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Prayers for Divine Protection: *The* Temple God *(1885)* of Heungcheonsa Temple and the Cult of Guan Yu

Seunghye LEE

Abstract

Korean Buddhist temples rarely dedicate shrines to tutelary deities or enshrine visual representations of them in worship halls. The Temple God *(1885), hung in the main hall of Heungcheonsa temple in today's Seoul, is a rare example. In this painting, the main deity sits at the center, solemnly facing front. Its iconographical features demonstrate visual affinities with cultic images of Guan Yu, the legendary Chinese marshal who was deified and worshipped as Gwanwang or "King Gwan" in late Joseon Korea. Intriguing visual similarities between this Buddhist deity and Guan Yu have not been examined thoroughly in previous studies of late Joseon Buddhist paintings. The cult of the Chinese god, which enjoyed unparalleled support from the royal court and commoners during King Gojong's reign, seems to have been a major factor behind this unlikely iconographical borrowing. By closely analyzing the* Temple God *against the religious and visual culture of the late 19th century, this study sheds new light on the religious syncretism reflected in the painting and implications behind the royal patronage of the Guan Yu cult in a time of political chaos and upheaval.*

Keywords: Guan Yu, Heungcheonsa temple, King Gojong, royal patronage, religious syncretism, votive temple, late Joseon Buddhism, Korean Buddhist painting

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Seunghye LEE is a curator at Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art. E-mail: seunghye.lee@gmail.com.

Introduction

The history of Heungcheonsa 興天寺 temple, located on Samgaksan mountain in today's Seoul, traces its origins to the early years of the Joseon dynasty (1392–1910). Initially erected in 1397 by King Taejo 太祖 (r. 1392–1398), the dynastic founder of Joseon, in the southwestern part of the city for his late queen, it was soon relocated at the command of King Taejong 太宗 (r. 1400–1418) in 1409 to a valley outside the northeastern corner of the capital.[1] Although Heungcheonsa temple was founded to aid the upkeep of Jeongneung 貞陵 tomb, it came to serve primarily as a votive temple for the royal court in the 19th century.[2] Most of the extant temple structures were built in the late 19th century under the patronage of royal in-laws and court members; these structures include the Hall of Ultimate Bliss (Geungnakbojeon 極樂寶殿, rebuilt in 1853; Fig. 1), Large Chamber (Daebang 大房, built in 1865), and Hall of the Underworld (Myeongbujeon 冥府殿, built in 1855). Housed in these halls are approximately forty Buddhist paintings, mostly produced from the late 19th to the early 20th century. These paintings were, according to their votive inscriptions, dedicated by key members of the royal court during the reign of King Gojong 高宗 (r. 1863–1907) for their welfare and prosperity on earth and beyond.

1. The founding of Heungcheonsa temple is documented in Gwon Geun's 權近 (1352–1409) "Jeongneung wondang Jogyejong bonsa Heungcheonsa joseonggi" 貞陵願堂曹溪宗本寺興天寺造成記 (Record on the Construction of Heungcheonsa Temple, the Head Temple of Jogye Order, the Votive Shrine for the Upkeep of Jeongneung Tomb) compiled in *Dongmunseon* 東文選 (Anthology of Korean Literature), *gwon* 78, and An Jin-ho's 安震湖 (1880–1965) *Bongeunsa bonmalsaji* 奉恩寺本末寺誌 (Gazetteer of Bongeunsa Temple and Its Sub-temples) compiled in 1938. The latter is reproduced in C. Yi (1994). Also, see Gwon (1979, 2:1228–1234). For the complicated historical relationship between Heungcheonsa temple and Jeongneung tomb, see Yoon (2009, 162–168).
2. The tradition of establishing a Buddhist temple for prominent members of the royal family traces back to the Goryeo dynasty. By the late Joseon dynasty, such monastic establishments, commonly called "votive temples" (*wonchal* 願刹), had developed into several subtypes, including temples aiding the upkeep of royal tombs (*neungchimsa* 陵寢寺), temples supplying food, goods, and personnel for ancestral rites at royal tombs (*joposa* 造泡寺, "tofu-making temple"), and "votive shrines for dedicating prayers" (*wichuk wondang* 爲祝願堂). Tak (2012a) provides a comprehensive analysis of such temples throughout the Joseon.

Figure 1. Hall of Ultimate Bliss of Heungcheonsa temple, rebuilt in 1853 (Seoul)
Source: Author.

A painting currently hung in the Hall of Ultimate Bliss, the main hall of Heungcheonsa temple, is intriguing in many respects (Fig. 2). At first glance, it seems to be an offshoot of a genre of Buddhist paintings depicting guardian deities as a collective group (*sinjungdo* 神衆圖), which gained enormous popularity in the late Joseon. However, it shows idiosyncratic features not found in any of the extant late Joseon Buddhist paintings. Although the painting is customarily called the *Temple God* (*Doryangsindo* 道場神圖), such a deity is seldom included in the iconographical repertoire of late Joseon Buddhist paintings. The unusual iconography was noted in a recent study on late Joseon Buddhist paintings commissioned by the royal court for Heungcheonsa temple (Ryu 2017a, 102). However, questions about the painting's iconographical sources and the historical context in which such an idiosyncratic painting could have been dedicated, remain unresolved. Close examination of the *Temple God* suggests that its iconography was formulated by borrowing features from the cultic images of Guan Yu 關羽 (Gwan U in Korean), the third-century Chinese marshal who came to be worshipped in late Joseon Korea in his deified form, "King

Gwan" (Gwanwang 關王) (Tak Kim [2004] 2006; Van Lieu 2014; Kuwano 2015). Although the heroic general was given the post of tutelary deity at most Chinese Buddhist temples from the Ming and Qing dynasties onward, this specific facet of the deity's cult never developed in Korea.[3] Rather, several Joseon rulers, including King Gojong, appear to have resorted to the Guan Yu cult in times of political upheaval to promote the ideal of his loyalty to the throne and martial valor among their subjects (Yoo 2006; M. Kim 2016). Understanding the *Temple God* as related to the cultic imagery of Guan Yu requires fresh consideration of its value outside the immediate confines of contemporaneous Buddhist paintings.

Figure 2. Daeheo Chehun and Hakheo, *Temple God*, 1885. Color on silk. 150.5×112.4 cm. Hall of Ultimate Bliss, Heungcheonsa temple, Seoul
Source: RIBCH.

3. For more on this aspect of the Chinese Guan Yu cult, see ter Haar (2017, 42–44).

This article, through a comprehensive analysis of syncretic iconography in the *Temple God*, sheds new light on the interface between court patronage of royal votive temples and the state-run Guan Yu temples during King Gojong's reign. It delves into the historical context and meaning of this painting by closely analyzing its votive inscription and iconography in relation to contemporaneous images of Guan Yu. The study proceeds to examine the patrons' commission of the painting in the Korean context of the Guan Yu cult and elucidate the significance of worshipping this deity for the king and queen in the 1880s. I argue that the *Temple God*'s appropriation of Guan Yu iconography closely reflects the royal patronage of the Guan Yu cult in this time of political chaos and upheaval.

Hall of Ultimate Bliss and Court Commissions for Buddhist Paintings

Heungcheonsa temple, founded and maintained through royal support, underwent a major change of patronage affiliation by the end of 18th century. The main hall exemplifies this shift of patronage in the unique political and religious climate of the 19th century. The eminent members of the Andong Kim family, which produced three queens during the reigns of Kings Sunjo 純祖 (r. 1800–1834), Heonjong 憲宗 (r. 1834–1849), and Cheoljong 哲宗 (r. 1849–1864), served as a de facto patron of the temple, then called Sinheungsa 新興寺 (likely a shorthand for "Newly Built Heungcheonsa"), throughout the first half of the 19th century. Given that the Andong Kim family sponsored a series of large-scale construction projects, including reconstruction of the main hall at Sinheungsa temple for almost 60 years, they seem to have privatized it as their own prayer temple during this period (Son 2017).

The enthronement of King Gojong in 1863 brought many changes not only in state politics but also in the temple's patronage. Prince Yi Ha-eung 李昰應 (1820–1898), better known as Heungseon Daewongun 興宣大院君, ruled Korea from 1864 to 1873 as regent on behalf of his son, King Gojong, who was still a minor. In 1865, Yi Ha-eung patronized the renovation of the Hall of Ultimate Bliss and reconstruction of the monks' quarters, a

building with a unique plan that was widely called Large Chamber and became the temple's hallmark (Fig. 3). Details of the construction are narrated in the "Gyeonggi udo Yangjumok ji Samgaksan Heungcheonsa yosa jungchang gimun" 京畿右道楊州牧地三角山興天寺寮舍重刱記文 (Record of Reconstruction of the Monks' Quarters at Heungcheonsa Temple on Samgaksan Mountain in the Land of Yangjumok, Gyeonggi udo, dated 1870). According to this record, Yi Ha-eung donated not only large sums of money (3,500 out of 9,373 taels in total) but also timber, roof tiles, and metal.[4] The grandiose project culminated in the bestowal of a wooden plaque inscribed with the temple's original name, Heungcheonsa, in Yi Ha-eung's own calligraphy (Fig. 4).

With the completion of this construction, Heungcheonsa temple came to acquire a spatial layout consisting of the main Buddha hall and multi-functional hall facing each other across a courtyard.[5] Standing on the site where a gate tower (*nu* 樓) is usually located, Large Chamber completely hides the main Buddha hall, the usual cultic and architectural focus of any Buddhist temple, projecting a formidable presence. As mentioned above, the forerunner of the Hall of Ultimate Bliss was built under the patronage of the Andong Kim family. Given Yi Ha-eung's attempts to reinforce the monarchy against rule by in-law families, the reconstruction of Large Chamber also held political implications in addition to serving religious needs of the major patron and monastic community of Heungcheonsa temple. Large Chamber seems to have been a structure that enabled the court to reclaim royal authority over the royal in-laws who wielded power over state affairs and had even taken over the royal votive temple (Son 2017, 156–159). From this time on, Sinheungsa temple, which had once been a private votive temple of the Andong Kim family, recovered its original name as well as its original function as a royal votive temple. With the completion of Large Chamber project in 1865, the refurbishment of worship halls at Heungcheonsa temple began shortly thereafter. Under the aegis of eminent figures from the royal

4. CHA and RIBCH (2013b, 165–166, entry 489).
5. This spatial layout has been largely maintained to date. For more on this issue, see Seoul teukbyeolsi (1988, 79–102, and esp. 88) for a ground plan of the temple.

household, the paintings and sculptures necessary for worship halls were produced and installed in subsequent years.

Figure 3. Large Chamber of Heungcheonsa temple, built in 1865 (Seoul)
Source: CHA.

Figure 4. Name plaque of Heungcheonsa temple. 19th century. Ink on wood. 68.0×179.5 cm. Large Chamber of Heungcheonsa temple, Seoul
Source: CHA and RIBCH (2013a, 2:163).

The Hall of Ultimate Bliss was the first to enshrine newly created Buddhist paintings after the completion of a series of construction projects at Heungcheonsa temple. Currently, the rear and side walls are hung with eight Buddhist paintings of different subjects produced between 1867 and 1939. On the rear (south) wall behind the main altar hangs the *Assembly of Amitābha Buddha* (dated 1867). To its immediate left is the *Nine Grades of the Rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss* (datable to 1885; hereafter, the *Nine Grades*), and to its immediate right is the *Host of Guardian Deities* (dated 1885). On the east wall hang the *Temple God* and the *Nectar Ritual* (dated 1939), while on the west wall hang a painting also entitled the *Host of Guardian Deities* (dated 1898), the *Kṣitigarbha and Ten Kings of the Underworld* (dated 1867), and the *King Yama* (datable to 1867) arrayed from inside to the outside.[6] The votive inscriptions of late Joseon Buddhist paintings typically identify the subjects, patrons, intentions of dedication, painters and monastic participants, and circumstances of production. A close reading of these paintings' votive inscriptions suggests that the court commissioned Buddhist paintings for the Hall of Ultimate Bliss in two instances: a group of three paintings in 1867 and a group of four in 1885. The iconographical and formal features of the six extant paintings allow us to situate them securely in the category of court-sponsored Buddhist paintings from the late 19th century. Thus, the present discussion is limited to these six paintings.

The *Assembly of Amitābha Buddha*, the *Kṣitigarbha and Ten Kings of the Underworld*, and *King Yama* were newly created in 1867 for the Hall of Ultimate Bliss for the welfare and prosperity of the royal court. It is no wonder that the *Assembly of Amitābha Buddha* was one of the first paintings produced for the hall (Fig. 5). The votive inscription relates that it was intended as an altarpiece behind the main icon of the hall.[7] Such altar paintings usually depict a large assembly of the main deity to whom the hall is dedicated, thereby echoing the main sculptural icons before

6. For illustrations of these paintings, see CHA and RIBCH (2013a, 1: 143, 145, 149–151). A discussion of these paintings, including their dating, is found in Ryu (2017a, 2017b).
7. CHA and RIBCH (2013b, 159, entry 400).

them. The inscription refers to the temple as Heungcheonsa instead of Sinheungsa, once again denoting its affiliation with the royal court. The phrase "to conduct for the sake of" (*bongwi* 奉爲) the good health of the king and queen in the middle of the inscription further suggests that the *Assembly of Amitābha Buddha* was dedicated by the royal couple rather than three court women who identified themselves as *sanggung* 尙宮 and one female devotee.[8] Queen Min (1851–1895, posthumously titled Empress Myeongseong 明聖皇后 in accordance with King Gojong's pronouncement of the Great Han Empire), who was invested in 1866 but had not yet gained the king's favor, may have been the driving force behind this dedication. The painting was most likely dedicated to the wish for the birth of a son (Ryu

Figure 5. Uiun Jau and others, *Assembly of Amitābha Buddha*, 1867. Color on silk. 168.0×238.5 cm. Hall of Ultimate Bliss, Heungcheonsa temple, Seoul
Source: RIBCH.

8. The identities of the three *sanggung* officers and one female devotee remain unknown, as only their surnames and dharma names were revealed.

2017a, 94–95). *Sanggung*, the senior fifth rank at the internal court, was the highest rank attainable for a lady-in-waiting during the Joseon dynasty. In the late 19th century, it was customary for *sanggung* to commission Buddhist artworks on behalf of the royal household. They seem to have acted as go-betweens for the royalty and Buddhist monks in the dedication of Buddhist paintings at Heungcheonsa temple.

The second court commission of Buddhist paintings for the Hall of Ultimate Bliss was undertaken in 1885 when its interior was renovated and Large Chamber repaired.[9] Given that the roof of a wooden hall was typically repaired every 100 to 150 years, it is curious that the two buildings, constructed only twenty years prior, were repaired simultaneously in 1885. Citing the *Myojeon gungneung wonmyo joposa jo* 廟殿宮陵園墓造泡寺調 (Collection of Reports on the Temples Supplying Goods for Royal Ancestral Shrines and Tombs), the architectural historian Son Shinyoung recently suggested that the two buildings were severely damaged during the Imo Incident of 1882, a violent military uprising and riot instigated in the capital by the Korean army (Son 2017, 153–154).[10] The documents and property of Heungcheonsa temple, according to this report, burned down at that time. In a similar vein, Bongguksa temple 奉國寺, another temple entrusted with the upkeep of Jeongneung tomb, was said to have been burned to ashes in 1882 and reconstructed the following year (Gwon 1979, 1:513). Considering the public resentment toward the reform measures taken by King Gojong and Queen Min, it is no wonder that Heungcheonsa temple, which had functioned as a royal prayer temple from the start of King Gojong's reign, became a target for raging rioters. In other words, the rioters' attack on Heungcheonsa temple attests to the public perception of the temple as a symbol of the royal court in the early 1880s.

The violent attack on the temple seems to have necessitated the reestablishment of royal authority within the newly reconstructed worship

9. CHA and RIBCH (2013b, 163, entry 478 and 166, entry 490).

10. The text is a collection of official documents compiled in 1930 by the Yesikgwa 禮式科 (Department of Rites) of the Iwangjik 李王職 (Riōshoku in Japanese, Yi Royal Household), an office established by the Government-General of Korea to handle matters related to the Joseon royal family. For an introduction to this text, see Tak (2012b, 200–209).

halls through visual means. Buddhist paintings commissioned for the Hall of Ultimate Bliss accordingly echo the immediate concerns and politico-religious aspirations of their patrons.[11] According to the votive inscription of the *Host of Guardian Deities* (1885), four Buddhist paintings were created and consecrated together for the Hall of Ultimate Bliss in the fifth lunar month of 1885. Although some parts of the inscription have faded, the four paintings seem to have been the *Host of Guardian Deities, Nine Grades, Temple God*, and *Nectar Ritual*.[12] Given that the *Host of Guardian Deities* and *Nectar Ritual* are mentioned by title, the other two were likely recorded in the same manner. The inscription further relates that two *sanggung* surnamed Kim and Hong dedicated the *Host of Guardian Deities* on behalf of King Gojong, Queen Min, the crown prince (thereafter known as Emperor Sunjong 純宗, r. 1907–1910), and crown princess.[13] The votive inscriptions of the extant three paintings from 1885 contain no phrase indicating direct involvement of the king or queen, such as "to conduct for the sake of," as appears in the votive inscription of the *Assembly of Amitābha Buddha* of 1867. It is difficult to determine whether the listed patrons such as *sanggung* officers dedicated these paintings of their own accord or were acting as a proxy for the king or queen.

An even more intriguing example is the *Temple God*, whose votive inscription in ink at the bottom center of the margin reads:

> Monastic participants. The verifier Hwanong [Hwanjin]. Painters Daeheo, Hakheo. Fundraiser Eungmyeong. Fundraiser Yeong □. We hope that this merit will extend to all and … I and others because of … will be reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss and together see [Amitābha Buddha]. [We hope that] all accomplish it together.[14]

11. No Buddhist paintings were commissioned for Large Chamber in 1885. Instead, the *Ten Kings of the Underworld, Messengers*, and *Guardians* seem to have been created for the Hall of the Underworld in this year. See Ryu (2017a, 102–104; 2017b, 208–210).
12. The *Nectar Ritual* of 1885 does not survive. Instead, a painting of the same subject created in 1939 currently hangs in the Hall of Ultimate Bliss.
13. See CHA and RIBCH (2013b, 160, entry 415).
14. For the original text, see CHA and RIBCH (2013b, 161, entry 435). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

The inscription documents names of key monastic participants, including the verifier of contents, painters Daeheo Chehun 大虛體勳 (d.u.) and Hakheo 鶴虛 (d.u.), and fundraisers. These names accord well with those appearing in the votive inscriptions of the *Host of Guardian Deities* and *Nine Grades* from 1885 (CHA and RIBCH 2013b, 159–160). Such correspondences suggest that the three paintings, and possibly the now lost *Nectar Ritual*, were products of the same painting workshop led by the monk-painter Daeheo Chehun,[15] and of the same patronage network linked to the royal court of King Gojong and Queen Min. The simultaneous dedication of the *Host of Guardian Deities* and the *Temple God* should be examined in this regard; it already suggests that the patrons and painters recognized the temple god as distinct from the pantheon of other divine protectors and worthy of independent worship. Such distinction is visually embodied in the representation of the main figure, as will be shown shortly.

Religious Hybrids in Paintings of Guardian Deities

The *Temple God* presents the principal icon at the center, facing front (Fig. 2). Seated against a three-panel folding screen, the deity is depicted larger and more prominent than other figures in the painting. On the upper left is a celestial child holding a banner, while the upper right features another celestial child holding a parasol decorated with variegated short sashes. Depicted in the foreground are two armor-clad figures. The one on the left holds a sword in his outer hand, while the one on the right holds a round blue object in his. This basic composition commonly appears in late Joseon Buddhist paintings of modest size in which divine beings are represented as the main objects of independent worship. For instance, *King Yama* (1867) of the Hall of Ultimate Bliss shows the principal icon seated at the center on a throne in an interior space demarcated by a three-panel screen (Fig. 6).

15. The notion of a *school* has been rigorously developed and validated by scholars of late Joseon Buddhist paintings since the early 1990s. For more on Daeheo Chehun's painting oeuvre and his school, see H. Chang (2003, 135–139) and Ryu (2017a, 115–116; 2017b, 201–206).

What distinguishes the temple god from other divine beings that appear at the center of similar compositions are his facial features. Notably, Indra, King Yama, and other kingly figures tend to be represented as light-skinned, and even the representative of guardian generals (*sinjang* 神將), Skanda, has fair skin in late Joseon Buddhist paintings.[16] By contrast, the temple god has a dark red face, a three-pronged beard that drapes across his belly, dramatically upturned eyes, and bristling eyebrows (Fig. 7). These physical features recall the well-known portrayal of Guan Yu in Luo Guanzhong's 羅貫中 (1330–1400) *Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義 (Romance of the Three Kingdoms), which is generally maintained in visual representations across

Figure 6. Uiun Jau and others, *King Yama*, 1867. Color on silk. 131.7×111.0 cm. Hall of Ultimate Bliss, Heungcheonsa temple, Seoul
Source: RIBCH.

16. For comparative examples from the capital area, see CHA and RIBCH (2013a).

Figure 7. Detail of the *Temple God*
Source: RIBCH.

temporal and geographical boundaries (Luo [n. d.] 2004, 1:5; June-gu Chang 2007, 89–92; Jina Chang 2008, 97).

Although the historical Guan Yu had been well known to Joseon Koreans through diverse mediums, the beginning of his official cult during the Imjin Wars (1592–1598) seems to have been a watershed moment in the burgeoning of his cult and visual imagery across the Korean Peninsula. The Ming commanders who had fought the Japanese on the peninsula believed that worship of Guan Yu would inspire the military spirit of soldiers, as he was widely considered an embodiment of martial valor and victory. Although King Seonjo 宣祖 (r. 1567–1608) and his court officials were skeptical, they had to comply with the Ming requests to build temples honoring Guan Yu (Tak Kim [2004] 2006, 48–57; Van Lieu 2014). Nammyo 南廟 temple was constructed in 1598 outside the Great South Gate of

Hanyang (Seoul) at the request of the Ming general Chen Yin 陳寅.[17] The Ming court asked the Joseon court to construct another state-run temple to the god outside the capital's Great East Gate, which was completed in 1601 and came to be called Dongmyo 東廟 temple.[18] While these two temples gradually became the center of state rituals and popular devotion to Guan Yu starting in the 18th century, two more temples to the Chinese god—commonly called Bungmyo 北廟 and Seomyo 西廟 (officially named Sunguimyo 崇義廟)—were founded in the capital area by King Gojong in 1883 and 1903, an act that had been suspended since the reign of King Seonjo.[19] The cultic images of Guan Yu enshrined at these temples became foci of religious devotion for their supposed efficacy, which in turn seems to have shaped visual experience of the deity.

Monk-painters of the late 19th century were attentive to other religious and visual traditions, adopting iconographical features from the Daoist and folk religious pantheon, appropriating certain figural types from popular culture, or employing visual motifs characteristic of decorative court paintings (H. Chang 2003; H. Kim 2015; Ryu 2017b). Paintings of guardian deities appear to have been more susceptible to cultural and religious trends of the time since the genre was established fairly late in the 18th century and deities of non-Buddhist origins were actively co-opted into the pantheon. Thus, it may come as no surprise that Chehun appropriated the iconography of Guan Yu in creating a hitherto dubious type of divine protector. It is worth asking whether the temple god was meant to be seen as one of the many forms of Guan Yu or, rather, a minor deity that coincidentally bore a striking resemblance.

17. *Seonjo sillok*, 25th day of the 4th lunar month, 1598. The history of the Nammyo and Dongmyo temples is extensively documented in the *Haedong seongjeokji* 海東聖蹟誌 (Record of the Holy Traces in Korea, 1876) in two volumes published by the Danguk hyeonseongjeon 檀國顯聖殿 (Hall of the Wise Sage in Korea). See "Nammyo go" in *Haedong seongjeokji* (1876, 1: 1a–1b); Yu (1876, 2: 9a–10a); Van Lieu (2014, 42–49).
18. *Seonjo sillok*, 29th day of the 4th lunar month, 1599; 19th day of the 6th lunar month, 1601; 27th day of the 8th lunar month, 1601. See "Dongmyo go" in *Haedong seongjeokji* (1876, 1: 1b–2a); Van Lieu (2014, 56–63).
19. *Gojong sillok*, 25th day of the 9th lunar month, 1883; 27th day of the 11th month, 1903.

Closer comparison of the *Temple God* and *Host of Guardian Deities*, painted also by Chehun and others in 1885 for the Hall of Ultimate Bliss, may help answer the question raised above. Chehun's assembly depicts rows of guardian deities within a single composition (Fig. 8). At the upper left and right are fair-skinned Indra and Brahma, respectively, each holding a flower. At the lower center stands Skanda, the commander of this heavenly army and devoted guardian of Buddhist temples, with his two hands resting on a weapon. On either side of Skanda are the kitchen god (*jowangsin* 竈王神) and mountain god (*sansin* 山神), who joined the pantheon of guardian deities in the late 18th century. Arranged in an inverted triangle, the three haloed figures are surrounded by multiple divinities—both civil and martial—along with celestial musicians and attendants. This composition enjoyed great popularity around the capital in the late 19th century (H.

Figure 8. Daeheo Chehun and others, *Host of Guardian Deities*, 1885. Color on silk. 150.7×219.3 cm. Hall of Ultimate Bliss, Heungcheonsa temple, Seoul
Source: RIBCH.

Figure 9. Detail of the *Host of Guardian Deities* (1885) showing the kitchen god
Source: RIBCH.

Figure 10. Detail of the *Host of Guardian Deities* (1885) showing the martial guardian
Source: RIBCH.

Kim 2015). The iconographical features of the kitchen god merit further examination (Fig. 9). The bearded deity wears a dark hood tied at the back instead of kingly headgear, holding a book in his right hand. The dark hood, three-pronged beard, and book are reminiscent of well-established iconographical traits of Guan Yu.[20] The martial figure at the left of the painting in the middle row shows a further iconographical link to Guan Yu (Fig. 10). He holds a weapon identifiable as the Bluegreen Dragon Crescent Moon Halberd wielded by Guan Yu in the *Sanguo yanyi*. Taken together, the two figures recall depictions of Guan Yu and his weapon-bearer Zhou

20. The book most likely stands for the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (Spring and Autumn Annals) that Guan Yu is said to have read constantly. See H. Kim (2015, 61).

Figure 11. Shang Xi, *Guan Yu Captures General Pang De*, ca. 1430, Ming dynasty. Ink and color on silk. 200.0×237.0 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing
Source: Public domain.

Figure 12. Gyeongseon Eungseok and others, *Host of Guardian Deities*, 1867. Color on silk. 139.1×191.2 cm. Hall of the Great Hero, Bomunsa temple, Seoul
Source: RIBCH.

Cang 周倉 in Shang Xi's 商喜 (fl. ca. 1430–1440) well-known painting or Mao Zonggang's 毛宗崗 (1632–1709) *Huitu Sanguo yanyi* 繪圖三國演義 (Illustrated Romance of the Three Kingdoms) (Fig. 11). Combination of the two figures in fact traces back to the *Host of Guardian Deities* (1867) of Bomunsa 普門寺 temple, executed by the renowned monk-painter Gyeongseon Eungseok 慶善應釋 (d.u.) (Fig. 12).[21] The iconographical borrowing was apparently well received in the capital area, considering that similar depictions reappear not only in Eungseok's later works but also in other monk-painters' works from the 1870s to 1890s, including Chehun's (H. Kim 2015, 60–63). The pair of images shown in this group of guardian deities attests to the iconographical openness of the genre and, further, the great popularity that Guan Yu enjoyed in the late 19th century.

As the historical Guan Yu became an arena where different religious identities and political symbolism were superscribed, his iconography evolved to reflect the diverse titles bestowed on him and religious roles ascribed to him (Duara 1988; ter Haar 2017). Compared with the kitchen god, Chehun's depiction of the temple god shows a particular dimension of the Guan Yu cult and its iconography that is more historically contingent. A different type of images, which served as objects of independent worship at state-run Guan Yu temples or private shrines of varying sizes, show intriguing similarities with Chehun's portrayal of the temple god from the dark red face with stern expression to the courtly attire and frontal pose. In particular, the dark red complexion is a trait that ties the temple god to the now-lost Guan Yu icon at Nammyo temple and to contemporaneous images of Guan Yu (Fig. 7). The clay image of King Gwan at Nammyo temple, according to Yu Seong-ryong 柳成龍 (1542–1607), is said to have a face as red as a ripe jujube, eyes of a phoenix, and a beard draped over

21. Prior to this, the kitchen god had been represented primarily as a civil official holding a container of the Five Phases (*ohaeng tong* 五行筒). The portrayal of the god is based on an illustration found in the *Yushu jing* 玉樞經 (Scripture on the Jade Pivot), a Daoist scripture of Song origin that became very popular in late Joseon. Kim Hyun-joong argued that the iconographical borrowing may have been based on the *Gyeongsinnok* 敬信錄 (Records on Reverence and Faith) in which the cults of the kitchen god and the Saint Guan (Gwanseong 關聖) are shown to be interrelated. See H. Kim (2015, 51–60).

Figure 13. Guan Yu of Bungmyo temple, 1883. Wood and clay. Height 2.16 m. Main Hall of Dongmyo temple, Seoul
Source: CHA.

his belly (Yu 1876, 2: 9a–10a).[22] The red-faced deity is commonly found in the *Temple God*, a statue of Guan Yu, the main object of worship at Bungmyo temple founded in 1883, and contemporaneous paintings of varying artistic standards and religious orientations (Fig. 13). For instance, the two paintings of Guan Yu in the collection of the National Museum of Korea (NMK), stylistically datable to the reign of King Gojong, portray him with dark red face (Figs. 14, 15). This visual convention seems to have spread widely in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as exemplified by the *Portrait of Gwanseong* (1913), in which the renowned portraitist Chae Yong-

22. The clay icon of Nammyo temple was refurbished in 1600 because the original icon was thought to have been too small for a proper temple to the god, see *Seonjo sillok*, 29th day of the 1st lunar month, 1600.

sin 蔡龍臣 (1848–1941) depicted the "Saint Gwan" (Gwanseong 關聖) in a similar manner (Jina Chang 2008, 109–110).[23] This iconographical feature is commonly found in shamanistic paintings of Guan Yu, too (Taegon Kim 1989, 168–169).

Figure 14. Artist unknown, *Guan Yu*, late 19th century. Ink and color on silk. 72.4×52.1 cm. National Museum of Korea, Seoul
Source: NMK.

23. Recently, the art historian Kang Suji discussed another painting of Guan Yu dressed in a green robe with a black hood. This painting seems to have been created earlier than the two NMK paintings, considering that the visual signs of deification have not been adopted. See Kang (2018, 193–194).

Figure 15. Artist unknown, *Guan Yu*, late 19th century. Ink and color on silk. 102.5×66.6 cm. National Museum of Korea, Seoul
Source: NMK.

Another important commonality is found in the attire of the temple god, the Guan Yu icons at state-run temples to the god, and shaman paintings of the god. In the Heungcheonsa painting, the deity wears a white inner robe under a red outer one, both shoulders of which are decorated with a linear white wave-and-cloud pattern (Fig. 16). He also wears two belts, around the chest and waist, respectively, as well as a golden headgear. The red outer robe and headgear of the temple god, though greatly modified, are derived from kingly attire of the Joseon dynasty. Dressing deities in such attire was

Figure 16. Detail of the *Temple God*
Source: RIBCH.

a deep-rooted visual convention in religious art, since attire was perceived as a prominent channel for the expression of royal authority and dignity. This visual convention was gradually applied in cult images of Guan Yu at official temples, too. Earlier representations of Guan Yu, exemplified by the icon at Dongmyo temple, show him wearing a wide robe over Ming-style armor (Fig. 17). When the icon was first made by Joseon artisans under the supervision of a Ming officer, the armor, exposed in the chest and lap of the deity, was selected so as to remind worshippers of Guan Yu's dignity and

Figure 17. Guan Yu of Dongmyo temple, 1601. Gilt bronze. Height 2.5 m. Main Hall of Dongmyo temple, Seoul
Source: Public domain.

Figure 18. Guan Yu of Seomyo temple (the image on the right), early 20th century. Wood. Height 69.0 cm. Main Hall of Dongmyo temple, Seoul
Source: CHA.

martial valor (Jang 2012, 93–97). The Chinese armor came to be covered with a piece of real clothing, most probably a king's daily garment called *gollyongpo* 袞龍袍 (dragon robe), during the reign of King Yeongjo 英祖 (r. 1724–1776) at the latest. Four roundels with images of dragons are normally attached on the chest, back, and both shoulders of such robes. King Yeongjo ordered the old dragon robes at Nammyo and Dongmyo temples to be repaired in 1746 and bestowed new dragon robes to the two temples in 1767.[24] Such a practice was meant to present the Chinese deity as a tutelary guardian of the Joseon dynasty. When the Bungmyo statue was created, the practice of dressing the Guan Yu icon with a dragon robe had been well-established to the point of even replacing a Chinese robe worn over the armor. Although the dragon robe is currently painted emerald green, it seems likely to have originally been painted red, based on contemporaneous images of Guan Yu (Fig.13). Furthermore, the deity wears a winged coronet called *ikseongwan* 翼善冠, two jade belts, and boots. The two NMK paintings of Guan Yu show him dressed similarly with red robes and winged coronets accentuated in gold (Figs. 14, 15). The Guan Yu icon of Seomyo temple is represented in a similar fashion, wearing a golden winged coronet and red dragon robe (Fig. 18).[25] In other words, these images represent Guan Yu like a Joseon monarch, which is clearly different from Chinese conventions of portraying him as a mighty warrior in a green robe with a black hood, as in Shang Xi's painting or a Chinese emperor in a yellow dragon robe (Fig. 11) (Jina Chang 2008, 99–102).

Iconographical features of the temple god as a whole are reminiscent of the Korean convention of representing Guan Yu, a protector of legitimate and righteous rulers, which had been well-established by the late 19th

24. *Yeongjo sillok*, 10th day of the 8th lunar month, 1746; 28th day of the 2nd month, 1767.

25. Curiously, the *Gojong sillok* only records the enshrinement of pictorial icons and not sculptural ones at Seomyo temple (*Gojong sillok*, 27th day of the 4th month, 1904). However, a photo from the Japanese colonial period shows the three statues enshrined against the portraits of the three figures hung on the wall (Jang 2012, 115–121). Although it is hard to identify their exact date of production, their formal and iconographical features suggest they were made not long after the completion of Seomyo temple. Seomyo temple's statues and ritual accoutrements were transferred to Dongmyo temple in 1909.

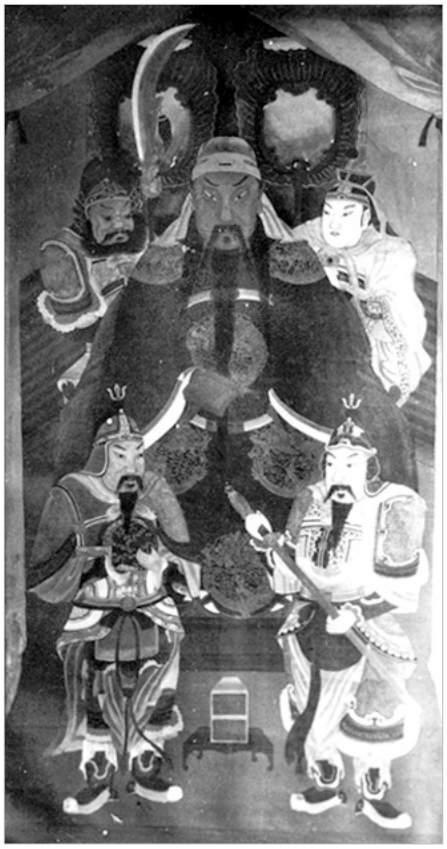

Figure 19. Photograph showing a portrait of Guan Yu, early 20th century. National Museum of Korea, Seoul
Source: NMK.

century and continued well into the early 20th, as a pictorial icon of the god with his attendant generals demonstrates (Fig. 19). Clearly, to create his painting, Chehun had followed an artistic tradition linked with the official cult of Guan Yu of representing the god as a Joseon monarch. To better understand the *Temple God*, we need to further examine Guan Yu as a tutelary deity of the dynasty in the late Joseon and his importance as an emblem of divine protection in times of political upheaval and chaos.

King Gwan, the Tutelary Deity of the Monarch and Heungcheonsa Temple

For a long time after the Imjin Wars the Joseon court remained rather indifferent to the Guan Yu temples. Vicissitudes in the perception of Guan Yu within Joseon Korea were intertwined with measures to strengthen the royal authority amid the changing political order of northeastern Asia following the Ming-Qing transition. Renewed royal interest in the Guan Yu temples, which began to appear in the reign of King Sukjong 肅宗 (r. 1674–1720), should be regarded as an expression of Joseon's obligations to Ming China even under Manchu dominance (Kuwano 2015).[26] Such royal interests turned out to be an opportunity to reorganize the ceremonial system for the Guan Yu temples. The sacrificial rites at official Guan Yu temples were incorporated into state rituals during the reign of King Yeongjo. While consolidating the custom of dressing the Guan Yu icon as a Joseon monarch, King Yeongjo linked the loyalty of Guan Yu—a universal virtue of righteousness—to Joseon's gratitude to the Ming for entering the peninsula during the Imjin Wars.[27] King Jeongjo 正祖 (r. 1776–1800) also took several measures to elevate the status of Guan Yu and promote the cult of the deity, whom he portrayed as the embodiment of loyalty and martial spirit as well as the tutelary deity of Joseon in the lyrics of newly composed ritual music for the temples (M. Kim 2016, 11–22).

The tradition of visiting the Guan Yu temples and performing sacrificial rites to the deity continued throughout the reign of King Gojong. King Gojong went a step further, embracing popular devotion to Guan Yu, which had often been condemned as "unorthodox rites" (*eumsa* 淫祀) during his predecessors' reigns,[28] even taking advantage of Guan Yu's intense

26. Daebodan 大報壇 altar, established in 1704 by King Sukjong, provides an interesting case to consider in this regard, see Kye (2014).
27. King Yeongjo composed two records commemorating Guan Yu, for the Nammyo and Dongmyo temples, respectively. See *Seungjeongwon ilgi*, 21st day of the 8th lunar month, 1746. For the stele texts, see Seoul teukbyeolsi munhwa gwangwangguk (2000, 3: 3–12).
28. For examples of such royal ordinances, see *Sukjong sillok*, 19th day of the 6th lunar month, 1703; *Yeongjo sillok*, 13th day of the 12th lunar month, 1761.

popularity among his subjects through a variety of special measures.[29] Above all, a number of *seonseo* 善書 (morality books) and Daoist scriptures, focusing mostly on Guan Yu, Wenchang 文昌 (Munchang in Korean) and Fuyou 孚佑 (Bu'u in Korean), were published intensively by both the king and a few lay Daoist societies around the capital from the late 1870s to the early 1880s. The three historical figures became deified collectively as the Sansheng dijun 三聖帝君 (Samseong jegun in Korean; "Three Lord-Emperors") and incorporated into the Daoist pantheon (I. Kim 2003). In 1880, King Gojong ordered a reprint of the *Gyeongsinnok* 敬信錄 (Records on Reverence and Faith, first published in 1795), the *Gyeongsinnok eonseok* 敬信錄諺釋 (Vernacular Korean Translation of the Records on Reverence and Faith, first published in 1796), and the *Taesang gameungpyeon doseol* 太上感應篇圖說 (Illustrations and Explanations of the Most High's Treatise on Action and Response, published in 1848 and 1852), and newly published the *Gwahwa jonsin* 過化存神 (Where There Is the Holy, There Is Edification) and *Samseong hungyeong* 三聖訓經 (Scripture on the Instructions of the Three Holy Ones).

Aside from the *Gyeongsinnok*, all of the other texts were written in vernacular Korean script instead of Chinese logographs, in order to reach a wider readership. The *Gwahwa jonsin* and *Samseong hungyeong* are relatively short texts containing canonical accounts of Guan Yu, Wenchang, and Fuyou, miracle tales of their efficacy, and their spells. In particular, these two canonical texts begin with inscriptions describing the royal patronage and end with prayers for the longevity of the king, queen, and crown prince (Yoo 2006, 36–40; I. Kim 2014).[30] The selection of texts and script indicates that King Gojong intended to promote devotion to Guan Yu, a symbol of military prowess and unswerving loyalty, among his subjects. It is important

29. An explicit example is An Hyo-je's 安孝濟 (1850–1916) appeal to the throne to stop shamanistic rites at the Guan Yu temples and punish the impertinent shamans. Instead of prohibiting such practices, King Gojong condemned An to exile. See *Gojong sillok*, 21st day of the 8th lunar month, 1893. For an in-depth discussion of An Hyo-je's memorial, see Van Lieu (2019, 109–117).

30. For more on the publication of Daoist texts during the reign of King Gojong, see I. Kim (2003, 193–195) and Tak Kim ([2004] 2006, 79–80).

to note that these texts were published in 1880, a time when King Gojong was taking conservative measures to stabilize the political situation as his reforms ran into problems. The royal patronage of Daoist publications, discussed above, seems to have been geared towards the urgent needs of King Gojong, who aimed to re-establish royal authority and co-opt the popularity of Guan Yu for himself (Yoo 2006, 39–40).

King Gojong's interest in Guan Yu intensified during a series of chaotic and violent events that threatened his rule from the 1880s onward. The crucial turning point was the Imo Incident of 1882, during which rioters invaded the royal palace and threatened the lives of the king and queen. King Gojong credited Guan Yu for saving him and the queen, and repaid the deity by resuming construction of the Guan Yu temples. The construction of Bungmyo temple in 1883, just like the repairs on the Hall of Ultimate Bliss and dedication of Buddhist paintings in 1885 at Heungcheonsa temple, was an immediate consequence of the Imo Incident. King Gojong wrote an account of Bungmyo temple's founding in his own hand. In 1887, a stele carved with the king's writing was erected in the courtyard of Bungmyo temple (Figs. 20, 21).[31] The inscription opens with a brief introduction to the origin of Korean Guan Yu temples and narrates the Bungmyo temple's founding:

> I never neglected to revere him but honored him far more sincerely since my enthronement. One night, the king [i.e., King Gwan] appeared in my dream and also in the queen's dream.[32] I felt protected by the divine, wholeheartedly. Therefore, I searched for a site and decided to construct his temple underneath a cliff inscribed with the phrase, "Establishing the thoughts of Zengzi and Zhu Xi," in Songdong, in the northeastern part of

31. The stele currently stands at the National Museum of Korea in Seoul. For a detailed discussion of the stele text, see Van Lieu (2019, 105–109).

32. An interesting account of Guan Yu's appearance in King Gojong's dream is related in an article in *Byeol geongon* 別乾坤 (Another World), although we cannot substantiate its historical accuracy. In the spring of 1882, King Gojong is said to have had a dream in which Guan Yu saved him from a murderer. Queen Min is said to have had an identical dream a few days later. See Gogosaeng 考古生, "Gyeongseong-i gajin myeongso-wa gojeok" (Tourist Attractions and Historical Sites of Gyeongseong), *Byeol geongon* 23 (September 1929).

Figure 20. Photograph of the stele pavilion of Bungmyo temple, early 20th century. National Museum of Korea, Seoul
Source: NMK.

Figure 21. Stele of Bungmyo temple, 1887. Stone. National Museum of Korea, Seoul
Source: NMK.

> Sunggyobang. I financed the construction with funds from the *naebu*. In the autumn of *gyemi* [1883] construction was completed, and the temple was named Bungmyo. The design of the temple, such as its iconography, followed that of Nammyo temple … In the summer of *imo* [1882] prior to this, as a military uprising broke out and the insurgents stormed the palace, it was impossible to foresee any signs of the calamity. Shortly after, they were disbanded, arrested one after another, and punished according to the law. Three years later, in the winter of *gapsin* [1884], a coup was staged and I, together with the high and low of the palace, took refuge in the temple of Guan Yu [i.e., Bungmyo temple]. At the time, the enemies' power was so great that anything could have happened in a split second and I did not know what to do. Finally, the heinous traitors were caught and the enemy soldiers fled. The royal procession that had taken refuge returned safely and the state reclaimed peace … . (Ollimpik junbidan 1987, 196–197)

The inscription offers insights into the circumstances that led to the founding of Bungmyo temple and, more importantly, what King Gojong asked of the deity and did in return. The temple was constructed under the joint patronage of King Gojong and Queen Min with funds from the *naebu* 內府 (internal office). The *naebu* in this case most probably refers to the Naesusa 內需司 (Royal Treasury), an institution that administered the private estates of kings. The privy purse, more commonly called *naetang* 內帑, was separate from official government agencies of state finance and was oftentimes used for the patronage of royal votive temples. King Gwan's appearance in dreams was apparently taken as a personal sign of divine intervention. King Gojong, according to the inscription, felt bathed in divine favor. By constructing a new temple to Guan Yu, King Gojong aimed to reinforce the loyalty of his subjects, who could have easily turned into rioters, as he learned from the Imo Incident. Understanding King Gojong as the driving force behind the construction of Bungmyo temple allows us to re-evaluate popular accounts of its founding. Unofficial historical accounts relate that Bungmyo temple was founded by a female shaman favored by Queen Min for her prophetic powers in the aftermath of the Imo Incident. This shaman, who claimed to be possessed by Guan Yu, was later honored as the Jillyeonggun 眞靈君 (Lord

of the True Spirit). Similarly, Seomyo temple was said to have been founded in 1902 at the request of another shaman, Hyeollyeonggun 顯靈君 (Lord of the Wise Spirit) who enjoyed Imperial Consort Eom's 嚴貴妃 (1854–1911) lavish patronage (Hwang [1910] 2005, 1:193; N. Yi [1927] 2008, 140–141). The historical credibility of these accounts is beyond the scope of this short paper. In the very least, these unofficial accounts may reflect public reception of the royal patronage of the newly founded Guan Yu temples at the turn of the 20th century.

As examined previously, King Gojong had already patronized publication of the canonical texts of the Three Lord-Emperors prior to the construction of two temples and Queen Min's alleged association with Jillyeonggun. Furthermore, the large scale of the temple and high craftsmanship of its icons and ritual accoutrements suggest official patronage from the royal court (Jang 2012, 40–42).[33] As the king wrote in the stele inscription, the design and composition of Bungmyo temple closely followed those of Nammyo temple, the first state-run Guan Yu temple on the Korean Peninsula. The composition of Nammyo temple, consisting of a monumental Guan Yu icon and statues of four attendant generals, was maintained in the Bungmyo temple. It is noteworthy that King Gojong chose Nammyo over Dongmyo temple as his exemplar to follow. The Guan Yu icon of Nammyo temple, which survived the great fire of 1899 but was destroyed during the Korean War, had long been considered efficacious and, more importantly, was red-faced.[34] In addition, King Gojong ordered the performance of sacrificial rites to Guan Yu at Bungmyo temple in accordance with those of Nammyo and Dongmyo temples.[35] The king and crown prince paid a visit

33. An Hyo-je, who implored the throne to stop improper rites at the Guan Yu temples in 1889, acknowledged the king as founder of Bungmyo temple. See *Gojong sillok*, 21st day of the 8th lunar month, 1893.
34. Much of Nammyo temple was burned down in 1899 but was reconstructed the same year. The Guan Yu icon was returned after the reconstruction. See *Gojong sillok*, 14th day of the 2nd lunar month, 1899; *Seungjeongwon ilgi*, 19th day of the 4th lunar month, 1899. For more on the efficacy of the Nammyo icon, see *Hyeonjong sillok*, 17th day of the 10th lunar month, 1671 and Tak Kim ([2004] 2006, 76–78).
35. *Gojong sillok*, 25th day of the 9th lunar month, 1883.

to Bungmyo temple about a month after its completion to conduct sacrificial rites to Guan Yu.[36] Following this, King Gojong conducted the sacrificial rite only at Bungmyo temple among state-run Guan Yu temples in the capital area.[37] Such exceptional royal interest suggests that the construction of Bungmyo temple was part of King Gojong's measures to re-establish the royal authority that had suffered after the Imo Incident. The significance of Bungmyo temple increased as the king took refuge there during the Gapsin Coup, a failed three-day coup d'etat led by reformers in December 1884.[38] It is no wonder that King Gwan was considered a tutelary deity of the throne and the kingdom after the life-threatening political upheavals of 1882 and 1884.

Considering the heightened royal interest in the Guan Yu cult, it is no surprise to find a painting like *Temple God* in the main hall of Heungcheonsa temple, which also served the royal court. In fact, the reign of King Gojong witnessed an unparalleled degree of religious syncretism in the capital area (Walraven 2000; I. Kim 2003; Park 2017; Lee 2019). King Gojong and Queen Min were no exception to this rule; more precisely, they appear to have set the tone for the whole kingdom. It is well known that Queen Min lavishly patronized the performance of prayer rituals for the longevity and health of King Gojong and the crown prince. Court documents called *gungjung balgi* 宮中件記 (or 宮中撥記) reveal the number of such prayer rituals and objects used for them.[39] It is important to note that these rituals were performed at state-run Guan Yu temples, Buddhist temples, shrines of local gods, and residences of female shamans (Choi 1970, 67–72). On the birthday of King Gojong in the seventh lunar month, prayers for his health and longevity

36. *Gojong sillok*, 21st day of the 10th lunar month, 1883.
37. *Seungjeongwon ilgi*, 25th day of the 9th lunar month, 1883; 13th day of the 4th lunar month, 1885; 10th day of the 9th lunar month, 1892; 13th day of the 5th lunar month, 1893; 19th day of the 9th lunar month, 1893.
38. *Gojong sillok*, 19th day of the 10th lunar month, 1884.
39. The *gungjung balgi* refers to lists of objects used in daily life or special occasions written in vernacular Korean script by court ladies attending members of the royal family. The *gungjung balgi* under discussion seems to have been composed prior to 1902, since Seomyo temple, built between 1902 and 1903, is not included. See Choi (1970, 68).

were performed at Dongmyo, Nammyo, and Bungmyo temples under the patronage of Queen Min. The three Guan Yu temples also held prayer services in the first and tenth lunar months of every year. Various Buddhist temples, mostly in the capital area, similarly held prayer services on the birthday of King Gojong, New Year's Day, and the designated day of the tenth lunar month. Heungcheonsa temple was one such temple. It should be noted that the Guan Yu and royal votive temples in the capital area almost exclusively held prayer rituals whose merit was first and foremost dedicated to King Gojong. Queen Min did not sponsor prayer rituals of great scale for the crown prince at the Guan Yu temples, and mostly offered prayers at noted mountains and large rivers (Choi 1970, 68, 72–76; Son 2014, 42–45). In other words, the Bungmyo and Heungcheonsa temples, despite their different religious affiliations, functioned mainly as places to pray for the throne when Queen Min was still alive.

Such shared functions may have led monks at Heungcheonsa temple to enshrine an image of Guan Yu as the tutelary god of their temple and the reigning king whom they served. The divine protection of the mighty King Gwan may have been what the monks of Heungcheonsa temple—who had also survived the attack during the Imo Incident—wished for when they dedicated a new type of Buddhist painting. The *Temple God* of Heungcheonsa temple is thus best understood as embodying the sincere hopes of both the royal patrons and participating monks of the temple for divine protection. The temple god was perceived as the tutelary god of both the throne and the royal votive temple, Heungcheonsa. Shared aspirations for divine protection could have necessitated the creation of new iconography for the painting and allowed the enshrinement of the *Temple God*, depicting the tutelary god of non-Buddhist origin, next to other altar paintings of the main hall.

Conclusion

The *Temple God* of Heungcheonsa temple exemplifies the interface of court patronage of royal votive temples and Guan Yu temples during the reign

of King Gojong. Through a close examination of the painting against its immediate historical context, this study has traced the creation of a unique Buddhist painting. Granted, most Buddhist paintings commissioned by the royal court were dedicated to the repose of deceased members of royalty or the birth of a prince. The dedicatory wishes recorded in the *Temple God* do not diverge from the standard. However, the unique iconography of the painting and the series of historical events preceding its production urge us to consider the religious and political implications of the painting that lie beyond the votive inscription. The distinctive iconography of the temple god, the tutelary guardian in the mien of a Joseon monarch, attests that the painting was sponsored by, or at least on behalf of, the royal couple. To King Gojong and his close associates, the creation of *Temple God* could have been understood as part of royal patronage of the Guan Yu cult just like the dedication of icons at the newly constructed Guan Yu temples. Therefore, the *Temple God* represents King Gojong's patronage of the Guan Yu cult and thus should be understood as one of the political emblems of King Gojong in visual format. That such a religious and artistic hybrid could have been enshrined in the main hall of Heungcheonsa temple attests to the conspicuous religious syncretism accommodated by the royal court as well as the Buddhist monastic community at the time. In this sense, the *Temple God* is a hybrid that was created through interactions among different social groups across the boundaries that usually divided Buddhism, state-approved worship, and popular religions. The *Temple God* is one of the most remarkable examples of cultural interactions in the final days of the Joseon dynasty.

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