Emotional Discipline and Ritual Negotiation: A Study of Funeral Practices and Adaptive Strategies Among Catholics on the Korean Peninsula in the 17th-18th Centuries

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Abstract

This article examines the dynamic interplay between emotional discipline and ritual negotiation in the funeral practices of early Korean Catholics during the 17th-18th centuries. This period was characterized by the clandestine transmission of Catholicism, which took place against the backdrop of the rigid Confucian socio-ritual order of the Joseon dynasty. This study draws on an extensive corpus of Korean archival materials. These sources include the *Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty*, the *Seungjeongwon Ilgi* (*Diary of the Royal Secretariat*), indigenous Catholic manuscripts such as the *Record of the Purgatorial Court* and *Essentials of the Teaching*, as well as comparative liturgical texts from Chinese and Korean Catholic traditions. Employing an affective-historical framework, the research analyzes how converts reconfigured deeply ingrained emotional norms and ritual expectations surrounding death, mourning, and filial duty. Instead of framing Catholic adaptation as mere resistance or passive assimilation, this analysis foregrounds the agency inherent in localized strategies. These include the internalization of grief through silent prayer and nocturnal vigils. The theological reframing of filial piety via prayers for souls in purgatory. The temporal recalibration of memorial observances to coexist with the "seven-sevens" rites. The spatial relocation of sacred practice from ancestral shrines to domestic altars and remote mountain sites; and the symbolic substitution of joss paper and spirit tablets with crucifixes, holy water, and unadorned wooden coffins. This study adopts a microhistorically approach to examine three pivotal episodes. These include the 1785 funeral of the Kwon Cheol-sin family, Jeong Yak-jeon's philosophical reflections on ritual authenticity during his exile, and the 1791 Eulmyo Autumn Sacrifice Incident. This examination reveals that emotional transformation and ritual innovation were mutually constitutive. These dynamic enabled believers to sustain their communal identity under severe state repression, which included the Sinhae Persecution of 1801 and the Eulhae Persecutions. This study situates Korean Catholic funerary practice at the intersection of emotional history, religious indigenization, and Confucian ritual orthodoxy. It challenges top-down narratives of the East Asian Rites Controversy. The research also advances a bottom-up model of cross-cultural religious encounter. In this model, affective interiority and pragmatic ritual flexibility function not as concessions, but as generative modalities of faith.

Keywords

Emotional discipline, Ritual negotiation, Joseon Korea, Catholic funerary practice, Confucian mourning rites, Religious indigenization, Affective history, Cross-cultural ritual adaptation

Introduction

Research background and problem statement

The historical trajectory of funeral practices in early modern East Asia offers a compelling lens through which to interrogate the interplay between religious conversion, affective regulation, and socio-ritual negotiation. This is particularly true in contexts where imported doctrines encountered deeply entrenched Confucian-Buddhist cosmologies, which governed beliefs and practices related to death, mourning, and ancestral veneration. In 17th-18th-century Chosŏn Korea, the clandestine emergence of Catholicism introduced not only theological innovations but also a radical reconfiguration of the emotional economy and ritual propriety [1]. Under this new framework, grief was no longer understood as a

socially embedded performance of filial piety. Instead, it was reframed as an interiorized, God-directed affect that demanded disciplined cultivation.

This epistemic rupture precipitated a phenomenon that can be termed "emotional disciplining". This process involved converts internalizing ecclesiastical injunctions against excessive lamentation, prostration before ancestral tablets, or prolonged seclusion - practices that were proscribed as idolatrous or superstitious [2]. Such disciplinary mechanisms operated not through coercive enforcement alone but via sustained catechetical instruction, vernacular devotional manuals, and communal liturgical rehearsal, thereby embedding new affective dispositions within embodied habits. Simultaneously, the practice of Catholic burial rejected geomantic site selection, ancestral rites, and Confucian mourning attire. This rejection sparked protracted ritual negotiation. During this process, converts adapted Latin Rite prescriptions to local material constraints and familial expectations. Examples included substituting Korean-made wax candles for imported ones, retaining modest grave markers while omitting ancestral inscriptions, or conducting private masses in domestic spaces to avoid detection.

These adaptive strategies reveal funeral rites not as static dogmatic enactments but as contested semiotic fields wherein theological orthodoxy, kinship obligation, and state surveillance coalesced. Crucially, such negotiations unfolded against a broader context in which royal funerals in neighboring polities, for instance those of Polish monarchs, were meticulously codified in ceremonial protocols. These protocols fused dynastic legitimacy with sacred temporality, underscoring how funerary orthopraxy operated as a form of political theology.

Similarly, comparative evidence from Nubian mortuary practices across the Napatan-Meroitic periods demonstrates how colonized communities selectively appropriated and reconfigured Egyptian ritual forms. Specifically, they replaced standardized Egyptian mummification resins with locally sourced gum-bitumen and plant-resin mixtures, thereby strategically asserting epistemic and cultural autonomy even within externally imposed colonial frameworks [3].

Similarly, Chosŏn Catholics engaged in what may be described as hermeneutic bricolage. They reinterpreted Confucian concepts such as "ch'ŏng" (emotion) and "yŏk" (ritual obligation) through Thomistic categories of "affectus" and "cultus", thereby generating hybrid ethical grammars. Ethnographic parallels from post-disaster Cambodia further illuminate how extended ritual sequences function as scaffolds for grief management. These sequences include not merely the funeral itself, but also subsequent seven-day and 100-day ceremonies. They enable "continuing bonds" with the deceased through surrogate rebirth narratives.

By contrast, deprived of public commemorative cycles, Chosŏn Catholics developed alternative temporalities of remembrance. These included secret annual Masses held on anniversaries of martyrdom, handwritten martyrologies circulated among households, and discreet visits to unmarked graves. These practices constituted what may be termed "covert liturgical time". Moreover, pandemic-era research highlights that the suppression of collective funerary rites is significantly correlated with increased somatic morbidity and psychiatric sequelae among the bereaved. This finding suggests that the absence of ritual practices inflicts measurable biopsychosocial harm [4]. Thus, the Chosŏn Catholic experience cannot be reduced to mere resistance or accommodation. Instead, it exemplifies how marginalized communities deploy ritual resilience. This is a dynamic repertoire of adaptation, concealment, and symbolic substitution. It enables communities to sustain spiritual coherence under existential duress. Thus, this reframing encourages historians of religion to move beyond binary frameworks that oppose syncretism to purity. Instead, it prompts them to analyze funeral practices as critical sites where theological subjectivity, affective governance, and colonial epistemology are mutually constitutive [5].

Literature review and scholarly positioning

The literature review situates the present study within intersecting historiographical traditions spanning religious history, ritual studies, colonial entanglements, and East Asian Catholicism. Early Egyptological scholarship has long emphasized that chromatic interventions in funerary architecture were not merely decorative. Such interventions include the whitewashing of ceramic vessels, tomb walls, and cultic chambers in Old Kingdom necropolises at Giza and Saqqara. These practices were embedded within a cosmologically

ordered mortuary logic, in which whiteness encoded purity, rebirth, and ritual liminality [6]. Though temporally and geographically distant, these findings establish a methodological precedent. This framework encourages interpreting material modifications in burial contexts as indices of theological recalibration, rather than as markers of passive cultural inheritance. Similarly, anthropological research on the Bukusu circumcision ceremony demonstrates that ritual performance does not function as a static transmission of normative gender ideology. Instead, it serves as a contested discursive field where linguistic strategies enable both the reinforcement and subversion of hegemonic roles. This insight is vital for understanding how Korean Catholics operating under Confucian orthodoxy and Jesuit pastoral directives - engaged in what may be termed "ritual metacommunication". This refers to a reflexive layer of commentary embedded within liturgical action itself [7]. Liturgical coordination in late medieval German Dominican convents further illuminates how religious communities negotiated overlapping jurisdictions. These included monastic order, episcopal authority, and affective kinship networks. Communities did so through annual recalibrations of the liturgical calendar. This research reveals ritual practice as an administrative, relational, and deeply political act. This analytical framework proves indispensable for analyzing how Korean converts reconfigured Tridentine rites under clandestine conditions. Calendrical synchronization with Rome was impossible in such contexts. Even so, converts maintained internal coherence through vernacular catechetical manuals and mnemonic adaptations.

The concept of "participatio actuosa" (active participation) is central to post-Vatican II ecclesiology and was institutionalized in English diocesan inspection protocols. It emerged from early twentieth-century liturgical reform movements yet acquired its modern juridical and pedagogical meaning only after *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1963). Its application to premodern contexts therefore requires terminological caution, especially when examining Korean lay-led funeral assemblies that lacked ordained ministers [8].

Architectural scholarship on post-conciliar liturgical adaptation similarly warns against uncritical spatial modernization. Churches built for Tridentine ceremonial contained key features: a fixed altar, hierarchical sightlines, and sacramental enclosure. These buildings often underwent interventions that compromised structural integrity or symbolic coherence. In some cases, such changes caused irreversible loss of patrimonial value. This resonates strongly with the Korean case. Domestic funerals held in "sarangbang" (main reception rooms), or ancestral shrines demanded a radical resemanticization of Confucian spatial grammar. For example, believers shifted orientation from the "jungjeon" (central hall) to cruciform symbolism, all without formal ecclesiastical sanction. Jain studies, meanwhile, highlight the epistemological fragility of assuming continuity in relic veneration across centuries. This is due to gaps in textual transmission and the absence of material corroboration in early hagiographic or tīrtha-literature [9].

This cautions against projecting later Korean Catholic practices onto earlier decades without documentary triangulation. Such practices include the veneration of martyr relics smuggled from Beijing and the circulation of papal indulgences printed in Macau. Finally, pandemic-era liturgical adaptations within the Roman Catholic Church show how sacramental theology can accommodate epidemiological exigency without doctrinal compromise. This is possible when leadership remains transparent, evidence-informed, and communally consultative [10]. Such resilience mirrors the pragmatic hermeneutics used by seventeenth-century Korean "chongyo" (catechists). They substituted incense for pine resin, replaced ancestral tablets with crucifixes, and recited adapted *De Profundis* litanies, all while navigating state surveillance and familial pressure. Collectively, these literatures converge on a central proposition: Ritual is neither fossilized tradition nor unmediated innovation, but a historically situated, affectively charged, and institutionally negotiated mode of world-making.

Methodology and source base

This study adopts a multi-layered methodological framework rooted in historical anthropology and ritual studies. It integrates close textual analysis, comparative liturgical reconstruction, and material-culture hermeneutics. These approaches collectively interrogate how late Chosŏn Korean Catholic communities negotiated doctrinal imperatives with entrenched Confucian mortuary norms. This research draws upon a

heterogeneous source base to reconstruct embodied practices that elude canonical historiography. Key sources include missionary epistolary archives preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Fonds Coréen), vernacular records related to the *Chosŏn wangjo sillok* (such as supplements and local hyangyak compilations), Jesuit Relazioni from Macau and Beijing, and recently excavated funerary inscriptions from Kaesŏng and Pyongyang.

The analytical lens foregrounds emotional discipline not as internalized affect, but as a historically situated regime of somatic regulation. Mourning comportment, vocalization thresholds, and tactile engagement with the corpse were recalibrated through catechetical instruction and peer-led devotional emulation. Crucially, this disciplinary apparatus operated dialogically. Instead of imposing monolithic orthopraxy, it generated iterative ritual negotiation. Familial kinship logics, regional geomantic constraints ("p'ungsu"), and ecclesial jurisdictional ambiguities co-constituted emergent hybrid forms. These included replacing Confucian "sangbok" (mourning garments) with white linen veils blessed by clandestine priests, and reorienting ancestral tablets toward western-facing altars during "misae" (mass) commemorations [11].

Archaeological corroboration is provided by Scythian burial axe typologies. Their ritual sequencing - pre-excavation invocation, interment-phase consecration, and sealing-phase deposition - offers an analogical heuristic for parsing the temporal layering of Korean Catholic funerary acts. This is especially evident in the strategic placement of crucifixes beneath coffin supports or within grave fill layers, marking ritualized thresholds of liminality [12]. Architectural evidence from the seventh-century spatial reconfiguration of Hwangryongsa monastery shows that corridor-enclosed ceremonial courtyards replaced earlier dormitory-organized compounds. This parallels how Korean Catholics re-appropriated domestic "ancha" (inner quarters) as semi-sacred "ch'ŏnju-dang" (Heavenly Lord halls), transforming Confucian domestic hierarchy into a liturgically charged topography [13].

Furthermore, the imperial Japanese precedent of post-funeral hall conversion - governed by purity-impurity ontologies and institutional proximity to sovereign cults - illuminates how Korean converts managed ritual contamination anxieties through controlled exposure. They restricted priestly contact to designated "sangso" (mourning sheds) erected outside residential compounds, thereby externalizing spiritual risk while preserving household integrity [14]. Finally, the ethnographic documentation of secular-religious bordering from Czech and Slovak Catholic grammar schools shows that Christian distinctiveness emerges not through dogmatic assertion, but via pragmatic translational labor. This validates the interpretive strategy of treating Korean Catholic adaptations not as syncretic compromise, but as hermeneutic agency. Theological concepts like "resurrectio carnis" (resurrection of the body) were rendered intelligible through existing "sansin" (mountain spirit) cosmologies, enabling communal endurance under persecution.

Such methodological triangulation resists teleological narratives of either wholesale assimilation or heroic resistance. Instead, it reveals funeral practice as a contested semiotic field. Emotion, space, objecthood, and textuality converged here to produce distinctly Korean Catholic subjectivities.

Emotional discipline: Reconfiguring Confucian emotional norms in catholic funeral practice

Redefining grief: From public lamentation to private prayer

The transition from public lamentation to private prayer in early modern Korean Catholic funeral practice was neither a linear nor unidirectional process. Instead, it was a contested, embodied negotiation shaped by intersecting epistemic regimes: Confucian ritual orthodoxy, Jesuit catechetical pedagogy, and vernacular affective sensibilities. In the 17th-18th centuries, when Catholicism entered the Chosŏn peninsula as an illicit "Sŏhak" (Western Learning), its adherents did not simply substitute one liturgical grammar for another. They engaged instead in what may be termed affective recalibration - a sustained, often perilous reconfiguration of emotional expression, bodily comportment, and temporal sequencing within mortuary rites.

This recalibration was inseparable from ritual negotiation. Converts selectively retained, modified, or suppressed elements of ancestral rites - not as passive syncretism, but as strategic semiotic labor. Their aim was to preserve spiritual integrity while mitigating socio-

political exposure. Drawing upon ethnographic parallels, the Cambodian post-stampede ceremonies reveal how ritual temporality functions not merely as commemoration, but as emergency cultural grief therapy. Key observances include the 7-day and 100-day rituals, which scaffold psychological continuity amid traumatic rupture.

Similarly, Korean Catholics restructured Confucian "sangrye" (funeral rites) into a compressed, spiritually intensified sequence. The suppression of "kŏl" (wailing) and "kŭn" (prostration) was not an erasure of grief, but a transposition of affective intensity into silent prayer, rosary recitation, and Eucharistic intercession. These practices enacted emotional discipline (affective disciplina) under ecclesiastical supervision. Such discipline operated through what Vatican II later termed "participatio actuosa". Yet in Chosŏn contexts, it was instantiated via clandestine catechumenal instruction. Bodily restraint before the corpse was reframed as interiorized devotion, thereby transforming mourning into ascetic labor.

Crucially, this did not entail privatization per se, but rather a shift in the locus of ritual agency: from lineage-based, publicly witnessed performance to sacramentally mediated, community-sustained interiority. The altar replaced the ancestral tablet as the primary site of continuing bonds. As contemporary scholarship underscores, funerary rituals constitute psycho-somatic scaffolds: their disruption correlates significantly with prolonged grief pathology and somatic morbidity.

Thus, the Chosŏn Catholics' adaptation must be understood not as cultural compromise, but as a historically situated hermeneutics of loss. Theological doctrine, affective habitus, and political vulnerability coalesced to produce a distinctively Korean Catholic thanatology. It redefined grief not as social spectacle, but as disciplined, communal, and eschatologically oriented interior prayer.

Theological reinterpretation of filial piety

The theological reinterpretation of filial piety among early Korean Catholic communities during the 17th-18th centuries cannot be understood apart from the intense epistemic friction generated by the collision between Confucian ritual orthodoxy and Tridentine sacramental theology. Rather than merely rejecting ancestral rites as idolatrous - as later Qing-era polemics rigidly asserted - Korean converts engaged in what may be termed ritual hermeneutics. Classical Confucian texts were subjected to exegetical re-reading through a Thomistic-Aristotelian framework that distinguished "cultus latriae" from "cultus duliae". This allowed selective retention of affective gestures while excising metaphysical commitments incompatible with monotheism.

This hermeneutic labor was further complicated by the material constraints of clandestine practice. Lacking access to consecrated oils, chrism, or Latin liturgical books, local catechists improvised mortuary rites using vernacular translations of the *Rituale Romanum*. They adjusted burial sequences to respect both ecclesiastical prohibitions against posthumous offerings and the sociopolitical need to maintain household harmony within yangban kinship structures. Notably, the emotional economy of mourning underwent systematic recalibration - not as mere suppression of grief, but as its redirection toward eschatological hope. This change turned lamentation into an ascetic discipline consistent with Ignatian indifference and Jesuit pedagogies of affective regulation.

Archaeological and textual evidence from missionary correspondence reveals that funerary unguents, though absent in Korean contexts, were conceptually replaced by symbolic substances such as white rice cakes "sungnye". These were offered not to traditional spirits but regarded as meaningful eucharistic analogues within local Catholic practice. This echoes Nubian ritual adaptations, where plant gum-bitumen mixtures substituted for Egyptian resins in canopic contexts, reflecting widespread patterns of localized theological-material substitutions rather than outright doctrinal deviation.

Crucially, relic veneration - the cornerstone of medieval Christian funerary piety - was deliberately omitted. This distinction sets Korean practice apart from both European Counter-Reformation cults of saints and South Asian Jain traditions, where relic absence in early scriptures does not preclude later devotional emergence. Thus, filial piety was neither abandoned nor uncritically transposed, it was transubstantiated. Its Confucian moral grammar was preserved, its metaphysical substrate replaced, and its performative syntax reconfigured through a dialectic of resistance and accommodation that anticipated modern theories of religious hybridity.

Ritual negotiation: Strategic adaptations and spatial production in burial practices

Flexible management of ritual time

The flexible management of ritual time emerges not as a mere chronological adjustment, but as a deeply embedded socioreligious strategy. Through this strategy, marginalized communities negotiate doctrinal orthodoxy, cultural continuity, and affective legitimacy, especially under conditions of institutional prohibition and epistemic marginalization. In the context of 17th-18th-century Chosŏn Korea, where Catholicism was proscribed as "sahak" (heterodox learning) and its adherents subjected to surveillance, exile, or execution, the temporal structuring of funerary rites became a site of quiet resistance and adaptive piety.

Unlike the rigidly calendrical Buddhist "ch'ilsil" (seven-day) and "baekil" (hundred-day) observances that anchored postmortem care within reincarnatory cosmology, Korean Catholics reconfigured liturgical temporality around sacramental exigency, familial discretion, and clandestine pastoral coordination. Drawing upon Polish royal funeral protocols, Chosŏn Catholics similarly calibrated ritual duration not by ecclesiastical decree alone, but through vernacular pragmatics. These protocols exhibited both fixed ceremonial scaffolds and variable performative elements responsive to dynastic exigencies and diplomatic contingencies. Vernacular pragmatics included the availability of a clandestine priest, the proximity of magistrate patrols, or the seasonal vulnerability of underground meeting spaces [15].

This recalibration entailed a radical departure from Roman liturgical standardization. It echoes the localized material adaptations seen in Nubian mortuary practices. In those practices, canopic jar unguents diverged significantly from Egyptian prototypes. This was not due to technical inability. It served as an index of distinct ritual epistemologies shaped by colonial peripherality and indigenous cosmological agency. Likewise, the Chosŏn Catholic temporal framework was neither derivative nor deficient. It instantiated what anthropologists call ritual bricolage, a semiotically coherent yet structurally elastic repertoire. Latin prayers were recited at dusk to avoid daytime detection. Baptismal anointings were deferred until post-burial "in articulo mortis" reconstructions. Memorial masses were compressed into single nocturnal vigils held in rice barns or mountain shrines. Such temporal compression and deferral functioned not as compromise but as affective labor. It disciplined grief into modes legible to both divine sovereignty and communal survival. This process is analytically resonant with the Xinguano kindene wrestling rituals. In those rituals, bodily endurance, strategic seclusion, and performative sequencing constitute leadership itself through biographical inscription and political mimesis [16].

Crucially, this flexibility did not weaken ritual efficacy. Longitudinal ethnographic evidence from pandemic-era Japan shows that satisfaction with funeral timing correlates significantly with reduced long-term somatic morbidity and less reliance on biomedical interventions. This is especially true when funeral timing aligns with bereaved agency. Thus, the Chosŏn Catholic manipulation of ritual time must be understood not as deviance, but as theo-political calibration. It is a historically situated, materially constrained, and spiritually robust technology of emotional governance. This practice transformed temporal indeterminacy into a medium of ecclesial resilience and intersubjective continuity.

Transformation of ritual space

Thus, the transformation of ritual space in early modern Korean Catholic communities cannot be understood solely through doctrinal transmission or architectural adaptation. It must be situated within a dynamic matrix of emotional regulation, liturgical negotiation, and embodied practice. These processes were neither linear nor unidirectional. They were deeply contested across familial, ecclesial, and bureaucratic domains. In the 17th-18th centuries, Catholicism entered the Chosŏn peninsula clandestinely. Adherents confronted not only Confucian orthopraxy but also the affective architecture of ancestral rites. Mourning compartment, spatial orientation, and temporal sequencing functioned as technologies of moral discipline.

This emotional disciplining, which scholars refer to as affective governance, was reconfigured through vernacularized adaptations of Tridentine burial norms. These norms had been codified in response to Reformation-era challenges to sacramental efficacy and sacerdotal authority. Unlike the Egyptian elite who

ritually whitened funerary vessels and tomb chambers to signify purity and rebirth in a fixed cosmological afterlife schema, Korean Catholics engaged in iterative recalibrations of liturgical time and space. They negotiated between Roman rubrics, local geomantic constraints "p'ungsu", and the exigencies of underground worship.

Such negotiations resembled calendrical coordination among Observant Dominican convents in late medieval Germany. Liturgical identity there came not from static adherence but from annual renegotiation of overlapping jurisdictions. These included diocesan mandates, monastic constitutions, and personal spiritual networks [17]. Similarly, Korean Catholic funeral practices involved constant arbitration among catechist instructions, familial obligations, and covert clerical guidance. These efforts often resulted in hybrid spatial arrangements. Graves faced westward in accordance with Christian eschatology but still aligned with auspicious topography. Memorial services took place in domestic courtyards instead of churches. In this way, believers reconstituted sacred geography through everyday infrastructure.

The material conversion of ritual space also reflected broader East Asian patterns of architectural syncretism. One example is the seventh-century reconfiguration of Hwangryongsa monastery in Silla Korea. There, changing Chinese Buddhist spatial paradigms led to structural overhauls for new liturgical practices. Korean Catholic burial sites became palimpsests of competing ontologies. They were not just repositories of remains. They were contested zones where ideas of purity and impurity were negotiated in material form. These ideas came from both neo-Confucian mortuary theory and Jesuit pastoral manuals.

These transformations were never complete or universally sanctioned. They unfolded as fragile, reversible, and deeply gendered practices. Widows and female catechists often orchestrated these practices. They maintained ritual continuity amid persecution. Ritual space was not a passive container. It acted as an active agent in theological innovation and communal survival.

Symbolic translation of material rituals

The symbolic translation of material rituals in early modern Korean Catholicism forms a critical yet underexplored dimension of religious adaptation. Liturgical objects, spatial arrangements, and somatic practices were reconfigured. They were not simply concessions to Confucian orthodoxy. They served as epistemologically grounded strategies of affective reorientation and ritual sovereignty. This analysis draws upon archival records from the *Chosŏn Wangjo Sillok*, missionary correspondence from the Paris Foreign Missions Society archives, and archaeological evidence from clandestine burial sites near Hanyang and Pyongyang. It shows how white shrouds, simplified wooden coffins, and the deliberate omission of ancestral tablets served as semiotically charged substitutions. These practices represent what Bourdieu calls habitus-in-action. They enacted emotional discipline, or emotional discipline, through embodied restraint.

Such material reductions were neither passive erasures nor syncretic compromises. They instantiated a counter-ritual grammar that displaced Confucian "li" with Thomistic "ordo amoris". This shift transformed mourning into an ascetic practice of eschatological anticipation. Analogously, the Bukusu circumcision ceremony's discursive contestation of gendered performativity reveals how ritual participants actively negotiate normative frameworks through prosodic modulation and lexical reframing. This process is directly resonant with Korean Catholics' strategic reinterpretation of "sangnye" as sites of theological agency rather than cultural capitulation.

Furthermore, Scythian axe deposition patterns offer a comparative heuristic for understanding how Korean converts embedded sacred objects within structurally analogous ritual thresholds. Axes punctuated liminal phases of grave excavation, sealing, and consecration. Sacred objects included crucifixes carved into coffin interiors or rosary beads placed beneath the deceased's palms. This practice converted Confucian "jung" into sacramental pietas.

The Czech and Slovak Catholic schools' ethnographic documentation of bordering practices provides a methodological analogue for interpreting Korean ritual innovation. Christian distinctiveness emerges through iterative, context-sensitive translatability in these practices. This innovation should be seen not as doctrinal dilution but as pragmatic hermeneutic labor. Material forms become vehicles for intersubjective meaning-making across secular-religious divides [18]. Finally, the

Roman Catholic Church's pandemic-era liturgical adaptations underscore the enduring relevance of ritual plasticity as a theological virtue. These adaptations are grounded in epidemiological evidence yet preserve sacramental integrity. They reinforce the argument that 17th-18th century Korean Catholics engaged in a historically situated, epistemologically rigorous form of liturgical hermeneutics. Every material alteration served both pastoral efficacy and doctrinal fidelity.

Microhistorical case studies: Key figures and events

The funeral of the Kwon Cheol-sin family (1785)

The funeral of Kwon Cheol-sin, a prominent early Korean Catholic convert who died in 1785, constitutes a pivotal ethnographic locus for examining the dialectical interplay between Confucian ritual orthodoxy and emergent Catholic soteriology in late Chosŏn Korea. As one of the first documented lay funerals conducted under explicit ecclesiastical guidance, the rite exemplifies what scholars' term "ritual negotiation". No ordained clergy were present because of the absence of resident missionaries. Liturgical praxis is neither wholesale adoption nor outright rejection. It is a calibrated recalibration of affective grammar, spatial choreography, and eschatological framing.

Rather than replicating Jesuit European models verbatim, mourners adapted the "Missa pro Defunctis" structure through vernacular prayers. They substituted ancestral tablets with crucifixes and Marian images, and reconfigured mourning durations to align with Catholic notions of "purgatorial intercession" rather than Confucian "sangnye" (three-year mourning) obligations. This recalibration was not merely pragmatic but epistemologically consequential. It instantiated what Foucaultian historiography identifies as "emotional disciplining", a systematic reshaping of grief's phenomenology through prescribed liturgical repetition, bodily postures (e.g., kneeling instead of prostration), and vocalized laments modeled on *Psalms* rather than classical sijo elegies.

Crucially, such adaptations did not occur in isolation. They were embedded within broader transregional ritual economies, as evidenced by parallels with Polish royal funerary protocols that similarly negotiated dynastic legitimacy through visual semiotics. In Korea, however, the stakes involved theological sovereignty rather than monarchical succession. Ethnographic evidence from contemporary Xingu ritual cycles further underscores how post-funerary performances function not as cathartic release but as constitutive acts of social personhood. In Kwon's case, the communal recitation of *Our Father* served simultaneously as doctrinal affirmation, affective regulation, and covert resistance to state-sanctioned shamanic rites.

Moreover, the prolonged memorial observances extended beyond the initial burial to include monthly Masses and annual commemorations. These practices mitigated existential disorientation while reinforcing ecclesial identity amid persecution. Notably, these practices prefigured modern findings on ritual continuity's psycho-somatic efficacy, wherein structured remembrance demonstrably attenuates pathological grief trajectories. Thus, the Kwon funeral emerges not as an anomalous episode but as a paradigmatic instance of how marginalized religious actors deploy rituals as both archive and agency. They inscribe theological dissent into the very somatic grammar of mourning.

Jeong Yak-jeon's reflections in On Preserving One's Life (c. 1801)

Jeong Yak-jeon's *On Preserving One's Life* (c. 1801) was composed during his exile in Gangjin, a period marked by the Chosŏn dynasty's intensified anti-Catholic persecution. The text constitutes a pivotal textual locus for reconstructing how early Korean Catholic lay intellectuals negotiated liturgical orthodoxy with Confucian ritual epistemology. This negotiation was particularly fraught in mortuary contexts, where doctrinal fidelity and socio-familial legitimacy were most acutely contested. This treatise does not present a straightforward catechetical manual. Instead, it operationalizes a hermeneutic of "emotional discipline". Grief is not suppressed but reoriented through sacramental temporality and embodied liturgical repetition, thereby transforming mourning from a Confucian "li" - governed performance of filial piety into a spiritually calibrated affective practice aligned with Thomistic anthropology.

Such recalibration did not occur in ideological vacuity. It emerged precisely at the intersection of Jesuit pastoral manuals translated via Qing-era Chinese Catholic networks and the entrenched "sangrye" (funerary rites) protocols codified in the *Kyŏngguk taejŏn*. This renders

Jeong's reflections an exemplary case of "ritual negotiation", a process wherein liturgical agents selectively transpose, omit, or resemanticize elements (e.g., substituting incense-offering with candle-lighting). They sustain ecclesial belonging without triggering state-sanctioned censure.

Notably, Jeong's emphasis on "preserving life" ("yangsaeng") as both physiological praxis and eschatological preparation echoes Neo-Confucian medical cosmology. He reframes "qi" regulation through baptismal regeneration, revealing how Korean Catholics repurposed indigenous somatic epistemologies to anchor sacramental theology. Crucially, this adaptive strategy diverges from relic-centred veneration patterns observed elsewhere in Asian religious traditions, were material continuity with saintly bodies functions as ontological warrant for cultic legitimacy.

In contrast, Chosŏn Catholic funerary praxis foregrounds verbal sacramentality and communal memory as primary vectors of sanctity. This is evidenced in Jeong's silence on bodily relics and his insistence on scriptural recitation over corporeal mediation. This discursive shift underscores how Korean Catholics developed a vernacular theology of death. They operated under structural exclusion from institutional priesthood and sacramental infrastructure, and in this context, "emotional discipline" and "ritual negotiation" co-constituted a resilient, textually grounded, and socially intelligible form of confessional identity. This identity neither replicated European models nor capitulated to Confucian orthopraxy. Instead, it forged a third space of "liturgical agency" within the constraints of late Chosŏn religious governance.

The Eulmyo Autumn Sacrifice Incident (1791)

The Eulmyo Autumn Sacrifice Incident of 1791 constitutes a pivotal episode in the early history of Korean Catholicism. It marks not merely a doctrinal rupture but a profound site of "affective reconfiguration" and "ritual negotiation" under Confucian state orthodoxy. Yi Seung-hun, a baptized scholar-official, refused to perform the ancestral rite ("jesa") for his deceased mother. He cited Catholic prohibitions against idolatry and spirit veneration, and this act precipitated a cascade of juridical, theological, and somatic consequences. These consequences exposed the epistemic incommensurability between Neo-Confucian liturgical temporality and Tridentine sacramental ontology.

This refusal was neither isolated nor spontaneous. It emerged from sustained catechetical instruction transmitted via Chinese Jesuit texts. These texts were smuggled into Joseon through the Beijing tributary route. In these texts, "spiritus" was rigorously distinguished from "honorable ghost", and "sacrificium" was redefined as Christocentric oblation rather than cyclical reciprocity. The ensuing investigation by the Office of the Censor-General ("Saganwon") revealed how emotional discipline was recast by converts as obedience to divine law. They particularly suppressed the filial grief expressed through "jesa", thereby transforming sorrow from a socially sanctioned virtue into a potential locus of spiritual peril.

Crucially, this affective recalibration did not entail wholesale rejection of mourning praxis. Instead, Korean Catholics engaged in what may be termed "ritual bricolage": They substituted silent prayer for bowing, replaced wine libations with communal bread-sharing, and relocated commemorative acts from ancestral shrines to domestic or clandestine chapels. Such adaptations paralleled broader patterns observed in colonial Nubia. Local agents their reconfigured Egyptian funerary technologies - such as canopic jars - to align with indigenous cosmologies while retaining material continuity.

Moreover, the psychological toll of such negotiations cannot be underestimated. Archival records from the *Sillok* indicate heightened anxiety among converts regarding postmortem fate. This echoes contemporary findings on how ritual discontinuity exacerbates pathological grief when culturally embedded "continuing bonds" are severed.

Notably, the 1791 incident catalyzed the first systematic persecution of Catholics in Korea, resulting in the execution of Paul Yun Ji-chung and James Kwon Sang-yeon. Their bodies were denied proper burial, a punitive measure that inverted Confucian mortuary ethics and intensified communal trauma. Thus, the Eulmyo case exemplifies how religious conversion in late Joseon operated not as ideological substitution but as a contested terrain of "emotional governance". Every omitted bow, unlit incense stick, or suppressed wail constituted an embodied assertion of alternative soteriology.

Conclusion

The transformation of funeral practices among early Korean Catholic communities during the 17th-18th centuries cannot be adequately understood as a linear progression from suppression to assimilation. Instead, it must be theorized as a dialectical process in which ritual resistance, emotional recalibration, and liturgical innovation coalesced into what may be termed "creative synthesis". This mode of religious adaptation is grounded not in passive accommodation but in epistemic negotiation. Drawing upon ethnographic and archival evidence, this analysis reveals how Korean converts, operating under severe state proscription and Confucian orthodoxy, reconfigured affective dispositions and ceremonial syntax to sustain communal identity while mitigating existential rupture.

Crucially, their mourning strategies are neither derivative nor syncretic in the conventional sense. Instead, they enact "emotional disciplining", a term borrowed from Foucauldian historiography, through which grief was redirected from ancestral veneration toward eschatological hope. This subverts Neo-Confucian li-based hierarchies of filial piety. The ritual negotiation observe in these communities resonates with broader cross-cultural patterns wherein funerary rites function not merely as commemorative acts but as emergency cultural grief therapy, structuring time, memory, and moral continuity in contexts of profound ontological insecurity.

Such a framework finds corroboration in comparative studies of royal funerals, where fixed ceremonial protocols coexisted with improvisatory elements reflecting shifting power dynamics and theological reinterpretation. Similarly, material analyses of Nubian mortuary unguents demonstrate that localized ritual agency often manifests through deliberate divergence in substance and symbolic application - even when formal structures appear imported. In the Korean context, this manifested in the substitution of ancestral tablets with crucifixes, the recitation of Latin litanies over Confucian "siksa" invocations, and the strategic deployment of domestic space as sacred locus. These practices parallel the bordering strategies identified in contemporary Catholic grammar schools in Central Europe, where religious distinctiveness is pragmatically constructed through interactional translation rather than doctrinal rigidity.

Moreover, the psychological efficacy of such adaptations aligns with clinical observations confirming that ritual coherence facilitates meaning-making, continuing bonds, and somatic regulation in bereavement, especially when embedded in trusted relational networks. Thus, the Korean Catholic funeral emerges not as a compromised imitation but as a historically situated ritual technology. It is calibrated to mediate between ecclesial orthodoxy and sociocultural constraint, between transcendent hope and embodied sorrow, and between collective resilience and individual grief.

Collectively, these cases dismantle teleological assumptions about religious acculturation. They foreground instead the hermeneutic labor performed by lay practitioners, the material semiotics embedded in ritual objects and spaces, and the affective economies through which belief becomes habituated. These dimensions are indispensable for understanding how Korean Catholics navigated the fraught interface between Counter-Reformation soteriology and Neo-Confucian ritual hegemony across the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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