times more to Beijing as a messenger.

Another letter from Bishop Gouvea gave a tremendous shock to Catholic converts in Korea, when Yun Yu-il returned from Beijing after his second journey in the winter of 1790. In

44 Cho Kwang, Chosŏn Hugi Ch’ŏnjugyosa Yŏn’gu [A Study on the History of Catholicism in Late Chosŏn Korea] (Sŏul, Korea: Kodae Minjok Munhwa Yŏn’gu Ch’ulp’anbu, 1988), p.56.
this letter, Gouvea promised to send a missionary to Korea and, in response to the converts’ questions about the ancestral rituals for Korean Catholic believers, ordered them to completely stop practicing Confucian ancestral rituals. From 1643 to 1742 the Catholic Church in China had already gone through an almost century-long contention, which would later be called the Rites Controversy, until the Papal decrees of 1715 and 1742 completely banned the Chinese Rites.45 The denouement of the Chinese Rites Controversy, at last reached Korean Catholic converts with Yun Yu-il’s return with the Bishop’s instruction in 1790.

The order prohibiting the Confucian ancestral rituals threw another wrench into the creation of a Catholic community in Korea and resulted in most of the yangban leaders abandoning the church. Among those who left at this time were Yi Sŭng-hun, Kwŏn Il-sin, Kwŏn Ch’ŏl-sin, Chŏng Yak-chŏn, Chŏng Yak-yong, and Hong Nak-min.

The prohibition of Confucian rituals soon produced a bigger incident, which cost the lives of two yangban converts. It would later be called the Chinsan Incident of 1791. The two victims were Yun Chi-ch’ung (1759-1791) and his maternal cousin Kwŏn Sang-yŏn (1750-1791). In the fall of 1791, a rumour was widely spread in the Chinsan area of Chŏlla Province that Yun Chi-ch’ung and Kwŏn Sang-yŏn did not perform proper funerary or ancestral rituals for Yun’s deceased mother and instead had burned the ancestral tablets. Sin Sa-wŏn (1732-1799), Magistrate of Chinsan County, reported this rumour to the government and visited Yun Chi-ch’ung’s house. Confirming the missing ancestral tablets, he ordered the arrest of both men and sent them to Chŏng Min-si, the Governor of Chŏlla Province. After continuous interrogations,

the government confirmed that they had burned the ancestral tablets and buried the ashes. King Chǒngjo, in shock, agreed to execute both Yun and Kwŏn, but still did not want to create a national turmoil. As the result, only a few important Catholic believers were arrested but they were soon released. However, Kwŏn Il-sin died on his way to exile as the result of torture and several converts including Yi Sŭng-hun were released after publicly declaring their apostasy.

This incident reshaped the leadership of the nascent Catholic Church in Korea centering around the lower classes because of the departure of a massive number of yangban converts. Even after this incident, the Church still had some yangban converts who stayed as believers and were actively involved in works for the Church, such as Chǒng Yak-chong, Chǒng Ch’ŏl-sang, Hwang Sa-yŏng, Yun Chi-hŏn and so on. They ascended as new Church leaders and led the converts throughout the ups and downs of the Church from then on. However, they were a minority, and most of the believers consisted of people below the technical expert class, which made them the main believers from then on.

In contrast to their male counterparts, this incident did not shake the Catholic faith of women of all social classes in the Chosŏn dynasty. When the first Catholic missionary arrived at Chosŏn and began his mission, these female converts’ roles became more crucial for the development and survival of the nascent Catholic Church in Korea.

### 2.2 Korean Women in the Catholic Church under Kang Wan-suk’s Leadership

The Chinsan Incident and entrance of Father Zhou Wen-mo (1752-1801), a Chinese priest, enhanced the importance of female Catholic converts and Kang Wan-suk’s leadership for the nascent Catholic Church in Chosŏn Korea. The role and leadership of Kang Wan-suk Columba (1761-1801) become even more important in respect not only to the increase in the
number of women in the Church but also to the survival of the Church. Kang Wan-suk Columba was a descendant of a secondary wife of a yangban family and had been married to Hong Chi-yŏng, also a son of a secondary wife of yangban family, in Naep’o of Ch’ungch’ŏng Province, where Catholicism had spread faster than in other areas in Korea at the time. Interacting with a widow whose family name was Kong, she converted to Catholicism and abandoned her faith in Buddhism.\(^{46}\)

Her name appears at a quite early stage of the history of Korean Catholic Church. She was arrested by the police during the Chinsan Incident but was released without punishment. However, she moved to Seoul with her mother-in-law and Hong P’il-ju (1773-1801), her stepson, after her husband expelled her for fear of being punished due to her Catholic faith.\(^{47}\)

Moreover, her name is also listed as one of the church leaders who planned and contributed money towards Fr. Zhou Wen-mo’s mission to Korea in 1791. Catholic converts in Chosŏn did not stop their efforts to invite missionaries to Korea, repeatedly sending messengers to the Church in China. Arriving at Beijing with Korean envoys in 1794, the messengers reported the situations the Korean Church had confronted to Bishop Guvea and requested him to send a priest in order to avoid the total collapse of Church in Korea. At last, Bishop Gouvea decided to send a missionary and appointed Zhou Wen-mo to establish a mission in the country. Bishop Guvea believed that it would be easier for a Chinese priest to avoid the danger of being detected

\(^{46}\) *Sahak ching’ŭi, Interrogation of Kang Wan-suk.*

\(^{47}\) *Sahak ching’ŭi, Interrogation of Kang Wan-suk.*
in Korea due to his similar appearance to Koreans.\(^{48}\) Thus, Fr. Zhou Wen-mo became the first Catholic missionary and priest for the Catholic Church in Korea

Born in Suzhou of Jiangsu Province in 1752, Zhou Wen-mo was raised by his aunt after his parents died when he was very young. He married at the age of twenty but his wife died three years later. At first he studied for the civil service exams but he decided to enter the priesthood after failing to pass them several times.\(^{49}\) He was one of the first to graduate from the seminary of the Beijing Diocese and was forty-two years old when he was chosen for the mission in Korea.\(^{50}\) He arrived at Seoul in January of 1795 with the assistance of Korean believers including the messengers Chi Hwang (1767-1795) and Yun Yu-il (1760-1795). He stayed in the home of Ch’oi In-gil (1765-1795) in Seoul, learning Korean, performing baptisms and taking confessions. Although the existence of a priest contributed to a rapid increase of the number of Catholic converts from 4000 in 1794 to 10,000 after 1795, although the majority of the new converts were still men of lower classes and women of all classes.

Recognizing the importance of her role for the Church, Fr. Zhou appointed her as the leader for female believers as soon as he arrived.\(^{51}\) And after the government discovered Zhou


\(^{49}\) Pang Sang-gŭn, “Chu Mun-Mo Sinbu üi Ipkuk kwa Chosŏn Kyohoe [Entrance of Father Zhu Wen-Mo and the Church in Chosŏn Korea],” in Han’guk Ch’önju Gyohoesa [History of Catholic Church in Korea], vol. 1 (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 2009), 311–314, p.312.

\(^{50}\) Charles Dallet wrote that Priest Zhou Wen-mo was chosen as a missionary for Korean mission at the age of 24 (Charles Dallet, Han’guk Ch’önju Kyohoesa Vol. 1, p.377). However, the footnote in the Korean translation correct that his age was forty-two based on Bishop Gouvea’s letters, written in August of 1797. Korean Catholics, who had seen him, also testified that he was a middle-aged man, who was nearly fifty.

Wen-mo’s arrival in 1795, which led to the deaths of several important Church leaders including Ch’oi In-gil Matthew (1765-1795), Yun Yu-il (1760-1795) and Chi Hwang (1767-1795), she took on the role of concealing him in her women’s quarters. From then, Zhou Wen-mo remained hidden in Kang Wan-suk’s house and continued his mission in secret until the first nationwide persecution in 1801.

Overcoming the limits on his activities, Fr. Zhou Wen-mo devised a congregation for lay believers and appointed important leaders. Among them, Kang Wan-suk Columba was appointed as a female leader (yǒ hoejang) for the women’s congregation(s). Discovering that one of the new converts had informed the government of Zhou Wen-mo’s presence in Korea, Zhou Wen-mo became extremely vigilant in his interaction with Korean converts. He cautiously moved around only reliable believers’ houses, narrowed the boundaries of his movements, and allowed only very few Korean converts to meet him in person, which extremely limited his activities. Therefore, in 1795 he organized the several lay-believers’ congregations in Seoul, including Myǒngdohoe.\(^{52}\) Kang Wan-suk was appointed as a leader for the female converts’ congregation, and was successful in obtaining new female converts.

\(^{52}\) Fr. Zhou Wen-mo created Myǒngdohoe in Korea by modeling on the lay believers’ organization of the Beijing Church. The goal of the Myǒngdohoe was “deepening knowledge on Catholicism with goals to spread Catholic faith widely to both Catholic believers and non-believers” (Charles Dallet, Han’guk Ch’ŏnju Kyohoesa Vol. 1, p.391). Myǒngdohoe helped the nascent Catholic Church in Korea to overcome the previously limited pattern of conversion, which occurred mainly among families or friends, and to expand evangelization outside blood ties. (Pang Sang-gŭn, “Ch’ogi Kyohoe e Issósŏ Myǒngdohoe ŭi Kusŏng kwa Sŏnggyŏk” [The Characters and Organization of Myǒngdohoe at the Nascent Catholic Church in Chosŏn Korea], Kyohoesa Yŏn’gu 11 (1996): 213–26, p.216.) Zhou Wen-mo divided the Myǒngdohoe into sub-organizations called, hoe (confraternity or congregation), mostly with five or six members including the leaders. The appointed hoejang by Zhou Wen-mo were Ch’oi Ch’ang-hyon (Ch’ong hoejang), Chŏng Yak-chong (Myǒng hoejang), Kang Wan-suk and Yun Chŏm-hye (yǒ hoejang). There were local hoejang for Seoul (Kim Sŭng-jŏng, Hwang Sa-yŏng, and Son Kyŏng-yun) and Naep’o (Chŏng San-p’i) (Pang Sang-gŭn, “Pakhae Sidae Chosŏn Ch’ŏnju Kyohoe ŭi Hoejangje” [The Catechist System of Chosŏn Korea during Period of the Persecutions], Kyohoesa Yŏn’gu 51 (2017): 7–42, p.22-23). However, it is impossible to know more about these hoe established outside Seoul due to massive loss of primary documents during continuous persecutions. All the members of each hoe had to abide by the regulations made by Zhou Wen-mo and regularly gathered to study the catechism and participate in masses. Names of new candidates for membership in the hoe were
Kang Wan-suk Columba, as a yǒhoejang, successfully spread Catholicism among Chosŏn women more than any other hoejang of the Myǒngdohoe from 1795 and 1801. The meaning of yǒ (female) hoejang (leading catechist) can indicate either “a female catechist” or a “catechist for female converts.” Kang Wan-suk successfully implemented both roles, contributing tremendously to spreading the Catholic faith widely among women of all social classes from the royal family to slaves. In the royal family, she proselytized Song Maria (1753-1801), wife of Prince Ŭn’ŏn (1754-1801), Shin Maria (?-1801), her daughter-in-law, who were confined to an isolated palace together, and Sŏ Kyŏng-ŭi (?-?), Kang Kyŏngbok Susanna (1762-1801), and Mun Yŏng-in Viviana (1776-1801), three court ladies who had served the two unfortunate women in the royal family.

Also, most of the women of the yangban and commoner classes who appear in documents before 1801 were closely related to Kang Wan-suk’s activities as a catechist. Accounts in the Sahak ching’ŭi demonstrate that most of the important female converts from yangban to slaves were directly connected with Kang Wan-suk. Some of them converted to the

reported to Zhou Wen-mo and they was obliged to study catechism for one year. Only those who studiously studied the catechism and obtained enough knowledge over that one year were permitted to join (Pang Sang-gŭn, “Ch’ŏgi Kyohoe e Issŏsŏ Myŏngdohoe ŭi Kusŏng kwa Sŏnggyŏk” [The Characters and Organization of Myŏngdohoe at the Nascent Catholic Church in Chosŏn Korea], Kyohoesa Yŏn’gu 11 (1996): 213–26, p.216, p.221.) Even though the Myŏngdohoe seems to have disappeared after the persecution in 1801, the hoejang system persisted and contributed to leading the Church and Korean converts throughout the continuous persecutions and absence of missionaries in Korea (Pang Sang-gŭn, “Pak’ae Siadea Chosŏn Ch’ŏnju Kyohoe ŭi Hoejangje,” Kyohoesa Yŏn’gu 51 (2017): 7–42, p.13.)

53 Song Maria was a primary wife of Prince Ŭn’ŏn (1754-1801), a step-brother of King Chŏngjo, and Shin Maria was a primary wife of Prince Sang-gye (1769-1786), Song Maria’s son. Since Prince Sado, father of King Chŏngjo and Prince Ŭn’ŏn, was killed in the middle of political turmoil, King Chŏngjo and his step-brothers had to go through diverse perils. Although King Chŏngjo attempted to protect them, Prince Sang-gye committed suicide after unintentionally becoming embroiled in a scheme related to succession of the throne in 1786. Subsequently, his family were denounced as traitors and exiled to Kanghwa Island. Although Prince Ŭn’ŏn himself was not a Catholic convert, he was also executed during the Persecution of the Sin’yu year due to the conversion of his wife and daughter-in-law. Their status as members of the royal family was recovered when Song Maria’s grandson ascended as King Ch’ŏljong in 1849.
Catholic faith by learning it from her and worked as her assistants. Particularly, Kang Wan-suk held *chŏmrye*, regular religious meetings for praying and studying catechisms for female converts in her own house. Female converts, under Kang Wan-wuk’s leadership, joined the meetings regularly at her house. Moreover, female slaves, owned by Church leaders including Kang Wan-suk, also converted to Catholicism and secretly served the Church, working as maids or messengers for leaders, Zhou Wen-mo and other converts.

In another important role as a *yŏ-hoejang*, Kang Wan-suk also took care of and nurtured a group of female converts in Korea, who chose lives as consecrated virgins in the service of God. The Catholic Church and Catholic creed introduced the converts to the consecration of virginity for religious life and a group of young girls hoped to practice it as their vocation. However, their families—even Catholic families—refused to allow their daughters to reject marriage and choose to live as consecrated virgins; Catholic girls thus often had to leave their families in defiance. Kang Wan-suk provided her house as a shelter, a school and a church for those girls and educated them in the Catholic creed. Yun Chŏm-hye Agatha (1776-1801) is one example. She found shelter in Kang’s home, studied Catholicism under Kang’s patronage, and transformed herself as a catechist for other female virgin converts. I return to the female converts in Chapter 3.

The recently discovered *Sugi* by Pak Chong-ak (1735-1795) provides a glimpse of Kang Wan-suk’s activities to proselytize women in Naep’o area, her hometown, in 1791 and those she met after moving to Seoul. *Sugi* is a document which transcribes Pak Chong-ak’s replies to King Chŏngjo’s letter on his reports related to the investigations of Catholic converts in Naep’o area during the Chinsan incident in 1791. Particularly, his report on December 11 of 1791 shows that Hong Chi-yŏng, Kang Wan-suk’s husband, was arrested and interrogated in the local
government office in Hongju. Hong Chi-yŏng was soon released after saying that his mother and wife had read Western books but he himself did not care about it due to his illiteracy. This testimony matches with Kang Wan-suk’s accounts that her husband expelled her from his house after being arrested and interrogated by the local government in 1791 in the midst of the Chinsan Incident.

Moreover, Pak Chong-ak’s reports illustrate the active roles of Catholic women from yangban families in the Naep’o area, which included Kang Wan-suk. The reports state that women of the yangban class did not hesitate to invite male and female Catholic converts into their homes whenever they encountered fellow believers. His reports further explain that yangban women taught Catholic catechist books written in Chinese by reading and explaining them in Korean to lower-class women. These women of the lower classes memorized them in Korean, because they could not read Chinese. Kang Wan-suk might have been familiar with this method based on her experience in her own hometown and adopted it for teaching the female converts gathered in her house after moving to Seoul.

Kang Wan-suk’s activities contributed tremendously to introducing Catholic faith into women’s inner chambers, where male converts were forbidden: as in China, Chosŏn Korea also severely segregated male and female spaces. Kang Wan-suk evangelized other women, protected the country’s only Catholic priest in her home, and educated female converts, penetrating other women’s inner chambers and integrating the separated spaces of men and women. As a result,


Sahak ching’ŭi articulates that Kang Wan-suk was the most important leader not only for women but also for men.\textsuperscript{56} Also, Hwang Sa-yŏng’s \textit{Silk Letter} states that the number of Korean converts increased from four thousand to ten thousand after Father Zhou Wen-mo’s arrival, and women represented two thirds of the new converts thanks to Kang’s passionate proselytization.\textsuperscript{57}

It is true that Kang Wan-suk was one of the most conspicuous women who contributed to opening a new chapter in the history of the Catholic Church in Korea, but that fact has been distorted by contemporary scholars. First of all, it is problematic to claim that the appointment of Kang Wan-suk as female catechist can be regarded as a symbol of Catholic modernization for the women of Korea. Scholars in the field of Catholic history in Korea have suggested that the Church accepted women’s social activities outside the domestic sphere for the first time in history.\textsuperscript{58} However, this claim neglects the fact that Buddhist nuns had existed outside of the domestic sphere in Korea for almost 1,300 years. Upon transmission of Buddhism to Korea and the formation of the monks’ order, a Buddhist nuns’ order was also established at almost the same time.\textsuperscript{59} Since then, for hundreds of years there had always existed ordained Buddhist nuns as well as abbesses of Buddhist hermitages such as the Chŏngŏpwŏn, the Anliwŏn, and the

\textsuperscript{56} Hwang Sa-yŏng, \textit{Silk Letter}. Line 20.

\textsuperscript{57} Hwang Sayŏng, \textit{Silk Letter}, line 20.

\textsuperscript{58} These claims can be seen in Kim Ok-hŭi, \textit{Han’guk Ch’ŏnjugyo Yŏsŏnga: Han’guk Ch’ŏnju Kyohoe 200-Chunyŏn Kinyŏm} [\textit{A History of Korean Women Catholics: In Memorial of the Bicentennial of the Catholic Church in Korea}], vol. I (Masan, Kyŏngsang namdo, Korea: Han’guk Inmun Kwahagwŏn, 1983), p.83; Kim Yŏng-sun, “Han’guk Ch’ŏnjugyo e Itŏsŏŭ Yŏsŏng Kyoyuk” [Women’s Education by Catholic Church in Korea] (Master’s Thesis, Kyŏnghŭi University, 1976), p.25–26; Song Ok-hwa, “Ch’ŏnjugyo Chŏllae Ga Yŏsŏng ŭi Kûndaejŏk Ŭisik Sŏngjiang e Mich’i’nYŏngyang” [Acceptance of Catholicism and Its Influences on Women’s Cultivation of Modern Consciousness] (Master’s Thesis, Hong Ik University, 1995), p.29.

Greater and Lesser Sŏwŏn, although none of were officially recognized cloisters. On the contrary, in the Catholic Church in Korea, it is difficult to find women in prominent roles equivalent to that of Kang Wan-suk after her death in 1801.

Second, it is also problematic to interpret Kang Wan-suk’s active proselytization of women of all classes as proof of Catholic modernization, which aimed to abolish the social hierarchy of Chosŏn society. It is true that the spectrum of Kang Wan-suk’s evangelization broadly encompassed all the social classes from court women to slaves. Particularly, Kang Wan-Suk’s attempts to convert So-Myŏng have been regarded as proof that she spread the egalitarian message of Catholicism. However, this does not mean that the purpose of Kang Wan-suk’s wide proselytization was to abolish social classes or to attempt to bring social equality to Chosŏn Korea. So-myŏng (dates unknown) was Kang Wan-suk Columba’s female slave and appeared in many interrogation documents as the most active secret messenger, who had connected important church leaders before the persecution of 1801. In the documents So-myŏng states that she had been a slave of Cho Sin-ae, a female Catholic convert, but was sent to become Kang Wan-suk’s slave due to her refusal to convert to Catholicism. Since she still strongly rejected


\[\text{These claims can be seen in Park Sŏng-hye, “Chosŏn Hugi Ch’ŏnjugyo Yŏsŏng Hwaldong Yŏn’gu” [A Study of Catholic Women’s Activities in the Late Chosŏn Period] (Master’s Thesis, Kyŏnghŭi University, 2005); p.28; Yi Hyŏn-a, “Sib’al Segi Chosŏn Ch’ŏnjugyo Yŏsŏng Sinja ūi Ûisik Pyŏnhwa” [A Study on the Change of Women Catholics’ Consciousness in the Chosŏn Dynasty of the 18th Century] (Master’s Thesis, Chunggany University, 2005), p.27; Song Ok-hwa, “Ch’ŏnjugyo Chŏllae Ga Yŏsŏng ūi Kändaejŏk Ûisik Sŏngjang e Mich’innŏnghyang” [Acceptance of Catholicism and Its Influences on Women’s Cultivation of Modern Consciousness] (Master’s Thesis, Hong Ik University, 1995), p.37.}\]

\[\text{Kim Ok-hŭi, Han’guk Ch’ŏnjugyo Yŏsŏngsa: Han’guk Ch’ŏnju Kyohoe 200-Chunnyŏn Kinyŏm [A History of Korean Women Catholics: In Memorial of the Bicentennial of the Catholic Church in Korea], vol. I (Masan, Kyŏngsang namdo, Korea: Han’guk Inmun Kwahagwŏn, 1984), p. 91; p. 177.}\]
conversion, Kang Wan-suk Columba beat her severely until she acquiesced.\textsuperscript{63} Considering the fact that So-myŏng renounced her Catholic faith during her first interrogation, it is possible that she might have lied. But if there is still credible factor in her testimony, Kang Wan-suk might have forced her own faith on her unwilling servant by taking advantage of her own status as a master.

Third, the established discussions assert that Kang Wan-suk taught anti-Confucian ideology by teaching Catholicism to female Catholic believers without providing concrete evidence.\textsuperscript{64} As those discussions put it, it is true that Kang Wan-suk taught them how to practice Catholicism at her house by reading, praying and memorizing important parts of the catechism. Women who were converted to Catholicism by Kang Wan-suk had regular gatherings on the seventh day of each month at her house and learned Catholicism from her and studied together.\textsuperscript{65} But studying Catholic theology does not mean that these women learned anti-Confucian attitudes: it was orthodox Catholic catechism which Kang Wan-suk made efforts to teach the female converts, not anti-Confucian ideology. Even male church leaders and converts had never promoted anti-Confucian ideology to subvert Confucianism.

In fact, this assertion is a product of a naïve presumption that everything in Catholicism was the opposite of Confucianism, because it is a Western religion and thus was connected with modernization from the West. These established discussions begin from several fundamental

\textsuperscript{63} Sahak ching’uï, Interrogation of So-myŏng.

\textsuperscript{64} These claims can be seen in An Hwa-suk, “Chosŏn Hugi ŭui Ch’ŏnjugyo Yŏsŏng Hwaldong Gwa Yŏsŏnggwan ŭi Paljŏn” [Catholic Women’s Activities and Development of Understanding of Women in Late Chosŏn Period] (Master’s Thesis, Ewha Women’s University, 1979), p.28.

\textsuperscript{65} Sahak ching’uï, Interrogation of Kang Wan-suk.
agreements: first, Catholicism created Korean women’s “feminist” consciousness by enlightening them to the fact that they were oppressed by the Confucian patriarchy; second it liberated Korean women from the shackles of Confucian patriarchy and brought social equality for all Korean people. In other words, the notion of modernization brought by Catholicism in late eighteenth-century Korea suggests that Catholicism introduced (or even accomplished) social and gender equality in Korean society before the beginning of the nineteenth century. Therefore, the influence of these premises has been much greater particularly when it comes to analyses of Catholic women in Chosŏn Korea thus far.

It is undeniable that Kang Wan-suk’s role was pivotal for women’s conversion to Catholicism in the late eighteenth century, but there could have been other appealing factors or aspects that were more attractive to women than to their male counterparts. Currently, the established claim affirms that women were fascinated by the new marriage practices of the Catholic Church. They even argue that the Church liberated Korean women from patriarchal oppression and stimulated consciousness of gender equity through Catholic marriage practices. The next section will explore why this claim is not correct and how this misunderstanding was constructed.

2.3 Did Catholic Marriage Really Bring “Modernization” to Women in Chosŏn Korea?

It is clear that Catholicism attracted both male and female converts in Korea despite its totally foreign elements. The reasons that Korean men were attracted to Catholicism have been discussed multi-dimensionally, particularly focusing on Confucian yangban scholars’ ethical or scientific curiosity and efforts to understand the new learning from the West with the purpose of complementing Neo-Confucianism. However, the reasons for Korean women’s attraction to the
religion have not yet been fully analyzed, mostly due to the lack of extant primary sources on the
activities of Catholic women other than Kang Wan-suk. Nevertheless, when it comes to women
of Chosŏn Korea, contemporary scholars have agreed that Catholicism attracted them through its
“modernization.”

The conclusion established by the previous research can be summarized by two main
points: first, women of Chosŏn Korea were fascinated with the “modern factors” brought by
Catholicism, and second, those “modern factors” not only created a sort of “feminist
consciousness” among Korean women but also liberated them from Confucian patriarchy. Here,
the meaning of “modern factors” is very ambiguous and can be connected with anything related
to Western influence on Korea since the end of the nineteenth century. When it comes to
Catholic women in Chosŏn Korea, the “modern factors” often specify gender equality and
liberation from subordination by the Confucian patriarchy.

However, the problems with these conclusions begin from the fact that they were not the
results of academic endeavors based on analyses of primary sources, but a by-product of Korea’s
collective trauma from Japanese colonization in the early twentieth century. It was Yi Nŭng-hwa
(1869-1943) who initiated the discussion in his book published in 1928 that Korea had lost a
pivotal opportunity to achieve enlightenment and civilization by rejecting Christianity—
particularly Catholicism—throughout the nineteenth century.66 What Catholicism could
potentially have brought to Korea was munmyŏng and kaehwa, Korean pronunciations of bunmei

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66 Yi Nŭng-hwa, “Chosŏn Kidokkyo kŭp Oegyosa” [A History of Christianity and Diplomacy in Korea] (Sŏul,
and *kaika*, Japanese translations of the English words civilization and enlightenment as well as the names of modern Japan’s goals for development through Westernization from the 1860s.

After the end of colonization in 1945, *Korean* scholars of the post-colonial period not only shared the same views as Yi Nŭang-hwa but also elaborated them further for their Korean history decolonization projects with the updated term *kūndaehwa*. Although the territorial colonization by Japan was over, Korea’s unique experience as a non-Western colony led post-colonial intellectuals to reconstruct their knowledge system based on Western measures. Under U.S. hegemony from the 1950s, “civilization and enlightenment” became “modernization.”

Particularly, scholars of Korean history began their endeavors to decolonize Korea’s past by disproving Japanese colonial historians’ claims that Korea had never experienced the linear development of history, which Japan and the West had both gone through. Their arduous

67 American intellectuals (especially, the Charles River Group) began devising a metamorphosis of the idea of progress under the name of “modernization” to utilize it for the foreign policies of the government from the 1940s and, finally, they established ‘modernization theory’ at the end of the 1950s (Brett Bowden, *The Empire of Civilization: The Evolution of an Imperial Idea* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009, p.69–70.) It came to be utilized for actual U.S. policymaking about the Third World by the Kennedy government in the 1960s. The purpose was to nurture abilities of the Third World countries to help themselves through their own economic development, to block the expansion of communism by developing them and by providing them abilities for self-survival (Hwang Pyŏng-ju, “Paek Chŏng-Hŭi Chibae Ch’ŏlgi ûi Tamron” [Political Discourse of Pak Ch Ŭng-Hŭi’ Ruling System]” (Ph D. Dissertation, Hanyang University, 2008, p.73–75). In postcolonial Korea, *kaehwa* (enlightenment) had continued to be used as the discourse for indicating the idea of progress, instead of *munmyŏng*. The reason needs to be examined more in detail. Also, I believe *kūndaehwa* might have been a Japanese translation and was imported from Japan to Korea before the 1950s to be used for modernization. It is surely Kim Chong-p’il, Pak Chŏng-hŭi’s right-hand man, and his followers, who began using *kūndaehwa* in its present meaning. However, the process of importing and selecting “*kūndaehwa*” from Japanese needs to be explored.

68 Since Korea’s liberation from Japanese colonization in 1945, historians of post-colonial Korea initiated several discussions on the reasons for Korea’s inferiority, conducted by Japanese historians during the colonial period with the purpose of proving the legitimacy of Japan’s colonization of Korea. The first and biggest goal was rebuffing Fukuda Tokuζo’s “stagnation theory” in the 1900s, which argued that not only was Korea never able to achieve development in spite of its dynastic changes but also the nature of Korean history or even Korea’s national character was doomed to be backward and stagnant, unable to join the universal progress toward bunmei *kaika*. He claimed the reason was Korea’s lack of experience of a Western-style medieval period, which he saw as an essential prerequisite for social and economic historical progress (Yi Man-yŏl, “Han’guk Kŭndae Yŏksaθak ǔi Ihae” [Understanding Korea’s Modern Historiography] (Sŏul, Korea: Munhak kwa Chisŏngsa, 1981), p.282-283)
efforts to find this linear development within the history of Korea had continued since the 1950s and was firmly established as truth until the early 2000s.

It was this endeavor which established the claim that Catholicism had successfully planted the “seed of modernization” in the history Korea in the late eighteenth century. Believing that all histories of the world had progressed linearly like that of the West, scholars of Korean history attempted to find the beginning point of the Western style of modernization in the history of Korea. Noting the economic and social changes of the late Chosŏn dynasty, they claimed that they had found developments equivalent to the modernization of the West—particularly the British model of capitalism—in Korean history.69 They also paid attention to a group of Confucian scholars’ new intellectual movements and named these Confucianists’ studies Sirhak (Practical Learning), since it was believed that they had tried to reject the dominance of orthodox Confucianism and wished to revamp the Chosŏn dynasty. Since some of these Confucianists had shown a passion for learning Catholicism and became early Catholic converts as well as church leaders, the historians strengthened their belief that Korea’s rejection of Catholicism was a fatal loss of the chance for Korea’s modernization prior to Japan and caused Korea’s colonization.

Since then, research on the history of Catholicism and the Catholic Church in Korea has been enlisted to support or prove the credibility of the established conclusion from its foundation throughout the entire twentieth century. Historians have argued that there were two kinds of

69 Yun Hae-dong, “Sum’ŭn Sin úl Pip’an Halsu Innŭn’ga?” [Can We Criticize the ‘Hidden God’?], in 20-Šegi Han’guk kwa Ilbon üi Yŏksahak [Historiographies of Korea and Japan of the Twentieth Century], ed. To Myŏn-hoe and Yun Hae-dong (Sŏul, Korea: Humŏnisŭtŭ Ch’ulp’an Kŭrup, 2009), 250–284, p.261.
modernization brought to Korea through Catholicism: material and spiritual. Material modernization means the Western technologies in the Jesuits’ publications in Chinese, and spiritual modernization was anti-Confucianism, equality of the social classes, and liberation of women.

The connection between material modernization and Sirhak with Catholicism as a modernizer have been challenged in recent years but the gendered side of this argument has not yet even begun. The authority of the established hypothesis on Catholic modernization in late Chosŏn seemed to be unchallengeable until the 1980s. However, it was Donald Baker who began contradicting the seemingly invincible established hypothesis by discussing the fatal flaws of the previous arguments concerning the Western technologies and Catholicism brought by the Jesuits, which reached first China and then Korea.

First, Baker correctly affirmed that the Western technologies, taken by the Jesuits first to China and then to Korea, were not modern technologies but the products of medieval and Renaissance Europe. Second, he also accurately pointed out that the Catholicism of the Jesuits was not a modern message of human rights or equality, but Scholasticism, which reflected Thomas Aquinas’s thirteenth-century theology of Europe. This challenge successfully stimulated an awareness in the field that the established conclusion could be flawed. Nevertheless, the established discussions on Catholic women have not been challenged but instead have been sustained as a proof of spiritual modernization in Chosŏn Korea.


71 Donald L Baker, “Silhak ūi Yŏksasŏng kwa Ch’ŏnjugyo” [Historical Correctness of Sirhak and Catholicism], in Chosŏn Hugi Yugo wa Ch’ŏnjugyo ūi Taerip [Conflicts between Confucianism and Catholicism in the Late Chosŏn Dynasty], trans. Kim Sae-yun (Sŏul, Korea: Ilchogak, 1997), 214–331, p.130-133.
The previous discussions on modernization by Catholicism related to women of Chosŏn Korea have focused on the new marriage practices that appeared among Catholic converts from the late eighteenth century. It is noteworthy that Korean Catholic converts adopted new forms of marriage practice almost from the establishment of Korean Church in the late eighteenth century, including chaste marriage, consecration of virginity, monogamy, and prohibition of concubinage. I return to the consecration of virginity by Catholic women in Chapter 3.

Moreover, Catholic converts in Chosŏn Korea were commanded to perform Catholic marriage practices much more strictly by Bishop Siméon François Berneux (1814-1866), the fourth Vicar Apostolic of Korea, in his pastoral letter Chang chugyo yunsi cheusŏ (Bishop Berneux’s Pastoral Letter to all Catholic Brethren) in 1857. These can be placed into four categories: consent of women to their own marriages, permission for widows to remarry, prohibition of Catholics marrying non-Catholics without dispensation from the Church, and baptism or education of Catholicism for the bride or groom before their marriage. What this pastoral letter was emphasizing was that all Catholics in the Church of Chosŏn Korea were to practice a more orthodox form of Catholic marriage based on the regulations in Canon Law.

These new marriage practices have been interpreted by contemporary scholars of the history of the Catholic Church in Korea as a “modern factor” brought to Korean women through Catholicism. They have argued that the new marriage practices were so revolutionary as to stir

72 Simeon Francois Berneux, “Chang Chugyo Yuni Cheusŏ” [Bishop Chang’s Pastoral Letter to the All Believers],” in Sun’gyoja Wa Ch’unggŏha t’ul [Martyrs and Witnesses], ed. Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 1982), 165–78, p.172-173. Bishop Berneux used Chang Kyŏng-il as his name during his mission in Chosŏn Korea.
up Korean women’s awareness of the gender oppression of Confucianism and stimulate desires for women’s liberation.

Based on this understanding scholars have argued that the requirement for women to consent to their own marriages was equivalent to freedom of spousal choice. Also, they also understood that the permission for widows to remarry meant freedom for women to divorce and remarry. They further argued that Yi Sun-yi Lutgalda and Yu Chung-ch’ŏl John’s chaste marriage is proof that Catholicism was promoting class equality in the choice of spouse. This claim was made based on the accounts on their marriage in Charles Dallet’s book. This marriage, however, was actually between two yangban.

These misunderstandings, therefore, have caused contemporary scholars of the Catholic Church in Korea to overlook the fact that the Church’s endeavors to bring new marriage practices was intended to switch the orthopraxy of marriage from Confucian rituals to a Christian sacrament. The new marriage brought by the Catholic Church was not what we think of as contemporary love marriage, with freedom to choose one’s spouse, divorce, and remarry, but

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75 Charles Dallet, Han’guk Ch’ŏnju Kyohoesa [Histoire de l’église de Corée], trans. An Ŭng-nyŏl and Ch’oe Sŏg-u, vol. 1 (Kyŏngbuk Ch’ilgok-kun Waegwan-up: Pundo Ch’ulp’ansa, 1979), p.535: The social status of (Yu Chung-ch’ŏl) John’s family was much lower than (Yi Sun-i) Lutgalda’s, although his family were affluent yangban. Moreover, he lived in the Ch’onam area in the vicinity of Chŏnju in Chŏlla Province, far away from Seoul, where there were very few prominent yangban families. Yi Sun-I Lutgalda’s non-Catholic relatives were furious about the marriage, and they tried to break it up.
rather orthodox Catholic marriage. It was one of the seven Sacraments, “a ceremony that provided visible evidence of God’s grace of baptism,” in contrast to Confucian marriage, one of four major rituals. Therefore, Catholic marriage is regulated by Canon Law, and its validity requires obtaining permission from the Church. Catholic marriage was imposed upon Korean Catholics to replace the orthopraxy of marriage from a ritual to a sacrament, not to liberate Korean women from either patriarchal control or Confucian oppression or to bring gender equality.

Women of Chosŏn might well have welcomed the monogamy and prohibition of concubinage in the new Catholic marriage: concubinage had been the biggest reason for domestic disputes and tensions among women in Korean households. However, the aims of imposing monogamy and prohibition of concubinage were not to liberate Korean women. Instead the goal was the establishment of the orthopraxy of Catholic matrimony and Catholic patriarchy replacing the authority of the patriarch of the Confucian patriarchy with that of priest and Church.

In fact, it was the sacramental nature of Catholic matrimony which was misunderstood as the modernization of the marriage system by contemporary scholars of the history of the Catholic Church in Korea. As Merry Wiesner puts it, the sacramental nature of Catholic marriage created

76 Merry E. Wiesner, Gender in History: Global Perspectives (Chichester, West Sussex ; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), p.37.

77 Pak Mi-hae, Yugyo Kabujangje wa Kajok, Kasan [Confucian Patriarchy and Family, Patrimonialism] (Sŏul, Korea: Ak’anet, 2010), p.114.
unique regulations such as indissolubility and illicitness of sexual relations outside of marriage, which promoted monogamy and prohibited concubinage.78

The elevation of marriage as a sacrament changed its meaning under the Church authority to God’s blessing. Therefore, as a sacrament, it was to be a monogamous contract between one man and one woman, and polygamy and concubinage are strictly banned. Also, both the groom and the bride had to be baptized Catholics and to mutually consent to the union. Since the basic principle of Christian marriage is that an “unbreakable bond [is] created by the consent of the two parties,”79 once the Church validates the marriage, affirming that there are no obstacles to its validity under Canon law, the marriage becomes indissoluble. This is the marriage that Korean Catholics practiced since the establishment of the Korean Catholic Church in the eighteenth century.

Hence, in contrast to the arguments by contemporary scholars of Korea, consenting to marriage does not mean the freedom for women to choose their spouses. Although a young man and woman might fall in love and agree to marry, the marriage could be validated only by the Church. If one of the parties had any impediment and failed to remove the impediment according to Canon law, the couple could not wed. It is true that a woman could reject a coerced or unwanted marriage based on Canon law, but this did not mean that the Church encouraged people to select their own partners.

78 Merry E. Wiesner, Gender in History: Global Perspectives (Chichester, West Sussex; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), p.37.

Also, permission for widows to remarry did not mean that the Church allowed women the freedom to request either divorce or remarriage. The Catholic Church did not allow divorce from a valid Catholic marriage for reasons such as discord between the spouses, because holy marriages are indissoluble. Only annulment was permitted, and only on very limited grounds for such reasons as impotence of the husband, polygamy, and later discovery of unresolved impediments to the marriage.

Moreover, in Asia, consent in Catholic marriages was utilized for a special purpose: preventing Catholic women from marrying non-Catholic men. Catholic missionaries in China and Korea shared the same concerns on this matter. A Catholic man’s marriage caused less concerns both in terms of observance of orthopraxy for matrimony and the couple’s Catholic faith after the marriage, because it was often the case that the bride converted, following her husband and his family. However, it was extremely difficult or impossible for Catholic women to have Catholic weddings, maintain their faith after marriage, and refuse to participate in Confucian rituals, particularly ancestral rituals, if they married non-Catholic men.

Therefore, the Sichuan Synod in 1803 produced rather unequal decisions regarding holy matrimony in Asia for Catholic men and women, taking a more lenient attitude towards marriages between Catholic men and non-Catholic women than those between Catholic women and non-Catholic men. The Synod explains that the reason for this unbalance was because a

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80 The Sichuan Synod of 1803 and decisions made by it have a tight connection with the Catholic Church of nineteenth-century Korea. Recovering from the persecution of 1784 in Sichuan, Bishop Gabriel-Taurin Dufres, Vicar Apostolic of Sichuan, summoned all missionaries in Sichuan for the ordination of Pierre Trenchant as the Vice-vicar Apostolic of Sichuan and a synod in 1803. (Cho Hyŏn-bŏm, “1803 Sach’ŏnsŏng Sinodŭ Yŏn’gu” [A Study on the Sichuan Synod in 1803], Kyohoesa Yŏn’gu 24 (2005): 5–40, p.19-20.) And Pope Gregory XVI proclaimed in 1841 that the decisions of the Sichuan Synod were the rules for all missionaries not only in Sichuan but all of Asia (Chang Tong-ha, “Han’guk Kŭndaesa wa Ch’ŏnju Kyohoe” [Modern History and Catholic Church of Korea] (Sŏul, Korea: K’at’olik Ch’ulp’ansa, 2006, p.325.)
woman’s domestic position would make it more difficult to maintain her Catholic faith and easier to apostatize after her patrilineal and patrilocal marriage.

There should be additional rules (like these). First, (except for very special and rare cases,) a dispensation would not be given to woman, who wants to marry a pagan man. The reason is that there are always relentless perils of apostasy (for a woman) from the day of entering her pagan husband’s home, as the experiences from the environment and daily life have usually shown. Second, it is possible to give a dispensation to a Catholic man, who wants to marry a pagan woman under these circumstances. As the experiences from the environment and daily life have mostly shown, if it can be clearly seen that there are no perils of apostasy from the side of Catholic man, his non-Catholic spouse shows her hope for conversion (to Catholicism), and they show their will certainly to educate their children in Catholicism, (dispensation can be given to them). (...) In fact, it is easy to provide dispensations for the marriage between a Catholic man and pagan woman. However, there are more danger for a Catholic woman to get married to a pagan man, because it is not easy for a Catholic woman to meet a Catholic man as her spouse.  

This situation, on the contrary, expected a non-Catholic bride to convert to Catholicism by marrying a Catholic man and building a new Catholic family. Prohibiting parents from marrying their Catholic daughters to non-Catholic men, the Church also commanded missionaries to lead Catholic women to reject marriage to non-Catholic men by educating and enlightening them.

(Missionaries) must severely warn those who married off or betrothed their daughters to non-Catholics, forgetting love and justice and ignoring to obtain a certain form of dispensations. (…) (Missionaries), by all means, also must lead or even coerce the girls to break such a dangerous contract on their own as much as they can.  

However, (missionaries) must not stop helping to enlighten and strengthen these girls’ minds by insisting and enlightening them whenever (missionaries) can have chances so that they would never leave from Christian faith, duties, and activities. Moreover,


(missionaries) must ask or strongly request so that these girls would actually and efficiently practice these duties.\textsuperscript{83}

The requirement for the consent of both spouses could be utilized as a means to prevent a Catholic woman being married off to a non-Catholic and forced to abandon her faith.

In fact, the actual practices of Catholic matrimony in Chosŏn need more scrutiny through extant documents, in that the actual practices of marriage of Korean Catholics often caused difficulties for missionaries trying to establish their validity throughout their mission in Korea. In establishing clerical permission as a mandatory factor, missionaries in Chosŏn Korea quite often faced difficulties declaring the validity of a Catholic marriage. Particularly, a convert’s remarriage often created confusion among missionaries due to the continuous persecutions, which caused unexpected separations among Catholic families. It was quite usual that a Catholic would not know whether his or her missing spouse was alive. If a Catholic wanted to remarry, missionaries had to decide whether to permit a new marriage by annulling the previous marriage. Therefore, missionaries often sent letters for advice or solutions from Church authorities during their mission in Chosŏn Korea. Hence, Catholic converts’ actual marriage practices should be re-examined through scrutiny of extant documents, not by just assumptions based on the principle of Catholic matrimony.

Even though certain aspects of Catholic marriage practice such as monogamy and prohibition of concubinage might have been appealing to women of the Chosŏn dynasty, the Catholic Church did not attempt to liberate them from patriarchal control or to bring gender equality. Rather, the Church aimed to replace Confucian patriarchy under the authority of the

traditional father figures—the monarch and patriarch—with Catholic patriarchy under the control of the church and the clergy. Despite the established discussions insisting that Catholic marriage brought equity between spouses and liberation of women in the marriage, there had constantly been Catholic women who rejected all forms of marriage, to even Catholic men, through either Confucian ritual or Catholic matrimony. In the next chapter, I will explore the muffled voices of female Catholic virgins in Chosŏn Korea, who appeared between the late eighteenth and the end of the nineteenth centuries, to reveal why they tried to refuse marriage, often risking their safety or even lives for their goal, and to explicate what their goals were in choosing lives of perpetual virginity.
Chapter 3: Becoming A Catholic Virgin in Chosŏn Korea (1784-1840)

3.1 Introduction of Catholic Virginity in Korea (1784-1800)

Among many foreign features of Catholicism, the notion of perpetual virginity was one of the most fascinating elements to practice among women of Chosŏn Korea. It is not clear exactly when Korean female converts first learned the notion of Catholic virginity and began practicing it in their lives. It is also impossible to ascertain when some young Catholic women first began practicing the Catholic concept of virginity unless new documents are uncovered. Considering the government’s discovery of virgin converts in during the persecution in 1801, it seems that a number of young female converts had already begun consecrating their virginity for religious devotion between the establishment of the Catholic Church in Korea in 1784 and the arrival of Zhou Wen-mo in 1796. They might have learned the notion with or from their male counterparts through the Jesuit publications written in Chinese.

Also, it seems that Korean Catholic women began practicing the Catholic notion of perpetual virginity on their own through self-learning. Consecrated female virgins in China could learn the concept and ways for the practice directly through sermons by and discussions with Western missionaries from the late seventeenth century. However, Korean Catholic women had to study these foreign concepts and practice them on their own for almost for ten years, until Fr. Zhou Wen-mo entered Korea and helped them to enlarge and deepen their understandings.

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84 Eugenio Menegon’s research shows that Dominican friars could observe that devoted Catholic girls in the Fuan area were fascinated with the lives of European nuns and holy women and asked to be allowed to follow the Western exemplars’ path of virginity and dedication to God (Eugenio Menegon, Ancestors, Virgins, & Friars: Christianity as a Local Religion in Late Imperial China, Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series 69 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center for the Harvard-Yenching Institute : Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2009, p.318-319).
Virginity here is one of various performances of human sexuality, which demonstrates the various wills of the agents who plays them, especially, through the choice of sexual renunciation. In English, there are three kinds of words to refer to sexual abstinence adopted by mankind: chastity, celibacy, and virginity. All three words commonly contain the meaning of “abstinence from sexual intercourse,” but they have different nuances respectively. Chastity accentuates meanings of abstention particularly from unlawful sexual intercourse more than the other two words.\(^\text{85}\) Celibacy means the state of “intentionally” not being married or having a sexual relationship, which emphasizes the agent’s intention.\(^\text{86}\) Virginity, on the other hand, refers to the state of “never” having had sexual intercourse, which places more emphasis on sexual inexperience.\(^\text{87}\) Despite these different connotations, they were all practices of human sexualities, demonstrated by diverse agents in the various societies.

Moreover, virginity is also a multifaced concept in that the meanings of performance of virginity can bring different goals as well as meanings based on the agent’s gender and social roles. Sarah Sahih points out that virginities are multiple in the aspect that there are diverse ways to practice them.\(^\text{88}\) Women’s practice of virginity could be different from that of their male counterparts, religious virginity could be not the same when an individual performs it in the secular space, and vice versa. Among those multiple sides of virginity, I will focus mainly on


women’s practice of religious – particularly Catholic – virginity in Chosŏn Korea throughout this research.

The terms for Catholic virgins and virginity in Korea all came along with the other Catholic terminologies, coined by the Jesuits from adaptations of Confucian words as part of their accommodation policy. These terms were also accepted among Korean converts through the books written by the Jesuits in China for Chinese converts, because Koreans shared the same understandings of the Confucian meanings and usages of those terms.

Overall, teaching the concept of virginity was an important but difficult task for the mission in Asia, where the notion of “perpetual celibacy” was totally new and foreign. For example, one Jesuit missionary wrote that whenever he introduced the ideal of perpetual chastity and abstinence for male and female clergy in Laos, he encountered the native peoples’ astonishment.89 The mission in China, which influenced Korea as well, could not have been an exception. It was even more crucial to convince the Chinese that Christian virginity was not only different from what was seen in Buddhism but was also uniquely Christian.

Introducing Christian virginity to China, the Jesuits had to create a new term to accentuate its difference from celibacy in other religious traditions, which had already existed in China and were more familiar to the Chinese. As Eugenio Menegon puts it, the Chinese had already experienced religious celibacy, particularly for women. Buddhist celibacy was recommended for both male and female clergy. Also, folk religions of China had provided

diverse female virgin deities such as Lady Linsui and Princess Miaoshan. Hence, on one hand, it was not difficult for the Jesuits to introduce the concept of religious celibacy. But on the other hand, they had to be very careful to differentiate Christian virginity from that of other religions by emphasizing that it was not only sexual renunciation but keeping virginity for both men and women as a way to maintain childlike innocence. At the same time, they also had to emphasize that the ideal of Christian virginity was a superior form of religious commitment.

Finding a relevant word from Confucian tradition, the Jesuits could accomplish their goals of teaching the new notion without damaging the original meanings in the Christian tradition. It was in Matteo Ricci’s *Tianzhu shiyi (The True Meaning of the Lord Heaven,* published in Beijing in 1604), as Eugenio Menegon puts it, that the earliest Christian material introduced the Catholic notion of virginity. In this book Ricci attempts to introduce clerical celibacy to Chinese by explaining that Catholic clergy choose to remain chaste and stay unmarried in order to serve God and spread the gospel without distractions from mundane life. In this explanation, Ricci appropriates the concept of *zhennü* (貞女, Kr. *chǒngnyǒ*), virgin widow, to distinguish Buddhist celibacy, which was already familiar to the Chinese.

There are at this time certain virgin widows [*zhennü* (貞女)] whose menfolk, to whom they have been betrothed, have died before they were married. To maintain their honor such women have refrained from a second betrothal. Confucians praise such action and emperors give public recognition to it. Chastity of the kind which results in a refusal to transmit life to later generations is merely due to a desire to keep faith with a spouse; and yet to remain at home and to refrain from further espousals results in public tribute being paid to that person. It is not unfair that we few friends should be censured when, due to our work for the Sovereign on High, and so that we

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might conveniently travel throughout the world in order to transform all men, we have not time to concern ourselves with marriage?  

The notion of zhennü was particularly useful for Ricci to correctly deliver the Catholic notion of virginity to the Chinese. The prevalence of the chastity cult in Ming and Qing China had created the new phenomenon called the virgin widow in China. Virgin widows were women who had lost their fiancés after their betrothals. Although they were not actually widows, their betrothals were considered to be equivalent to marriage, and thus they were treated as such. However, never having actually married they were (expected to be) virgins, and had to maintain their virginity for their dead fiancés throughout their lives. Ricci found this concept very useful to illustrate for the Chinese two important implications related to Catholic virginity: staying unmarried for chastity and preserving one’s virginity perpetually at the same time. In this manner, Ricci successfully minted a new term for Christian virginity to imply a resolution for one’s sexual decision for religious life by not merely being chaste but by being virgin.

Ricci’s aim to distinguish the Catholic notion of virginity from other religious virginity was accomplished by his successors, who added the word tong (童, child) to words for virgin widows and others. The neologisms with tong first appear in chapter three of Pantoja’s Qike, earlier than other Jesuit publications in Chinese. This chapter explains to the Chinese how and why among the seven cardinal sins of pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath, and sloth


Catholics overcome lust. Comparing to Ricci’s writing, the chapter in Qike provides more diverse and elaborated meanings and utilizations of neologisms to designate the Catholic concept of virginity and virgins: zhen (貞, Kr.: chōng), zhende (貞德, Kr.: chōngdōk), shouzhen (守貞, Kr.: sujōng), shoushen (守身, Kr.: sushin), tongshen (童身, Kr.: tongsin), and shoutongshen (守童身, Kr.: sutongsin). Also, the addition of the word tong enabled the Jesuits to clearly transmit the meaning of Christian virginity, which was supposed to preserve the bodily purity of childhood. These neologisms for Catholic virginity were also accepted smoothly by mendicant orders such as the Dominicans and the Franciscans and were used for their sermons on Christian virginity for Chinese converts. As a result, the missionaries could highlight the importance of the virgin body for Christianity and raise the meaning of Christian virginity to higher and more sacred status.

Although Ricci selected the feminine metaphor of the zhennǔ (virgin widows) to indicate Catholic virginity, the Chinese terminologies for virginity were actually coined to refer to the male clerical celibacy. And Pantoja’s Qike also utilizes the aforementioned new terms for Catholic virginity to illustrate the importance of celibacy for Catholic clergy and as a way to overcome the lust of male lay believers, providing misogynistic examples. Also, women in Qike are described as rather negative figures such as femmes fatales, who take advantage of men’s lust and cause their self-destruction.


Nevertheless, this new term was soon applied to indicate Virgin Mary and her Immaculate Conception with a virgin body in chapter eight of Tianzhu siryi.

One thousand six hundred and three years ago, in the year of Keng-shen, in the second year after Emperor Ai of the Han dynasty adopted the reign title Yuan-shou, on the third day following the winter solstice, God selected a virgin woman to be his mother (擇貞女為母), became incarnate within her and was born. His name was Jesus, the meaning of which is “the one who saves the world.”

But it was Pantoja’s Qike, despite the plenitude of misogyny in that book, which utilized diverse vocabularies to teach Christian women about the consecration of their virginity for a religious life in Christianity. Among them, shouzhen (守貞) and shoushen (守身) had been used as expressions to characterize the choice of virgin widows (zhennū) to be chaste but were appropriated to indicate Christian virgins’ consecration of their virginity for religious life.

Therefore, there are various appellations for labeling Catholic virgins or virginity in China. Official accounts show names including those in the Tianzu siryi and Qike for women who consecrated their virginity such as xiaozhen (小貞, small chaste [women]), tongzhenshen (童貞身, virgin body), xiudao (修道, person who cultivates the virtuous way), or even shengnu (聖女, holy woman), shoutongzhen (守童貞, to keep one’s virginity), and shoutongshen (守童身, to


keep one’s virgin body). In addition, there were colloquial names for Catholic virgins in China such as *zhuijia* (those who dwell at home) in certain parts of China and either *guniang* (old mother) or *gu taitai* (auntie) elsewhere.¹⁰⁰ Catholic virgins in northeastern China developed a unique name for themselves: *xiao shennu* (God’s little daughters).¹⁰¹ Most of the terms written in Jesuit publications, except for the colloquial names in Chinese, were also transmitted to Korea.

In Korea, Confucian scholars learned the Chinese terms for Catholic virgins and virginity from the Jesuit publications and adopted them. Among the many names, *chǒngnyǒ* (*zhennū* in Chinese) and *tongsin* (*tongshen* in Chinese) appeared much earlier than the establishment of the Korean Catholic Church in 1784. These appellations are mentioned mostly in Confucian literati writings which either evaluate or contradict Christian theologies, such as Yi Ik’s *Pal ch’ōnju sirŭi* (*A Short Introduction to Ch’ōnju Sirŭi*) and An Chong-bok’s *Ch’ōnhakko* (*A Consideration on the Teachings of the Heaven*) as well as *Ch’ōhak mundap* (*Questions and Answers on the Teachings of the Heaven*), respectively.

It was Ri Ma-tu (Matteo Ricci), who wrote *Ch’ōnju sirŭi*. Ricci was a man from Europe. (….. He) arrived at China by a ship in the third year (after his departure from Europe). His teaching considers only the Lord of the Heaven as the supreme God….. The one that proselytized and saved the world was called Yaso (Jesus) and Yaso is the name for the savior in the western world. (…) Hence, God wished to spread his mercy and save the world by coming down in person. He selected a *virgin woman* (*chǒngnyǒ*, 貞女) as his mother and was born in Judea by borrowing her womb without any intercourse between a man and a woman. He was called Yaso. (…..) After one thousand six hundred three years since the Yaso’s time, Ri Ma-tu arrived at China and his colleagues all had high noses as well as blue eyes and wore blue clothes and rectangular veils on

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their heads. Preserving the child (virgin) bodies (tongshin, 童身), they had never married. (….)

<Yi Ik’s Pal Ch’ŏnju sirui>102

Ri Ma-tu (Metteo Ricci) states in his Ch’ŏnju sirŭi, “in the year of Keng-shen, in the second year after Emperor Ai of the Han dynasty adopted the reign title Yuan-shou, on the third day following the winter solstice, God selected a virgin woman and was born in this world by borrowing her womb (擇貞女託胎降生). His name was Jesus and the meaning is the savior of the world.” (…) <An Chong-bok’s Ch’onhakko>103

These European priests live celibate lives (童身), and that is more than virtuous Chinese scholars are capable of… This was during the reign of Emperor Aidi of the Han dynasty, in the second year after he adopted the reign title Yuanshou. The Lord of Heaven selected a chaste maiden (貞女) to be his mother. Even though she had never had sexual relations, she became pregnant and gave birth. Her child was named “Jesus.” Jesus means “the messiah, he who will save the world.” <An Chong-bok’s Ch’onhak mundap>104

Since these documents are responses to Matteo Ricci’s Tianzhu siryi, the authors are using the same expressions found in that book, such as chŏngnyŏ (貞女, Ch.: zhennū) and tonsin (童身, Ch.: tongshen). Also, since Korea had already adopted the same notion of the virgin widow from China and practiced it widely, it may have been as straightforward for Koreans to understand the metaphoric meanings and intentions of the neologisms as for their Chinese counterparts.

However, it seems Pantoja’s Qike, which included a wider variety of terms for the Catholic notion of virginity, deepened the understanding of Koreans. Compared to China, there

102 Yi Ik, “Pal Ch’ŏnj Sirŭi” [Introduction to Ch’ŏnj Sirŭi], in Sŏngho Sŏngaeng Chŏnjip [Anthology of Mater Sŏngho’s Writings].
http://db.itkc.or.kr/dir/item?itemId=MO#dir/node?grpId=&itemId=MO&gubun=book&depth=5&cate1=Z&cate2=&dataGubun=%EC%B5%9C%EC%A2%85%EC%A0%95%EB%B3%B4&dataId=ITKC_MO_0489A_0550_010_0190 (Assessed January 19, 2019).

103 An Chŏng-bok, “Ch’ŏnhakko” [A Consideration Of the Celestial Learning], in Sun’am Sŏnsaeng Munjip [A Compilation of Master Sun’am’s Writings].
http://db.itkc.or.kr/dir/nodeViewPop?grpId=&itemId=BT&gubun=book&depth=5&cate1=Z&cate2=&dataGubun=%EC%B5%9C%EC%A2%85%EC%A0%95%EB%B3%B4&dataId=ITKC_BT_0534A_0170_010_0010&viewSync=OT (Assessed January 19, 2019).

104 This translation is from Donald Baker and Franklin Rausch, Catholics and Anti-Catholicism in Chosŏn Korea (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2017), p.123-139.
were fewer appellations for Catholic virginity in Chosŏn Korea. They had consistently used the names that appeared in Qike from the first nationwide persecution in 1801 to the Catholic Church’s acquisition of freedom for its faith in Korea in 1886. Catholic virginity was called chŏngdŏk (the virtue of virginity). The most widely used names for Christian virgins throughout those periods were tongjŏng (virginity, Ch.: tongzhen) and tongshin (virgin body, Ch.: tongshen) for both male and female converts. When it comes to indicating only female virgin converts, tongchŏngnyŏ (virgin woman) was used from 1801.105 Also, tongnyŏ (young woman) appears in Sahak chingŭi,106 but this term does not show up in other documents. It is unclear which names were preferred among Korean Catholics themselves, but terms including “child” (tong) seem to have been preferred, perhaps because virginity was called “child” (a-hae) in the letter written to her sisters in 1801 by Yi Sun-yi Lutgarda (1782-1801), whose union with Yu Chung-ch’ŏl John (1779-1801) was the first Korean Catholic chaste marriage.107 By using those appellations, female Catholic converts actually practiced perpetual consecration of their virginity for a religious life.

In translating the catechism to Korean, converts developed a Korean way to name Catholic virgins for both men and women by turning nouns into verbs for Catholic virginity and conjugating them, instead of creating new colloquial names for female virgins. In contrast to the first half of the century of persecution of the Catholic Church in Korea, which had mainly


106 Tongnyŏ (Yi Tuk-im & Cho To-ae & widow: Kim Wŏl-im & Hong Sun-hui, Pak Sŏng-yŏm)

produced female virgin converts, there were a number of male virgin converts in the latter half. After the loss of prominent converts who could write and read Chinese fluently, the Church and converts made arduous efforts to translate the catechism into Korean.

Therefore, Korean converts developed another way to indicate these Catholic male and female converts who wanted to accomplish their chǒngdŏk (virtue of virginity), by conjugating verbs in the meanings of doing or keeping virginity. For example, “chŏngsu hada” or “sujŏng hada” meant that a person “does or practices Christian virginity,” and these words were combinations of “chŏngsu” or “sujŏng,” which commonly mean Catholic virginity, with “hada,” meaning “do” or “does.” Another verb “chik’ida” (to preserve) was used to designate Catholic virgins with the same mechanism by combining with tongjŏng and tongshin to produce the terms tongjŏng ūl chik’ida (to preserve virginity) or tongshin ūl chik’ida (to preserve virgin body). By conjugating those verbs and combining them with diverse nouns, Korean Catholics expanded expressions to designate Catholic virgins. For instance, “tongchŏng ūl chik’il maŭm” (tongchŏng ūl chikida [to preserve virginity] + maŭm [a desire]) is an expression for “the desire to preserve virginity,” and “sujŏng hanŭn nu’i” (sujŏng hada [to do preserving virginity] + nu’i [a sister]) means “a sister who does virginity.”

Another source that taught Korean converts how to practice perpetual virginity was hagiographies, which had already been imported to Korea and translated into Korean before the first persecution in 1801. Sahak chingŭi shows various titles for confiscated and burnt Catholic

108 Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., Kihae Pyŏng’o Pakhæ Sungyoja Chŭng’ŏnok [Testimonies on Martyrs during the Persecutions in Kihæ and Pyŏng’o Years], vol. I (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 2004), p.57.

books burned during the persecution of 1801. Among them were several hagiographies of female
virgin saints of the West, most of them already translated into Korean. The burnt hagiographies
in Sahak chingŭi are a tale of Saint Laurentius (Norŭng chawmyŏng ilgi), a tale of Saint Candida,
a tale of Saint Victoria, a tale of Saint Theresa and two tales of Saint Agatha.\textsuperscript{110}

Among them, it is noteworthy that Sŏngnyŏn kwang 'ik appeared as one of the burnt
books in Sahak chingŭi. Sŏngnyŏn kwang 'ik is a compilation of Catholic hagiographies written
by Joseph-Anne-Marie de Moyriac de Mailla (馮秉正, 1669-1748) in Chinese in 1738. The first
compilation of Catholic hagiography was the Tianzhu shenggiao shengren xiangshi (The Life of
Saints in the Catholic Church, Ch’ŏnju sŏnggyo sŏng’in haengsil in Korean), written by
Alphonso Vagnoni (1566-1640) in Chinese in 1629.\textsuperscript{111}

However, it seems that the influence of the Sŏngnyŏn kwang ‘ik lasted for a longer time
among Korean converts since the introduction of Catholicism by Yi Sŭng-hun in 1783 brought
the reading and circulating of Catholic hagiographies to Korea. The bits of hagiography in the
burnt book list were by-products of the processes of translating de Mailla’s Sŏngnyŏn
kwang ‘ik.\textsuperscript{112} A revised version of De Mailla’s’ Sŏngnyŏn kwang ‘ik was published in the mid-

\textsuperscript{110} Unknown, Sahak Ching’ŭi [Punishing Evil Catholicism and Promoting the Right Teaching], ed. Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso (Sŏul, Korea: Pulham Munhwasa, 1977), p.379-386.


\textsuperscript{112} Kim Yun-sŏng, “Ch’ogi Han’guk Kat’olic üi Sŏng’in Chŏn’gi” Sŏji Mit Kujojŏk T’ŭsŏng ǔl Chungsim ŭro” [Catholic Hagiographies of Early Period of the Church in Korea: Focusing on Their Bibliographic and Structural Characters], Kyohoesa Yŏn’gu 15 (2000): 51–81, p.63
nineteenth century under the same title by unknown author(s)\textsuperscript{113} and its Korean translation was widely circulated among Catholics at almost the same period in Korea. The three different versions of \textit{Sǒngnyǒn kwang’ik} all provide examples of both female and male saints’ lives. Therefore, the influence of \textit{Sǒngnyǒn kwang’ik} seems to have prevailed throughout the history of the Catholic Church in Chosǒn Korea more than other hagiographies, teaching Korean Catholic girls the meanings and the ways to practice consecrating their virginity through revered role-models.

Korean Catholics’ selections of their baptismal names also reflect different preferences and expectations on their own lives as well as their roles within the Church based on their gender differences. Considering the fact that later on Catholics’ baptismal names were given by their parents, it is important to examine those of their predecessors of the late eighteenth century in light of the fact that they had to choose their baptismal names at the time of their conversion, which had occurred for the first time in the history of Korea. Pang Sang-gŭn’s research demonstrates that there were different preferences for choosing baptismal names for male and female converts out of 146 Catholics whose names were known during the period from 1784 to 1802 (male: 116, female: 30). First, 54\% of Korean male converts chose names of disciples such as Peter, Thomas, Paul, John, Simon, Andrew, Matthew, Jacob, Mathias, Phillip, and Thaddeus.

On the other hand, female converts mostly selected names of virgin martyrs like Barbara, Agatha, Columba, Lucy and Agnes.\textsuperscript{114}

These Korean converts chose their baptismal names with a view that the saints’ lives resembled theirs or a wish to follow the examples of their patron saints’ models.\textsuperscript{115} For instance, Chŏng Yak-jong Augustine (1760-1801) selected his name because he considered that his own long hesitation before converting to Catholicism seemed to be similar to that of Saint Augustine (354-430).\textsuperscript{116} Also, Yun Chŏm-hye Agatha (1776-1801) had often told to people of her wish for martyrdom by emulating her patron saint Agatha (231-251), a virgin martyr of Rome.\textsuperscript{117}

The female converts’ choice of baptismal names seems to reflect a stronger desire for martyrdom than their male counterparts. Particularly, the wish for martyrdom with a virgin body was conspicuous among female adherents from the early period of the Catholic Church in Korea during the first nationwide persecution in 1801. They persisted and acted upon the wish for almost a century onward, as the later discussions in this chapter will show.

\footnotetext[114]{Pang Sang-gŭn, “18 Segimal Chosŏn Chŏnju Kyohoe ǔi Palchŏn kwa Seryemyŏng” [Development of Catholic Church in Kore and Baptismal Names of the Converts in the Late 18th Century], \textit{Kyohoesa Yŏn’gu} 34 (2010): 63–91, p.79, p.82.}

\footnotetext[115]{Pang Sang-gŭn, “18 Segimal Chosŏn Chŏnju Kyohoe ǔi Palchŏn kwa Seryemyŏng” [Development of Catholic Church in Kore and Baptismal Names of the Converts in the Late 18th Century], \textit{Kyohoesa Yŏn’gu} 34 (2010): 63–91, p.84.}


3.2 The First Generation of Female Catholic Virgins during the Persecution of Sin’yu Year (1801-1802)

In 1801, the first nationwide and full-blown persecution against the Korean Catholic Church revealed the hidden existence of the first generation of female virgins to the society of Chosŏn Korea. The persecution broke out one year after the death of King Chŏngjo (r. 1776-1800), who had carefully tried to avoid political turmoil despite continuous incidents related to Catholicism and accusations against Catholics; the first bloody persecution broke out due to the complicated political situation of the Chosŏn dynasty from 1801 to 1802, after his death. The Noron (Old Doctrine) party and Dowager Queen Chŏngsun (1745-1802) tried to eliminate their political enemies the Southerners with the help of anti-Catholic Southerners who attempted to protect their faction and prevent total destruction of the whole faction by removing pro-Christian members from the faction. As the result, arrests and investigations occurred throughout the Chosŏn territory and most important church leaders as well as conspicuous converts were arrested for interrogation accompanied by various physical tortures.

The government first learned of the existence of perpetual Catholic female virgins through this persecution. This was considered one of the most shocking and disturbing discoveries about the Catholic community. The uncovering of Catholic virgin women made the government aware that it faced a new challenge to its long-standing efforts to prohibit unmarried women from turning to a religious life despite its suppression of Buddhism for almost four centuries.118

118 As an example of anti-Buddhist policies, the Chosŏn government prevented elite women, particularly unmarried daughters of yangban families, from becoming nuns. In 1413, King T’aejong was the first who commanded Buddhist nuns who had decided to join the nunnery as an unmarried women to return to the secular world (June 29, 1413). The Chosŏn government, finally, prohibited unmarried elite women from becoming nuns by the royal
It seems that the government first came to be aware of the existence of Catholic females who consecrated their virginity perpetually for religious lives and their practice of Catholic virginity through the interrogation of those women.

The results of interrogation of Pak Sŏng-yŏm is the same as the reports by the Capital Police. However, she confessed that she had pretended to be a widow. <Reports of Pak Sŏng-yŏm’s interrogation, Sahak chingŭi>\(^{119}\)

I am a younger sister of Chǒng Kwang-su. I learned about Catholicism from my brother and his wife around in 1795 and came to Seoul with them. I met Priest Zhou (Wen-mo) last year and was baptized under the name of Barbara by him. I had stated that I was wife of Mr. ᴴₒ during the interrogation at the Capital Police. However, truth to be told, I have never married so far despite my age of 25 years old. <Chǒng Sum-mae Barbara’s confession at the Ministry of Punishments, Sahak chingŭi>\(^{120}\)

There are many examples of female followers of the evil learning to pretending to be widows, although they had never married. <Interrogation at the Ministry of Punishments on Yun Chŏm-hye Agatha, Sahak chingŭi>\(^{121}\)

At first, the women attempted to hide their identities as consecrated Catholic virgins by disguising themselves as young widows during the first persecution. However, they soon confessed their true identities following severe interrogations and tortures.

command of King Sŏngjong in 1473 (August 4, 1473). The severe concerns of the government regarding Buddhist nuns were related to the violation of their commitment of chastity. Buddhist nuns were often accused of being lecherous, dirty, and harmful to the people (Jung Ji-young, “Buddhist Nuns in Confucian Joseon Society,” The Review of Korean Studies 11, no. 4 (December 2008): 139–54, p148). Although enforcement of prohibition of becoming nuns was not very effective, nuns, who violated the commitment of chastity, were often severely punished by the government throughout the history of Chosŏn Korea (John Jorgensen, “Marginalized and Silenced: Buddhist Nuns of the Chosŏn Period,” in Korean Buddhist Nuns and Laywomen: Hidden Histories, Enduring Vitality, ed. Cho Eun-su (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2011), 119–46, p.125-129).


\(^{120}\) Unknown, Sahak Chingŭi [Punishing Evil Catholicism and Promoting the Right Teaching], ed. Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso (Sŏul, Korea: Pulham Munhwasa, 1977), p.110-112.

\(^{121}\) Unknown, Sahak Chingŭi [Punishing Evil Catholicism and Promoting the Right Teaching], ed. Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso (Sŏul, Korea: Pulham Munhwasa, 1977), p.107-110.
The government also learned the common patterns and details of the false identities adopted by these consecrated virgins through their confessions. While there were some actual young widows among the Catholic converts, female virgins also attempted to hide their identities as consecrated perpetual virgins by disguising themselves as young widows. Therefore, the government needed to identify the real young widows among the female Catholic converts. As it turned out, it was not difficult to discern the patterns of these women’s disguises. First, they changed their appearance to look like married women by pinning up their hair.

I was born in Yanggŭn region and learned Catholicism from my mother. I escaped from my home and came to Seoul, living in Hong Mun-gap (Kang Wan-suk’s step-son)’s house. Although I have never married to anyone, I pinned my hair and pretended to be a widow.

<Confession of Yun Chŏm-hye Agatha at the Capital Police, Sahak ching ’ūi>122

Usually, young girls of Chosŏn had a long braid to represent their unmarried status. In contrast to China, the women’s initiation ritual in Zhu Xi’s family rituals was not considered to be important in Chosŏn and Korean girls pinned up their hair on their wedding day.123 After the wedding, they maintained their new hairstyle as a symbol of their married status. The consecrated Catholic virgin girls of Chosŏn adopted this hairstyle as a disguise to avoid suspicion by non-Catholics.

The consecrated virgins commonly provided the government with either Hŏ or O as the family names of their fictional husbands.

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I am originally from Yǒju area. I was married to Mr. Hŏ at the age of seventeen but expelled by him. So, I came to Seoul with my brother. <Confession of Chǒng Sun-mae Barbara at the Capital Police, Sahak ching 'ūi'>.  

My daughter, Kyǒng-ae, is indeed an unmarried woman. She lied that she was a wife of Mr. Hŏ but he died after sending her betrothal gifts. <Confession of Yi Ōrin’agi at the Ministry of Punishments, Sahak ching ‘ūi’>.  

Cho To-ae, A younger sister of Cho Sŏp. Disguised wife of Mr. O. Evil name (Baptismal name) is Anastasia. Came to the Capital Police on her own for being arrested. <Interrogation report on Cho To-ae, Sahak ching ‘ūi’>.  

The abovementioned accounts from Sahak ching ‘ūi show that only Cho To-ae chose O for her disguise, and the rest of the virgins used Hŏ. Their disguises were uncovered because the virgins confessed their true identities one by one after being tortured.

You (Chǒng Sum-mae Barbara) already told us that you had been married to a man whose last name was Hŏ but was abandoned by him. However, we know that this is actually a common deception of those who practice perpetual virginity among the followers of the evil learning (Catholicism). How dare you try to deceive us? <Interrogation at the Ministry of Punishments on Chǒng Sum-mae Barbara, Sahak ching ‘ūi’>.  

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Witnessing repetitions of this disguise, the government learned how to detect more consecrated Catholic virgins, who claimed they were the widows of “Mr. Hồ,” from the real widows among the Catholic converts.

In fact, the choice of the names Hồ and O was a strategy with two purposes. First, the consecrated virgins could avoid unnecessary suspicion about their unwed state from both non-Catholics and society at large because Hồ and O were both common family names in Korea at the time (as they are still). Second, depending on the Chinese characters used, the names could have alternate meanings of “emptiness” or “hollowness” (Hồ: 虛) and “wrongness” or “fabrication” (O: 誤, 吳). In other words, by calling herself the wife of Mr. Hồ or Mr. O, a consecrated virgin was actually saying “I am nobody’s wife.”

You (Kim Kyŏng-ae), unwed woman, pretended to be a widow and lied that you were wife of Mr. Hồ (許). Hồ means hōmu (虛無: to be empty and nothing there). <Interrogation of Kim Kyŏng-ae at the Ministry of Punishments, Sahak ching’ŭi>128

The government discerned this strategy through confessions made by these perpetual virgins, as interrogation of Kim Kyŏng-ae in Sahak ching’ŭi indicates.

The government included refusal to marry as one of reasons for punishing these women in the final verdicts at the end of the interrogations, but their marriage denials were not the pivotal determinant for the death penalty. It was true that their marriage refusals were included as one of their violations of national law. However, the actual reason for execution was not their marriage refusals but their persistence in their Catholic faith. According to Sahak ching’ŭi,

among the consecrated female virgins Yun Chŏm-hye Agatha and Chŏng Sun-mae Barbara were beheaded, but not all Catholic virgins were executed along with them. Other virgins including Hong Sun-hŭi Lucia, Kang Wan-suk’s daughter, were exiled after declaring their apostasy as the result of continuous, severe physical torture.\(^{129}\) Once they pronounced their renunciation of their religious faith, the death penalty was withdrawn and they were sentenced instead to exile. The lives of those exiled previous Catholic virgins are unknown as they disappeared into obscurity. However, it is clear that the government was more interested in their religion than their marriage status, and regarded their persistent Catholic faith as more worthy of punishment.

Those consecrated virgins detected during the first persecution were tightly connected with Kang Wan-suk’s home and Yun Chŏm-hye Agatha’s activities. Dallet’s records show that Yun Chŏm-hye Agatha had stayed at Kang Wan-suk’s home and taught catechism to female virgins as their leader there. Kang Wan-suk invited female virgins, who had to leave their homes to avoid forced marriages, and provided her home in Seoul as a shelter. Yun Chŏm-hye Agatha, who had once been one of them, excelled in her knowledge of Catholicism and taught other virgins as a model for practicing perpetual Catholic virginity.\(^{130}\)

The voices of these young Catholic women, when they spoke for themselves, explain the various reasons for their rejection of marriage. It is more difficult to discern the reasons that they decided to abandon what was considered a normal life from extant primary sources written by


French missionaries or testimonies by other Catholics, which are full of religious discourses or focus solely on eulogies about their martyrdom.

In this light, interrogation records such as Sahak ching ’üi are more useful, in that these accounts came directly from the women and were taken down during their interrogations. In Sahak ching ’üi, Yun Chŏm-hye Agatha testifies that she did not want to get married because it was difficult to live far from her parents. Actually, she temporarily left her home to avoid forced marriage but returned to stay with her mother. She went to Kang Wan-suk’s house and began her activities as a leader for consecrated virgins ten years later, after her mother died. Pak Sŏng-yŏn also says that she came to fall deeply into Catholicism after the death of her mother, who had led her to the Catholic Church. It seems that she considered consecration of her virginity as an alternative life choice, as she was unmarriageable due to poverty and orphanhood.

Kim Wŏl-im also confesses the same reasons—both poverty as well as orphanhood—as the basis of her decision to be a Christian virgin. She was a poor orphan girl and grew up in Kang Wan-suk’s house, serving her as a maid. Since the marriage rituals in the Zhu Xi’s Family Rituals require both interactions of the parents of the two families and exchanges of presents, both orphanhood and poverty were common obstacles for both men and women to


Another reason given for the choice of consecration of virginity was in order to stay single: Kim Kyŏng-ae, one of those who pretended to be Mr. Hŏ’s widow, directly states that she spurned marriage after her conversion to Catholicism. She also confessed that she wore her hair up in a chignon, a symbol of married women, by her own decision.\textsuperscript{135} Although they did not clearly mention it during interrogation, religious zeal was another strong motive for the decision to live as a Christian virgin. The activities of the consecrated virgins provided a role model for the next generation of Christian virgins after the end of the first persecution in 1802.

3.3 The Recovery of the Korean Catholic Church after the Sin’yu Persecution (1802-1836)

Although the aim of the persecution, which persisted for one year, was suppressing or eliminating Catholicism in the kingdom, it instead caused it to spread throughout the territory of what is now South Korea. Some of the exiled Catholic converts resumed their faith and attempted to proselytize Catholicism in their new homes.\textsuperscript{136} And many Catholic converts who survived that first serious persecution went underground and scattered over almost the entire Korean peninsula, except for the northernmost areas. They lived in extreme poverty with their children or elderly parents, wandering in search of safety. Catholic yangban converts also lost

\textsuperscript{135} Unknown, Sahak Ching’ŭi [Punishing Evil Catholicism and Promoting the Right Teaching], ed. Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso (Sŏul, Korea: Pulham Munhwasa, 1977), p.342.

\textsuperscript{136} Cho Hyŏn-bŏm, “Kyohoe ŭi Chaegŏn kwa Sŏngjikcha Ch’ŏngwŏn” [Restoration of the Church and Requests of Missionaries], in Han’guk Ch’onju Kyohoesa [A History of Catholic Church in Korea], ed. Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, vol. 2 (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 2010), 152–78, p.153, p.157.
their social status and privileges, because the government confiscated their properties as punishment, and they lost their family heads in the persecution.

The Catholics scattered around Korea began forming villages for Catholics, called kyo’uch’on (villages of Catholic Brethren) from the early nineteenth century, and reconstituted their Church communities as well, as sources for survival. The building of Catholic villages began in 1791 when Yun Chi-ch’ung Paul’s brother moved to the Wanju area after Yun Chi-ch’ung Paul’s execution due to his abandonment of Confucian ancestral rituals. Catholic converts from Ch’ungch’ŏng Province also moved to this village and Fr. Zhou Wen-mo visited to bless the residents in 1795.137

The majority of residents of the hidden Catholic villages were either families of the persecuted led by widows of Catholic converts or wives of investigated Catholics. They had to leave their hometowns, either abandoning their properties and possessions or having them confiscated, and wander around with their families in order to escape persecution and find safer places to live. Charles Dallet reports that the few female converts persecuted in 1801 were mostly from prominent (and thus, from the perspective of the government, more threatening) families, and other women were not persecuted or caught.138

However, they had to leave their hometowns, because they were in constant danger of being detected due to the ogachakt’ong pop (five-family mutual responsibility and surveillance

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137 Kim Chin-so, “Han’guk Ch’ŏnju Kyohoe ū Sogodongch’e Chŏnt’ong” [A Tradition of the Creation of Small Communities in Korean Catholic Church], in Minjoksa Wa Kyohoesa [National History and Church History] (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 2000), 245–82, p.249-250.

system), which was strengthened by the government for the purpose of detecting Catholics through surveillance by neighbours. The first Catholic village that emerged after the persecution of 1801 was built in a mountainous area in Kangwŏn Province by forty people, which consisted of five families centered on Sin T’ae-bo’s leadership. This village also included forty more people, whom Sin T’ae-bo discovered during his desperate search for safety. The members were all from families who had lost their patriarchs during the persecution, and comprised surviving widows and their young children or elderly parents.\textsuperscript{139}

The formation of these villages increased after the persecution in 1801, mostly in the mountainous areas.\textsuperscript{140} The residents had to be mobile to escape the continuous persecutions. If they were detected by the government, they needed to be able to flee right away. Some villages were completely abandoned but others were restored upon the return of the residents.\textsuperscript{141} In this way, these villages contributed to the survival of the underground Catholic Church of Korea and its converts throughout the continuous persecutions.

The patterns of residence of the Catholic convert survivors could be categorized into two forms: some resided in the mountainous villages of Catholic brethren, but others decided to hide among non-Catholics, staying in the plains despite the difficulties they encountered practicing


\textsuperscript{141} Kim Chin-so, “Han’guk Ch’ŏnju Kyohoe ŭi Sokongdonch’e Chŏnt’ong” [Tradition of Small Communities of Catholic Church in Korea], Minjoksawakyoheosa [History of the Nation and Church], 2000, 245–82, p.253.
their religion. Residents of non-Catholic villages also fled to the Catholic villages if they were in danger of being caught by the government due to the exposure of their identities as Catholics.

Being isolated and going underground, Catholic converts developed efficient ways to maintain their secret connections with other converts scattered throughout the kingdom and to support their villages and families financially. The Catholic villages were a community for both economic and religious lives working and praying together, and collectively engaged in tobacco cultivation through slash-and-burn field agriculture. Particularly, the mountainous locations had an advantage for cultivating cash crops such as tobacco by this method. However, they had to move their villages regularly, because slash-and-burn field agriculture requires a lengthy period of non-cultivation, taking two or three years from burning to recovery.

It was the pottery trade, more than the tobacco trade, which connected these scattered Catholic villages and even Catholics living in the non-Catholic villages. Many Catholics gradually transformed their livelihood from agriculture to making and trading pottery. The pottery trade was a good occupational choice for the hidden Catholics in that it was easy in the

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145 Kim Chŏn-so, “Han’guk Ch’ŏnju Kyohoe ŭi Sokongdonch’e Chŏnt’ong” [Tradition of Small Communities of Catholic Church in Korea], Minjoksa wa Kyohoesa [History of the Nation and Church], 2000, 245–82, p.253.
mountains to obtain empty lands to build kilns, as well as to find clay for making pottery and wood to fire the clay. It was also easy for Catholic converts to utilize their pottery kilns as bases for contacts among converts, concealing their identities as pottery peddlers while carrying Catholic goods and books inside the pottery.\footnote{146} Wandering around to sell pottery, they could maintain connections with other Catholics living outside their villages, contacting Catholics in the non-Catholic villages and sharing news among Catholic villages about persecutions in other areas.\footnote{147} By looking for secretly marked crosses in middle patterns on the surfaces of the pottery, the Catholics could distinguish Catholic from non-Catholic peddlers.\footnote{148} This type of mountainous agriculture and pottery trade contributed tremendously to rehabilitating the communities of the hidden Korean Catholics and supported their livelihood.

As an endeavor for the recovery of the Church, Korean Catholic converts began attempts to invite missionaries to Korea, sending messengers several times to China between 1811 and 1816. The early attempts (Yi Yô-jin’s trips in 1811 and 1813) failed due to the persecutions in China and Napoleon’s attacks on the Pope. However, Chŏng Ha-sang Paul\footnote{149} did not give up and

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\begin{enumerate}
\item Pak Chae-man, “Han’guk Ch’ogi Kyohoe (1784-1840) üi P’yŏngsindo Sadojik” [The Roles of Lay Catechists in the Nascent Korean Catholic Church (1784-1840)], in Ch’oe Sŏg-u Kohŭi Kinyŏm Nonmuniip [Anthology of Essays for Celebration of the Seventieth Birthday of Father Ch’oe Sŏg-U], ed. Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso (Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 1991), 91–118, p.113-114.
\item Chŏng Ha-sang Paul was a son of Chŏng Yak-chong Augustine, a leader of the early Catholic Church in Korea and a martyr of the first persecution in 1801. He was six years old and too young to be executed. He survived with his mother and sister and became one of most important church leaders, who endeavored to request missionaries after 1816. (Cho Hyŏn-bŏm, “Kyohoe ŭi Chaegŏn kwa Sŏngjikcha Ch’ŏngwŏn” [Restoration of the Church and
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
made visits to China a total of sixteen times between 1816 and 1835, which at last successfully persuaded the Vatican to send missionaries to Korea.¹⁵⁰

The Vatican decided to create an Apostolic Vicariate of Korea and separate it from the Chinese Diocese in 1831 by appointing Bishop Barthélemy Bruguière (1792-1835) as the first Apostolic vicar for Korea and entrusting Korea to the Missions Étrangères de Paris for the continuous dispatching of missionaries. The Vatican sent Yu Pang-je Pacificus (1795-1854), a Chinese Priest who already had shown a desire to work as a missionary in Korea at the seminary in Naples, to Korea with the mission of preparing for Bishop Bruguière’s arrival. Fr. Yu arrived at Seoul in 1834 but only Pierre Philibert Maubant (1803-1839) followed him in 1836 and became the first French missionary, Bishop Bruguière having died in Manchuria before reaching Korea. Also, Jacques-Honoré Chastan (1803-1839) arrived in Korea in 1836 and Bishop Laurent-Joseph-Marius Imbert (1796-1839) arrived as the second Apostolic vicar for the Apostolic Vicariate of Korea in 1837. Thus, the Catholic Church in Korea came to have three missionaries and their existence and activities contributed tremendously to speeding up the recovery of the underground Catholic Church in the 1836-1839 period. Fr. Yu Pang-je Pacificus had to leave Korea in 1836 after conflicts with Maubant,¹⁵¹ and I will return to a discussion of their feud in chapter 7.

Requests of Missionaries], in Han’guk Ch’ŏnju Kyohoesa [A History of Catholic Church in Korea], ed. Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, vol. 2 (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 2010), 152–78, p.171-173.

¹⁵⁰ Cho Hyŏn-bŏm, “Kyohoe ŭi Chaegŏn kwa Sŏngjikcha Ch’ŏngwŏn” [Restoration of the Church and Requests of Missionaries], in Han’guk Ch’ŏnju Kyohoesa [A History of Catholic Church in Korea], ed. Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, vol. 2 (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 2010), 152–78, p.156-178.

¹⁵¹ Cho Hyŏn-bŏm, “Chosŏn Taemokku ŭi Sŏlchŏng kwa Sŏngyosa ŭi Ipkuk” [Establishment of Apostolic Vicariate of Chosŏn and Entrance of Missionaries], in Han’guk Ch’ŏnju Kyohoesa [A History of Catholic Church in Korea], ed. Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, vol. 2 (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 2010), 203–335, p.204-334.
The arrival of Western missionaries caused another nationwide persecution in 1839 after a political change in ruling circles. The political situation of the Chosŏn dynasty came to be dominated by the relatives of kings throughout the nineteenth century. Particularly, the Kim family of Andong and the Cho family of P’ung’yang competed to seize political power, creating acute rivalry. The power struggles between these two families had a significant political impact on the central government. The Kim family was relatively favorable to Catholicism, but the Cho family was rather antagonistic to it. Seizing political power in 1839, the Chos began another nationwide bloody persecution which lasted until 1840. As a result, the government caught and executed the three French missionaries along with important church leaders such as Chŏng Ha-sang Paul and Yu Chin-gil Augustine.

Also, this persecution revealed the next generation of consecrated Catholic virgins, who had shown both similarities to and differences from their predecessors, as I will show in the next section.

3.4 The Second Generation of Female Virgins in Chosŏn Korea (1802-1840)

The breakout of the second nation-wide persecution in 1839 uncovered the second generation of female virgins in Chosŏn Korea, as the previous persecution had already done several decades ago. Enduring the aftermath of the persecution of 1801 as well as experiencing


153 Ch’oe Sŏn-hye, “Kihae Pakhae” [Persecution of the Kihae Year], in Han’guk Ch’ŏnju Kyohoesa, ed. Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, vol. 3 (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 2010), 14–104, p.19-20.
the recovery of their Catholic communities, both female converts and married couples continued to consecrate their virginity for religious life. The small local persecutions in the Kyŏngsang region in 1815 and in the Chŏlla area in 1827 revealed the fact that not only many female virgins but also celibate couples such as Kwŏn Theresa and Cho Myŏng-su Peter remained. The practice of perpetual virginity had still flourished among Korean female Catholics despite the brutal aftermaths of the atrocious persecution of 1801 based on the experience of the previous generation of the female Catholic virgins.

Also, Charles Dallet reports that consecrated virgin women established and ran schools to teach and guide other unmarried Catholic women between 1801 and 1839. It seems that older virgins teaching and guiding younger virgins became a general way to nurture the next generation of Catholic virgins. Han Sŏng-im (1813-1868), a martyr of the Persecution of the Pyŏng’in Year of 1868, stated during her interrogation that Chŏng Chŏng-hye Elisabeth (1797-1839), a consecrated virgin who was martyred in the Persecution of the Kihae Year of 1839, taught her Catholicism when she was eighteen years old in 1831. It is unclear what she learned from Chŏng Chŏng-hye Elisabeth, but she might have learned how to practice perpetual virginity in Chosŏn society as well as examples from the hagiographies as a young candidate for perpetual


156 P’odoch’ŏng tŭngnok, U P’odoch’ŏng tŭngnok, Vol. 23, p.703. Chŏng Chŏng-hye Elisabeth was a daughter of Chŏng Yak-chong Augustine, a martyrs of the previous persecution in 1801, and sister of Chŏng Ha-Sang Paul.
virginity. And this was a clear example that virgins taught the younger virgins in the Catholic Church in Korea.

Moreover, some Catholic girls left their home in search of female virgin communities to support their lives as consecrated virgins, risking all kinds of dangers they might confront outside the inner quarter. Yi Si-im Anna (?-1815), a martyr of the local persecution in 1815, was one such girl. A daughter of a yangban family, she ran away from home to avoid betrothal to a man from another yangban family and remain a Catholic virgin. A Catholic boatman whose family name was Pak was supposed to take her to the community. However, he raped her on the way there and forced her to marry him. Successful escapes from home seem to have been rare and many more unknown Catholic girls might have encountered fates similar to Yi Si-im Anna’s and been completely forgotten and left in obscurity.

Also, the Persecution of the Kihae year of 1839 provided an opportunity to demonstrate the multilateral lives and distinguished characters of the next generation of consecrated female virgins during the period between 1802 and 1839. According to the extant documents, the government detected fourteen consecrated female virgins out of a total of seventy martyrs and forty-three women. It is noteworthy there were also two male virgins who consecrated their virginity among the twenty-seven male martyrs during this period. They were Chŏng Ha-sang Paul, brother of aforementioned Chŏng Chŏng-hye Elizabeth, and Yi Kyŏng-sam John. Chŏng


158 Since only records of martyrs are left, there might have been more virgins who either survived, apostatized, or were not detected. The following numbers of male and female martyrs are shown in Kihae Ilgi.
Ha-sang Paul was studying to be a priest under Bishop Imbert’s direction but was executed before he reached that goal.\footnote{Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., Kihae Ilgi [Testimonies on Martyrs of Persecution in 1839] (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 1985), p.388-389; p.416-419.}

Compared to the numbers of martyrs from other persecutions, the persecution in 1839 produced the largest number of consecrated female virgin martyrs. The fourteen consecrated female virgins who died during this period were: Yi Yŏng-hŭi Magdalena, Yi Barbara, Kim Lucia, Yi Yŏng-dŏk Magdalena, Yi In-dŏk Maria, Cho Magdalena, Wŏn kwi-im Maria, Pak Hŭi-sun Lucia, Chŏn Kyŏng-hyŏp Agatha, Kim Julietta, Chŏng Chŏng-hye Elisabeth, Kim Hyo-im Columba, Kim Hyo-ju Agnes, and Yi Agatha.\footnote{Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., Kihae Ilgi [Testimonies on Martyrs of Persecution in 1839] (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 1985).} This list reflects only women who were caught and executed in the middle of the persecution in 1839. But there must have been many more female virgins who avoided detection by the government. Kim Hyo-ju Columba and Kim Hyo-im Agnes had a sister, Kim Clara, who also consecrated her virginity and lived with them. She successfully fled when the police came to arrest her sisters, and her life after the persecution is unknown. Also, Kwŏn Chin-yi Agatha and Yi Kyŏng-yi Agatha were excluded from this category due to their previous marriages, which were unconsummated and annulled, respectively, by Priest Yu Pang-je Pacificus and by Bishop Imbert. I return to Kwŏn Chin-yi Agatha in chapter 7.

The Catholic female virgins detected during the persecution in 1839 lived with other women and were caught or surrendered themselves to the government collectively. The first is Yi Mae-im Teresa’s group, which had three consecrated virgins: Yi Yŏng-hŭi Magdalena, Yi
Barbara and Kim Lucia. The second is Cho Barbara’s group, which had another three perpetual virgins: Yi Yong-dok Magdalena, Yi In-dok Maria, and Cho Magdalena. The third group consisted of two consecrated sisters: Kim Hyo-im Columba and Kim Hyo-ju Agnes. The other group was two former court ladies, who were caught together: Pak Hu-i-sun Lucia and Chŏn Kyŏng-hyŏp Agatha. Other female virgins were caught individually or with their families. Kim Yulidae Julietta, a former court lady and surviving virgin from the Sin’yu Persecution, was also caught by the government. And Chŏng Chŏng-hye Elisabeth were caught with her brother Chŏng Ha-sang Paul and her mother Yu Cecila. Also, Yi Agatha was caught with her parents, Yi Kwang-hŏn Augustine and Kwŏn Hŭi Barbara, and Wŏn Kwi-im Maria tried to escape from the police but was caught.

All of them were either neighbours, family members, or acquaintances of those who had been caught earlier. Most of the martyrs or those who were caught were residents of Seoul and had close relationships with both Fr. Yu Pang-je Pacificus and the French missionaries, in that

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161 Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., Kihae Ilgi [Testimonies on Martyrs of Persecution in 1839] (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 1985), p.75.
some of them were involved in the plans for inviting the missionaries. Chŏng Chŏng-hye

Elisabeth was a sister of Chŏng Ha-sang Paul, the leader of the project for requesting
missionaries and also contributed to the project by sewing.168 Yi Agatha’s father, Yi Kwang-hŏn
Augustine, was baptized by Fr. Yu Pang-je Pacificus and served as one of the important hoejang
(catechists) for some time starting in 1836 until his execution in 1839.169

Other women gathered in Seoul one by one and lived together for personal reasons or for
convenience in religious life until the persecution broke out. The first group consists of a total of
eight women, who were mostly related to each other: Yi Yŏng-hŭi Magdalena, Yi Barbara, Kim
Lucia, Yi Chŏng-hŭi Barbara, Hŏ Gye-im Magdalena, Yi Mae-im Theresa, and Kim Sŏng-im
Martha. In this group, Yi Yŏng-hŭi Magdalena, Yi Barbara, and Kim Lucia were consecrated
virgins. Among them, five had blood ties: Yi Yŏng-hŭi Magdalena and Yi Chŏng-hŭi Barbara
were sisters, and Yi Barbara was a daughter of their sister, who had died.

Also, Hŏ Gye-im Magdalena was their mother and Yi Mae-im Theresa was their aunt. At
first, Yi Yŏng-hŭi Magdalena escaped from her home and came to Yi Mae-im Theresa’s home in
Seoul to avoid a forced marriage arranged by her father. Yi Yŏng-hŭi Magdalena had observed
that Yi Chŏng-hŭi Barbara, her sister, had to surrender her wish for perpetual virginity. When
she discovered that her father was discussing her marriage, she ran away and went to the home of
Yi Mae-im (her aunt) in Seoul. Her sister (Yi Chŏng-hŭi Barbara) and mother (Hŏ Gye-im

168 Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., Kihae Ilgi [Testimonies on Martyrs of Persecution in 1839] (Sŏul, Korea:

169 Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., Kihae Ilgi [Testimonies on Martyrs of Persecution in 1839] (Sŏul, Korea:
Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 1985), p.360.
Magdalena) also joined them later. And Yi Barbara, Kim Sŏng-im Martha, and Kim Lucia joined them and lived together with them until they all surrendered to the police in 1839.\textsuperscript{170}

The second group was formed by two mothers and their respective daughters. In this group, Yi Yŏng-dŏk Magdalena, Yi In-dŏk Maria and Cho Magdalena were perpetual virgins. And Cho Barbara was the mother of Yi Yŏng-dŏk Magdalena and Yi In-dŏk Maria, who were sisters. And Yi Katharina was Cho Magdalena’s mother. Yi Yŏng-dŏk Magdalena was a poor Yangban woman and Cho Barbara’s eldest daughter. Although she became a Catholic along with her mother due to her maternal grandmother’s influence, her father was not a Catholic and forced her to get married when she was twenty years old. When she was twenty-seven years old, she contacted Bishop Imbert in order to obtain his permission to leave her home for perpetual virginity. He turned down her request, but she ran away with her mother and her sister in search of the convenience of religious life. Bishop Imbert initially urged them to go home but had to arrange for the three women to live at another Catholic believer’s house, because going home meant facing certain death.\textsuperscript{171}

Later, Yi Katharina and her daughter Cho Magdalena, a consecrated virgin, joined the group right before the breakout of the persecution of 1839. Even though Yi Katharina was a Catholic, she tried to persuade her daughter to get married due to concerns her daughter might have no one to depend on in the future and would face difficulties as a single woman. Cho Magdalena refused to marry a Catholic man at the age of eighteen and ran away to Seoul to


avoid a forced marriage. After working as a maid and doing volunteer work for the church until the age of twenty-two, she returned to her hometown with the belief that she had passed the marriageable age and with a desire to take care of her mother. When the persecution of Catholics began in their hometown in 1838, they fled to Seoul together and Bishop Imbert sent them to the place where Yi Yŏng-dŏk Magdalena’s group resided. They were all arrested together during the persecution in 1839.\textsuperscript{172}

The third group consists of consecrated virgin sisters: Kim Hyo-im Columba and Kim Hyo-ju Agnes. They lived with Kim Clara, another virgin sister, in their Catholic brother’s home and, as mentioned above, only Kim Clara succeeded in escaping when the police arrived. The sisters’ father committed suicide due to despair from his wife and children’s conversion to Catholicism and fear of the possibility of the demise of his family.\textsuperscript{173}

However, compared to other consecrated virgins, their family seems to have been affluent to enough support these sisters’ lives of perpetual virginity. Kim Benedicta (Punda), their surviving sister, testified for their beatification in 1889 that her mother attempted to married off both Kim Hyo-im Columba and Kim Hyo-ju Agnes several times. Although the sisters’ Catholic mother was affluent, she prohibited them from choosing the religious life. So, Kim Hyo-im Columba protested to her mother that the mother of Yi (Yŏng-dŏk) Magdalena and Yi (In-dŏk)

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Maria, who were living poorly in Tokkabi village in the Sŏgang area, had allowed them to consecrate their virginity despite their poverty.\textsuperscript{174} The fourth group, who had previously served as court ladies, Pak Hŭi-sun Lucia and Chŏn Kyŏng-hyŏp Agatha, attempted to avoid the police but were arrested together.\textsuperscript{175} Among the martyrs from this persecution, Wŏn Kwi-im Maria, Chŏng Chŏng-hye Elisabeth, and Kim Yuridae Julietta did not live with other female Catholics.\textsuperscript{176}

Consecrated female virgins in this period show differences from their predecessors. First, there is an increase in the number of consecrated female virgins compared to previous periods. After the end of the persecution of 1801, consecrated virgins, both men and women, were highly respected as honorable individuals among the hidden Catholics. Only fourteen female virgins were caught during the persecution, but many more were not detected, such as the aforementioned Kim Clara, the sister of Kim Hyo-ju Columba and Kim Hyo-im Agnes.

Also, even among married women some had once wished to be consecrated virgins but were married off either due to family pressure to marry or their families’ financial difficulties. Examples include Kim Magdalena, Yi Chŏng-hŭi Barbara (Yi Yŏng-hŭi Magdalena’s elder sister), Kim Theresa, and Kim Barbara, as we can see in Kihae ilgi.\textsuperscript{177} They all had wished to

\textsuperscript{174} Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., \textit{Kihae Pyŏng’o Pakhae Sungyoja Chŏng’ŏnnok [Testimonies on Martyrs during the Persecutions in Kihae and Pyŏng’o Years]}, vol. I (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 2004), p.154-155.

\textsuperscript{175} Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., \textit{Kihae Ilgi [Testimonies on Martyrs of Persecution in 1839]} (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 1985), p.382-383, p.443-446.

\textsuperscript{176} Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., \textit{Kihae Ilgi [Testimonies on Martyrs of Persecution in 1839]} (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 1985), p.402-404, p.440-443, p.476-482.

consecrate their virginity, but their parents forced them to marry. If a Catholic girl had to renounce her wish to consecrate her virginity, the second-best choice was getting married to a Catholic man. Yi Chŏng-hŭi Barbara had faked being a cripple for three years to avoid marriage in her aim for perpetual virginity, but finally agreed to marry to a Catholic man. Kwŏn Chin-yi Agatha and Yi Agatha could have remarried to Catholic men but decided to annul their unconsummated marriages, which had been arranged by their parents when they were quite young, in order to consecrate their virginities of their own free wills.

Also, they clearly show their self-identities as consecrated virgins during their interrogations. The consecrated virgins continued to tie up and pin their hair with the purpose of being seen as either a married women or widows to avoid unnecessary attention or suspicion. Kim Hyo-im Columba and Kim Hyo-ju Agnes decided to tie up and pin their hair when their mother promised them in marriage. Wŏn Kwi-im Maria did the same so as not to be noticed by guests at the house of her aunt, where she had been living and working. However, none of them, according to extant documents, used code names such as Mrs. Hŏ or Mrs. O like their predecessors.

Their self-identities as consecrated virgins appear more clearly during their interrogations, particularly from the example of Kim Hyo-im Columba. Since the government had already learned from the previous persecution that some of Catholic women practiced consecration of virginity, detection of more consecrated virgins was not a shocking revelation.

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At that time, the Chief of the Capital Police asked her (Kim Hyo-im Columba), “why did you not get married before you reached this advanced age?” Columba answered, “it is in order to praise the Creator of all things in the universe by keeping the body and soul pure and to save my soul on my own. <Kim Hyo-im Columba in Kihae ilgi>¹⁸⁰

Particularly, Kim Hyo-im Columba’s abovementioned answer surprised and pleased Bishop Imbert. He wrote his opinion of Kim Hyo-im Columba’s statement in his journal and it was quoted in Charles Dallet’s *History of Korean Catholic Church*.

This is the first time for virgin women to talk openly about this issue. The virgin Catholic women, who had been caught during the last persecutions, always concealed the reasons why they had chosen to keep virginity.¹⁸¹

The virgin women who were caught last April, could not have dared to clarify the reason why they remained virgins by using trickery. Instead, they just answered through the typical Korean style of lies and trickeries and said that they could not find decent spouses or had gotten too old to get married due to poverty.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., *Kihae ilgi [Testimonies on Martyrs of Persecution in 1839]* (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 1985), p.455.


Not all consecrated virgins dauntlessly confessed their identities as Catholic virgins, however. As Bishop Imbert states, highly respected virgins either claimed their unfortunate status had caused them to choose the life of a Catholic virgin (in the case of Chŏng Chŏng-hye Elisabeth\textsuperscript{183}) or did not clearly mention the reasons, like Kim Lucia.\textsuperscript{184}

Kim Hyo-im Columba is, again, noteworthy in that she asked for humane treatment based on national law and protections for the incarcerated female prisoners from sexual harassment by police and interrogators. When Kim Hyo-im Columba and other Catholic women were caught and imprisoned, guards attempted to rape or sexually harass them after the official interrogations and tortures. When she was sent to the Ministry of Punishments for more interrogations, she bravely requested justice, complaining about the mistreatment she had experienced at the hands of the Capital Police.

\begin{quote}
When the Minister (of the Ministry of Punishments) finished questioning, (Kim Hyo-im Columba) said, “‘Because I believe you are supposed to treat commoners as though they are your own children, I would like to talk to you about my humiliating treatment.” He said, “Talk to me.” She said, “The policemen stripped women of their clothes. In addition, they tied, hung, harassed, beat, and mocked those women and burned them. All women are the same and are supposed to be respected regardless of her class. If you kill us based on the national laws, we would accept that without any complaints. However, I am ashamed of their offenses, because they abused us in ways that are not allowed under the national laws. The minister was enraged and shouted, “Who
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{183} Chŏng Chŏng-hye Elizabeth was a daughter of Chŏng Yak-jong Augustine, the church leader and a martyr of the previous persecution, and a sister of Chŏng Ha-sang Paul. \textit{Kihae ilgi} shows that she claimed that no one would take her as a spouse due to her unfortunate situation and family background. Testimonies by other witnesses also state that she had once articulated her desire to get married around the age of thirty. Even though Bishop Imbert said this type of explanation was the “typical Korean style of lies or trickeries” it might have been partly the actual situations that some Catholic virgins were facing.

\textsuperscript{184} Kim Lucia was very vocal about her loyalty to her faith, but her answer does not seem to have satisfied Bishop Imbert. This is the conversation between Kim Lucia during interrogation by the Chief of the Capital Police: (The Chief of the Capital Police said), “Tell me why you did not get married, what is the soul, and whether you are not afraid of death?" (She answered) “(…..) the age of twenty something years is not too old, and please do not ask about my marriage, because it is not a matter that a lady can answer. (Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., \textit{Kihae Ilgi [Testimonies on Martyrs of Persecution in 1839]} (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 1985), p.407).
dare treat this lady like jade in that way?” He immediately ordered the seizure of two policemen, punished them and ordered them into exile. … Afterwards, they were not abused or humiliated by the police. <A Testimony on Kim Hyo-im Columba>\(^{185}\)

Kim Hyo-im Columba was obviously a very extraordinary individual compared to her fellow female virgins in that she represents the zenith of consciousness of identity as well as subjectivity as a Catholic virgin.

The numbers and attitudes of female Catholic virgins have led contemporary scholars of Korean history to view every aspect related to their activities by applying the discourse of “modernization,” which, again, means gender equity, women’s liberation, and anti-Confucianism. Here, the women’s groups found during the persecution of 1839—whether they had lived together or were caught together before or after the persecution—have been called *Yögyoin kongdongch’ega*, “communal-families of female Catholics.” The problem is that these female communities were believed to be “anti-Confucian,” thus a modern form of family and a modified form of singlehood with chaste marriage.\(^{186}\) Based on this perspective, these Catholic women’s communities have been seen as challenging the patriarchal Confucian morality and order based on women playing a leading role.\(^{187}\)

However, although women’s cohabitation might be seen as a modified form of singlehood, it cannot be interpreted as anti-Confucian or modernization in that it was not a new

\(^{185}\) Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., *Kihae Ilgi [Testimonies on Martyrs of Persecution in 1839]* (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 1985), p.458-459.

\(^{186}\) Yi Mi-jin, “Chosŏn Huje Ch’ŏnjugyo Yŏsindo ŭi Kajokgwan Mit Kyŏlhŏngwn Yŏn’gu” [A Study on Catholic Women’s Understanding of Family and Marriage in the Late Chosŏn Period.] (Master’s Thesis, Sungshin Women’s University, 1994), p.3.

\(^{187}\) Ch’oe Chŏng-mun, “Chosŏn Ch’ŏnjugyo Ch’ogig Yŏsindo ŭi Hwaldong” [Activities of Korean Catholic Women in the Early Period of Acceptance of Catholicism in Chosŏn Korea] (Master’s Thesis, Yŏnsei University, 1999), p.44.
phenomenon brought by adoption of Catholicism in Chosŏn Korea. Chŏng Chi-yŏng’s research on heads of households in the family registries from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries demonstrates that it was not rare to discover widows cohabiting even when they had no family ties. Also, this form of pseudo-family among women was not a violation of the law, because the government did not punish the members of women’s communities, and indeed recorded their cohabitation as a legally acceptable form for the family registries.188

The widespread and development of Catholic villages in Chosŏn Korea enhanced the chances of Catholic women to preserve their faith after marriage by marrying Catholic men. Korean Catholics endeavored to find spouses for their children among their fellows. Under this situation, the Catholic villages in nineteenth-century Korea came to be connected together through matrimony. Therefore, most Catholics in the Catholic villages were relations by marriage, as they were all like one clan or family.189 Thus, marriage between Catholic men and women could be the best option for the Catholic women to choose to preserve their religious faith and activities after their marriages.

Nevertheless, devoted Catholic women in Chosŏn Korea still followed their desire to consecrate their virginity perpetually and even preferred to live their lives as consecrated virgins. As mentioned above, Yi Chŏng-hŭi Barbara had to compromise her wish for perpetual virginity after faking physical disability for three years, by agreeing to marry a Catholic man.190 Most


Catholic women were either forced or had to choose to marry Catholic men, but it was still just an alternative option for them rather than the most favorable solution.

It is true that life as a consecrated virgin was preferred among Catholic women of Chosŏn Korea, but this does not mean that we should call their choice the “modernization” of Korean women. When it comes to discussing Catholic virginity as modernization, one problem persists: there were striking similarities in the practice of Catholic virginity between women of third-century Rome and nineteenth-century Korea, despite the spatial and temporal gaps. When some young female Christians of early Rome, where there was no convents yet, eschewed marriage and family, many Romans viewed this as a threat to the foundations of society and the patriarchal order.\textsuperscript{191} Moreover, in Europe before the rise of the medieval convent, female candidates for virginity had constantly to rely on deception— i.e. cross-dressing or ruining their appearance— or ran away to avoid forced marriages.\textsuperscript{192} Does this imply that modernization existed in Rome at the time? Or does this common movement among women in different spaces and times imply something else brought by Catholicism?

Moreover, we need to see the bigger picture of the gender politics of Catholicism on other continents, given that the missions of the Catholic Church were indeed a global enterprise. If we see the whole map of gender politics of the Catholic Church of the pre-twentieth century, the established knowledge claim on Korean Catholicism is puzzling, in that it invites the conclusion that in the whole world the Catholic Church attempted to liberate only Korean women from the constraints of patriarchy. In the Western societies, feminists have argued that

\textsuperscript{191} Merry Wiesner-Hanks, \textit{Gender in History} (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), p.128.

the Catholic Church has been an androcentric, misogynistic, patriarchal, sexist religion. It has rejected women from the priesthood based on the beliefs in the God-given inferiority of women and their subordinate position, thus consolidating the Church’s strongly hierarchical institution dependent on a male clergy. Returning to the former colonies of the West, we can also see that the first task of the Western missionaries or other Christian officials was to impose European-style patriarchy based on monogamous marriage, illegalization of concubinage, male-headed households, and limited (or no) divorce.

Also, we need to keep in mind that not all women of the non-Christian societies welcomed these Christian endeavors to impose a new gender system; indeed, these attempts produced two distinct reactions. On one hand, in some areas, women became fervent Christians and sometimes used priests and church courts to confront their husbands or male relatives, although this too does not mean that Christianity liberated women. On the other hand, in the Andes and the Philippines, where women had been important religious leaders, women opposed Catholicism more than men, and thus the missionaries focused more on boys and young males for their initial conversion efforts.

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If we cannot call Korean women’s desire to consecrate their virginity modernization, what could it be called? As I discuss in the next chapter, I would argue that women of many societies have repeated similar actions and reactions despite their spatial and temporal differences, given the choice of life as a virgin. Using Chosŏn Korea as an example, I will delve into reading the meanings of feminine virginity and pursue the answer to the question of what women obtained through a life of virginity and why they chose that life, in an effort to explore Korean female virgins’ lives without the discourse of “modernization.”

The breakout of the second nation-wide persecution in 1839 uncovered the second generation of female virgins in Chosŏn Korea, as the previous persecution had already done several decades ago. Enduring the aftermath of the persecution of 1801 as well as experiencing the recovery of their Catholic communities, both female converts and married couples continued to consecrate their virginity for religious life. The small local persecutions in the Kyŏngsang region in 1815 and in the Chŏlla area in 1827 revealed the fact that not only many female virgins but also celibate couples such as Kwŏn Theresa and Cho Myŏng-su Peter remained. The practice of perpetual virginity had still flourished among Korean female Catholics despite the brutal aftermuths of the atrocious persecution of 1801 based on the experience of the previous generation of the female Catholic virgins.

Also, Charles Dallet reports that consecrated virgin women established and ran schools to teach and guide other unmarried Catholic women between 1801 and 1839. It seems that older


virgins teaching and guiding younger virgins became a general way to nurture the next
generation of Catholic virgins. Han Sŏng-im (1813-1868), a martyr of the Persecution of the
Pyŏng’in Year of 1868, stated during her interrogation that Chŏng Chŏng-hye Elisabeth (1797-
1839), a consecrated virgin who was martyred in the Persecution of the Kihae Year of 1839,
taught her Catholicism when she was eighteen years old in 1831.199 It is unclear what she learned
from Chŏng Chŏng-hye Elisabeth, but she might have learned how to practice perpetual virginity
in Chosŏn society as well as examples from the hagiographies as a young candidate for perpetual
virginity. And this was a clear example that virgins taught the younger virgins in the Catholic
Church in Korea.

Moreover, some Catholic girls left their home in search of female virgin communities to
support their lives as consecrated virgins, risking all kinds of dangers they might confront
outside the inner quarter. Yi Si-im Anna (?-1815), a martyr of the local persecution in 1815, was
one such girl. A daughter of a yangban family, she ran away from home to avoid betrothal to a
man from another yangban family and remain a Catholic virgin. A Catholic boatman whose
family name was Pak was supposed to take her to the community. However, he raped her on the
way there and forced her to marry him.200 Successful escapes from home seem to have been rare
and many more unknown Catholic girls might have encountered fates similar to Yi Si-im Anna’s
and been completely forgotten and left in obscurity.

199 P’odoch’ŏng tŭngnok, U P’odoch’ŏng tŭngnok, Vol. 23, p.703. Chŏng Chŏng-hye Elisabeth was a daughter of
Chŏng Yak-chong Augustine, a martyr of the previous persecution in 1801, and sister of Chŏng Ha-Sang Paul.
200 Charles Dallet, Han’guk Ch’ŏnju Kyohoesa [Histoire de l’église de Corée], trans. An Ŭng-nyŏl and Ch’oe Sŏg-u,
Also, the Persecution of the *Kihae* year of 1839 provided an opportunity to demonstrate the multilateral lives and distinguished characters of the next generation of consecrated female virgins during the period between 1802 and 1839. According to the extant documents, the government detected fourteen consecrated female virgins out of a total of seventy martyrs and forty-three women.\(^1\) It is noteworthy there were also two male virgins who consecrated their virginity among the twenty-seven male martyrs during this period. They were Chŏng Ha-sang Paul, brother of aforementioned Chŏng Chŏng-hye Elizabeth, and Yi Kyŏng-sam John. Chŏng Ha-sang Paul was studying to be a priest under Bishop Imbert’s direction but was executed before he reached that goal.\(^2\)

Compared to the numbers of martyrs from other persecutions, the persecution in 1839 produced the largest number of consecrated female virgin martyrs. The fourteen consecrated female virgins who died during this period were: Yi Yŏng-hŭi Magdalena, Yi Barbara, Kim Lucia, Yi Yŏng-dŏk Magdalena, Yi In-dŏk Maria, Cho Magdalena, Wŏn kwi-im Maria, Pak Hŭi-sun Lucia, Chŏn Kyŏng-hyŏp Agatha, Kim Julietta, Chŏng Chŏng-hye Elisabeth, Kim Hyo-im Columba, Kim Hyo-ju Agnes, and Yi Agatha.\(^3\) This list reflects only women who were caught and executed in the middle of the persecution in 1839. But there must have been many more female virgins who avoided detection by the government. Kim Hyo-ju Columba and Kim Hyo-

\(^1\) Since only records of martyrs are left, there might have been more virgins who either survived, apostatized, or were not detected. The following numbers of male and female martyrs are shown in *Kihae Ilgi*.


\(^3\) Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., *Kihae Ilgi [Testimonies on Martyrs of Persecution in 1839]* (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 1985).
im Agnes had a sister, Kim Clara, who also consecrated her virginity and lived with them. She successfully fled when the police came to arrest her sisters, and her life after the persecution is unknown. Also, Kwŏn Chin-yi Agatha and Yi Kyŏng-yi Agatha were excluded from this category due to their previous marriages, which were unconsummated and annulled, respectively, by Priest Yu Pang-je Pacificus and by Bishop Imbert. I return to Kwŏn Chin-yi Agatha in chapter 7.

The Catholic female virgins detected during the persecution in 1839 lived with other women and were caught or surrendered themselves to the government collectively. The first is Yi Mae-im Teresa’s group, which had three consecrated virgins: Yi Yŏng-hŭi Magdalena, Yi Barbara and Kim Lucia.204 The second is Cho Barbara’s group, which had another three perpetual virgins: Yi Yŏng-dŏk Magdalena, Yi In-dŏk Maria, and Cho Magdalena. The third group consisted of two consecrated sisters: Kim Hyo-im Columba and Kim Hyo-ju Agnes.205 The other group was two former court ladies, who were caught together: Pak Hŭi-sun Lucia and Chŏn Kyŏng-hyŏp Agatha.206 Other female virgins were caught individually or with their families. Kim Yulidae Julietta, a former court lady and surviving virgin from the Sin’yu Persecution, was also caught by the government.207 And Chŏng Chŏng-hye Elisabeth were

204 Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., Kihae Ilgi [Testimonies on Martyrs of Persecution in 1839] (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 1985), p.75.
caught with her brother Chŏng Ha-sang Paul and her mother Yu Cecila.208 Also, Yi Agatha was caught with her parents, Yi Kwang-hŏn Augustine and Kwŏn Hŭi Barbara,209 and Wŏn kwi-im Maria tried to escape from the police but was caught.210

All of them were either neighbours, family members, or acquaintances of those who had been caught earlier. Most of the martyrs or those who were caught were residents of Seoul and had close relationships with both Fr. Yu Pang-je Pacificus and the French missionaries, in that some of them were involved in the plans for inviting the missionaries. Chŏng Chŏng-hye Elisabeth was a sister of Chŏng Ha-sang Paul, the leader of the project for requesting missionaries and also contributed to the project by sewing.211 Yi Agatha’s father, Yi Kwang-hŏn Augustine, was baptized by Fr. Yu Pang-je Pacificus and served as one of the important hoejang (catechists) for some time starting in 1836 until his execution in 1839.212

Other women gathered in Seoul one by one and lived together for personal reasons or for convenience in religious life until the persecution broke out. The first group consists of a total of eight women, who were mostly related to each other: Yi Yŏng-hŭi Magdalena, Yi Barbara, Kim Lucia, Yi Chŏng-hŭi Barbara, Hŏ Gye-im Magdalena, Yi Mae-im Theresa, and Kim Sŏng-im


Martha. In this group, Yi Yŏng-hŭi Magdalena, Yi Barbara, and Kim Lucia were consecrated virgins. Among them, five had blood ties: Yi Yŏng-hŭi Magdalena and Yi Chŏng-hŭi Barbara were sisters, and Yi Barbara was a daughter of their sister, who had died. Also, Hŏ Gye-im Magdalena was their mother and Yi Mae-im Theresa was their aunt. At first, Yi Yŏng-hŭi Magdalena escaped from her home and came to Yi Mae-im Theresa’s home in Seoul to avoid a forced marriage arranged by her father. Yi Yŏng-hŭi Magdalena had observed that Yi Chŏng-hŭi Barbara, her sister, had to surrender her wish for perpetual virginity. When she discovered that her father was discussing her marriage, she ran away and went to the home of Yi Mae-im (her aunt) in Seoul. Her sister (Yi Chŏng-hŭi Barbara) and mother (Hŏ Gye-im Magdalena) also joined them later. And Yi Barbara, Kim Sŏng-im Martha, and Kim Lucia joined them and lived together with them until they all surrendered to the police in 1839.\(^\text{213}\)

The second group was formed by two mothers and their respective daughters. In this group, Yi Yŏng-dŏk Magdalena, Yi In-dŏk Maria and Cho Magdalena were perpetual virgins. And Cho Barbara was the mother of Yi Yŏng-dŏk Magdalena and Yi In-dŏk Maria, who were sisters. And Yi Katharina was Cho Magdalena’s mother. Yi Yŏng-dŏk Magdalena was a poor Yangban woman and Cho Barbara’s eldest daughter. Although she became a Catholic along with her mother due to her maternal grandmother’s influence, her father was not a Catholic and forced her to get married when she was twenty years old. When she was twenty-seven years old, she contacted Bishop Imbert in order to obtain his permission to leave her home for perpetual virginity. He turned down her request, but she ran away with her mother and her sister in search

of the convenience of religious life. Bishop Imbert initially urged them to go home but had to arrange for the three women to live at another Catholic believer’s house, because going home meant facing certain death.214

Later, Yi Katharine and her daughter Cho Magdalena, a consecrated virgin, joined the group right before the breakout of the persecution of 1839. Even though Yi Katharine was a Catholic, she tried to persuade her daughter to get married due to concerns her daughter might have no one to depend on in the future and would face difficulties as a single woman. Cho Magdalena refused to marry a Catholic man at the age of eighteen and ran away to Seoul to avoid a forced marriage. After working as a maid and doing volunteer work for the church until the age of twenty-two, she returned to her hometown with the belief that she had passed the marriageable age and with a desire to take care of her mother. When the persecution of Catholics began in their hometown in 1838, they fled to Seoul together and Bishop Imbert sent them to the place where Yi Yŏng-dŏk Magdalena’s group resided. They were all arrested together during the persecution in 1839.215

The third group consists of consecrated virgin sisters: Kim Hyo-im Columba and Kim Hyo-ju Agnes. They lived with Kim Clara, another virgin sister, in their Catholic brother’s home and, as mentioned above, only Kim Clara succeeded in escaping when the police arrived. The sisters’ father committed suicide due to despair from his wife and children’s conversion to


Catholicism and fear of the possibility of the demise of his family.\textsuperscript{216} However, compared to other consecrated virgins, their family seems to have been affluent to enough support these sisters’ lives of perpetual virginity. Kim Benedicta (Punda), their surviving sister, testified for their beatification in 1889 that her mother attempted to married off both Kim Hyo-im Columba and Kim Hyo-ju Agnes several times. Although the sisters’ Catholic mother was affluent, she prohibited them from choosing the religious life. So, Kim Hyo-im Columba protested to her mother that the mother of Yi (Yŏng-dŏk) Magdalena and Yi (In-dŏk) Maria, who were living poorly in Tokkabi village in the Sŏgang area, had allowed them to consecrate their virginity despite their poverty.\textsuperscript{217}

The fourth group, who had previously served as court ladies, Pak Hŭi-sun Lucia and Chŏn Kyŏng-hyŏp Agatha, attempted to avoid the police but were arrested together.\textsuperscript{218} Among the martyrs from this persecution, Wŏn Kwi-im Maria, Chŏng Chŏng-hye Elisabeth, and Kim Yuridae Julietta did not live with other female Catholics.\textsuperscript{219}

Consecrated female virgins in this period show differences from their predecessors. First, there is an increase in the number of consecrated female virgins compared to previous periods. After the end of the persecution of 1801, consecrated virgins, both men and women, were highly

\textsuperscript{216} Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., \textit{Kihae Ilgi} [Testimonies on Martyrs of Persecution in 1839] (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 1985), p.486-490, p.453-460.

\textsuperscript{217} Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., \textit{Kihae Pyŏng’o Pakhae Sungyoja Chŭng’ŏnnok} [Testimonies on Martyrs during the Persecutions in Kihae and Pyŏng’o Years], vol. I (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 2004), p.154-155.

\textsuperscript{218} Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., \textit{Kihae Ilgi} [Testimonies on Martyrs of Persecution in 1839] (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 1985), p.382-383, p.443-446.

respected as honorable individuals among the hidden Catholics. Only fourteen female virgins were caught during the persecution, but many more were not detected, such as the aforementioned Kim Clara, the sister of Kim Hyo-ju Columba and Kim Hyo-im Agnes.

Also, even among married women some had once wished to be consecrated virgins but were married off either due to family pressure to marry or their families’ financial difficulties. Examples include Kim Magdalena, Yi Chŏng-hŭi Barbara (Yi Yŏng-hŭi Magdalena’s elder sister), Kim Theresa, and Kim Barbara, as we can see in Kihae ilgi.\(^{220}\) They all had wished to consecrate their virginity, but their parents forced them to marry. If a Catholic girl had to renounce her wish to consecrate her virginity, the second-best choice was getting married to a Catholic man. Yi Chŏng-hŭi Barbara had faked being a cripple for three years to avoid marriage in her aim for perpetual virginity, but finally agreed to marry to a Catholic man.\(^{221}\) Kwŏn Chin-yi Agatha and Yi Agatha could have remarried to Catholic men but decided to annul their unconsummated marriages, which had been arranged by their parents when they were quite young, in order to consecrate their virginities of their own free wills.\(^{222}\)

Also, they clearly show their self-identities as consecrated virgins during their interrogations. The consecrated virgins continued to tie up and pin their hair with the purpose of being seen as either a married women or widows to avoid unnecessary attention or suspicion. Kim Hyo-im Columba and Kim Hyo-ju Agnes decided to tie up and pin their hair when their


\(^{221}\) Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., Kihae Ilgi [Testimonies on Martyrs of Persecution in 1839] (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 1985), p.391-392.

\(^{222}\) Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., Kihae Ilgi [Testimonies on Martyrs of Persecution in 1839] (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 1985), p.467-468.
mother promised them in marriage. Wŏn Kwi-im Maria did the same so as not to be noticed by
guests at the house of her aunt, where she had been living and working. However, none of them,
according to extant documents, used code names such as Mrs. Hŏ or Mrs. O like their
predecessors.

Their self-identities as consecrated virgins appear more clearly during their
interrogations, particularly from the example of Kim Hyo-im Columba. Since the government
had already learned from the previous persecution that some of Catholic women practiced
consecration of virginity, detection of more consecrated virgins was not a shocking revelation
this time. Instead of threatening these consecrated female virgins with the death penalty,
interrogators showed more generous attitudes toward them and focused on encouraging their
apostasy. Records of the persecutions of 1839 provide similar testimonies made by witnesses of
the conversations between the interrogators and Kim Hyo-im Columba. First of all, both Kim
Hyo-im Columba and Kim Lucia freely admitted their identities as consecrated virgins.

At that time, the Chief of the Capital Police asked her (Kim Hyo-im Columba), “why did you not
get married before you reached this advanced age?” Columba answered, “it is in order to praise the
Creator of all things in the universe by keeping the body and soul pure and to save my soul on my
own. <Kim Hyo-im Columba in Kihae ilgi>223

Particularly, Kim Hyo-im Columba’s abovementioned answer surprised and pleased Bishop
Imbert. He wrote his opinion of Kim Hyo-im Columba’s statement in his journal and it was
quoted in Charles Dallet’s History of Korean Catholic Church.

223 Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., Kihae Ilgi [Testimonies on Martyrs of Persecution in 1839] (Sŏul, Korea:
Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 1985), p.455.
This is the first time for virgin women to talk openly about this issue. The virgin Catholic women, who had been caught during the last persecutions, always concealed the reasons why they had chosen to keep virginity.\textsuperscript{224}

The virgin women who were caught last April, could not have dared to clarify the reason why they remained virgins by using trickery. Instead, they just answered through the typical Korean style of lies and trickeries and said that they could not find decent spouses or had gotten too old to get married due to poverty.\textsuperscript{225}

Not all consecrated virgins dauntlessly confessed their identities as Catholic virgins, however. As Bishop Imbert states, highly respected virgins either claimed their unfortunate status had caused them to choose the life of a Catholic virgin (in the case of Chŏng Chŏng-hye Elisabeth\textsuperscript{226}) or did not clearly mention the reasons, like Kim Lucia.\textsuperscript{227}

Kim Hyo-im Columba is, again, noteworthy in that she asked for humane treatment based on national law and protections for the incarcerated female prisoners from sexual harassment by police and interrogators. When Kim Hyo-im Columba and other Catholic women were caught


\textsuperscript{226} Chŏng Chŏng-hye Elizabeth was a daughter of Chŏng Yak-jong Augustine, the church leader and a martyr of the previous persecution, and a sister of Chŏng Ha-sang Paul. \textit{Kihae ilgi} shows that she claimed that no one would take her as a spouse due to her unfortunate situation and family background. Testimonies by other witnesses also state that she had once articulated her desire to get married around the age of thirty. Even though Bishop Imbert said this type of explanation was the “typical Korean style of lies or trickeries” it might have been partly the actual situations that some Catholic virgins were facing.

\textsuperscript{227} Kim Lucia was very vocal about her loyalty to her faith, but her answer does not seem to have satisfied Bishop Imbert. This is the conversation between Kim Lucia during interrogation by the Chief of the Capital Police: (The Chief of the Capital Police said), “Tell me why you did not get married, what is the soul, and whether you are not afraid of death?” (She answered) “(…) the age of twenty something years is not too old, and please do not ask about my marriage, because it is not a matter that a lady can answer. (Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., \textit{Kihae Ilgi [Testimonies on Martyrs of Persecution in 1839]} (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 1985), p.407).
and imprisoned, guards attempted to rape or sexually harass them after the official interrogations and tortures. When she was sent to the Ministry of Punishments for more interrogations, she bravely requested justice, complaining about the mistreatment she had experienced at the hands of the Capital Police.

When the Minister (of the Ministry of Punishments) finished questioning, (Kim Hyo-im Columba) said, “Because I believe you are supposed to treat commoners as though they are your own children, I would like to talk to you about my humiliating treatment.” He said, “Talk to me.” She said, “The policemen stripped women of their clothes. In addition, they tied, hung, harassed, beat, and mocked those women and burned them. All women are the same and are supposed to be respected regardless of her class. If you kill us based on the national laws, we would accept that without any complaints. However, I am ashamed of their offenses, because they abused us in ways that are not allowed under the national laws. The minister was enraged and shouted, “Who dare treat this lady like jade in that way?” He immediately ordered the seizure of two policemen, punished them and ordered them into exile. … Afterwards, they were not abused or humiliated by the police. <A Testimony on Kim Hyo-im Columba>228

Kim Hyo-im Columba was obviously a very extraordinary individual compared to her fellow female virgins in that she represents the zenith of consciousness of identity as well as subjectivity as a Catholic virgin.

The numbers and attitudes of female Catholic virgins have led contemporary scholars of Korean history to view every aspect related to their activities by applying the discourse of “modernization,” which, again, means gender equity, women’s liberation, and anti-Confucianism. Here, the women’s groups found during the persecution of 1839—whether they had lived together or were caught together before or after the persecution—have been called Yōgyoin kongdongch’ega, “communal-families of female Catholics.” The problem is that these female communities were believed to be “anti-Confucian,” thus a modern form of family and a

modified form of singlehood with chaste marriage. Based on this perspective, these Catholic women’s communities have been seen as challenging the patriarchal Confucian morality and order based on women playing a leading role.

However, although women’s cohabitation might be seen as a modified form of singlehood, it cannot be interpreted as anti-Confucian or modernization in that it was not a new phenomenon brought by adoption of Catholicism in Chosŏn Korea. Chŏng Chi-yŏng’s research on heads of households in the family registries from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries demonstrates that it was not rare to discover widows cohabiting even when they had no family ties. Also, this form of pseudo-family among women was not a violation of the law, because the government did not punish the members of women’s communities, and indeed recorded their cohabitation as a legally acceptable form for the family registries.

The wide spread and development of Catholic villages in Chosŏn Korea enhanced the chances of Catholic women to preserve their faith after marriage by marrying Catholic men. Korean Catholics endeavored to find spouses for their children among their fellows. Under this situation, the Catholic villages in nineteenth-century Korea came to be connected together through matrimony. Therefore, most Catholics in the Catholic villages were relations by

229 Yi Mi-jin, “Chosŏn Huge Ch’ŏnjugyo Yŏsindo ūi Kajokgwan Mit Kyŏlhongwn Yŏn’gu” [A Study on Catholic Women’s Understanding of Family and Marriage in the Late Chosŏn Period.] (Master’s Thesis, Sungshin Women’s University, 1994), p.3.

230 Ch’oe Chŏng-mun, “Chosŏn Ch’ŏnjugyo Ch’ogi Yŏsindo ūi Hwaldong” [Activities of Korean Catholic Women in the Early Period of Acceptance of Catholicism in Chosŏn Korea] (Master’s Thesis, Yŏnsei University, 1999), p.44.

marriage, as they were all like one clan or family. Thus, marriage between Catholic men and women could be the best option for the Catholic women to choose to preserve their religious faith and activities after their marriages.

Nevertheless, devoted Catholic women in Chosŏn Korea still followed their desire to consecrate their virginity perpetually and even preferred to live their lives as consecrated virgins. As mentioned above, Yi Chŏng-hŭi Barbara had to compromise her wish for perpetual virginity after faking physical disability for three years, by agreeing to marry a Catholic man. Most Catholic women were either forced or had to choose to marry Catholic men, but it was still just an alternative option for them rather than the most favorable solution.

It is true that life as a consecrated virgin was preferred among Catholic women of Chosŏn Korea, but this does not mean that we should call their choice the “modernization” of Korean women. When it comes to discussing Catholic virginity as modernization, one problem persists: there were striking similarities in the practice of Catholic virginity between women of third-century Rome and nineteenth-century Korea, despite the spatial and temporal gaps. When some young female Christians of early Rome, where there was no convents yet, eschewed marriage and family, many Romans viewed this as a threat to the foundations of society and the patriarchal order. Moreover, in Europe before the rise of the medieval convent, female candidates for virginity had constantly to rely on deception—i.e. cross-dressing or ruining their

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appearance—or ran away to avoid forced marriages. Does this imply that modernization existed in Rome at the time? Or does this common movement among women in different spaces and times imply something else brought by Catholicism?

Moreover, we need to see the bigger picture of the gender politics of Catholicism on other continents, given that the missions of the Catholic Church were indeed a global enterprise. If we see the whole map of gender politics of the Catholic Church of the pre-twentieth century, the established knowledge claim on Korean Catholicism is puzzling, in that it invites the conclusion that in the whole world the Catholic Church attempted to liberate only Korean women from the constraints of patriarchy. In the Western societies, feminists have argued that the Catholic Church has been an androcentric, misogynistic, patriarchal, sexist religion. It has rejected women from the priesthood based on the beliefs in the God-given inferiority of women and their subordinate position, thus consolidating the Church’s strongly hierarchical institution dependent on a male clergy. Returning to the former colonies of the West, we can also see that the first task of the Western missionaries or other Christian officials was to impose European-style patriarchy based on monogamous marriage, legalization of concubinage, male-headed households, and limited (or no) divorce.


Also, we need to keep in mind that not all women of the non-Christian societies welcomed these Christian endeavors to impose a new gender system; indeed, these attempts produced two distinct reactions. On one hand, in some areas, women became fervent Christians and sometimes used priests and church courts to confront their husbands or male relatives, although this too does not mean that Christianity liberated women. On the other hand, in the Andes and the Philippines, where women had been important religious leaders, women opposed Catholicism more than men, and thus the missionaries focused more on boys and young males for their initial conversion efforts.²³⁹

If we cannot call Korean women’s desire to consecrate their virginity modernization, what could it be called? As I discuss in the next chapter, I would argue that women of many societies have repeated similar actions and reactions despite their spatial and temporal differences, given the choice of life as a virgin. Using Chosŏn Korea as an example, I will delve into reading the meanings of feminine virginity and pursue the answer to the question of what women obtained through a life of virginity and why they chose that life, in an effort to explore Korean female virgins’ lives without the discourse of “modernization.”

Chapter 4: Reading Catholic Virginity Without the Discourse of “Modernization”

4.1 Problems of Virginity as Women’s Subjectivity

It is a complicated project to read women’s diverse practices of subjectivity through virginity among many other forms of performances of women’s sexualities, particularly in the light of the premodern period without the discourse of modernization. Virginity, as one’s subjectivity, is gendered because the means, goals, and methods to perform it were imperatively different for women and men. Thus, “virginities are multiple” in that there are various ways of “doing” sexual purity: secular virginity is not identical to religious virginity, nor male virginity to female virginity.240 Performers of virginity historically have developed diverse dimensions to be performed as a practice based on the performer’s gender and social status.

Women’s practice of subjectivity by “doing” virginity requires different ways of approach when the agent is performing it in the secular environment and in the religious institutions. When it comes to the secular, their subjectivity can be demonstrated more visibly, because the direction of their performance fits with the understanding of liberal feminism, because the agents clearly resist the constrains of the patriarchal norm, which opposes their life decision. However, women’s practice of subjectivity in the institutions of traditional religions causes different issues in that those systems have the authority to permit the agents’ life choice

and, thus, women seems to be subordinate to the authority, which make their subjectivity often invisible.

Here, traditional religions refer to those that promote strict gender relationships based on male headship and women’s submission such as Catholicism, conservative Protestantism, Orthodox Judaism, and some sects of Islam.\textsuperscript{241} As Kelsy Burke points out, these religions tend to emphasize differences between men and women, assuming supremacy and privilege of the male roles, leadership, activities and ethics.\textsuperscript{242} For this reason, “mapping the dynamic pattern of religion and gender” requests more careful endeavors, because the lines of connection are often complex, subtle and invisible when in comes to delve into the issues between religions and gender.\textsuperscript{243}

Therefore, two different perspectives have ben arisen in the research on religious women of medieval Europe. One side sees the female renunciants with the positive view, focusing more on the fact that their practice of perpetual celibacy and virginity liberated women from constraints of the established womanhood.\textsuperscript{244} Another side pays attention more to the reality that lives of women celibates were still constrained by traditional beliefs about women both of the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{241} Kelsy C. Burke, Women’s Agency in Gender-Traditional Religions: A Review of Four Approaches, Sociology Compass Vol. 6 No.2, 122-133, 2012, p.122.
\item \textsuperscript{242} Kelsy C. Burke, Women’s Agency in Gender-Traditional Religions: A Review of Four Approaches, Sociology Compass Vol. 6 No.2, 122-133, 2012, p.122.
\end{itemize}
convent and the society. However, it is also noteworthy that even the latter do not completely deny that women obtained a certain degree of freedom from reproductive social roles which they were expected to perform.

This also reflects the complicated side of performing virginity as women’s subjectivity in diverse social conditions. First of all, women’s choice of life as a perpetual virgin can be fit into the concept of autonomy of the liberal feminism, which sees agency as the ability of an agent to “act without constraint in the world.” The widely-shared feminist assumption is that there is something inborn to women that should incline them to resist practices and values that those conveyed by non-liberal norms. This notion of individual autonomy is a philosophical product of the Enlightenment, which have been developing for the last three hundred years, leading understandings like women’s right and the abolition of slavery, which consists of modern concept of women’s liberation. Facing constraints from their families or the societies – e.g. forced arranged marriage –, women, who decided to consecrate their virginity perpetually, resist by escaping from those restrictions, manifesting their will to live or die based on their own


choice. Since its origin from the Enlightenment, this interpretation regarding women’s autonomy in the light of modernism as well as the liberal feminism.

However, women’s practice of virginity as a form of subjectivity requires much more complex when it comes to discussing women’s position in the institutions of the traditional religions and, especially, of the pre-modern period in the aspect of the control over women. From early on mostly it was religions which provided both men and women the formats and languages to perform virginity for their subjectivities. Very commonly, gendered and religious virginity, as mentioned above, were interwoven and benefitted mostly female performers, who faced more difficulties “doing” virginity under the secular environment. This benefit of becoming a female virgin in the religious institutions such as Buddhist Sangha or Catholic convents also invited strict control as well as submission to the clerical authority. Discerning the way of the “doing” virginity requires more complicated views to analyze the different performance of female virgins’ subjectivity when they made subaudition to the male authority as a means for performance of their autonomy instead of resisting against it.

In this case, we need to pay attention to Saba Mahmood’s theorization of the practice of Muslim women’s subjectivity in the institution of the Islam for discussion of Catholic virgins’ practice of autonomy in the system of Catholic Church. Problematizing the feminist literature’s views on resistance as an unproblematic, universal and natural predisposition, Mahmood discusses the agency of women “who may be socially, ethically, or politically, in different to the goal of opposing hegemonic norms.”249 Witnessing female participants of the piety movement in

Egypt in her field work, Mahmood finds out that submission to an external authority functions as an indispensable condition to achieve self-realization and, thus, can be regarded as a form of their performance of subjectivity.

Therefore, she points out that acts that resist norms and inhabitation in the norms both can be a one of multiple forms of performing agency.²⁵⁰ Those who decide to “inhabit” in the norm regard that seemingly subordinate acts – e.g. wearing the veils, casting down their eyes to address men, and showing shyness or humility – as a means to achieve their self-realization as an ethical self in the system of the religious institution. For this reason, on one hand, those religious women decide to work or inhabit within the religious system through subordination to the male authority of during the pre-modern and modern periods. On another hand, some of them, at the same time, have resisted against the social restrictions based on the male authority of patriarchal control, which prohibit them from achieving their self-development.

One thing I should clarify here is that these women were not passive victims of the male dominance of the religious institutions despite their subordination to the male authority. Saba Mahmood’s theorization of religious women’s subjectivity entails the possibility of resistance to the religious institutions as well as the male authority, if they turn into an obstacle of their self-realization. Saba Mahmood’s theorization of female agency through the “ethical self-formation” is actually developed based on Michel Foucault’s notion of the ethical subject.²⁵¹ This concept actually encompasses the consideration how ethical action is connected to individual freedom

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and agency when developing the virtuous self. Mahmood’ theorization did not go further to discuss the possibility of the agent’s resistance in front of obstacles for the ultimate goal for the ethical self-formation. However, Foucault’s concept of the ethical subject discusses the validity of resistance against the obstacles for the ultimate goal for the self-realization by the subject, who achieves freedom and, thus obtains ability to resist obstacles.

In this chapter, I will argue the exertions of subjectivities by religious women, who chose virginity as a mean to resist against the male-dominated social norms to obtain their autonomy based on Saba Mahmood’s theorization. Thus, the later sections of this chapter will touch upon their decisions to subordinate to the male authority within the religious institution for their self-realization through history of the West and the East despite their fierce resistance against the society before discussing Korean female virgins. However, I will not argue religious women’s practice of virginity as their subjectivity in this chapter. This discussion will come in Chapter 7 when I deal with development of Korean female virgins’ subjectivity as the ethical subject more in detail.

4.2 Meaning of Women’s Virginity in Patriarchal Societies

Women’s sexuality has been linked to the creation of various ideologies, taboos, regulations and discourses in human societies throughout history. The notion of female virginity was one of the most creative, effective, and useful tools for regulating and controlling women’s

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sexuality. While it is unknown exactly where and when the concept originated, it has been argued that the notion and importance of virginity were imposed on women about two millennia ago mainly within patriarchal societies the world over.254

This situation began because most patriarchal societies began imposing a higher value on the virginity of brides. Even though virginity is a gender-neutral concept, much more value has been placed on female than male virginity. Ottokar Nemecek argues that it is mostly male-dominated, patrilineal, and patriarchal societies which were inclined to place the highest value on female virginity and impose chastity on young women in the process of sexual morality building. He also argues that matrilocal or matrilineal societies, on the contrary, show little concern or almost none at all with women’s pre-marital sexual experience or the intactness the hymen. Moreover, in such societies pre-marital loss of virginity has no impact on women’s social and economic status either.255 This could be connected with the fact that female genital mutilation, virginity tests, and female initiation rites are more commonly found in societies with strong fraternal interest groups.256 Families in these patriarchal societies increasingly placed tremendous value on women’s pre-nuptial sexual purity to increase their value as brides.

In this sense, the obsession with female pre-marital sexual purity or virginity is a matter of patriarchy, or “a matter between men,” which locates the prestige of a man “between the legs of a woman.”257 The original function of marriage was not a union of individuals based on love.

Rather, in most societies in the world it traditionally functioned more as an economic and political institution or contract for exchange of resources and creating alliances among families, whether in the seventeenth-century West or the nineteenth-century East. When the patriarchs of two families create such a contact, the patriarch of the bridal side is obliged to insure verifiability of paternity for the groom’s family. Since in patriarchies property is inherited through paternal lines, legitimacy of offspring and the uncontaminated continuity of the man’s family line are crucial. Therefore, the importance of virginity was imposed on female bodies as “a marker of men’s possession of women” or “market value for their marriageability and precious asset on the marriage market.”

The value of a woman’s virginity is valid until her husband “disposes” of it in the process of consummation of the marriage. As only descendants born in wedlock were seen as “legitimate,” women’s premarital virginity was a prerequisite for marriage. Thus, a bride had to prove her value as a commodity due to her lack of experience of premarital sex and her sexual purity through surrendering her virginity to prove the unblemished paternity of her first born. The social role of virginity as a valuable commodity comes to an end there.

Moreover, the notion of women’s virginity contributed to sustaining and reproducing the patriarchy. A bride’s virginity had several meanings to her husband and his family beyond just

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proving legitimate paternity, including transformation from her father’s virginal daughter to her husband’s chaste wife. As Blank puts it, a woman’s premarital virginity indicated her good upbringing and her trustworthiness as a wife with a “symbolic guarantee” of her behaviour and value system, which would put the priorities of her family, her future husband, and her community ahead of her own desires. Thus, a woman’s virginity had come to bear the male desire to control the purity of his paternity as well as the behaviour of his women and children. In this sense, the notion of female virginity became a symbol of successful patriarchy as a whole and helped patriarchy reproduce itself.

It was Christianity, which widely spread virginity for both men and women with sophisticated theology and supportive communities from the first century CE, that transformed and developed the notion to its zenith. Early Christians followed the teachings on the Christian concept of virginity or celibacy under their strong belief in Christ’s imminent Second Coming during the first century CE. Although this faith soon faded, celibate life among early Christians was still widely performed, to the extent that they eventually built monasteries and nunneries. In nunneries, women in the Christian West could carry out a subtle revolt against the cultural definitions of their role in marriage and household. Also, from the third century onwards society eventually accepted the choice of virginal or unmarried life for religious vocations, not just by young men but also by women.

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The concept of Christian virginity, which also includes celibacy and monasticism, became an important litmus test to distinguish Catholics from Protestants during and after the Era of religious Reformation from the fourteenth century onward.264 The Roman Catholic Church established priestly celibacy as a doctrine from the Lateran Councils in the early twelfth century after long and considerable debates and tensions within the Church.265 Protestants vehemently attacked the Catholic emphasis on virginity and monasticism because they considered these “Catholic elements” claimed the moral superiority of clergy to laity. In reaction, they accentuated importance of marriage as a factor for the egalitarian doctrine of equality between clergy and laity.266 While Protestant societies abolished clerical celibacy and monasticism, the Catholic Church, in response to the Protestant attacks, reaffirmed the superiority of virginity over marriage and the importance of religious seclusion for women at the Council of Trent.267

Nevertheless, female virginity itself was still commonly one of the most important feminine values for Protestant morality as well. Protestant critiques of virginity, despite their passionate opposition to nunneries, were mainly aimed at male clergy and their abuses of power, not at female virginity in general. Indeed, the Protestant Church reinforced premarital virginity


as a female virtue, which shares the ideals of female femininity and virtue with Catholic models.\textsuperscript{268} It was the concept of perpetual virginity for religious vocations which was rejected and ultimately completely abandoned in Protestant societies to distinguish themselves from their Catholic counterparts. However, pre-marital female virginity in the secular world was still considered a crucial indicator of a woman’s value.

Since women’s virginity under patriarchal norm functioned as something to be owned, traded, bought, and sold, those who failed to maintain it were often referred as “damaged goods.”\textsuperscript{269} Even though it was society which imposed upon women value as a marriageable commodity though virginity, it was every individual woman who carried the responsibility to protect her purity prior to her marriage. Since she was considered to have violated her father’s patriarchal right to control the women under his roof, a woman who lost her virginity before marriage suffered a catastrophic decrease in her value as a commodity; this also sometimes resulted in her killing as a matter of (men’s) “honor.” This signifies men’s right and obligation to punish women who evade their control.\textsuperscript{270}

The knowability of female prenuptial sexual chastity thus becomes tremendously important, and led many societies to devise ways to prove the sexual “purity” of female bodies, and to guarantee that a woman’s virginity was “taken” by the right actor under the accepted conditions (i.e. marriage). Societal anxieties over young women’s virginity were derived from


uncertainty. Although bleeding at the moment of first sexual intercourse has often been seen as a proof, more convincing and visible proof of feminine virginity was needed. These endeavors finally resulted in the controversial discovery of the hymen in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Western society, which is still utilized as a primary physiological proof for feminine virginity.

In this respect, the societal character of virginity is both exclusively heterosexual and also exclusively feminine, in that the sign or proof of virginity has been used unilaterally to judge women’s sexual experience or inexperience. Women’s virginity has been defined by its loss via penetration by a penis within a heterosexual marriage, and the value of male virginity was measured differently. Thus, the renunciant male body has instead usually been labeled as “continent” or “celibate” rather than “virginal,” even within the Catholic Church.

In addition, in contrast to female virginity, male virginity has never been an indication of suitability for marriage. Virginity, therefore, is socially feminine and heterosexual. When a woman refuses to surrender her virginity to a man and decides to retain it, it suddenly creates a subversive power for her as a symbol of the woman’s autonomy, which proclaims that she is the owner of her own sexuality. In the next chapter I will discuss the meanings of feminine virginity for women themselves for further arguments on women’s obtaining autonomy and empowerment by subverting the social meaning of feminine virginity.

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271 Anke Bernau, Virgins: A Cultural History (London [England]: Granta, 2007), p.2; Hanne Blank, Virgin: The Untouched History (New York: Bloomsbury USA: Distributed to the trade by Holtzbrinck, 2007, p.42-52: Understanding of the hymen had existed since the Greco-Roman period. However, it was Vesalius who confirmed its existence by undertaking dissections of two women (a middle-aged nun and a seventeen-year-old hunchbacked girl) in early 1544 in the university town of Pisa, Italy.

4.3 **Meaning of Virginity for Women themselves and their “Doing” Virginity**

The patriarchal attitude toward feminine virginity strongly affected women’s understanding of their own bodies and sexualities, and as a result women too have highly valued their own prenuptial virginity. Women in patriarchal societies have been carefully educated on the importance of sexual purity as an absolute feminine virtue. Girls grow up observing social judgement and treatment of so-called “good” (that is, sexually chaste) and “bad” (promiscuous) women, based on the notion of sexual “purity.” The social standard of women’s sexual purity had come to create in women themselves to a strong attitude toward both their own virginity and its loss.

Women of the pre-modern societies of both the East and the West walked similar paths, because those societies commonly imposed marriage and domestic life as the only choice for women. Their lives could be demarcated by two phases: childhood and adulthood. Marriage was the crucial line between childhood and adulthood in a woman’s life, when she would leave her natal family and enter a new kinship network in her husband’s family in order to assume her social roles of wife, mother, and daughter-in-law. Since prior to the modern period women obtained these social roles officially and legally only through proper marriage, marriage was an inevitable and imperative life path a woman ought to take at least once in her life.

In this respect, the gendered notion of virginity has more complicated meanings for females than for males. In their wide research on the meanings of loss of virginity for both men and women in literature, myths and psychological interviews, Holtz and Kulish found that cross-culturally and cross-temporally women commonly show feelings of negation related with loss of
virginity. The researchers sum up women’s common attitude toward their own virginity and its loss in the word “nevermore.”

Sybille Yates also discusses that women, as both the main object and subject of defloration, come to possess a special valuation of their virginity and its loss which is not a mere reflection of men’s views. They consider their own virginity as a symbol of their childhood and the defloration as a threshold which when crossed transforms them from girl to woman. Also, the loss of their virginity becomes a symbol of their perpetual loss of childhood and the passage to adult sexuality. Therefore, Yates also argues that women come to have fears of defloration and think that they are going to lose something precious to themselves forever, believing a wound is left. They also think they are essentially different after their defloration: “never the same again.”

It was this special meaning on feminine virginity and fear of losing it that led some women to eventually reject crossing the threshold and surrendering their virginity. Thus, there were girls who wanted to reject crossing the threshold and retain their virginity by avoiding

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marriage. This become a serious issue for girls of the premodern patriarchal society, because the society would not allow them to evade marriage or childbearing.

We can hear this fear in the voices of Buddhist nuns in Hiroko Kawanami’s research in Myanmar. Kawanami notices “a high level of almost neurotic anxiety about being thrust into the adult world” in her interview with nuns and young novitiates in Myanmar.277 She pays particular attention to a common fear among teenage candidates for Buddhist ordination: their air of existential angst from their growing sexual awareness, their confusion in dealing with many of its social and physical implications, their confusion over the demands of and expectations imposed upon their own bodies, and their perception of the “dangerous” implications of female sexuality. Having never been sexually active, those informants already demonstrated the “phallocentric” view dominant in the patriarchal society, providing a clue to understanding the notion of “fear” these girls were implicitly referring to.

It is noteworthy that these girls aspired to receive Buddhist ordination due to their vague anxiety and fear over entering adult sexuality and expected marital life based on indirect experiences. Their prime and immediate motive to be nuns was “fear”: anxiety of possibly encountering some “danger” of life as well as socially prescribed womanhood, which they might experience after getting married. However, strikingly, most of them could not even articulate what exactly they were going against despite their strong desire to pursue a monastic vocation as an alternative to the conventional life of laywomen to be independent and self-determinant.278


Their accounts were usually based on their own indirect experiences of appalling events they had encountered, or horror stories they had heard from female relatives, which gave Kawanami an impression that they seemed to refuse to grow up.279

This fear and anxiety led these girls to articulate their yearning to cutting the patriarchal constraints based on social expectations through their choice of the ascetic life. Kawanami notes that particularly older nuns commonly showed a strong sense of wanting to “break free” from the constraints of patriarchal society, where their options in life were limited. They consistently considered the only option of life choice as the very reason of their expected sufferings: married life, painful childbirth, marital problems like domestic violence, a vague (at times strong) fear of having to engage in sex. The notion of “liberation” included the aspiration to become free from both the social and the reproductive pressures of being female.280 Kawanami argues that joyous sentiments and a similar sense of relief that we can detect in the verses of Therigatha recited by ancient female renunciants can also be recognized in the contemporary accounts of Myanmar nuns, suggesting that patriarchal issues surrounding women’s lives have not changed fundamentally since the time of the Buddha.281

In this respect, a women’s rejection of surrendering her virginity can be a form of performance of human sexuality, which is rather “doing” than simply “becoming,” in that they

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280 Kawanami Hiroko, Renunciation and Empowerment of Buddhist Nuns in Myanmar-Burma: Building a Community of Female Faithful, Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013, p.52.

281 Kawanami Hiroko, Renunciation and Empowerment of Buddhist Nuns in Myanmar-Burma: Building a Community of Female Faithful, Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013, p.52.
are facilitating it as a certain agenda. The “doing” of virginity begins when a woman decides to remain a virgin and refuse to surrender to a man, constituting her own identity based on sexual abstinence, particularly if the society places importance on female prenuptial virginity. Under this situation, “doing virginity” allows a woman to practice a certain form of performance in order to assert her autonomy as an act to proclaim ownership of her own body and sexuality. All individuals—both men and women—have a virginal body until they have their first sexual experience. But merely being born with a virginal body is not “performing” virginity. It becomes “performance” when an individual decides to facilitate her virginity as a ground for certain purposes. As a result, performers “doing” feminine virginity have commonly had to confront anxiety and repugnance from patriarchal societies, which sees them as a threat to the social order and an abnormal or pathological existence.

The aforementioned life progression of women functioned as a strategy to protect the foundation of patriarchal norm, guaranteeing men’s sexual pleasure and hiding the scene from the “good women” under their roofs. On one hand, the society confined their daughters and wives in the inner chambers in order to keep them sexually intact to be virginal bride or chaste wives to guarantee the clarity of the paternity. Sexually “pure” “good girls” were supposed to ensure healthy reproduction of patriarchal system. On the other hand, promiscuous women were stigmatized as sexually impure “bad girls.” Even though respectable men of the patriarchy could enjoy “impure” women’s service for their sexual pleasure, the stigma could never be lifted from those women: prostitutes, courtesans, or female entertainers like geisha in Japan, kisaeng in Korea, or jìnǚ in China. If a woman “performs promiscuity” inside the inner chamber, she could be either punished or executed under the accusation of disturbing the social—actually,
patriarchal—order. These impure women had to be concealed from the “good girls” in the inner chamber or to be expelled.

However, paradoxically, women “doing virginity” share a common ground with women “doing promiscuity” in that they can possibly blur and disturb the patriarchal order by proclaiming ownership of their own sexuality and controlling it by themselves. Therefore, despite their differences, both were considered dangerous in most patriarchal societies such as in the Greco-Roman West and the Confucian East. When a woman rejects surrendering her own virginity, this traditional tool for maintenance of patriarchal system is ironically transformed into a weapon for her to engage in her exertion of her agency against the social norm, which attempts to control her sexuality via the marriage system. A woman’s virginal body is supposed to belong to her father and becomes a place to set his patriarchal control and negotiation. However, when a woman refuses to give her virginity up she becomes the owner and controller of her own body and sexuality, circumventing patriarchal authority. Thus, although doing virginity and promiscuity had been presented as polar opposites of women’s sexuality, they ironically share a common ground in that both are perceived as difficult to control and are therefore potentially disorderly and threatening.282

Hence, the patriarchy allowed only a very minimized space for the women who decided to keep their virginity perpetually by adopting religious norms and rhetoric, just as they opened a small space to permit female promiscuity. The religious practice of renunciation had long been

4.4 Boycotting the Wombs under the Religious Spaces

The performance of virginity through rejection of social demands on their fertile bodies empowered those who chose this “exceptional” style of life by providing motives to raise their voices to request freedom (or dynamics) for the choice on their own. By performing virginity these women could fulfill their diverse goals, which were not allowed for those in the “inner chamber.” This was particularly crucial for the women of the pre-twentieth century, since they had fewer life choices outside the boundaries of the patriarchal control.

Mostly it was religions that historically provided institutions and social permission for certain groups of women to preserve their virginity either temporarily or perpetually, allowing them special privileges based on their sexual purity. Before the Christian era, female virginity had long been an important subject of auspicious religious authority; the examples of the Pythia, priestesses of Apollo, and the Vestals of the Rome, the virginal priestesses who served Vesta, the goddess of the hearth and home, show their important religious and social roles based on veneration of their sexual purity. Additionally, the bodies of virginal prepubescent girls had been demanded as the most powerful human sacrifice to offer to the appropriate gods in times of

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283 Hanne Blank, Virgin: The Untouched History (New York: Bloomsbury USA: Distributed to the trade by Holtzbrinck, 2007), p.139.


greatest crisis or devastating natural disasters. These examples show the long history of faith in the mysterious power of sexual purity, particularly imposed more onto females than males.

However, it is the Christian concept of virginity and the Buddhist sangha which have provided women the systemized languages, institutions, and ideologies to escape the social demands to push them into the marriage system. There had always appeared groups of women who rejected being married off and retained their virginity perpetually in both Eastern and Western societies. Most of these religions highly valued sexual purity for men as well as women and commonly requested vows of celibacy. However, even though these religions did not impose virginity as the prerequisite for vows, religious women—particularly when they chose to take vows at a very young age—identified vows of celibacy with those of virginity.

It is particularly noteworthy that the aforementioned discussions are also commonly applicable especially to the case of Buddhist nuns of contemporary Asia. These Buddhist nuns provide abundant and living rhetoric and ideas to share and compare with their Catholic counterparts. Like their Christian counterparts of the pre-modern periods it is difficult or almost impossible to access the Buddhist nuns’ voices directly. However, the interviews in recent research on Buddhist nuns throughout Asia from Tibet to Sri Lanka show the same recurring motivations and purposes for their life choice as ascetic renunciants. It is particularly clear when an unmarried young girl chooses to retain her virginity, which might have been practiced among female renunciants for thousand years.

Becoming a Buddhist nun did not mean obtaining total liberation or high social mobility even in Buddhist-dominated societies. Rather it required rigid observation of strict religious

regulations. Also, the position of a nun, even in predominantly Buddhist countries such as Myanmar or Thailand, was socially disparaged, not welcomed, and generally considered “a digression from the traditional notion of femininity.”\textsuperscript{287} They had to face and overcome opposition from their families—especially their parents—about their choice to abandon the “normal” life of wife and mother which the society expected from them. In contrast to their male counterparts, becoming Buddhist nuns did not promise to lift their social status or to earn them privilege: indeed, they retained lower status than their male counterparts in the monastic hierarchy. Despite these gendered disadvantages, there were nevertheless women who chose life as Buddhist renunciants.\textsuperscript{288}

Especially, it is striking that although Buddhism, unlike Christianity, does not put a specific value or importance on virginity for monks or nuns, Buddhist women chose to become nuns by retaining their virginity or to avoid losing it. Monica Lindberg Falk explains that when a young girl decides to receive ordination, her goal is to become a nun with a virgin body. Although unlike Catholicism, Buddhist monastic life does not place value on virginity, Falk finds that her interviewees commonly express the importance of their virginity, treasuring their virgin bodies as intact, and a self-imposed informal higher status on their own lack of experience of married life wanting to be “clean” and to live a “clean” life.\textsuperscript{289}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{287} Hiroko Kawanami, \textit{Renunciation and Empowerment of Buddhist Nuns in Myanmar-Burma: Building a Community of Female Faithful} (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013), p.51-52.
\item \textsuperscript{288} Monica Lindberg Falk, \textit{Making Fields of Merit: Buddhist Female Ascetics and Gendered Orders in Thailand} (Copenhagen, Denmark: NIAS Press, 2007), p.53.
\item \textsuperscript{289} Monica Lindberg Falk, \textit{Making Fields of Merit: Buddhist Female Ascetics and Gendered Orders in Thailand} (Copenhagen, Denmark: NIAS Press, 2007, p.50.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Also, monastic life for Buddhist nuns was perceived to be rewarding as it gave them a chance to achieve a better rebirth in the afterlife, which was also the common dream among Christian virgins. Becoming a Buddhist nun enhanced their spiritual well-being, providing them with a kind of assurance that they would fare well in their next life. And for that reason alone, many of their initial fears and anxieties were taken care of. Moreover, those who chose renunciatory life could find safety and companionship from other ascetic peers in their religious female community. While women will always be subject to the law of patriarchal control, nuns have both freedom and safety within the company of women.

Similarly, the Christian notion of perpetual virginity and institution of monasteries have provided women a legitimate way to evade marriage and to “do” virginity wherever Catholicism reached. Entering a nunnery—either Buddhist or Catholic—convents had been the only legitimate way to escape from marriage for girls despite their lower status in the hierarchy of the convents. Like the Buddhist sangha, Catholic monasteries had also required vows of celibacy—not virginity—of candidates for both the priesthood and the nunhood. Nevertheless, the concept of perpetual virginity was more cherished among women within and without the convents and thus nuns were naturally considered as retaining their virginity in perpetuity.

In the case of Christian virgins, they also realized their desire to keep their virginity when they saw that marriage, which required surrendering virginity, was imminent. The hagiographies


292 Hanne Blank, Virgin: The Untouched History (New York: Bloomsbury USA: Distributed to the trade by Holtzbrinck, 2007), p.16.
and biographies of Christian females of the both East and the West have commonly shown that many proclaim their desire to retain their virginity and actually perform their decision when they are faced with enforced betrothal or the appearance of potential grooms. As Bynum puts it, it was the presence, not the absence, of a perspective bridegroom which led many women to activate the desire for perpetual chastity. When those women decided to go against the expectations of their own societies, consecration of their virginity not only became the best excuse for refusal of betrothal but also provided an alternative way of living their lives.

Thus, the concept of consecration of virginity functioned as a tool for a group of women to fulfill their desire not to cross the threshold from “sexually pure girl” to “sexually adult woman” by rejecting the marriage system. It functioned as a tool for pubescent girls to articulate their tremendous fear of loss of virginity and to fulfill a desire to avoid surrendering it. Borrowing the form of religious life and activities, they found a way to avoid the fear of defloration and choose a life not determined by male expectations, especially concerning sex.

As the aforementioned Buddhist nuns put it, they could be free from all burdens and duties related to marriage: potential brutality and unhappiness from married life, the deadly dangers of childbirth, the arduousness of childrearing, and even despair from the death of a child. Traditionally, a girl’s crossing over the threshold toward marriage and sexual adulthood implied that she would enter the real chapter of her life as a woman with the expected “normal” womanly life, which her society imposed on and demanded from her. The notion of perpetual virginity


offered a woman an ideal life free from the requirement to reproduce and, indirectly, from subordination to men. This is precisely where Catholicism struck, and why it had such an appeal for women.295 Thus, ascetic renunciation was attractive to many women even from the period of the early Christian Church because it offers them control over their sexuality by rejecting social demands on their fertile bodies, which is related to the conventions of marriage and motherhood.296

This freedom from “normal” and “expected” womanly roles enabled those women who chose the celibate life to pursue achievements for self-development which were difficult or impossible for married women. Life as a celibate woman in religious institutions like the convents did not mean total freedom from all social regulations, however. The monastic life imposed rather strict duties and regulations in return for providing life outside of the marriage system. But it still offered foundations and opportunities “to think, read” and, presumably, write by allowing them to escape the demands of the body—of sex, pregnancy, and childbirth.297

Also, the decision to remain virgin empowered women as agents with control over their own bodies and sexualities by thwarting social intervention. Bonnie MacLachlan explains that virginity is always closely allied with power despite the cultural variations in the social meaning and understanding of human virginities, which would be magnified when the others—either


seducers or parents eager to marry off a daughter—are frustrated, which, in turn, becomes
symbolic of something bigger. 298

Choosing consecration of their virginity provided social admiration as well as moral
superiority through sexual purity in certain religious groups, especially when the religion
permitted the ascetic life as an ideal way of living for women. Even though religious virginity
provided one way to escape the patriarchal family system, for women who chose religious
vocation as their life path it was not simply a means of escape from family. Anke Bernau argues
that the sexual purity represented by virginity became increasingly central to the way in which a
religious identity was understood and how it was displayed to the outside world for those who
chose to follow a religious vocation. She also says that clerical celibacy (ideally virginity) has
become a main marker of moral and spiritual superiority and difference of Catholic priests,
monks and nuns from those living secular lives, since the Gregorian Reform of the Church (mid-
eleventh century) exhorted them to remain celibate or virginal. 299

As a result, both men and women considered it as a positive and compelling religious
ideal, and virginal woman who joined the religious vocation were seen as being set apart from
the world by intact boundaries and untouched by ordinary flesh. Especially the Christian virgins,
who were destined for higher consummation as brides of Christ, were highly admired inside the
religious group and could have superiority over lay women. 300

298 MacLachlan, Bonnie. “Introduction.” In Virginity Revisited: Configurations of the Unpossessed Body, edited by


300 Caroline Walker Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women
Virginity as a religious vocation promised the virgins heavenly life after their death as a reward for the difficult life of an ascetic. Entering convents or joining lay ascetics never meant absolute liberation for both men and women. Rather it demanded obedience to and endurance of the strict regulations of the religious institutions, requiring poverty, intense labour, and religious service as a way of serving God. Having escaped from their families, the virginal religious were put under the absolute authority and hierarchy of the Church. However, female virgins were also guaranteed an angelic afterlife as a reward for enduring the hard demands of ascetic life alongside their male counterparts.

Moreover, women’s collective practice of female virginity offered them communities, which enabled them to overcome the fear of leaving the safety net of the patriarchal control, and the companionship of colleagues who shared the same way of life as an alternative family. There had always existed single women and widows, outsiders of the patriarchal rule, who had to be left out of or expelled from the marriage system for various reasons. Most of them were unseeable and invisible, treated as abnormal or suspicious under the patriarchal norm. Standing alone outside the patriarchal control was much harsher for these women, whether the choice was voluntary or not. They faced much more peril due to lack of money or social protection. Religious institutions (either Buddhist or Christian) have provided them a way to survive, be protected, and thrive for their own personal goals by providing social roles, positions, and communities where such women gathered, shared companionship, and survived together in the form of an alternative family.

In this manner, renunciation through religions—narrowly both Christianity and Buddhism—provided the opportunity for women to meet their aspirations to escape the socially expected roles of the patriarchal society, especially during the long period when women had very
limited choices. It might be impossible simply to generalize or to conclude that girls under strong patriarchal norm preferred consecration of virginity due to lack of choice in their lives. Nevertheless, it is true the celibate life allowed them to be free from their fear and anxiety regarding marital life, childbirth, and adult sexuality.

Catholic women of Chosŏn Korea may have chosen or preferred to live as sexual renunciants for the reasons I have discussed so far. Therefore, their choice of perpetual virginity should not be processed through the discourse of modernization, which has distorted their muffled voices in the documents. There is another factor that demonstrates that “doing Catholic virginity” must not be interpreted as equalizing or liberating the women of Chosŏn Korea through modernization. It seems that the choice of life as a perpetual virgin provided enormous empowerment to virginal women. However, it actually bestowed limited empowerment, particularly to those female virgins in the Catholic convent. In the next section, I will explore why the Catholic way of doing virginity came to endow only limited empowerment to those who chose lives of perpetual virginity by delving into the engendering notion of Catholic virginity for women to prove its adoption should and could not be “modernization.”

4.5 Doing Catholic Virginity: Its limitation of Women’s Empowerment

When it comes to the consecration of women’s virginity in Christianity, life as an ascetic renunciant offered only limited empowerment, especially due to the androcentric root of the notion of Christian virginity: mind/flesh dualism. A woman’s performance of perpetual virginity in Christianity is not exactly compatible or interchangeable with the modern concept of women’s performance of their agency to break free from social oppressions in many ways. Above all, the
concept of Christian virginity was originally established via rather misogynistic theology rather than from a desire to liberate women.

The misogyny related to women’s virginity is based on patristic dualism, which assimilated male-female dualism into soul-body dualism.\textsuperscript{301} The basic notion of Christian virginity had been developed mostly during Christianity’s first four centuries by Church Fathers like Ambrose, Jerome, Tertullian, and Augustine. Holding harsh views of any sexual activity both within and without marriage, they elaborated theological frames based on their views regarding the carnal, lustful, seductive, evil, and weak-willed nature of women.\textsuperscript{302} They taught Christians that women were the source of lust and jealousy, which pitted men against each other.\textsuperscript{303} They founded the concept of Christian virginity on the basis of the assumption that the sex drive was stronger in the female. So, the female was understood as being both morally weaker and more frequently adulterous than the male, considering her entire being was identified with the reproductive function.\textsuperscript{304} Here women are symbolized as lustful seductresses who endanger holy men’s will for a celibate life and for their sacred religious mission.

This assimilation of gendered dualism in patristic theology not only indoctrinated a view of women that was in general negative, but legitimated the subordination of women by linking their carnality with sin. The Church Fathers, despite their understanding of the equivalence of


male and female in the original creation, assumed women’s subordination to men as the order of nature due to this sinfulfulness and carnality. Defining women particularly as the symbol of the Fall and sin, the Church Fathers emphasized the connection between Eve and all women, who bear a special burden of guilt regarding the Fall. Eve’s sin and the Fall were inevitable results of her carnality, and all women as Eve’s daughters were considered as embodying this insatiable sexuality. The Church authority legitimized women’s subordinate status in the Church as dangerous sinners and temptresses of the male.

As a result, this equation of femininity with lust, as Elizabeth Castelli puts it, delimited women’s experience of both marriage and virginity within an ideology that women’s sexuality as an object of value to be traded “whether in the social marketplace or in the spiritual trading ground.” Thus, Castelli argues that it also exacts a far more “poignant price,” which made the ideology of virginity rather adopt the established culture of marriage and virginity in the secular world instead of challenging them, even though virginity provided a woman an opportunity to avoid certain constraints and real sufferings.


In fact, in contrast to contemporary scholars of the history of Catholicism in Korea who see Catholic virginity as a liberator of Korean women, the process of legitimizing women’s performance of perpetual virginity reflects its androcentric factor. The main target of Christian virginity was males, and consecration of virginity and maintenance of a single life were a “profoundly male virtue” due to women’s assumed nature of carnality.310 In addition, the notion of Christian virginity, in contrast to that of the secular world, does not particularly privilege the body of the female virgin, because it was not focused on the intactness of the hymen. It is rather a “generalized purity of body” as a signifier of the most powerful incorruptibility of flesh, which would be restored in Christ and in Paradise.311 Thus, the “Archvirgin” is Christ, not Mary.312 In this way, virginity is seen as restoring men to all natural traits of nobility of mind and transcendence to the body that are masculine by nature.313

As a result only the female, as Eleanor McLaughlin argues, must deny what society defined as her nature to pursue the religious life, because the mind/flesh dualism saw women’s whole existence and finality as bound up in her procreative function. Thus, the Church Fathers adopted the ideal of virago, the female military hero who achieves equivalence or eminence by becoming not a great woman but a man through assumption of “the nature of the male, which is


identified with the truly human; rationality, strength, courage, steadfastness, loyalty.” What those Church Fathers celebrated in female virgins was their liberation from sin, particularly, by transcending their carnality or “being forgetful of [their] natural weakness” and accepting manly vigor and virtue. They claimed that women who please God will be elevated to male ranks.

As the institution stabilized, systematized and elaborated, the Church restored the previous patriarchal desire to confine the women under its authority by creating a new discourse: that of the Bride of Christ. The idea has a long history in Western Christianity, particularly among in the Church Fathers’ writings since around the fourth century CE. The Church created the new role of the sponsa Christi, the spouse of Christ, to establish institutional roles of women in the third century before setting up a system of monastic rule. On one hand, religious writers accentuated that young women could avoid worldly ordeals by choosing a virginal career. On the other hand, however, they did not want to promote the idea that women who chose a life of virginity could expect a greater degree of independence from male supervision or authority. Thus, religious documents from the twelfth century onwards increasingly illustrate the female virgin through the feminized term Bride of Christ. By doing so, they could avoid portraying those women as the masculinized virago, who discarded her female nature.

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This feminization of virginity through the discourse of the brides of Christ restored the concept of the secular marriage system into the understanding of religious vocation among virginal women. The lives of these “spouses” should focus on devotion, service, the renunciation of sexuality, and the dedication of their worldly goods to their heavenly husband, which was not exactly like an earthly marriage but recognizably similar. As the Christian community is considered one’s “true” family in the theological perspective, Christ became “the superlative husband.” The notion of virginity as liberation from the exigencies of earthly marriage leads into the theme of celestial marriage with Christ. And the language of Christ as bridegroom is present throughout all of the literature concerning virgins, along with the assertion that a vow of virginity is an irrevocable marriage contract with Jesus.

In this respect, feminine virginity takes on the same significance as feminine chastity in the institution of marriage, the loss of which, whether by rape or adultery, becomes a life-threatening event. Indeed, female virgins in the hagiographies commonly face threats of rape or are otherwise in danger of losing their purity. These threats to their virginity are equivalent to the secular anxieties about the pre-marital loss of virginity, rendering women as damaged goods no longer eligible for the celestial bridal chamber.

The definition of consecrated women as the Brides of Christ invites all the historical notions of patriarchy related to the institution of secular marriage: women’s sexuality once again became a tool of men’s power, a sign in the masculinist system of communication, and a commodity in the system of exchange. Here, the virgin’s body conceptually belonged to the celestial bridegroom in the same way that it would have to his earthly counterpart and thus the practice of virginity reduced women’s sexuality to a token of exchange in a masculine system, whether that system was social or religious.323

Accordingly, women’s virginity in the Christian world remained patriarchal in language and concept, instead of becoming a way to either change it or destroy it. The root of women’s valuation of virginity under traditional patriarchal norm came from several convoluted motives: the wish to preserve it for the ideal man—for God, that is, for the Father—and the fear of losing something precious.324 As a result, when a Christian girl refused obedience to her human father by asserting the “supremacy of God’s patriarchal authority” it provoked the father, who considered it an insult to his patriarchal authority and demanded she fulfill the social exceptions related to “traditional” womanly roles.325 Therefore, a bid for freedom from the patriarchal frame was effectively a shift from the secular to the religious patriarchy: God and the clerical hierarchy replaced the lay patriarchal authority over the virginal women.

In this light, Christian virgins in Chosŏn Korea engaged in a form of resistance to the patriarchal society, which forced them to get married, and exercised their agency by adopting the


Catholic notion of perpetual virginity. However, it was a limited resistance: refusing obedience to the human father’s authority but submitting instead to the control of the spiritual father (God and priests) with the purpose of connecting with their heavenly grooms in the Church—God as well as Christ.

What drove girls of Chosŏn Korea to refuse to get married and instead to consecrate their virginity, when they first encountered the Catholic notion of virginity? What was the meaning of marriage for women in Chosŏn Korea around the time when Catholicism brought the new lifestyle of perpetual virginity? Also, what were the fears or anxieties about married life which caused them to hesitate or refuse to cross the threshold into adulthood? I will delve into these questions in the next chapter, focusing on the meanings of marriage as a family ritual in Confucian society, fundamentally derived from the religious nature of (Neo-) Confucianism.
Chapter 5: Getting Married in Chosŏn Korea

5.1 Engendering Confucian Religiosity

The role of Confucianism is crucial for discerning the impact brought by Catholicism to people in Chosŏn Korea under the dominance of Confucianism, particularly Korean women. Particularly, understanding Confucianism is much more important in that it provided ideological and systemic foundations for the marriage system, which affected tremendous influences upon women of Chosŏn Korea during their lifetime and after their death.

Confucianism had long been an object of contentions over its identity—whether it could be categorized as a religion or a philosophy. Confucianism clearly has significant differences from religions such as Christianity or even Buddhism. Confucianism has no defined religious membership or definitive conversion rites. It lacks clergy and official religious organizations such as churches, temples, or mosques. Moreover, there is a lack of clarity about who founded it. Also, the original names—rujia (Kr.: yuga, the Confucian family), rujiao (Kr.: yugyo, Confucian teachings), and ruxue (Kr.: yuhak, Confucian scholarship)—did not originate from the founder or god(s).326 These differences mean that Confucianism is usually considered more as a philosophy than a religion, although efforts to find ways to reify and define the field of “philosophy” was also another modern challenge.

However, Confucianism clearly played the role of what we now call “religion” in organizing and operating the social system, encompassing the secular and spiritual connections

between the living and the dead in East Asia. Even though it seems Confucianism focuses only on this-worldly matters, it also elucidates its own concepts regarding death and provides rituals dealing with matters the so-called “religions” have long focused on: spirits, gods, the afterlife, and rituals for the deceased. The Confucian cultural sphere overcame the fear of death by identifying human life with endlessly changing nature and venerating multiple deities of nature in Heaven, on Earth, and among humans. Especially, the religiosity related to death and the afterlife functioned as a foundation for the orthopraxy of Confucianism.

In that respect, fathoming the religiosity of Confucianism is a crucial factor for the analysis of women’s lives in the pre-modern Confucian societies in order to discern the foundation of patriarchal control based on Confucian teachings and women wielding their agency in pre-modern East Asian societies. It is the religiosity of Confucianism that functioned as the very core of women’s legal, social, and political oppression, particularly in China and Korea. Despite its importance, this has long been neglected.

It is important to note that only the orthopraxy of Confucianism, particularly ancestral rituals, had been permitted as an orthodox religion for women of the Confucian social order. Although rituals had existed before Confucianism appeared, ritual practice became the main value of Confucianism by being sophisticatedly systemized after the period of Confucius as a set of rules which aim to harmonize relationships between human and nature, human and human,


and self and other. As Patricia Ebrey puts it, power is “an intrinsic part of ritual itself” in the sense that people who routinely performed the proper rituals were expected to recognize their social and ethical obligations and act on them. Confucianism also produced its own combination of orthodoxy and orthopraxy, because Confucian rituals are the symbolized expression of ideal and abstract political ideologies based on its texts through practical and concrete activities of its practice. However, the problem was that balance between knowledge of orthodoxy and orthopraxy of Confucianism was not a virtue for women, in contrast to their male counterparts. Confucian women were supposed to obtain a very small amount knowledge only related to orthopraxy as a feminine virtue, particularly in Chosŏn Korea.

It was four family rituals in Zhu Xi’s Family Rituals (Ch.: Zhuzi jiali, Kr.: Chuja karye) which were established as the Confucian orthopraxy throughout the history of Chosŏn Korea: cappings (for men) and pinnings (for women), marriage, funerals and burials, and sacrifices for deceased ancestors. The four rituals in Zhu Xi’s Family Rituals became “orthodox” Confucian rituals in the homes of Korean people under the official level of Taebu (Ch.: dafu, grand masters in imperial China) by the enthronement edict of King T’aejo (r. 1392-1398) in 1392. The family rituals in Zhu Xi’s Family Rituals subsequently obtained official sanction by being legalized in the five state rituals in the fifteenth century and being included as a subject for the

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civil service exams in 1403. Eventually, the Chosŏn dynasty proclaimed the four rituals as the only orthopraxy for all people under its rule to perform in *Kukcho Oreyŭi (Manual of the Five State Rites)*, a national ritual manual completed in 1474.³³³

On the surface, *Zhu Xi’s Family Rituals* is a liturgical text which provides guidance on how to perform four essential rituals properly for and by a family. It was men of high status who were supposed to nurture balanced knowledge both of the orthodoxy and the orthopraxy for the ancestral ritual (Kr.: *cherye*, Ch.: *jili*), based on Zhu Xi’s theorization of ghosts and spirits. In Zhu Xi’s discussions, ghosts and spirits are functions of the natural processes of *qi*, which lack consciousness and personal will.³³⁴ He asserts that spirits are nothing more than the growth and dispersion of two *qi* of *yin* and *yang*, and therefore all natural phenomena such as rain, snow, and seasonal changes are traces of ghosts and spirits created by expansion and contraction of *qi*. Zhu Xi articulates that dying occurs when a person’s *qi* is separated and scattered in the air upon death.³³⁵

Zhu Xi argues that only descendants of the dead can invite their ancestors to the ritual table through the same *qi* that they shared through their ties of blood. When offspring carry out the ancestral rituals with sincerity and respect, the *qi* of the dead ancestors (contracted existence) comes to be expanded (*shin*) to make new *qi* of the ancestral spirits. Eventually, spirits are


completely exhausted around the time that their descendants of the fourth generation die. Until
the complete exhaustion of the existence of their spirits, they must receive sacrificial offerings
through ancestral rituals.\textsuperscript{336}

In Chosŏn Korea, gender ascends as an important issue related to (Neo-)Confucian
orthopraxy in that the ancestral rituals are the only legally permitted religious activities for
women. The first problem is that, theoretically, a married woman lost all of her qualifications to
offer ancestral rituals to, and all social and economic privileges related to inheritance from, her
birth family. According to the Zhu Xi’s ghost theory, a woman is still eligible to offer sacrificial
offerings to her natal ancestors, because she shares their qi through blood ties. Actually, Zhu Xi’s
theorization of ghosts does not clearly exclude women from offering rituals for their own
ancestors but does not include them as ritual providers either. Despite the lack of clarity women
were effectively deprived of performing ancestral rituals because the offering hall, the center of
all family rituals, was clearly instructed to be built in a man’s home.\textsuperscript{337} I return to this point in
detail in the following section.

The second problem is that Zhu Xi’s Family Rituals provides insufficient instructions on
women’s role in ancestral ritual practice, except for those of the wife of the grandson (chongbu),
the only woman allowed to participate in the main sequence. Despite the socially imposed
importance of ancestral rituals, women were excluded from the main sequences. Their main roles
were behind the scenes: they cleaned the house, washed the utensils, and, above all, prepared

\textsuperscript{336} Pak Sŏng-gyu, Chuja Ch’ŏlhak ūi Kwisinron [Ghost Theory in Zhu Xi’s Philosophy]. (Sŏul, Korea: Chu Han’gul

\textsuperscript{337} Kim Yun-jŏng, “Chosŏn Chungi Kobu Kwangye ūi Pyŏnhwa Yangsang: Chongbŏp Suyong Kwajŏng ūl
Chungsim ūro” [Changes of In-Law Relationship among Women of the Early Chosŏn Period], Minsokhak Yŏn’gu
food for both the spirits of the ancestors and for the living family before the beginning of the ritual, and cleaned up afterwards. The exclusion of women from the rituals occurs right away, once the main sequences begin. From inviting to sending away the ancestral spirits, there were no roles for women except, as mentioned above, for the wife of a lineage grandson, who was allowed to join the ritual for the second wine offering (ahŏn) in Zhu Xi’s *Family Rituals*. Yet even this role was not mandatory and was often taken by one of the male relatives instead.338

Third, for women ancestral rituals were more like burdensome labour than divine rituals due to the substantial work required. Although women were absent from the place where the ancestral ritual was performed, their role was indispensable, because it was they who prepared the medium for the communications between the ancestors and descendants through their shared qi—i.e. the food and wine. Moreover, in contrast to their male counterparts, women’s labours for ancestral rituals behind the scenes were actually year-round endeavors, preserving or preparing ingredients in advance and calculating the budget.339 Hence, although women’s labour was essential for ancestor rituals, women themselves were absent from the ritual spaces of their husbands’ families despite the year-long efforts they had made for carrying out the rituals.340


339 (...) You must clearly learn the ancestral rituals so that you would not lose the sequences for setting the ritual tables and teach other women by writing them down in a book / letter. (…) If you obtain fruits, crops, meats, or vegetables, you must separate and save some for the annual ancestral rituals first and use the rest for other affairs. (…) Yi Tug-mu, Sasojŏl: Sŏnbi Chib’an ŭi Yejŏl [Elementary Matters of Etiquette for Scholar Families], ed. Yi Tong-hŭi (Sŏul, Korea: Chŏnt’ong Munhwa Yŏn’guso, 2013), p.179.

340 Kim Mi-jŏng and Ch’oe Sŏn-yŏng, “Kihon Yŏsŏng ŭi Cha’a wa Kajok Chilsŏ ŭi Kyunyŏl and Ponghap: Myŏngjŏl, Chesa Kyŏnghŏm ŭl Chongsim ŭro” [Ruptures between the Self and Family Order of Married Women of Korea: Centering around Their Experiences of traditional holidays and Ancestral Rituals], *P’eminijŭm Yŏn’gu 5* (2005): 133–87, p.136. In this research the authors point out that contemporary married Korean women have experienced exclusion or absence from the place where rituals are observed for their husbands’ ancestors on traditional holidays or ancestral memorial days, although their labor and dedication are the sine qua non for the
Indeed, women, particularly, wives of lineage grandsons, were often under severe pressure to prepare the sacrificial offerings well enough to show off the authority of the family. Such was the pressure that some are even known to have committed suicide when they failed to do so. Kim Mi-yŏng gives one example at the house of a lineage grandson of the Andong Kwŏn family in Ponghwa county in Kyŏngsang Province. The piles of meats for sacrificial offerings use several pieces of steamed rice cakes garnished with adzuki beans as a foundation. However, it was very difficult to steam the rice cakes properly. If they are overcooked, they become too soft. And if they are undercooked, they crumble due to lack of consistency. It is unclear when it actually occurred, but one of the lineage grandson’s wives hanged herself in front of the steamer after failing several times to properly steam the rice cakes.\(^\text{341}\)

Fourth, there were no separate rituals for the married women’s natal family in Zhu Xi’s *Family Rituals*. All the ancestors who were supposed to receive rituals according to the orthopraxy were the husband’s. The fact that a woman had to provide all her efforts for her husband’s ancestral rituals made it much more difficult for her even to attend the rituals offered in her natal family for her own ancestors and even parents. Women, who joined their new families through marriage, had to be excluded from the main sequence of the ancestral rituals because they did not share the same *qi* through blood ties with their husbands’ ancestors. However, Confucian orthopraxy did not provide separate rituals for married women equivalent to those of their husbands. Particularly, the absence of rituals for women’s family members

\(^{341}\) Kim Mi-yŏng, *Yugyo Ŭiryе ēi Chŏnt’ong kwa Sangjing* [Traditions and Symbols in the Confucian Rituals] (Minsog’wŏn, 2010), p.73-74.
resulted in endless tensions for orthopraxy in the family and became the main reason that in China and Korea women were seen as the source of ritual impurity in the family, as I will argue in detail in the following sections.

5.2 Space: An Important Notion for Gendered Confucian Orthopraxy

Surprisingly, when it comes to gender in the orthopraxy of Confucianism—particularly Neo-Confucianism—gendered ritual space becomes an important consideration. The gendered space for Confucian orthopraxy indicates “male-centered domestic space.” The requirement for legitimate Confucian rituals is for people to gather inside a man’s domestic space as the center of the practices of all family rituals, instead of going outside the family home to shrines or temples. This change results in the efficient exclusion of ritual experts such as monks or shamans from the Confucian orthopraxy.

In this respect, Zhu Xi’s Family Rituals was clearly the most efficient means to take away the ritual authority of Buddhism and Shamanism in Chosŏn Korea, especially because of its domestic nature. It successfully switched the spatial and human gears for ritual practices as a domestic matter as well as family business. First of all, Zhu Xi’s Family Rituals ordains that ritual space is domestic space: the (man’s) family home. Most other religious activity in other religions occurs at a sacred institution such as a temple, church, or mosque where the sacred is signified with religion symbols—i.e. statues of the Buddha or crosses—and by ritual experts like monks or priests. People gather inside these designated religious institutions in search of purification or blessings from deities through the mediation of these ritual experts.
Primarily, the spatial switch for orthopraxy was possible because Zhu Xi’s *Family Rituals* instructs that the offering hall (or family shrine or ancestral altar), the center of the all those family rituals, should be built inside the home. The first chapter of his *Family Rituals* instructs that the offering hall must be established inside the home, specifically, on the east side of the main room of the house.\(^{342}\) The offering hall is the place where the spirits of ancestors reside with their descendants until their spirits expire after four generations.\(^{343}\)

Therefore, it is the sacred center for all rituals for the family and the symbol of familial solidarity. All family rituals such as cappings and pinnings, marriage, and the ancestral sacrifices, which include a procedure for reporting the changes in the composition of the family, were based on the rituals to ancestors in the offering hall. Even funerals, which necessitate burials outside the home, include a procedure for moving the spirit of the deceased to a spirit tablet outside the home and bringing it back to the house of their descendants after burying only the body in the tomb.\(^{344}\)

The spatial domestication of the religious locality of Neo-Confucianism in Korea clearly appeared in the example of funerals, specifically the change of the space for the rituals from the Koryŏ dynasty to the Chosŏn dynasty. Since Buddhist rituals mainly took place at temples, officials and nobles of Koryŏ, who preferred Buddhist rituals, were moved to temples when

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\(^{342}\) Zhu Xi’s *Family Ritual*, Chapter One, General Principles of Ritual.

\(^{343}\) According to the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn*, any person who holds a government position of the 6th grade is allowed to hold ancestral rites for the previous three generations of his family andcommons may only conduct ancestral rites for their parents in Chosŏn Korea. However, as time went by the practice of holding such rites for four generations of one’s ancestors became increasingly common among the yangban class. Also, this pattern even spread to the commoner class to some degree as well (Han Hee-sook, “Women’s Life during the Chosŏn Dynasty,” *International Journal of Korean History* 6 (2004): 113–60, p.135).

death was imminent. The rituals for funerals and burials were performed by monks in monasteries through Buddhist cremation. The cremated remains either stayed in the temple until their burial or were moved out of the temple for burial right after the cremation under the guidance of Buddhist priests. If all of these processes were performed at different locations, the body had to be moved between at least three temples (deathbed, funeral, and burial). After the funeral, sacrifices for the dead were supposed to be held regularly by Buddhist monks in a temple. Sometimes, the monk might have been a family member of the deceased, and the temple could have been the property of the deceased’s family. However, the locality for all rituals was still clearly outside of the domestic sphere.

Hence, the Chosŏn dynasty had paid special attention to funerals and ancestral rituals as the core ritual areas to eradicate non-Confucian heteropraxy and replace it with Confucian orthopraxy according to Zhu Xi’s *Family Rituals*. Until the late fourteenth century, people selected their preferred way to carry out these rituals among Buddhist, shamanist, or Confucian rituals. Shamans were often requested to carry out rituals for the dead and received lands or slaves from each family in return for assuming responsibility for their rituals.

Although funerals, burials, and sacrifices in the form of Confucianism had been practiced among the families of high officials, they were mixed with Buddhist rituals. Also, it had been mostly Buddhist rituals which were preferred by the majority of people. They entrusted both


funerals and ancestral rituals for their families or ancestors to Buddhist temples and priests.\(^\text{347}\)

However, among the four main family rituals, in Chosŏn funerals and ancestral rituals particularly were emphasized and were to be precisely carried out based on *Zhu Xi’s Family Rituals* from the late fourteenth century. This shows that the ancestral rituals and funerals were settled the earliest and considered the most important among the four rituals,\(^\text{348}\) which resulted in the firm establishment of Confucian rituals based on *Zhu Xi’s Family Rituals* in the seventeenth century and their spread throughout all social classes by the nineteenth century.

Additionally, all rituals in *Zhu Xi’s Family Rituals* exclude any intervention by (non-familial) “others” by eliminating the involvement of ritual experts. The main agents of all the rituals in *Zhu Xi’s Family Rituals* are male descendants of either the recently deceased, for a funeral, or ancestors, for ancestral rituals. Instead of inviting clergy or professionals, family members themselves take the main roles for performing the four family rituals. Even though the primogeniture holder of the family takes the role of the leader, other roles for the rituals are to be temporarily distributed among the other male family members. People outside of the family could be also invited for the rituals, but only as guests. After carrying out the entire procedure of the ritual, the participants’ roles as pseudo-priests were dismissed, and they returned to their normal lives. Since the right to be ritual practitioners was limited to members of the family, no ritual specialist could be involved.

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Most of all, in Confucianism it was the family’s ancestors who were worshipped and received offerings during rituals directly from their own descendants without the mediation of gods, deities or Buddha. The Buddhist rituals and shamanist rituals by ritual experts, on the other hand, were practiced toward certain deities such as Buddha (or Bodhisattvas) or various shamanic gods (or ghosts). It was these sacred entities which mediated the blessings from the spirits for the descendants and wishes for the spirits from the offspring through the ritual experts, who had ability to communicate with them.

However, Zhu Xi’s *Family Rituals* and the Confucian classics teach that descendants can directly communicate with their ancestors’ spirits without the assistance of mediators such as monks or shamans. Therefore, the offerings should be provided to the ancestral spirits, not to specific deities or Buddha. This is based on the Neo-Confucian philosophy, which explains that ancestors and their living descendants can communicate with each other through their shared qi, since they are connected by blood ties.

The adoption of Zhu Xi’s *Family Rituals* as the only orthodoxy for orthopraxy transformed the domestic space into a sacred place. The family became a ritual community and the home became simultaneously a quotidian and a sacred place. Also, producing at least one male heir became the most important issue for continuation of the rituals, because only a male (especially the first son) was qualified to perform the family rituals and could succeed to the leading position in the offering hall. All members of the family were also educated in their social and religious roles and places in the rituals at home.

The impacts of the changes of Koreans’ religiosity and ritual spaces were much more significant for Korean women than for their male counterparts since they changed not only women’s religious activities but also their daily lives. They not only changed the boundary of
women’s daily activities, but also marriage patterns, postnuptial residence, and preference of children’s gender, which would all function to oppress women in Chosŏn Korea.

The changes in Korean women’s religiosity in the aforementioned period show similarities with what Zhou Yiqun describes for the cases of Chinese women from 1550-1900: struggles between the Hearth (the religious space inside the home) and the Temple (the religious space outside the home). Confucian elites in China expected their domestic space would preserve the integrity and purity of the house as a Confucian sacred space that should see no presence of non-Confucian religious activities. However, as Charlotte Furth demonstrate in hear scrutiny on the household instructions of Ming and Qing dynasties, patriarchs associated women – especially wives – in their families as the threat with the religious heterodoxy. Although Chinese elites had established a premium on ancestral rituals and linked closely between ritual decay and family decline, affection to non-Confucian religious practices as the main source of religious heterodoxy within the family, some popular worship were a female sphere both inside and outside the home. Women often presided over the religious meditation of fertility, childbirth, and many illnesses, which required the service of ritual specialists and devotion to a variety of popular spirits.


As their Chinese counterparts had already experienced, Korean women’s religiosity also came to be connected with the need for ritual purity to prevent the decline of the family in Chosŏn Korea as well. “Ritual purity” here means that all family rituals had to be practiced properly according to *Zhu Xi’s Family Rituals* in the hearth not at the temple to prevent the family from declining through ritual decay based on heteropraxy. In Chosŏn Korea, establishment of Confucian ritual practice as orthopraxy resulted in “feminization” of popular religions such as Buddhism and Shamanism.353

The feminization of the popular religions also caused the feminization of ūmsa (淫祀), which means licentious sacrifice or improper rituals. In the *Li-ji* (the Book of Rituals), ūmsa is a polar opposite of chŏnga (正祀, proper sacrifices), and refers to the presenting of offerings to improper spirits by irrelevant agents. Furthermore, ūmsa can bring no blessing due to its inappropriate nature.354 Only an eligible agent (i.e. a descendant) should offer sacrifices to the relevant objects (i.e. ancestors) through the proper rituals sequence. If an ineligible individual (i.e. a shaman) carried out rituals for an inappropriate object (i.e. an other’s ancestors), that was stigmatized as ūmsa.355 Therefore, ūmsa was originally a concept to be used to refer to improper ritual practices by both men and women. The meaning of ūmsa had not been changed but gradually came to be used more often to indicate either illegal or inappropriate ritual practice by


354 *Book of Rites (Liji)*, Quli Section II.

women in Chosŏn Korea. Also, Koreans, too, began to believe that non-Confucian (i.e., Buddhist or shamanic) ritual practices would cause ritual decay, and as a result the family fame and prosperity would be also damaged. Therefore, Confucian literati had to be continuously vigilant about encroachment of other religious rituals into the domestic space and replacing Confucian rituals, particularly by women in their families, regarding women as the source of ritual decay and contamination by heteropraxy.

In this sense, families in Chosŏn Korea also began waging struggles between the hearth as the domestic space for the sacred Confucian orthopraxy and the temple as the outer space for the profane non-Confucian heteropraxy. As a result, Korean patriarchs also accused women in their families as the source of possibility of ritual decay and family decline and had to endeavor to protect “ritual purity” for their family rituals based solely on the orthopraxy in Neo-Confucian teachings in the “hearth,” not at the “temple.”

For this reason Confucian literati of Chosŏn Korea became concerned about women’s religious activities outside the home, which they associated with sexual laxity, and called for women’s confinement in the domestic space. Women were not allowed to leave the domestic space for any religious activities based on non-Confucian rituals led either by Buddhist monks or shamans because of the spatial transformation of the religious center to the home. Later women

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357 In this research, the “ritual purity” narrowly means the ideal of Korean Confucian literati, which dreamed to practice Neo-Confucian rituals based solely on the instructions in the Zhu Xi’s Family Rituals only by members of one family in the family house with family shrine in Chosŏn Korea. These rituals were intended to reinforce the social hierarchy, assumed superior position of men compared to women, and aimed to eliminate potential factors to blur the patrilineal line of succession such as Buddhist or Shamanic rituals, which often implied those who practiced them were not a truly Confucian scholar family and were associated with lower social status than those who offered Confucian rituals.
leaving the domestic space for non-religious activities also came under suspicion, again related to the suspicion of sexual promiscuity, particularly among upper-class women. As a result, the linking of women’s living spaces with sexual purity resulted in women’s further spatial confinement even inside their domestic space, which separated living spaces within the family based on gender.

Women’s confinement was the earliest policy on women of Chosŏn in that it was the first to be discussed and implemented among many regulations on women implemented since the reign of King T’ae-jo (r.1392-1398), the founder of Chosŏn. The first step was regulating women’s contact with male relatives and their confinement to prevent them from contact with any men. The record in the Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn shows that Nam Chae (1351-1419), Inspector-General of the Bureau of Justice, suggested regulating the boundary of relatives that all yangban women were allowed contact with only two months after the enthronement of King T’aejo in 1392. Obtaining the King’s approval, this regulation became the basis of the official regulation for the law of women’s confinement and was set up as a permanent law under the name of Nae’oe pŏp (Law of the inner and outer spaces), first in 1397 and in all of the later legal codes of Chosŏn.

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358 Nam Chae, the Inspector-General of the Bureau of Justice, submitted a memorial to the king: “In ancient times, married women were not supposed to visit their parents’ home once their parents passed away, and the custom was observed strictly. At the end of the former dynasty, however, the custom degenerated so much that the wives of the literati began to frequent the houses of powerful families without shame, and men of discernment are ashamed of it. We would like to request you to rectify the current custom by prohibiting the women in the families of civil and military officials henceforth from visiting people freely except their parents, brothers and sisters, paternal uncles and aunts, and maternal uncles and aunts.” The record on September 21, 1392, The Annals of King T’aejo, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn.

359 Kang Myŏng-kwan, Yŏlnyŏ ŭi T’ansaeng [The Birth of Chaste Women, Recognized by the State] (Sŏul, Korea: Tolbegae, 2009), p.75.
Under this regulation a woman could have contact for any reason only with her parents, her siblings, and her paternal and maternal uncles. This law, from the beginning, contains the discourse of sexual regulation. The society, therefore, required women to stay at home, stigmatizing women’s religious activities outside the domestic boundary by treating such activities as evidence of sexual licentiousness. The law decreased the boundary of human networks for women to only a few members of her natal and marital families. In addition, the state also made women’s religious activities outside of their domestic space illegal, especially after the implementation of ŭmsa (淫祀, licentious sacrifice) regulations. The Chosŏn government especially linked women’s non-Confucian based rituals outside of the domestic space with ŭmsa. Also, this regulation was connected with women’s potential sexual laxity and thus punishable by the Nae’oe pŏp.

Based on the regulation limiting whom women could contact, the state also illegalized women’s trips to Buddhist temples for religious activities (Punyŏ sangsa kŭmjipŏp, The Law on Prohibition of Women’s Trip to Buddhist Temples). Until the establishment of the Chosŏn dynasty, religious activities were one of the most frequent reasons for women to leave the boundaries of the domestic space. They visited either Buddhist temples or shamans’ shrines to participate in various religious rituals or festivals. These religious activities often doubled as good leisure activities for both men and women. However, the new state legally prohibited women’s joining these activities outside the domestic space, with the excuse that they had the potential for sexual licentiousness by allowing women to mingle with non-familial men.

Particularly, the records of early Chosŏn illustrate that the state was more concerned with regulating women leaving home for religious activities than for non-religious ones, although both were related to sexual risk. Discussions between kings and officials clearly shows that the
The fundamental purpose for confining women was regulating their religiosity practiced outside of the domestic space.\textsuperscript{360}

On the other hand, it is noteworthy that women traveling for non-religious purposes was banned much later and after much longer struggles between kings and officials until they reach an agreement on the ban.

A: The Office of the Censor-General presented six suggestions for the current affairs (...) Sixth, married women have no work to do outside home and are in charge only of matters related with food. However, wives of literati do not ride a horse or a sedan chair and instead walk on the streets on foot. This is loss of women’s virtue. Please, correct the custom by prohibiting women from leaving home except the case of the meeting with their parents and from wandering around the village on foot from now on. Also, please let the state offices punish those who violate this regulation. (...) The King did not allow it. \textit{<The record of August 20, 1416, The Annals of King T’aejong, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn>}

B: Kim Pok-hang, the third inspector <of the Office of the Inspector General> requested King’s permission in his previous petitions. King answered (...) The intention of your petition is very beautiful, but it is difficult to correct in one morning and the situation has been improved compared to the previous years. Even China has boasted that its women vie with one another in flocking to see the sights of festivals such as the lantern festivals, exorcist festival, and miscellaneous folk festivals. In the ancient time of Han dynasty of China, Chinese women gathered and watched Xiongnu invaded the capital. Why should we make a haste with prohibiting this custom now, since it has existed since the ancient period. It will disappear, if we deal with it gradually. \textit{<The record of July 22, 1431, The Annals of King Sejong, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn>}

C: The King hunted on the fields in Ch’ŏlwŏn. Women of the neighborhood came to watch it. The king served them with wine and food and stayed at the Sŭpmaep’o area. \textit{<The record of February 19, 1435, The Annals of King Sejong, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn>}

D: the Office of the Inspector General suggested: “When the embellished tents (for envoys from Ming China) are built, wives and concubines of the officials watch it on a bleachers by the side of
the road (浮階) and women and men are intermingled in there. If the envoys see it, how would not they laugh at it. Please ban it.” The king did not allow it. <The record of January 29, 1450, The Annals of King Sejong, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn>

E: (The King Sŏngjong) commanded: “Even though it would not be prohibiting people from traveling to watch festivals or special events (觀光), they should look at the scene by erecting an awning in front of their houses. I will ban men and women from climbing on the roofs to watch it. <The record of Bissextile January 20, 1488, The Annals of King Sŏngjong, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn>

F: The King (Chungjong) strictly banned women of yangban families from going sightseeing (觀光). This was (the king) following the suggestion of the Royal Lecturers. <The record of August 28, 1511, The Annals of King Chungjong, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn>

The records A from F to show the long contentions between kings and officials on women traveling for non-religious purposes until King Chungjong accepted the officials’ suggestions in 1511. The non-religious purposes for women traveling based on the aforementioned accounts were related to entertainments like watching kings hunting or marching, folk festivals, Chinese envoys’ visits and so on. The official strongly and repeatedly suggested that the kings prohibit women from leaving home in search of these entertainments, just like the travel ban for religious activities. Kings often refused to accept those proposals, but partially accepted some requests, such as simply prohibiting women from climbing onto rooftops (E).

Particularly, the records of King Sejong’s reign are noteworthy in that they clearly illustrate the king’s ambivalent attitude towards women leaving home depending on the purpose.

G: The Office of the Inspector-General suggested (……) a number of people violated the law, because they do not learn them each year. Please summarize the articles on the law and hang them various places such as gates including the outside of Kwanghwa Gate as well as bell towers by writing them on a board. (…) <The state> prohibit women from visiting Buddhist temples. <The state> prohibit monks from visiting widow’s houses. (…) The King accepted these suggestions. <The record of February 5, 1429, The Annals of King Sejong, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn>
H: The King commanded to the Office of the Inspector General: I heard that women’s visit to the Buddhist temples had stopped to some extent, but they still visit shamans a lot. Ban this situation from occurring inside of the capital. <The record of June 23, 1431, The Annals of King Sejong, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn>

I: Officials including Sin Kae, the Inspector-General, petitioned: “(…) Nowadays, wives of literati are led astray by their belief in spirits and pray to them, carrying out rituals for bewitching spirits of the mountains and fields. They, particularly, worship at Song’ak Mountain and Kam’ak Mountain very fervently, offer plenty of wine and food by visiting there in person each spring and fall, play music loudly and indulge in going out under the excuse of pleasing the spirits. Although they come back after staying overnight, they brag about their excursion on the way home, and are accompanied by shamans and jesters both in front and behind them playing music raucously. They really enjoy themselves and let themselves go wild. Not only do husbands instead of stopping them join them in this, they don’t even think it strange. This is an extreme loss of women’s virtue (…) Please, ban women from visiting famous mountains and shrines. If there are those who violate this, please punish them as losing chastity based on the Yukchŏn (The Six-fold Law Code). Also, many women do not feel shame at exposing their face to public views, erecting awnings along the sides of the road, or going up to the rooms above the gates in order to watch festivals like exorcist festivals or folk plays. This must be banned more heavily, because it is very serious violation of women’s virtues.” The King commanded postponing the implementation, and then answered to the Office of the Inspector-General. “Wives of literati visiting shrines in person is violation of customs for rituals. If there are those who visit there in person, discuss their punishments with the heads of their households, and the offices, which have responsibility for those shrines, would be punished, unless they do not make careful efforts to ban these activities. <The record of June 25, 1431, The Annals of King Sejong, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn>

J: (…) Sin Kae, the Inspector-General, also suggested: “(Women of yangban families) not only provide shamans slaves (for praying and taking care of their deceased parents) but also frequently visit the shaman’s residences under the pretexts of avoiding illness or asking about their fortune. Please prohibit these from happening.” The King answered: “from now on, ban shamans from obtaining slaves under the excuse of protecting spirits and also forbid the women of yangban families from visiting shaman’s residence.” <The record of July 13, 1431, The Annals of King Sejong, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn>

K: The Council of State stated the items related with prohibition of wrong rituals (ŭmsa): (…) Please punish the head of the household as violation of King’s written commands, if women of yangban families visit or stay in shaman’s residences under the pretexts of avoiding illness. (…) If a woman who violates this law does not have a head of her household, her eldest son will be punished. If she does not have her eldest son, her second son will be punished. If she does not have her second son, her eldest grandson will be punished. If she does not have the eldest grandson, her second grandson will be punished. If she does not have her second grandchild, she herself will be punished. (…) King allowed these suggestions. <The record of August 25, 1443, The Annals of King Sejong, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn>

Striving to stabilize state and social policies based on Confucian teachings, King Sejong strongly supported officials’ suggestions of a total travel ban for women for all non-Confucian religious
activities outside homes (G, H, I, J, K). Particularly, in 1431 he shows a contradictory attitude
toward women’s travels based on purpose. On one hand, he rejects officials’ requests to prohibit
women from travelling to watch entertaining events (B, C, D), but on the other hand, he bans
women’s religious travels for non-Confucian rituals, particularly in one specific year (H, I, J). He
even provided wine and food to women who were watching his hunt in the Ch’ŏlwŏn area in
1435, instead of punishing them for leaving their homes for entertainment (C).

Even though the aforementioned discussions use the potential for women to engage in
sexual activity as the reason for banning them from travelling, their real agenda was protection of
purity for family rituals. The location of an offering hall or family shrine, the center of family
rituals, meant that the domestic space became the boundary between orthodoxy and heterodoxy
for the ritual purity of the family. This also redefined the spatial dimension for women’s
religiosity centering around the family rituals in Zhu Xi’s Family Rituals so that they would
venerate only familial ancestors, accept male ritual authority, and assist the smooth practice and
inheritance of the rituals.

Although the forced changes in women’s religiosity had often caused legal and social
contentions over inheritances or family dynamics up to the seventeenth century, Korean women
eventually accepted and adjusted to them. Offering halls or family shrines were built inside
family homes and ancestral tablets placed there. All family rituals were carried in the family
home with Zhu Xi’s Family Rituals narrowly defining orthopraxy. Since ancestors became the
only object to be served for rituals, living family members became the ritual practitioners as well
as participants during their lifetime. Also, they would be revered as ancestral spirits and would
receive the offerings through the rituals after their deaths by being carried in the ancestral tablet
from the family shrine to the ritual room by the hands of their own descendants.
Complete spatial change for women for Confucian religiosity was possible through implementation of the patrilocal marriage system in Chosŏn Korea. It completely changed a woman’s space not only during her lifetime but also her afterlife, severing her physically and spiritually from her own family and demanding that she blend into her husband’s family.

5.3 Once You Are Married, Even Your Soul Must Belong to His Family: Patrilocal Marriage for Neo-Confucian Orthopraxy in Chosŏn Korea

The impact of the change to the patrilocal marriage was enormous to women of Chosŏn Korea, altering Koreans’ understanding of lifetime and afterlife for women. The imposition of Confucian religiosity not only demanded women to switch their affiliations for their lives during their lifetime as well as for their souls after their deaths. The marriage system of Confucianism deprived a woman of the qualification to be an ancestor for her own natal family but provided a new affiliation for her spirit to belong to her husband’s family, causing new pains and conflicts inside of her mind and daily life from her new roles and duties as a late comer in the family.

The Confucianization of Chosŏn Korea demanded different religiosity for men and women in the family through a new marriage system, which required women to adopt the religiosity of her husband’s family. Thus, it became the most important task for Chosŏn Korea to switch from the previous matrilocal marriage system to the new patrilocal system after the mid-seventeenth century. Since the establishment of the Chosŏn dynasty, the state and Confucian literati had made arduous efforts to plant the patrilocal marriage system of China in Korean society as the foundation for properly implementing two important elements: the agnatic principle (chongppǒp), the fundamental base for all Confucian rituals, and male-centered ritual
practices and inheritances based on the ritual authority of male primogeniture; and Zhu Xi’s *Family Rituals*.

Throughout the Chosŏn period, *cherye* (祭禮), ancestral rituals, were the only legitimate religious activity for women. Therefore, ritual purity also meant practice of ancestral rituals based on the Neo-Confucian orthopraxy in *Zhu Xi’s Family Rituals*. In contrast to the other three rituals, ancestor rituals were carried out both regularly and irregularly throughout the year\(^{361}\) and could never be properly practiced without women’s hidden assistance. By gathering for these rituals for common ancestors, the kin confirmed and intensified their membership in the family on a regular basis. Thus, they were useful to confirm and reinforce the hierarchies and solidarity of the family based on gender and kinship relations, regulated by the agnatic principle.

It was also the ancestral rituals which required Korean women to completely adopt their husbands’ home and family as their space for living, death, and the afterlife through the Chinese style of patrilocal marriage. Since at the moment a woman comes to her husband’s home for the wedding ceremony she obtains membership in her husband’s family, she is supposed to spend the remainder of her lifetime in his home, serving her husband, her living parents-in-law, and her husband’s ancestral spirits through rituals. On her death, her spirit continues to belong to her husband’s family as their ancestor and is to be served by her daughters-in-law in the subsequent

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\(^{361}\) Zhu Xi’s *Family Rituals* provides six major ancestral rituals which should be practiced each year: *sasije* (sacrifices for the four seasons), *ch’ojoje* (rites to the earliest ancestor), *sŏnjoje* (sacrifices to early ancestors), *nyeje* (sacrifices to fathers), *ki’ilche* (sacrifices for taboo days), and *myoje* (sacrifices at graves). All these rituals are arranged as one full set based on the flow of nature for one year. The dates for the *ki’ilche* are fixed, because they were supposed to be practiced on the days of the parents’ deaths. Chu Hsi, *Chu Hsi’s Family Rituals: A Twelfth-Century Chinese Manual for the Performance of Cappings, Weddings, Funerals, and Ancestral Rites*, trans. Patricia Buckley Ebrey (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), p.153-154.
generations. This life cycle made a woman’s role as daughter-in-law more crucial than her role as a wife.

The hidden dynamic in Zhu Xi’s Family Rituals is the aforementioned agnatic principle. A family shrine as the center for all rituals can be established only at the house of a primary wife’s eldest son. When the eldest son inherits the position of the head of the lineage, he becomes the lineage grandson (chongson) and takes charge of all rituals as the representative of the family and kin. He also inherits the ancestral home (chongga) with the shrine as the center for all family rituals as well as the kinship organization. Meanwhile, his primary wife becomes the wife of the lineage grandson (chongbu) and takes on the role of being in charge of family rituals related to female kin. Only his male descendants become the solely legitimate inheritors of the position of the head of the lineage and assume responsibility for leading the ancestral rituals for his family generation by generation. Since inheritance according to male primogeniture was available only among the paternal line, the agnatic principle has functioned as the foundation of patriarchy, patrilineage, and patrilocal marriage system in China.

The agnatic principle is also the fundamental base for the organization of the kinship system, which enables people to properly perform the orthopraxy in Zhu Xi’s Family Rituals: the five grades of the mourning system (obok chedo). In Confucian societies, there are two ways of demarcating hierarchy and degree of intimacy of kinship, organized by ego as the center of the relationship. The first rule is a genealogical line, which distinguishes the vertically ascending and descending generations from the apical ancestor. The second regulation is a horizontal

relationship, which would decide the degree of distance of kinship by blood among kin. This kinship functions as the source for solidarity among the most intimate kin by providing the degrees of their distance as affine.\textsuperscript{363} The relatives within the “five degree” include kin within four ascending and descending generations and at the fourth collateral line including the third cousins.\textsuperscript{364} The five grades of the mourning system was convenient for clarifying the hierarchies and degree of intimacy among paternal kin by imposing a different length for mourning periods as well as materials for mourning garments.\textsuperscript{365} It clearly showed one’s status in the family and the boundary of essential kinship based on his/her relationship with the deceased.

Particularly, the agnatic principle became the fundamental standard for the reconstruction of the sociopolitical map of Chosŏn Korea to make it more similar to the Chinese patriarchal system at the expense of Korean women. First, it was useful to change the family system of Korea from the traditional bilateral kinship system based on matrilocal marriage to the patrilineal kinship system based on patrilocal marriage. In contrast to previous periods, a Korean woman had to move to her husband’s house after her wedding. Also, she lost the ritual authority for her own parents but took on the role of supporting the ancestral rituals for her husband’s ancestors. Since the lineage came to be inherited along the male line, her most important duty was production of male descendants to continue her husband’s bloodline. Moreover, her loss of


ritual authority also resulted in her loss of the privilege of receiving the same amount of inheritance as her brothers from her natal family.

The traditional matrilocal marriage system of Korea had been the biggest hindrance for implementation of the Confucian orthopraxy and had to be changed to operate the agnatic principle properly in Chosŏn Korea. Traditionally, a married couple in Korea, under the matrilocal marriage system, carried out their wedding ceremony at the bride’s home, after which the couple lived temporarily at the bride’s home. When the bride moved to the husband’s family home was quite flexible, depending on the individual couple. Some decided to move only after their children were fully grown up, but others never moved to the husband’s home, because a woman changing her postnuptial residence was not a mandatory factor for marriage.

Matrilocal marriage was not a big problem when society permitted women authority for ritual practices for her own kin and the financial privileges derived from them. Women gave birth to and raised their children in their natal homes and often shared or inherited the ritual authority for her own parents as well as inheritance equally with her siblings. If she was the only daughter, she and her husband and sons could perform the rituals for her parents or ancestors.

The problem was that implementation of the Neo-Confucian orthopraxy was impossible unless women completely changed both their family membership and residences. The marriage ritual in Zhu Xi’s *Family Rituals* clearly illustrates the identity switch of a bride from one man’s daughter to another man’s wife through ritual performance. It designates each of the lineage grandsons of each of the bride’s and groom’s families as the presiding men, who would

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exchange the betrothal documents and make a report of the content to their ancestors at their own respective ancestral halls. The bride moves to her groom’s house for the wedding ceremony and reports her membership in the new family to her husband’s ancestors on the third day after the wedding ceremony. The presiding man takes the bride to the offering hall for presentation at the family shrine as a display of being officially introduced to the ancestors. This means that she has become a new member of his family, and will support the rituals for the ancestors in the shrine during her lifetime and be served through rituals as one of the ancestors after her death. The ancestral hall is thus the center for the identity switch of a woman from a daughter of one family to a daughter-in-law of another. After the presentation, the wife obtains complete membership in her husband’s family. The bride-side presiding man also reports her betrothal and wedding to her own ancestral hall, which means that she has lost membership in her own family.367

Henceforth, a newlywed woman had to learn the traditions relating to the practice of ancestral rituals for her husband’s family, because her life-long duty was to serve only her husband’s ancestral spirits. A daughter learned the basic concepts behind the common recipes for sacrificial offerings, such as how to properly cook meat or rice, before her marriage. But once she was married off, she had to completely abandon the traditions of her natal family and spend a significant amount of time learning the traditions of her husband’s family’s orthopraxy from scratch, under the tutelage of women in his family. Usually, the recipes for the ancestral rituals for each family were transmitted from mother-in-law to daughters-in-law. Once a woman

became a mother-in-law, she had to teach her own daughters-in-law so that the family tradition could be continued generation to generation as a unique symbol of the house.

Families in Korea developed different ritual traditions for sacrificial offerings in the midst of adopting the instructions in *Zhu Xi’s Family Rituals*. Each family had to develop their own traditions due to cultural differences between China and Korea as well as regional differences inside Korea. The sacrificial offerings in *Zhu Xi’s Family Rituals* were written based on the Chinese customs and cooking methods as the standard. Also, Zhu Xi’s instructions do not provide specific menus for the sacrificial foods in detail. Therefore, Koreanization of the Confucian ancestral rituals caused various modifications of the recipes and menus for the sacrificial foods in Korea, which came to be called *kagarye* (family rituals for each family).

The discrepancies and differences between the actual practices and instructions in the ritual books for the ancestral rituals occurred in the domains of women’s work related to preparing ingredients and cooking foods.

For these reasons, Confucian literati of Korea had been long troubled by problems caused by matrilocal marriage in the midst of their efforts to establish a solid foundation for Confucian orthopraxy centering around the agnic principle. First of all, due to spatial separation it was difficult for the husband’s family to summon the daughter-in-law and impose the year-round duties for the ancestral rituals, which came around frequently and required consistent


preparations. Furthermore, it was also hard to train the daughter-in-law in the unique familial traditions and recipes related to ancestral rituals, which became the symbol to show off the identity of the family. Also, it was impossible for the bride to present herself to her parents-in-law on the day after the wedding and at her husband’s family shrine on the third day after the wedding, violations of the orthopraxy for the marriage ritual based on the Zhu Xi’s Family Rituals. Additionally, the children showed a lack of a sense of solidarity to their paternal affinity such that it became difficult for them to become the future successors of the family rituals when they were being raised among their maternal kin. The simplest and most convenient solution for these all problems was forcing women to switch their post-marital life completely to their husbands’ family homes through patrilocal marriage. And that was the only way for successful implantation of the agnatic principle and practice of Neo-Confucian orthopraxy at the same time.

The Confucian literati in Chosŏn Korea believed that they would be able to replace the tradition of the matrilocal marriage of Korea with patrilocal marriage by carrying out the ch’in’yŏng (Ch.: qinying, welcoming in person.), one of the mandatory sequences for marriage rituals in Zhu Xi’s Family Rituals. Ch’in’yŏng means that the groom leaves his home and goes to his bride’s home to collect her for the wedding ceremony.370

Nevertheless, their efforts to adopt ch’in’yŏng eventually failed as a mandatory sequence for the marriage ritual. Instead, pan (half)-ch’in’yŏng, a mixture of the Chinese form of the ch’in’yŏng with the indigenous format of marriage of Korea, spread widely as the norm for marriage in Korea from the eighteenth century. Instead of taking the bride to the groom’s house

for the wedding ceremony, the groom went to his bride’s house to carry out the wedding ceremony at her home. The newly married couple could then stay at the bride’s home for three days to less than one year. However, once the bride moved to her husband’s home and reported her inclusion in the family to his ancestors at the offering hall, the move became permanent for her lifetime and thereafter.

As a result, a woman’s position as a daughter in her family dramatically decreased and her social position and identities as wife, mother, and daughter-in-law were given only through marriage and became more important than her role as a daughter. Elimination of women’s ritual power was the crucial factor for the establishment of the agnatic principle in early Chosŏn, which was successfully accomplished by the seventeenth century. The government had to bring new lifestyles for practice of these family rituals into Korean society by reinstituting the sociopolitical fundamentals from the top to the bottom of the state. Although it was a long and gradual transformation, it succeeded at the expense of women.

From the eighteenth century onwards, Confucian religiosity had expanded even to the lower class, reflecting their aspiration to model their behaviour on that of the yangban class. The desire for social mobility among the lower class led them to adopt and imitate the family rituals of the yangban. The Confucian transformation of the lower class centered around the family rituals, particularly ancestral rituals, which also changed Chosŏn into a patriarchal, patrilocal, and patrilineal society all the way from the ruling class to the lower class. Some of the lower-class people, who tried to obtain yangban status based on new economic prosperity between

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eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, adopted the practice of ancestral rituals in order to elevate the dignity of their social status equivalent with that of the yangban class. They not only widely adopted the same surnames as those of yangban families but also began creating same-surname villages from the end of eighteenth century as their yangban counterparts had done.

Furthermore, adoption of patrilocal marriage was successful throughout all classes in Chosŏn. The patrilocal marriage system also spread to the lower-class and eventually replaced traditional matrilocal marriage for them as well from the eighteenth century along with the downward spread of the agnatic principle and practice of the ancestral rituals. Commercial development and economical changes caused the demise of some members of the yangban class from the eighteenth century on but also resulted in the economic ascendance of lower-class people. These new social conditions stimulated desires for social mobility among the lower-class people. They actively imitated the lifestyle of the yangban class in order to show the elevation of their status particularly by buying their way into genealogies and adopting Confucian rituals. As a result, they actively adopted Confucian family rituals and replaced the traditional matrilocal marriage with patrilocal marriage like their counterparts in the higher social class.

In reaction to the spread of the ancestral rituals throughout all classes in Korean society since the eighteenth century, each social class began showing two diagonal movements in the practice of ancestral rituals: becoming different from the ruling class while at the same time the

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lower class was trying to act the same as the yangban. While Confucian rituals had spread throughout the whole society, the yangban class tried to elevate their authority by further differentiating from, and making their ritual practices more sophisticated than, those in the lower social echelons.

Some yangban families attempted to carry out more distinctive forms of ancestral rituals as a symbol of their higher social hierarchy. It was around this time so called the pul ch’ŏnwi chesa (rituals for perpetual ancestors) became a symbol of the highest status even among yangban families. Those who receive the pul ch’ŏnwi chesa are mostly recognized as distinguished Confucian scholars or honored as meritorious officials by the state. All ancestors were supposed to receive ancestral rituals only for four generations and their spiritual tablets were then buried. However, those who are venerated by the pul ch’ŏnwi chesa are commemorated forever.375 Since not many yangban families had ancestors who could be elevated for the pul ch’ŏnwi chesa, the practice of the pul ch’ŏnwi chesa became a distinguished privilege even among yangban class.

All these social changes based on the competition among various social classes successfully changed the fabric of Korean society based on Neo-Confucianism. Confucian family rituals (particularly the ancestral rituals) were the main means for these wide social transformations. Patrilineal kinship was the central organization which enabled these changes for all the social classes.

The enhanced importance of the ancestral rituals affected the religiosity of as well as the space for the religious lives of Korean women from the top to the bottom of the society. Korean women, too, accepted that their most important duties were to serve for the ancestral rituals and to produce male heirs for the continuation of the lineage. Since the agnatic principle, the pivot of Confucian religiosity, excluded women from the line of succession according to primogeniture and ritual authority, women could be involved in ritual activities only by marrying a man and helping with rituals for his family. Therefore, a woman could obtain social status as a wife, mother, and sister-in-law only after her marriage. This inevitably created significant dilemmas and conflicts in Korean women’s lives, which crossed the social class lines in Chosŏn Korea after the seventeenth century.

By the seventeenth century the agnatic principle had put down deep roots in the society of Chosŏn Korea, completely reconstituting women’s legal and social status. As a result, the four main rituals based on Zhu Xi’s Family Rituals also came to be established as the only orthopraxy among all social classes in Korea. In addition, men’s monopolization of ritual authority had caused various declines in women’s economic and social status in Chosŏn Korea. This situation was shared with their Chinese counterparts, as Zhou Yiqun discusses: very different implications of either the meaning of ancestor worship or the relationship between space and religiosity for men and women. In contrast to men, who never changed their religious space or relations with the spirits for orthopraxy, women experienced enormous changes in identity in their own natal

and marital families. They experienced the spatial changes and membership switch for the orthopraxy to be attributed to their husbands’ line of descent.

The dilemma of Confucian orthopraxy was due to the very fact it did not provide any rituals for the woman’s side of family. That is the reason that, paradoxically, Confucian scholars could not ban heteropraxy performed by women in their families and had to wage relentless struggles against infiltration of heteropraxy under their own roofs.

5.4  Heteropraxy: A Necessary Evil for Confucian Ritual Purity and Paradox of Confucian Orthopraxy

The intrinsic paradox of Confucianism begins from the very fact that it is impossible for it to provide women equal rituals with their male counterparts or other alternatives in order to protect men’s monopolization of ritual authority. Under this circumstance, heteropraxy functioned as both a threat and as a necessary evil for the purity of Confucian orthopraxy, which requires us to consider gender to understand the Confucian societies better.

Since the beginning of the Confucianization of Korean society, women had been constantly accused of bringing heteropraxy into the domestic space and ruining ritual purity by quitting orthopraxy. Despite the law, women did not stop practicing heteropraxy, and it was difficult for patriarchs to completely prohibit women in their families from engaging in it. Since it was mostly women who carried out heteropraxy in the family, both the state and the Confucian literati blamed them as the source of ritual impurity against the Neo-Confucian orthopraxy. Most of the heteropraxy of the latter Chosŏn period was in the form of women inviting ritual experts such as shamans or the blind into the domestic space. Sometimes, even ancestral rituals were replaced by such heteropraxy when serious diseases broke out in the family. Patriarchs were
often accused of allowing women to bring heteropraxy into family spaces and contaminating ritual purity.  

The accusation that patriarchs condoned heteropraxy in their homes illustrates that these heterodox rituals occurred quite often by women’s initiative and men’s tolerance. The reason could have been that even Confucian literati shared faith in the efficacy of heteropraxy due to fears of illness, wishes for treatments, and uncertainty about their future. *Miam Ilgi (Miam’s Diary)* by Yu Hŭi-ch’un (1516-1577) shows that heterodox rituals were quite often performed when someone in the family suffered from illness such as measles or smallpox.  

Also, Yi Tŏg-mu (1741-1793) wrote that even Confucian literati or men of the yangban class often relied on shamans’ fortune-telling about social accomplishments and possessed amulets written by shamans. Particularly, in *Yang’arok (A Record of Raising a Grandchild)* Yi Mun-gŏn (1494-1567) confessed that due to his grandfatherly love and concern for the child he could not help inviting a shaman to pray for a cure whenever his grandson fell ill, despite its absurdity. His record in *Yang’arok* also shows that he stopped carrying out ancestral rituals when smallpox broke out in his family between spring and summer of 1556.  

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concerns of losing a family member due to illness, women stepped in to carry out heteropraxy and took the blame for inviting ritual impurity into the family on behalf of men, who could not openly suggest the practice of the non-orthodox rituals in their homes.

Also, there was more fundamental reason the patriarch could not completely forbid women in his family from carrying out heteropraxy: the absence of orthopraxy for women’s blood kin. The agnatic principle only regulates the patrilineage-centered orthopraxy and excludes most of a woman’s kinship from receiving the fruit of orthopraxy. Unable to find rituals for their own kin inside the Confucian orthopraxy, women had to carry out heteropraxy to mourn for their deceased kin and pray their wellbeing in the afterlife.

In this aspect, both orthopraxy and heteropraxy had the same meanings in that they were rituals for women’s family members, and did not cause any conflicts inside their minds. On one hand, they carried out their duties for the orthopraxy in order to avoid conflicts and establish their status in their husbands’ families. On the other, they also brought heteropraxy for those whom they cared for but who were excluded from the orthopraxy as outsiders in accordance with the agnatic principle. Since their own marital homes and families were the objects of the worship and devotion of Confucian religiosity, women did not experience conflicts over embracing Confucian religiosity and carrying out orthopraxy. And heteropraxy functioned to compensate for the absence of rituals in the orthopraxy for women.

Moreover, heterodoxy and heteropraxy were useful to relieve women’s suffering in their daily lives, which Confucianism had failed to provide women under its dominance. The this-worldly character of Confucianism could not provide spiritual shelter from increased suffering due to patrilocal marriage for women, regardless of class. The perpetual spatial change required of married women led to a widely used new term to describe their position between the two
families in her life: ch’ulga oein (an outsider of the family by marriage). The common extreme suffering was called sijip sari (postnuptial life in the in-law’s house) from the seventeenth century onwards.

Regardless of their social status, women of all classes had to adapt to the new environment in their husbands’ homes as newly accepted members. A new bride had to completely abandon everything related to her previous identity as a daughter. And she had to establish her brand new life as a wife and daughter-in-law in her husband’s family, assuming a heavy load of labour under severe discipline by her mother-in-law. Her status as a new family member could be gradually improved over time by giving birth to children, especially sons. Her sijip sari would end when her mother-in-law died and she got her own daughter-in-law, to repeat the cycle. All women of Chosŏn Korea were subject to this life pattern created by patrilocal marriage.

The patrilocal marriage of the late Chosŏn dynasty also caused a new form of domestic conflict among women who became family members by marriage called kobu kaldung (strife between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law). The spread of patrilocal marriage after the seventeenth century inevitably caused elevation of the authority of the mother-in-law in the domestic space, which exacerbated kobu kaldung. A woman who had experienced severe sijip sari from her own mother-in-law tried to train her own daughter-in-law based on her experiences. Since brides were supposed to learn their new families’ traditions from their mothers-in-law, they had to do their best to adjust and to put up with the training. Sometimes, a sister-in-law could intervene and become a common enemy along with the mother-in-law against the new daughter-in-law. However, even the sister-in-law after getting married could not avoid experiencing sijip sari from her own mother-in-law and animosity from her own sister-in-law.
Despite their difference in social status, both women of the yangban class and those of the lower class show emotional distress under the patrilocal marriage system. Women’s experiences and memories relating to their marital lives under the patrilocal marriage system were often constructed under the psychologies of anxiety and horror in the new and unfamiliar domestic environment. Additionally, in contrast with what their male counterparts experienced, Confucian religiosity demanded women of Chosŏn to completely change their religiosity to blend into their new families after marriage. While men experienced few changes after marriage, the religious changes that women had to undergo were tremendous.

This identity switch commonly caused substantial suffering to women because of the authority of their mothers-in-law and other members of their new families, until they acquired stable membership in the family after producing sons. Indeed, there was tremendous pressure to produce at least one male heir to prevent the lineage from being discontinued. On one side, the production of a male heir could mean to a woman that her future position to be an ancestor was guaranteed. On the other hand, all the burdens related to the production of male heirs were imposed only on women, and failure to produce a male heir often jeopardized a woman’s position as well as dignity in the in-law’s family.

Changes of living space caused tensions too, particularly among female members of the in-law family. Also, they commonly lamented the endlessness of their heavy work load. Even

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though women of yangban families were born with higher social status, they too took on a heavy domestic workload after marriage. 

Needless to say, women of the lower class also suffered from a heavy workload, both in their domestic space as well as outside in the fields for survival against the poverty they faced, to the extent that they described themselves as “slave[s] without the slavery documents.”

The secular character of Confucianism as a religion failed to provide consolation for women. In contrast to Buddhism or shamanism, Confucianism focuses on the importance of self-cultivation and learning only for male Confucian literati, who were allowed to achieve the Confucian ideal as well as honor in the society through their literary or scholarly achievements. It deprived women of the comfort needed to tolerate the suffering caused by their everyday life, nor did it allow them to expect rewards for this suffering, even in their next life, a solace provided by non-Confucian religions.

Although this does not mean that Confucian orthopraxy never functioned at all as a part of women’s religion in Chosŏn Korea, Confucian religiosity and orthopraxy always failed to make up for the absence of rituals for the women’s natal families. Women understood that the ancestral rituals would bring blessings for their marital families through their labours and efforts to prepare the sacrificial offerings. However, the absence of rituals for their blood relatives, who provided their roots, had always been an unrecoverable loss for women of the Confucian society.

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The absence of orthopraxy for women’s kin was a huge dilemma for families in Korea, particularly, under the circumstances that in Korea married women of all classes shared longing for the affections of their natal families. Both women of the yangban and of lower classes demonstrate that the mother functions as a common symbol of women’s longing for their childhood memories and their lament over their loss of dignity in their families, regardless of social status. Yangban women express the strong mother-daughter bond and mutual sadness over its loss after marriage in the literature of eighteenth century. This literature articulates their anguish over not serving their own parents—particularly their mothers—and their wish to stay with them by being born as male, expressing distress over losing their parents. The greater their duties for Confucian orthopraxy, the greater their misery for their parents, particularly among yangban women.

In this environment, the solution for a patriarch was to accept the peaceful coexistence of Confucian orthopraxy and heteropraxy in his family. It was impossible for him to provide proper orthodox rituals for the women in his family to protect the ritual purity of the orthopraxy. The only solution was allowing women to carry out heteropraxy such as the cult of households, shamanism, and Buddhism inside the domestic sphere under the pretext of pacification of trouble in the family.

Shamanism was a frequent choice for women’s practice of heteropraxy. Shamanism switched the ritual place to the domestic space of shamans’ clients, as did Confucian rituals.


Thus shamans, ritual experts, visited their female clients’ domestic places for ritual practices, instead of insisting that their clients visit them to carry out the rituals, obviating the need to cross the domestic boundary. Moreover, the nature of shamanism provided a good excuse for women to carry out heteropraxy with the tacit permission of the head of the household. Shamanistic rituals could be categorized as “rites of affliction” in that they were carried out to allay dangers which disturb daily life conditions, such as natural disasters (i.e. floods or draught) or diseases. If the order of daily life was maintained, shamanist religiosity did not come out or the ritual practice was not required. Once order was disturbed or collapsed, rituals were requested to solve the problems.

Shamanistic rituals were performed particularly at the moment when certain troubles and concerns occurred at home. If one or several members of the family happened to fall ill or experience unfortunate events, wives requested a shaman to perform rituals to either placate angry ghosts or expel evil spirits. As long as a woman fulfilled her roles in practicing Confucian orthopraxy, her husband had to tolerate her diverse religious activities, which were carried out in the name of filial piety.

Women also found a solution for their unfulfilled filial piety for their deceased parents by relying on the Buddhist ritual for helping the dead cross over to the afterlife. Women’s exclusion from education on Confucian philosophy, which rejects the existence of perpetual spirits or Heaven and the Hell, allowed women to maintain faith in diverse beliefs in the afterlife.

389 Yi Uk, Chosŏn Sidae Chaenan kwa Kukka Úirye [Disaster and State Rituals of the Chosŏn Dynasty] (Sŏul, Korea: Ch’angbi, 2009), p.22.

Particularly, devotion to the Bodhisattva of the Great Vow (Ksitigarbha, Chijang Posal in Korean) was popular among women, who wished for their parents to cross over to Heaven.  

Women either chose shamanism or Buddhism or embraced both based on their needs.

For these reasons, Chosŏn Koreans also came to wage relentless struggles for the purity of Confucian orthopraxy with heteropraxy, a problem their Chinese counterparts had long wrestled with. The male-centered nature of Confucianism successfully established patriarchal system, patrilineage, and patrilocal marriage through Confucian orthopraxy in Korea. However, the paradox of Confucianism is that the absence of women’s side of rituals in the orthopraxy was the fundamental reason for the constant encroachment of heteropraxy. The irony is that the ritual purity of Confucian orthopraxy could be protected because the heteropraxy embraced everybody that was excluded from the orthopraxy. Hence, heteropraxy functioned as both a threat and as a necessary evil for the purity of Confucian orthopraxy. This was the reason Confucian society could not or did not endeavor to eliminate heteropraxy in the family to protect the authority of Confucian orthopraxy. Instead, women were constantly accused of being the source of ritual impurity family both in China and Korea, even as the sources of their ritual impurity were helping to maintain the supremacy of orthopraxy.

Under this circumstance, Catholicism arrived in Chosŏn Korea. From the perspective of Confucian scholars, Catholicism was a totally unacceptable threat to the ritual purity of Confucianism. However, the meaning could be different from the perspective of women who had long embraced and juggled diverse non-Confucian religions. In the next section, I will discuss

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Korean women’s understanding of Catholic heteropraxy and its attractiveness, which might have been different from their male counterparts, after the establishment of Catholic Church in Korea in 1784.

5.5 Purgatory and Heaven: Women’s Attraction to Catholicism in Chosŏn Korea

Considering the aforementioned inborn paradox of Confucianism caused by women’s exclusion from the Confucian orthopraxy, one fresh impact of Catholicism can be vividly pictured, which might have been welcomed more among women of Chosŏn Korea. This feature might provide us the answer on why Korean women were not influenced by the Bishop Gouvea’s order to abandon Confucian ancestral rituals and maintained their Catholic faith even after the Chinsan Incident in 1791 in contrast to their male counterparts.

The most significant Catholic challenge in Chosŏn Korea began with the attempt to suddenly and immediately replace Confucian orthopraxy with Catholic orthopraxy from the 1790s. The command in 1791 to prohibit ancestral rituals by Bishop Gouvea, the Archbishop of Beijing Diocese, proclaimed that Confucian rituals were heteropraxy for all Catholics in Chosŏn Korea. The denial of ritual authority of Confucianism broke the hitherto peaceful coexistence of multiple religions under the dominance and tolerance of Confucian orthopraxy for the first time in the history of Korea. And Catholicism became the only foreign religion to experience massive bloody persecutions by the government for almost a century.

Although prohibition of ancestral rituals was the direct cause of the tensions for orthopraxy, the Catholic Church aimed eventually to subsume all the Confucian family rituals into the seven Sacraments of Catholicism, which were carried out under the ritual authority of the Church. The rituals for Catholic orthopraxy were: Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist,
Confession, Anointing of the Sick, the Holy Orders, and Matrimony. All converts were requested to displace the wedding rite into Matrimony, funerals into the Anointing of the Sick.

In contrast to Confucian rituals, the Catholic Sacraments required mediation as well as ritual authority outside of family: the Church and the clergy. The newly introduced rituals for Korean Catholics were Confession and the Eucharist, which also required the clergy. Although the six Sacraments are for lay believers and only the Holy Orders is a rite for clergy, all seven Sacraments required the Church and priests as two indispensable elements to practice. Instead of staying at home for the rituals, all lay Catholics, women included, were to gather at the Church and follow the priests’ presiding roles for the rituals. This meant Confucian efforts to establish orthopraxy only at and by the family would be collapsed and both spatial change and involvement of ritual experts outside the family would again be required. The returns of the ritual space and ritual experts outside the family meant that all the endeavours exerted by Confucian literati and the government of Chosŏn for several hundred years could have been in vain.

Since it was an attempt to seize ritual authority, the Church’s demand to displace Confucian orthopraxy caused more and bigger challenges, particularly to yangban men, the authority holders of Confucian rituals. Their conversion to Catholicism meant total renunciation of their social identity, responsibilities, and privilege provided by the ritual authority of Confucianism. Total abandonment of Confucian family rituals caused more severe struggles among male converts, the first Korean Catholic converts, Church builders, and Confucian scholars, despite their voluntary acceptance of Catholic orthodoxy.

On the other hand, for women conversion to Catholicism was rather easier in terms of both orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Women of Chosŏn Korea had embraced multiple religiosities without any problems, which might have affected their openness, flexibility, and willingness to
accept Catholicism as a new religion. Also, in contrast to their male counterparts, who would hold the ritual authority was not an important issue for women.

Moreover, women’s lack of education on Neo-Confucian teachings might have caused them fewer inner struggles with their conversion to Catholicism. Women had no education on Confucian spirituality in Chosŏn Korea. Instead of high-level metaphysics on the interactions between *li* and *qi*, women learned only the importance of provided food sacrifices to the ancestral spirits by connecting them with receiving blessings for the family. Also, women were taught that the mechanism for receiving ancestral blessings through food was similar to the explanation of shamanism; this was in sharp contrast to what their brothers were learning from the Neo-Confucian orthodoxy. Therefore, it was not important or possible for women to distinguish the significant difference of Confucian spirituality related to the ancestral rituals from those of the cult of household or shamanism. A woman could worship either a monotheistic god or polytheistic deities and convert to one religion or multiple devotions, as long as she could bring blessings to her family. In this aspect, the sophisticated Catholic theology provided a better understanding of God and afterlife, which might have been helpful to nurture women’s devotion.

The most conspicuous impact of Catholic orthopraxy on Korea women’s conversion to Catholicism was its lack of emphasis on the patrilineage, which was more helpful for women’s renunciation of ancestral rituals and integration of non-Confucian rituals into Catholic ones. In

392 Women were warned not to drop hair into the offering food. The reason is that hair in the food would look like a big snake to the eyes of ancestral spirits and they would not be able to either approach to or eat the offerings out of fear of the snake (“Chesa Ŭmsik ū Mŏrik’arak” [Hair in the Offerings on the Table for an Ancestral Ritual], http://yoksa.aks.ac.kr/jsp/ur/TextView.jsp?ur10no=tsu_1086&ur20no=Q_1086_2_F_010&keywords=%20%EB%A8%B8%EB%A6%AC%EC%B9%B4%EB%9D%BD, (accessed January 5, 2019). This teaching considers ancestral spirits as maintaining the same consciousness as during their lifetime, which is based on shamanism, which Neo-Confucianism is critiquing.
contrast to the importance of the patrilineage for the agnatic principle, patrilineage was not a crucial element for Catholic religiosity.\(^{393}\) Hence, Catholic orthopraxy included women’s blood kin and others who were excluded from Confucian orthopraxy. Also, as Catholic rituals did not require women to prepare or cook sacrifices, the Church’s order to abandon Confucian ancestral rituals might have been more welcomed by women of yangban status, who had suffered from the heavy burden of preparing the sacrifices. Instead, all family members including women were requested to pray for the deceased.

The ancestral ritual of Confucianism was the only Confucian ritual that had no equivalent in the Seven Sacraments of Catholicism, while it was the first element that had to be abandoned for conversion to Catholicism. The Catholic belief in Heaven and Hell is based on the notion of the immortality of the soul, in contrast to Confucian teaching on the extinction of human spirits. Catholic converts in Korea believed that the immortal souls of their ancestors would cross either to Heaven or Hell, and therefore would not return to the descendants to receive the sacrifices during the ancestral rituals.

(The official also asked to Kim Hyo-im Columba) Is it correct (Catholics) do not carry out ancestral rituals? (She answered) Practicing ancestral rituals is a useless thing. If a person is imprisoned, he cannot freely come and go for food prepared by his children despite their invitation, much more how can the soul in the Hell come out and indulge in the food? We do not carry out (the ancestral rituals), because it is futile and meaningless. *<Testimony on Kim Hyo-im Columba in Kihae ilki>*

The pattern of the aforementioned conversation between the interrogators and Korean coverts can be found in many documents throughout the one-hundred year of persecutions in Chosŏn. It

\(^{393}\) The lack of patrilineage in Catholic religiosity does not mean that Catholicism treated women and men equally or pursued gender equality in Chosŏn Korea.
is noteworthy that the sacrificial offerings, the core part of the Confucian ancestral ritual as well as the source of women’s labour for the ritual, became the source of renunciation of Confucian orthopraxy. Catholics believed that the ancestors had already crossed over the boundary beyond the space for the living and could not come back to eat the sacrificial offerings, which made preparation of sacrificial food futile.

In fact, Catholic converts of Chosŏn utilized their renunciation of ancestral rituals as one of the ways to claim their identity as Catholics from the end of the eighteenth century. Accounts by Korean Catholic converts in Sahak ching’ŭi should be noted as evidence that Catholic converts (both men and women) had already abandoned the practice of ancestral rituals in before the first persecution in 1801.

The first teachings for Catholicism are burying the ancestral tablets and renouncing ancestral rituals. Therefore, I indeed did not participate in my parents’ sacrificial rituals. <Yi Kuk-sŭng’s testimony, Sahak ching’ŭi>

I abandoned practicing ancestral rituals, because I believed the teachings (on the rituals) were wrong. <Chŏng In-hyŏk’s testimony, Sahak ching’ŭi>

The above accounts demonstrate that both men and women maintained their faith by overcoming their repugnance or resistance to the previous teachings on the importance of ancestral ritual practice. Even though most male converts from the yangban class renounced their Catholic beliefs, some embraced the new religiosity by rejecting the practice of ancestral rituals based on the Church’s teaching, and accepting a new religious identity.

Catholic converts, both men and women, found an alternative way to mourn their dead kin: the notions of salvation and purgatory. The concept of purgatory, firmly established in twelfth-century Europe, became a useful alternative rite to replace the Confucian ancestral rituals
in Korea, as it had been for Catholics in China.\textsuperscript{394} The \textit{Catechismus Romanius}, the authoritative Catholic catechism for four hundred years from 1566 to 1997, taught that purgatory is one of four hells, located between Hell and Heaven. However, purgatory is not a place for the perpetual punishment of the souls but rather for temporary penalization for the purpose of purification of unfulfilled repentance in order to be accepted into Heaven.\textsuperscript{395} The salvation of souls was possible through their living descendants’ prayers, attendance at Mass, and philanthropic activities. Since prayers for souls in purgatory were more universal concerns for the dead, not just one’s own ancestors,\textsuperscript{396} women’s kin excluded from Confucian ancestral rituals could be included as recipients of the prayers in Catholic orthopraxy. Moreover, indulgence of the souls in purgatory did not require the preparation of food but rather oral chanting of the designated prayers, which considerably reduced women’s burden of labour.

Extant documents show that Catholic converts had learned prayers for those suffering in purgatory from the beginning of the history of Catholic Church in Korea at the end of the eighteenth century. The first example is Yun Chŏm-hye Agatha, a martyr of the first persecution in 1801 discussed previously. The letter sent by Korean Catholics to the Bishop of the Chinese Diocese in 1811 shows that Yun Chŏm-hye Agatha prayed for indulgence for her deceased

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\textsuperscript{396} Eugenio Menegon, \textit{Ancestors, Virgins, & Friars: Christianity as a Local Religion in Late Imperial China}, Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series 69 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center for the Harvard-Yenching Institute: Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2009), p.298.
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mother after having a dream in which her mother was serving the Virgin Mary.\textsuperscript{397} Also, 

*Ryŏn’ok domun* (Prayers for Those in the Purgatory) appeared in the *Sahak ching’ūi* as one of the Catholic books confiscated and burnt by the government in 1801 and demonstrates that Korean Catholic converts began praying for the salvation of their deceased ancestors between 1784 and 1801. In addition, *Kyoyo sŏron* (Ch.: *Jiaoyao jieliu*, Essential Teachings of the Church Briefly Explained) and *Sŏnggyŏng chikhae* (Ch.: *Sheng jing zhi jie, Direct Explication of the Scriptures*), Catholic catechisms, which introduced the concept of purgatory and teach how to pray for those suffering there, were widely read among Catholic converts before 1800.

Moreover, the prayers for the souls in the purgatory were included as one of the daily prayers, such as those done before and after meal times.\textsuperscript{398} It was also all Catholic converts’ duty to pray for the souls of the dead in purgatory on the Solemnity of all Saints (November 1) and the Memorial Day for all the dead (November 2).\textsuperscript{399} All these activities to wish for the salvation of souls in purgatory merely required women to pray orally instead of preparing sacrificial food.

The concept of purgatory inspired a unique form of song for praying the souls of the dead in Chosŏn Korea: *yŏndo* (chanting for those in the Purgatory). Korean Catholics began singing

\textsuperscript{397} Yun Chŏm-hye Agatha had always been concerned about her mother, who died without receiving the last sacrament. One day, she had a dream that her mother was serving the Virgin Mary, and she asked to Father (Zhou Wen-mo) what it meant. He suggested that she should pray for indulgence for her mother in purgatory, if it was true. From then she prayed for mother every day. Unknown, “Korean Catholics’ Letter to the Bishop of Beijing Diocese in 1811,” in Unknown, “Simminyŏn e Chŏsŏn Ch’ŏnjugyo Sinja Tūri Pukkyŏng Chugyo Ege Ponaen P’yŏnji [Korean Catholics’ Letter to the Bishop of Beijing Diocese in 1811],” in *Han’guk Ch’ogyo Kyohoe e Kwanhan Kyohwangch’ŏng Ch’ogyo Mo’um [A Collection of Letters on Early Korean Church in the Vatican]*, ed. Yun Min-gu (Sŏul, Korea: K’at’olik Ch’ulp’ansa, 2000), 214–68, p.239.


yŏndo particularly during funerary rituals from the 1780s, and they are still sung in Korea today.\textsuperscript{400} Yŏndo were sung by both the family of the deceased and other Catholics (either one or more than fifty people) by turn throughout the funeral. The development of diverse yŏndo in Chosŏn proves how successfully the concept of purgatory had replaced the ancestral rituals for Korean Catholics. Catholicism also brought a new notion of the afterlife, which could alleviate believers’ suffering during their lifetimes, particularly women. Most female Catholic converts’ confessions during governmental interrogations show that clear explanations of the afterlife related to Heaven and Hell were one of the crucial appealing elements of Catholicism for them.

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A-1. (Court Lady Sŏ Kyŏng-ŭi) stated, “my old mistress insisted me to learn evil Catholicism telling me that I would be able to go to the Heaven after my death, once I become a Catholic. I guess that was the reason my mistresses believed in the evil Catholicism. \textit{<Court Lady Sŏ Kyŏng-ŭi’s confession, Sahak ching’ŭi>}

A-2. (Mr. Shin) stated that “… I believed in and learned Catholicism with sincerity after listening that I would be able to go to the Heaven after my death, ….. \textit{<Mr. Shin’s confession, Sahak ching’ŭi>}

B-1. I read books on Catholic theology with my brother (Kwŏn Il-shin) and he castigated and rejected it at first. However, after a while, he sent me a letter from Inch’on and said, “I could not believe in Catholicism when I first heard about it. I got a Catholic book and read it later. I thought it had doubtlessly extreme reason such as worshiping the ultimate God, discussions on three kinds of soul such as the vegetative soul, the sentient soul for the birds and beasts, and intellectual soul for human, and theory of the four elements on fire, air, water, and earth. \textit{<Kwon Ch’ŏl-shin’s confession, Ch’uan kŭp kug’an>}

B-2. I originally had studied only Confucian teachings, ….., I went to Seoul to take the civil service examination and met Min Do in a inn. I could get a couple of Catholic books after hanging out with him for several days and getting to know him better. The core teaching was ‘respect the Lord of the Heaven and love others.’ It was easy and fast to learn. I came back home putting in a sleeve of my garment and fell in the teaching deeply. \textit{<Yu Kwan-gŏm’s confession, Ch’uan kŭp kug’an>}
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The aforementioned testimonies show the different motivations for conversion to Catholicism for males and females. A-1 and A-2 show that women were fascinated by the discussion of the afterlife related to Heaven and Hell, while B-1 and B-2 demonstrate that the motivation for male converts was more related to intellectual concerns.

The Catholic notion of the Creation and the Creator, two newly introduced religious concepts in Chosŏn, was another appealing factor for women. Chŏng Yak-chong (1760-1801), the leader of Korean Catholic Church and martyr of the persecution of 1801, emphasized the importance of learning about Creation and God as the Creator from the first to the sixteenth chapters in his book *Chugyo yoji* (Summary of the Lord’s Teaching), the first introductory book on Catholicism for Korean converts written in the 1790s. In contrast to the richness of these stories there are no written records which tell the myths of the creation of the world in Korean culture, except for only a very few which appear in ritual songs of shamanism. Hence, the Catholic emphasis on the Creation and the almighty Creator attracted some women who were curious about the origins of the world. The most representative example is Kim Lucia (1818-1839), a virgin and martyr of the persecution in 1839.

C-1: .... Kim Lucia is my aunt, ...., when Lucia became seven years old, she asked to her mother and said, “you gave birth to me. Then, who did give birth to you?” Her mother answered, “your grandmother did.” She continued asked this question more and more and reached to the question on the origin of the human beings. Hence, her mother answered, “I don’t know. Ask it to Grandmother from the Chestnut Island, who will visit us tomorrow.” The next day, she asked the grandmother about the question and learned Catholic teachings from her. At last she mastered reading and writing Han’gŭl and completed learning the Holy catechism only after three days. <Kim Agatha’s testimony on Kim Lucia in the *Testimony of Witnessing the Martyrs’ during the Persecution of Pyŏng ’in Year*>

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As C-1 shows, Kim Lucia’s faith was derived from her curiosity about the origin of human beings, including herself. Currently, Kim Lucia is the only female Catholic convert known to have first been attracted to Catholicism by the notion of the Creation and the Creator. However, her example in C-1 shows that the origin of the self and the living also attracted female converts to Catholicism, stimulating their intellectual curiosity.

Forms of matrimony and marital life among Korean Catholics under the persecutions have not yet been explored in detail. Original sources are either scattered or hidden in the archives of the Catholic Church in Korea. Nevertheless, it can be presumed that Korean Catholics also had patrilocal marriages, which required brides to move in with their husbands’ families, in that choice of spouse for women was always a concern of the missionaries. Although the spread of Catholic villages was also useful for finding suitable (Catholic) matches, there were always groups of Catholic women who wanted to choose perpetual virginity over marriage. The most desired dream was to become a virgin martyr in the middle of a persecution, which meant dying unmarried and sexually inexperienced. It was indeed a huge paradigm shift in that the traditional perspective had always been that dying unmarried and sexually inexperienced was the most miserable and distasteful death. It was indeed a subversion of the traditional view and the creation of a new paradigm.

403 Simeon Francois Berneux, “Chang Chugyo Yuni Cheusŏ [Pastoral Letter from Bishop Chang to All Catholics],” in Sun’gyoja wa Ch’anggŏja t’al [Martyrs and Witnesses] (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 1982), 165–78, p.172. Bishop Berneux’s pastoral letter Chang Chugyo Yuni Cheusŏ shows warnings and concerns on marriage of Catholic girls and choice of husbands, which explains that Catholic women’s marriages were a much more serious problem than Catholic men’s marriages, as marriage was patrilocal among Korean Catholics too. It demonstrates that accepting a non-Catholic bride was not a big concern, because she could easily be converted to Catholic faith alongside her husband’s family after moving into his home.
Therefore, in the next chapter, I will explore the traditional viewpoint and understandings of unmarried women’s life, death, and afterlife to reveal why Catholic women’s dream of virgin martyrdom is still striking in the context of Korean history without recourse to the claim of modernization. This will demonstrate that Korean Catholic women’s desire for virgin martyrdom could be still a striking phenomenon even from the context of the pre-modern period, reflecting a tremendous paradigm shift on their perspectives related to death and afterlife of unmarried women.
Chapter 6: Paradise Lost by Getting Unmarried in Chosŏn Korea:

Traditional Understanding of Female Virginity in Korea

6.1 Systemization of Women’s Prenuptial Virginity in Chosŏn Dynasty

Chosŏn Korea faced serious social problems due to increased number of unmarried women in the eighteenth century when Catholicism reached Korea. The society and the families treated unmarried women as the living dead to be concealed in the inner chamber, considering them as the most shameful beings. The examination of the traditional understanding of unmarried women of Chosŏn Korea will demonstrate that Korean Catholic women’s preference of life choice for perpetual virginity was a tremendous paradigm shift among Koreans.

Marriage both in the East and the West was considered as one of the most important rites of passage as well as all the destiny of every adult, to the extent that it was believed that “to be grown up was to be married.” The same was true in traditional Korea. It was expected that both men and women would or should be married when they reached puberty.

However, there had always existed many women who remained unmarried, although mostly their existence had been deleted or concealed from documents. Some of these “single women” were temporarily single, and would eventually marry, while others would never wed. And some continued their “adult destiny” by getting married after spending a longer time unmarried than their contemporaries. But it is extremely difficult to find lifelong single women.


in traditional Korea because of the lack of extant documents. In contrast to their Western counterparts, who are recorded in censuses, tax records, and other nominal listings, it is almost impossible to identify lifelong single women in the history of traditional Korea.

There do exist records which enable us to get a glimpse of single women’s lives, particularly those of Koryŏ period. The first example is the case of a woman from a rich family who never married. Lady Wang (1141-1183) was a daughter of Wang Chae, kin of the royal family of Koryŏ. She was commemorated as a filial daughter who had taken good care of her father after the early death of her mother, staying unmarried until her death at the age of forty-three years old. She was also honored for managing and protecting her inheritance well after her father’s death. The reasons why she stayed unmarried are not specified in the record, but it seems poverty was not the reason according to the account, which mentions her good management of her inheritance. Moreover, it is noteworthy that she was still praised as a filial daughter despite her status as a single woman, while records of Chosŏn dynasty always mention failure to marry as the most unfilial behavior.

The next examples are unmarried women of Koryŏ found in Buddhist nunneries, which shows one of the reasons for staying single. Another Lady Wang (1151-1186), Wang Yŏng’s daughter and the niece of King Injong (r. 1122-1146), was praised for her virtuous behaviour in serving her father well without getting married. Her epitaph says that she made reading Buddhist

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sutras her daily routine, wishing to be reborn in the Western Pure Land based on her Buddhist faith until she died in 1186 at the age of thirty-six at Ch’angsin Temple.\footnote{Kim Yong-sŏn, ed., Koryŏ Myoji Chiptaesŏng [Compilation of Inscriptions on the Tomb Steles] (Ch’unch’ŏn, Kang’wŏndo, Korea: Hallim Dae Asea Munhwa Yŏn’guso, 1993), p.252.}

Despite the examples of these two Ladies, poverty seems to have been the most common and frequent reason for women choosing to stay unmarried or to join Buddhist nunneries for survival. There are two such records in Koryŏsa (History of the Koryŏ Dynasty). Wang Sŏn was a great-great-grandson of King Sukchong (r. 1095-1105). However, he died in poverty, because he did not work hard and focused solely on his devotion to Buddhist faith. The record on him says that his two daughters were unable to marry due to poverty.\footnote{Koryŏsa [History of Koryŏ Dynasty] Volume 90, Biographies of Royal Family Section 1. http://db.history.go.kr/KOREA/item/level.do?itemId=kr&bookId=%E5%88%97%E5%82%B3&type=o#detail/kr_090_0010_0550, (accessed January 5, 2019).}

Another account in Koryŏsa says that two daughters of Kim Chi-suk (1237-1310), a civilian official who served under three kings—King Wŏnjong (r. 1260-1274), King Ch’ungryŏl (r. 1274-1308), and King Ch’ungsŏn (r. 1298, 1308-1313)—could not get married because of poverty and eventually became Buddhist nuns after the death of their father.\footnote{Koryŏsa Volume 108 Biographies of Officials Section 21, Kim Chi-suk http://db.history.go.kr/KOREA/item/level.do?itemId=kr&bookId=%E5%88%97%E5%82%B3&type=o#detail/kr_108_0010_0020_0010, (accessed January 5, 2019).} These are among the few documents concerning unmarried women of the pre-Chosŏn period. Considering the tone in those records, it seems that Koryŏ did not push single women to be married off and did not
accuse unmarried women of staying with their fathers to retain control of their fathers’ fortunes.412

In pre-Chosŏn Korea, relying on the Buddhist nunnery to stay celibate was the most preferred and permitted way for women to avoid marriage. A Buddhist nunnery provided the safest and most reliable place for the daughters of poor aristocrats, who found it impossible to find decent husbands or have impressive marriage ceremonies with ample dowries. Moreover, widows of all social classes who chose to stay celibate and not remarry preferred to enter the Buddhist nunnery. Koryŏ, as a Buddhist kingdom, did not prevent them from choosing a life in the nunnery whether they were married or unmarried.

However, the Chosŏn dynasty began intervening in the legal definition of a woman’s qualification to be a primary wife of a yangban man based on her premarital sexual purity in the midst of its process of revamping the society based on the Neo-Confucian ideology favoring the agnatic principle. After the establishment of the Chosŏn dynasty in 1392, officials of the Ministry of Personnel officially consulted with King T’aejo in 1396 about setting a new policy which would bestow honorary titles on the wives of government officials, discussing terms like “virginity” or “chastity” for the first time.

The Ministry of Personnel requested (to the King ….) 1. Those who would be officially bestowed an honorary title (as an official’s wife) must be their primary wives, who married them as never-married virgins. Although one is an official’s current primary wife, she must not be installed if she married him as a non-virgin (or a woman, who had once married). She must be only called Lady X, a wife of Mr. Y, who has the governmental position of Z. If she is someone’s current primary wife, she must not be installed when she has any problems with her lineage. If a woman falsely assumes the title of official installation despite the fact she has never been installed, she

must be severely punished. If those who had once been installed remarry, please invalidate her installation.  

King T’aejo approved this request and the result was made law with almost no revision in the Kyŏngje yukchŏn (The Six Codes of Administration), the first official law code of Chosŏn which was published in 1397, and became the model for publication of the Wŏn yukchŏn (Basic Six Codes) in 1431. This implies that the state would allow a woman the position of primary wife only if she met the requirement of having maintained her prenuptial virginity.

At the same time, the state demanded marriage as an indispensable duty for all women and began legal punishment of patriarchs who failed to marry off their daughters before those daughters turned thirty. The state policies for marrying off women of yangban families before the age of thirty had frequently appeared in government discussions throughout the history of Chosŏn, since it had first appeared in 1407. Also, the legal codes show that throughout the


416 The Council of State requested the King (…). “The second policy is about relief for the poor. (…) If there are any daughters of yangban, who could not be married due to poverty after the age of thirty, the local governments must investigate this case and provide materials for them so they could get married. (The record of July 2, 1407, The Annals of King T’aejong, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn); The Ministry of Rites requested: You had once commanded us, “(…) However, there might be still unmarried women even after the age of thirty or forty due to stupidity of their fathers or poverty of their families. You must discuss and tell me the solutions on how to marry them off.” We investigated the family finances among all women that had not yet married over the age of twenty-five. They were all poor and could not have the proper rituals for proper marriage processes. There for we would like to suggest you (…) to provide daughter of yangban ten sŏk of rice and beans for their dowries, and daughters of non-yangban a half of the amounts. (…) The King accepted this suggestion (The record of May 7, 1472, The Annals of King Sŏngjong, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn); (King Sŏngjong) sent his letters of commands to each of the Provincial Governors: The laws for taking care of widowers and widows and providing materials for old (unmarried) virgins are just words on paper in (Kyŏngguk) Taejŏn. I have never heard they were fruitfully implemented. You must carry them out more effectively from now on. (The record of July 4, 1489, The Annals of King Sŏngjong, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn)
history of Chosŏn patriarchs had the responsibility of marrying off single women in their families and were punished if they failed to do so. *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* (Grand Code for State Administration), proclaimed the basic policy to prevent women from staying single.417

The fundamental reasons women stayed unmarried were related to their financial situations, like their counterparts during Koryŏ period. The first and most frequent reason was poverty, which made it difficult to go through the proper processes for the marriage ritual based on *Zhu Xi’s Family Rituals*, which presents four processes for a proper marriage: negotiating the marriage, presenting the betrothal gift, presenting the valuables, and welcoming in person. The groom’s family presents the betrothal gift to the bride’s family and the bride’s family returns the valuables as a symbol of agreement to the engagement.418

Although it is impossible to delve into the actual processes for the weddings of yangban families of Chosŏn due to the lack of sources, it is known that marriage entailed material exchanges between two families at stages for the presenting the betrothal gift and presenting valuables. Commoners had exchanged wine and rice as marriage gifts and valuables had been exchanged among aristocrats during the Koryŏ period.419 However, the change in the marriage process based on *Zhu Xi’s Family Rituals* spread the custom of exchanging valuables throughout

417 If a daughter of a yangban literati was unable to marry due to poverty by the time she got close to the age of thirty, the Ministry of Rites would inform King so that he would provide crops and cloth. (...) A patriarch would be heavily punished if he did not marry off his daughter near the age of thirty in spite of not being poor. *<Kyŏngguk taejŏn Yehŏn Hyehyul>*


419 Pak Mi-hae, *Yugyo Kabujangje wa Kajok, Kasan [Confucian Patriarchy and Family, Patrimonialism]* (Sŏul, Korea: Ak’anet, 2010), p.127-128.
all social classes. Therefore, it became mandatory that there be exchanges of expensive materials during these two processes of marriage on top of the costs of the preparations for the wedding ceremony as well as the beginning of marriage life for the newlywed couple. Thus, poverty was a serious barrier to marriage, not only for women but also for men.

Also, the Chosŏn government began intervening into the historical functions of the Buddhist temples as a shelter for women. As we have seen, Buddhist temples had been the only place women could live outside the patriarchal system. There, unmarried women or widows could find protection, community, and a social role. The Chosŏn government opposed entrance to the Buddhist nunnery for both unmarried women and widows, but took a much stronger stance regarding unmarried yangban daughters from the early period of the dynasty. The Chosŏn dynasty ultimately legally prohibited young unmarried women from choosing a life of sexual


\[\text{From now on, if a son of yangban wants to become a monk, (...) he will be allowed by getting state permission (toch’ŏp). However a man who is liable for corvée labour or is an only son, or a woman who is an unmarried virgin, are all prohibited from doing that. (The record on May 10, 1408, The Annals of King T’aejong, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn); Office of the Inspector-General insisted, “if an unmarried virgin from a good family become a nun, please make her return to the secular life so that the custom would be corrected. (The record on June 29, 1413, The Annals of King T’aejong, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn); (Ministry of Rites suggested, …) (the government) will completely ban an only son and unmarried virgin from joining the sangha. Those who violate (this policy) will be returned to the secular life. Their parents who force them to enter the sangha and monks and temple owners who took them to the temples will be heavily punished. A widow, who shaved her hair for chaste life, will be treated as an exception and not be punished. (The record on November 7, 1420, The Annals of King Sejong, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn); There are so many women of yangban class shaving their hair and joining the sangha, because there are no regulations for becoming a nun. However, actually, there are very few became a nun out of devotion, and most of them became a nun due to their loss of chastity or in order to be sexually promiscuous after death of their husbands freely hanging around temples under the pretext of mourning for their husbands. (The record on August 4, 1473, The Annals of King Sŏngjong, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn)}\]
abstinence for religious purposes, and as a result all women in Chosŏn had to enter matrimony as never-married virgins. Once they obtained the position of wife (particularly for yangban women), there was no way to go back or switch membership since to do so would disturb the lineage purity based on the agnatic principle.

The state connected the purposes of the policy for women’s marriage with social welfare when confronting challenges from natural disasters such as floods, draughts, or famines, based on the teachings in Zhouli (Rites of Zhou). They believed that missing the right time for marriage hindered the harmonized operation of the world (hwagi), which caused natural disasters. Particularly, the existence of unmarried women was considered as the reason for droughts and thus the policies for assisting then to marry were one part of the welfare policies of Confucian states, which aimed to take care of them to prevent natural disasters.

The state’s attention to new marriage policies focused mainly on women. The various social and political changes, brought for protection of the agnatic principle, had caused changes and regulations to the marriage system in Chosŏn. However, these changes and regulations mainly focused on women, like regulations on women’s remarriage, new protection of the status of primary wives and so on. Although men who were unable to marry due to poverty were also

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423 Zhouli shows twelve policies to deal with natural disasters and take care of the public, and the tenth solution is the increase in marriages. (以荒政十有二聚萬民：一曰散利，二曰簿征，三曰緩刑，四曰弛力，五曰舍禁，六曰去幾，七曰皆禮，八曰殺哀，九曰蕃樂，十曰多昏，十有一曰索鬼神，十有二曰除盜賊。) (Unknown, “Zhouli [The Rites of Zhou],” https://ctext.org/rites-of-zhou?searchu=以荒政十有二聚萬民, (accessed January 5, 2019)).

discussed as an urgent matter to solve, the government considered women’s marriage much more important and serious, even requiring state intervention.\footnote{The record on April 14, 1439, The Annals of King Sejong, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn. The Department of the Censorate suggested: “the marriage of a man and a woman is the most important human affair, which could cause damage to harmonization of natural forces by losing the right time. Therefore, there is a law for marrying off unmarried old women in Sokchŏn and the offices in the Capital and local areas are implementing it from time to time. This law had not targeted men from the beginning, because they were considered to solve the problem on their own. However, some cannot get married because their parents love them or hate them too much to marrying them off. Others, it is a pity to say, cannot get married due to their parents, because their fathers fell in love with their stepmothers, who took the family fortune, did not take care of the stepsons’ lives, or had no intention to marry them off. Thus, we would like to suggest men should be urged to get married.” The King ordered the Council of State to discuss this suggestion, and they answered, “we agreed with the suggestion from the Department of the Censorate. However, how can we compare men’s missing the right time for marriage with those for women? We are afraid of causing problems by establishing a new law imprudently. We do not think it is not that important to press men to get married and it is not right enforcing the new law carelessly.” The King followed this decision.}

However, the legalization and continuous encouragement of women’s marriage implies that there had always been women who, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, did not marry.\footnote{Chŏng Chi-yŏng also shows skepticism regarding the actual punishment of the patriarchs by the legal codes related to the failure of marrying off their daughters based on the lack of the written documents. (Chŏng Ji-yŏng, “Chosŏn Sidae Hon’in Changryŏch’ae kwa Toksin Yŏsŏng” [The Government’s Policy for Encouragement of Marriage and Single Women in the Chosŏn Dynasty], Han’guk Yŏsŏnghak 20, no. 3 (2004): 5–37, p.11, p.7-8.)} It is not known whether the any man was ever actually punished for failing to marry off his daughters, because no such accounts have been discovered.\footnote{The record on April 24, 1486, The Annals of King Sŏngjong, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn; The record on July 4, 1489, The Annals of King Sŏngjong, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn; The record on July 8, 1489, The Annals of King Sŏngjong, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn; The record on April 29, 1496, The Annals of Prince Yŏnsan’gun, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn.} However there are records that local officials did not implement the state policy for seeking out unmarried women and providing funds for their marriages.\footnote{The record on April 14, 1439, The Annals of King Sejong, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn. The Department of the Censorate suggested: “the marriage of a man and a woman is the most important human affair, which could cause damage to harmonization of natural forces by losing the right time. Therefore, there is a law for marrying off unmarried old women in Sokchŏn and the offices in the Capital and local areas are implementing it from time to time. This law had not targeted men from the beginning, because they were considered to solve the problem on their own. However, some cannot get married because their parents love them or hate them too much to marrying them off. Others, it is a pity to say, cannot get married due to their parents, because their fathers fell in love with their stepmothers, who took the family fortune, did not take care of the stepsons’ lives, or had no intention to marry them off. Thus, we would like to suggest men should be urged to get married.” The King ordered the Council of State to discuss this suggestion, and they answered, “we agreed with the suggestion from the Department of the Censorate. However, how can we compare men’s missing the right time for marriage with those for women? We are afraid of causing problems by establishing a new law imprudently. We do not think it is not that important to press men to get married and it is not right enforcing the new law carelessly.” The King followed this decision.}

The state policy for assisting marriage has differences from the previous period in the eighteenth century under the reign of King Yŏngjo (r. 1724-1776), because King Yŏngjo
extended the object of this policy to the lower class and requested to be shown the actual effects.

Although kings and officials had frequently discussed helping poor unmarried men and women to marry during previous periods, it is not clear whether these policies were actually implemented and what effect they had, if any. However, King Yŏngjo had a different attitude. First, he not only constantly commanded implementation of the policies for provision of marriage expenses, but also examined whether those policies were actually implemented by officials both in the capital and local areas.  

Also, he designated specific officials and offices to assume the duty of providing marriage expenses and punished those who had not yet followed his commands.

429 Cho Hyŏn-myŏng, the Third State Councilor, suggested, “(…) marrying and cohabiting afterward of a man and a woman is the most grave affair for human morality. Therefore, the most urgent works for king’s rule is have people not blame the government for their unmarried lives. (…) Please set up the age limits for men as 30 years old and for women as 25 years to thoroughly investigate and find those who could not get married beyond those ages due to poverty. And then, please command the Board of Taxation as well as the Office for the Dispensation of Benevolence for those in Seoul and provincial officials as well as local magistrate for local areas to help people get marriages so that normal men and women would never be resentful over the impossibility of their marriage.” The King followed it. (The record of January 25, 1743, The Annals of King Yŏngjo, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn); The King summoned officials of the Five Districts and asked them how many unmarried people after the right time for marriage are there (in Seoul) (The record of January 29, 1772, The Annals of King Yŏngjo, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn); The King commanded the Governor of Kyŏnggi to come to the court with magistrates of Koyang and Kwach’ŏn. He asked them how much marriage expenses their offices had spent (The record of January 29, 1772, The Annals of King Yŏngjo, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn).

430 Cho Hyŏn-myŏng, the Third State Councilor, suggested, “You, Sire, had commanded the Five Districts (of Seoul) to examine unmarried men and women after the right time for marriage last month and those who could not practice funerary rites after the end of the mourning period. Looking at the reports, (…), I found unmarried men and women in the yangban families even at the ages of thirty six and thirty seven. How would the local areas be when even Seoul is under this situation? (…) I believe that you, Sire, should issue a royal order and provide financial supports for marriage and funerals.” At last, the King commanded, “(…) I heard again that there are those who could not get their matches until they reached their forties, (…). I order you to help them generously by ordering the offices in Seoul and local regions. Officials, who neglect their duties, will be reported and punish by the central offices, if they work in Seoul, and by the provincial officers, if they work in local areas (The record of February 22, 1743, The Annals of King Yŏngjo, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn); The King went to the Kŏnmyŏng Gate and ordered to arrest of the Heads of the Five Districts (of Seoul). The reason (of their arrest) is that they had not yet reported the results of the New Year’s royal command to provide marriage expenses for the poor members of the public. And Yi Ch’ang-jun, Staff Official of the Office for the Dispensation of Benevolence was arrested (The record of January 23, 1772, The Annals of King Yŏngjo, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn).
King Chŏngjo (r. 1776-1800) also continued to implement King Yŏngjo’s policies for assisting marriage for poor men and women and left a noteworthy example, which shows the state actually made substantive efforts with this issue and earned quite noticeable results.

The Five Districts submitted lists of a total of two hundred and eighty-one men and women, who needed to be married off. Hearing the news that the daughter of Shin Tŏk-bin, a young student (幼學) has been exchanging marriage proposals with Kim Hŭi-chip, a young student (幼學), the King commanded Cho Chŏng-jin, Minister of Finance, and Yi Pyŏng-mo, Director of Office for the Dispensing Benevolence to help the preparations of their marriage and celebrated their marriage ceremony with a banquet. He also ordered an official in the government to write and leave a biography about the couple’s story.  

According to the above account, the government conducted actual investigations and made lists of the men and women who needed help to marry. Among them, Shin Tŏk-bin’s daughter and Kim Hŭi-chip’s son were left unmarried. Therefore, the government became the go-between and had them successfully marry. Also, the King commanded the writing of a story about this event to celebrate the successful case of matchmaking by the state.

From the eighteenth century on, the government noticed that the reason for women failing to marry was tightly related to a newly ascending social problem, particularly when it came to the daughters of the yangban class.

Yi Chong-sŏng, the Second Magistrate of the Bureau of Royal Relatives suggested that “… our kingdom is poor. There are generally a lot of poor Confucian scholars and people inside and outside Seoul except for those who are holding public posts or the rich. Yangban occupy the largest numbers and are in the poorest state among them. (…) Their numbers are more than a half of the all commoners in our kingdom. Yangban of Chosŏn would be degraded to the status of a plebeian, once they become an artisan or a merchant and, thus, cannot carry on those occupations. Their only way to survive is engaging in agriculture. However, they cannot do so either, even though they die of starvation. That is because they would soon receive a notice of appointment either as an unregistered

adult man or promoter for agriculture (as a taxpayer) from the government, if he cultivates the fields by himself and have his wife carry food to the fields like farmers. They strive not to lose their face by wearing official outfits and performing marital and funerary rituals. How could they not be the poorest ones among them? (...) Moreover, most of unmarried old women were mostly daughters of yangban class. 432

This discussion at court illustrates the serious economic situation most of yangban families were facing from the eighteenth century, which made it difficult situation to marry off their daughters.

The social changes after the Japanese and Manchu invasions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries shook the social status of Chosŏn and rapidly increased the numbers of yangban. However, the path to the official posts came to be monopolized by a small number of yangban who had already resided in the capital area generation to generation from the eighteenth century onward. These social changes degraded the financial situations of most of the yangban class, who could not hold official posts for several generations, leading to a reduction in income and inheritance. Also, the only economic activities available to them were in agriculture, which accelerated the collapse of the yangban class in the nineteenth century. 433 This financial decline of the yangban class resulted in an increase in the difficulty of yangban women marrying, which required a large expenditure. This provoked the governmental concerns regarding the increase of the unmarried yangban women.

It is worth noting that the genre of kyubang kasa (A Song from the Inner Chamber) began telling the hidden stories of unmarried yangban daughters from the eighteenth century: And


example is *Noch’onyŏ kasa* (*A Song of An Old Spinster*).434 *Noch’onyŏ kasa* is one of many *kyubang kasa*, which had been widely sung alongside other *kasa* in the inner quarters without clear recognition of the authorship in Chosŏn Korea from the eighteenth century.435 The voices of women in the various *Noch’onyŏ kasa* directly articulate that the reason for their situation lay in the new social problems, which disproportionately affected the yangban class: economic hardship and yangban’s obsession to maintain their prestigious status through hypergamy of their daughters despite their own poverty.

(...)
People in the world, please listen to me.
All things in the universe have their matches after being born.
(......)
Would be there more pitiful one than me?
If one lives for hundred years, it would be thirty-six thousand days.
If I live alone, could I live for thousand years?
If I became a chaste woman, could I live ten thousand years?
My stuffy parents, poor and narrow-minded yangban
Shabby-genteel and pretending to be (rich) yangban
Incompetent at everything
Extremely fastidious, which makes me older day by day
Sitting alone monotonously in a lonely room,
Tossing and turning with insomnia
I am singing alone. Please listen
My parents in their dotage
What on earth are they expecting by raising me?
Are they going to use me to catch things or roast things?
(......)
People’s tying the knot had existed since long time ago
And a certain girl is very lucky to get married before turning to twenty years old.

434 *Kyubang kasa* is a representative genre of female literature which gained popularity among women of Chosŏn from the mid eighteenth century. A *kasa* is a song written on a long scroll. The main authors and singers of *Kyubang kasa* were women. Women of a family or neighbourhood sang, shared, copied, and spread the *Kyubang kasa* (Pak Hye-in, “Kyubang Kasa ‘Sach’in’ga’ Rūi T’onghae Pon Mnyŏ Kwan’g’ye” [Mother-Daughter Relationship from the Sach’in’ga of Kyubang Kasa], *Journal of Korean Studies* 1 (2000): 183–99, p.184).

435 Sŏng Mu-kyŏng, “‘Noch’onyŏ’ Tamnon ŭi Hyŏsong kwa Munhak Yangsig Tŭl ŭi Panhyang” [Creation of Discourses on ‘Old Spinsters’ and Their Reflections through Literary Formats], in *Chosŏn Hugi, Siga Munhak ŭi Munhwa Tamnon ŭi T’ansaek* [Scrutiny on the Cultural Discourses in the Poetic Literature of Late Chosŏn Period], ed. Sŏng Mu-kyŏng (Sŏul, Korea: Pogosa, 2004), 177–210, p.180.
Marriage of a son or a daughter is a proud event.
But my fate is so unfortunate enough to stay unmarried at my forties.
(…..)
My parents gave up the matchmaking and are just complaining poverty.
(…..)
If a man has a decent appearance and conduct, please do not consider his wealth or honor and make him my match
Do you think forty is a young age for an unmarried woman?
(…..)
I have been getting older thus far while they are being too picky about men’s family backgrounds as yangban
My father used to be the Minister of War and my grandfather used to be the Minister of Finance
This is my family background and it is hard to catch up with what is customary (…..)

<Noch ’onyŏ kasa I>436

The above song is one of many Noch ’onyŏ kasa, which shows the typical format and common lamentation among noch ’onyŏ (old spinsters) with other Noch ’onyŏ kasa. Other Noch ’onyŏ kasa state the more diverse and personal reasons of a woman’s inability to marry, such as physical disability and deformation.437 Nevertheless, poverty, as this song shows, was the most important and common reason. The issue of poverty lamented in this kasa would have resonated with many in the yangban class, who were facing the same concerns.

As the collective impoverishment of the yangban intensified from the seventeenth century onward, the increase of the number of unmarried yangban women also became more noticeable as a newly serious social problem of the Chosŏn dynasty, not just a personal issue. Poverty had always been the main reason for a woman failing to be married off even during the Koryŏ dynasty, as we saw in the previous section.


Yangban poverty made marrying off daughters more difficult than marrying off sons, because most yangban families did not want to marry their daughters to families with lower social status or more financial difficulty than theirs.\textsuperscript{438} Therefore, most yangban families rejected proposals from such families, even as their daughters reached thirty or forty years old, as the song describes it. Since the impoverishment of yangban happened collectively, this situation created major obstacles to marriage among yangban women.\textsuperscript{439} It also became a major social issue in the latter half of the Chosŏn dynasty.

Although the issue of unmarried women created a social problem serious enough to attract governmental attention and led to frequent calls to solve it, unmarried women of Chosŏn had to remain in inner quarters and invisible from society.

The King (Yŏngjo) commanded to help central and local officials to care and assist those who lost their chance to get married among both yangban and commoners and said, while sending the order, “poor yangban scholars often conceal and do not inform others of the loss of marriage timing due to their shame. How can the children (yangban and commoners) hide the fact from their parents (the king and government)?\textsuperscript{440}

As this account from the \textit{Chronicle of King Yŏngjo} in the \textit{Veritable Records of the Chosŏn Dynasty} demonstrates, parents often hid the existence of their unmarried sons and daughters because of shame over their inability to marry. Under the Confucian marriage system, which required exchanging marriage proposals between the parents of the two families, it was the


\textsuperscript{440} The record of January 1, 1757, \textit{The Annals of King Yŏngjo, Veritable Records of the Royal Courts of Chosŏn}. 
parents’ duty and responsibility to marry off their children. Hence, parents were also responsible if their children were not able to marry, which caused shame and led many to hide the existence of such children despite governmental edicts. Under this circumstance, “old spinsters” were considered the most shameful and had to be completely confined in the inner quarters until death. Unmarried women of yangban status were likely to have spent their entire lives in such isolated conditions, further increasing their invisibility.441

Staying unmarried in Chosŏn was equivalent to a death sentence for women, as marriage was the only means for a woman to obtain a social position and role in Korea throughout the pre-twentieth century period. Particularly from the seventeenth century onward, all daughters were supposed to leave their natal homes forever by marrying, and only males inherited their fathers’ estates. As a result, it was difficult for families to financially support their unmarried daughters. Without access to ancestral ritual practices and inheritance, unmarried women were both a burden and a shame while they were alive.

Moreover, since marrying meant that a woman became an ancestor in her husband’s family and would receive ancestral sacrifices from his descendants after her death, staying unmarried in Chosŏn meant that a woman had no place to go in the afterlife. Since the only way to obtain this qualification was through marriage, unmarried women were completely ineligible to receive ancestral rituals in the Confucian orthopraxy.

So, what happened to the souls of unmarried women in Chosŏn? I turn to this topic in the following section.

6.2 Virgin Ghosts in Korea

The most noteworthy fresh impact of Catholicism can be found from the fact that Koreans changed their previous perspectives on unmarried women’s death from the most tragic and ominous affair to glorious martyrdom. Particularly, people of Choson Korea shared fears about virgin ghosts as the most vengeful supernatural entity. Catholicism provided unmarried Korean women Heaven as a place to live after their deaths and proper burials as well as memorial rituals, which had been missing from Confucian orthopraxy. This change should not be interpreted in the light of the so-called “modernization.” However, it was very big paradigm shift occurred in the mind of Korean women regarding their understanding of their deaths and afterlife, which is worth to delve into.

The fact that no one can escape death has stimulated human imagination and created countless stories of the afterlife in various cultural and religious contexts. Most religions designate either heavens or hells as the last destinations to which people are supposed to go after death. However, there have always those who failed to cross over to the world of the dead and returned to the world of the living. They appear in front of the living as either ghosts or monsters, causing horror or fear.

In Korean folklore there are three representative types of paranormal beings. The first is mulgwoe, which was believed to be a spiritual creature attached to an object where it had existed for a long time. The second is yogwoe, various magical non-human monsters, which are transformed from animals. And the last is in’gui, apparitions of the dead. These three kinds of entities can have human appearances, because the mulgwoe and yogwoe have the ability to disguise themselves with human forms despite their non-human origins. However, it is
noteworthy that only in’gui are associated with biological death, while mulgwoe and yogwoe are not related to the physical death of a living entity.442

Their traditions show that Korean people shared profound fears about a unique female specter: virgin ghosts. Among many scary female monsters and ghosts in Korean literature and folklores, virgin ghosts have been always been the scariest. Virgin ghosts, as the name implies, are the ghosts of people who died as virgins, typically before marriage. According to folk legends and the shamanistic faith of Korea, both men and women could become virgin ghosts. Male virgin ghosts were vengeful and dangerous, due to their sadness and regret over dying before marriage. They were thought to wander around mountain paths and cause illness to passersby.443 But female virgin ghosts were always considered to be much more frightening, more dangerous, and more vengeful than their male counterparts. Virgin ghosts are distinguished from other supernatural entities in that they had once been living human beings and must have experienced death to be turned into spectres. An in’gui extends its existence with memories before its corporal death, and virgin ghosts are one of the most representative examples of the human apparitions.444

The concept of the return of a dead unmarried woman in Korea seems to have originated from China, in that Korea and China share the same theorization and understanding of the


transformation of women, former human beings, into ghosts. Chinese religion explains that a young woman who dies unwed has ample cause for resentment, because of her untimely and tragic death. Hence, a dead virgin inevitably takes unfulfilled sexual desires to the grave, and her repressed desire obstructs her from normal processes of change by causing static congestion, a melancholic disorder arising from suppressed longing and resentment.445

In Korea, this explanation from China was merged with traditional belief in the afterlife. Until the acceptance of Zhu Xi’s ghost theory, which explains the eventual extinction of human spirits after several generations, Korean society had persisted in its beliefs regarding spiritual immortality as well as the existence of an afterlife. Korean tradition explains that the whole world consists of three layers: this world, for the living; the world of the dead; and the middle world, where the deceased stay temporarily until they eventually cross over to the world of the dead. All the dead were supposed to cross over, but the souls of those who died prematurely or were murdered would fail to fully disperse due to their bitter resentment, and would therefore be stuck in the middle world, and thus, often return to this world.446

Also, we first find the actual appearance of female virgin ghosts in Korean literature when the genres of zhiguai (accounts of the strange) and chuanqi (tales of the marvellous) were adopted from China in approximately the ninth century. It is the Ch’oi Ch’i-wŏn chŏn (A Story of Ch’oi Ch’i- wŏn’s Life) in the Suichŏn (Tales of Remarkably Strange Things), a literary anthology presumed to have been collected from the mid ninth to the late fifteenth centuries,


which contains the first appearance of female virgin ghosts in the history of traditional Korean literature. The Suichŏn is considered to be the earliest fantasy literature in Korea, and was heavily influenced by the genre of zhiguai, although the Tale of Ch’oi Ch’i-wŏn itself is categorized as chuanqi genre. The ghosts of two sisters in this story demonstrate a prototype which would recur in later female virgin ghost stories in Korean literature and folklores: a young unwed woman who died with extreme rancor, unable to cross over to the afterlife, and her repeated attempts to relieve her resentment from untimely death by finding a listener for her untold or unheard stories.

This prototype of virgin ghosts flourished in fifteenth-century Chosŏn mostly in chŏn’gi novels, Korean adaptations of chuanqi, as hypersexual female characters similar to their Chinese

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449 Chŏng Hwan-guk, “Tong Asia Hwansang ū Chip’yo wa Han’guk Ch’ogi Sŏsa ū Hwansangsŏng - Chigwoe, Yonghŏm Sŏsa ū Kyŏng’u” [Indicator of Fantasy in East Asia and Nature of Fantasy in the Korean Narratives in Early Period: In the Cases of Monsters and Magics], Hanmun Hakpo 32 (2015): 3–40, p.14. The chuanqi genre is longer than zhiguai and tells more elaborate tales of the marvelous, often framed around verse; they started to be written in the eighth and ninth centuries during the Tang dynasty (Judith T. Zeitlin, Phantom Heroine: Ghosts and Gender in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Literature (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2007), p.5).

450 Yun Chŏng-an, “Kojŏn Sosŏl ū Yŏsŏng Wŏn’gwi Yŏn’gu” [A Study on Female Vengeful Ghosts in the Classical Novels] (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Seoul, 2017), p.27-28: The first appearance of virgin ghosts in Korean literature can be found in the chapter on Ch’oi Ch’i-wŏn’s life. Ch’oi Ch’i-wŏn (857-?) was a renowned poet and scholar of the Kingdom of Unified Silla (676-935). In the tale of the Suichŏn, ghosts of two sisters appeared in front of Ch’oi and asked him to hear their stories. The sisters had died of despair caused from their unwanted betrothals made by their father. The father attempted to marry them off to a salt merchant and a tea merchant, respectively. However, the sisters wanted better husbands and became vengeful ghosts after their untimely deaths from frustration. The sisters’ ghosts thought of Ch’oi as the ideal husband due to his literary talents, and appeared in front of him, wanting him to listen to their stories, and they composed poetry together all night long in order to relieve their sadness.
counterparts during the fifteenth-century Chosŏn period. Whilst intellectuals of the Chosŏn dynasty had engaged in heated debates on issues related to ghosts and spirits, some of them also wrote novels which were almost equivalent to the chuanqi of China in that they commonly revolve around the romantic relationship between a living man and a female ghost. The Tale of the Dice Game at Manbok Temple (Manboksa chŏp’ogi)\textsuperscript{451} in Kŭm ’o shinhwa (New Stories Written in Kŭm’o Mountain), written by Kim Si-sŭp (1453-1493), demonstrates a Korean adaptation of female virgin ghosts in the works of Chinese chuanqi. The female ghosts in these tales commonly died unwed with a virgin body and posthumously pursued physical relationships with living men to satiate their unfulfilled sexual desires.

These highly seductive and sexualized virgin ghosts repeatedly appear in later literary genres like yadam\textsuperscript{452} and novels. They are described as supremely beautiful and sexually unstable and seduce their targets with hyperfemininity or hypersexuality.\textsuperscript{453} Rather than scary or hideous

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\textsuperscript{451} Yangsaeng, a hero of The Tale of the Dice Game at Manbok Temple (Manboksa chŏp’ogi) in Kŭm ’o shinhwa, was an orphaned young man who lived in the Namwŏn area. Staying at the Manbok Temple, he was lamenting his lonely feelings and his situation as a helpless single man when Buddha appeared and asked him to play a dice game, promising Yangsaeng to find a beautiful woman for him, if he won. Yangsaeng won the game and he found a beautiful woman, who had kept her chastity after her parents had died three years before, and was looking for a husband. They fell in love immediately and had sex for several days whereupon they temporarily separated with a promise to meet again and continue their relationship. Yangsaeng arrived the arranged place where a funerary march for a yangban’s daughter was underway. He realized that his lover was the spirit of the daughter who had died three years ago. She appeared in front of him later to eat the offerings and left him because she could not avoid her fate. Later, Yangsaeng heard her voice, which informed him of her rebirth as a baby boy in a foreign country. In extreme longing, he led the life of a recluse at Chiri Mountain and nobody heard from him again.

\textsuperscript{452} Yadam is a general term for a corpus of prose narratives claimed by modern-day South Korean scholars to derive from stories orally circulating in the world during the Chosŏn Dynasty. The Chinese characters for the works in this genre denote unofficial; unsophisticated; (uncultivated) field and talk, respectively. Most yadam narratives cover a wide spectrum, ranging from fantastic and humorous stories about anonymous protagonists to stories about the experiences of historical figures. The authors of yadam were Confucian literati, and they selected and recorded stories circulating among the lower classes in Classical Chinese (Park Si Nae, “A Textual Study of Tongp’ae Nakson: Problems of Oral Storytelling, Genre and The Vernacular in Late Chosŏn Yadam” (The University of British Columbia, 2012), p.1-2.)

\textsuperscript{453} Judith T. Zeitlin, Phantom Heroine: Ghosts and Gender in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Literature (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), p.27.
they are sexualized and have unearthly beauty, because these literary genres existed to fulfil the fantasies of male authors, both Korean and Chinese, through their male heroes’ desires.454

From the seventeenth century onwards, the characters and gender of ghosts in Korean literature differ from both their Korean and Chinese predecessors. The most notable change is the disappearance of ghosts from the chŏn’gi novels, while only fake female “ghosts” appeared to make fun of the heroes of stories such as The Tale of O Yu-ran (O Yu-ran chŏn) and The Tale of Chong’ok (Chong’ok chŏn) written by Mok T’aе-lim in 1803. Eventually, female ghosts completely disappeared from chŏn’gi novels in Korea after the Tale of Un-yŏng (Un-yŏng chŏn).455

Another change related to ghosts in Korean literature is more diversified characters in yadam based on the ghosts’ gender. Yadam is a genre of essays on various topics which were considered by yangban scholars inappropriate to write in the official documents but were still worth recording. The authors collected the rumours or stories, which circulated among people in various classes, and wrote them in Classical Chinese.456 Ghosts in the tales of yadam had once shared the common characters with those in the abovementioned chŏn’gi novels, particularly the female ghosts. Before the seventeenth century, the ghosts in yadam stories can be categorized


into two sorts: first, ghosts exorcised by officials or yangban men, and second, ghosts mesmerizing or cursing yangban men.\textsuperscript{457} Female virgin ghosts in the latter category are similar to those in \textit{chŏn'gi} novels in that they are highly sexualized and hyper-feminine temptresses. Some of them seduce male scholars and successfully accomplish their goals by consummating their relationships, allowing them to cross over. Others destroy men’s lives or careers in revenge, if the men reject or abandon them.

On one hand, \textit{yadam} began featuring gendered ghosts—benevolent spirits of male ancestors and vengeful spirits of female virgins—from the seventeenth century onward. The appearance of the ghosts of ancestors in \textit{yadam} was the most noticeable change in the genre of \textit{yadam}. These ancestral ghosts, mostly men, appear in front of their descendants with the same personalities, morality, and appearance they had when alive.\textsuperscript{458} Also, they commonly return to their descendants in order to scold them over their improper practice of Confucian rituals and disturbance of the agnatic principle, or to assist them to overcome difficulties in their lives. These ancestral ghosts would become the most dominant ghost stories in \textit{yadam} in the following eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The rate of appearance of these ancestral ghosts in \textit{yadam} tales increased strikingly from the seventeenth century. Hence, they ended up occupying the

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dominant position as supernatural beings from the eighteenth century onward in the genre of *yadam*.\(^{459}\)

On the other hand, *yadam* after the seventeenth century and *han’gŭl* novels, which gained wide popularity after the eighteenth century, increasingly feature vengeful female virgin ghosts. Chinese literature had continued to deal with love stories between young human males and beautiful female virgin ghosts during the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. However, the female virgin ghosts in literature in Chosŏn Korea no longer try to release their unfulfilled sexual desires by seducing young male scholars. Instead of sexual beings who wander in search of men for posthumous sexual relationships, they provoke the readers’ sympathy by being killed by their rapists while defending their chastity, or committing suicide due to false accusations of sexual impurity.

*Han’gŭl* novels usually pay more attention to the female heroines’ lives and struggles before their deaths, in contrast to *yadam*, which focus more on the appearance of ghosts and officials’ punishment of the perpetrators. As they are also relatively longer than *yadam*, readers get more detail about (and are more likely to sympathize with) the lives of the young women before their deaths and the ordeals they suffer until they are transformed into vengeful ghosts. The newly diversified virgin ghosts of Chosŏn persistently haunt local government buildings to discover extraordinary officials who would take revenge and lift the stigma of the slander against their chastity on the dead women’s behalf. Despite these differences, these stories show that Korean yangban officials began imagining that their authority as officials could be stretched not

only to the living but also to the deceased, with their extraordinary capabilities enough to complete the unfinished business of the returned dead.\(^{460}\)

The reason for these female virgin ghosts’ deaths demonstrates the epidemic of the cult of chastity in Chosŏn Korea. The government of Chosŏn had promoted women’s chastity as a means to rebuild the social order and overcome the aftermaths of the Japanese and Manchu invasions in the early seventeenth century. The state generously honored and rewarded chaste women who took their own lives to protect their chastity in the face of sexual violation by the foreign invaders.\(^{461}\)

The cult of chastity in Korea closely interwove female chastity with death from the seventeenth century. The state promotion of women’s chastity resulted in the wide spread of the chastity cult throughout the entire society of Chosŏn along with the new discourse of yŏlnyŏ (chaste women). This label resonated with the wide spread of the notion of chastity vertically from the ruling class to the lower class and horizontally from married to unmarried (thus, virgin) women. Before the seventeenth century, chŏlbu (loyal wives) and yŏlbu (chaste wives) were terms for married women who gained royal recognition, rewards and honors for their chastity. Chŏlbu was the appellation for a widow who did not remarry after her husband’s death and

\(^{460}\) It is noticeable that yangban men also developed another fantasy around the similar period that they would sustain their social position as the ruling class after their death or even become rulers in the afterlife. Pak Sŏng-ji notices that the stories of yangban males’ transformation into officials or a rulers of the afterlife increased particularly in the yadam genre from the sixteenth century onward. She argues that this phenomenon demonstrates that yangban men desired to prolong their dominance and authority even in the afterlife by creating these stories in yadam. Pak Sŏng-ji, “Illha, Yadam ŭi Kwisin Tammon ŭl T’onghae Pon Sadebu ŭi Ilwŏnjŏk Segyegwan” [Korean Confucians’ Unitary Understandings on the World Shown in Their Discourses on Ghosts in the Anecdotes and Yadam Writings], Kojong Munhak Yŏng’u 44 (2013): 157–94, p.177, p.179–180, p.184.

practiced rituals for her deceased husband based on the instructions in Zhu Xi’s *Family Rituals*. On the other hand, *yŏlnyŏ* was used to recognize those who protected their chastity from threats of rape by foreign invaders starting from the seventeenth century, regardless of their marital status.⁴⁶² Therefore, the appellation of *yŏlnyŏ* was increasingly used to honor chaste women without regard to their marital status, including unmarried (thus, virginal) women, and disseminating the notion of chastity among all women of all classes.⁴⁶³

The chastity cult created a new social obsession with women’s chastity, placing women under surveillance by families, society, and the state and punishing heavily those who violated or disobeyed the norm after the eighteenth century. Kim Sŏn-kyŏng argues that women’s sexuality after the eighteenth century was an object to be appropriated by social relationships as a medium for connection of one family to another through marriage, the only socially allowed sexual relationship for women. Family, society, and state became the subjects to appropriate women’s sexuality by managing and controlling their chastity as a means. Kim explains that this social appropriation brought the concept that women’s chastity was “easy to be corrupted and broken” and operated a surveilling gaze upon women’s daily life to protect their fragile and vulnerable sexuality.⁴⁶⁴

As a result, women came to be othered by close and direct surveillance and constrained by the concerns of their natal and marital families for their reputations in the village as well as

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society at large, and subject to punishment by the state. Once she was thrown under any suspicion of corruption of her chastity, the tripartite authority considered a woman’s value as an individual was also corrupted and began to subject her to social exclusion.  

The broadened definition of yŏlnyŏ also led to an increase in suicides among unmarried women by imposing the concept of “corruption” on them from the seventeenth century. Based on her research in *Ch’ugwanji (Records of the Ministry of Punishments)* Mun Hyŏn-a points out that the official documents on sex crimes of the late Chosŏn period demonstrate that women were the major victims of suicides caused by sex crimes.  

Also, Kim Hyŏn-jin also argues that the documents in *Simnirok (Records of Official Investigations)* illustrate that women’s suicide rates were double those of their male counterparts in the eighteenth century. The cases are all related to sex crimes such as rapes or murder, for revenge of rape attempts, or slanderous remarks concerning the victims’ chastity. Since suicides of chaste widows are excluded here, it is likely we would see a much higher women’s overall suicide rate if we include widows who

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466 Mun Hyŏn-a, “P’ang’yŏlmun Naeyong Punsŏg ŭl T’onghan Chosŏn Hugi Anae Sarhae Sagŏn ŭi Chaehaesŏk - Ch’ugwanji Sarye rŭl Chungsim ŭro” [Reinterpretation of Murder Cases of Wives of the Late Chosŏn Period in the Legal Verdicts: Focusing on the Cases in the Ch’ugwanji], *Chindan Hakpo* 113 (2011): 163–95, p.185.

killed themselves to stay chaste. However, it is noteworthy that suicides related to chastity issues occurred only among women,468 and among all social classes.469

Here, we need to go back to the female virgin ghosts in the tales of *yadam* and *han ’gül* novels by dividing them into two categories to see more details on what these tales are trying to tell us. The first is the Arang type seen in the *Arangchŏn* [*Tale of Arang*]. Arang was a daughter of a magistrate of the Miryang area in Kyŏngsang Province, but was murdered by a man who secretly loved her, during his attempt to rape her. Arang vehemently resisted his attack in defense of her chastity, and he brutally stabbed her to death. Her ghostly appearance, therefore, is horrendous, with either white clothes stained with blood spatters or a blade still stuck in her neck or chest as proof and a vivid illustration of the gruesome way she died. This type can encompass the victims, who are recorded in the official records on sex crimes during Chosŏn dynasty as either committing suicide or as killed during attempted rapes.

The Arang type reveals an increase in and closer connections between women dying because of sex crimes and chastity, particularly in the cases of young girls or unmarried women, who were supposed to stay as pure virgins during the late Chosŏn period. The records on sex crimes in *Simnirok* (*Records of Official Investigations*) and *Ch’ugwanji* (*Records of the Ministry of Punishments*) demonstrate that not only married women but also unmarried women were victims of sex crimes such as rapes or attempted rapes. Some women like Arang were killed by

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468 Chŏng Il-yŏng, “Chosŏn Hugi Sŏngbyŏl e Ttarŭn Chasal ŭi Haesŏk: Chŏngjo Tae Simnirok ŭi Chsal Kwallŏn Sagŏn ŭl Chungsim ŭro” [Interpretation of Suicide Cases Based on Gender of the Late Chosŏn Period: Focusing on the Cases Related to Suicide in the Simnirok during the Reign of King Chŏngjo], Ŭisahak 17, no. 2 (2008): 155–75, p.160.

their rapists before or after the crime had been committed. Others killed themselves after the attack or attempted attack.

The most noticeable thing among these cases is that young girls increasingly committed suicide when they had not been raped yet but had suffered attempted rape. The government also officially recognized as chaste and rewarded women who killed themselves, and particularly praised and honored suicides by victims of attempted rape, more than it did those who killed themselves after being raped.\(^{470}\) This was because the government valued highly the fact that they killed themselves even though their “sexual purity” had not been “corrupted,” reflecting the belief of the government that the suicide of rape victims was unavoidable due to the stain on their bodies.\(^{471}\) This situation implies the arrival of the “era of \(\text{yŏlnyŏ}\),” which implies the wider spread of women’s sexual subordination through the cult of chastity even among unmarried women, as the appellation came to embrace more women as chaste.\(^{472}\)

The second type is the Changhwa type in the \textit{Changhwa Hongryŏn chŏn} (\textit{Tale of Changhwa and Hongryŏn}), in which the victim commits suicide to prove her innocence due to rumours or accusations about her lack of chastity. Changhwa and Hongryŏn were sisters and daughters of the overseer (Chwasu) of the local gentry associations (Hyangch’ŏng) of the Ch’ŏlsan region in P’yŏng’an Province. The unmarried Changhwa was falsely accused by her


stepmother of having had a miscarriage, because her stepmother did not want to pay for her costly marriage expenses. Her infuriated father ordered her half-brother to kill her, as he was afraid that if rumours spread that Changhwa had had a pre-nuptial sexual relationship, that would ruin the family honor. Therefore, she was drowned in a pond without the chance to protest her innocence. Hongryŏn committed suicide in the same pond to follow her sister after meeting Changhwa’s ghost and hearing stories about her death in her dream. Hence, this type includes those listed in the official documents on sex crimes who either were killed or committed suicide due to circulation of rumours accusing them of losing their sexual purity.

The Changhwa type also shows us another common category of sex crime woman of Chosŏn were sometimes caught up in: death by gossip. The close surveillance of a woman by her family and neighbours could often cause unexpected problems, either due to misunderstandings or for nefarious reasons. If a woman became the subject of gossip charging her with sexual misdeeds, the damage she experienced in the community was almost the same as if she had been sexually violated. Even though she had not been raped or had any physical relationships, her existence itself was already considered and treated as physically and sexually “corrupted.”

The fact that an unmarried woman was involved in a scandal could cause cancellation of her engagement or exclusion from the marriage market, because her value as a woman was lost along with her sexual purity. The official records of sex crimes such as Ch’ujo kyŏlokrok

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(Records of the Verdicts by the Ministry of Punishments) demonstrate that some men manipulated the moral perils that women were facing for their sexual desires. They spread false rumours related to sexual misdemeanors by unattainable women whom they desired, which often resulted in either revenge through murder, or suicide. A woman subject to such a rumour had to provide evidence of her innocence, but this was often impossible. Therefore, suicide was the strongest and most effective way for her to proclaim her sexual purity and actively fight the slander, whether she was married or unmarried.475

The majority of female virgin ghosts in the literature of the late Chosŏn period return to prove their sexual purity instead of surrendering it, in contrast to their predecessors in the literature of the early period. The transformation of female virgin ghosts reflects changes in the society of the time. Furthermore, although the ghosts could take revenge for themselves, instead they persistently appear in front of local officials, perhaps because they are eager to obtain official recognition by the state, which they had failed to achieve by proving their sexual purity when they were alive. It seems that sympathy for women who died because of false accusations impugning their chastity was widely shared.

(King Chŏngjo says) There are nothing which can provoke enough resentment from a chaste woman enough to permeate her bones except being falsely accused of promiscuity. Once she is stigmatized, it pushes her to into the abyss. One can climb out of a hole and leap over a moat. However, how can she prove her innocence no matter how she hard she tries to, and how can she wash it off no matter how she tries to. Therefore, there are those who even attempt to drown themselves out of wrath and resentment.476


476 Chŏng Yak-yong, Hŭmhŭm sinsŏ, vol. 3, 158.
This sympathetic attitude became more visible when a young girl committed suicide because of false accusations of the loss of her virginity.

The widespread fears of female virgin ghosts actually created a new anxiety among local officials: the stories of spectral haunting in local administrative offices were not treated as just stories during the late Chosŏn period. Local officials shared fears of potential hauntings by female virgin ghosts in their offices, who could get them into trouble or cause them to fall ill. Since magistrates, governors and the like were the official conduit to recommend chaste women to the central government, in the literature female virgin ghosts persistently appear wailing in front of these local officials. As a result, when they learned that an unmarried girl in their administrative area had committed suicide to prove her sexual purity they built memorial gates to console her soul.477

In contrast to virgin ghosts who lost their lives due to accusations of loss of chastity, virgin ghosts in folk religions came back mostly to cause illnesses or deaths to members of their own families instead of local officials. The return of a dead female family member caused collective fears and sympathy among people in Chosŏn Korea, particularly from the eighteenth century onward, around the time when the Catholic notion of virginity was introduced among Koreans. In the following chapter, I will explore what folk religion and folklores tell us about the meanings of dying unmarried due to natural causes in traditional Korea and what such ghosts requested by returning from death.

6.3 **Paradise Lost: Return of the Unmarried Female Dead**

Virgin ghosts in folk religion included the victims of sexual crimes as in literature but also unmarried women who died of natural causes without being entangled in tragic crimes. It was believed that a woman would be turned into a virgin ghost if she died before marriage, which as we have seen was the only legally and socially permitted way for a woman to have a sexual relationship. A woman who died in this state was thought to fail to cross over from the world of the living due to her despair over her lost opportunity to ever live the life of a married woman. Even in contemporary Korean society it is believed that the most vengeful ghosts are female virgin ghosts, even compared with those who were transformed into vengeful spirits by an “inappropriate” death.

As I discussed previously, the category of virgin ghosts includes both men and women, and, therefore, males were also believed to turn into vengeful virgin ghosts if they died before marriage. Filled with remorse and resentment, such ghosts wander around mountain valley paths and pounce upon travelers, causing them to become ill.\(^{478}\) They are known by the umbrella name *ch’onggak kuishin* (male virgin ghost), but there are other terms to indicate male virgin ghosts as well: *samt‘ae gui(shin), mongdal gui(shin), wadal gui, tangdal gui, mongdal honsin,* or *hōgui wŏnsin.*\(^{479}\) Male virgin ghosts are considered evil, because they cause sickness and even death. However, they are believed to be much less dangerous and vengeful than female virgin ghosts.


Like their male counterparts, female virgin ghosts are known by the term *ch’önyŏ kuishin* (female virgin ghost). However, there are many other terms such as *kaksi gui*, *son’gakssi*, *golmi guisin*, *pusa gui*, *maengdo nawŏnsin*, *sonyŏ gui*, *wangsin*, *hon’gakssi*, *talgyal guishin*, and, like male virgin ghosts, *mongdal gui*.\(^{480}\) *Ghosts in Korea*, a study conducted at the request of the Japanese Government-General of Korea from 1919 to 1941 by Murayama Chijun (1891-1968), a Japanese ethnographer, demonstrates the widespread belief in female virgin ghosts among Koreans in the early twentieth century.\(^{481}\) Murayama’s report particularly discusses the female virgin ghosts called *son’gakssi*.

*Son’gakssi*: Dying as a teenager without sexual experiences, the young girl is believed to turn into an evil ghost due to her unbearable despair. One version says that she curses her own family generation to generation and does harm to other virgin girls in the family. Another version says a dead virgin girl would become an evil ghost with snaggle teeth and possesses to only other virgin girls, but this version is unclear. Since Koreans are the most horrified by these female virgin ghosts, shamans manipulate their fears as a means for making money. If a young girl gets ill, her family immediately invite a shaman to confirm whether it was caused by *son’gakssi*’s curse or not. Once it was indeed verified as a curse by a *son’gakssi*, the family have the shaman perform exorcism by praying, offering sacrifices, and dancing while playing a gong and a drum. The shaman piles the sick girl’s all clothes in an empty room of the house and continues to pray day and night and so that the *son’gakssi* would be able to move to those clothes. […] The existence of *son’gakssi* in a family is considered extremely important to the extent that families clandestinely check each other out to see whether there had once been *son’gakssi*’s curses in other families before agreeing to betrothals in certain regions.\(^{482}\)

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\(^{482}\) Murayama Chijun, *Chosŏn ŭi Kwisin* [Ghosts of Chosŏn Korea], trans. Kim Hŭi-kyŏng (Sŏul, Korea: Tongmunsŏn, 1990), p.175.
Also, it is said that people in villages avoided going out at night on the day when an unmarried girl died in the village. Since Koreans were afraid of the vengeance of female virgin ghosts, most nationwide shrines and relics are more related to female virgin ghosts rather than their male counterparts. Moreover, Murayama Chijun does mention fears of male virgin ghosts among Koreans, in contrast to the details concerning the horror they feel toward female virgin ghosts.

The existence of (both male and female) virgin ghosts can be found particularly in China, Korea, Taiwan, and Okinawa, where Confucianism affected the bases for ritual practices and social ideology. The geographic spread of the conjunction of the two notions of “virginity” and “ghosts” seems to coincide with the power sphere of Confucianism. It is noteworthy that Japan, which has always had more profound influences from Buddhism, does not share the notion of virgin ghosts despite its geographical location in East Asia and despite its large number of female monsters and ghosts. However, Okinawa, which had once been an independent kingdom and maintained strong cultural and political ties with China and adopted Confucianism for social and political operations, shared the concept of virgin ghosts and spiritual marriage of those ghosts.

In East Asia, the existence of female virgin ghosts can be found in modern Taiwan as well, and discussion of them would be a good comparative case to understand female virgin


ghosts in Korea, particularly considering that the root of virgin ghosts might have originated from China. Most of the research post-1970s on female virgin ghosts in Taiwan demonstrates striking similarities with their Chosŏn Korean counterparts, despite the different timespans. A virgin ghost is created when a teenage girl, who ought to look forward to marriage and motherhood, dies unmarried.\textsuperscript{486} As in Korea, young unmarried men also turn into ghosts, but female virgin ghosts are believed to be more vengeful and resentful.\textsuperscript{487} In contrast to the ancestral spirits, who provide blessings and are seen as good, they are considered to be evil since they are the sources of troubles and disharmony in their families and should either be exorcised or placated. In that case, the dead woman’s family invites non-Confucian ritual experts (Taoist, shamanic, or Buddhist) to perform rituals including posthumous marriage, or they put her ashes on tablet in a special temple for unmarried girls rather than preserve traces of her in the family home.\textsuperscript{488}

However, the most outstanding commonality is that in both Korea and Taiwan female virgin ghosts cause troubles to their own families, unlike their counterparts in literature who search for men either to seduce or to appeal against injustice they suffered. Whenever random misfortune or troubles particularly related with illness occurred in families, people in Taiwan and


all over China attributed then to the ghosts of unmarried women in their families.\textsuperscript{489} Ghosts of unmarried women in Chosŏn Korea also caused random misfortune or troubles mostly in their own families, rather than attacking strangers. As Murayama Chijun pointed out in the study discussed above, female virgin ghosts particularly cause sickness to unmarried women in their own families and function as creators of new virgin ghosts by causing their deaths.\textsuperscript{490} They are commonly placed at the antipodal point with the ancestor spirits whose roles are blessing their families.

Although Koreans of the late Chosŏn period no longer imagined female virgin ghosts as seductive temptresses with otherworldly beauty, they were still fascinated with them, imagining they had various appearances—not necessarily just beautiful. In literature and folk tales some wore white clothes (with or without blood splatters in order to demonstrate the sinister moments and atrocities of their deaths), and others wore colourful clothes (mainly a green upper dress and a red skirt). In addition, some of them still had daggers or knives thrust in their body parts as evidence that they were murdered, and still others appeared either with neatly combed or disheveled long black hair. Since their appearance was not as important during the Chosŏn period when most cultural content was orally transmitted, some of them were even invisible and appeared only as disembodied voices. But whatever their appearances, these female ghosts


continued to mesmerize people, commonly inflicting them with extreme fear mixed with fascination more than any other supernatural beings in Korean tradition.

Koreans’ constant fascination with female virgin ghosts has generated gorier and more grotesque appearances with the development of technologies and expansion of visual media such as cinematography or illustrations. The diverse appearances of female virgin ghosts in Korea came to be standardized into one form throughout the entire twentieth century, creating a stereotype: a pale face running with blood and disheveled long black hair in white clothes full of blood spatters. The advent of visual media such as film and mass media illustrations made visuality more available and important to attract a large audience.

In fact, the standardized appearance of Korean female ghosts is a new creation of the 1920s, when modern technology began adopting traditional ghost stories visually on the screen. The standardized images were repeatedly reinforced, making their appearances even more grotesque and gory over time until the pattern was finally fully evolved in the 1960s. Koreans’ fascination with female ghosts has recently been replaced with ghosts of high school girls in school uniforms. Their popularity reflects the social change in contemporary Korea, where marriage is no longer essential for a woman’s life. However, they still resonate with the previous female virgin ghosts in the sense that they are also unmarried teenage girls who


transformed from innocent girls into scary supernatural beings. Also, Koreans of the pre-modern and modern periods commonly abhor them but are fascinated with them at the same time.

These paradoxical emotions related to female virgin ghosts can be explained by the concept of the uncanny developed in an essay by Sigmund Freud in 1919. The uncanny is a feeling of extreme horror often accompanied with morbid anxiety and panic, but unlike a general horror, is an affect that begins from something familiar. Therefore, this Freudian concept can be summarized as a fear of the return of the repressed. Freud argues that this affect can be provoked when a thing which had once been familiar returns to the subject after being repressed and vanishing. Returning to the subject, it is experienced as familiar but unfamiliar at the same time by being transformed into a different phenomenon through repression. Freud suggests that this sense of the uncanny may take place in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead and to spirits and ghosts, and that we are still primitive in matters concerned with death despite the advances of civilization.

Robin Wood, adopting the Freudian uncanny, theorizes how women are placed at the center of the terrifying “return of the repressed” in horror movies. Wood argues that the monsters in horror movies are always the products of “surplus repression.” In contrast to basic repressions, which are universal, necessary, and inescapable to distinguish human beings from animals,


surplus repression is “specific to a particular culture and is the process whereby people are conditioned from earliest infancy to take on predetermined roles within the culture.”

Also, surplus repression creates the “others” in the culture by stigmatizing them as a perversion of the main stream of the social ideology, called “normality.” Therefore, the repressed “others” in a given culture usually return as monsters in horror movies to disturb or destroy “normality,” creating morbid fears and anxieties in the society. Wood points out that women had always been one of the major surplus repressed and had to return as monsters in horror movies. In this sense, female virgins of Chosŏn had to return as ghosts, because they were the ones most repressed and at the extreme margins of that society.

We need to look more closely the reason that dead females in Chosŏn constantly returned to the land of the living in order to apply the discussions of Freud and Wood. In Appearance of the Dead, Ronald Finucane categorizes the major reasons for the returns of the dead in a broad range of folk tales and literature, which had been shared among the public in Europe despite Christian teachings and strong repugnance toward the remnants of pagan beliefs. Some of the dead returned to offer useful advice to the living, like the ancestral spirits in the yadam stories of Chosŏn. Others came back to name the guilty parties responsible for their deaths, if they had been murdered like Arang and Changhwa in the han’gŭl novels.

However, the most noteworthy returned dead who can be related to female virgin ghosts in Korean folk religions are the ghosts that are angry at the absence of memorial rituals.

Finucane found that the dead return with anger when they fail to receive suitable and public ritual acknowledgement (such as a funeral to remind their friends or kin of their negligence) of the changed status of the dead individual and their family.\textsuperscript{499} The dead also request observance of the anniversary of their death and come back when sacrifices, offerings and commemorative services are lacking.\textsuperscript{500} Jean-Claude Schmitt also argues that the deceased generally returned when the “rite of passage” of death, such as funerals and mourning rituals, could not be performed in the prescribed way in medieval Europe.\textsuperscript{501}

If a lack of rituals is a reason for the dead returning, the unmarried dead in Chosŏn are eligible to become returned dead. In Chosŏn, Confucianism only permitted those who had died “properly” to become ancestral spirits. “Proper” death here means that an individual dies at home surrounded by his or her descendants after completing all the rites of passage in life from initiation to marriage. This is the only way someone becomes eligible for the other two major rituals for the dead: funeral and annual memorial services. Those who died before marriage were disqualified from being ancestors because in Confucian teachings the necessary first step to becoming an ancestor is marriage.\textsuperscript{502}

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{499} Ronald C. Finucane, \textit{Appearance of the Dead: A Cultural History of Ghosts} (London: Junction Books, 1982), p.10.
\item \textsuperscript{502} Ch’oe Kil-sŏng, \textit{Han’guk ŭi Chosang Sungbae} [\textit{Ancestral Worship in Korea}] (Sŏul, Korea: Yechŏnsa, 1986), p.152-153.
\end{itemize}
Shamanism also provided similar explanations of the different paths between the qualified-ancestor-to-be and the unmarried dead. In Korean shamanism, all dead people are supposed to go to chŏsŭng, the origin of the living before their births as well as the destination of the dead. Since the path to the chŏsŭng is extremely dangerous and tough to pass, the qualified dead must be guided by chŏsŭng saja, a type of shamanistic Grim Reaper, who was empowered by the descendants’ ritual practices.\(^{503}\)

Therefore, the unmarried dead fail to cross over and are stuck between the world of the living and the world of the dead and return to their family wrathfully, causing trouble. Since no one takes care of them by providing offerings, these angry ghosts wander around other people’s rituals to feed themselves. Shamans summon and feed them in their ritual practice. These angry ghosts of the unmarried are the abovementioned male and female virgin ghosts, called ch’onggak kwishin and ch’ŏnnyŏ kwishin, respectively.\(^{504}\) In this respect, the ghosts of unmarried men and women could be categorized as the returned dead like their Western counterparts.

Here, we need to go back to the question of repression as the source of the uncanny, connecting it with female virgin ghosts of Chosŏn. Although both male and female dead came back to this world due to the absence of proper rituals, repression did not function equally. And the cases of women who died before marriage caused more disturbing problems in the family and society, enough to transform them into the scariest supernatural beings. In Confucian society, unmarried women theoretically could not exist, because all adults, both men and women,


were obliged to get married to produce offspring to continue the lineage lines and the circles of family rituals. Thus, a daughter was considered to belong to her natal family only temporarily, and her social membership was to be transferred to her husband’s family through marriage.

This transfer of familial membership included not body but also soul. A woman served her husband’s ancestors by preparing offerings for ancestral rituals and giving birth to male descendants, and became one of the ancestors of his family after her death. This also meant that an unmarried woman had no place in her own family. This social system completely deprived all daughters of their place in their own families not only while alive but also when dead. This is much more disturbing and problematic in that the repression was more systematic and even legitimized by the fundamentals of the society, expelling them from the territory of socially accepted normality.

These socially repressed unmarried women could not have proper funerals or even burials. Murayama Chijun, in The Ghost of Chosŏn, records one way to bury an unmarried female:

If she dies of illness, she is buried in male clothes with her head downward and legs upward at the place. Also, her coffin would be surrounded with thorny boughs. (…) Her family secretly bury her body on a crossroad so that many men step on her body so that her evil spirit would not come out of it to fulfill her sexual desires.505

This unique form of burial was caused by people’s fears of virgin ghosts and aimed to prevent them from creating yet more virgin ghosts. Also, many regions developed their own ways to bury unmarried women, considering diverse ways to prevent them from returning. In many areas

in Ch’ungnam province dead girls were buried with their heads covered by a fine sieve to let their ghosts escape slowly from their burial sites by making them count the number of holes in the sieve. In other areas dead girls were buried with beans or millet in the hope that they would come out of their graves slowly to count the number of those crops.\textsuperscript{506}

It is noteworthy that the practice of posthumous marriage overlaps with the distribution of the concept of female virgin ghosts in East Asia and their various forms are related much more with unmarried female dead than their male counterparts. In East Asia, China is seen as the origin of posthumous marriage, which is found in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea, and Okinawa.\textsuperscript{507} In Korea, it is clearly mentioned that posthumous marriage came from China. It reached Korea for the first time around the period of the Yuan occupation of Koryŏ in the early fourteenth century,\textsuperscript{508} and was first performed for a Manchu court lady who died in Chosŏn in the mid seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{509} However, posthumous marriage among Koreans seems to have flourished after the seventeenth century based on the fact that Yi Kyu-kyŏng (1788-?), a Confucian literatus, lamented that this Chinese-originated marriage had prevailed throughout Chosŏn. In Korea, posthumous marriage was accepted by Confucian, Buddhist, and Shamanistic


\textsuperscript{508}Yi Nŭng-hwa, \textit{Chosŏn Musokko [A Consideration on Shamanistic Custom of Korea]}, trans. Sŏ Yong-tae (Sŏul, Korea: Ch’angbi, 2008), p460-463.

practitioners and was practiced based on the format established within those religious ritual practices.\textsuperscript{510}

Both male and female unmarried dead could be married, but the ritual practice and contents developed more intensively in connection with ghost brides in East Asia due to the absence of places for them within their natal families. Posthumous marriage has the common goal of transforming both groom and bride from virgin ghosts into ancestral spirits by offering them a qualification to receive ancestral rituals through posthumous adoption. However, it has one more important meaning for the bride’s side in that her family could ease their guilt and burden by transferring her affiliation to her husband’s lineage and erase her existence completely from the natal family. The purpose of removing the dead daughter’s traces from the family can be found more in cases in Taiwan,\textsuperscript{511} where ghost brides often married living men.\textsuperscript{512} However, posthumous marriage, not only in Taiwan and Korea but also in Okinawa, commonly deal with the ghosts of unmarried women in the family.\textsuperscript{513}

Deprived of proper rituals and burials, unmarried female dead had to return to their families as the most repressed in Chosŏn society, particularly after the seventeenth century when

\begin{footnotes}\footnote{Ch’oe Chun, “Han’guk Shamanism Esŏŭi Yŏnghon Kyŏlhon” [Posthumous Marriage of Korean Shamanism], \textit{Han’guk Munhwa Yŏn’gu} 17 (2009): 153–87, p.163.}


\end{footnotes}
Confucianism had set down its roots throughout the whole social and legal system. Zhu Xi’s *Family Rituals* provides instructions for *kyerye*, the initiation ritual for girls, as one of the most important rituals. However, the *kyerye*, in contrast to *kwanrye*, the initiation ritual for boys, had been ignored and failed to be firmly established as a mandatory ritual in Chosŏn, because it was combined with weddings. Therefore, the only way for a girl to be accepted as an adult was marriage, and an unmarried girl could not be fully accepted as an adult.

To maintain the purity of social “normality,” unmarried females were to be almost invisible when they were alive, and their rituals were also performed only by so-called “heterodoxy” such as shamanism and Buddhism in sympathy and guilt from their families, to maintain the purity of the Confucian rituals. Also, their unmarried status was usually caused by parents or kin, when they failed to find spouses for these girls, as the genre of *kasa* tell us. They might have to spend their entire “socially unaccomplished” existence in fear of becoming a virgin ghost. In folk belief, such females would return as the creators of other virgin ghosts by attacking other unmarried girls—both outsiders and the biggest threat to the patriarchal order in Chosŏn Korea.

In this sense, the Catholic notion of the virgin saint caused a huge paradigm shift, at least among Catholic girls in the Chosŏn dynasty. Dying as an unmarried virgin became an honor in the name of martyrdom rather than a fear, transforming their posthumous future and roles with proper funerary rituals. Moreover, despite their unmarried status and perpetual virginity, they

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514 Nam Mi-hye, “Ch’oryŏ Yi Yu-T’ae ŭi Chŏngbun ŭl T’onghae Pon Karye Ŭisik” [Marriage Ritual Appeared in Ch’oryŏ Yi Yu-t’ae’s Instruction], in *Chosŏn Chunggi Yehak Sasang kwa Ilsang Munhwa: Chuja Karye rûl Chungsim ūro* [Ideology of Rituals Studies and Daily Life in the Mid-Period of Chosŏn Korea: Centering Around Zhu Xi’s Family Rituals], ed. Yi Hye-sun (Sŏul, Korea: Yihwa Yŏja Taehakkyyo Ch’ulp’anbu, 2008), 97–132, p.106.
still could enter Heaven and even become saints who could help others out of purgatory, instead of being trapped in the shamanistic middle world.

However, paradoxically, when unmarried Catholic girls in Chosŏn found a place to belong to after death and wished to die virgins, the Church took away the chance for them to accomplish their goal, pushing them to wage struggles with the clergy in order to accomplish their desire to die sexually pure and go to Heaven.
Chapter 7: Korean Female Virgins’ Development of Subjectivity and Resistance Under the Control of M.E.P. Missionaries (1840-1886)

7.1 Disappearance of the Third Generation of Female Virgins in Chosŏn Korea (1840-1886)

Korean female virgins’ lives between the 1840s and 1880s were the least explored part in the field of the history of Catholic Church in Chosŏn Korea. During this period, the Catholic Church of Chosŏn Korea finally came to have French missionaries and witnessed their zealous activities for their mission. Also, the Church was more organized, enough to have native priests. Nevertheless, Korean female virgins suddenly and rapidly disappeared from the records. Here, we need to delve into the hidden interactions and relationship among French missionaries and Korean female virgins to discern whether there was a certain form of conflicts between the missionaries and the native Catholics in Chosŏn Korea to break the faith in the modernization of Catholicism of Korea.

The brutal persecution in 1839 took away Bishop Imbert, Maubant and Chastan along with the most important native church leaders, who had contributed to the rehabilitation of the church and the invitation of French missionaries to Korea. However, the damages caused by the persecution were much smaller than those of the persecution in 1801, and the Catholic community continued to survive and even attracted more converts until another persecution struck in 1866.

Above all, the most significant event for the Korean Catholics was that the Church came to have two fully ordained Korean priests for the first time: Kim Tae-gŏn Andrew (1821-1846)
and Ch’oi Yang-ŏp Thomas (1821-1861). They were two of three Korean boys sent to a seminary in Macao in 1836 by Fr. Maubant for the purpose to turning them into native priests of Korea. The third boy, Ch’oi Francis Xavier (1820?-1837), died of illness in Macao in 1837, but Kim Tae-gŏn Andrew and Ch’oi Yang-ŏp Thomas successfully completed the whole course. Kim Tae-gŏn Andrew became the first officially ordained Korean priest in 1845, and Ch’oi Yang-ŏp Thomas returned to Korea in 1849 right after he was ordained as the second native priest in the same year.515

The roles taken by these two native priests were different. Kim Tae-gŏn Andrew worked as a missionary and priest for Korean Catholics in Korea but focused more on pioneering safer sea routes for missionaries to reach Korea and establishing communications with the mission posts outside Korea. He successfully accomplished these tasks and contributed to opening several sea routes between the west coast of Korea and the east coast of China, which enabled more French missionaries to enter Korea.516 On the other hand, Ch’oi Yang-ŏp Thomas returned to Korea after Kim Tae-gŏn Andrew’s martyrdom in 1846 and focused more on the domestic mission. He took charge of the widest territory for his mission. He also had to work for the most exposed areas where the French missionaries could be easily detected, and the most remote regions where the foreign missionaries could not go. His contributions were indescribable for the

515 Yang In-sŏng, “Chosŏn’in Saje ŭi Tŭngjang” [Appearance of Korean Priests], in Han’guk Ch’ŏnju Kyohoesa [History of Korean Catholic Church], ed. Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, vol. 3 (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 2010), 105–91, p.108-112.

516 Yang In-sŏng, “Chosŏn’in Saje ŭi Tŭngjang” [Appearance of Korean Priests], in Han’guk Ch’ŏnju Kyohoesa [History of Korean Catholic Church], ed. Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, vol. 3 (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 2010), 105–91, p.113-128.
recovery of the Korean Church, but these heavy tasks consumed his health through physical exhaustion and caused his early death at the age of forty in 1861. Fr. Kim Tae-gŏn Andrew’s efforts to find better and safer sea routes caused one more small-scale persecution in 1846, which caused two more consecrated female virgins’ martyrdoms. The converts executed during this short persecution were nine important Catholics who were closely related with Fr. Kim Tae-gŏn Andrew: five men and four women. Two out of the four women were consecrated female virgins: Kim Yim-yi Theresa (1811-1846) and Chŏng Ch’ŏl-yŏm Catharina (1814-1846). Kim Yim-Yi Theresa was born to Catholic parents and decided to consecrate her virginity at seven years old. Chŏng Ch’ŏl-yŏm Catharina, on the other hand, was a slave of a yangban and converted to Catholicism at seventeen years of age. She was tortured by her mistress severely enough to cause permanent impairment of her health, because she refused to participate in (possibly work for) traditional seasonal festivals including the winter solstice. After enduring torture a second time, she escaped from her mistress’s home and hid in a fellow Catholic’s house. She and Kim Yim-Yi Theresa worked to take care of Fr. Kim Tae-gŏn Andrew together in 1845 and were caught with other fellow Catholics who were

517 Yang In-sŏng, “Chosŏn’in Saje ŭi Tŭngjiang” [Appearance of Korean Priests], in Han’guk Ch’ŏnju Kyohoesa [History of Korean Catholic Church], ed. Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, vol. 3 (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 2010), 105–91, p.159-176.

518 Yang In-sŏng, “Chosŏn’in Saje ŭi Tŭngjiang” [Appearance of Korean Priests], in Han’guk Ch’ŏnju Kyohoesa [History of Korean Catholic Church], ed. Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, vol. 3 (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 2010), 105–91, p.129-139.

519 Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., Kihae Pyŏng’o Pakhae Sungyoja Chŭng’ŏnnok [Testimonies on Martyrs during the Persecutions in Kihae and Pyŏng’o Years], vol. 1 (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 2004), p.57-58.

520 Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., Kihae Pyŏng’o Pakhae Sungyoja Chŭng’ŏnnok [Testimonies on Martyrs during the Persecutions in Kihae and Pyŏng’o Years], vol. 1 (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 2004), p.66-70.
closely related to him. Kim Yim-Yi Theresa was thirty-six years old and Chŏng Ch’ŏl-yŏm Catharina was thirty-two years old when they were executed.521

After the end of this persecution, Catholics and missionaries in Korea entered a relatively peaceful time which they used to restore and re-organize the Church during fourteen years of King Ch’ŏljong’s reign (r. 1849-1863). King Ch’ŏljong was a grandson of Song Maria, a Catholic convert and a martyr of the persecution in 1801 and Prince Ŭn’on, executed in 1801 because of the conversions of his wife and daughter-in-law, Sin Maria, a martyr of the persecution in 1801. The government wanted to avoid turmoil related to Catholicism to avoid any threats to the throne or accusations about King Ch’ŏljong’s family background after his accession to the throne.522

One more small persecution broke in Chŏlla province for nine months from 1859 to 1860. However, this was caused by personal animosity against Catholicism and an attempt to extort Catholics’ properties by Im T’ae-yŏng (?) and Shin Myŏng-sun (1789-1870), two heads of the Agency for the Arrest of Thieves. Since they began the persecution without permission from the state and created enormous complaints due to their harsh punishments and illegal extortions, even the government criticized them and forced them out of office.523

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521 Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., Kihae Pyŏng’o Pakhae Sungyoja Chŭng’ŏnok [Testimonies on Martyrs during the Persecutions in Kihae and Pyŏng’o Years], vol. I (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 2004), p.498-500.


Kim Tae-gŏn Andrew’s efforts succeeded in opening safer sea routes for missionaries to enter Korea. All French missionaries entered Korea via the sea after 1845, in contrast to their predecessors, who had crossed the mountainous border of Korea and China on foot. As a result, Korean Catholics came to welcome Bishop Jean-Joseph-Jean-Baptiste Ferréol (1808-1853), the third Apostolic vicar, who arrived with Marie Nicolas Antoine Daveluy (1818-1866) in 1845. After them, Joseph Ambroise Maistre (1808-1857) arrived in 1852. François Stanislas Jansou (1826-1854) also successfully arrived in 1854 but died of illness three months later. Although Bishop Ferréol died of illness in 1853, Bishop Simeon Francois Berneux (1814-1866), the fourth Apostolic vicar, entered Korea in 1856 with Michel-Alexandre Petitnicolas (1828-1866) and Jean Antoine Pourthié (1830-1866) as replacements.524

After the entrance of Bishop Berneux, the Catholic Church in Korea came to have more French missionaries up until 1866. Stanislas Féron (1827-1903) arrived in 1857, and Jean Marie Pierre Landre (1828-1863), Pierre Marie Joanno (1832-1863), Félix Clair Ridel (1830-1884) and Adolphe Calais (1833-1884) arrived together in 1861. Pierre Aumaître (1837-1866) entered Korea in 1863, and Simon Marie Antoine Just Ranfer de Bretenieres (1838-1866), Martin Luc Huin (1836-1866), Bernard Louis Beaulieu (1840-1866) and Pierre Henri Dorie (1839-1866) arrived together in 1865.525


The increased number of French missionaries enabled Bishop Berneux to manage his Apostolic vicariate in a more orderly fashion by designating different regions for different missionaries to be in charge of and assume responsibility for educating Korean boys for ordination both inside and outside of Korea. Although the number of missionaries increased, the Korean Catholic Church still faced a shortage due to the rapid deterioration of missionaries’ health from heavy workloads and malnutrition, and the deaths of four such men: Jansou in 1854, Maistre in 1857, and Landre and Joanno in 1863. Nevertheless, Bishop Berneux managed to allocate districts for the missionaries to work in. Also, he ordered a seminary to be built in Paeron, a small village in the Ch’ungch’ŏng province in Korea, and sent two more boys to a seminary in Penang.

The upgraded church organization enabled Bishop Berneux to appoint one more bishop for his Apostolic Vicariate and hold the first Synod for the Catholic Church in Korea inside Korea. Bishop Berneux appointed Fr. Daveluy as a suffragan bishop, so he would become his successor in an emergency, and held a ceremony for ordinating him as a bishop in 1857. On the day after that ordination, Bishop Berneux summoned missionaries and important hoejang (catechists) and held the first Synod to discuss rules and plans for their missions including regulations for lay believers to observe as Catholics. The results were promulgated as two separate pastoral letters: one as regulations for lay Catholics in Korea including hoejang

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(catechists) and another as more detailed rules for all missionaries in Korea. From then, the Catholic Church and converts in Korea could enjoy a more stable religious environment and dream of thriving during this lull in persecutions.

However, that lull ended with the death of King Ch’ŏljong in 1863, and the Catholic Church soon confronted its longest and cruelest nationwide persecution, from 1866 to 1873 under the reign of King Kojong (r.1863-1907). This persecution began after Prince Hŭngsŏn (1820-1898), father of King Kojong as well as the young king’s regent, attempted to contact Bishop Berneux through Nam Chong-sam (1817-1866), a Catholic and a high official of the central government, in 1866. The fact that Korea came to share its northeastern border with Russia in 1860 increased Prince Hŭngsŏn’s anxiety. Hence, he wanted to discuss ways to prevent potential threats from Russia by obtaining assistance from the French government through the mediation of the French missionaries.

The goal of Nam Chong-sam here was to obtain approval of the Christian faith by preventing Russia from invading Korea through alliance with France and England by mediation of French missionaries. But their meeting was postponed, because both Bishops Berneux and Daveluy were out of Seoul for their respective pastoral trips. In the meantime, Prince Taewŏn changed his mind after listening to the misinformation that a persecution against Catholicism had

528 Chang Tong-ha, Han’guk Kŭndaesa wa Ch’ŏnju Kyohoe [Modern History and Catholic Church of Korea] (Sŏul, Korea: K’at’olik Ch’ulp’ansa, 2006), p.73-74.

broken out in Beijing, China.\textsuperscript{530} As a result, not only did their meeting not transpire, but the attempt also unexpectedly caused another persecution starting in 1866, which cost lives of French missionaries including Bishop Berneux, Bishop Daveluy and thousands of Korean Catholics over seven years. This persecution lasted longer than the previous ones, most of which lasted less than two years, due to continuous foreign violations of Korean territory, which had a negative effect on the images of Catholics and the West from 1866 to 1872.

First, the French military attacked Kanghwa Island to protest the executions of French missionaries in 1866. Next was the violation of Prince Nam’yŏn’s tomb by German merchant E. J. Oppert (1832-?) in 1868. Prince Nam’yŏn was Prince Hŭngsŏn’s father and King Kojong’s grandfather; Oppert violated Prince Nam’yŏn’s tomb in order to steal his cadaver to utilize it for negotiation of commerce with the Chosŏn government. The government later found out that Fr. Stanislas Féron M.E.P. (1827-1903) had participated in the violation of the tomb of Prince Nam’yŏn with several Korean Catholics. Although that plan failed, it infuriated Koreans and Prince Hŭngsŏn and worsened the image of Catholics due to their involvement in the incident.

Two other incidents also provoked the fury of Koreans against Catholicism, extending the period of persecution until 1873. The first was the involvement of Fr. Félix Clair Ridel M.E.P. (1830-1884) in the French attack of Kanghwa Island in 1866, which occurred as a protest by the French government about the execution of French missionaries in 1866. Second, the General Sherman, an American commercial ship, was burnt with all of its passengers in the vicinity of Taedong River by the Korean government and people in 1871, which also caused the

\textsuperscript{530} Pang Sang-gŭn, “Pyŏng’in Pakhae” [The Persecution in the Year of Pyŏng’in], in Han’guk Ch’ŏnjugyohoesa [A History of Catholic Church in Korea], ed. Han’gu kyohoesa yŏn’guso, vol. 3 (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 2010), 249–88, p.253-256.
American military attack of Kanghwa Island in 1871. As a result, the persecution lasted for seven years and produced casualties of more than 8,000 Catholic converts from 1866 to 1873, until it was ended by King Kojong’s direct rule in 1873.531

Compared to previous persecutions, it is noteworthy that the number of virgin couples and male virgins increased. Extant records show that there were ten male virgins. They were Chŏn Jacob, a blind man (?-1867),532 Kim Casimir (1843-1866),533 Sin Chrysanthus (1812?-1868),534 Kan Philip (1805-1868),535 Sŏ Pong-yi Louis (1849-1868),536 Wu Se-yŏng Alexis,537


532 Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., Ch’imyŏng Ilgi [Testimonies on Martyrs] (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 1985), p.863.


Yi Gonzaga (dates unknown), Pak John (?-1868), Kim Peter (?-1866), Ko Joseph, and Kwŏn John (?-1871), who was educated to be an ordained priest in the Paeron Seminary. Kang Paul (?-1866) had married but decided to stay celibate after the death of his wife. Also, there were three virgin couples: Chŏng Ŭi-bae Marcus (1794-1866) and P’i Catharina (1805-1866), Pae Mun-ho Peter (1842-1866) and his wife (dates unknown), and Hwang Chae-sŏn Lucas (?-1866) and his wife (dates unknown).

However, in contrast to the increased number of male virgins, the number of known female virgins dramatically decreased during this long-lasting persecution. The extant records

538 Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, Pyŏng’in Ch’imyŏng Sajŏk [Records on the Martyrs during the Pyŏng’in Persecution], vol. 3.

539 Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, Pyŏng’in Ch’imyŏng Sajŏk [Records on the Martyrs during the Pyŏng’in Persecution], vol. 3.

540 Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, Pyŏng’in Ch’imyŏng Sajŏk [Records on the Martyrs during the Pyŏng’in Persecution], vol. 4.

541 Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, Pyŏng’in Ch’imyŏng Sajŏk [Records on the Martyrs during the Pyŏng’in Persecution], vol. 4.


543 Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, Pyŏng’in Ch’imyŏng Sajŏk [Records on the Martyrs during the Pyŏng’in Persecution], vol. 4.

544 Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, Pyŏng’in Ch’imyŏng Sajŏk [Records on the Martyrs during the Pyŏng’in Persecution], vol. 4.

545 Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, Pyŏng’in Ch’imyŏng Sajŏk [Records on the Martyrs during the Pyŏng’in Persecution], vol. 16.
show only eight female virgins: Han Sŏng-im Barbara, Yi Theresa, Sister of Yi Han’gyo, Yi Agatha, Pak Magdalena, Yi Monica, and Kang Lucia. These women were executed during the long persecution, but Kim Catharina, a former court lady, survived and delivered her witness testimony on martyrs of the persecution of 1839, in 1883. As the example of Kim Catharina tells us, there must have been many more hidden or unknown female virgins than those in the records. Although previous persecutions had lasted for less than one year, many consecrated female virgins had always been found. However, considering the longer duration of the persecution in 1866, it is strange that the number of female virgins radically decreased.

Also, most female Catholics in the records, in contrast to the dwindling number of female virgins, are married women or widows. The established discussions regarding Catholic virgins of the Chosŏn dynasty are that the Church liberated women from the patriarchal control and

546 P’odoch’ŏng tungnok II, p.703-704
547 Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, Pyŏng’in Ch’imyŏng Sajŏk [Records on the Martyrs during the Pyŏng’in Persecution], vol.23.
548 Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., Ch’imyŏng Ilgi [Testimonies on Martyrs] (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 1985), p.782-783.
550 Aforementioned Pak John’s sister: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, Pyŏng’in Ch’imyŏng Sajŏk [Records on the Martyrs during the Pyŏng’in Persecution], vol. 3.
551 Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, Pyŏng’in Ch’imyŏng Sajŏk [Records on the Martyrs during the Pyŏng’in Persecution], vol. 23.
553 Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., Kihae Pyŏng’o Pakhae Sungyoja Ch’ung’ŏnnok [Testimonies on Martyrs during the Persecutions in Kihae and Pyŏng’o Years], vol. I (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 2004), p.57.
promoted women’s consciousness to fight against Confucian oppressions. This is a weak point in the established discussions.

Moreover, the married women did not show signs of the modern consciousness some scholars claimed to have found in them. Unlike previous believers who had been drawn to Catholicism by their mothers, married women—the majority of female martyrs during the persecution from 1866-1872—converted to Catholicism by marrying male Catholics. Furthermore, in contrast to the established discussions, they showed very strong obedience to their husbands, similar to Confucian Three obediences, and selected apostasy or martyrdom based on their husbands’ decision.

Accounts in the *P’odoch’ŏng tŭngnok* (Records of the Capital Police) demonstrate that the police refused to arrest some married Catholic women, for example those who had to take care of children or elderly parents.

A: When the policemen prohibited her (Kim Sun-o’s daughter-in-law) from following her arrested husband, she kept going along with him saying, “What good is a woman who has no husband?”

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557 Pyŏng’in ch’imyŏng sajŏk Vol. 8, p.43.
B: “How can a young widow live without a husband? I (Park Anna) would rather die with my husband.”

C: (Poryŏn, Puwŏl, and Jamu) We all three are sisters-in-law. (...) Even though we want to renounce our religion, our husbands [have] already died. Thus, how could the wives live comfortably? Since a wife’s obedience for her husband ( Yöp’il jongbu) could be said as daily truth, we wish we would die sooner.

D: My husband already died. My wish is just to die soon to do Yöp’il jongbu (to follow my dead husband). <Ch’oe Hyŏng’s wife, Kim Theresa>

E: “People say that parents are like sky and a husband is like a big mountain. Now, my father-in-law was caught, and my husband was also caught; I don’t know whether he is still alive or not. So, what could I do, even though I could survive alone? I would follow my father-in-law and husband and be punished with them. <Chang Anastasia>

Nevertheless, these women chose to die or arrest, often mentioning that they preferred to die alongside their husbands than to live as widows (A, B, C, D, E), or tried to follow their male relatives (E). Kim Sun-o’s daughter-in-law turned herself in to the police so that she could die with her husband, even though the police had already released her. Women like Yŏ Theresa (D), Poryŏn, Puwŏl, and Jamu (C) chose death with their husbands, citing the Confucian concept of yöp’il chongbu: a wife’s obedience to her husband. This strongly suggests that they were still under Confucian influence rather than the new modern consciousness on women’s liberation.

Previous research has already noticed this contradiction to the established discussions. However, scholars’ belief that Catholicism had brought women’s liberation and equality to

558 Pyŏng’ın ch’imyŏng sajŏk Vol. 5, p. 42.


Chosŏn Korea before the twentieth century was too strong to change their perspective. It was Kim Ok-hŭi who discovered in the 1980s that Catholic virgins had radically disappeared from the documents and that most of married Catholic women continued to show obedience to men in their families.562

However, she argues that missionaries’ conservative views on Korean women promoted marriage for Korean Catholic converts and brought back Confucian obedience without further analysis.563 Pang Sang-gŭn also notices this discrepancy in his research on Catholic women in the mid-nineteenth century.564 However, he contradicts Kim Ok-hŭi’s discussion, asserting that the Catholic Church still persisted in protection of women’s “right” to marriage and remarriage and promoted conjugal equality, such as virgin couples.565 Also, he sees that the decrease in the number of female virgins and increase of married women were the results of the Church’s protection of Catholic women and flexible application of the grand premise regarding women’s equity.566


The weakness of the established discussions were caused because contemporary historians of Korea misunderstood the Jesuit encounter between East and West as the beginning of modernization in the East and ignored the fact that the M.E.P.’s mission enterprise in Korea was totally different from that of the Jesuits. Hence, we return to the discussion on who the M.E.P. were, what their mission activities in Korea were, and the results of their mission in Korea in the following section. By reading the documents against the grain, I will examine the one missing question which has long been ignored: why did the M.E.P. missionaries prohibit Korean Catholic women from practicing perpetual virginity?

7.2 The Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris and Their Mission in Korea

It is important to examine the nature of mission and the missionaries in order to discern the details of French missionaries’ gender politics in Chosŏn Korea. Previously, differences between French missionaries, who engaged in mission in Chosŏn Korea, were neglected from the scholarly endeavors, simply assuming that they might have shared the same features with the Jesuits in China. Since this was the one of many reasons of the misunderstanding that Catholicism brought modernization to Chosŏn Korea, it is crucial to substantiate differences of French missionaries in Korea from their Jesuit counterparts in China. This would enable us to discern the direction of mission by French missionaries in Korea and the reason of dramatic disappearance of Korean female virgins under their mission.

The separation of Korea from the Diocese of China and the establishment of the Apostolic of Vicariate of Korea in 1831 was done not only for Korean Catholics but as part of the bigger plans for the centralization of hegemony for foreign missions under Papal authority.
The wide expansions of the Portuguese and the Spanish empires of the fifteenth century had been seen as an opportunity to rehabilitate the Catholic Church outside of Europe. Therefore, the Vatican granted privileges called *padroado real* (crown patronage) to the Portuguese kings and entrusted the mission in Asia to them at the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries.\(^567\)

As a result, the Portuguese monarchy took charge of managing the full-fledged bishoprics in China in Macao, Nanjing and Beijing to govern Chinese Catholics and missionaries of various orders and nationalities. On one hand, the Portuguese support and monopoly of power for Asian missions contributed to the expansion and stabilization of the Catholic Church in Asia. On the other hand, however, their abuse of power caused more problems and interruptions in the work of non-Portuguese missionaries and their orders for Asian missions over time. The Vatican began movements to curtail the Portuguese *padroado* and established the Propagation of the Faith (Propaganda Fide) in 1622 as an institute to place overarching papal authority over new missions and entrust them to non-Portuguese orders.\(^568\)

The separation of the Korean Church from the Beijing diocese was also one of the plans for recovery of papal authority by establishing the Catholic Church in Korea as separate from the management of Beijing under the Portuguese kings as a form of an Apostolic Vicariate. As Ernest Young puts it, the Vatican used this tactic to “whittle away” at the domains of the bishops chosen by Portugal by establishing “vicariates,” missionary dioceses under “apostolic vicars,”


who were endowed with an episcopal title but without diocesan bishop’s autonomy.\textsuperscript{569} Being directly under the authority of the Propaganda Fide in Rome, instead of the Portuguese or any other king, Apostolic vicars and missionaries serving under them were recruited among priests of various missionary orders and nationalities and were dispatched particularly to Southeast and East Asia.\textsuperscript{570}

The Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris was formed in 1658 to serve the purpose of dismantling the old Portuguese \textit{padroado} and placing the foreign mission under direct papal authority via the Propaganda Fide. From the beginning, the M.E.P. enlisted secular or diocesan priests whose duties were dedicated solely to pastoral duties within the diocesan structure, in contrast to religious priests such as Franciscans and Jesuits, whose work might be specifically vocational, for example, teaching or scholarship.\textsuperscript{571} The M.E.P. was not an order entrusted with pioneering or opening a new mission in a foreign territory but was entrusted with the responsibility of temporarily managing missions which had been already opened, until the Vatican officially established dioceses and clerical hierarchy there.\textsuperscript{572}


In addition, the primary mission of the M.E.P. and the very reason for its presence was the establishment and cultivation of the local priesthood. The reason for the establishment and the goals of the M.E.P. were to assist natives in Asia to develop and cultivate their own Catholic Church and to dispatch missionaries in order to find and nurture future priests among native Catholics. Therefore, the first priority among the duties of the M.E.P. was building a native priesthood, and the second was taking care of new converts. The conversion of non-Catholics was the third. Therefore, the regulations of the M.E.P. prohibited them from accepting native priests as members of the M.E.P., although they were selected and cultivated by the M.E.P.

Hence, M.E.P. missionaries in Korea were dedicated to building seminaries and training native clergy. As the M.E.P. missionaries in Vietnam established a number of seminaries to train the local catechists throughout Annam for their mission, those in Korea also built several seminaries. Sending three priest candidates to the seminary in Penang in 1854, they also built the first seminary in Korea under the management of Mgr. Maistre in Paeron Catholic Village in 1855. Also, two more preparatory seminaries were built, but their exact locations are still unknown.

The M.E.P. was different from the Jesuits not only in the aspect of their establishment or duties but in the missionaries themselves in many ways. In contrast to the Jesuits in China, who were experts on theology, geography, mathematics and science trained with a higher-level education, the M.E.P. missionaries could not receive enough education due to the anti-Catholic environment in France from the 1790s. Both the French Revolution and the ensuing Napoleonic reign caused a dark period for the Catholic Church in France from the 1790s to 1815. The French Revolution from the 1790s almost destroyed the society of the M.E.P. by closing their home seminary in Paris in 1791 and dismissing the M.E.P. in 1809. Moreover, the acute conflicts between Napoleon and the Vatican also caused difficulties for the supply of missionaries and the financial situation of the M.E.P. until the fall of Napoleon in 1815.578 Although the M.E.P. and the M.E.P. seminary in France were rebuilt in 1815,579 this turbulence in France made it difficult for the missionaries to get enough education before leaving their country for their respective foreign missions in Asia.

The relatively humble social class of the majority of the M.E.P. missionaries in Korea was another factor for their lack of higher education. A total of twenty M.E.P. missionaries, who were all French, entered the territory of Chosŏn Korea and engaged in missions from 1836 to 1866. Cho Hyŏn-bŏm’s research on the M.E.P. missionaries in Korea shows that the majority had come from poor families living in the suburban areas of Bretagne, Pyrénées, and Alsace-


Lorraine except for Daveluy, Bretenieres, and Ridel. Their family backgrounds and the anti-Catholic social environment in France at that time caused a limitation on their education so they obtained only shallow knowledge of philosophy and theology at the level of the minor and major seminaries in France. Therefore, their intellectual levels and depth could not reach the expert level of their Jesuit counterparts.

Moreover, the majority of the M.E.P. missionaries had little actual ecclesiastic experience even in France, since they directly joined the M.E.P. and volunteered for the foreign mission. The M.E.P enlisted secular or diocesan priests who were dedicated solely to pastoral duties within the diocesan structure. Most of the M.E.P. missionaries for Korea were ordained at the age of twenty-three or twenty-five years old and were dispatched to Korea within two or three years after their ordination, which is too short to acquire enough pastoral experience in France.

Therefore, instead of knowledge or experience, they were full of religious passion for their foreign missions and even for martyrdom, arising from the rehabilitation of religious zeal.


which swept the suburban regions of nineteenth-century France.\textsuperscript{584} As a result, nineteenth-century Korean Catholicism was characterized by a “stark division between the sacred and the profane,” which caused obsession with death and a preoccupation with the consequences of sin and guilt.\textsuperscript{585}

In addition, the mistreatment of the M.E.P. at the hands of the French government led the M.E.P. missionaries to have a negative perspective and attitude towards the French Revolution and to prefer the attitudes of the Ancien Regime. The M.E.P missionaries in Korea were not only unfamiliar with emerging modernity in Europe, they also had a negative attitude to the social movement toward modernization brought after the French Revolution.\textsuperscript{586} Thus, they judged and underestimated Korea and Koreans using China and France as the yardstick, instead of attempting to modernize Korea. They tried to implant Church hierarchy and the authority of the clergy, since they did not intend to promote an indigenized form of Catholicism but rather “one imported wholesale from Europe.”\textsuperscript{587}

As a result, in contrast to the stabilization of the institutions of the Catholic Church in Korea and the growing authority of the clergy, the autonomy of Korean Catholics dwindled

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under the M.E.P missionaries. The authority of the clergy was extremely difficult to ignore among Korean Catholics, considering their arduous efforts to bring missionaries to Korea. We can see that in China, returning and renewing their contact with Chinese Catholics in the mid-nineteenth century, European missionaries had conflicts with long-neglected Christian communities and with Chinese priests due to their indigenization.\textsuperscript{588} It is not known whether Korean Christians also had to go through similar conflicts with the M.E.P. missionaries after their entrance to Korea. However, I believe that a similar situation might have happened in Korea, and the sudden disappearance of consecrated female virgins was one of the examples of the conflict between Western missionaries and native believers in Chosŏn.

\subsection*{7.3 \textbf{Prohibition of Consecration of Virginity: The Beginning of Conflicts Between the Clergy and Korean Catholic Virgins}}

The entrance of French missionaries and systemization of their mission cost previous autonomy of native believers in Chosŏn Korea in many ways, dramatically damaging Korean female virgins’ self-determination in particular. They considered that female virgins in Korea were entrusted to them, suggesting that they require the protection of male church authorities, as their colleagues in China had regarded so for Chinese female virgins.\textsuperscript{589} With this purpose,

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French missionaries in Korea began systemization of full-scale means to control Korean female virgins from the 1850s by adopting the decision of the Sichuan Synod made in 1803.

The fundamental reason for the decline in the number of consecrated female virgins in the Catholic Church in Korea could be attributed to the promulgation of Bishop Bernueux’s instructional letter which announced the results of the first synod in Korea in 1857. This instructional letter, which called Chang chugyo yunsi cheusŏ (Bishop Berneux’s Pastoral Letter for All Brethren, hereafter, Cheusŏ), provides a regulation that individuals must obtain permission from the Church before consecrating their virginity.

The law of the Holy Church has prohibited anyone from deciding to consecrate his/her virginity on their own. They must discuss the decision in detail with a priest beforehand. If he does not allow it, they will not be able to consecrate their virginity. This regulation will be also applied to virgin couples. <Chang chugyo yunsi cheusŏ>\(^{590}\>)

Korean Catholics might have already acknowledged that they needed to obtain permission from the Church to consecrate their virginity even before Bishop Berneux circulated this letter. However, the explicit iteration of this regulation caused enormous changes for those who had already practiced consecration of virginity on their own or had a desire to practice it, because this was an edict for all Catholics in Korea, not just a simple letter for instruction.

Summoning all missionaries in Korea for the ordination of Fr. Daveluy as vice-bishop in 1857, \(^{590}\) Chang chugyo yunsi cheusŏ means “Bishop Chang’s Letter to be circulated among all fellow Catholics.” Bishop Chang refers to Bishop Berneux whose Korean name was Chang Kyŏng-il.

\(^{591}\) Simeon Francois Berneux, “Chang Chugyo Yunsi Cheusŏ [Pastoral Letter from Bishop Chang to All Catholics],” in Sun ’gyoja wa Ch’anggoja tul [Martyrs and Witnesses] (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guuso, 1982), 165–78, p.173.
Bishop Berneux held the first synod and discussed important agenda items and made many decisions on regulations as well as rules for both missionaries and lay-believers.

After the Synod, Bishop Berneux promulgated the decisions in the form of two pastoral letters: one for lay-believers in Korean in 1857, and another for missionaries in Latin in 1858. Cheusŏ was the version written in Korean, and was binding for Korean Catholics. Anyone who attempted to violate any of instructions in the letter could be disciplined or even excommunicated under the name of the Bishop. 592 All the regulations requiring permission from the Church were thus clearly proclaimed to all lay-Catholics in Korea—men, women, and married couples—if they intend to consecrate their virginity for the first time.

More detailed instructions on the eligibility for consecration of virginity are shown in another of Bishop Berneux’s letters, Hwannan ŭl wirohanŭn marira (Words to Console Our Ordeals, hereafter, Hwannan), probably written either in 1864 or 1865. 593

Also, discussing consecration of one’s virginity, Jesus, Our Lord, said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” However, this never means that Jesus, Our Lord, ordered us to be virgins. People are or are not consecrating their virginity on their own without taking into account the orders of the Holy Church. However, the strict command of the Holy Church prohibited those who are under twenty-five years old from consecrating their virginity. In addition, even those who turned that age cannot choose it on their own and must take a vow after awaiting a priest’s permission. <Hwannan ŭl wirohanŭn marira> 594

592 Chang Tong-ha, Han’guk Këndaesa wa Ch’ŏnju Kyohoe [Modern History and Catholic Church of Korea] (Sŏul, Korea: K’at’olik Ch’ulp’ansa, 2006), p.335.


594 Simeon Francois Berneux, “Hwannan ŭl Wirohanŭn Marira” [Words to Console Our Ordeals], in Sun’gyoja wa Ch’unggŏha t’ul [Martyrs and Witnesses], ed. Han’guk kyohoesa yŏng’guso (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏng’guso, 1982), 254–66, p.264.
This additional instruction shows that all candidates for consecration of virginity had to be over twenty-five years old. Even if they met this requirement, they still needed to obtain permission from the Church, which banned candidates from deciding how to live their own lives. Considering that the average age for women to marry was sixteen or seventeen years old in Korea at that time, this regulation might have made it more difficult for female Catholics to persist in their desire to be consecrated virgins when confronting conflicts with their families’ decisions to marry them off.

The age of twenty-five years old had come from the regulations established for consecrated female virgins in China at the Sichuan Synod by the M.E.P. in 1803. Since Chinese women began consecration of their virginity for religious life in the seventeenth century, the orders of missionaries in China had long devised diverse regulations to control female virgins in that country. In 1744, Joachim-Enjobert de Martiliat, M.E.P. (1706-1775), Apostolic Vicar of Sichuan, integrated these diverse regulations into twenty-five rules and established the age of twenty-five as the standard minimum age for vows of virginity in Christian countries. Reaffirming Bishop Martiliat’s rules, the Propaganda Fide added six new rules and issued new instructions for the regulation of Christian virgins in a letter to François Pottier 1784, and the


rules were outlined in a pastoral letter by Fr. Jean Didier de Saint-Martin (1743-1802) in 1793. Subsequently they were further elaborated by the Sichuan Synod of 1803 and made applicable to all of China by decree in 1832 with approval from the Propaganda Fide, by being promulgated as Article 37. The second instruction in Article 37 articulates the minimum age to be a candidate for consecrated female virgins:

2. If a virgin has not reached the age of twenty-five, she is not allowed to take a vow neither for chastity nor for perpetual profession. However, if her life and virtue is verified and it is believable that she would maintain her will not to get married to the end, she can take a temporary vow for a three-year period under missionaries' agreement and, then, renew it every three years.

This rule declares that twenty-five is the minimum age for the vow of chastity, but permission was still temporary in that the virgin had to renew her qualification every three years by being confirmed in her eligibility by missionaries.

The Sichuan Synod of 1803 and decisions made by it have a tight connection with the Catholic Church of nineteenth-century Korea. Recovering from the persecution of 1784 in Sichuan, Bishop Gabriel-Taurin Dufress, Vicar Apostolic of Sichuan, summoned all missionaries in the area for the ordination of Pierre Trenchant as the Vice-vicar Apostolic of Sichuan and for a...


synod in 1803.\textsuperscript{601} And Pope Gregory XVI proclaimed in 1841 that the decisions of the Sichuan Synod applied to all missionaries, not only in Sichuan but all of Asia, and the rules for consecrated female virgins were added in the appendix part of the papal edict.\textsuperscript{602}

Bishop Berneux’s pastoral letter for missionaries in Korea of 1858, which was written in Latin, advises all missionaries in Korea to thoroughly learn and observe the instructions from the Sichuan Synod. Moreover, this letter commands them to obey all instructions for consecrated virgins from the Sichuan Synod without any separate discussion for female virgins in Korea. The only difference in Berneux’s policy from those of the Sichuan Synod was that he required permission from missionaries for couples and male candidates who wished to consecrate their virginity, as the Cheusŏ above shows.

It is unclear whether the Catholic Church of Chosŏn Korea established separate or more detailed regulations to control consecrated female virgins in Korea. However, if it strictly followed the regulation for Christian virgins in the Sichuan Synod, only a few Korean women could have been eligible as candidates: Article 37 requires that only candidates with familial and financial support could take a vow to consecrate their virginity.

3. Those who were unable to get support at all from their fathers’ homes and, thus, had no choice but to wander around to find a way to survive can never be accepted for taking a vow of chastity. After a consecrated female virgin solemnly and divinely takes a vow, she must avoid sharing a residence with outsiders and must stay at home by herself so that she could preserve her commitment, which has been received from God, in silence and prayers.\textsuperscript{603}


\textsuperscript{602} Chang Tong-ha, Han’guk Kŭndaesa wa Ch’ŏnju Kyohoe [Modern History and Catholic Church of Korea] (Sŏul, Korea: K’at’olk Ch’ulp’ansa, 2006), p.325.

This clause in Article 37 authorized only those Christian virgins who remained at home to be allowed to take a vow of chastity, and prohibited those who lacked financial support from their families.

Also referring to Article 37, Jean-Didier de Saint Martin provided more instructions for eligibility for a consecrated female virgin related to her financial stability in his pastoral letter of 1793, which was added as Appendix I for the instruction of the Sichuan Synod.

2. Missionaries must not tolerate poor girls, who live through manual labors, to approach them easily. They wish to take a vow with a hope for a better standard of living and prospects for a safer residence, food, and clothing. Hence, missionaries must be careful and never promise anything to a woman [about the vow of chastity], unless her parents are willingly to provide lands for their daughter or there is upmost hope that her brothers or other heirs would never deprive her of the lands inherited by her.\(^{604}\)

3. Missionaries are never be allowed to provide perpetual necessities for a virgin’s corporeal life by spending the funds for their pastoral journeys or donations for charity by their own authority and then to accept their vows after doing so. Missionaries, with the similar purposes or aims, will never be allowed to purchase houses or lands to feed Virgins or, as a much worse deed, dare to reside there with them even temporarily.\(^{605}\)

All these clauses, both from Article 37 and from Saint Martin’s pastoral letter of 1793, specify that only women with financial resources are eligible to consecrate their virginity.

These rules for Christian virgins in China led to the establishment of the Institute of Christian virgins, an order of Chinese Catholic women living with their families who chose to

\(^{604}\) Chang Sin-ho, trans., *Ssŭnch’wan Taemokku Sinodŭ* [Synod in Sichuan Varicariate Apostolic] (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 2012), p.204-205.

lead lives of celibacy and religious dedication in eighteenth-century Sichuan. In contrast to the Jesuits, who had limited interactions with women, the Dominican friars brought the *beatas* for Christian virgins to China in the early 1600s. The *beatas* originated in Spain as a Third Order, whose members led religious and celibate lives privately at home. It was taken to the Philippines first in 1682 and then to Fuan under the leadership of the Dominicans.

In addition, the M.E.P. in eighteenth-century Sichuan also introduced the Institute of Virgins, another order of Chinese Catholic women living with their families, who chose to lead lives of celibacy and religious dedication. The abovementioned rules were established based on the Dominican regulations for the *beatas* in Fujian and revised as rules to control the members of the Institute of Christian Virgins by the M.E.P.

It is still unclear whether the M.E.P. missionaries brought the Institute of Christian Virgins in China to Korea for the consecrated Korean virgins, but the rules for Chinese virgins were obviously imposed as the regulations for Korea virgins. The main tasks for Christian females were religious meditation or prayers at home and, therefore, they had to possess enough financial sources and property to support their entire lives on their own. Particularly, their role

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was a crucial element in the propagation of the Christian faith among women from the beginning of the mission in China due to the strict segregation of the sexes in that country.\textsuperscript{610}

The rule requiring financial resources for a life of virginity for female candidates had been widely implemented by most of the missionary orders throughout China. The Franciscan friars in the less affluent mission in Shandong province also preferred to accept candidates for consecration of virginity from higher class or wealthy families, who could set aside a dwelling or a piece of land sufficient to support them.\textsuperscript{611} Also, issuing its own regulations for Christian virgins, the Manchuria Mission aimed to recruit candidates from among the wealthy by requiring three hundred \textit{diao}, not a small amount of money in nineteenth-century Manchuria, as a prerequisite to join the institute of the Chinese Christian Virgins.\textsuperscript{612}

In fact, it is still difficult to clearly discern the eligibilities of Christian virgins and their activities in Chosŏn Korea after the end of the persecution of 1801. Also, with the currently available sources it is difficult to assess to what extent the decisions on Christian virgins from the Sichuan Synod were also implemented for Catholic Korean virgins. If they were also strictly implemented for Korean female virgins in observance of the decisions of the Sichuan Synod, only very few might have been eligible. Most Korean converts were impoverished, having experienced continuous persecutions, and even the financial situation of yangban converts was

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not so different from that of the commoners—certainly not enough to provide property for a
daughter’s religious devotion.

The only clear fact, according to accounts drawn from the primary sources, is that from
the beginning of their mission in Chosŏn Korea the M.E.P. missionaries were not favorable to
consecrated Korean female virgins. Before Bishop Berneux’s explicit command to observe the
rules on Christian virgins of the Sichuan Synod, his two predecessors discouraged or rejected
Korean women’s desires for consecration of their virginity.

First, in 1838, Yi Yŏng-dŏk Magdalena contacted Bishop Imbert to request his advice
and ask him for help when her non-Catholic father forced her to marry at the age of twenty-seven
out of fury at her rejection of marriage for seven years. However, Bishop Imbert’s answer was
she had to obey her father, because it would be extremely difficult to be a Christian virgin.
Nevertheless, she left her home with her mother and her younger sister Yi In-dŏk Maria, who
also desired to consecrate her virginity, and went to Seoul in order to avoid marrying. Bishop
Imbert initially insisted that they go back home, but relented after learning that if they did so they
were at risk of being murdered by the patriarch of their family.613

Although Bishop Imbert did not directly refer to the rules on Christian virgins of the
Sichuan Synod, he might have been familiar with them from his work in Sichuan from 1825 to
1837.614 According to these rules, both Yi Yŏng-dŏk Magdalena and Yi In-dŏk Maria were

ineligible: they not only did not have the financial resources to support themselves, but they had left their father’s home and become a burden for other believers. His attitude might have reflected his attempt to implement those rules in Chosŏn to control Christian virgins in Korea as well, even though he had to be more flexible in applying the rules to avoid their possible murders. Bishop Ferréol, the next Vicar Apostolic after Bishop Imbert, shared his predecessor’s unfavorable attitude toward Christian virgins in Korea. He did not allow consecration of a Korean girl’s virginity even before her early death at the age of eighteen due to illness, which had been caused by her emotional despair615 (I will discuss this case more in detail in the next chapter). Choosing a life as a consecrated virgin was thus already difficult even before the Cheusŏ was written.

After the Cheusŏ was produced it might have been even more difficult than in previous periods, since all candidates had to be assessed based on the rules from the Sichuan Synod. Kang Lucia’s defiance is an example which demonstrates the conflicts between the M.E.P. missionaries and female virgins in Korea after the promulgation of the Cheusŏ. Kang Lucia (1844-1868), a martyr of the Pyŏng’ın Persecution in 1868, rejected a marriage proposal in order to consecrate her virginity at the age of nineteen in 1863. M.E.P. missionaries rejected her request to take a vow of chastity, commanded her to get married, and banned her from receiving the sacraments for three years. However, it seems that she might have obtained temporary permission to stay unmarried from the missionaries based on the fact that they allowed her to

receive the sacraments after the three-year ban.\textsuperscript{616} The reason could have been that she fulfilled the qualifications for the vow in the Sichuan Synod: financial sources for self-support as well as residence in her father’s home. All preserved records on her life show that she was living in her father’s home with her family until she was arrested alongside them in 1868.\textsuperscript{617} Those primary sources show that Kang Paul, her father, had a prominent position in Chŏpt’i Village in Kongju, Ch’ungch’ŏng Province, and was affluent enough to spend a sizable amount of money to save fellow Catholics in the village at the beginning of the persecution in 1866.\textsuperscript{618} Kang Lucia could not have taken a vow of chastity due to her young age—she died during the persecution at the age of twenty-four, one year short of the minimum age of twenty-five.

However, there were women who decided to live as Christian virgins without permission from the missionaries. Yi Agatha, born in a Christian family, determined to consecrate her virginity to dedicate her life to God and lived with Yi Gabriel, her younger brother, farming in a mountainous area in Ch’ungch’ŏng Province. She was caught and strangled to death in jail at the age of thirty-eight in 1866. It is unclear whether she had acknowledged the rules in the Cheusŏ or even whether she had any contact with the missionaries to seek permission for her decision.\textsuperscript{619}

\textsuperscript{616} Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., \textit{Pyŏng in Pakhae Sun’gyoja Ch’ung’ŏnok: Hyŏndaemun P’yŏn [Testimonies of Witnesses during the Persecution of Pyŏng in Year: Contemporary Translation]} (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 1987), p.230.

\textsuperscript{617} Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., \textit{Pyŏng in Pakhae Sun’gyoja Ch’ung’ŏnok: Hyŏndaemun P’yŏn [Testimonies of Witnesses during the Persecution of Pyŏng in Year: Contemporary Translation]} (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 1987), p.231.

\textsuperscript{618} Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., \textit{Pyŏng in Pakhae Sun’gyoja Ch’ung’ŏnok: Hyŏndaemun P’yŏn [Testimonies of Witnesses during the Persecution of Pyŏng in Year: Contemporary Translation]} (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 1987), p.228-229.

\textsuperscript{619} Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, ed., \textit{Pyŏng in Pakhae Sun’gyoja Ch’ung’ŏnok: Hyŏndaemun P’yŏn [Testimonies of Witnesses during the Persecution of Pyŏng in Year: Contemporary Translation]} (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 1987), p.208-209.
According to the extant records, it can be surmised that Yi Agatha decided on her own to live as a Christian virgin, and made her life in a remote place out of sight of the missionaries.

The M.E.P. missionaries in Korea discouraged young girls’ resolutions to consecrate their virginity much more strictly than did their counterparts in China. The rules for Christian virgins from the Sichuan Synod continued to be applied to Korean Christian virgins even after the Catholic Church in Korea obtained freedom for evangelisation in 1886. Appointed the seventh Vicar Apostolic of Korea in 1884, Bishop Marie-Jean-Gustave Blanc (1844-1890) held the third Synod for the Korean Catholic Church in 1884 and promulgated Coutumier de la Mission de Corée, the first official church regulation written specifically for the country, in 1887. This regulation reaffirmed that the Korean Catholic Church still strictly banned women from choosing a consecrated life due to the difficult situation in the country, although Bishop Blanc invited the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres the very next year.

In contrast to the Catholic Church in Korea, the Catholic Church in China allowed various organizations for consecrated female virgins before other regular Christian organizations from Europe for women were introduced into China under the supervision of missionaries. Including the aforementioned beatas under the Dominicans, the Institute of Christian Virgins flourished by the early twentieth century under the missionary jurisdiction of the M.E.P in Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangdong, Tibet, and northeast China.

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620 Chang Tong-ha, Kaehanggi Han’guk Sahoe wa Ch’ŏnju Kyohoe [Korean Society and Catholic Church during the Port-Opening Period] (Sŏul, Korea: K’at’olik Ch’ulp’ansa, 2005), p.269.

Moreover, there were several more known organizations for Christian virgins in China. The first was the Association of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin (*Présentandines*), organized by some of Jiangnan virgins themselves as an indigenous religious congregation under the authority of the French mission superior.622

In addition, convents were established in China by Western nuns who entered China from the mid-nineteenth century. In 1846 the Vincentian Fathers brought the Daughters of St. Vincent de France to Ningpo, Chekiang Province, primarily to work with women, and by the turn of the century seven other European congregations of Catholic sisters had arrived in China.623 Also, Bishop Emmanuel Verrolle (1805-1878), the first Vicar Apostolic of Manchuria, built the convent of the Sacred Heart of Mary to foster Chinese Catholic nuns in Xiaobajiazi in 1858.624 The Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul arrived in 1847, followed later by the Society of Helpers in 1867, and a group of Carmelite Sisters (from Laval) arrived in 1869.625

Also, numerous sources demonstrate that Christian virgins in China actually worked for the Church. Despite their limited designated roles, consecrated female virgins in China contributed to sustaining the Church during the absence of missionaries in times of persecution by undertaking the duty of teaching girls, training catechumens for baptism, and baptizing dying


infants. Particularly, Jean Martin Moyë (1730-93), an M.E.P. missionary in Sichuan, promoted consecrated female virgins for the practice of baptizing dying non-Christian children, which had been practiced from the mid-seventeenth century in China, during the great famine in eastern Sichuan in 1778.

However, Moyë’s attempts to promote greater roles outside the family for female virgins caused strong objections by Pottier M.E.P., the Vicar Apostolic of Sichuan, and resulted in the abovementioned promulgations of Article 37 and Saint Martin’s pastoral letter, which reinforced stronger regulations for Christian virgins to stay at their fathers’ houses.

There is one more source to consider when it come to the M.E.P. missionaries’ stricter attitudes toward consecrated virgins in Korea: the scandal of Kwŏn Chin-yi Agatha and Fr. Yu Pang-je Pacificus in 1836. Entering Korea as the first M.E.P missionary for Korea in 1836, Fr. Maubant had serious conflicts with Fr. Yu Pang-je Pacificus, who had arrived in 1834. Eventually Fr. Maubant banned Fr. Yu’s pastoral activities and ordered him to return to China. Charles Dallet’s Histoire de l’Église de Corée provides four reasons for Maubant prohibiting Fr. Yu from continuing to work as a priest in Korea: first, his laziness in learning Korean, second, his seclusion in Seoul and neglect of believers outside the city, third, his illicit accumulation of


wealth, and fourth, his sexual affair with Kwŏn Chin-yi Agatha. However, Maubant’s letter to Pierre-Louis Legregeois (1801-1866), Procurator for the M.E.P. in Macao, describes only Fr. Yu’s misconduct with Kwŏn Chin-yi Agatha.

The problem begins from the fact that Kwŏn Chin-yi Agatha (1819-1840) was a consecrated virgin. She was a daughter of Kwŏn Yŏng-jwa, a prominent yangban scholar and Catholic convert, and Han Yŏng-yi Magdalena (1784-1839). She lived with her mother in Seoul after her father’s death and was married to a Christian relative of Chŏng Ha-sang Paul at the age of thirteen. However, because her husband could not afford to live with her due to extreme poverty, she was still living with her mother in 1834 when Fr. Yu Pang-je Pacificus arrived in Seoul. Being baptized by Priest Yu, she asked him to annul her unconsummated marriage out of a wish to live a consecrated life. After her marriage annulment was approved, she served Fr. Yu’s as his an boksa.

An boksa were helpers during the period of persecutions and the early twentieth century in the Catholic Church in Korea who took care of domestic chores for the priests. The word boksa means “altar boy” in the contemporary Catholic Church in Korea, but there were male and female boksa during the period of the persecutions. The an boksa were “inner boksa,” figuratively denoting “female boksa.” Since male boksa served the missionaries as teachers of Korean, guides for pastoral journeys, interpreters, messengers, and personal servants, their


importance during these periods was almost equivalent to that of the *hoejang* (catechists). The female *boksa* seem to have taken roles similar to maids or housekeepers: cooking, cleaning, and doing the laundry, and thus for convenience had to live in the priests’ homes.

The scandal between fifteen-year-old Kwŏn Chin-yi Agatha and the young Fr. Yu began from the fact that they lived together under the same roof. Fr. Maubant reported details of his accusations related to Fr. Yu’s misconduct in a letter to the Propaganda Fide in Rome in April of 1836. In this letter, Fr. Maubant reported that Fr. Yu insisted on having a sexual affair with Kwŏn Chin-yi Agatha, which eventually led to her impregnation.

The next statement is from confessions made by two women to me. … One lady allowed that poor man to take advantage of her body. (One lady) told me: my spiritual father, Tao Kouang (Fr. Yu) requested me like this on the fourteenth (day?): “do you want to sleep with me or are you willing to allow it for me?” Hence, she consented to it. Other than this, she had received baptism from Fr. Yu and divorced her husband with a wish to maintain her virginity. Not only did Priest Yu permit it but suggested that her husband remarry another woman. (…) Also, Fr. Yu provided her medicine so as not to leave evidence that she had miscarried. (Kwŏn Chin-yi) Agatha testified that Fr. Yu had requested to have sex with her forty four times, she had sex with him forty times, and she also requested it once. She had given birth to a baby in front of her mother and Chŏng Chŏng-hye Elizabeth. They promptly let Fr. Yu know and he came to them. While the baby was crying, he told them, “this will be an ugly scandal to the Church, we have no choice but to kill it. The three women confirmed me that they had heard him speak them like this. (…) In the evening of Sunday of the same week, I approached to him, because everything seemed to be clear. He refused to listen to my command suspending his execution of the Holy affairs and claimed that he had not slept with her. (…..)[631]

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If this accusation is true and Kwŏn Chin-yi Agatha gave birth to a baby as the result of a physical relationship with Fr. Yu, it must have been the biggest scandal in the history of Korean Catholic Church.

However, it is noteworthy that Bishop Imbert, the second Vicar Apostolic of Korea, argued that Maubant’s accusations were exaggerated. He helped Fr. Yu to lift his suspension and continue to work as a priest in China. Bishop Imbert believed that Fr. Yu might have been misunderstood by Fr. Maubant due to his initial hesitation to accept Barthélemy Bruguière, the first Vicar Apostolic of Korea, and strong insistence that the entrance of Western missionaries would lead to serious persecution in Korea. Fr. Imbert met Fr. Yu in China on his way to Korea, heard his side of the story, and helped him to work as a priest in China. All the accusations about Fr. Yu discussed in Imbert’s letters focused on his hesitation and uncooperative attitude, not his alleged sexual affair, in contrast to Maubant’s accusations.

It was true that Fr. Yu Fang-je Pacificus was hesitant to accept the first Vicar Apostolic of Korea’s arrival at his post, but there were reasons for that which were entangled with complicated history of the missions in Asia. Yu Fang-je Pacificus was sent to Korea to prepare for the establishment of missions in Korea by the Propaganda Fide, based on his expressed wish


634 Imbert’s Thirteenth Letter (1837.10.10.), p.107-109; Imbert’s Tenth Letter (1837.6.18.), p.151-153; Imbert’s Thirteenth Letter (1837.10.10.), p.179, Laurent-Joseph-Marius Imbert, Angberŭ Chugyo Sŏhan [Letters from Bishop Imbert], ed. Suwŏn Kyohoesa Yŏn’guso (Suwŏn, Kyŏnggi-do, Korea: Hasang Ch’ulp’ansa, 2011). In these letters, Bishop Imbert consistently defended Fr. Yu Fang-je Pacificus saying that he was innocent from the accusations related to the sexual scandal.
to dedicate his life as a missionary in Korea during his studies at the Collegio della S. Famiglia di Gesú Cristo in Naples in 1828.\textsuperscript{635}

Entering Korea in 1834 with assistance and support from the Portuguese missionaries in Beijing, he came to be confused about his future after learning the news that the mission in Korea was entrusted to the M.E.P. As mentioned, he was not a priest of the M.E.P. and had been sent to Korea by the order of the Propaganda Fide, which made his position and future in Korea more ambiguous. Thus, he sent his pastoral reports on the mission in Korea to Bishop Ferreira in Beijing instead of to Bishop Barthélemy Bruguière, which aroused Bruguière’s suspicions regarding his intentions. Knowing Bishop Bruguière’s will to enter Korea at any cost, Fr. Yu sent his pastoral letters to him. However, Bishop Bruguière died before he could go to Korea due to the long interference and negligence by the Portuguese missionaries in Beijing, which provoked Fr. Maubant’s wrath and suspicions about Priest Yu.\textsuperscript{636}

Fr. Maubant’s arrival in 1836 caused a lot of trouble between the two missionaries as well as among the Catholics in Korea. Fr. Maubant seems to have decided to expel Fr. Yu from Korea before he even arrived, in that he ordered Fr. Yu to leave Korea two days after their meeting in 1836, according to Fr. Yu’s letter to the Procurator in Macao written in 1837. This

\textsuperscript{635} Cho Hyŏn-bŏm, “Kyohoe ŭi Chaegŏn kwa Sŏngjikcha Ch’ŏngwŏn” [Restoration of the Church and Requests of Missionaries], in Han’guk Ch’onju Kyohoesa [A History of Catholic Church in Korea], ed. Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, vol. 2 (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 2010), 152–78, p.241-242.

\textsuperscript{636} Cho Hyŏn-bŏm, “Kyohoe ŭi Chaegŏn kwa Sŏngjikcha Ch’ŏngwŏn” [Restoration of the Church and Requests of Missionaries], in Han’guk Ch’onju Kyohoesa [A History of Catholic Church in Korea], ed. Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, vol. 2 (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa yŏn’guso, 2010), 152–78, p.265-277.
letter shows a different situation from what we see in the letter written by Fr. Maubant on their relationships with Catholic converts as well.637

The conflicts between these two missionaries also seem to have caused divisions between believers: those who followed Fr. Yu and those who supported Fr. Maubant. Recently, Kim Ki-hyŏp has pointed out that Kim Yŏ-sang (dates unknown), an apostate during the persecution of 1839 who helped the authorities arrest all of the important Catholics and the French missionaries, might have been connected with Fr. Yu’s supporters. During the persecution, Kim Yŏ-sang had a list of prominent Catholics and led police to them so that they could be arrested. Therefore, common believers knew that he held a grudge only against those prominent believers, and they felt they need not fear that they would be arrested. Kim Yŏ-sang also met Kwŏn Chin-yi Agatha in jail, and encouraged her to run away. Based on these records, Kim Ki-hyŏp suggests that there might have been a group of believers or apostates who were provoked by Priest Yu’s expulsion and accusations against him.638

The accusation of an affair between Fr. Yu and Kwŏn Chin-yi Agatha could have been caused by Maubant’s personality as a man of principle. Accounts in the primary sources describe him as a strict man of principle who did not compromise his opinion even when flexibility was required. Bishop Imbert allowed Korean Catholics to accept food offered for Confucian rituals if the giver did not explicitly mention the source, understanding that sharing offerings after rituals

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had been a long convention. However, he did not announce it because Fr. Maubant disagreed with the decision. Indeed, Fr. Maubant strictly prohibited Korean Catholics from receiving offerings from Confucian rituals, even punishing those who had by banning them from receiving Holy Communion.\textsuperscript{639} Thus he might have objected to Fr. Yu having a young woman living in his home, even as a servant.

Fr. Maubant himself had to accept three elderly women as helpers out of strict necessity, but still hated them to wash his clothes, saying that he really did not want any women in his house.\textsuperscript{640} He might have considered this a violation of Clause X of the Sichuan Synod, \textit{Missionaries’ conduct for themselves and the faithful entrusted to them}, which regulated intimate interactions between missionaries and women.\textsuperscript{641} Even though more detailed rules on the age for female maids for priests in Korea did not appear until much later, Fr. Maubant was clearly unhappy with Fr. Yu sharing a dwelling with Kwŏn Chin-yi Agatha and considered it suspicious.

Under the circumstance of continuous persecutions, in contrast to their Chinese counterparts the French missionaries in Chosŏn Korea considered female virgins a source of scandal and a burden. The scandal of Priest Yu and Kwŏn Chin-yi Agatha could be the

\textsuperscript{639} Imbert’s Twenty Second Letter (1838. 12. 1.), Imbert’s Seventh Letter (1837.6.16.), p.375.

\textsuperscript{640} Fr. Maubant’s Letter from Seoul written on April 4, 1836, Didier t’Serstevens, Tellier Olivier, and Théophile Choi, eds., \textit{LETTRERES DE St. MAUBANT 1832-1839} (Chŏnju, Korea: Unpublished, 2004), p.92. Letters written by French missionaries in Korea including Fr. Maubant’s were painstakingly transcribed from the original documents by Fr. Chi Chŏng-hwan (Fr. Didier t’Serstevens) over a period of more than ten years. Unfortunately, these new translations have not been published. He kindly provided me with this valuable resource when I was having difficulty obtaining the M.E.P. documents in Korea. I deeply appreciate his kind help.

beginning of the stricter attitudes on Korean virgins even though their sexual affair might never have happened.

In addition, the M.E.P. missionaries were focused on nurturing native priests, and the financial sources were not even enough to provide for them, meaning there was not enough to provide for virgins at the same time. Moreover, the continuous persecution did not allow Korean female virgins to serve as assistants to French missionaries as their Chinese counterparts had done. Although Chinese virgins could be seen as a necessary evil by the missionaries, Korean virgins might have been just an evil due to the extreme difficulties and dangers they had been facing in Chosŏn Korea.

Along with society at large, which commonly forced marriage upon them and prohibited them from choosing their own life path, the Church now became another battlefield for Catholic women in Chosŏn Korea. Instead of abiding by the Church’s prohibition, they began developing their own strategies to accomplish their objectives to live their lives on their own by consecrating their virginity. When the Church was the shelter for their religious purpose, these women could leave their homes and conceal their identities as a form of resistance in order to escape from forced marriage and live as perpetual virgins. However, they had to develop a new subjectivity in defiance to the Church, which had the authority to recognize and permit their choice of perpetual virginity.

In the next chapter, I will explore why women’s choice to preserve their virginity could have a significant role in their empowerment under the patriarchal society and why the empowerment

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was doomed to be limited. I will argue that female virgins in Korea developed a new subjectivity to maneuver the limitations to accomplish their goal.

### 7.4 Subjectivity of Korean Female Virgins toward the Catholic Church and the Clergy in Chosŏn Korea

The subjectivity of Korean female virgins had practiced bidirectionally toward the Confucian society – both the government and family – and the Church in a different manner in my previous discussions on the religious women’s performance of their virginity in Chapter 4. In Chosŏn Korea, on one hand, female virgins also practiced their subjectivity to resist the authority of patriarchal norms, which force them to get married, although they did not intend to subvert the patriarchal control, when they deal with the Confucian society. On another hand, dealing with the male authority within the institution of the Church, these women clearly showed the features in discussions of Saba Mahmood and Michel Foucault that I discussed in Chapter 4 and will argue in this section.

Before the arrival of the French missionaries in Korea in the 1830s, Korean virgins’ agency was exerted toward the Chosŏn government, society, and their families, who opposed their consecration of their virginity. Christian virgins in Korea had never expected the missionaries to object to their spiritual intentions, which were a legitimised and even honored practice in the Church system. They had already practiced the consecration of virginity on their own for a half century and shared memories that Father Zhu Wen-mo had once promoted and supported it.

In defiance of this new challenge, Korean virgins began demonstrating new ways to exert their agency in the face of the prohibition of the French missionaries. Confronting
opposition from the Church, which was supposed to support and allow their life choice, the exertion of their agency and the form of their resistance are rather unclear. The reason is that Korean virgins exerted their agency to stay and get approval from the Church system by participating in Church rituals instead either of refusing or escaping from them. Particularly, Korean virgins came to face more a complicated situation, because the Church refused to recognize them as Catholic virgins, which was prerequisite for the consecration of virginity.

Resisting society could take the form of leaving home to avoid forced marriage and finding a Church community. But when the Church became the place of conflict, those women had to wage a different form of agency to fight within the system. This was inevitable, because after the arrival of the M.E.P. missionaries the Church became the authority to recognize and name women Catholic virgins by allowing them to take vows of chastity; it was no longer possible for them to perform Christian virginity on their own. Also, they neither intended to bring any changes to the Church nor hoped to achieve liberation or equality in society or the Church. What they wanted was to practice perpetual virginity with the permission of the Church authority. They needed this permission in order to inhabit the Church system and show their obedience to it, even though the Church persistently refused to recognize them as Christian virgins.

The more the Church rejected them, the more they had to prove their good qualities for their religious calling. Instead of surrendering their will or leaving the Church, they tried to stay inside the Church and obtain permission from the French missionaries. They utilized the forms, language, and methods provided by the Church and abided by its teachings to demonstrate that they were “ideal Catholic girls” who were perfectly qualified for perpetual virginity. Instead of
challenging or rejecting the clerical authority, they became even more subordinate to the missionaries, wishing to obtain their recognition.

However, that does not mean that Korean female virgins were passive victims of the male dominance in society or the Church. Rather, it illustrates that they developed a new form of subjectivity to cope with a new situation, which shows similarity with Saba Mahmood’s argument on Muslim women’s agency during the piety movement in Egypt discussed earlier.

Notions of women’s agency have been elaborated based on the strong ground of liberal feminism. These discussions see women’s agency as actions without constraint born of women’s free will to accomplish universal freedom and equality, which all women share regardless of temporal, spatial, and cultural differences.

Realizing that the standard definition of agency cannot articulate participants’ agency in the piety movement, Saba Mahmood demonstrates that Muslim women practiced their agency differently for a particular goal: accomplishment of their self-realization. The main point of Mahmood’s argument is that women’s subordination to male authority could become a way for women in traditional religions to practice their agency for their ultimate aim of realizing the self in the system of the religious institution. The piety movement has required female participants to wear veils and obey males since its beginning in the 1970s. Thus, the participants seem to surrender themselves to Islamic tradition, which reinforces their subordination.

However, Mahmood attempts to demonstrate that female participants in the piety movement in Egypt have exercised a different form of agency from the liberalist understanding

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of female agency in an environment where subordination to external authority is the condition for the development of the self. Mahmood explains that their seemingly subordinate demeanours—wearing veils or submissive attitudes toward the religious authority—have particular meanings as a form of practice of positive ethics to accomplish the self-realization, self-formation and self-development of the participants. Therefore, instead of leaving the religious institutions or challenging the male authority, female agents choose to work within the religious system and obey the male authority. By doing so, they redefine the nature of human agency: it is not only in those acts that resist norms but also in the multiple ways in which one inhabits or practices a culture’s norms, although they may be incompatible with the ideal of freedom.

Female virgins demonstrate a similar form of agency practice towards the Catholic Church and the clergy in Chosŏn Korea. Korean virgins had endured continuous persecution and wished to be guided by missionaries with their fellow believers. However, the arrival of MEP missionaries ended their ability to choose perpetual virginity for a religious life, betraying their expectation that the Church would be a safe place and ground for their lives as Catholic virgins. This situation drove many persistent candidates to wage a long but covert resistance to the Church, which required them to marry. Confronting the prohibition, they decided to stay in the Church instead of leaving it to seek freedom. When society had been the barrier, leaving their homes was one solution: they could find a safe haven in the Church community and with fellow


believers. However, when the Church became the battleground, their form of resistance had to change.

Some women actually tried to leave their homes in search of ways to live as Catholic virgins, but they could not escape the Church authority. In contrast to their predecessors, they now learned that they could not become Catholic virgins merely by calling themselves virgins: they now had to receive permission to officially take vows. Their resistance for the Church was thus waged with to obtain its recognition under the authority of the M.E.P. missionaries.

The most famous example is the case of Yi Barbara (1832-1850), a Korean girl who resisted this command up until her death. Yi Barbara’s resistance and demand for her own agency appears in Fr. Ch’oi Yang-ŏp’s seventh letter to the M.E.P. in Hong Kong. Considering the letter was written in 1850, it occurred about ten years prior to Bishop Berneux’s promulgation of the aforementioned Cheusŏ.

There was a girl, named Barbara, who was the youngest daughter in her family. (…) She learned to read at the age of seven and decided to consecrate her virginity since then. One day, her sister-in-law made clothes and told her, “these clothes are yours. You will wear it on your wedding day. Hearing this, Barbara hid at the most obscure place in her house right away and cried badly. Her mother managed to Barbara to stop crying by consoling her, saying that she would never marry off Barbara in the future.\(^\text{646}\)

She also decided to live her life as a perpetual virgin at a young age like other candidates.

Yi Barbara’s decision to consecrate her virginity for dedication to God brought her first struggles with her own family when she was approaching marriageable age. Although she had not yet been forced to marry, she attempted to leave her home with another girl of her age to experience life in seclusion.

On one day when Barbara turned eleven years old, she ran away with one more girl around her age to a deep mountain forest, leaving several lines of message on the wall of her room and packing two books and a bit of rice. Her parents woke up and found out Barbara was missing. They were searching for her and found her message on the wall. The message said, “my beloved parents, please consider me not as your child but as daughter of Virgin Mary. Life in this world is too short and everything is vain and futile. (...)” Her family searched for her and (her brother) found her inside of a cave three days later. (…) However, she was brought by her brother to her father’s home. Arriving at home, her mother yelled at and scolded her, “what on earth are you doing? How could you do such a stupid thing. You might have been fooled by demons. Otherwise, how can a little girl like you are not afraid of tigers and death by starving?” She answered, “please don’t worry, mother. God would not let die those who rely on him.”

Barbara’s leaving home to articulate her desire for perpetual virginity shows a similar pattern with her predecessors, who had resisted their families and society.

Firmly deciding on the path of her own life, Yi Barbara strove to realize herself by behaving as an ideal “Catholic girl,” one who was qualified to be a Catholic virgin. She voluntarily began practicing austerities in her daily life based on her own understanding of the life of a consecrated Christian virgin, including regular fasting, prayers and a vegan diet.

Since then, Barbara regularly fasted twice in a week and never had meat and fish. She ate only a bit of food once in a day every day during Lent. She never stopped praying and had prayed all the time whenever she was doing chores or working at the field. In Chosŏn, the daily prayers are not that short, but she memorized all of them. Also, she memorized all catechisms for Catholics, hagiographies of St. Barbara, St. Peter, and St. Paul including Korean martyrs, other small Korean catechisms, written by devoted Korean Catholics. (...)\(^{648}\)

It seems her family members were also Catholic believers and Barbara had no trouble continuing to live her life as a perpetual virgin once she showed her dedication and adamant desire to do so.

However, Barbara came to face a real challenge from the Church when the M.E.P. missionaries rejected her request to permit to consecrate her virginity.

Barbara could receive the Sacraments of Holy Communion from a priest for the first time at the age of fourteen, since she could never have had any chances to meet priests to listen to her confessions. She told her decision to consecrate her virginity to him. The priest dissuaded her by telling her all dangers that she would face by being a Christian Virgin and commanded her to change her mind and get married. She went to confess to the same priest the next year. She told the priest that her mind had never changed and would keep her decision. He, again, explained her the perils she would face as Virgin and reasons she had to change her mind. And then, he talked to her, “if you want to receive the Sacraments, you must change your mind. Otherwise, you cannot receive the Sacraments. Choose one of these two.”\(^{649}\)

Receiving the Sacraments of Holy Communion for the first time from a priest, she told him her wish to consecrate her virginity to God. To her shock, the priest discouraged her decision, explaining all the difficulties a Christian virgin would confront.


From this moment, Yi Barbara’s agency practice became different from that of her predecessors, who had to resist Confucian society, in that she endeavoured not only to stay in the Church rather than leaving it, but also to obtain approval for her choice from the clergy instead of challenging them. Barbara came to confront more severe struggles from society as well as the Church when she reached marriageable age. She had to leave her hometown due to continuing threats caused by her rejection of marriage proposals. This was perhaps less of a problem for her, because her family was willing to relocate to protect her safety and to support her persistent desire for perpetual virginity. It was rather the conflicts with the missionaries that caused her much more severe pain.

She had been rejected from receiving the Sacraments and already expelled from the confessional three times. She went to the confessional a fourth time but was kicked out again. Bishop (Ferréol) summoned Barbara several times. Although he tried to persuade her even by intimidating her, she did not obey. Thus, he, at last, banned her and her parents from receiving the Sacraments as the punishment.\(^\text{650}\)

Bishop Ferréol summoned her to dissuade from her decision several times and banned her and her family completely from receiving the Sacraments due to her defiance. Although Barbara visited Father Ch’oe Yang-ôp during his pastoral trip and asked him to give her the Sacraments, he also had to refuse her request in order to respect the Bishop’s command. Even when she became seriously ill, due to her persistence the ban was not lifted. She received the last

sacrament on her deathbed just before she died at the age of eighteen in 1850. However, her request for perpetual virginity was never approved, even at the moment of her imminent death.651

The conflicts between the M.E.P. missionaries and Korean female virgins for almost thirty years resulted in a new form of practice of subjectivity among Korean Catholic women who wanted to consecrate their virginity. There are several notable points in this new pattern of subjectivity practice: First, the subjects still stayed and worked within the Church system, instead of leaving it. Second, they continued to show subordination to the authority of Church and clergy, rather than challenging or refusing it. Third, they nevertheless did not pursue recognition of their choice of perpetual virginity and kept it secret from the authorities. Fourth, what they valued most was the development and realization of the self through the practice of renunciation on their own based on Catholic teachings. As long as they consider themselves Christian virgins, the approval or recognition of the Church was not important, which is a new form of practice of subjectivity among female virgins in Chosŏn Korea.

The most noticeable example in the extant records is Yi Theresa (1841-1868?). Born the second daughter in a prominent yangban family, her father was Yi Francisco (1809-1868?), who was baptized by Bishop Ferréol and was one of the most prominent Christian yangban. Her mother was Nam Elizabeth (1808-1868?), a daughter of Nam Sang-gyo Augustine (1784-1866)

and a sister of Nam Chong-sam (1817-1866), who attempted to arrange a meeting between the
Prince Hŭngsŏn and Bishop Berneux and provided a reason for the persecution of 1866.652

Her childhood seems similar to that of Yi Barbara in that she was also born in a Catholic family and was raised as a zealous Christian, and had an ardent desire for a life as a perpetual Christian virgin from childhood, according to the records.

Growing up, Theresa was very good-hearted and, thus, had never quarreled with other children. Since she turned to the age of eight, she strongly reproved anyone who even made a joke about her marriage harshly enough even mature adults would feel ashamed.653

She did not want to even listen to jokes about her marriage at the age of eight and persisted in her wish to consecrate her virginity to dedicate her life to devotion to God and strove to show that she was a “good Catholic girl” whose was qualified to meet the ideal standard to be a perpetual virgin.

Her difference from Yi Barbara and other candidates for perpetual virginity appears from the moment she began faking disabilities around the age of ten, first feigning a limp and then pretending to be mute. Faking disabilities was not a new strategy for Korean Christian virgins, but her peculiarity is that the truth of her (dis)abilities had to be kept a secret not only from her own family but also from the missionaries.


When Theresa turned to the age around ten years old, she suddenly began limping on one of her legs, saying that she had fallen from a high spot. Reaching marriageable age, she learned that the family of Minister Hong in Wŏnju area was interested in her as a potential daughter-in-law and fell seriously ill for several days. One day, she wrote a letter and showed the message to her mother, “I lost the ability to speak since falling sick. I am very sorry for being an unfilial daughter, who causes you this kind of concern.” Several years after she became a mute, her married sister (Yi Kuk-hu Elizabeth) visited her natal family and was ready to go back to her husband’s home. Theresa came to her sister’s sedan chair and handed her a letter. Her sister opened and read it on her way back to home. [Theresa said in her letter,] “(…) Please sincerely pray for me. I decided to follow the trace of Virgin Mary for a long time ago.” (…) And then, she (Yi Kuk-hu Elizabeth) realized all of these (Theresa’s fake disabilities) had all come from her desire to consecrate her virginity.654

Becoming a mute, Theresa confessed her sin to a priest by writing. The priest worried about her disability several times and gave her the Sacraments. She had secretly spoken out to her mother to relieve her concerns but never spoke out to other people until her death.655

The records of her life do not show whether she and her family were martyred, although they do reveal that she was caught with her family and sent to Seoul at the age of twenty-seven. However, this short record suggests a high possibility that neither her family nor the missionaries ever detected her hidden resolution to be a Christian virgin. Considering her family’s important position in the Catholic Church at the time, she might have realized the difficulty of obtaining official permission to take a vow and decided to live as a virgin in her own way. There was no way for the missionaries to detect her decision, which even her own family did not recognize, because she wrote her confession to the priests instead of speaking it. The missionaries had


visited her home to console her mother over her muteness and had given her the sacraments several times not knowing her decision.

Despite their different forms of resistance Yi Barbara and Yi Theresa demonstrate a common desire: inhabiting the Church organization instead of leaving it. When Christian virgins were resisting their society, escaping could be a solution as they had somewhere to go. However, when the Church, which was supposed to be their shelter, become the object of their resistance and battleground over their choice for perpetual virginity, leaving could not be the solution. Both Yi Barbara and Yi Theresa, therefore, decided to stay in the Church organization. Also, they neither attempted to change the Church’s decision nor to protest it. Instead, they tried to receive the Sacraments by obeying the Church authority and personally cultivated themselves spiritually by reading hagiographies, fasting, and praying. Nevertheless, in contrast to their predecessors’ resistance to society, they continued both resisting and obeying the Church authority.

Yi Barbara’s example might have been very a common form of resistance by other unknown candidates for perpetual virginity. Since the arrival of the French missionaries and their newly brought regulations, Christian virgins ought to have been approved and recognized as consecrated virgins. The first response they received from the missionaries might have been rejection, and that could be the starting point of their resistance and efforts to obtain official permission. Most of them might have endeavoured to impress the Church authority by showing that they were outstandingly good Catholics who could become the best role models for other women and follow all the teachings in the catechisms as long as they did not give up their wish. Although Yi Barbara died with her wish unfulfilled, Kang Lucia (whom I discuss in the section 7.3) might have taken the same path to obtain approval for her candidacy for perpetual virginity.
Considering these examples, the case of Yi Theresa is extraordinary in that she did not want or attempt to obtain either the approval or the recognition of the Church authority or anyone else. Most Christian virgins in Korea show a common pattern: telling their families their wishes; either escaping from home or faking disabilities to avoid forced marriage; and being open about their desire to live a chaste life, the rejection of the priests, resistance, and either official approval or continuous rejections. However, Yi Theresa’s resistance does not follow this pattern: while she demonstrated her wish for the chaste life, and began feigning disability, she did not attempt to gain any recognition or approval, particularly from the priests. It seems that she already considered herself a consecrated virgin, qualified to dedicate her life to God by practicing the required practices such as fasting, praying, and reading hagiographies. Hence, she was not eager to obtain permission or recognition of the Church authority at all, and even confessed in writing in order to hide the fact that her disabilities were fake from the priests. Her relationship with God was the most important, and she wanted to connect with God by practicing perpetual virginity on her own, bypassing the authority of the priests, who were likely to be an obstacle to her self-realization.

In this respect, it is possible to see that Yi Theresa achieved her own subjectivation and resistance as an ethical subject by practicing “the care of the self,” in Michel Foucault’s terms. Acknowledging his overemphasis of the functions of power and knowledge for subjectivation, in his later life Foucault began tracing the different ways of subject formation before the domination of Christianity in Western culture (during the Hellenistic Greek, Imperial Roman, and early Christian periods). He decided to pay close attention to sexual desires as a means to compare different processes for subjectivation during those times based on his previous discovery: a modern ethical subject has come to be organized around the question of sexual
desire centering specifically around the moral project of self-denial as a central part of Western ethical life throughout Christianity and post-Christian modernity. He found that individuals of those epochs had striven to develop practices to control sexual pleasures on their own, although there did not yet exist regulations or customs related to sexuality during those times.

Foucault calls the technologies to practice autonomous control of sexuality as “arts of existence.” This refers to “those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an oeuvre” that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria.

Care of the self requires the subject to go through various practices in order to reflect, recognize, change and improve itself by turning its own eyes from external factors like fame, wealth, or other’s gazes to its inner self. Since the ethical is not only the subject’s own mode of life but also attitudes to display to others, ethics is expressed through the subject’s appearance, conduct, demeanour with others, and so on. Foucault also affirms that the subject’s practices of self-constitution are not something that the individual invents but are patterns which are proposed, suggested and imposed by the culture, society and social groups.


This Foucauldian notion of “ethics” is also different from the conventional understanding of ethics: a relation of self to itself in terms of its moral agency. Most of all, Foucault avoids identifying ethics as the abstract legislation of principles, which reduces ethics to an impersonal theme.\textsuperscript{660} He distinguishes moral code, an impersonal and abstract idea or sets of rules, norms, values, and injunctions to regulate behaviour, from ethics. These moral codes are imposed from the outside based on relations with others and society by institutions such as schools, temples, churches, families, and so on, and thus individuals might variously obey or resist.\textsuperscript{661} However, Foucauldian ethics are a set of practical activities, techniques, and discourses that are related to a certain way of life, including bodily practices such as expressions of modesty, fasting, or asceticism, through which a subject transforms herself to achieve a particular being, happiness or truth.\textsuperscript{662}

More precisely, Foucauldian ethics is “the conduct required of an individual so as to render its own actions consistent with a moral code and standards of moral approval.”\textsuperscript{663} Here, conduct broadly includes both non-moral actions and non-agential capacities such as attitudes, demeanour and so on. And, therefore, Foucauldian ethical conduct means actions performed, and

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\textsuperscript{660} Richard White, “Foucault on the Care of the Self as an Ethical Project and a Spiritual Goal,” Human Studies 37, no. 4 (2014): 489–504, p.492, 494-495.
\end{flushright}
capacities exercised intentionally by a subject for the purpose of engaging in morally approved conduct.  

This subject constitutes its own subjectivity through introspective and reflective contemplations and practices as an active agent of its own formation. Therefore, Foucault’s definition of ethics is a “relationship you ought to have with yourself.” And Foucauldian ethics consists of “the ways individuals might take themselves as the object of reflective actions, adopting voluntary practices to shape and transform themselves in various ways.” Thus, ethics in Foucault’s reconceptualization means that the agent revaluates them based on its desires and recreates itself as the agent to make its own modes of life based on the relation with the self/relationship that it ought to have with itself, instead of adhering to moral codes.

Foucault points out that the ethical subject practices freedom and can even resist obstacles. He reconceptualizes the notion of freedom—as the result of practicing care of the self, which is not a state to achieve but a practice to exercise. The freedom of the ethical subject also lies in the possibility of choosing the kind of self that one wishes to be. The free subject

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as an ethical subject can also practice care of the self as resistance through self-formation to threats which intend to control its constituted identity. Since self-formation is achieved when the subject is conscious of its being, the individual can resist the effects of power/knowledge which attempt to put constraints upon the subject.670

Thus, I argue that Yi Theresa completed achievement of self-formation as a Foucauldian ethical subject in that she delimited that part of herself that formed the object of her moral practice, defined her position relative to the precepts she would follow, and decided on a certain mode of being that served as her moral goal. Also, she acted to monitor, test, improve, and transform herself. Deciding to consecrate her virginity, Yi Theresa focused on constituting herself as an ethical subject by practicing care of the self, a relation of the self to itself, which would be formed through introspection and self-reflective practices for self-realization as a perpetual Christian virgin. She demonstrated her own self-realization through her demeanour and behaviours as a Christian virgin, practicing the teachings in the catechisms and following the life-paths of saints in the hagiographies, a form of Foucauldian ethical conduct. She became a perpetual virgin by recognizing herself as such and exercising practices required of candidates for Christian virginity and conduct that fit the requirements. She was a Christian virgin in relation to herself.

Yi Theresa’s resistance toward the Church is both obvious and invisible, because it was practiced as an ethical subject. Foucauldian freedom and ethics are actually two overlapping realms of action, because Foucault explains that human freedom is expressed in the deliberate

actions that individuals perform in response to others and the world.\textsuperscript{671} In finding a form of freedom not as being but as practicing, Foucault argues that ethics is the conscious practice of freedom, and the ethical self thus consists in the possibility of choosing the kind of self that one wishes to be.\textsuperscript{672} Foucault believes that an ethics of the self is the “first or final point of resistance to political power,” based on the freedom an individual achieves by subjection of the self with relation of self to self.\textsuperscript{673}

In this way Yi Theresa as an ethical subject could achieve freedom, without the need to obtain approval or recognition from the Church and other authorities. This was her own way of resistance towards both potential obstacles to her self-realization. By practicing ethical subjectivity, Yi Theresa considered that she already had consecrated her virginity and was directly connected with God without the mediation or approval of the Church authority.

Although most practices of Christian virgins could be done without the intervention of priests, one of the most important and essential factors for Catholics could only be done by a priest: the Sacraments. Becoming a Catholic means that an individual is baptized and participates in masses and Holy Communion. As Kim Yun-sŏng puts it, in Chosŏn Korea where the number of priests was very limited, receiving the Sacraments was a very rare opportunity that only a few


believers could have once or twice in their whole lives. Therefore, it was inevitable for Catholics at the time to engage in religious practices privately.\textsuperscript{674}

The most common religious practice engaged in by Korean Catholics, particularly virgins, was living a life of abstinence including regular fasting and celibacy. Kim Yun-sŏng explains that Catholics of Chosŏn Korea actively observed abstinence beyond the regulations. All Catholics of Chosŏn were requested to observe at least two kinds fasting: \textit{Sojae} and \textit{Taejae}. The days for the \textit{Sojae} were days for abstinence from eating food or meat on specific days of the four seasons, two days before every Sunday, and feasts of saints designated in the calendar for Korean Catholics. Also, there were at least nine days for \textit{Taejae} fasting in a year, mainly around Lent.\textsuperscript{675}

However, Korean Catholics also practiced abstinence on their own by studying the ways of practicing it in catechisms or hagiographies. There are five ways to practice abstinence: regularly refraining from eating certain foods, especially meat; controlling the diet by eating poorly cooked food or food sprinkled with ashes; sexual abstinence; retreating to a hermitage in a deep mountain; and self-injury or self-torture.\textsuperscript{676} Practicing abstinence was considered by Korean Catholics as a means to become closer to God. They emptied their bodies by fasting, and

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filled the emptiness with the sacred body of Christ by eating the Host at Holy Communion to honor and praise God’s grace.\textsuperscript{677} The tradition of active practices for abstinence to achieve self-realization among Korean Catholics became a ground for Yi Theresa to constitute her ethical subjectivity through care of the self.

For Yi Theresa, therefore, the very rare chance to receive Holy Communion from the priests would have been the most important practice for her self-constitution as a Christian and a consecrated virgin. Her freedom and resistance as an ethical self thus had to be waged in a manner that would not prevent her from receiving the Sacraments, which meant hiding her wish for perpetual virginity. Yi Barbara also strove to receive the Sacraments from missionaries including Father Ch’oe Yang-ŏp, although her requests were rejected until her death. Yi Theresa attempted to avoid this conflict with the priests by hiding her true aim, because she was already a Christian virgin, an ethical subject on her own.

Thus far I have argued the history of female virgins of Chosŏn Korea without the discourse of modernization, against the established discussions of the scholarship of contemporary Korea. As I have shown it is inappropriate to analyze women’s lives of the pre-modern period through the lens of modernity or modernization, an approach which has paradoxically hidden the voices of Korean female virgins. However, I would argue that this was a necessary and unavoidable process for decolonization of contemporary Korean scholarship and to overcome Korean scholars’ collective colonial trauma. In their efforts, they believed that they

found the seed of modernity, which proved that Korea had joined the linear march toward modernization, following the universal flow of world history.

Korean history might have developed linearly, but scholars have overlooked the important fact that history has never brought women the same historical development as men have experienced, liberating them from natural, social, or ideological constraints. Rather, “History” has often carried quite different or even opposite effects upon “Herstory,” as Joan Kelly puts it. The established discussions have failed to listen to the voices of Korean female virgins, because they began their discussions from the mistaken premise that the history of Korean women has marched towards lineal progress, following the universal flow of history.

This chapter has thus been an attempt to persuade scholars of Korean history and the Catholic Church in Korea that the discourse of modernization does not apply to Korean women in the Church. This rhetoric has been the fundamental obstacle to reading the extent documents against the grain to discern historically silenced voices. I believe that the long and lonely journey has just begun.


679 Chŏng Chin-hong, “Han’guk Yŏsŏng ūi Chŏnt’ongsang Simp’ojum ū Sangjingsŏng kwa Kŭ Ham’ŭi” [The Symposium on the Traditional Image of Korean Women and Its Implication], in Han’guk Yŏsŏng ū Chŏnt’ongsang [The Traditional Image of Korean Women], ed. Ha Hyŏn-kang and Chang Tŏk-sun (Sǒul, Korea: Min’ŭmsa, 1985), 147–75, p.150-151: It was Pak Yong-ok who provided this argument in her commentaries during the symposium. She raised the question: would it be correct to see the women’s history of Korea as flowing in the opposite direction of the flow of general history, towards progress? This question was produced to contradict the presentation of Ha Hyŏn-gang, who argued that Korean women’s status was higher during the Koryŏ period than in the following Chosŏn dynasty (Ha Hyŏn-kang, “Han’guk Yŏsŏngsang ūi Hyŏngsŏng” [Creation of Korean Women’s Image], in Han’guk Yŏsŏng ū Chŏnt’ongsang [The Traditional Image of Korean Women], ed. Ha Hyŏn-kang and Chang Tŏk-sun (Sǒul, Korea: Min’ŭmsa, 1985), 11–28). Pak Yong-ok was the first scholar who began discussion of Korean Catholic women and the effects of modernization, the established discussion thus far, as I argued in previous chapters. She began the research as an effort to prove that the history of Korean women had developed with that of men, towards the universal march for linear progress.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

In 1886, the Catholic Church in Korea finally obtained the right to evangelize when the
French and Korean governments agreed to conclude a treaty after almost one hundred years of
persecution. The treaty did not specify that the Korean government would permit French
missionaries freedom to proselytize in Korea. What both governments agreed was to ensure all
French people’s freedom of travel inside Korean territory, including missionaries, and
prohibiting punishment of the French by Korean law in Korea. Although it was much later than
1886 that the Korean government specified the freedom of the mission enterprise for the Catholic
Church in Korea, under the terms of the treaty it could expel French missionaries but not
execute them. In fact, there were no more bloody persecutions against Catholicism or the
Catholic Church led by the Korean government after this.

French missionaries began to return to Korea from 1876, endeavouring to reconstitute
the Church from the destruction caused by persecution from 1866 to 1873. Under the guidance of
Bishop Marie-Jean-Gustave Blanc, M.E.P. (1844-1890), who was appointed as the seventh Vicar
Apostolic of Korea in 1884, the Catholic Church of Korea searched for scattered and hidden
Catholic survivors, restored destroyed Church systems, and collected testimonies related to the
martyrdom of Catholics during the persecution for their later beatifications.

680 Cho Hyŏn-bŏm, “Chobul Choyak kwa Sŏn'gyo ŭi Chayu” [Treaty between Korea and France and Freedom of
Evangelization],” in Han’guk Ch’ŏnju Kyohoesa [A History of Catholic Church in Korea], vol. 4 (Sŏul, Korea:

Kyohoesa ŭi T’angui [A Search for History of Catholic Church in Korea] (Sŏul, Korea: Han’guk kyohoesa
As one of the efforts to rebuild the Korean Catholic Church, Bishop Blanc invited a Catholic female order, the Sisters of Saint Paul de Chartres (hereafter, SPC), for the first time. He built an orphanage in 1880 but this was a difficult task with few Catholics available for that task at the time. Encountering nuns from the SPC in Nagasaki in 1883, who had begun their mission for Japanese orphans in 1873, he decided to invite nuns from the SPC to Korea, and sent his request in 1885. As a result, the SPC began their mission by sending four nuns to Korea in 1888, which continued until they handed over most of their positions to Korean nuns in the 1960s.\(^{682}\)

The arrival of the SPC provided a chance for Korean female virgins to emerge from obscurity. Along with the French nuns, Bishop Blanc also searched for Korean candidates to enter the SPC and found five who were all descendants of Korean martyrs: Kim Haegyŏm Maria, Kim Sun-yi Maria, Kim Pog’uji Maria, Pak Hwang-wŏl Clara, Sim Barbara.\(^{683}\) Once they were selected, these novices of the early phase were summoned in roughly three different ways. First, those from rural areas were sent to Seoul with the assistance of priests working in areas nearby the stops they were passing. Other candidates’ parents, who were also devoted Catholics, brought their daughters in person to the convent with mixed feelings of offering them as God’s daughters and severing the connection with their own flesh and blood in the secular world for the greater


Finally, one non-Catholic was also accepted as a candidate, and she was requested to work at an orphanage first. Proving her dedication and religious zeal, she was finally accepted as a qualified candidate after receiving baptism.

We can find Catholic female virgins among the relatives of these early novices. Kim Haegyŏm Maria’s maternal aunt was a Catholic virgin, who worked for an institute built by French missionaries and was martyred at the age of seventeen. It is not clear what kind of institute she was working for and whether her request to take a vow of perpetual virginity was permitted by the missionaries. Pak Hwang-wŏl Clara’s two cousins were also consecrated virgins, who were martyred during the persecutions between 1866 and 1872. However, information on the lives of these women has not been written in detail.

Sun-im Cecila is noteworthy in that her story until entering the SPC echoes the life stories of her predecessors. Refusing a marriage proposal arranged by her parents for two years, she told a French missionary working in her hometown that she wished to consecrate her virginity to God. However, the priest opposed her decision. Although she had never seen nuns, she promised God to live a chaste life anyway. At last, she searched for the SPC convent and accomplished her goal by arriving there after crossing mountains on foot for three days.

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This shows that Christian virgins existed and persisted in practicing perpetual virginity for more than thirty years on their own, even after the Church prohibited Korean Catholic women from choosing such a life without priestly approval. With the acceptance of Korean novices to the convent, Catholic virgins’ struggle was finally over and they at last obtained the same chance to dedicate their lives to God as their male counterparts.

This dissertation has been an endeavor to find the women’s voices hidden in the extant documents by analyzing Confucianism and Catholicism through the lens of gender. By doing so, it has demonstrated how actively Korean women maneuvered their religious lives, overcoming the controls of Confucianism and Catholicism for almost five centuries. Since the documents contain few accounts by, about, or for women, it is extremely difficult to hear their voices. However, it is still possible when we read the extant documents against the grain by taking gender into account. We hear their quiet echoes, which request us not to give up the effort to uncover their lives, to match the scattered puzzles and remove the barriers which have hidden the truths of their pasts. I believe that the main barrier, which has muffled Korean female virgins’ voices for almost a half century, has been the discourse of “modernization,” the established discussions in the field of contemporary Korean history; I hope I have removed it in this dissertation.

In Chapter 2, I examined the contribution of Korean women to the protection and development of the Catholic Church in Korea in 1784, focusing on Kang Wan-suk Columba’s roles in hiding Fr. Zhou Wen-mo, the first Catholic missionary in the country, and her efforts to proselytize Catholicism to Korean women of all classes. Korean Catholic women actively participated in learning and spreading Catholicism, even when male Church leaders collectively abandoned their faith because of the ban on ancestral rituals by the Catholic Church in Beijing.
In this dissertation, I have argued that Korean women’s persistent devotion to Catholicism must not be read through the discourse of modernization, which asserts that Catholicism or the Catholic Church in Chosŏn Korea liberated women by destroying the foundation of the Confucian patriarchy.

Also, I pointed out that the new marriage practice among Korean Catholics was, in contrast to the current established knowledge claim, actually the adoption of the orthopraxy of Catholic matrimony, one of the seven Sacraments, not the modern concept of love marriage. As a sacrament regulated by Canon law, Catholic matrimony did not allow Korean Catholics freedom of spousal choice, divorce, or remarriage based on the emotion of love. This new marriage practice was an effort for Korean Catholics to become a better or real Catholics, not to liberate women nor to demolish the patriarchal norm. Rather, the adoption of Catholic marriage brought Catholic patriarchy, which emphasizes the authority of the Church and the priests for validation of marriage, just as was done by the state and fathers under Confucian patriarchy.

In chapter 3, I explored how Korean women developed their identity as consecrated virgins and the ways they practiced perpetual virginity from 1784 to 1840 during two nationwide bloody persecutions. Although it is not clear exactly when Korean Catholic women learned the notion of perpetual virginity in Catholicism, it seems that it might have been from Jesuit publications for Chinese Catholics, especially hagiographies. Even before the arrival of Fr. Zhou Wen-mo, Korean Catholic women had already begun practicing perpetual virginity on their own. The first generation of Catholic female virgins in Korea, who were discovered in the midst of interrogations in 1801, had hidden their identities by pretending to be widows or abandoned wives in order to avoid attention and suspicion from society. However, none of them had
actually been married, and many of them had left their family homes in order to escape forced marriages.

On the other hand, the second generation of Catholic female virgins, who were arrested during the persecution between 1839 and 1840, showed both similarities and differences from their predecessors of 1801. They also learned how to practice Catholic virginity on their own, from hagiographies and older virgins, and had to leave their families in order to avoid forced arranged marriages. However, they did not hide their identities by pretending to be widows or abandoned wives. And their zeal for virgin martyrdom reached its zenith, producing the largest number of virgin martyrs compared to other persecutions both before and after that of 1839 and 1840.

In Chapter 4, I examined how the choice of a virginal life could empower women of the patriarchal societies of the East and West, and why some women preferred perpetual virginity to marriage. I argued that the discourse of “modernization” was the wrong lens through which to analyze Korean Catholic women’s consecration of virginity by demonstrating the common preference for virginal life among women in patriarchal societies, regardless of spatial and temporal differences even prior to the modern period. Looking closely at Catholic virginity as an example, I also argued that women’s empowerment by choosing a virginal life, which had been traditionally allowed in religious institutions, ended up having limitations.

Most patriarchal societies in the East and West have commonly placed a high value on women’s pre-nuptial virginity as a means to control their sexuality in order to ensure paternal clarity for the stabilization and reproduction of the patriarchal system. The high value of feminine virginity affected women’s understanding regarding their own bodies, creating different meanings and fears about perpetual loss of childhood and the passage to adult sexuality through
the loss of virginity. These fears and anxieties led some women to refuse marriage and surrendering their virginity and instead to choose life in the religious institutions such as Buddhist sangha or Catholic convents. Paradoxically, women’s choice to maintain their virginity empowered them to claim ownership of their own sexuality. It also provided them a chance to escape from demands of the body in the marriage—i.e. sex, pregnancy, and child-rearing—and to engage in self-development in a safe community, which was impossible for married women.

However, entering a religious life with a virgin body does not mean total liberation for those women in the sangha or monastery. Particularly, Catholic virginity was constituted based on androcentric and misogynistic theology, which teaches of Eve’s sin and the Fall and emphasizes the connection between Eve and all women. Since virginity was originally a virtue for men, female virgins were considered as those who overcame their innate nature of carnality, and thus as men. Their consecration was also accepted by the secular marriage system, as perpetual virgins were called “brides of Christ,” replacing the authority of God—both male and the father—replacing the lay patriarchal norm over the virginal women with the clerical hierarchy. This is the reason why Korean Catholic women’s struggles for lives of perpetual virginity should never be read through the lens of the discourse of modernization: they had to continue to resist the M.E.P. missionaries’ efforts to control their autonomy.

In Chapter 5, I examined the various changes to a woman’s life after her wedding, particularly in the context of Confucian society, in order to discern the potential reasons for marriage refusals among the first generation of Catholic female virgins in Chosŏn Korea between 1784 and 1801. In this endeavor, I discovered that the religious side of (Neo-Confucianism functioned as the fundamental oppressor of women of Chosŏn Korea, especially due to the requirement for the physical and spiritual change of space (from her natal home to her
husband’s home) through marriage. This was because the ancestral rituals in Zhu Xi’s Family Rituals (Ch.: Zhuzi jaili, Kr.: Chuja karye) were the only religious activities permitted to Korean women, as their roles were essential for their practice. A woman had to serve her living parents-in-law diligently and contribute to rituals for her husband’s dead ancestors, as well as produce male heirs who would in turn assume responsibility for the rituals. As a reward, she would become an ancestor of her husband’s family and receive ancestral rituals from her male heir’s wives. Emphasizing the importance of serving the Confucian orthopraxy as women’s only legitimate religious activities, Chosŏn Korea strove to change the foundation of the society to implement patriarchal system, patrilocal marriage, and patrilineage based on the agnatic principle (chongpŏp).

However, this Confucian religiosity contained a destabilizing paradox: women were excluded from participating in the main stage of the ancestral rituals, although their roles were crucial in that the most important parts of the rituals (food and wine) could not be provided without their year-round efforts. This caused women to consider the ancestral rituals as one of their heavy duties or labours imposed upon them in marriage rather than as a sacred religious activity. Moreover, although women face demands that they give their all effort for the ancestral rituals, there were no rituals that they could perform to mourn or commemorate their natal families in the Confucian orthopraxy. This caused them to engage in heteropraxy such as shamanism and Buddhism. Patriarchs thus had to turn a blind eye to women’s practice of heteropraxy as long as they continued to provide their labour for the ancestral rituals. But like their Chinese counterparts they also blamed women as the source of ritual impurity to protect the ritual purity of Confucian orthopraxy.
Despite their success in switching the social fundamentals to Confucian orthopraxy, men therefore had to wage relentless battles with heteropraxy to protect the new orthopraxy. This is one of the reasons why women of Chosŏn persisted in their faith when their male counterparts collectively abandoned it after Bishop Gouvea commanded Korean Catholics to stop the ancestral rituals in 1791. The notions of purgatory and Heaven provided Catholic women of Chosŏn Korea a means to include their birth families in their rituals and prayers.

In Chapter 6, I examined the meanings of living and dying as an unmarried woman in the Confucian society of Chosŏn in order to demonstrate that becoming a virgin martyr, which meant dying unmarried, was a striking paradigm shift in pre-twentieth century Korea. In Korean history, it was the Chosŏn dynasty in the middle of its Confucianization of the marriage system which first paid attention to premarital virginity as a requirement for the primary wife of a yangban man. Also, Chosŏn Korea intervened in marrying off all women in the society to stabilize Confucian patriarchy and orthopraxy. This was done by punishing fathers who failed to marry off their daughters, commanding local officials to provide expenses to encourage poor women to marry, and making it illegal for unmarried females to join the Buddhist sangha.

Nevertheless, there still existed unmarried women in Chosŏn society and their numbers increased in the eighteenth century because many yangban families faced financial difficulties and could not afford marriage expenses for their daughters. Living as an unmarried woman in a society which demanded marriage was either painful or shameful, but a bigger problem was waiting after death: dying unmarried meant that a woman’s soul had no place to go, because there was no one who would practice memorial rituals for her in the family, since a woman was supposed to become an ancestor of her husband’s family and could thus receive offerings only by being married. Unmarried women were therefore doomed to be virgin ghosts who failed to
cross over to the world of dead and wandered around this world in hunger. This concept of the
virgin ghost was widely spread in the Confucian cultural sphere including China, Taiwan, Hong
Kong, Korea, and Okinawa, where rituals for unmarried children are uncommon. These countries
also developed posthumous marriage with the purpose of providing rituals or to help the
unmarried dead to cross over by relieving their anger. In Korean society, the collective
appearance of Catholic female virgins and their wish to be virgin martyrs is a major paradigm
shift.

In chapter 7, I delved into several points to contradict the discourse of
“modernization” of the established discussions, which fails to explain the reasons why Korean
female virgins rapidly disappear from the records from the 1840s, in order to find a new lens to
draw Korean female virgins’ autonomy out of obscurity from the hidden accounts in documents.
I discovered that the French missionaries from the Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris were
not favorable to Korean female virgins from the beginning of their mission enterprise in Chosŏn
Korea in 1836. Instead they tried to control virgins based on the decision of the Sichuan Synod in
1803, rather than liberate them from their social shackles; this contradicts the conclusions of
contemporary historians. Korean female virgins were required to obtain permission to take the
vow of chastity, to be over twenty-five years old, and to be able to support themselves on their
own, which was impossible for most Catholics in Korea at the time.

In the face of the missionaries’ attempts to limit their autonomy, Korean women decided
to stay in the Church without abandoning their faith instead of leaving in defiance of the
decision. On one hand, they struggled to obtain the M.E.P. missionaries’ permission by showing
that they were “extraordinarily good Catholic girls” who strove to nurture virtue as Catholic
virgins. On the other hand were women such as Yi Theresa, who were not eager to obtain either
priestly recognition or permission to take their vow of chastity. Yi Theresa did not reveal her wish to be a perpetual virgin to any priests or members of her own family but instead secretly consecrated her virginity to God. She created a new subjectivity, deciding for herself that she was already a Christian virgin by following the required practices for a chaste life such as fasting, praying, and reading hagiographies.

There might have been many more examples similar to Yi Theresa, who practiced perpetual virginity on their own in obscurity and did not pursue recognition or approval from other Catholics or priests. These young religious women of the Chosŏn dynasty developed diverse ways to practice their own identity and consciousness as consecrated virgins. In contrast to the previous discussions, they struggled both with Confucian society and with the Church, both of which attempted to force them to marry against their desires. Therefore, female Catholic virgins of Chosŏn Korea cannot be a symbol of the false belief that Catholicism brought “modernization”—women’s liberation and gender equality—into pre-twentieth century Chosŏn Korea. Suffering and overcoming struggles from their real lives, they chose to live as Christian virgins and die as martyrs.

There is much more still to cover in my effort to hear these women’s hidden voices, but I hope at least through this dissertation I have successfully eliminated the discourse of “modernization” from the history of the Korean Catholic Church.
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