

The Relationship between Joseon Envoys and Western Missionaries in Beijing in the Early 18th Century: Focusing on Lee Gi-ji's *Iramyeon-gi*¹

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In *Iramyeon-gi*, Lee Gi-ji described in detail his experiences of meeting Westerners while he followed his father on a diplomatic mission to Beijing in 1720. Unlike other visitors of his day, Lee visited all three Catholic churches: South Church, East Church, and North Church. He developed a relationship with the Western missionaries during his two month stay in Beijing.

Lee's encounter with Western missionaries was not originally intended, but he had the most communication with them in the eighteenth century. Through diverse meetings and conversations with the missionaries, Joseon envoys including Lee Gi-ji showed their interest in Western astronomy, the calendar and Catholicism. The missionaries also gradually tried to find out if Joseon was ready to accept Catholicism.

Iramyeon-gi demonstrates that Lee Gi-ji and his colleagues were able to meet Western missionaries without any biased thoughts, and these meetings were based on mutual respect and pure friendship. Their meetings and relationship with the missionaries are significant because starting in the late eighteenth century other Joseon visitors were usually not welcome by the missionaries.

Keywords: Lee Gi-ji, *Iramyeon-gi*, *yeonhaeng*, *yeonhaengnok*, Beijing Catholic churches, eighteenth century, Joseon envoys

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Diplomatic Trip to Beijing and Visit to Catholic Churches in Beijing

Lee Gi-ji (1690-1722) accompanied his father Lee Yi-myeong, who had the mission of reporting the death of King Sukjong to the Qing government. His father was the highest ranking envoy (*jeongsa*) in charge of *yeonhaeng*, or the diplomatic mission to Beijing. Lee Gi-ji himself was allowed to join the group as a *jaje gungwan*, or ‘sons or relatives of Joseon diplomats’. Lee Gi-ji was thirty years old when he arrived in Beijing on September 18.²

Lee Gi-ji’s *Iramyeon-gi* was written about his experiences while accompanying his father on a diplomatic mission to Beijing in 1720. Lee Gi-ji describes his experiences of meeting Westerners in detail, which makes this book important for studying the exchange between the Joseon people and Westerners during the 18th century. He stayed two months in Beijing until November 24 and met Western missionaries. In *Iramyeon-gi*, the details of his meetings with Westerners appear over twenty times. Kim Chang-eop, who had visited Beijing as a member of a diplomatic mission (*yeonhaeng*), gave Lee Gi-ji information about interesting people whom he should meet during his stay. Thus, Lee Gi-ji met a Chinese guide who took him to various places in Beijing as soon as he arrived.³

However, it does not seem that Lee Gi-ji had a plan to meet particular missionaries. His diary dated September 22 shows that he visited a Catholic church for mere curiosity. He joined Bak Taejung who was going to meet a Western missionary to deliver a present from Bak Pilseong. Bak Pilseong, who was sent to Beijing as a diplomat in former days, visited a Catholic church and met a missionary whose family name was Ji. During Bak Pilseong’s stay, Ji visited Bak Pilseong and gave him an antidote. Bak Pilseong kept in touch with Ji even after he returned to Joseon, and he asked Bak Taejung to deliver a present to Ji during Bak Taeseong’s visit. Lee Gi-ji was curious to meet a Westerner and asked Bak Taejung to accompany him.⁴ This unexpected opportunity to visit a Catholic

2. Dates shown in this paper are based on the lunar calendar.

3. According to Shin Ik-Cheol (2005:173), Kim Chang-eop gave information to Lee Gi-ji about the tour guide as well as Chinese intellectuals he should meet.

4. Lee Gi-ji particularly mentioned that the missionary Ji was treated as the emperor’s visiting teacher. It is assumed that the missionary’s high position drew Lee Gi-ji’s attention. However, Lee Gi-ji was not able to meet Ji, who had passed away in July of that year. Therefore, Lee Gi-ji met other missionaries during his first visit to Beijing’s Catholic churches.

church in the end led Lee Gi-ji to have more meetings with Western missionaries in all of Beijing's Catholic churches.

In this article, I will investigate the relationship between the Joseon people who visited Beijing and the Western missionaries in the early 18th century, which appears in Lee Gi-ji's *Iramyeon-gi*. As mentioned, Lee Gi-ji provides detailed descriptions of his meetings with the Western missionaries. I will analyze Lee Gi-ji's writing about his meetings with the Westerners and show the significance of the relationship between them.

Lee Gi-ji's Visits to Individual Churches: From the South Church to the East and North Churches

Iramyeon-gi chronicles the visits by Lee Gi-ji to the South Church, the East Church and the North Church and his meetings with Western missionaries. The Western missionaries also visited Lee Gi-ji's abode in Beijing. Lee Gi-ji and other members of *yeonhaeng* built a friendship with the Western missionaries after they met more missionaries. Lee Gi-ji wrote that he and the others went to the Catholic churches seven times from September 22 to October 30. The Western missionaries visited Lee Gi-ji's place three times. Since the first encounter between Lee Gi-ji and the Western missionaries at the South Church, they continued to meet at the East and North churches.⁵

According to *Iramyeon-gi*, during Lee Gi-ji's stay in Beijing, Lee Gi-ji and other *yeonhaeng* members exchanged letters and presents with the missionaries eighteen times: seven times by Lee and eleven times by the missionaries. They

5. In *Iramyeon-gi*, the North Church is not mentioned. Lee Gi-ji called the Catholic churches he visited 'the church in the south', 'the church in the east' and 'the church in the west', which are not the names of the churches. The way in which Lee Gi-ji referred to these churches causes a great deal of misunderstanding. In Lee Gi-ji's days, there were three Catholic churches, which were the South Church, the East Church and the North Church. The West Church was built in 1723 after Lee Gi-ji's death. 'The church in the west', located to the west of the East Church, was either the South Church or the North Church. At first, Lee Gi-ji called the South Church 'the church in the west' before he visited the North Church. After he visited the North Church, he began to call the North Church 'the church in the west'. I assume that Lee Gi-ji thought the North Church rather than the South Church was more westerly to the East Church.

The first Catholic Church in Beijing was the South Church, which was built in 1601. The East Church was established outside Donganmen Gate in 1655, the North Church near Xianmen Gate in 1703, and the West Church on the Xizhimen street in 1723.

Lee Gi-ji and his fellows' visits to the missionaries: ⁶ seven times (date; meeting place; missionaries)	The missionaries' visits to Lee Gi-ji's place: three times (date; visiting missionaries)
1. September 22; the South Church; Su Lin, Zhang Anduo and Mai Dacheng	1. September 29; Dai Jinxian and Su Lin
2. September 27; the South Church; Su Lin, Zhang Anduo, Mai Dacheng and Dai Jinxian	2. October 20; Dai Jinxian and Fei Yin
3. October 10; the East Church; Fei Yin	3. October 24; Su Lin and Fei Yin
4. October 22; the East Church; Su Lin and Fei Yin	
5. October 26; the South Church; Su Lin, Zhang Anduo, Dai Jinxian and Du Demei	
6. October 28; the North Church; Bai Jin, Lei Xiaosi, Tang Shangxian and Yin Hongxu	
7. October 30; the East Church ; Xu Maosheng	

kept in touch with each other by sending letters and presents when they were not able to meet each other. Eleven exchanges happened in November, which was after Lee and the other members' last meeting with the missionaries on October 30th. Compared with other travel literature written after the 18th century, *Iramyeon-gi* demonstrates that Lee Gi-ji's encounter with the missionaries was special in terms of the number of meetings and the closeness of the relationship.

1. The South Church

The South Church was the first church that Lee Gi-ji visited in Beijing. It was located inside Xuanwumen Gate. The South Church was the most well known church to the Joseon visitors since it was close to the guesthouse. Bak Taejung and Lee Gi-ji failed to meet the missionary by the name of Ji, but instead they met other missionaries such as Su Lin and Dai Jinxian who began to have an especially close relationship with Lee Gi-ji. After the first visit, Lee Gi-ji brought other *yeonhaeng* members including his father to the South Church and introduced them to the missionaries. The communication between the Joseon visitors and the missionaries was based on written Chinese when a Joseon-Chinese interpreter was not present. Since the Joseon intellectuals were educated

6. Western missionaries' names in this paper are romanized based on their Chinese names.

in the written form of Chinese, that is, classical Chinese,⁷ they were able to express themselves in written Chinese, but the Western missionaries in many cases required a translator or an interpreter because they were not accustomed to either colloquial or written Chinese.

The Joseon visitors including Lee Gi-ji and his father were satisfied with the conversation although they were not able to fully communicate using this indirect way. Apart from the conversation, Lee Gi-ji and the others saw exotic goods that the missionaries had brought to China and the Joseon envoys did not hesitate to express their surprise of these objects. Lee Gi-ji and the others met the missionaries three times in September. The conversations during these first trips did not seem to be serious. At first, Lee Gi-ji visited the church without any specific purpose and simply observed the eccentric culture of the missionaries.

Lee Gi-ji's diary records the second visit to the South Church on September 27, but it does not contain the specific conversation between his father, Lee Yi-myeong, and the missionaries although it mentions that there was a conversation. Since they had the conversation using written Chinese, it seems to have been too difficult for Lee Gi-ji to accurately transcribe the conversation. Instead, Lee Gi-ji concentrated on the description of objects that he had never seen before.

On September 29, missionaries such as Su Lin and Dai Jinxian visited the Joseon diplomats' guesthouse, which was the third meeting. Later, on October 3, Lee Yi-myeong sent the missionaries from the South Church a letter asking questions about the Western calendar, how to make a celestial globe and the manufacturing technique for glass.⁸ After this letter, the exchange between the missionaries and the members of *yeonhaeng* became more frequent and covered more diverse topics.

When Dai Jinxian visited the diplomats with Fei Yin of the East Church on October 20, the missionaries and Lee Gi-ji's party had a conversation about how to afford the ornaments of the Catholic churches and how to make wine and the effects of wine. When the Joseon envoys met the missionaries from the South Church, they asked again simple questions like how to bake bread(October 24). However, their conversation at the South Church finally included relatively serious topics such as astronomy (October 26).

7. This is like Latin for medieval Europeans.

8. The contents of the letter appear in Lee Yi-myeong's book *Sojaejip*.

2. The East Church and the North Church

Experiencing Western culture with the missionaries was a large part of Lee Gi-ji's experience in Beijing. The missionaries who Lee Gi-ji met during his first visit to the South Church led him to the East Church and then to the North Church.

The East Church was the closest church to Lee Gi-ji's guesthouse. However, not until Lee Gi-ji visited the East Church for the first time on October 10, did he know its exact location. Lee Gi-ji heard about Fei Yin of the East Church from Su Lin and Dai Jinxian of the South Church and then visited the East Church. At the South Church on October 26, he encountered the missionary Du Demei and heard about the North Church located outside Xihuamen Gate. Du Demei wanted to show Lee Gi-ji the inside of the North Church's clock so Lee Gi-ji visited the North Church on October 28.

The letters and the conversations between Lee Gi-ji and the missionaries show that the missionaries residing at the East and the North churches were more interested in missionary work in Joseon than those from the South Church were. During Lee Gi-ji's visit to the East Church on October 10, Lee told Fei Yin that it was necessary to ask the emperor's support and to translate Catholic books into Chinese for the purpose of expanding missionary work in China. Lee Gi-ji's interest in Catholicism did not necessarily mean that he was interested in missionary work in Joseon. However, as Fei Yin recognized Lee Gi-ji's friendly attitude, he perhaps decides to get more information about Joseon for future missionary work in Joseon. Fei Yin showed Lee Gi-ji a map of East Asia and asked the route traveled from Joseon to Beijing.

Fei Yin of the East Church and Bai Jin and Tang Shangxian from the North Church were the missionaries who expressed a strong interest in missionary work in Joseon. When Lee Gi-ji visited the East Church on October 22, Fei Yin opened a map again and asked Lee Gi-ji about the route to Joseon while he calculated the distance between Beijing and Zhamen near the Joseon-Qing border.

According to the *Iramyeon-gi*, Fei Yin and Bai Jin were very interested in Joseon, and they had accompanied Mu Kedeng's expedition to Baekdusan (Mount Baekdu) to confirm the border between Joseon and Qing (records from October 22 and 28). Bai Jin also asked how long it took to Joseon by sea (October 28 record). When Lee Gi-ji visited the East Church to say farewell on October 30, Fei Yin was at the South Church and missed Lee Gi-ji. The next day (November 1), Fei Yin sent a letter to Lee Gi-ji asking about the sea route from

Shandong Province to Joseon. Moreover, Tang Shangxian asked whether it was possible to build a Catholic church in Joseon when Lee Gi-ji visited the North Church on October 28. Their persistent interest in missionary work continued and can also be regarded as contributing to Lee Seunghun's baptism at the North Church in 1784, which was the starting point for the development of Korean Catholicism.

Open Mind to Accept 'Otherness'

As mentioned, Lee Gi-ji met the Western missionaries with pure curiosity. The first meeting with the missionaries led to Lee Gi-ji frequently visiting the Catholic churches during his two-month stay in Beijing. The doorman of the South Church who shared with Lee Gi-ji and Bak Taejung the bad news that the missionary Ji had died introduced them to other missionaries at the church. Lee Gi-ji met Su Lin, Zhang Anduo and Mai Dacheng first. Su Lin welcomed Lee Gi-ji, the first visitor from the Joseon envoy, and showed him many exotic objects from Europe. Lee Gi-ji saw a telescope, pens made of feathers and clocks.

For the second visit to the South Church on September 27, Lee Yi-myeong and other members of *yeonhaeng* accompanied Lee Gi-ji. At the end of the visit, Lee Yi-myeong invited the missionaries to his guesthouse and the missionaries accepted his invitation. On September 29, Su Lin and Dai Jinxian visited the Joseon diplomats. With this visit, the missionaries grew closer to the Joseon envoys and brought presents such as an antidote stone, nuts, a knife, a crystal box, pictures of Western churches and Catholic books. Lee Gi-ji and the others also offered various rice cakes, abalone and cinnamon wine to the missionaries and gave presents such as paper, knives, dried octopus and folding fans.

The relationship between the Joseon people and the missionaries was intimate and pure from the beginning to the end. This intimate relationship was exceptional in the 18th century. Later Joseon visitors were not welcomed as Lee Gi-ji was. About forty years later, in Hong Dae-yong's writing about his *yeonhaeng* between 1765 and 1766 in the same position as Lee Gi-ji (*jaje gungwan*), the relationship between the Joseon visitors to Catholic churches and the missionaries was not the same as that of Lee Gi-ji's group and the former missionaries. The visitors' rude behavior changed the hospitality of the missionaries. Hong Dae-yong wrote:

Since the emperor Kangxi (r.1662-1722), Joseon's diplomats used to visit the Catholic churches in Beijing and to be welcomed by the missionaries. The missionaries used to show exotic paintings, icons and other objects in the churches and even give the visitors presents brought from Europe. Joseon diplomats year by year wanted more exotic goods and experiences at the churches, so visiting the Catholic churches in Beijing became the diplomats' conventional practice. Our country's custom seemed like arrogance, exaggeration and maliciousness, and the diplomats from Joseon often neither behaved politely nor paid back for the presents they received. Moreover, their followers were often uneducated, smoked and spat inside the churches, and touched things without allowance, which made the missionaries, who liked cleanliness, angry.

Recently, the Western missionaries became to dislike visitors from Joseon more than before. The missionaries refused to do the Joseon visitors a favor. They did not treat the visitors with heart. Thus, I thought that unless we treated the missionaries politely from the heart, the missionaries could not change their attitude. Therefore, I sent two rolls of paper and three fans, three boxes of ink-stick, three tablets of tonic medicine with a letter to the Westerners Liu Songling and Bao Youguan.(Hong Dae-yong 1974, "oejip" gwon 7: 9)

Hong Dae-yong's writing above demonstrated that the negative behavior of the Joseon people during their *yeonhaeng* became the usual scene in Catholic churches forty years after Lee Gi-ji's visits. As Hong Dae-yong mentioned, the time when "the missionaries used to show exotic paintings, icons and other objects in the churches and even give the visitors presents brought from Europe" had already passed when Hong went to Beijing. Whereas Lee Gi-ji was welcomed by the missionaries without any advance notice of his visit, the visitors from Joseon in Hong's days were not allowed to enter the church even when they asked to see the church. Therefore, Hong did not forget to send a present with a polite letter asking the missionaries to meet him.

The way in which the Joseon visitors and the missionaries exchanged presents illustrates the kind of relationship they had. Compared with Hong Dae-yong's times, when Lee Gi-ji's group visited the churches, the Joseon people met the Westerners in a polite way and gave presents to express their heart. Hong's description shows that, when the time passed, the Joseon people should first have given presents to the missionaries as a way to pay for being shown

around the churches.

Lee Gi-ji and the other Joseon envoys met the missionaries with open minds. They were ready to experience otherness and to understand different values and cultures. The reason for Lee Gi-ji having a close relationship with the missionaries lies in his curiosity to know an unknown people. As Lee Gi-ji did not have an opportunity to meet Westerners, the missionaries did not have opportunity to meet the Joseon people. Therefore, both of the parties were full of pure interest in each other. Both Lee Gi-ji and the missionaries were open-minded, and built trust with each other. When Lee Gi-ji met Su Lin in the South Church, he even accepted Catholicism. On September 20, Lee Gi-ji wrote:

They [Su Lin and Dai Jinxian] hesitated to give me a painting on which a woman was holding a baby and returned it to its place. When I asked the reason, they answered that it was the painting of the mother of Jesus and it was not good to treat it badly or give and take it around. I said, "If Jesus's teaching is spread to Joseon that will be your contribution. Why not spread the icon of Jesus?" They replied, "You are truly right." And gave it to me. (Lee Gi-ji 1720, gwon 2: "September 20")

Compared to the typical scholars from Joseon, Lee Gi-ji was so open-minded that he thought it might be all right to "spread the icon of Jesus" and moreover to spread Catholicism itself. The intimacy between Lee Gi-ji and the missionaries was not firm enough for the missionaries to begin missionary work in Joseon. Nevertheless, the relationship between them was closer than any other relationship between other Joseon visitors and the missionaries because both parties were generous in accepting the other's attitude towards the world.

The relationship between missionaries and the Joseon visitors appearing in travel literature from the late 18th and 19th century was not based on mutual respect or friendship. Their meetings were not developed compared to concrete and active contacts such as in *Iramyeon-gi*. For instance, in *Muo yeonhaengnok*, the author Seo Yumun describes a Western missionary in a negative way: "(he is) short, black, and looks harsh(Seo Yumun 1976, gwon 4: "January 19, 1799")." We also know from this writing that the missionary was informed of Joseon's prohibition from believing in Catholicism, which might have affected friendly encounters between the Joseon visitors and Western missionaries. *Buyeonilgi*, written about one hundred years after *Iramyeon-gi*, also shows a bigger gap between the Joseon people and Western missionaries. The experi-

ences with Western missionaries and Catholicism no longer provided any curiosity to the Joseon scholars. In this writing, a Western missionary is regarded as a barbarian while the author points out that the missionary's geographical knowledge is absurd (Anonymous 1982, "June 25, 1828."). The author of *Buyeonilgi* eventually implies that the missionary's opinion and the value cannot be shared with the Joseon people.

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Iramyeon-gi is very important material especially in understanding *yeonhaeng* literature of not only the early 18th century but the late Joseon period. Lee Gi-ji's visits to Catholic churches in Beijing left a diverse and vivid record even if the meetings were not arranged for any special intention. In this article, mutual perceptions between the Joseon envoys and the Western missionaries in Beijing was founded upon an open-minded attitude towards the other, which is a unique characteristic of *Iramyeon-gi* compared to other literary works dealing with *yeonhaeng* from the late Joseon period.

In the Joseon dynasty of the late 18th and 19th century, a series of oppressive measures against Catholicism (i.e. Catholic persecutions of 1791 and 1801) were likely to have a negative influence on the close relationship between Joseon's diplomats in Beijing and the missionaries. Lee Gi-ji's travel in Beijing was an early opportunity for the Joseon people to meet Western missionaries. His visit was also carried out before the Joseon government showed an oppressive attitude toward Catholicism. Lee Gi-ji was free from any bias against missionaries and Catholicism. At the same time, his *Iramyeon-gi* demonstrates the characteristics of his time when the Joseon people and missionaries were able to meet without any biased thoughts or for any particular purpose. The relationship between them was based on mutual respect and pure friendship. *Iramyeon-gi* has yet to be fully utilized for a better understanding of Korean travel literature, and additional research on it could also contribute to a broad examination of social consciousness during the late Joseon dynasty.

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