

Asian Christian Writers in the 16th-18th Centuries

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The following selection of writings from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries have emerged in the course of research on Asian theology in the “medieval” and “early modern” periods. They are offered as a small beginning towards assembling the local resources for that period in, firstly, Korea, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Vietnam.

KOREA

Sixteenth to seventeenth centuries:

1. Extant writings by Korean Christians in this period are almost all in the form of letters. Of the many Korean martyrs, six have left such writings:
 - Pedro and Miguel - ‘proto-martyrs’ (d. 1614)
 - Catalina Kuzaemon - (d. 1623)
 - Francisco - ‘aged 12 years’ (d. 1623)
 - Vincent Kuan - member of the Society of Jesus (d. 1626)
 - Gayo lemon - novice in Society of Jesus (d. 1627)

Other letters have come from:

- Maxima - ‘Dama Coreana’ (imprisoned 1613)
- and Ota, Julia (imprisoned, dies in poverty c. 1652)

Most of the above appear in Juan G. Ruiz de Medina’s *Origenes de La Iglesia Catolica Coreana Desde 1566 Hasta 1784*. Rome, Institute of History, Society of Jesus, 1986.

Eighteenth century:

Writings here include hymns and extensive catechisms or outlines of the faith. They include those of:

2. I Py-ok (1753-1786)
 - Son g-Gyo Yo-ji* (Essentials of the Holy Teaching). Seoul, c. 1784.
 - Outline of Christian faith by a leading ‘Sirhak’ scholar. Hymns and a Catechism have also been left by him.
3. Chong, Yak-jong Augustine (1760-1801)
 - Chu-Gyo Yo-ji* (Essence of the Lord’s Teaching). 2 vols., c. 1795.

Systematic presentation of Christian doctrine in Confucian and Korean context. (Reprinted in *Martyrs and Witnesses* edited by the Institute of Korean Church History, Seoul, 1982; and in *A Korean Theology* by Hector Diaz, Immensee, 1986.

4. Chong, Yak-yong (1762-1836)

Sip Kye Myong Ga (Hymn of the Ten Commandments). Seoul, c. 1787.

Mongmin Simso, a book for the Mind of the Shepherds of People. 4 vols. (Originally 48 vols., completed in 1818). Reprinted Seoul, Hwangsong, 1902.

Kyonse, Yap'yo, also known as Pongnye Ch'obon (Proposals for Government Reform). Originally 40 vols. but unfinished in 1817.

Also a Catechism, and writings on the Chinese classics, on rites, music, geography, law, medicine, history, language. (154 vols., reprinted Seoul, 1960).

5. Hwang, Sa-yong Alexander (d. 1801)

Hwang Sa-Yong Baekso (The Silk Book of Hwang). A fabric scroll manuscript addressed to the Bishop of Peking, c. 1799.

PHILIPPINES

1. From the sixteenth century, the Christian writing we have in the Philippines is principally poetry: epic poetry by Pedro Bukaneg (1590-1626), and the poems of ladino writers (bilingual in Spanish and native language): Fernando Bagongbanta (H. 1605), and Pedro Ossorio (H. 1625) whose works show the influence of folk poetry as does the fine anonymous allegory, *May Bagyo Ma't May Rilim* (Though it is Stormy and Dark)

A collection of Tagalog poetry was published by San Augustin in 1703: the *Compendio de las lengua tagala*.

2. The first narrative poem in Tagalog, and a classic model for the pasyon genre is:

Gaspar Aquino de Belen's (fl. 1710) *Mahal Na Pasióng Ni Jesu*

Christong Pan ginooon Natin Na Tola (The Story of Our Lord Jesus

Christ's Priceless Suffering), 1704, (and five editions by 1760).

Edited by R. B. Javellana, Manila, 1990). Stresses the humanity of

Jesus within the context of the events of Holy Week.

3. Another early narrative is by

Felipe de Jesus (H. 1715) *Dalit Na Pamucaon Sa Balang Babasa Nitong Libro*

(Poem meant to Mourn the Piety of the Every Reader of this Book)

Manila, 1712. Tagalog version of the legend of Barlaam and Josaphat.

4. Manesay, Ignacio Gregorio (1675-1732)
The Gates of Heaven are Open to Chinese Christians; and *The School of Christian Children*. Both Published in Canton c. 1715-1720. Manesay, a Chinese-Filipino, also left translations of Tagalog petitions into Spanish.
5. Saguinsin, Bartolome (c. 1694-1772). The first Indio priest-poet and writer of historical and theological treatises. Of his many writings in Tagalog, Spanish and Latin, the following have survived:
Doctrina Christiana—of which he was co-editor and translator of selections in Tagalog. Manila 1749.
Epigrammata: Collections of verse in Latin and Spanish to honour Simon de Anda Y Salazzar. Sampaloc, 1766.
La Novena De San Juan De Dios, Manila 1771. The first valedictory work to be written by a Filipino priest.
6. Amongst the many Spanish writers working in the Philippines in this period who have left studies on Filipino languages and culture are:
 Juan de Plasencia (d. 1590) *Realcion de las Costumbres de Los Tagalos* (1589) and a Tagalog translation of *Doctrina Christiana* (c. 1583);
 Antonio de Morga *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas* (1609);
 Marcelo de Ribandencira *Historia de las Isla del Archipeligo Filipino* (1601);
 Pedro Chirino (d. 1635) *Relacion de las Islas Filipinas* (1604);
 Domingo de los Cantos (1703) and Nocenda (1753) have left tagalog dictionaries and Sanchez (1711) one for Visayan;
 Sebastian Totanes *Arte de la Lengua Tagala* (1703), and a Tagalog manual for the Sacraments.

SRI LANKA

1. The earliest work from Sri Lanka presenting Christian beliefs and sentiments is the *Kustantinu Hatana* (c. 1620) by the classical Sinhalese poet Alagiyavanna (b. 1552). A ballad of war which, however, refers to central Christian teachings.
2. Two works by Ceylon Tamils are extant: *Santiago Maiyer Ammanai* by Pedro (1647), a panegyric to the patron saint of the Jaffna Kilali Church, and *Nanap-~pallu* (anon. c. 1650), a spiritual pastoral.
3. Vaz, Joseph (1651-1711). The collection of his letters 1688-1711 is translated in V. Per niola *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: The Dutch Period*, vol I, Colombo 1983. He also composed a catechism and manuals of prayers.
4. Goncalvez, Jacome (1676-1742). Among the 22 books of the “father of

Sinhala literature” are:

Deva Veda Puranaya, Biblical teaching in Sinhalese verse. Folio, 1725.

Tamil version also.

Veda Kavyaya, Summary of Biblical history and teachings in classical and popular Sinhalese metres, Quarto, 1725. English translation by E. Pieris, Colombo, 1979.

Matara Pratyaksaya (Enlightenment of the Kingdom of the Mature), Octavo, 1733.

Dukprapti Prasangaya (Sermons on the Passion) in Sinhalese, Quarto, 1728. Many editions also of the Tamil version *Viyakula Pirasangam*

Gnana Unartchy (Spiritual Exhortations) 1734. Fourteen doctrinal sermons, printed 1844. (Tamil)

5. Fernando, M. S. Gabiriel (fl.1750)

Purana Raja-Tun-Kattuwa. Sinhala ‘Nadagama’ or drama based on the *Deva Veda Puranaya* of Goncalvez, above, c. 1750.

6. Sinno, Pilippu (c.1770-1840). Nadagama attributed to him include those on the lives of St. Josephat, Helena, St. Nicholas, and the three Kings.

VIETNAM

The earliest Christian documents which are extant from Vietnam (Tonking, Annam, Cochin China) includes:

1. The *Relation de la mission du Tonkin* (1630-1645), Annamese Dictionary and Grammar (1651) and the *Phep giang tam ngay* (Catechism explained in eight days) (1651) of Alexandre de Rhodes. The latter two reprinted many times, most recently in Saigon 1991 and 1961 respectively.
2. Statements or letters from those imprisoned or killed during persecutions. Many of these are anonymous but known authors include Peter Dang (d. 1661), Thomas Lucy Ki (1665) and Paul Kien (1698). See John R. Shortland *The Persecutions in Annam* (London, 1875).
3. The biographies of fifty three native priests in Tonking, given in *Neez Documents sur le Clerge Tonkinois aux XVII & XVIII Siecles* (1754-61), Reprinted Paris, 1925.
4. Along with collected letters of the M.E.P. priests, Christopher Born has also left a *Relation de Ia Nouvelle Mission au royaume de la Cochin chine* (reprinted 1931) and Pierre J. G. Pigneau, an Annamite Dictionary and the *Than giao yen ly guoc ngu* (1774)
5. Philippe de Rosario Bihn (c. 1758-?1825). Amongst twenty-three volumes of his writings are:

Ngat Trinh Kim Thu Khat Chinh Chua Giao (Chronicles of all events of the Catholic Church). It includes letters and poems by Binh. *Borgiani Tonchinesi* (Manuscript volumes) 7 vols. Vatican library, 1793-1826.

Catechism and Auszuge of Al. de Rhodes. Includes also biographical and historical writings in Annamese, Portuguese and Latin. *Borg Tonch* 12, 1797.

Sach Gu'O'Ng Truyen (Books of Examples). *Borg Tonch* 9 and 16. Explain the Decalogue, Death, Lives of Archangels and Apostles, etc. Printed, Lisbon, 18 14-16.

Tua Truyen Ong Thanh Phanchico Xavier (Life of the Holy Francis Xavier). Includes also lives of Annamese martyrs of the eighteenth century and history of the mission in Annam. *Borg Tonch* 6. Printed Lisbon, 1818.

6. Vincente de la Paz Liem (1731-1773) and Lu Y Doan (fi. 1730) have left translations in Nom verse, and the latter utilizing Confucian imagery.
7. *HoiDong Tu Giao* (c. 1790). Summary of exchanges by leaders of four religious traditions (Confucian, Buddhist, Christian and Taoist). Fourteenth edition printed Ho Chi Minh Ville, 1959.