Special Feature

The Guan Yu Cult and Joseon-Qing Visions of State Legitimacy, 1882-1894*

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The Guan Yu Cult and Joseon State Legitimacy in the Late Nineteenth century

In 1910, Hwang Hyeon 黃玹 wrote that in the late 1880s noted Joseon official Yi Yuin 李裕寅 was a beggar on the streets of Seoul. Although Yi had left his humble beginnings in the town of Gimhae 金海 and managed to pass the military exam he remained destitute. One day he heard that Lord Jillyeong 眞靈君, the shaman who channeled the god Guan Yu on behalf of the Joseon throne, enjoyed the unwavering trust of King Gojong and Queen Min and thereby wielded great influence in state affairs. Moreover, she had a fondness for the occult arts and here, in Hwang's telling, Yi Yuin sensed an opportunity for his own advancement. He circulated a rumor that he could summon ghosts and had the wind and rain at his command. Word reached Lord Jillyeong and aroused her curiosity; she invited Yi for a meeting. Upon his arrival she immediately asked him to conjure a ghost. Hwang wrote that Yi said, "That is easy enough but I suspect you may be frightened. You must first ritually bathe for several days to purify yourself." Yi then left and called upon a group of his wandering ruffian associates from Yeongnam 嶺南 and secretly gave them instructions.

Hwang continued that in the evening Yi Yuin took Lord Jillyeong to the deepest part of Bukhan Mountain 北漢山. The pine forest was dark and remote; flowing fireflies alone illuminated the gloom. The atmosphere was otherworldly even before the summoning of ghosts. Hwang recounted that Yi Yuin spoke to her grimly, "I am here; do not be afraid." Yi then shook a towel in the dark and shouted, "Azure Emperor-General of the East, come forth!" A ghost appeared and solemnly bowed, its entire body an azure-blue. "Is that all?" Lord Jillyeong asked. "What's so frightening about that?" "Be quiet and wait," Yi Yuin replied.

Hwang recounted that Yi once again called out, "Crimson Emperor-General of the South, come forth!" A ghost ten feet tall appeared, its entire body a crimson red. Its head was shaped like a winnow with four horns, bulging eyes like red glass, and a mouth dripping with blood. A rancid odor assaulted them as the ghost stood and raised its fists with a demonic ferocity as though it was

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preparing to attack. Lord Jillyeong stomped on Yi Yuin's foot and said, "Quick! Dispel the ghost! I don't want to see anymore!"

Hwang Hyeon assured us that these ghosts were Yi Yuin's co-conspirators wearing masks but Lord Jillyeong was not as discerning; she returned to court and reported these goings on to the throne. King Gojong and Queen Min commanded Yi Yuin to come in for an audience. So impressed were they by Yi's qualities that by 1890 they had appointed him to the Yangju Magistracy 揚州牧, the first of many appointments throughout the remaining years of the Gojong reign.[1] From then onward Yi Yuin and Lord Jillyeong became bound as mother and son. There were allegations that he occasionally spent the night with her at the Northern Guan Yu Temple where she lived but, Hwang Hyeon wrote, these were nothing more than obscene rumors.[2]

Lord Jillyeong, the king's and queen's devotion to her and their devotion to Guan Yu were to become a stock topic in popular histories of Korea published during the colonial period. Writers as diverse as the literatus Hwang Hyeon above on the eve of annexation, historians Jeong Gyo 鄭喬 and Gim Taegyeong 金澤榮 in the 1910s, the Daoism scholar Yi Neunghwa 李能和, popular historians Gim Byeongeop 金炳業 and Gim Yonghak 金龍學 in the 1920s, and finally Jang Dobin 張道斌 in the first few months after liberation, all held up the lord and the queen as the very quintessence of irrationality, superstition, and fiscal excess at the heart of the Joseon failure to embrace the modern, a failure that invited, if not necessitated, Japanese colonial rule.[3] While the majority of the humiliating anecdotes these authors included in their texts are easily traced to Hwang Hyeon, Hwang himself appears to have created several elements of the narrative from his reading of the 1893 memorial of An Hyoje 安孝濟. An was infuriated by the resources devoted to the Guan Yu cult and to Lord Jillyeong personally. He found her rituals at court deeply inappropriate and despaired at how willing the king and queen and their courtiers were to accept such ritual improprieties, fiscal abuse, and what he saw as the degradation of royal prestige. This assault on the royal dignity that was best halted by beheading

1. *Gojong Sunjong sillok* (Seoul: Tamgudang, [1935] 1986), 25.10.14. Citations of the *sillok* are in the form: reign year. lunar month.lunar day.
2. This tale may be found in its entirety in Hwang Hyeon's *Maecheon yarok*. See Hwang (1910) 1971, 69-70.
3. Even in more recent scholarship there some hesitation to take the nineteenth-century Joseon state Guan Yu cult seriously. See Hong 2018; Gim 2016.

Lord Jillyeong. Upon learning of An's remonstrance, the queen called for *his* execution, but the king intervened and instead sentenced him to banishment (Gim 1928, 12:22b-23a, 25a; Song 1974, 202). The Joseon throne took the Guan Yu cult seriously. He had saved the monarchy, not once, but twice in as many years; first during the Emeute of 1882 and once more during the Coup of 1884. There could be no better indication of the legitimacy of the Joseon state in general and Gojong's rule in particular; Guan Yu had bestowed his divine protection.

The king and the queen, however, were not the only ones to take the Guan Yu cult seriously. The officers of the Qing expeditionary forces who restored the throne to King Gojong in the wake of the 1882 and 1884 incidents also understood their victories as a matter of divine will. They donated plaques to the Southern and Eastern Guan Yu Temples inscribed with phrases and verse that praised the virtuous and heroic qualities of Guan Yu and, like the King Gojong and Queen Min, connected his interventions to his concern for the welfare of Joseon as a legitimate state. And yet, despite this seemingly shared understanding of Guan Yu and the manifestation of his will in the temporal world, there was a divergence of interpretation. If the deity intervened in Joseon out of his concern for the survival of a legitimate ruling house, what was the source of that legitimacy? The Qing texts mounted within the temple precincts make clear that Joseon legitimacy was the product of receiving investiture and submitting tribute to continental empires. King Gojong, however, personally composed offertory odes, which were read within the temples during sacrifices to Guan Yu, as well as a substantial stele text erected in the courtyard of the Northern Guan Yu Temple, which reveal an understanding on the part of the Joseon throne that there was a universality to Guan Yu's defense of the legitimate that reached far beyond the interstate politics of investiture; the Joseon state and throne were worthy of divine protection on their own merits without consideration of any relationship to the Qing Empire.

This contestation of the source of Joseon state legitimacy played out within the textual spaces of the Seoul Guan Yu Temples. Qing interpretations of the divine interventions defined, and were defined by, the spaces of the temple precincts by virtue of their physical presence in the form of plaques hung inside and outside the temple structures. The Joseon throne also produced texts, in the forms of offertory odes read within the temple spaces and a courtyard stele, which presented an opposing understanding of the divine manifestations and

the constitution of the state legitimacy that brought them into being. The discursive space of the Guan Yu cult, both as abstraction and as physical site defined by text, served as a locus of contestation in which the Joseon throne and the Qing military sought to define themselves and one another in a period in which the Joseon-Qing relationship was in the midst of a profound renegotiation brought on by rapidly changing geopolitical and security calculi. The Guan Yu cult was more than the sad joke of failed modernity in colonial era histories of Joseon misrule; it was part of Joseon-Qing navigations of a late nineteenth-century modern defined by the currents of global imperialism.

Guan Yu in Joseon

The historical Guan Yu was a general who lived in the period of intense political violence that characterized the final decades of the Eastern Han during the late second and early third centuries of the common era. Along with Zhang Fei, he served Liu Bei, a warlord and distant claimant to the Han throne who founded the Shu Han state in 221 CE. Guan failed as a general to militarily restore the Han; indeed, he and his son were beheaded in captivity (ter Haar 2017, 5). This incident, however, proved to be only a temporary setback as Guan Yu underwent a posthumous deification from the late sixth century (ter Haar 2017, 26-44; Van Lieu 2014, 41-42). From that time forward Guan Yu became a deity of many abilities, including exorcism, control of rain, and a defender against demons, bandits, and barbarians, and eventually the ultimate defender of moral order with a particular interest in aiding and defending legitimate rulers and their loyal subjects. By the closing decades of the establishment of the Ming Empire in the seventeenth century, Guan Yu had received the title of Emperor Guan 關帝 (ter Haar 2017, 173-78).

At the close of the sixteenth century, despite a millennium of Chinese faith, the Guan Yu cult had not yet spread in Joseon, whether as a state cult or a popular religion. The Ming military intervention during the Imjin Wars of 1592-1598 brought faith in Guan Yu for the first time. Ming soldiers had visions on the field of battle in which Guan Yu appeared in the clouds with his divine armies to drive away the Japanese. So moved were some of the commanders that they built shrine to Guan Yu outside of the South Gate of Seoul in 1598 to express their gratitude for the final victory against Hideyoshi's

forces. This was to become the Southern Temple 南廟. Ming commanders approached the Joseon court to ensure that King Seonjo attend the opening ceremonies and other rituals to express gratitude to Guan Yu for having saved his throne but the king and many of his officials, especially those in the Censorate, were deeply uncomfortable with the prospect of having to participate in what they saw as an affront to the royal dignity posed by a wholly foreign superstition. Seonjo finally did participate but only once (Van Lieu 2014, 49-56).

In 1599 the Ming emperor issued an edict to the Joseon court commanding the construction of a second temple. Built outside the East Gate of Seoul, this came to be known as the Eastern Temple 東廟. Unlike the Southern Temple, which was built in a few weeks, the Eastern Temple construction project took three years. It was plagued by shortages of materials, manpower, and the outright theft of construction materials. The fraud, abuse, and perceived pointlessness of the project at time when Joseon was still reeling from the impact of war all combined for a hostile political climate. Seonjo, however, could not bring himself to directly defy a Ming edict, especially after his own kingdom had been saved by Ming expeditionary forces. He had to continue with the project at enormous expense for a cult in which no one in Joseon believed. Indeed, for years after the completion of the project, government officials and other observers could not understand why the Ming court had ordered the construction or what purpose the worship of Guan Yu could possibly serve (Van Lieu 2014, 62-63).

Decades would pass before the Joseon court finally came to see the utility of a state sponsored Guan Yu cult. From the 1680s, Kings Sukjong, Yeongjo, and Jeongjo all found support for a Joseon state Guan Yu cult to be of substantive political benefit. As Guan Yu was a deity concerned with the defense of legitimate rulers and loyal subjects, his cult was useful to Sukjong and Yeongjo in particular for settling or at least marginalizing questions of royal legitimacy and dampening the ferocity of court factionalism. A monarch enjoying the favor of Guan Yu would have to be, by definition, legitimate. Moreover, placing factional interests above the welfare of king and country was a form of disloyalty, a crime for which Guan Yu had no tolerance and brought swift and terrible punishment. Thus, it was that from the late seventeenth century and across the eighteenth century, the Guan Yu cult became an integral part of the system of Joseon state ritual (Han 2003; Yi 2014; Gim 2016).

The Divinity of Qing Military Intervention, 1882 and 1884

In the summer of 1882 Joseon soldiers stationed in Seoul erupted in rebellion after suffering months without pay while a new elite Special Skills Corps enjoyed augmented pay, provisions, the newest equipment, and the latest military training under a Japanese drill instructor Horimoto Reizo 堀本禮造. When the Joseon quartermaster finally issued them their rations in rice, the soldiers found them to be spiked with stones and sand in order to cheat them of their due pay. The soldiers killed the quartermaster and went on a rampage for several days, killing Joseon officials associated with military reform, setting fire to the Japanese legation, killing Horimoto and members of the legation staff, and hounding the Japanese minister and his men out of the country. They also broke into the royal palace seeking to execute Queen Min while calling upon the Daewongun 大院君 李昰應, previously the royal regent from 1864 to 1872, to resume control of the government in place of his son King Gojong. The Queen managed to escape the palace disguised as a maidservant and fled into the countryside while King Gojong remained and ceded power to his father. By the end of the uprising, the Daewongun had resumed power, King Gojong was king in name only, and the queen was missing. The Daewongun declared her dead and issued the command to prepare her state funeral.[4]

One month after the violence ended and the Daeweongun restored his regime, Qing troops under the command of Wu Zhangqing 吳長慶 routed the Joseon soldiers and took control of Seoul. They abducted the Daewongun and took him to Baoding 保定 in Qing for a three-year confinement on the pretense that he had dethroned the legitimate king in possession of Qing investiture. During the early days of this operation, General Wu made his headquarters at the Eastern Guan Yu Temple outside the East Gate of Seoul. In the wake of this intervention and a second intervention in the coup of 1884 (Cook 1972; Sin 2013), a total of sixteen Qing officers of sundry ranks presented plaques to the Eastern Guan Yu Temple expressing both their admiration for Guan Yu and the way in which they understood Joseon-Qing relations as mediated through Guan Yu's divine manifestation.

The present article considers four such texts. The first two are framed

4. For a detailed account of the 1882 revolt, see Jo 2013, 263-317.

horizontal plaques 扁額·懸板, each composed of four characters and donated in autumn of 1882, just a few months after the Qing suppression of the emeute. The second two are paired of vertical column plaques 柱聯, one pair presented in 1883 in reference to the 1882 revolt and the other in 1885 in reference to the coup of 1884. There are three themes that permeate the Qing texts of the 1880s. The first is that the Qing interventions were matters of great fortune and happiness for Joseon. The Qing expeditionary force was an agent of purification and rectification. Second, there was a connection between Joseon and the Han Empire of antiquity that is important in understanding why it was that Guan Yu intervened in Joseon affairs. Third, there was no differentiation between the intervention of Guan Yu and the Qing military intervention. Guan Yu himself did not make an appearance; he worked through the Qing military to enact his will. This is theme that permeates the Qing texts by the fact of their location. Guan Yu and his divine intervention in human affairs is the context in which all the texts in the temple precincts are to be understood.

Wu Zhangqing was the first to present a plaque to the temple in October of 1882, about three months after the emeute. The text reads, "Conceived in purity, bound for glory" 惟淸緝熙.[5] While this statement is vague, considered in temporal and spatial context its meaning becomes clearer. Wu commanded an expeditionary force to cleanse Joseon of an illegitimate regime and restore the proper political order as ordained by the Qing investiture of King Gojong; the mission was conceived in purity of intent and the results were bound for glory as the Qing victory and Gojong's ensuing restoration to the throne illustrated. The presence of the text within the temple precincts firmly locates the sentiment in relation to Guan Yu. As a deity concerned with moral and ethical order, Guan Yu would naturally act through the Qing mission, pure of intent as it was, to punish pretenders and restore the legitimate sovereign to the throne, thereby restoring not just the Joseon political order as validated by Qing investiture but also the Qing imperium in its broadest understanding as a universal empire.

Another Qing officer, Huang Shilin 黃仕林, presented a plaque to the Eastern Temple in December 1882 that reads, "Fortune washes over the Three Han" 福波三韓.[6] Here Hwang is more explicit than Wu Zhangqing. Again, as

5. At the time I first conducted research on this project this plaque was located under the eaves of the west fact of the Eastern Temple. An image of this plaque may be found in Jang 2012, 75.
6. At the time I first conducted research on this project this plaque was located under the eaves of the west fact of the Eastern Temple. An image of this plaque may be found in Jang 2012, 76.

this text is mounted within the temple precincts, we must understand it within the context of Guan Yu's interventions in human affairs. Moreover, the fact that the text was donated by a Qing officer so soon after the emeute makes its meaning clear. In the first half of the text, Guan Yu has engulfed Joseon in a wave of good fortune 福波, the waves of this fortune washing up upon the shores in the form of waves of Qing troops landing on the Joseon coast west of Seoul to restore politico-moral order. The military intervention of the Qing Empire is indistinguishable from the divine intervention of Guan Yu.

In the second half of the text, Hwang chose to use the term Three Han 三韓 rather than Joseon 朝鮮. During the Three Han period, the northern portion of Joseon territory was under the control of the Han Commanderies 漢四郡, the military colonies of the Han Empire, while the southern portion of Joseon was occupied by three decentralized confederations of microstates: Mahan 馬韓, Jinhan 辰韓, and Byeonhan 弁韓. Huang's use of the term "Three Han" makes two rhetorical points. First, by equating Joseon with the Three Han, he suggested an ancient relationship with and deference to continental empires, in this case the Han, as the Han Commanderies were advanced outposts of culture while the Three Han were but loose tribal confederations bereft of authentic civilization.[7] This Joseon connection to the Han then provides a rationale for Guan Yu's interest in Joseon. If half of Joseon was once Han territory and the remaining half was in a deferent relationship with that territory, then Guan Yu, who in life was swore to restore the Han imperial house, would naturally come to the aid of Joseon to restore the politico-moral order in face of a clear usurpation of the throne. The suggestion is, in effect, that Joseon is Han.

Zhu Xianmin 朱先民, a lieutenant to General Wu, made the connection between Joseon and the Han Commanderies explicit in the paired column plaques he presented to the Eastern Temple on October 31, 1883. The first text of the pair reads:

> [He] enjoyed the Zuo Commentary on the *Spring and Autumn Annals* throughout all his days. [His] sincere aid all-pervasive, in July the imperial

7. For an exposition of the imagined superiority of the civilization of the Han commanderies in comparison to the Three Han of the southern Korean peninsula, see Chen (c. 280) 1977, 2:851-52.

army enacted the command to punish [the rebels].
生平好左氏春秋孚右能通六月王師申命討[8]

Hagiographies of Guan Yu commonly portray him as a master of the Zuo Commentary on the *Spring and Autumn Annals* with an especially keen interest in its emphasis on the virtues of loyalty and righteousness (ter Haar 2017, 202-06). Zhu suggested that this lifelong concern for these values formed the foundation of Guan Yu's "sincere aid." Moreover, this divine sincerity was the very energy that surged through the Qing troops as they carried out their orders to suppress the 1882 emeute; Qing troops were the instrument not only of the emperor's will but also of the divine will of Guan Yu. The Qing intervention itself here becomes the divine intervention of Guan Yu. There is no mention of Guan Yu himself manifesting with his divine armies to join in the fray of battle, as Ming soldiers reported during the Imjin Wars (Van Lieu 2014, 42-49). Guan Yu and the Qing military are as one.

The second text of Zhu Xianmin's pair makes explicit what Huang Shilin's text only suggests:

This land was of old a commandery of the Han imperial house. With the grant of investiture without reservation, for a thousand years [His] spirit kept [this land from] turmoil.
此地故漢家郡國提封無恙千季靈氣護風雲[9]

Zhu suggested here that Joseon was in some foundational way a territory of the Han Empire. As this plaque should be read in the parallel with the previous plaque, the implication is that Joseon being a part of the empire is as right as the righteousness and loyalty of the Zuo Commentaries in which Guan Yu took such great pleasure. Similarly, the unflinching Han granting of investiture to "this land" stands textually side-by-side with Guan Yu's "sincere aid" in the previous text, invoking a merging of the political act of investiture with the divine

8. At the time I first conducted research on this project this plaque was located on the east side of the west interior column of the antechamber of the Eastern Temple. An image of this plaque may be found in Jang 2012, 79.
9. At the time I first conducted research on this project this plaque was located on the west side of the east interior column of the antechamber of the Eastern Temple. An image of this plaque may be found in Jang 2012, 79.

intervention of Guan Yu. Indeed, it was the Han house and its full restoration to which Guan Yu had dedicated himself in life. It is then unsurprising, Zhu suggests, that Guan Yu would have spent the last millennium defending the states of the Korean peninsula from harm.

This is a key rhetorical moment for it is here that Guan Yu's manifestation in the form of the Qing expeditionary force becomes explainable from a Qing perspective. In contrast to earlier temple plaques presented by Ming officers in the wake of the Imjin Wars which locate the origins of Chinese investiture of Korean states with a request from the sage Gija/Jizi 箕子 (Van Lieu 2014, 44-47), Zhu locates this relationship in the Han military defeat and annexation of Old Joseon. Moreover, Guan Yu has exerted his strength and influence to defend Joseon because the origins of its territory and legitimacy, as expressed through investiture, can be traced to the Han, the very state he sought in life to restore. Placing the origin of investiture at this juncture locates the legitimacy of all the states of the Korean peninsula, from the first century BCE to the end of the nineteenth century of the Common Era, in the context of Chinese military conquest. In so doing, this claim serves as an expression of proposals among conservative Qing officials and intellectuals that Qing Empire would best be served by the annexation of Joseon on the basis of the Han precedent (Chien 1967, 132-33; Kim 1972, 184-85). Zhu thus expands the meaning of the divine protection of Guan Yu from the restoration of a monarch legitimate by virtue of Qing investiture to the legitimization of military occupation. Qing control of the Joseon capital becomes a restoration of the Han Commanderies as a realization of the divine will of Guan Yu.

Two years later, the Qing military again mobilized to intervene in Joseon affairs, this time to end the coup attempt of 1884 in which pro-Japanese reformers under the leadership of Gim Okgyun 金玉均 seized control of the government. After three days, Qing and Joseon troops under the command of Wu Zhaoyou 吳兆有 and Yuan Shikai 袁世凱 and others stormed the royal palace and put an end to Gim's nascent regime. Wu Zhaoyou presented a pair of column plaques to the Eastern Temple in May of 1885 to commemorate the victory and to express gratitude to the deity for his aid. The first text of the pair reads:

Great Righteousness is rooted in the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. How could wandering bandits and treasonous ministers be so fortunate as to escape the

executioner's axe?
大義本春秋豈客賊子亂臣倖逃斧鉞[10]

Like Zhu Xianmin before him, Wu begins with a reference to the *Spring and Autumn Annals* that in this case comes from *Mencius*, "When Confucius completed the *Spring and Autumn Annals,* treasonous ministers and bandits were terrified" 孔子成春秋而亂臣賊子懼.[11] The treasonous and criminal fear the *Spring and Autumn Annals* because the text illuminates righteous and loyal exemplars and lays bare the consequences for those who deign to ignore their model in favor of selfish, short-term desires. Wu makes the connection between Guan's reading of this text with his tireless punishment of the disloyal such that none could ever dream of flight. This is a clear reference to the Qing assault on Gim Okgyun and his co-conspirators. Once again, Qing military action is one in the same with the divine will of Guan Yu.

The second text of the pair reads:

[His] awesome spirit shakes past and present. Throughout history, he has expelled the barbarous and brought peace to civilized; for all eternity we make offerings of incense.
威靈震今古顧賴攘夷安夏永薦馨香[12]

Wu links the historical past and the miraculous present to show that the powers and concerns of Guan Yu are unchanged across time; his fantastic exploits of the Three Kingdoms period were in evidence in the present as manifest in the failed coup only six months previous. Whether man or god, he has always expelled the barbarous and defended the civilized. The Qing intervention of 1884 was no mere callous political calculation as it was an expression of the timeless workings of an eternal moral order first expressed in writing in the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and continually expressed in ritual action for all time to come.

10. At the time I first conducted research on this project this plaque was located on the east side of the eastern interior column of the antechamber of the Eastern Temple. An image of this plaque appears to have been inadvertently omitted from Jang 2012.
11. See chapter "滕文公下" of Mencius 孟子 of *Shisanjing zhushu* (Ruan [1815] 1983, 2:2715).
12. At the time I first conducted research on this project this plaque was located on the eastern column of the eastern exterior wall of antechamber of the Eastern Temple. An image of this plaque may be found in Jang 2012, 80.

Wu Zhangqing, Huang Shilin, Zhu Xianmin, Wu Zhaoyou, and all the other Qing officers who presented plaques to the Guan Yu Temples conceived of their victories in 1882 and 1884 as the direct result of Guan Yu's favor. Moreover, Huang, Zhu, and Wu, among others, saw this divine grace as the result of Joseon loyalty not only to the Qing Empire but to a series of continental empires backward through time to the Han. It was this imagined Korean submission across the centuries that moved Guan Yu to restore King Gojong's throne not once but twice. Guan Yu worked through Qing soldiery to defend the loyally submissive; it was Joseon submission as validated by Guan Yu's favor that was the marker of legitimacy.

Qing military figures in Seoul in the 1880s, however, were not alone in their contention that their role in quelling the rebellion of 1882 and toppling the government that briefly came to power after the coup of 1884 was the work of Guan Yu. King Gojong and Queen Min were convinced of this as well. The king had been making offerings at Guan Yu temples since his teens and the queen was swayed by her own harrowing experience of the revolt of 1882. Moreover, the Joseon state had sponsored the Guan Yu temples in Seoul since the turn of the sixteenth century. And yet, despite what was by the 1880s a shared faith in Guan Yu, Gojong did not share Qing explanations of his demonstration of divine grace.

King Gojong, Queen Min, and the Sincere Affection and Care of Guan Yu

Both King Gojong and Queen Min believed themselves to have had a special relationship with Guan Yu. This became apparent to them through the fact of their having survived the Emeute of 1882. Queen Min famously escaped the palace as the rampaging soldiers had broken in and were searching for her. She fled to Cheongju 淸州 where she hid for several weeks in complete secrecy. It was during this time, according to popular understanding, that she first came into contact with a shaman who claimed to be the daughter of Guan Yu. It is difficult to know the degree to which this tale is true, but it appears repeatedly in popular histories of Korea from at least 1910 to 1945. It is this very ubiquity that makes it worth recounting, and moreover, given the complaints in the memorial of An Hyoje in 1893, this narrative appears to have some accuracy, at

least in its broadest outlines.

Although there are variations in different texts, the narrative is largely as follows. While Queen Min was in hiding, an old woman claiming to be a shaman requested an audience. The shaman, who had the surname Yi 李, was from somewhere between Jecheon 堤川 and Cheongpung 淸風 in Chungcheong Province 忠淸道, not far from where the queen was in hiding. The queen met the shaman who predicted not only that the queen would safely return to her palace in Seoul but also predicted the date of her return. When the predictions turned out to be true, the queen was impressed and called the shaman to join her in Seoul. Upon her arrival the shaman announced that she was the daughter of Guan Yu, the divine savior of both the king and the queen during the uprising. The queen then bestowed the title Lord Jillyeong upon her and built the Northern Temple 北廟 where the queen installed her (Hwang [1910] 1971, 69-70; Gim [1918] 2006, 6:3a; Gim 1922, 2:563-64).[13]

From this point onward in popular histories from the first half of the twentieth century, Lord Jillyeong became the power behind the throne, holding the king and queen in her thrall and enjoying the position as one of the most important power brokers in Seoul. She frequented the court in military attire, had the ears of the king and queen, conducted rites in the palace precincts, and hosted the king and queen at her residence in the Northern Temple. Her influence over the throne attracted numerous courtiers attempting to develop relationships with her, competing with one another to call her "sister" or to induce her to take them as her adopted sons. Foremost among her considerable entourage were Jo Byeongsik 趙秉式, Yun Yeongsin 尹榮信, and Jeong Taeho 鄭太好 (Hwang [1971] 1910, 69-70; Jeong [1913] 1974, 1:20; Gim [1918] 2006, 6:3a; Gim 1922, 2:564; Gim 1928, 2:125a).

Official Joseon records remain almost entirely silent on Queen Min's involvement in the state Guan Yu cult but King Gojong wrote numerous offertory odes 祭文 for rites at Guan Yu Temples throughout the country which are preserved in his collected works.[14] In addition, he also composed the text of the Northern Temple Courtyard Stele 北廟廟庭碑 currently erected outside the National Museum of Korea in Seoul. The composition of offertorial odes

13. For variations on this narrative, see Yi 1927, 14-15; Jang 1945, 77-79; Gim (1912) 1972, 1(pt. 1):15a.
14. This work was edited and reprinted in 1999, and it was titled *Gojong munjiip*: *juyeonjip*.

might normally be a task the king would not actually undertake himself but rather delegate to a lesser scribe. Indeed, the offertory odes can come across as formulaic, leading one to suspect that they are generic and devoid of feeling. Gojong's odes, however, are more personal and less generic by virtue of the inclusion of particular events of personal importance, namely the incidents of 1882 and 1884. For Gojong, there is nothing generic about them; he and the queen could very well have been killed in both events and yet, as he reminds us in these texts, he, the queen, and the throne survived each time. It is not hard to imagine that a man having gone through those experiences might attribute his survival to divine protection. The same is true of the stele text. Hong Yungi (2018, 103-04) has pointed out the intimate style of the text to suggest that there is no reason to doubt that Gojong did indeed compose them. Moreover, Gojong writes about Queen's dreams and her punishing sleep schedule driven by her work ethic. It is highly unusual that she appears in official text at all and her presence in this stele text is even more unusual because of its intimate accounting of sleep and dreams.[15]

These texts show not only a deep faith in Guan Yu on the parts of the king and queen, but also a different understanding of the powers and interests of Guan Yu. First Gojong closely associated Guan Yu with the forces of the cosmos, suggesting that he was an emanation of natural rather than political energies. Second, Gojong saw faith in Guan Yu as universal. This echoes the earlier Ming sentiments about Guan Yu in the Imjin Wars; Guan Yu was omnipresent and everyone everywhere shared a faith in him. Third, Guan Yu intervened because virtues were in danger. His manifestations in the world did not relate directly to questions of investiture; the Joseon state was possessed of its own legitimacy and worthy of Guan Yu's protection on its own merits. I will consider in this article two texts Gojong composed for the Northern Temple: an offertorial ode and the courtyard stele text.

Gojong's offertorial ode for the Northern Temple to Guan Yu is broadly similar to most of the others he composed.[16] It consists of five parts, each composed of four couplets. In the first he began with an accounting of the cosmic qualities of Guan Yu and the universality of his power and faith. Second, Gojong continued with a recounting of Guan Yu's particular interest in Joseon.

15. *Bungmyo myojeong bi*, obverse face, line 6; reverse face, line 6.
16. Gojong, *Juyeon jip*, 4:20b.

Third, Gojong provided a dramatic rendition of Guan Yu's action in the human world. And finally, he concluded with expression of gratitude and pleas to accept his offerings. Gojong began:

I.
Primordial energy, prominent and strong, 一氣精剛
Heaven and Earth exist intrinsically. 自有天地

Throughout the ages without respite, 萬古不磨
You train your thought on trust and righteousness. 惟信與義

The rivers and streams long have flowed, 江河長存
Sun and stars illuminating the earth below. 日星垂示

Your Heroic Spirit permeates it all, 英靈貫之
You are only one, there is no other. 純一無二

II.
Amid the Four Seas, roiling into one another, 四海橫流
You firmly raised the Red Banner. 卓竪赤幟

And yet Your Great Ordering was incomplete, 整頓未了
And Your Heroic Will was frustrated. 慷慨雄志

Those troubled by the many difficulties of the world, 憫世多艱
Send their pleas to You, oh Servant of Heaven. 封狀天吏

Every household tends an altar to make offerings to you, 家尸戶祝
In this the civilized and barbarous are as one. 華夷一致

The basic characteristics of the universe, like the virtues of Guan Yu, are firm and unchanging. As the rivers and streams have long flowed through the earth and the light of celestial bodies illumined the world, the heroic spirit of Guan Yu permeates all, a wholly unique figure among all that is. Throughout all times and in all places he is undistracted from trust, which we may read here as loyalty and righteousness. During the Three Kingdoms period, Guan Yu threw himself into the geopolitical instabilities of the day and let fly the Red Banner

of the Han imperial house. Despite his bravery and perseverance, his attempts to restore the old order failed. Ever conscientious, however, Guan Yu hears the worries of the world and heeds the myriad households who tend his altars and make offerings, whether they are among the civilized 華 or the barbarous 夷. The faithful are myriad and he responds to them wherever and whoever they may be. It is this perceived pervasiveness of the deity and his faithful that acts as an equalizer between Qing and Joseon. Guan Yu is not limited by polity; he is guided only by adherence to universal principles, themselves indwelling the cosmos itself.

It is from this point the king began his supplication and account of past manifestations and interventions:

III.
Please look out for of Our Eastern Land, 眷我東方
Uplift us when we falter. 扶顚持墜

In the years of the dragon and snake The Deity was ardent, 龍蛇神烈
This is recorded in the chronicles of state. 國乘有記

Moreover in the years *im* [1882] and *gap* [1884], 粵在壬甲
The response of Your Spirit was even more remarkable. 靈應尤異

Your bright blade, a flash of moonlight! 月閃白鍔
Your crimson steed, a lightning strike! 電激赭驥

IV.
With the wind and thunder at Your command, 驅使風霆
You beheaded demons with Your mighty scolding. 叱咤斬魅

Brilliance, brilliance, shining bright! 赫赫明明
Simply inconceivable! 不可思議

Having received such determined aid, 蒙被騭佑
Peace and stability now prevail. 今休式至

In reverently repaying Your favor, 崇報之儀
Our deepest sincerity knows no end. 忱誠曷遂

After asking for divine protection, King Gojong tallied the divine interventions of the past. He first included the Imjin Wars, here indicated by reference to the years of the dragon (1592) and snake (1593), the revolt of 1882, and the coup of 1884. It is something of a strain to suggest that the events of 1882 and 1884 were "even more remarkable" than the Imjin Wars but perhaps for the King and Queen personally this was true. The king then provided a spirited account of Guan Yu's intervention. He appears upon his crimson steed brandishing his moonlit halberd. The elements are at his command and he slices off the heads of his enemies with his mighty shout. By the end the king seemed hardly able to contain his enthusiasm as the deity comes to serve justice upon his enemies.

Notably absent are references to any continental states, past or present, to the Qing Empire, to questions of investiture, or to the legitimacy of the Joseon state. Guan Yu here is a universal protector who responds to the needs of the faithful and defends legitimate rulers from the machinations of those who would disturb the rightful order. There is no need to explain why Guan Yu would have an interest in Gojong and his court. Guan Yu defends true sovereigns in their own right without regard to who or where they are. That Guan Yu had taken Qing troops as his instrument was of little interest to Gojong. It was the divine will that he addressed, not the medium of its expression.

V.

Now there is a temple in the north,	維北有廟
Your likeness in august repose.	有像儼莅
The rituals mirror the South and East,	制如南東
The offerings all made together.	一體將事
In this year our feelings increase,	是歲增感
I personally offer this chalice of wine.	躬奠罍觶
Your response is like an echo [of our pleas],	昭格如響
We offer these gifts for Your consideration.	歆鑑其賜

In the final section, Gojong presents the ways in which he and the state express gratitude for Guan Yu's interventions: an impressive new temple to the north, continued rites at the temples to the east and south, and a personal royal offering. In all, Gojong presents a relationship that is at once cosmic, national, and personal. Guan Yu courses through the air and water, he cares for the entirety of Joseon, and he has personally saved Gojong on two occasions. No matter the scale, this is a direct and immediate relationship unmediated by third parties.

Erected September 26, 1887, the text of the Northern Temple Courtyard Stele 北廟廟庭碑 is by far the most detailed account of Gojong's faith in Guan Yu, consisting of more than 1,100 characters.[17] Like the odes, the stele begins with the universal character of the Guan Yu faith, in this case suggesting that ritual offerings are entirely proper and carried out in every household. In this way, Gojong cast Joseon state ritual as part of a universal phenomenon. He continued with an account of the origins of the Joseon Guan Yu cult in the aftermath of the Imjin Wars at the close of the sixteenth century and the construction of the Southern and Eastern Temples.[18] This much is something close to boilerplate and does not auger the person tone Gojong was about to take.

He next recounted a visitation by Guan Yu. Both Gojong and Queen Min met Guan Yu in their dreams and so moved were they by the encounters that they both were sure the deity had communicated "a sincere affection and care" 諄諄眷佑 for them.[19] The shared experience convinced the king and queen to build the Northern Temple in recognition of the special grace they enjoyed. Gojong explained that this grace was clearly evidenced by the events of 1882 and 1884. In the first case, the rebelling soldiers had managed to break in to the palace without any warning. They royal couple was taken by complete surprise by the calamity and yet, Gojong continued, the rebels quickly dispersed; what had seemed like unmitigated disaster soon transformed into serenity and safety as the enemies met with justice once after the other. Similarly, in 1884 the king, queen, and their immediate family fled to the Northern Temple as Gim Okgyun and his associates took control of the government. The royal couple was so terrified they did not know what else to do, Gojong recalled. And yet,

17. For the text of the obverse face of the stele, see Hong 1987, 195-97; Jang 2012, 178-79. Both the obverse and reverse text can be found in Jo 2017, 1-2. The stele is currently erected outside the east facade of the National Museum of Korea in Seoul.
18. For a detailed account of the Joseon-Ming contestation of the establishment of the Guan Yu cult, see Van Lieu. 2014, 49-65.
19. *Bungmyo myojeong bi*, obverse face, line 6.

just as in 1882, the traitors who seemed so strong and pervasive suddenly fled and once again, at the moment when all seemed lost, peace and stability returned. For Gojong, there was only one explanation: Guan Yu. In light of their dreams of the deity, it was clear to Gojong that it was Guan Yu how had saved him and the queen from what should have been certain death:

> "Whose power was this? How could this not be an overwhelmingly clear experience of the sincere affection and care that we experienced in our dreams?"
> 誰之力疇昔夢遥若將眷佑者豈非明徵大驗耶[20]

> "This was not something the keenness of blades could achieve. Nor was it something the awe of axes could achieve. It must have been the enactment of heavenly retribution! It must have been the execution of divine punishment! How [astounding] this deity is!"
> 兵革之利之所不能及鈇鉞之威之所不能加必行天討必施陰誅何其神也[21]

It is important to note once more at this juncture that Gojong did not once mention the Qing military interventions in 1882 and 1884 that saved his throne and potentially his life, as well as the queen's life. This omission is all the more remarkable in consideration of the fact that the king and his family were able to escape the 1884 coup and flee to the Northern Temple when Wu Zhaoyou and Yuan Shikai commanded Qing forces to storm the palace and bring the coup to an end. It was during this attack that the royal family escaped and by different routes eventually arrived at the Northern Temple. Later Wu Zhaoyou met the king at the Northern Temple and brought him back to his headquarters while order was restored.[22] And yet, Gojong was quite explicit that his having survived the disturbances of 1882 and 1884 could not be explained by military action. It could not have been by force of arms that he remained on the throne. This is as close to a direct snub of the Qing court as he might make without directly citing the Qing by name.

20. *Bungmyo myojeong bi*, obverse face, line 11.
21. *Bungmyo myojeong bi*, obverse face, line 14.
22. *Gojong sillok* 21.10.19, 20; *Yongho hallok* 4:492; *Seungjeongwon ilgi* 21.10.20. Hereafter *SJW*. As with the *sillok*, entries in the *Seungjeongwon ilgi* are cited in the format "reign year.lunar month. lunar day."

Showing no interest in Wu Zhaoyou, Yuan Shikai, or any of the other Qing officers and soldiers who executed the attack on the palace and then took him from the Northern Temple in the aftermath of the coup, Gojong next launched into an account of the moral and ethical qualities of Guan Yu, the figure he maintained as his real savior. This account is rhetorically important because it establishes Guan Yu's motivation in delivering Gojong. As in the Qing plaque texts in the Eastern Temple, Gojong located the virtues of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* at the very core of the Guan Yu's being, and really at the very core of the cosmos:

> Ah! It is the energy of the great order of heaven and earth that the King [Guan] took as his foundation. And it is the righteousness of the prudent stricture of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* that he read. He committed his mind to handling affairs with brilliance and undistracted concentration. In maintaining propriety between lords and retainers, he stood firm until his final day. In keeping distance between men and women, he burned the candle until the break of day. He declined the money of Cao Cao and he refused to marry his daughter to the son of Sun Quan. He served only the imperial house, not the lying pretenders to the throne.
> 嗚呼王之所禀者天地剛大之氣也所讀者春秋謹嚴之義也立心處事光明磊落君臣之禮則侍立終日男女之別則秉燭達朝以至辭曺瞞之金却孫權之婚只知有帝室而不知有僭僞[23]

Here Gojong draws upon fictional accounts of the life of the historical Guan Yu to provide insight into what posthumously motivates the divine Guan Yu (Hong 2018, 105-26). From the outset, the values Guan Yu holds most dear, loyalty and righteousness as expressed in the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, are juxtaposed with the Guan Yu's love of the great natural orders of the heaven and earth and the entirety of the cosmos. Loyalty is not merely a good idea that Confucius decided to emphasize in his history; it is an expression of a cosmic order, unswerving and unchangeable. It is upon this order that the historical Guan Yu based his behavior. Until his death he was tirelessly loyal to Liu Bei 劉備, founder of the state of Shu and member of the Han imperial house. When he once found himself having to share a room with Liu's wives, Guan

23. *Bungmyo myojeong bi*, reverse face, lines 1-2.

stayed up all night and read the *Spring and Autumn Annals* to avoid even the appearance of impropriety. He refused payments from Cao Cao 曹操, founder of the state of Wu 吳, and brushed aside Sun Quan 孫權, founder of the state Wei 魏, when Sun proposed that Guan Yu's daughter marry his son. Both Cao Cao and Sun Quan were pretenders to the Han throne, but only Liu Bei had any legitimate claim. Guan Yu refused to serve the pretenders and remained loyal to the Liu house until death.

This loyalty to the Liu house is pivotal for in Gojong's calculation it is loyalty to the legitimate ruler, even in the face of insurmountable odds, that motivates Guan Yu. This is the reason that Guan Yu has intervened in Joseon affairs; he knows the Yi house and the Joseon state are legitimate and therefore he manifests, either in his own form to rout the Japanese or in the form of Qing troops to rescue the legitimate monarch Gojong from those who would do him, or Queen Min, harm. In a period when Qing interference in Joseon affairs was acute under the aegis of Yuan Shikai, then the Qing imperial resident in Seoul, a declaration of legitimacy beyond the reach of Qing investiture and Qing military protection was especially important in establishing Joseon as a kingdom in its own right. Gojong may have appeared to be helplessly dependent upon Qing but here he made a case for an independence defended by supernatural guarantee, an almost divine right to rule. As Gojong explains in the ode with which he ends the stele text, "Most of this is not a matter of human power; it all goes back to divine dispensation" 殆非人力咸歸神賜.[24]

The final line of the stele text is the date and herein lays a potential interpretive problem. Gojong uses the final Ming reign period to date the erection of the stele 崇禎紀元後五丁亥中秋澣立.[25] This would hardly suggest a monarch who is set on establishing an independent course. Indeed, this would mark him as a Ming loyalist nearly 250 years after the Manchu conquest. What Gojong's calendrical choice does, however, is to add one more indication that the Joseon relationship to Guan Yu is not related to Qing investiture. It is perhaps the most direct refusal of Qing authority in the entire text. Indeed, it constitutes an erasure of the last 250 years of Qing history in its refusal to recognize the imperial prerogative to establish the name of the era. The Chongzhen Emperor of the Ming Empire was the last ruler with the authority

24. *Bungmyo myojeong bi*, reverse face, line 12.
25. *Bungmyo myojeong bi*, reverse face, line 16.

to name time. The Qing emperors had each named their eras but, like Cao Cao and Sun Quan, this text reduces them to mere pretenders to the imperial throne. The use of the Chongzhen era name is the capstone in what we might well consider an anti-Qing document literally etched in stone at the height of the Joseon-Qing contestation of the tributary relationship in the highly unstable context of late nineteenth century imperialism.

The An Hyoje Memorial and Royal Obstruction

The only record of significant opposition within the court to the throne's fascination with Guan Yu came from An Hyoje, a conservative fourth censor 正言 in the Office of the Censor-General 司諫院. His widely-circulated memorial of 1893 excoriated the throne and court for their failure to remove Lord Jillyeong and end her corrupting rituals and her defrauding of the state. It is a useful, if polemic, document for its portrayal of royal support of an increasingly unorthodox approach to the Guan Yu cult. The controversy that followed An's memorial, however, gives some indication of the importance of the lengths that Gojong would go to avoid potential criticism that scrutiny of the cult might bring. While dozens of officials called for an investigation of An and his colleagues in the interest of handing down punishment of potentially treasonous behavior, Gojong continuously blocked their proposals. The clash between king and court over An Hyoje's memorial provides insight into the seriousness with which the throne approached the Guan Yu cult and the shaman who claimed to channel him.

From the time he was first appointed in 1883, An Hyoje was known for his defense of orthodoxy and had made something of a name for himself for his sharply-worded memorial that effectively ended proposed reforms to clothing regulations in 1884 (Gim 1974, 288). He was passionate in his defense of orthodoxy and was not afraid of going to extremes. According to what is likely an apocryphal tale, An learned of the growing abuses of Lord Jillyeong and was supposedly so outraged that he paid Yi Junghwa 李仲和 200 *nyang* 兩 to assassinate her. After receiving the payment, the would-be killer died of an illness on the way to completing his task. An supposedly thought that this was a message from heaven that he was going to have to take brush in hand himself and bring about Lord Jillyeong's demise through direct appeal to the throne

(ibid. 288-89).

While the story of his hiring of an assassin is of dubious veracity, An (1927, 2:3a) did submit his infamous memorial to the Royal Secretariat on August 27, 1893.[26] An began his memorial gently with an acknowledgement of the foundation of the Joseon Guan Yu cult in the aftermath of the Imjin Wars at the insistence of Ming commanders who believed they had witnessed divine manifestations on the battlefield. He did not recognize, however, that Guan Yu had *actually* manifest on the field of battle, only that Ming officers claimed he had.[27] An (ibid. 2:3a-3b) further recognized that Joseon kings from Seonjo forward incorporated offering to Guan Yu in the intermediate rites of state 中祀 and that Gojong's decision to build the Northern Temple was a continuation of the ritual practices already established in previous reigns and no less than a full flowering of the will of the past sagely sovereigns.

This, however, was as far as An was willing to tolerate the state-sponsored rites for Guan Yu. There was a difference, An maintained, between admiring the many qualities of Guan Yu and engaging in rites to uphold him as an exemplar and pray to him in the expectation that he would fulfill the desires of the faithful. Recent years had seen both the royal palaces and the Northern Temple occupied by shamans, seers, and their sundry altars, rites, and incantations. An was incensed that Lord Jillyeong had taken over the Northern Temple under the pretense that she was the adopted daughter 假女 of Guan Yu, assumed the title of "lord" 君, and enjoyed the extensive royal favor. As a result, she attracted officials throughout the court who vied with one another to be accepted as her brother or son so as to wield some of the political influence such recognition would confer. Their abject servitude, An lamented, was even worse than that of servants and slaves. Moreover, the palace and temple precincts had transformed into a lewd tableaux of the foul behavior of undesirable characters and their unsavory machinations and performances. If there really was a spirit of Guan Yu, An (1927, 2:3b-4a) protested, he would have been outraged to be associated with such depravity.

26. Gim Uihwan indicates An submitted the memorial on the sixth day of the seventh lunar month. See Gim 1974, 289.
27. I have translated An Hyoje's memorial in consultation with the modern Korean translation by Bak Junwon and Nam Jaeju (An 2008, 94-99). This memorial can be found in with slight variations in other sources, including Gim 1972, 1(pt.1):28b-29a; Bak 1980, 359-62; Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe 1971, 1:135-38.

To awaken the king to the fact that he was under the spell of what amounted to a con artist, An cited a memorial of the Han Dynasty censor Gu Yong 谷永 which read in part:

> If you illuminate the nature of heaven and earth, you cannot be taken in by the supernatural; if you know the nature of phenomena, you cannot be deceived by the unsavory.
> 明天地之性不可惑以神怪知萬物之性不可罔以非類 (An 1927, 2:4a)

In the context of the previous litany of impropriety and abuse at the hands of Lord Jillyeong and her hangers-on, this was sensible advice but there was more here than a common-sense admonition to the king to gird himself with authentic knowledge in defense against those who would defraud him. Gu Yong, however, is known for more than such platitudes. In 30 BCE, there was an eclipse and earthquake within a single day that troubled the Emperor Cheng of Han 漢成帝 (r. 33-7 BCE). He called upon his officials to explain the events. Gu Yong suggested that they were warnings from heaven that the emperor was showing far too much favor to the imperial consort and that she had taken to abusing her position (Ban [111] 1996, 85:1a-3a; Lewis 2007, 162). This explanation was not limited to Gu alone; the emperor came to accept the view of many of his officials that he had allowed "women to be defiant and inferiors to second-guess [his decisions]" 女無面從退有後言, bringing the imperium to the brink of ruin (Ban [111] 1996, 10:4a-4b). An did not cite this case directly but the comparison of King Gojong to Emperor Cheng and of Queen Min and Lord Jillyeong to the Han imperial consorts and concubines would surely have been clear to members of the Joseon court. The implication is bold; Gojong had granted Queen Min far too much latitude and now she had abused the royal favor by allowing Lord Jillyeong and her entourage access to the Northern Temple, the court, and the inner sancta of the royal palaces. An declared that Gojong would find no better advisor than Gu Yong, even in his own court. In so doing, he called upon Gojong to wrest control of the court from the women, be they royalty or shamans, who were presiding over the collapse of the state.

An continued with a critique of the constant rituals at the Guan Yu Temples and at the sundry altars maintained within the palaces. Citing the *Zhou li* 周禮 and *Shi ji* 史記, An explained that prayers were only acceptable in cases of emergency and only at the altars to the spirits of earth and grain 社稷壇.

There was only one instance in which a sovereign conducted prayers elsewhere; that was the case of King Tang of Shang 湯 who conducted prayers for rain for seven years at Mulberry Forest 桑林, a reference to the *Lushi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋.[28] Otherwise, An argued, there was no precedent for continuous rites and offerings in multiple locations, especially when there was no pressing national emergency. Lord Jillyeong's rituals were pointless and so expensive as to be pushing the state toward fiscal disaster. For An (1927, 2:4a-4b), the entire situation was an obscene embarrassment that rippled throughout the state and all of society.

What then was to be done? An cited the *Li ji* 禮記 and the *Kongzi jiayu* 孔子家語 to suggest that anyone who defrauded the state and deceived the lord and ministers of the court deserved execution. Since Lord Jillyeong's behavior matched the crimes laid out in the *Li ji* and *Kongzi jiayu*, An called for her execution—a sentiment he claimed the entire nation shared but dared not express. At this point in the memorial, An (1927, 2:5b) abandoned all pretense of decorum, and demanded Lord Jillyeong's head: "With this woman, you must take your scepter and knock her head clean off!" 此女以手板擊其首而斃之. Once she had been removed, An (ibid. 2:6a) proposed, the king could put an end to her absurd and abusive rituals and restore the dignity and proper functioning of the court.

So sharply had An written his memorial that the officers of the Royal Secretariat 承政院 were hesitant to forward it to the king for fear of the political fallout. Upon reading the text, Min Yeonghwan 閔泳煥 reportedly opined, "Censor An's memorial will be enough to give that wicked woman a coronary!" 今此安臺疏足以破妖女膽 (An 1927, 3:3a-3b).[29] Secretaries Jeong Inseop 鄭寅燮 and Gim Chunhui 金春熙 could not bring themselves to forward the text; only Min Yeongju 閔泳柱 favored sending it on to the throne. Since no one wanted to be the one to deliver it, Min took the task upon himself (ibid. 3:1b). Upon reading it, the king was enraged and reportedly declared,

> From now on, whenever such a misinformed memorial arrives at the Secretariat, reject it immediately. Any royal secretary who might accept it will be subject to especially severe interrogation, as will the First Royal Secretary. Take this as a permanent regulation and post it on the wall.
> 自此以後凡不成說到院卽爲退却如或捧入當該承旨嚴加重勘都令亦當嚴勘矣以永爲定式提壁 (ibid. 3:1b-2a)

28. See Lu (c. 239 BCE) 2000, 210. Knoblock and Riegel indicate that the drought was for five years, not seven; the seven-year period comes from a fragment misattributed to the *Lushi chunqiu* (ibid. 679).
29. An Hyoje, *Supa jip*, 3:3a-3b. Literally, "Censor An's memorial will be enough to burst that wicked woman's gall bladder!"

Beyond this, however, the king remained silent. An awaited what he thought would surely be a death sentence for fourteen days before he decided to return home to visit his parents. While he was away from the capital, Min Yeongju and Gim Manje 金萬濟 drafted memorials to the throne attacking An. Min Yeongjun 閔泳駿, however, intervened and prevented Min and Gim from submitting them (ibid. 3:2a).[30]

Like An's memorial, Gojong's formal response is not present in the court records but it appears that on October 11, more than six weeks after An submitted his remonstrance, Gojong commanded that An was to be sent into exile on Chuja Island 楸子島.[31] The reactions of the Censorate and the State Tribunal 義禁府, however, are present in court records. The court seems to have been surprised by the announcement and protested immediately. Gim Manje, Yi Jaeyeong 李載榮, Eom Bogyeon 嚴復淵, and Song Jeongseop 宋廷燮 were among the most vocal of An's critics (An 1927, 3:3a), but they were by no means the only ones. There were thirty-three instances between October 11, 1893 and August 2, 1894 in which the Office of the Inspector General 司憲府, the Office of Censor-General 司諫院, the Office of Special Counselors 弘文館, the Royal Secretariat, and State Tribunal either submitted protest memorials or refused to carry out the king's commands concerning An's exile. In all there more than two dozen officials involved, some of them submitted memorials more than once. There were fifteen such cases across the autumn of 1893,[32] four in the spring of 1894,[33] and fourteen during the summer of 1894,[34] some even after An had finally been released from exile.

The protest memorials generally coalesced around three arguments. The first was that the punishment of exile was woefully insufficient. An had assaulted the judgment of the throne, mocked the rituals of the court, and cast

30. An alleged that Min Yeongju was among Lord Jillyeong's adopted sons 假子.
31. *SJW* 30.8.21.
32. *SJW* 30.8.21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27; 30.10.27.
33. *SJW* 31.3.9, 10, 11.
34. *SJW* 31.4.30; 31.6.8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 17, 21, 22, 23, 26, 27; 31.7.2, 5.

aspersions upon the officialdom. Insubordination and disrespect was of such a serious nature that allowing the accused to live on in simple isolation upon a far island was hardly satisfactory and potentially dangerous. Similar cases in the past had resulted in execution, they argued, and there was no compelling reason that An should escape the ax. Moreover, the damage was ongoing; Song Jeongseop noted that someone had taken An's memorial and reproduced it in the form of a booklet that was already in broad circulation. With this continuing erosion of the dignity of the throne, it was important to punish An severely; an island stay was not going to strike fear into the hearts of those who might read the pamphlet and wish to emulate him.[35]

A second, less frequent, argument was that in addition to the disrespect of the memorial, it was also factually incorrect. Gim Manje suggested that there was no ritual impropriety in conducting rites for Guan Yu since the previous Ming court did so and the present Qing court continued to do so. Moreover, Guan Yu did, in fact, help Joseon during the Imjin Invasions, the Emeute of 1882, and the Coup of 1884. For Gim Manje, Guan Yu was quite real and quite important to the well-being of the Joseon state.[36] Eom Bogyeon maintained that An was entirely mistaken in his assault on the ritual propriety of the Guan Yu rites. He argued in particular that the act of state-sponsored prayer in the expectation of some result was not at all unprecedented and in no way a violation of the protocols or the dignity of the court.[37]

Finally, the nature of the punishment or the degree to which An's memorial was accurate seemed to be somewhat less important in these memorials than the fact that the king was not following proper procedure. The memorialists repeatedly asked the king to follow established precedent and have An arrested and brought to the State Tribunal for interrogation. A full investigation was necessary, the memorialists argued, to learn whether An was the only one involved or was there a conspiracy, to find the reasons for his insubordination and to determine a proper punishment. They were unwilling to accept that Gojong had by-passed them and made the decision on his own.

Gojong first attempted to thwart his court's efforts to investigate and further punish An Hyoje. He suggested that the matter simply was not grave

35. *SJW* 30.8.21.
36. *SJW* 30.8.21.
37. *SJW* 30.8.21.

enough to merit a full investigation. In his response, the memorial of royal secretaries Song Jongeok 宋鍾億 and Yun Dalyeong 尹達榮, the king explained:

> [The memorial] was foolish and ignorant; it does not merit deeper consideration. I have already issued a decision on this matter.
> 愚昧沒覺不足深究有此處分卽爲頒布[38]

The king responded similarly to the memorial of Song Jeongseop, declaring, "The former censor's memorial turned out to be ridiculous" 前銜疏果狂妄矣.[39] Although there was one instance in which Gojong admitted that an interrogation might be warranted,[40] he continued into October 12 to insist that An's memorial simply did not require an investigation and that he had already meted out appropriate punishment.[41] As the senior-most officials of the Censorate submitted a joint memorial together with eight other lesser officials demanding greater punishment on October 12, however, Gojong began to soften his stance and by October 13, he conceded that the majority opinion of the censors was that the punishment was too mild. He thus added house arrest to the sentence of banishment 圍籬安置.[42] This was still not enough. On October 16, Gim Manje again requested further investigation and punishment. Moreover, he pointed out that An had surely colluded with one of the royal secretaries, Pak Sisun 朴始淳, and yet inexplicably there was no inquiry into this alleged plotting. Although Gojong replied in exasperation, "Why do you repeatedly irritate me?" 又何如是支煩乎, Pak Sisun was sentenced to exile the same day.[43] From then onward, Gojong simply refused to entertain any more consideration of the case, flatly refusing all requests for investigation and increased punishment.

An Hyoje sharply criticized the king, court ritual, the queen and her associates, Lord Jillyeong and her entourage, and the entirety of the form into which the Joseon Guan Yu cult had evolved during the previous ten years. One might expect the king to fully agree with his court and command an

38. *SJW* 30.8.21.
39. *SJW* 30.8.21.
40. *SJW* 30.8.21.
41. *SJW* 30.8.22.
42. *SJW* 30.8.22, 23.
43. *SJW* 30.8.26.

investigation to learn all the details of what was certainly a case lèse-majesté and potentially treasonous behavior that could have indicated a threat to the security of the throne. And yet, the king did no such thing. While there appears to be no record of what Gojong did during the nearly seven weeks that he delayed responding to An's memorial it does appear that he was in no hurry to release the document and subject its content to open discussion at court. When he finally came to a decision, he did so unilaterally; there was no formal documentation of the memorial in court records, no court discussion, and no record of his command to banish An to Chuja Island. Indeed, the memorial and Gojong's decision to send An into exile are known in court records only through the protest memorials and resistance of the State Tribunal. And at every turn, Gojong refused the pleas of the Censorate to investigate the case; he steadfastly would not allow any interrogation of An or even any inquiry into the matter at all.

In insisting that the matter was not serious enough to trigger an investigation, he was actively thwarting any potential revelation about the particulars of the memorial. The king was engaging in what, in twenty-first century parlance, amounts to an obstruction of justice. He avoided established bureaucratic procedures in investigation, judgement, and punishment, even though all the while continuously subject to the sustained critique of the court. While it is not entirely clear why he was blocking the investigation, he likely did not want details of the state Guan Yu cult to be subject to examination and criticism. An Hyoje had clearly exposed something that the king did not wish to come to light. Given the substance of An's criticism, Gojong may have wished to avoid scrutiny of the money spent on the Guan Yu rituals, the role of Lord Jillyeong, and the very propriety of rites for Guan Yu, the deity whom he and the queen believed had saved them on two occasions. An's memorial was an exposé of fraud, waste, and abuse but perhaps more importantly, it was an attack on the faith of the king and queen in Guan Yu. And this Gojong could not endure.

It would not be difficult to dismiss the idea that the king and queen sincerely believed in Guan Yu; the accounts that have survived to the present are largely from unofficial histories and recollections that perhaps aim to entertain more than to inform. We have, however, three bodies of evidence that suggest that their faith was real. Gojong personally wrote numerous offertory odes, some of which he likely recited personally at the Northern Temple. While

they were formulaic to a certain extent, they also made reference to events of personal significance to Gojong. He also composed the text for the Northern Temple stele in a personal tone that again attested to what he believed were his and the queen's spiritual experiences in dreams and times of trauma. Finally, for months he suppressed an investigation into An Hyoje's memorial, despite its direct and harsh criticism of the Guan Yu cult and the royal support thereof. His expenditure of political capital in maintenance and defense of the state-sponsored Guan Yu cult show at the very least that he thought important. It also suggests that he and the queen were indeed believers.

Guan Yu Cult and Temple: Contested Legitimacies

Despite the righteous rage and patriarchal insecurities of An Hyoje in 1893 and the jeering of colonial era historians, the Guan Yu cult was a serious undertaking for both the officers of the Qing expeditionary forces in Seoul as well as for the Joseon throne. While one may question the prudence of the expenditures on temples and rituals in a time of acute fiscal stress, the issues contested in the material and discursive spaces of the Guan Yu faith, through texts both physical and performed, were of serious importance to the security of the Qing Empire and the Joseon Kingdom. This clash of interpretations was part of the larger renegotiation of the Joseon-Qing relationship that unfolded from the 1880s until the severance of tributary relations at the end of the Qing-Japanese War of 1894-1895. This is a period in which the Qing and Joseon governments have divergent visions of their evolving relationship, the fate of the tributary practice, and their respective places in a world of rapid economic and geopolitical transformation driven by the high imperialism of the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Through the Qing plaques, Gojong's odes and stele text, and the controversy over An Hyoje's memorial, we are able to see the personal negotiations of these dynamics by those whose experience was direct and visceral. The men of the Qing expeditionary force went to Joseon on a mission to enforce a particular vision on Joseon-Qing relations. The texts donated to the Eastern Temple are an intimate picture of the ways in which they understood their deployment. King Gojong established a vision of the legitimacy of his state and of his rule through the medium of his faith in Guan Yu. His throne, his family, and his own life were in mortal danger on two occasions and yet all

survived. The literary forms of offertory ode and stele text provided him with a medium through which to express his understanding of the nature of his state and of his rule as bound together in a universal faith in Guan Yu. This was not a Guan Yu wedded to any particular state but rather a Guan Yu who moved through all the phenomena of the cosmos and was moved by universal values of righteousness, loyalty, and legitimacy. Gojong's embrace of Guan Yu was a declaration of an essential Joseon legitimacy beyond Qing investiture. Finally, the weeks of argument among court officials and the king's suppression of the investigation into An Hyoje and his memorial illustrate the grave, if contested, nature of the Joseon Guan Yu cult. The Joseon throne approached the cult with a seriousness that calls upon us to understand it as something more than farce of superstition and outright fraud.

In this light, the facile anecdotes of Hwang Hyeon and his epigones appear to have strayed far afield indeed. The contestation of the Guan Yu faith was not a question of a pre-modern, or even an anti-modern inability to cope with contemporary realities. It was a reexamination of the state and of the location of Joseon in the world when the very definition of what constituted the world was in the midst of profound transformation. The Guan Yu cult was a piece of this Joseon shock of the modern. We may not readily associate the words "cult" and "modernity" together, but the state cult made the transition in 1897 to the Great Han Empire 大韓帝國 and even expanded with the construction of fourth Western Temple 西廟 in the first years of the twentieth century. While appearing as the quintessence of the modern fantasy of pre-modern obsession with ritual irrationality, we may alternatively approach the Guan Yu cult as an experience of the modern that instantiated a reimagining of the future of the Joseon state on path neither tied to the Qing Empire through tribute nor in some kind of partnership with the Qing Empire. As many a popular history already has, we could interpret the late nineteenth-century Joseon Guan Yu cult as the sham of a crafty fortune teller preying upon the fears of a throne under threat. To do so, however, would be to overlook the fact that by appropriating the very discursive strategies Qing officers deployed to reign Joseon into a permanent Qing orbit, the sundry tropes of the Joseon Guan Yu cult held a vision of a Joseon monarchy legitimate in of itself, under divine protection, and in accord with the currents of the cosmos.

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Abstract

The Joseon Guan Yu cult was a staple of informal and popular Korean histories written in the first half of the twentieth century. In these highly critical and often mocking accounts, the cult comes to signify an irrational refusal of the modern typical of the perceived Joseon failure to cope with the realities of global imperialism. The Guan Yu cult, however, was more than this. Qing military officers deployed to Seoul from 1882 to 1885 presented plaques to Joseon Guan Yu temples which, through the lens of the Guan Yu faith, located the legitimacy of the Joseon state in its submission of tribute to the Qing court. King Gojong composed ritual and stele texts that shared the Qing officers' faith in Guan Yu but interpreted his divine interventions in Joseon affairs not as the product of Joseon loyalty to Qing but rather of the inherent legitimacy of the Joseon state and throne. The seriousness with which the Joseon throne took the Guan Yu cult is apparent in the controversy at court in 1893 concerning the punishment of an official who publicly condemned lavish state support for the cult. The facile dismissals of colonial-period histories obscure the fact that the cult was one arena wherein Joseon and Qing understandings of Joseon state legitimacy and the nature of the Joseon-Qing relationship clashed at time when the two states were engaged in an often tense process of redefining their relations in a rapidly changing geopolitical environment.

Keywords: Guan Yu, Joseon, Qing, legitimacy, state cult

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