

Article

Enlightenment on the Spirit-Altar: Eschatology and Restoration of Morality at the King Kwan Shrine in *Fin de siècle* Seoul

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Abstract: The period from the Treaty of Kanghwa (1876) until the fall of the Korean Empire (1897–1910) is commonly characterized as a period of *kaehwa*—Enlightenment—in which the Chosŏn state strived to reform and modernize. This article complicates the notion of Enlightenment in the late Chosŏn context, arguing that it was a hybrid term concurrently connoting modernization and religious awakening. In particular, this article sheds light on spirit-written texts—so called ‘morality books’—employed by civil and military elites to participate in Enlightenment discourse. By the mid-nineteenth century, Guandi—the apotheosized version of the warrior Guan Yu—had emerged as one of the most popular spirit-writing deities in Qing dynasty China. This article explores the Korean faith and practice of spirit-writing centered on Thearch Kwan (Ch. Guandi) at shrines in Seoul. The King Kwan Shrines (Kwanwang myo) were the sites of production and publication of morality books during a critical period on the eve of modernization of Korea. Surprisingly, these texts were published with the sanction of King Kojong (reigned 1863–1907), the reformer who founded the new country. Kojong and his confidant servants were fully aware of the spirit-written texts and published them as the “Corpus of Enlightenment.” The corpus unintentionally emphasized the key term of modernization in their eschatology, urging enlightenment—conceived of as religio-ethical values—in order to resolve contemporary ills and bring about a new era of peace. This research will dissolve the sharp demarcation between premodern and modern in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Korea by illuminating the polyphony of Enlightenment ideas, conflicting and competing between the old and new.

Keywords: enlightenment; morality books; spirit-writing; Kwanwang shrines; Thearch Kwan (Kwanje/Guandi); Three Sages; Late Chosŏn; Korean religions

1. Introduction

The period from the Opening of Ports (*kaehang* 開港) (1876) until the fall of Great Han Empire (Taehan cheguk 大韓帝國, 1897–1910) is often characterized as a period of Enlightenment (*kaehwa* 開化) in which the Chosŏn state strived to modernize its social system. However, scholars have not questioned what *kaehwa* implied in the nineteenth century Korea. ‘*Kaehwa*’ consists of two Chinese characters: “to open (Ch. *kai*/K. *kae* 開)” and “to transform (*hua*/*hwa* 化).” The word was coined in late Edo Japan as a translation of “Enlightenment.” Did it mean “to open” the state to foreign countries and “to change” the overall system of governance by emulating the Japanese model of Westernization? This would be a widespread notion of *kaehwa* in modern understanding of Korean history. Given that

it entered modern Korean via the Japanese translation (*kaika*) of “Enlightenment,”¹ the term *kaehwa* deliberately invoked the values and ideas of the European Enlightenment that began in the seventeenth century: emphasis on human reason and the disenchantment and secularization of the world. Needless to say, in the project of the European Enlightenment, revelation was no longer considered a valid source of human knowledge and behavior. However, the Chinese term *kaihua* (K. *kaehwa*) has its own historical depth and strata of meanings. This article explores “Enlightenment (*kaehwa*)” in the late Chosŏn as a locus where the modernization projects and spiritual awakening met and conjoined.

This article aims to complicate our conception of “Enlightenment” in the late Chosŏn context through an examination of the spirit-written texts that civil and military elites employed to maintain Enlightenment discourse. Spirit-writing became a widespread practice since the Song dynasty (960–1279) China, where it served as a method of transmitting divine revelations and producing religious texts. By the mid-nineteenth century, Thearch Guan (Guandi 關帝)—the apotheosized version of the warrior Guan Yu 關羽 of the Three Kingdoms period (circa 220–280) in China—had emerged as one of the most popular spirit-writing deities. This research will elucidate the Korean faith and practice of spirit-writing centered on Thearch Kwan (Guandi/ Kwanje).

The King Kwan Shrines (Kwanwang-myo 關王廟) were the sites of production of morality books during a critical period on the eve of the modernization of Korea. Surprisingly, these texts were published under the explicit intention of Kojong (reigned 1863–1907), the last king of Chosŏn who pursued Enlightenment and Reform. Kojong and his confidant officials published these spirit-written works as the Corpus of Enlightenment (*kaehwa-jang* 開化藏). The corpus emphasized “Enlightenment”—the key term of modernization, but conceived of by them as ethical values—in their eschatology, deeming it the proper way to resolve disasters such as epidemics and military crises and bring about a new era of peace. This inquiry thus problematizes a binary conception of the modernization process in East Asia that draws a line between modern and pre-modern.

2. Enlightenment and Civilization

Scholars continue to debate exactly when the Enlightenment period of the late Chosŏn began, but there is broad agreement in placing it between the mid-nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. The *Korean History*, edited by the National Institute of Korean History, provides apparently standard historiography of the period, from the well-known perspective of conflict between reformers and conservatives (NIKH 1999). It counts three important figures at the dawn of the Enlightenment Age: Pak Kyusu 朴珪壽 (1807–1877), Oh Kyŏngsŏk 吳慶錫 (1831–1879), and Yu Hong’gi 劉鴻基 (1831–1884?). Shin Ch’aeho 申采浩 (1880–1936), a famous early twentieth century historian, recounted the opening scene of the age as follows:

When Kim Okkyun 金玉均 (1851–1894) visited the Prime Minister Pak Kyusu, Pak took a globe of the earth, which his grandfather, Sir Yŏnam 燕巖 (i.e., Pak Chiwŏn 朴趾源) had brought after traveling to China, out of his closet and showed it to Kim. Turning the globe, Pak told Kim with a smile, “Where is the Central State (中國: i.e., China) now? If you turn it that way, the US is the center. Turn it this way, Chosŏn is the center. If every state becomes the central one, where is the fixed Central State today?” Although Kim read about new thoughts and claimed Enlightenment, he had been captured by hundreds of years of an *idée fixe* that the state located in the center is China; cardinal states placed its East, West, South, and North are four barbarians; thus, it is taken for granted that the four should worship China. He had never dreamt of going further and maintaining the independence of his state. Enlightened greatly by what Pak said, Kim slapped his knee and stood up. The Kapsin [1884] Regime

¹ As stated below, “enlightenment” was translated as *kaika* in late Edo Japan. On the other hand, Korean “*kaehwa*” was also rendered as “Enlightenment” in most modern English articles and books of Korean history. For example, see (Lee 1984, p. 297; Seth 2010, pp. 226–39).

Change was brought out at the end. (Shin Ch'ae-ho, "The Influence of Copernican Theory," quoted in NIKH 1999, p. 18)

Shin's reminiscence portrays the decisive moment that young Kim Okkyun, the future leader in designing an independent country from Qing China and the 1884 Regime Change,² liberated himself from the Sinocentric worldview by Pak's enlightenment. The memoirs of Pak Yŏnghyo 朴泳孝 (1861–1939), another participant in the regime change, also testified that "the new thinking" came from Pak Kyusu's school (NIKH 1999, pp. 17–18). However, one should be careful as to whether or not these young leaders identified the new thinking as Enlightenment (*kaehwa*) under Pak's influence.

Unlike the middle class Oh and Yu, Pak was an elite official from the *yangban* class who had received a classical education for the civil service examination. He is characterized in the secondary literature as the first Enlightenment thinker and the successor of the Practical Learning (*Sirhak* 實學) (M. Kim 2011), inherited from his grandfather Pak Chiwŏn that challenged the orthodox Neo-Confucianism and strived to reform social structures. Indeed, Pak Kyusu is a significant figure who claimed "to open the ports" (*kaehang*) to foreign countries, after he had gone through the clash and war with the US in 1866 and 1871. However, the word *kaehwa* itself never actually appears in Pak's writings. On top of that, no contemporary records affirm when precisely Kim Okkyun started representing himself and his allies as the "Enlightenment Party" (*Kaehwa-dang* 開化黨). The earliest source of this naming is in 1897 in *The Independent*, the first English newspaper of Chosŏn, well after the occurrence of the events discussed. Giacinti, a reporter of *The Independent*, wrote a memorial address on the death of Sŏ Kwangbŏm 徐光範 (1859–1897), the third member of the Kapsin Regime Change. Of Sŏ and Kim Okkyun he stated:

The two men quietly organized a party among their young friends for the purpose of studying the history, customs and geography of the Western countries and the name of Kaiwha [dang] or Progressive Party was coined in the Korean language. During the year 1880 the two pioneers of Western education secretly went to Japan with the permission of His Majesty and took with them some twenty young men to study the outside world. (Giacinti, 4 September 1897)

In this passage, Giacinti stated that Kim and Sŏ organized the *Kaehwadang* before 1880. However, the earliest sources referring to the group as *Kaehwadang* are mostly Japanese newspapers after 1881. For example, on May 6 1881, the *Chōya Newspaper* bore the headline "Yi Tongin: Assassinated for the Chosŏn Enlightenment Party."³ When the first inspectors were dispatched to Japan, *Tokyo Daily News* wrote that the Chosŏn visitors were composed of two groups—"one is the conservative party, and the other is the progressive party"—and used "progressive (*kaijin* 開進)" as a synonym for "enlightened (*kaika*)" in opposition to "conservative (*shukyū* 守舊)"⁴ On 15 March 1882, the *Chōsen Shinbō* wrote, "Kim Okkyun, the famous [leader of] Enlightenment Party of Chosŏn, arrived in Japan with the King's Order."⁵

² I used the term "Kapsin Regime Change" for Kapsin Chŏngbyŏn 甲申政變 instead of the "Kapsin Coup" or "Coup d'état" (Lee 1984; Seth 2010, pp. 237–39) because Kim Okkyun and his allies had no intention of eliminating their King. They launched a coup against the conservative pro-China faction, not against king Kojong. Although they maintained the equality of people, they planned to reform government as a constitutional monarchy under the rule of Kojong. After the failure, their opponents defined it as treason and called for punishment. Although Kojong bowed to pressure and gave a tacit admission of assassinating Kim Okkyun, Kojong took most of the members again as the leading party of the 1894 Reform. On the Kapsin Regime Change, see (Yi 1986; Shin 2000).

³ *Shinbun*, vol. 4, pp. 386–87. *Chōya shinbō* 朝野新報: Chōsen kaikatō no tameni ansatsu sareta Ri Tōjin 朝鮮開化黨の爲に暗殺された李東仁.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, vol. 4, p. 393. *Tōkyō nichinichi shinbun* 東京日日新聞 7 May 1881. Chosŏn court officials came to study Japan: Enemies of the progressive and the conservative in the same boat (朝鮮國朝土日本の研究に渡來:開進守舊の吳越同舟). While it stated "Ichitō wa shukyū, ichitō wa kaishin 一黨は守舊, 一黨は開進," Yi Man-son 李萬孫 and Sim Sang-hak 沈相學 were the representatives of the conservatives; Ō Yun-jung 魚允中 represented the Enlightenment Party (*kaikatō* 開化黨).

⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 48. *Chōsen shinbō* 朝鮮新報, Kin Gyokukin ōmei o ukete Nihon e 金玉均王命を受けて日本へ: "朝鮮の開化黨の有名な金玉均は今般王命を奉じ我國に渡航する."

The meaning of the Japanese word *kaika* 開化 is quite clear when Fukuzawa Yukichi 福澤諭吉 (1835–1901) translated “civilization and enlightenment” as “*bunmei kaika* 文明開化.” In his short essay, “Enlightenment of the World Civilizations” (*Yo no bunmei kaika* 世ノ文明開化) published in 1867, Fukuzawa stated: “If we review history, human life was unenlightened at the beginning, and gradually progressed toward enlightenment and civilization.”⁶ Since the Meiji Restoration of 1868, *bunmei kaika* in the Japanese context implied by and large Enlightenment by embracing Western civilization.

The same usage of *kaika* (K. *kaehwa*) is found in the conversation between Oh Kyöngsöck and Japanese ministers in the naval vessel on 28 January 1876. Oh Kyöngsöck, a capable translator of his time and an influential figure in the Enlightenment Party, closed the meeting by saying, “It was a great pleasure to meet enlightened people and talk about Enlightenment.”⁷ Jong-Hak Kim has confirmed that this was “the first case that *kaehwa* appeared in the modern texts related to Chosön” (J.H. Kim 2017, p. 40). From this, we can understand that Oh intended his efforts to open ports to be consonant with the Meiji concept of Enlightenment (*kaika*) before 1876.

Kim Okkyun recorded “our party” (*o-dang* 吾黨) had kept in touch with the Palace ten years before the 1884 regime change.⁸ According to this record, most Korean historians consider that the Enlightenment Party was organized around 1874 (Lee 1989). Yongha Shin gave more weight to Oh’s role in the formation of the Party (Shin 2000), and Jong-Hak Kim dated it upto 1871 when Oh Kyöngsöck met Kim Okkyun for the first time (J.H. Kim 2017, p. 40).

However, it is still questionable whether the title of the Party was determined in the early 1870s. It is often called as the Reform Party (*Kaehyök-dang* 改革黨) or Independence Party (*Tongnip-dang* 獨立黨). Meiji politicians identified Kim Okkyun as “the head of Enlightenment Party,” while the Qing government called him “the leader of Independent Party.” Many historical records, including *The Veritable Records of the Chosön Dynasty* (CWS), tell us their primary concern was Chosön independence from Qing China. In the 1870s, Pak Kyusu claimed to strengthen military power for the sake of independence rather than to enlighten the country. Particularly, Pak Kyusu had confidence in the superiority of an “Eastern value system” over that of “the West” (M. Kim 2011, pp. 144, 155). Certainly, the most important aspect of Kjong’s reform around the mid-nineteenth century was independence; in order to achieve this goal, military reform was the foremost priority.

Most scholars who have written on this period use the term *kaehwa* in the sense of Enlightenment toward Western civilization. However, Kwan Bum Noh investigated usages of the term in the relevant primary sources and concluded that *kaehwa* with such connotation did not appear in official historical records before 1882. According to him, “the first usage of *kaehwa* with the implication of Enlightenment and Civilization as a foreign-oriented term” is seen in an 1894 record in CWS and an 1882 record in the *Daily Records of Royal Secretariat* (SJW) (Noh 2019). The earliest case is from Chi Sökyöng’s 池錫永 (1855–1935) appeal to education in international law (such as the Chinese translation *Wanguo gongfa* 萬國公法 of Henry Wheaton’s (1785–1848) *Elements of International Laws*) and new technologies in fields such as agriculture, textiles, and weaponry. Chi asserted that if education in these areas proceeded:

We can expect the age of Enlightenment and the days of Great Peace within the near future. Isn’t it truly an excellent method to transform people and develop the culture, as well as the foremost strategy to promote beneficial utility and prosperous livelihoods?
(SJW 1882-8-28)⁹

開化之期, 昇平之日, 可翹足而待也. 茲非化民成俗之妙法, 利用厚生之首謀乎?

⁶ Fukuzawa 1867, pp. 10–11. 史ヲ察スルニ人生ノ始ハ芥昧ニシテ次第ニ文明開化ニ赴クモノナリ.

⁷ NGB 9-1, No. 6, 38. 開化ノ人ニ遇ヒ開化ノ談ヲ爲ス情意殊ニ舒ブ.

⁸ There was a court lady, nicknamed the Lady Counselor (ko-daesu), who served to the Queen and communicated with Kim Okkyun’s party in secret. Kim O. 1884-12-01. 一宮女某氏(年今四十二, 身體健大, 如男子, 有力, 可當男子五六人. 素以顧大嫂稱別號, 所以得坤殿寵時得近侍, 自十年以前, 趨附吾黨, 時以密事通報者也).

⁹ I will use this date format (year-month-day) for the records of the lunisolar calendar type. In Korea, the Gregorian calendar was adopted in 1896.

There is a discord between what we expect as the “foreign-oriented term” and Chi’s thinking on Enlightenment. Noh also interprets Chi’s concept of Enlightenment as presenting the ideal state of the dynasty, achieved through overall strategies of strengthening the country. Noh pointed out: Chi did not separate the contemporary Chinese “Self-strengthening” (*zhiqiang* 自強) and modern Japanese “Enlightenment” (*kaika*). In addition, he tried to link them with the Confucian concept of “beneficial utility and prosperous livelihoods” (*liyong housheng* 利用厚生) whose *locus classicus* is in the *Book of Documents* (*Shangshu* 尚書) and “Transforming people and developing culture” (*huamin chengsu* 化民成俗) in the *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記) (Noh 2019, p. 359).

In sum, except for the case of Oh Kyöngsöck in 1876, the concept of Enlightenment as aspiring to Western civilization rarely appeared in intellectual documents before 1881, when Kojong despatched investigators to Japan. Oh Kyöngsöck might be the earliest advocate of *kaehwa* in a strict sense, and the most progressive reformers, such as Kim Okkyun, might be located on this side. On the other end of the spectrum of Enlightenment ideas might be the concept that Chi Sökyöng mingled with Confucian values. The next section will bring to light the previously unexplored notion of a concept of Enlightenment which is heterogeneous and much older than the Meiji-oriented one, not as a temporary misunderstanding but as a noteworthy trend of all social strata in the late Chosön.

3. Spirit-Writing and Publication of the Scriptures of Thearch Kwan

The Studio of Collecting Jade (Chibokchae 集玉齋) was Kojong’s personal library in the palace: it was a room for diplomatic meetings and a symbolic space of state reform. The catalog of its book collection (*Chibokchae syojök mokrok* 集玉齋書籍目錄 1908) shows a quest for expanding newly available knowledge. Although a large portion is dedicated to contemporary Chinese translations of Western books of science and technology, some peculiar books draw our attention (Table 1): they belong neither to the category of new scientific works nor to the Confucian classics.

Table 1. Taoist Books and Morality Books in the Studio of Collecting Jade.

Titles in the Book Catalog of the Studio of Collecting Jade	Place of Publication
<i>Complete Works of the Patriarch Lü</i> 呂祖全書 (LZQS) <i>Complete Biography of the Patriarch Lü</i> 呂祖全傳 (LZQZ)	Qing China
<i>Folios on Retribution</i> 感應篇 (GYP) <i>Anthology for the Pious Faith</i> 敬信錄 (JXL) <i>Illustrated Records of Sacred Achievements</i> 聖蹟圖誌 (KJ) <i>Records of Sacred Achievements in the East of the Sea</i> 海東聖蹟誌 (HD) <i>Commentary and Images of Precious Admonition</i> 寶訓像註 <i>Scripture of Luminous Sacredness</i> 明聖經 <i>Enlightenment by Passing, Miracles by Presence</i> 過化存神 (KHJS) <i>Scripture of Admonition of the Three Sages</i> 三聖訓經 (SSHG)	
	Chosön Korea

Most of these books are categorized as “morality books” (*shanshu* 善書, or *quanshanshu* 勸善書) by their content in modern studies. They were mainly classified into the Daoism section (*daoia* 道家) by the four-division (*sibu* 四部) classification system in East Asia. However, these books cannot be purely attributed to Daoism. Rather, they represent the moral values of pre-modern China in which the Three Teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism converged (Sakai 1999–2000; Brokaw 1991). In most case, these books were produced by a particular mantic practice of spirit-writing called “descending brush” (*jiangbi/kangp’il* 降筆) or “grasping [wood-pen for] spirit-writing” (*fuji* 扶乩). Spirit-written texts were revelations from divine beings that were treated as sacred scriptures by those who received and propagated them.

How should we conceive of Kojong’s collection of these books? Some of them were imported from China, and many of them were published during the so-called Enlightenment period (*kaehwa-gi*) of Korea. Some were printed bearing an edict of endorsement by Kojong himself. Kojong’s possession of these books indicates more than the collection of books popular in contemporary China and Korea.

It demonstrates the stirring interaction with ideas and practices that prompt a reconsideration of the meaning of “Enlightenment” itself.

In 1876, the year of Kanhwa Treaty, *Complete Collection of Illustrated Records of Sacred Achievements of the Thearch Lord Sage Kwan* (*Guansheng dijun shengji tuzhi quanji*/Kwansöng-jegun söngjök-doji jönpip 關聖帝君聖蹟圖誌全集, abbr. KJ/GQ), and its *Continuation* (*Sokchip* 續集, abbr. KS) and *Records of Sacred Achievements in the East of the Sea* (*Haedong söngjök chi* 海東聖蹟志, abbr. HD) were published in the same style (Figure 1, Tables 1 and 2).

Table 2. Publication of Scriptures of the Three Sages.

	Kwansöng-Jegun (K.) Guansheng Dijun (Ch.) 關聖帝君 Thearch Kwan	Pu-u Jegun Fuyou Dijun 孚佑帝君 Thearch of Succour	Munch'ang Jegun Wenchang Dijun 文昌帝君 Thearch of Literature
Chinese Edition & Chosön Reprint Edition	<i>Kwansöng-jegun söngjök doji jönpip</i> <i>Guansheng dijun shengji tuzhi quanji</i> 關聖帝君聖蹟圖誌全集 <i>Complete Collection of Illustrated Records of Sacred Achievements of the Thearch Lord Sage Kwan</i> [KJ] 1876 Chosön Reprint Edition of 19C Qing Edition Published in Kwanwang Shrine Pak Kyu-su, Preface Sö Chöng, Preface Kim Ch'anghui, Postscript <i>Kwansöng-jegun bohun sangju</i> <i>Guansheng dijun baxun xiangzhu</i> 關聖帝君寶訓像註 <i>Commentary and Images of Precious Admonition of Thearch Lord Sage Kwan</i> 1882 Chosön Reprint Edition of [1731] 1850 Qing Edition <i>Kwansöng-jegun myöngsöng gyöng</i> <i>Guansheng dijun mingsheng jing</i> 關聖帝君明聖經 <i>Scripture of Luminous Sacredness of Thearch Lord Sage Kwan</i> 1883 Chosön Reprint Edition	<i>Yöjo jönsö</i> <i>Lüzü quanshu</i> 呂祖全書 <i>Complete Works of the Patriarch Lü</i> [LZQS] [1744] 1868 Chinese Edition	<i>Munje jönsö</i> /Wendi quanshu 文帝全書 <i>Complete Works of the Thearch of Literature</i> [WDQS] [1743] 1775 Chinese Edition <i>Munje söch'o</i> /Wendi shuchao 文帝書鈔 <i>Anthology of the Works of Thearch of Literature</i> [WDSC] (1768) 1882 Chinese Edition <i>Ümjülmun juhae</i> /Yinzhiwen zhujie 陰騭文註解 <i>Commentary on the Essay of Secret Virtue</i> [YZW] 1883 Chosön Reprint Edition Zhu Gui 朱珪, Commentary Yu Un, Postscript
Chosön Anthology from Chinese Edition & Chosön Original	<i>Kwansöng-jegun söngjök doji sokchip</i> <i>Guansheng dijun shengji tuzhi xuji</i> 關聖帝君聖蹟圖誌續集 <i>Sequel to Illustrated Records of Sacred Achievements of the Thearch Lord Sage Kwan</i> [KS] 1876 Published in Kwanwang Shrine <i>Haedong söngjök chi</i> <i>Haidong shengji zhi</i> 海東聖蹟誌 <i>Records of Sacred Achievements in the East of Sea</i> [HD] 1876 Published in Kwanwang Shrine <i>Kwaha jonsin</i> /Guohua cunshen 過化存神 <i>Enlightenment by Passing, Miracles by Presence</i> [KHCS] 1880 Published by Kojong's Edict (Ch. with K. Translation) <i>Kwansöng-jegun myöngsöng gyöng</i> 關聖帝君明聖經 <i>Scripture of Luminous Sacredness of Thearch Lord Sage Kwan</i> 1886 (Ch. with K. Translation)	<i>Simhak jongjon</i> <i>Xinxue zhengzhuan</i> 心學正傳 <i>Orthodox Transmission in Learning of Heart-Mind</i> [SHJJ] 1878 Chosön Excerpt from LZQS Kim Ch'anghui, Preface (Ch. with K. Translation) <i>Chunghyang jip</i> <i>Zhongxiang ji</i> 衆香集 <i>Collection of Various Fragrance</i> [CHJ] 1881 Chosön Anthology of LZQS Kim Ch'anghui, Preface Yu Un, Postscript <i>Yagön bojön</i> /Yaoyan baodian 藥言寶典 <i>Precious Book of Remedial Advice</i> 1884 Anthology of CHJ	<i>Kyegung ji</i> /Guigong zhi 桂宮志 <i>Record of the Cassia Palace</i> [KGJ] 1881 Chosön Anthology of WDQS & WDSC Sin Chöng-hüi, Preface (1881) Yu Un, Postscript (1877) <i>Munch'ang-jegun mongsu bijang gyöng</i> <i>Wenchang dijun mengshou mizang jing</i> 文昌帝君夢授秘藏經 <i>Secret Scripture of Thearch of Literature Bestowed in Dream</i> [MC1] 1878 Chosön Original <i>Munch'ang-jegun söngse gyöng</i> <i>Wenchang dijun xingshi jing</i> 文昌帝君惺世經 <i>Scripture of Awakening World of Thearch of Literature</i> [MC2] 1878 Chosön Original <i>Munch'ang-jegun tongsam gyöng</i> <i>Wenchang dijun tongsan jing</i> 文昌帝君統三經 <i>Scripture of Unity in the Three Teaching of Thearch of Literature</i> [MC3] 1878 Chosön Original
	<i>Samsöng bojön</i> /Sansheng baodian 三聖寶典 <i>Precious Book of the Three Sages</i> [SSB] 1877 Published by Formless Altar <i>Samsöng hun'gyöng</i> /Sansheng xunjing 三聖訓經 <i>Admonition of the Three Sages</i> [SSHG] 1880 The same colophon with KHJS (Ch. with K. Translation)		

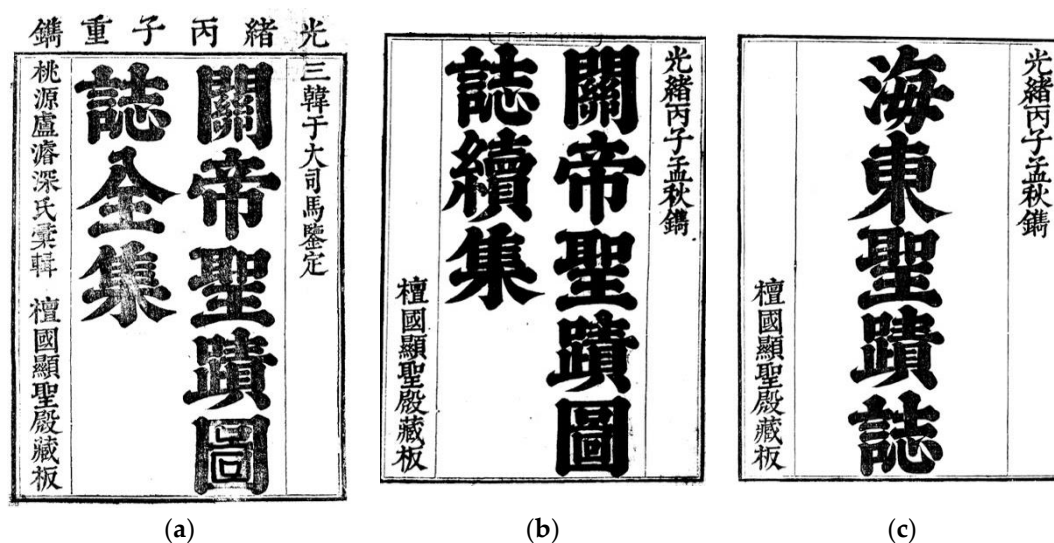


Figure 1. Publication of Guandi Texts in 1876. (a) *Complete Collection of Illustrated Records of Sacred Achievements of the Thearch Lord Sage Kwan*; (b) *Continuation of the Illustrated Records of Sacred Achievements of the Thearch Lord Sage Kwan*; (c) *Records of Sacred Achievements in the East of Sea*.

The *Complete Collection* (KJ/GQ) was initially published in 1693 by Lu Zhan 盧湛 in Qing China. Lu compiled historical records relating to Guan Yu, as well as canonical scriptures attributed to his deified form Guandi, divination texts, and miscellaneous works (Duara 1988; Goossens 2017). Kjong's collection was a Chosŏn edition of a nineteenth century Qing version. The *Continuation* collected the scriptures that were not included in KJ, especially the *Authentic Scripture of Awakening the World* (*Jueshi zhenjing/Kakse-jingyŏng* 覺世真經) (KS 1876, vol. 1),¹⁰ and other writings of Chosŏn literati, and anecdotal stories about miracles of Thearch Kwan in Chosŏn. The woodblocks of the series were stored in the Pavilion of Manifesting the Sacred (Hyŏnsŏng-jŏn 顯聖殿) at the East Kwanwang shrine in Seoul.

It is noteworthy that Pak Kyusu wrote the preface to KJ: this fact has been completely neglected in modern studies. In his preface, Pak stated admiringly:

The former general of the Han Dynasty, Marquis Kwan (kwanhu/guanhou 關侯), whose posthumous title is the Majestic and Sublime, became a King and a Thearch, with many honorable titles bestowed [from Chinese Emperors], so that he was worshipped in both Daoism and Buddhism, called as a Lord Thearch, a Heavenly Worthy, and a Bodhisattva.

(KJ 1876, vol. 1, 1a)

漢前將軍關侯諡壯繆，歷代屢加封典，爲王爲帝，而以至道釋二家，亦俱崇奉，稱帝君稱天尊稱菩薩。

Spirit-writing practice exploded since the Song (960–1279) dynasty period (Kleeman 1993) and became widespread in late imperial China, without respect for the domain of Daoist and Buddhist clergy, ordinary people and elite literati associations (Wang 2015; Kiely 2017). New teachings and religious scriptures were produced through the process of automatic-writing: Chinese characters were written while a spirit medium held a T-shaped or Y-shaped stick on a sandtray. By the mid-nineteenth century, the Three Sages—Guandi 關帝 (Thearch Guan), Lüzu 呂祖 (Patriarch Lü), and Wendi 文帝

¹⁰ According to the record of KS, *Jueshi zhenjing* was revealed in 1668 (the seventh year of Kangxi 康熙七年). KS 1876, vol. 1, 1a-b. Sakai pointed out its Japanese edition was circulated in the 1680s in Edo Japan without affirming the exact dating of the text (Sakai 1999–2000, vol. 2, pp. 184–85; vol. 2, p. 374). See also Goossens 2017, pp. 512–13; Yau 2015, pp. 222–25.

(Thearch of Literature)—became the most popular spirit-writing gods (Sakai 1999–2000; Yau 2005; Yau 2010; Esposito 2013; Goosseart 2015).

One of characteristics of the nineteenth century Chosŏn cult of Thearch Kwan was found in the worship of these Three Sages: Kwansong-jegun 關聖帝君, Thearch Lord Sage Kwan; Pu-u-jegun 孚佑帝君, Thearch Lord of Reliable Succour; Munch'ang-jegun 文昌帝君, Thearch Lord of Flourish of Literature.¹¹

According to the above Preface, the purpose of the 1876 publication of Guandi text was to enlighten the people from old customs and to become good. The Thearch of Literature also revealed that Sŏ Chŏng and the members of the spirit-writing altar are “the pivot of Enlightenment (*kaehwa ji chu* 開化之樞)” (KS 1876, vol. 3, 又51a-b). At that point, printing sacred books was a crucial element of their “Enlightenment” project. Sŏ Chŏng, probably a Chinese interpreter accompanying Chosŏn envoy to Qing China, was the core figure of the spirit-writing altar.

Recent studies provided an extensive investigation of the formation and development of the altar. Kim Yun Soo characterized it as “the first Korean Daoist organization of spirit-writing altar,” typifying “Popular Daoism” (Y.S. Kim 2008). Kim Youn Gyeong also regarded it as the “Daoist organization” and “Folk Daoism” (Y.G. Kim 2012; Y.G. Kim 2019). However, the faith and practices were not confined to Daoism or popular religion. The members related to the spirit-writing practice had connections with Buddhist associations and Buddhist text publications alike (Yi 1986; Park 2017; Seo 2017). The further investigation of a previously neglected source will serve as a link to connect the Three Sages cult with the royal family and the elite culture. This source is the *Collection of Sacred Spirit-writings* (*Sŏnggye-jip* 聖乩集, abbr. SGJ), a handwritten manuscript preserved in the Kyujang-gak Library of Seoul National University.

Thearch Kwan was at the center of the Chosŏn cult of the Three Sages. In this sense, it might be said to be the extension of the Guandi cult in East Asia. Prasenjit Duara analyzed the evolving myths and cults of Guandi in China in terms of “superscription,” meaning the layering of the contributions of rural cults and imperial liturgy, Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and other popular faiths and practices. Duara asserted that “Superscription enabled the imperial state to create an authoritative image of Guandi with which rural elites could identify and which peasants and other social groups could acknowledge without renouncing the dimensions of Guandi that were more immediately relevant to them (Duara 1988, p. 791).” The Chosŏn cult of Thearch Kwan not only expands superscription of Guandi symbolism geographically and temporally but also shows its recontextualization in Korea.

4. Spirit-Writing of the Three Sages and Enlightenment

4.1. The Kwanwang Shrines and the Related Figures

The *Collection of Sacred Spirit-writing* (SGJ) is a chronological record of revelations dating from 1874 to 1880. The place of revelation was not fixed: spirit-writing sessions were mostly held at the East and the South Kwanwang Shrines (Figures 2 and 3), outside the gates of Hansŏng 漢城 (present Seoul), and sometimes in the houses of the shrine administrators and the spirit-mediums as well.

The South Shrine was built in 1598 at the request of the Ming general Chen Yin 陳寅 (?–1621), who fought with the Japanese army in the East Asian War (1592–1598) (CWS 1598-4-25, HD 1876, vol. 1, 1a). The East Shrine was built during 1600–1602 on the desire and funds of the Ming Emperor Shenzong 神宗 (Van Lieu 2014, pp. 56–57). Despite Guan Yu already possessing the title of Thearch at the end of the sixteenth century,¹² the shrine was titled the King Kwan Shrine because Chosŏn ruler had the title

¹¹ I will unify their titles in Korean texts as Thearch Kwan, Thearch of Succour, and Thearch of Literature.

¹² Guan Yu was given the rank of Thearch in 1590 for the first time, titled “xietian huguo zhongyi dadi 協天護國忠義大帝, “the Great Thearch of Loyalty and Justice Who Protects the State and Assists the Heaven” (SXTZ, vol. 167). He subsequently received the title, “the Thearch Lord Sage Guan, Heavenly Worthy of Overarching Suppression with Divine Power, the Great Thearch who Subdues Demons in the Three Realms (Sanjie fumo dadi shenwei yuanzhen tianxun guansheng dijun 三界伏魔大帝神威遠鎮天尊關聖帝君” in 1605 (KJ 1876, vol. 3, 12a).

of King (*wang* 王) in the Sinocentric tributary system. Kwanwang Shrines were thus the initial places to house the protecting god of the Ming army. After the withdrawal of the Ming forces from the Korean peninsula, they became centers of the indigenization of the Guandi cult.



Figure 2. The South Shrine (a) and the East Shrine (b). (photographs held at the Korean National Museum).

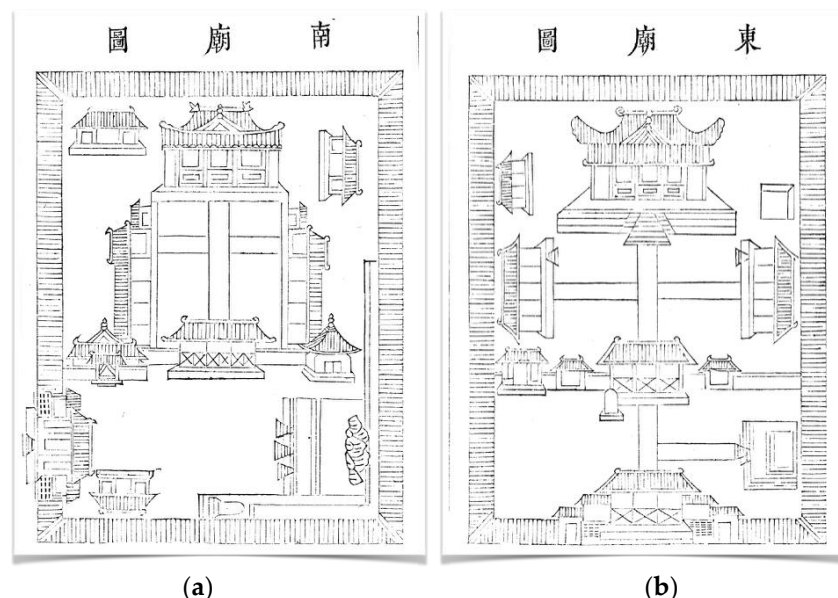


Figure 3. The South Shrine (a) and the East Shrine (b). (Continuation of the Illustrated Records of Sacred Achievements of the Thearch Lord Sage Kwan [KS] 1876, vol. 3, 11a-b).

It should be noted that Kwanwang Shrines were under the control of the state liturgical system in Chosŏn.¹³ The state worship of Thearch Kwan was elevated to the middle-rank in the eighteenth century (I. Kim 2014, p. 160). Each shrine had three *chuje-gwan* 主祭官, the Administrators of Sacrifice. Mostly the posts were occupied by the middle and lower ranks of Chosŏn officialdom, which was divided into an eighteen-rank system (from the top senior/junior first to the bottom senior/junior ninth) both in civil and military services.

¹³ Nevertheless, modern studies are inclined to discuss the Guandi cult as a popular faith (*mingan sinang* 民間信仰) (NIKH 1998, pp. 160–63). Youn Gyeong Kim categorized Kwanwang cult as “popular Daoism,” in the sense that the cult pervaded the broad social classes, albeit its origin was the state cult (Y.G. Kim 2012, pp. 312–13). Most researches agree that the characteristic of the Kwanwang cult was royal-initiated and became popularized in the entire state in the Kojong period (Murayama 1935; Jang 2004; Lee 2006).

The central figures who engaged in spirit-writing practice were the Administrator of Sacrifice at the East Shrine, Yi Chinmo 李瑄謨 (also called Chinsun 瑄淳 and Chunmo 駿謨) and his second son Kisŏn 基善. There were two known spirit mediums, Chŏn Chaesik 田在植 and Kim Hŭijŏng 金熙鼎. Other leading members of the Formless Altar (*musang-dan* 無相壇), such as Chŏi Sŏnghwan 崔瑄煥 (1813–1891), Sŏ Chŏng, Yu Un 劉雲 (1821–1884), Chŏng Hakku 丁鶴九, were also involved in spirit-writing practice and spreading the teaching of the Three Sages.

Sŏ Chŏng, who proceeded to publish the series of Guandi texts, was one of the three administrators of the South Shrine in 1876. Although he was the highest official among the three, holding the junior second rank title (*kasŏn-daebu* 嘉善大夫, Grand Master of Excellent Virtue), he was only in the senior fourth rank military office (*yongyangwi-hogun* 龍衛護軍, a deputy commander of the Left Guard). Yi Chinmo was the administrator of the East Shrine, with the same title (*kasŏn-daebu*) as Sŏ, and his actual post was in the junior second rank civil office (*tongji-jungch'u-busa* 同知中樞府事, a second deputy director of the Privy Council). The administrative office of the shrine seems to be a sinecure or a retreat place for elder military officials, usually former guard commander of Palace Guard (*wijang* 衛將), or remote relatives of the royal Yi clan.¹⁴ Other administrators were from sixth to eighth rank military officers who belonged to the Five Guard Armies (*owigun* 五衛軍) or lower rank officials who belonged to the Palace Supply Office (*naesusa* 內需司). In short, Yi was the highest official among the administrators of the shrine at that time.

The spirit mediums, Chŏng Hakku, Chŏn Chaesik, and Kim Hŭijŏng were able to communicate with deities through their visions and dreams. Chŏn's role was crucial in the revelation of the East Kwanwang Shrine, but he was illiterate in Classical Chinese. The deities were perplexed because he could not write down oracles. On the 27th day of the 10th month in 1877, Thearch of Succour—Pure Yang Lü (Yŏ Sunyang 呂純陽)—came to dedicate a poem to Thearch Kwan, but Chŏn Chaesik could not write it because of his illiteracy, thus Lü returned in vain” (田生在植, 以無識之故, 不得作詩而歸矣) (SGJ, 12a). Chŏn usually transmitted divine messages by words of mouth (*kujŏn* 口傳) rather than by written text. Hence, Thearch Kwan ordered Chŏn to learn classical Chinese from Chŏng Hakku (SGJ, 19b).

According to SGJ, the members of the Formless Altar received the Great Dharma (*taebŏp* 大法) (SGJ 1877-11-15, 14b) and Chŏng Hakku was essential to “the Enlightenment of the Three Sages” (*samsŏng kaehwa* 三聖開化) (SGJ 1878-1-27, 21a). At the same time, Yi Chinmo and Chŏn Chaesik were blessed as “the most beloved disciples” of Thearch Kwan.¹⁵ In the latter part of SGJ, instead of the pair of Yi and Chŏn, Chinmo's son Yi Kisŏn became the central figure, and Kim Hŭijŏng transmitted his vivid dream revelations.

Outside of Kwanwang Shrines, King Kojong and state officials showed great interest in the unseen world. People were sent to the shrines to consult health problem of the Grand Royal Queen Dowager (*taewang taebi* 大王大妃) (SGJ, 9a; 52a; 65b) and the Crown Prince (*seja* 世子) (SGJ, 58b; 59b; 75b): The prince is Yi Ch'ŏk 李坫 (1874–1926), who would be the next King Sunjong 純宗. The Grand Queen Dowager is the Queen Sinjŏng 神貞王后, the mother of the twenty-fourth king Hŏnjong 憲宗, from the Pungyang 豐壤 Cho 趙 clan, who had adopted Yi Chaehwang 載晃 (i.e., Kojong) to ascend to the throne of the twenty-sixth king of Chosŏn. SGJ reveals that Kojong himself was a main consultee (SGJ, 23a-b; 44a-b; 52a; 59a; 64a-b; 65a-66b; 69b; 71b).

Probably, when earthquakes occurred in the Ch'angdok Palace in the spring of 1879 (SJW 1879-3-17), Kojong consulted to resolve “the outbreak of demonic spirits within the palace (闕內雜神發動之事)” (SGJ 1879-3-17, 44b). Kojong interpreted his oracle poem as an injunction to build a new shrine (*sŏngmyŏ*

¹⁴ About twelve names of Yi clan members appear in SGJ. Among them were: Yi Chunmo (i.e., Chinmo), the guard commander of Kyŏnghŭi Palace 慶熙宮衛將; Yi Hangyu 李漢奎 (48a); Yi Bonghwan 李鳳煥 (62a-63a), who held the post of the commander of Five Guards 五衛將; and Yi Wŏnsik 李源植 (68a), a commander of Palace Gate 守門將. The guard commander (*wijang*) had no fixed assignment.

¹⁵ SGJ 1880-10-24, 31a. 李生瑄淳也, 田生在植也, 我本最愛之人也。

ch'angkön 聖廟創建) for Thearch Kwan.¹⁶ Kim Hŭijŏng made a divination to figure out the proper person to take charge of the construction¹⁷; he had a dream about the Prime Minister Yi Chŏiŭng 李最應 (1815–1882, Kojong's paternal uncle) and the Commissioner-Chief (*todok* 都督) Min Kyŏmho 閔謙鎬 (1838–1882, Kojong's maternal uncle) and asked their fortunes (*sinsu* 身數) by the divinations.¹⁸ It seems that they proceeded with the construction of the North Shrine. Since the following year, the two had led the first administrative reforms as the Heads of Office for Extraordinary State Affairs (*Tongni-gimu-amun* 統理機務衙門), until both were killed by soldiers who opposed the military reform of 1882 (an event known as the Soldier's Revolt; *Imo-gullan* 壬午軍亂).

Another high-ranking court official present in SGJ is Kim Ch'anghŭi 金昌熙 (1844–1890). He had been the secretary of the royal embassy to the Qing during Kojong's early reign period. He is the one who wrote a postscript for KJ, which he signed with the title of former President of the National Academy (*Sŏnggyun-gwan Taesasŏng* 成均館大司成). Kim was regarded as “a trustworthy official (*singwan* 信官)” (SGJ, 27b). As we will discuss later, he made a major contribution to the dissemination of the Three Sages' Teaching. Among the court servants, Kojong's closest eunuchs Ryu Chaehyŏn 柳載賢 (?–1884) and Hong T'aekchu 洪宅柱 (fl. 1877–1907) also appeared in the records (SGJ, 15b; 31b).

The military elite figure Cho Yŏngha 趙寧夏 had close relation with Yi Chinmo, who was deeply engaged in shrine affairs. Cho was a relative of the Grand Royal Queen Dowager and one of the main contributors to the coronation of Kojong. In 1874, after ten years of regency, Kojong began to rule directly; at that time, Cho became the Commander of Forbidden Guard (*kŭmwi-daejang* 禁衛大將). In 1875, the following year, he was promoted to the position of Commander of the Military Training Corp (*Hullyŏn-dogam* 訓練都監). According to Kojong's edict, the Commander was to lead the sacrificial rites to Thearch Kwan twice a year, in the spring and autumn. Even after Cho was promoted to minister,¹⁹ people at Kwanwang Shrines called him as the Commander, “*hunjang* 訓將” (SGJ, 9a; 10a; 24a; 24b) or “*hunjang-daegam* 訓將大監” (SGJ, 52b). Cho served as Kojong's right hand and trusted friend until he was assassinated in 1884 during the Kapsin Regime Change.

The most stirring document might be the divination records for the trifecta of Enlightenment Party figures: Pak Yŏnghyo (“*Kŭmrŭngwi* 錦陵尉,” the Royal son-in-law), Kim Okkyun (“*Kim Kyori Ok* 金校理玉”), and Sŏ Kwangbŏm (“*Sŏ Sŏbang Pŏm* 徐書房範”) (Figure 4). In 1879, the year specified in the transcript, most of them were in their twenties and the early stage of their careers.²⁰ It was about two years before Kojong dispatched them to Japan. The oracle poem for Pak Yŏnghyo depicted him as a figure who would cross the sea of suffering and save his people (乘舟苦海濟斯民). The oracle for Kim Okkyun described him as a giant fish in the deepest ocean: a creature that would transform itself into something extraordinary and bring thunderstorms.²¹ It remains unknown whether it was Kojong or themselves, who asked to predict their destinies (SGJ 1879-3-28, 47a). Later, despite the failure in 1884, Pak was taken in again as a court official and promoted as a leader of the 1894 Reform.

¹⁶ SGJ 1879-3-22, 44b-45a. 上行十籤事, 三日晝夜研究後, 聖廟創建事, 伏祝矣. 得六十一籤.

¹⁷ SGJ 1879-3-23, 45a. 聖廟事引道之人, 以何處可合之意, 伏告. 得五十四籤.

¹⁸ SGJ 1879-3-24, 45b-47b. 夢謁領相都統之後, 覺而即入殿內, 以周施之意, 而處身數, 伏告. 得十八籤, 得二十籤. SGJ 1879-6-5, 47b. 領相直心職事, 伏祝.

¹⁹ Cho Yongha was Minister of Work (*kongjo p'ansŏ* 工曹判書) in 1876 and served as Minister of Rites (*yejo p'ansŏ* 禮曹判書) and Minister of Personnel (*ijo p'ansŏ* 吏曹判書) in 1877.

²⁰ Pak was nineteen years of age and married to the princess Yŏnghye 永惠 (1859–1872). Kim Okkyun was twenty-nine and served as the fifth-rank official at the Office of Special Adviser (*Hongmun-gwan* 弘文館). Sŏ Kwangbŏm was twenty-one; he had not yet passed the civil service examination. “*Sŏbang*” is literally “a book-room,” which is a common title for educated men preparing for the exams.

²¹ SGJ 1879-3-28. 魚千里大海千尋, 誰識深深經劫沈, 一得寶珠生變化, 雷聲天地氣嚴森. The oracle poem was No. 49 lot of the *Sacred Lots* in KS 1876, vol. 3, 68.

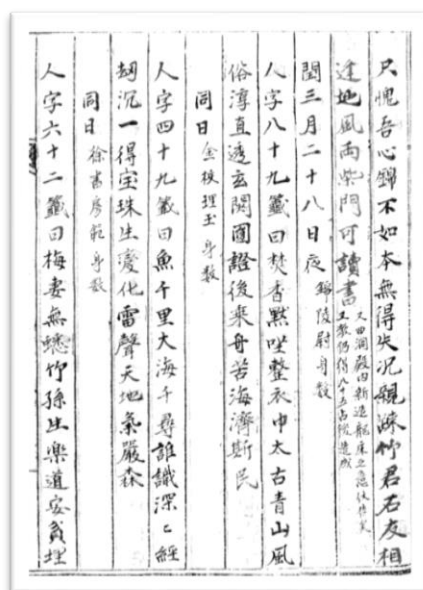


Figure 4. Oracle Poems for the Triad of Enlightenment Party (*Collection of Sacred Spirit-writings* [SGJ], 47a).

There was a notable association called “The Society of Spring and Autumn (*ch’unch’usa* 春秋社).” It seems to have been organized to support the official sacrifices in Kwanwang Shrine in March (*kyōngch’ip* 驚蟄, Insect Wakes) in the spring and October (*sang’gang* 霜降, Frost Descends) in the autumn. The name was taken from the Confucian classic *Spring and Autumn Annals*, which was utilized in putting Thearch Kwan into the genealogy of the Confucian lineage.²² It is said that the association had three hundred members, consisting of soldiers, court officials, and unknown ordinary people. Chōng Hakku and Yi Chinsun were declared as the spiritual leaders of this group (SGJ, 26a; 32b). They built a Kwanwang shrine at the garden of Yi Chinsun’s house following a revelation of Thearch Kwan (SGJ 1878-2-27, 24b-25b).

It should be noted that the Military Training Corps was the closest institution linked to Kwanwang Shrines. The Corps was the head of the Five Armies of the late Chosŏn, in charge of manufacturing and maintaining weapons. Every year, the generals of Three Armies—Military Training Corps, Royal Guard (*Ŏyōngch’ōng* 御營廳), and Forbidden Guard (*Kūmwiyōng* 禁衛營)—were appointed as the officiants at the rites. The Three Armies’ manpower was utilized not only for Kwanwang worship, but also for publishing books and the restoration of statues and shrine building (SGJ, 2b; SJW 1865–1893).²³

Cho Yongha, the former Commander of the Military Training Corps, kept in touch with the Shrine Administrators to discuss general administrative affairs of the shrine properties, as well as the health of the Royal family and even the diplomatic affairs.²⁴ In autumn of 1877, Japanese envoys planned to visit Seoul, which burdened Kojong’s court because of budget and security problems (SJW 1877-9-28).

²² SGJ 1876-10-7. 學宗春秋, 直接孔門之道統. Guan Yu’s Confucian lineage has been built up in China, and became prominent in Qing texts. KJ 1876 (GQ 1693); JY261, 1a. 關聖帝君本傳: 帝字雲長, ... 爲人義勇絕倫, 好讀左氏春秋, 諷誦略皆上口. It was already well known in eighteenth century Chosŏn (CWS 1730-12-6).

²³ Military Training Corps had a set of movable type (訓練都監字) since the sixteenth century, by which many books were printed.

²⁴ SGJ 1877-9-21, 9a. Yi Chinsun (i.e., Chinmo) made divination with the One-Hundred Lots inside a shrine in his house. He reported to Thearch Kwan, “Because the illness of the Grand Royal Queen Dowager was serious, I could not help but offering a prayer out of worry and informed the Commander of the Military Training Corp 大王大妃殿病患危重, 故不勝感懷, 以屬祈禱事, 告于訓將.” SGJ 1877-9-24, 9b. Thearch Kwan’s revelation: “Now the Japanese emissary’s affair is no need for doubt and worry. You discuss things fairly with ordinary minds and do not behave recklessly. The Vice Minister Cho Yōngha has various things to consult later, [thus if] he tells how things are going in person, sincerely serve him and perform without a doubt. 李生瑨也, 丁生鶴也, 兩人皆爲國之忠臣也. 今倭使之情, 可無疑慮. 汝等平心公議, 無妄作. 又趙判書寧夏, 後日種種有相議之事, 親近吐於事理, 無疑慎謹奉行.” Japanese affairs are also seen in SGJ 24a; 44a. There is also a record that alludes to a consultation about a secret agent to investigate Japan (*wōjejong* 倭情). SGJ 1877-10-6, 11a. 倭情之到京期約, 似在不遠矣.

SGJ indicates the consultation about Japanese affairs through Cho Yongha. Considering the liturgical system of the Kwanwang Shrines, the involvement of Kojong with the shrine was nothing out of the ordinary, but SGJ shows the deep interest of Corps members in the spiritual domain.

At this point, we must consider the meaning of Kwanwang shrines to kings and intellectuals of the mid- to late Chosŏn. After the East Asian War, Ming generals requested that king Sŏnjo 宣祖 participated in the sacrifice to Guandi. At first, Chosŏn people showed reluctance in regard to the shrine construction because of post-war fatigue; the Chosŏn literati evinced annoyance with the Ming general's request, protesting that there was no ritual protocol for their king to follow in relation to Guandi worship (Van Lieu 2014). However, after the foundation of Manchurian Qing, who invaded Chosŏn in 1627 and 1636 in the process of destroying the Ming, Sukchong 肅宗 (1660–1720) wanted to promote the “loyalty and righteousness” (*ch'ungŭi* 忠義) of Kwanwang (CWS 1691-2-27; 1703-6-18) and incorporated the ritual into the state liturgical system. In 1704, Sukchong ordered the construction of a shrine for Ming Shenzong 神宗—the Altar of Great Gratitude (Taibo-dan 大報壇)—in commemoration of the post-war reconstruction (*chaejo* 再造) of Chosŏn (CWS 1704-4-10). Chosŏn kings Sukjong, Yŏngjo 英祖 and Chŏngjo 正祖 all tried to strengthen the kingship through promotion of the ideal of “King's [righteous] governance” (*wangjŏng* 王政) and to maintain a distance from the “barbarian intruder” Qing. They each continuously used the Kwanwang shrines to express their Ming affiliation, under the slogan of “The Great Cause to Revere the Zhou” (*chonju taeŭi* 尊周大義), in which the Zhou symbolizes the essence of Confucian culture transmitted to the Ming dynasty.

The meaning of “revering the Zhou” or “Little Central Efflorescence” (*xiao Zhonghua*/so *Chunghwa* 小中華) has long been disputed among Korean scholars. The widespread understanding is that Chosŏn insisted to be the center and heir of Chinese orthodox culture succeeded to Ming, instead of barbarian Qing. Kim Youngmin suggested recently that, after the fall of Ming, “Central Efflorescence” (*Zhonghua*/*Chunghwa* 中華) lost its geopolitical significance and became “a theoretical placeholder,” which was opened to broaden interpretations and diverse utilization (Y. Kim 2013, pp. 224–26; Y. Kim 2019, pp. 93–99). What he called “placeholder” can be thought of as an empty signifier or an open symbol, which is also applicable to Kwanwang. Since the seventeenth century, Chosŏn kings and elite officials filled up the symbol with Chosŏn ideals, “the Zhou” with “King's righteous governance”; “Kwanwang” with “loyalty and righteousness”; “the Ming” with “the legitimacy of Chosŏn state.”

In the late Chosŏn context, Kwanwang has been officially commemorated as the deity who protected Chosŏn from the Japanese invasion (Figures 5 and 6), formulated as the protagonistic figure who embodies loyalty to the righteous governance of Chosŏn, and simultaneously as an antagonistic figure to the Qing and other foreign powers. Interestingly, the Qing dynasty also promoted the loyalty discourse of Guandi to consolidate the adherence of Chinese literati to the Manchu emperor, appropriating Guandi as the protective deity of the entire empire. In the broader East Asian context, Guandi was no longer a determinate signifier, fixed in a definite time or place, but the open symbol of universal justice and protection.



Figure 5. Thearch Kwan (*Complete Collection of Illustrated Records of Sacred Achievements of the Thearch Lord Sage Kwan* [KJ] 1876, vol. 1, 1b).



Figure 6. Manifestation of Thearch Kwan in Chosŏn (*Records of Sacred Achievements in the East of Sea* [HD] 1876, vol. 1, 1a).

Thearch Kwan himself deconstructed Sinocentrism, in declaring, “I am impartial from the outset, and just protect and bless the good. The Chosŏn state has great fortune on her side. Therefore, her near future will be prosperous” (吾本無私, 惟佑善人. 朝鮮國之運大通, 故年來豐也) (SGJ 1880-10-08, 76a). Spirit-written communication with Thearch Kwan was an important locus of the development of the imagination of Chosŏn’s place in a post-Ming order and the reformulation of Chinese deities into universal and transcendent standards of goodness.

4.2. The Three Sages and Revelations

As stated previously, an important feature of the Chosŏn cult of Thearch Kwan was the veneration of Samsŏng 三聖, Three Sages. In China, each of the three—Guandi, Lüzu, and Wendi—has his own deification history and independent sanctuary. Guan Yu, the war hero of the Three Kingdoms period,

was developed as the protector god of a local Buddhist temple and then of merchant communities, eventually to be incorporated into the Daoist pantheon and imperially sanctioned sacrifices (Duara 1988; Ter Haar 2017). Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓 is the legendary master of internal alchemy of the late Tang and a Daoist immortal, who became a very popular god of universal salvation and the patriarch of Quanzhen Daoism (Lüzü) as well as many spirit-writing associations (Katz 1996; Mori 2001; Lai 2016). Lüzü received the title of Thearch of Reliable Succour from the Yuan emperor in 1310. Wenchang, originally a deity of ancient Chinese astrology, evolved as a spirit-writing god who was worshiped by the literati class since the Southern Song period (Kleeman 1994). Wenchang received the title of Thearch from the Yuan emperor in 1316.

Each cult was not limited to Daoism but had developed in response to the spiritual needs of various social classes, including literati, warriors, merchants, and ordinary people, which resulted in multiple religious crossovers. In China, the three gods usually had individual shrines. In other cases, the pavilions for more than two deities—usually Lüzü and Wendi—are installed in the temple complexes of Daoism, local shrines, and charitable institutions called philanthropic halls (*shantang* 善堂) in the later period.

In contrast, except for the case of Thearch Kwan, no sanctuary dedicated to the Thearch of Succour or the Thearch of Literature has been reported in Chosŏn. SGJ is the only source that documented the process of the Kwanwang Shrine's becoming a place of the Three Sages worship.²⁵ In 1879, spirit medium Kim Hŭijŏng received detailed instruction from Thearch Kwan to make the images of the other two Thearchs (SGJ, 52b-54a).

[1879-9-13] (Instruction in the dream of Kim Hŭijŏng).

The Sacred Thearch [Kwan] descended and instructed: "Did you look into the divine color of the Thearch of Literature in detail?" I replied that I had respectfully looked into it more closely. Then [the Thearch] gave me a plate. I reverently looked up, and [its surface] was multicolored and had a red spot in the middle. [The Thearch] gave another plate. I saw it was red-colored and had a black spot in the middle. Shortly afterward, the Thearch gave an instruction: "The divine colors are just like that." I received the instruction.

The Sacred Thearch instructed: "Disciple Yi, use the portraits of Thearchs of Literature and Succour as they are. The most critical thing is to take the style of old versions. Then, you should describe completely according to what you've seen of the divine colors." (SGJ, 52b-53b)

九月十三日(金熙鼎夢教) 聖帝下教曰, "爾果詳瞻文昌帝君神色耶?" 以詳細仰瞻對奏, 則下賜接匙一箇, 奉瞻則着彩而中點脂者也. 又下賜接匙一箇, 又奉視則着石礪朱而中點墨色者也. 仍下教曰, "神色若此也." 承教. 聖帝教曰, "李某, 仍用文昌帝孚佑帝影帖, 以舊本之意最緊, 則一從爾之仰瞻神色圖寫."

Here, "the style of old versions" might designate the images inserted in the previous Qing versions of Lüzü and Wendi texts. Since 1877, Sŏ Chŏng and Yu Un began to make the two anthologies from their Qing collections (KGJ 1881, Preface), which contained the images of each deity (Figures 7 and 8). Yi Chinsun's group completed a portrait of the Thearch of Literature in ten days and enshrined it at midnight on the 29th day of 9th month in 1879. They finished installing the images of the Thearch of Succour about a week later (SGJ 1879-10-7, 53a-54b). Thearch Kwan was placed in the middle of an offering altar, Thearch of Succour in the left (East) and Thearch of Literature in the right (West) (SGJ, 1879-11-9).²⁶

²⁵ Yun Soo Kim pointed out the images of Three Sages were installed at the Formless Altar in 1883 (Y.S. Kim 2008, p. 75), but the date of enshrinement at the Kwanwang Shrine precedes it by four years.

²⁶ SGJ 1879-11-9. 聖帝奠座于文昌帝孚佑帝兩聖奠座之中間. Based on another record, Thearch of Succour was placed in the East and Thearch of Literature in the West. SGJ 1878-1-27. 柱聯揭例, 東則孚佑帝聯, 西則文昌帝聯, 中則予聯.



Figure 7. Thearch of Succour [Patriarch Lü] (*Collection of Various Fragrance* [CHJ] 1881).

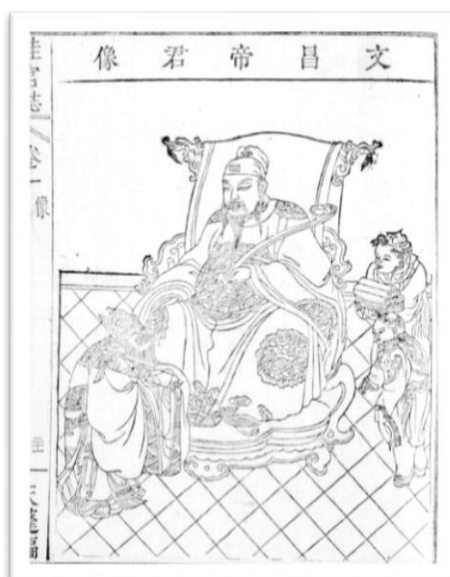


Figure 8. Thearch of Literature [Wenchang] (*Record of The Cassia Palace* [KGJ] 1881).

A difference in spirit-writing practice in Chosŏn from China was the absence of wood-pen and sandtray. Although the practioners read about the spirit-writing tools and even received a revelation to prepare a sandtray (SGJ, 41b),²⁷ they could not make them. Eventually, Thearch Kwan instructed them to replace the sandtray with red square papers, and a wood-pen with a brush-pen, the pen-holder for which was made of copper and carved with a phoenix (SGJ, 75a-b).²⁸ It was apparent that in the late Chosŏn period, spirit-writing was performed with the medium of writing down directly on a paper with an inked brush-pen.²⁹ Not only that, the revelations were varied in type: they wrote down the spirit-medium's dream (*hyŏngmong* 現夢) and words that he heard from deities; they used

²⁷ SGJ 1879-2-13. 伏見救劫文中, 有木筆沙盤之句, 敢發愚意, 雖欲舉行, 知識暗昧, 敢此伏告伏侯聖旨. 即因夢教, 設于香案之訓.

²⁸ SGJ 1880-10-2. 筆則以銅新造, 鸞鳥則如鳳. . . . 沙盤則以代紅紙, 長廣如席敷之, 甚好. 伏魔大帝示訓.

²⁹ Byounghoon Park informed me of the possibility that Chosŏn spirit-writing had a different type from Qing China, in referring to the earlier practice of spirit-writing in Tonghak 東學 (Eastern Learning) with ink-brush on papers. According to him, spirit-writing played an important role in formation of scriptures and incantations, as well as the establishment of Tonghak lineage since 1860s (Park 2020).

drawing a lot (*ch'u-ch'öm* 抽籤) of fortune-telling poem (Figure 9). There were three kinds of Numinous Lots (*lingqian/yöngch'öm* 靈籤): *Numinous Lots of Thearch Guan* (*Guandi lingqian* 關帝靈籤) in KJ vol. 2, *Numinous Lots of the East of the Jiang River* (*Jiangdong lingqian* 江東靈籤) in KS vol. 4, and the Chosŏn original *Sacred Lots* (*Söngch'öm* 聖籤) in KS vol. 3.



Figure 9. Numinous Lots at the East Shrine (No. 1027-1, National Museum of Korea).

Above the Three Sages presided the Jade Emperor (Yuhuang/Okhwang 玉皇), who was conceived of as the supreme ruler in the celestial realm. The deity was transmitted to the Korean peninsula in Koryŏ period. In SGJ, the Jade Emperor is depicted as the highest god, who resides in the heavens and issues his edict through the Three Sages, or sometimes through a Confucian sage such as Zengzi 曾子 (SGJ, 65b).³⁰ Such a hierarchy reflects religious interaction with Qing China. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the increasing spirit-writing texts featured the three—Guandi, Wendi, and Lüzu—as the Three Ministers (*sanxiang* 三相) of the Jade Emperor, and formed the narrative of the Three Ministers' promulgating transformation in place of the Heaven 三相代天宣化" (Sakai 1999–2000; Yau 2010).³¹

Then, what was the main purpose of the Three Sages revelations in Chosŏn? Thearch Kwan said:

I admonish you by descending edict, for I am desperate for the task of Enlightenment.

降乩之諭, 予切開化之事也. (SGJ 1878-12-27, 37b)

The most important keyword of *Sönggye-jip* was *kaehwa*, Enlightenment. Thearch Kwan was described as the "Jade Emperor's envoy who enlightens and transforms the human world (玉皇勅使, 開化人間)" (SGJ, 3b). The most serious problem for which people needed to be enlightened was that people make their habituated tendencies become their true nature (*sŭpki söngsöng* 習氣成性). In order

³⁰ The Jade Emperor rarely descends directly on earth, but Yi Chinmo was blessed that the Jade Emperor descended to his house and gave a sacred name to him. SGJ 1877-6-17, 6b-7a. 玉皇上帝上天, 伏魔大帝奉命, 李瑑謨下字, 以淳字賜下 ... 玉皇上帝降坐于李瑑謨家示訓.

³¹ Besides, the Formless Altar has been influenced by the Altar of Awakening Origin (Jueyuandan 覺源壇), the early nineteenth-century spirit-writing altar of Qing elite literati, that contributed to the compilation of *Essentials of Daoist Canon* (*Daozang Jiyao* 道藏輯要) in the 1810s. They worshiped Lü Dongbin as the first Patriarch and Liu Shouyuan 柳守元 as the second Patriarch. The Formless Altar also received a revelation from Liu Shouyuan, and Wendi compared the spirit medium Chōng Hakku with the Qing literati Peng Dingqiu 彭定求 (1645–1719) and Huang Zhengyuan 黃正元 (fl. 1713–1755) (MC1, 1b). The altar members might be related to the reception of *Essentials of Daoist Canon*. As for the study of MC1, see (Y.S. Kim 2008; Y.G. Kim 2019). Huang Zhengyuan's edition of *Yinzhijwen tushuo* 陰鸞文圖說 explicitly influenced the creation of MC1, because major illustrations of MC1 are copies from Huang's collection. As for Peng Dingqiu's spirit-writing, see (Burton-Rose 2015).

to attain “Enlightenment,” one should not be contaminated by worldly dirt and commit oneself to the Learning of Heart-Mind (*simhak* 心學) and make one’s faith and goodness strong, bearing the two words “Loyalty and Righteousness” (*chung’ui* 忠義) in mind. Thearch Kwan emphasized that the true master is only inside the one word “sincerity” (*sŏng* 誠) (SGJ 1878-12-27, 37b). Their *kaehwa* conveys the Confucian ethos within the frame of Buddhist awakening. Thearch Kwan gave an interpretation to Kim Hŭijŏng’s dream that “he came out the worldly dirt and enlightened at the Jewel Mountain” (出於塵世, 寶山開化) (SGJ, 63b):

The constant ethical standard has been violated and transgressed. Thus, I entrusted Yi Chinsun and others with [the task of enlightening and] transforming this world into the state of the Jewel Mountain.

(SGJ 1880-2-10, 63b)

倫常乖舛。故我托於李瑄等, 此世化為寶山之境。

The mandate that I received from the Highest Thearch [the Jade Emperor] is the edict to manifest myself in this world and broaden the enlightenment-transformation [to all beings] in the air and in the water. Thousands and millions of my sayings come from the two words, “constant morality.” (SGJ 1880-8-3, 74a)

吾之所奉上帝勅命, 諭顯此世, 敷化飛潛。千萬其言, 皆由此倫常二字中也。

The state of the Jewel Mountain, “Enlightenment,” implies the restoration of the ethical norms among the Five Constant Relationships (*wulun/oryun* 五倫): ruler and minister, father and son, husband and wife, the elder and the younger, and among friends. It is clear that the term *kaehwa* is connected to the Confucian ideal of “transforming people and completing customs” (*huamin chengsu* 化民成俗), based on the Neo-Confucian rectification of the mind and self-cultivation of one’s nature. It also contains very old and serious meanings in the history of Daoism.

5. Daoist Eschatology and Publication of Morality Books

5.1. Apocalypse and Salvific Enlightenment

The Enlightenment of the Three Sages was predicated on the Daoist view of time. By combining the Buddhist concept of *kalpa* (*jie* 劫) with the Chinese notion of cyclical time, Daoism developed its own eschatology in which numerous universes repeatedly emerge one after another, but the great disasters will come and destroy everything to return to nothingness at the turning of a *kalpa*.

The Chosŏn editions of Guandi texts incorporated *Jiujie wen/Kugŏmmun* 救劫文 or *Writ of Salvation from the [End of] Kalpa* (KS 1876, 2: 11a-11b; KHJS 1880, 7b-8a), a scripture which predicts an imminent holocaust at the end of Great Kalpa (*dajie* 大劫). The synopsis is as follows: The Highest Thearch Jade Emperor commanded the destruction of the human world through wars and epidemic (*wenyi* 瘟疫) because of moral deprivation. At that moment, Guandi and other deities presented a petition to hold on a while in order to allow for the opportunity of enlightening people. The spirit-writing with wood-pen and sandtray (*mubi shapan* 木筆沙盤) was a method of Enlightenment (*kaihua* 開化).³² In this context, Enlightenment was an urgent matter for survival at the turning of a *kalpa*.

The *Writ* was said to have been revealed in Xing Zhou 荊州, around two hundred years after the foundation of the Qing dynasty (KS 1876, 2: 11a). It was thus produced in mid-nineteenth century

³² KS 1876, vol. 2, 11a-11b. 嗚呼! 大劫臨矣。吾等皆為爾曹受罰, 爾等猶優遊自如耶? 恭惟帝心仁愛, 何忍以大荼毒斯民? 所以然者, 人心既壞, 王法難容, 地獄之說疑誕, 來生之報為, 不得已假手凶神, 授之鋒刃, 使一切元惡大憝, 分受其罪, 庶足以剔邪蕩穢, 興起良善。…… 大清定鼎二百餘年, 昇平日久, 奸偽遂滋, 官吏紳民, 大率逆倫背理, 自絕於覆載。上帝震怒, 已於數十年前, 令諸魔王降世, 流布瘟疫, 蜂起干戈。爾時, 吾等聞命悚, …… 乃借諸神祇, 俯伏金闕, 哀懇暫緩, 容俟導化, 蒙恩准奏, 即速開化。於是遍處降乩, 不時降壇, 木筆沙盤, 千萬其言, 自謂可以普渡迷津矣。

China, probably during the period when the Qing was suffering through the Taiping Civil War.³³ The revelation sheds a shadow of the apocalypse, as Vincent Goossaert discussed its eschatological significance. Goossaert stressed that the characteristic of the eschatology lies in non-messianism and non-millennarianism (Goossaert 2014, p. 244); in other words, the scenario did not designate the time and place of the great end.

However, the spatial indeterminacy and temporal obscurity provides adaptive capacity and mobility to the narratives for spreading in East Asia. Afflicted with starvation and epidemic disease in the late 1850s–1870s and beset by domestic riots as well as foreign powers, Chosŏn figures shared in the atmosphere of crisis and insecurity of mid-nineteenth century China. The logic of Enlightenment with spirit-writing at the imminent crisis was recapitulated in the spirit-writing altars of Chosŏn.

Although modern scholars of Japanese studies did not pay much attention to the origin of the term *kaika*, its oldest usage is found in the Chinese Buddhist text, which means its ultimate goal, Buddhahood, and “to enlighten [with Buddhist teaching].” The second-century Chinese translation of Buddhist sutra, *the Scripture of Origin of Buddhist Practice* (*Xiuxing benqi jing* 修行本起經), a Samarkand monk Kang Mengxiang 康孟詳 (fl. 194–199) used *kaihua* in a passage describing Śākyamuni enlightening myriad beings: “After the attainment of Dao, he was called as Buddha, the Highest Worthy. The light of his divine virtue was illuminating day and night. With the sixty-two thousand followers of bhikshus, he traveled the world and *enlightened* the myriad of living beings.”³⁴ A Kashmiri monk, Buddhayaśas 佛陀耶舍, also used the term in his translation of *The Longer Āgama Sutra* in 413: “(The Boddhisatva) resided in the celestial hall and enlightened by [Buddhist] Dao 在天正堂, 以道開化” (T1, 6a).

In the Daoist context, particularly substantiated in the *Scriptures of Numinous Treasure* (*Lingbao jing* 靈寶經), Enlightenment has simultaneous cosmological and soteriological meanings, because it implies the beginning of a new cosmos after the time of destruction and chaos. The fourth-century Daoist scripture stated:

[The True Writs of] *Five Ancients of the Primordial Beginning* written in Red Script on Jade Tablets emerged spontaneously from the midst of cavern-like emptiness (i.e., the Dao). It generated the sky and established the earth, and enlightened the luminous spirits [of all being]. (DZ22, vol. 1, 2b)

元始五老赤書玉篇, 出於空洞自然之中, 生天立地, 開化神明。

“Luminous Spirit (*shenming* 神明)” covers the spiritual, perceptive operations in nature and life. It claims that the True Writs (*zhenwen* 真文), the archetype of Daoist talisman and scripture, are the origin of heaven and earth, divine and human beings. It enlightened both realms of the human and the divine spirit (*kaihua renshen* 開化人神).³⁵ In this context, Enlightenment implies the beginning of the human world and consciousness. The explanation became a Daoist doctrinal discourse of canonical scripture (DZ1124, 8b; DZ1241, 9a). Such Daoist Enlightenment always began with the manifestation of scripture. From the Daoist perspective, the Dao unites in itself the whole universe, which was gradually differentiated in forms of *qi* 氣, being simultaneously spiritual and material, the prima pneuma and the prima materia of the universe. Based on the idea that the primordial *qi* congealed into the writs and scriptures, Daoism gave the cosmological ascendancy to the scriptures rather than to the subject of teaching, such as deity or founder (J. Kim 2019, pp. 127–31).

In other words, the substantial being of Daoist Teaching is the scriptures themselves, because those are the forms that Dao spontaneously has taken. Relatively, the deities, being themselves also certain

³³ The same passage was included in *Guandi quanshu* 關帝全書 edited and published by Huang Qishu 黃啓曙 in 1858 (GDQS 1858, vol. 24, 53b–55a; *Guandi wenxian huibian* 1995, vol. 6, pp. 662–65). Thus, the text was written between 1816–1858. See also (Goossaert 2017, pp. 520–22).

³⁴ T3, 461b. 道成號佛, 無上至尊, 神德光明, 無晝無夜。從比丘衆, 六十二萬, 遊行世界, 開化群生。

³⁵ The quotation in the Tang period Daoist Encyclopedia, *shenming* 神明 was replaced with *renshen* 人神. DZ1124, 8b. 其五篇文合六百六十八字, 是三才之元根, 生天立地, 開化人神, 萬物所由。故有天道地道神道人道, 此之謂也。

forms of Dao, are phenomenal agents that transmit the scriptures to the human world. Therefore, the scriptures and characters themselves were considered to be sacred. The spirit-writing practice is grounded in this tradition and developed the culture of revering written characters (*jingzi* /*kyōngja* 敬字). Therefore, the words and scriptures descending from spirit-writing could replace the messiah (Goosseart 2014, p. 241).

In this sense, Daoist Enlightenment is interchangeable with its soteriological term, *kaijie duren* 開劫度人 or “opening of a [new] *kalpa* and saving the people.” Both imply the beginning of a new cycle of time and the transformation of humans from mortal error and death into immortal life. The salvific enlightenment was the prominent function of the Thearch of Literature since the twelfth century. The deity was destined to “enlighten nine heavens and redeem the world with flying phoenix” (開化九天, 飛鸞救世) (DZ29, 6a). The following description in the *Book of Transformation* (*huashu* 化書) was a precursor of the nineteenth century *Writ of Salvation from the Kalpa*.

Recommended highly by the Heavenly Mandate, my position was elevated to the Golden Gate. I usually take a stroll in the Purple Void heaven and fly my spirit for visits and inspections [on the human world]. However, I descended on earth increasingly as the world changed. [Human world] is full of moral degradation, greed, shallowness, and deceit. It is harder to extinguish them all, even when the catastrophe of *kalpa* is about to occur. Thus, I manifest myself and enlighten through the phoenix [of spirit-writing]. (JY255, 91b)

余以天命薦隆, 位登金闕, 逍遙紫虛, 遊神察訪, 而世變愈降. 薄鄙詐之風, 在在皆然. 況劫難將興, 未易消弭. 乃寓鸞顯化.

The celestial duty of the Thearch of Literature was versified as “to enlighten everywhere by the flying phoenix, and save every life at the turning of *kalpa* as he wishes (飛鸞開化於在在, 如意救劫以生生)” in the “Precious Declaration of Thearch of Literature” (*Munch’ang-jegun pogo* 文昌帝君寶誥) (SSHG 1880). The verse functioned as an invocation that was to be recited before chanting the scripture since the late thirteenth century in China, and it seems not to be much different in its recitation in Chosŏn. In nineteenth century Chosŏn, the Thearch of Succour expatiated on their duties as follows:

Human heart-minds become depraved every day, and enlightenment is seriously urgent. Although we could not secure three persons for the phoenix each time, we should transmit spirit-writing everywhere. Then, how can we wait for the wood-pen on the sandtray and the splendorous phoenix of the beautiful pavilion? Sometimes we show dream revelations, and sometimes we give lessons by miracles. (KGJ, vol. 1, 28b)

人心日異, 開化時急. 每不擇三鸞之人, 而徧處降乩. 奚待沙盤之木筆, 畫亭之綵鸞乎? 或示夢諭, 或誠靈跡.

This explanation characterized the Chosŏn revelation of Three Sages. Among all of them, dream revelation is notable. In 1877, the Thearch of Literature revealed a series of scriptures (MC1, MC2, MC3, Table 2) to the altar members in the dream of the young spirit medium Yi To 李濤 (Y.G. Kim 2019). Spirit mediums Chŏn and Kim were also remarkable for their dream revelations.

5.2. Sacred Writs, Cure, and Distribution of Scriptures

Daoist ideas on scriptures and letters will help convey the significance of the “descending of the glyph (*haja* 下字)” in the Three Sages cult in Chosŏn: a belief in the sacredness of the Chinese characters or the hierogram. Thearch Kwan descended glyphs such as “*su* 壽 (longevity)” (SGJ, 4b) or “*pok* 福 (blessing)” (SGJ, 6a-6b), sometimes in a form of maxim—e.g., “Close your mouth three times (*sanjianqikou/samham-kigu* 三緘其口)—and sometimes in verse. SGJ recorded the process of making the Chinese calligraphy panels for the shrine pillars. The couplet came down from the Three Sages; thus, every word it contained was treated as sacred.

We received the order at the time of republishing the *Illustrated Records of Sacred Achievement* in 1876 that the Three Sages descended the eight-line regulated verse by spirit-writing to make pillar couplet for the East Shrine. (SGJ 1878-2-10, 23b-24b)

丙子年《聖蹟圖誌》重刊時，三聖帝乩下律詩八句，以爲東廟楹聯事，奉命矣。

Since 1877, the Administrator of the East Shrine was granted an audience by his Majesty and seems to have secured a channel to deliver messages to him. Kjong directed Cho Yongha to manage with making the pillar couplet, supporting him by providing workspace at a palace agency, the Military Guard Office (Muwiso 武衛所), and bestowed his calligraphy for the divine poem. Royal Secretariats also recorded the event, and copies of the calligraphy were stored in Royal Palace and Library (SJW 1878-1-26, 1878-2-11).

Descending a hieroglyph or a sacred name was primarily a method of giving a new identity as “the Enlightened” (*kaehwa-ji-in* 開化之人) (SGJ, 6a), i.e., leaders in the process of Enlightenment. Yi Chinmo received a glyph “*sun* 淳” (honesty) which prompted him to change his name to Chisun (SGJ 1877-6-17, 7b). This was declared as “a grateful gift from the [Heavenly] Court of Jade [Emperor] (*okcho ūnsa* 玉朝恩賜)” (SGJ, 23b). In addition, he received a Daoist name,³⁶ Master of Pure Cloud (Ch’ongun-ja 清雲子), because “he purifies his heart-mind like water, and maintains his heart-mind as white cloud” (SGJ, 21a). Based on these records, we can infer how the Formless Altar members attained their Daoist names: Master of Pure Lotus (Ch’ongnyŏn-ja 清蓮子) Yu Un; Master of Pure Void (Ch’onghŏ-ja 清虛子) Chong Hakku; Master of Pure Serenity (Ch’ongnyŏng-ja 清寧子) Sŏ Chŏng; and Master of Mysterious Void (Myohŏ-ja 妙虛子) Chŏi Sŏngwan 崔理煥。

Given that the glyphs and names transmitted through spirit-writing were so sacred and extraordinary, the scriptures—which are constituted of thousands of hieroglyphs—were regarded as having the salvific power to enlighten people and recover the essential energy of life. Curing was the foundation of the popularization of the shrine. Thearch Kwan gave medicinal prescriptions for smallpox, cholera, sterility, and other unknown illness. The Administrator of the South Shrine, Ko Sang-jin 高尚鎮, stated that he could beget his only son after printing one hundred copies of the *Anthology for the Pious Faith* (*Jingxinlu* 敬信錄, JXL), a popular morality book collection in eighteenth century China and the Chosŏn, which included the *Folios of the Most High on Retribution* (*Taishang ganying pian* 太上感應篇, GYP), *Essay on Secret Virtue* (*Yinzhwen* 陰騭文, YZW), and the *Scripture of Awakening the World* (titled *Guandibaoxun* 關帝寶訓).³⁷ After the recovery of his wife, Ko printed a thousand copies of the *Scripture of Awakening the World* (KS 1876, vol. 3, 51a).³⁸

As Thearch Kwan insisted that “Enlightenment should be progressed moderately and steadily (開化必以穩當靜當耳)” (SGJ, 15b), the main method was to spread their teaching by books and to cultivate ethical virtues. After publishing the collection of Thearch Kwan, those Enlightened had begun to publish two more collections: *Records of Cassia Palace* (*Kyegung-ji* 桂宮誌, KGJ) and *Collection of Various Fragrances* (*Chunghyang-jip* 衆香集, CHJ) (SGJ, 13a, Table 2). The actual publication was completed in 1881, supported by the elite officials (KGJ 1881, Preface; CHJ 1881, Preface). All these efforts were to complete the three-part Corpus of Enlightenment.

[1878-5-28] Disciple Yu Un and Yi Chinsun report: As for the work of [completing] the *Corpus of Three Sages Enlightenment*, we already humbly received the holy decree from the

³⁶ It is not certain whether they referred to their names as “Daoist name (*toho/daohao* 道號).” There are usages that Chosŏn literati called ‘*ho*’, the name of the eminent literati scholar as ‘*toho* 道號,’ in which Dao means Confucianism. By “Daoist name,” I mean the name of one who pursues the Dao of the Three Teachings.

³⁷ *Jingxinlu* was compiled in 1769 and widely circulated in the eighteenth century China (Sakai 1999–2000, vol. 2, 171–93). It was published in Chosŏn as the *Kyŏngshin rok ŏnsŏk* 敬信錄譯釋 at Buddhist temple Pulamsa 佛岩寺 in 1796, both versions of classical Chinese and vernacular Korean (HC 1986, vol. 2, pp. 1–26). I could not locate the 1796 edition. The 1880 edition was reproduced in HC 1986, v. 2.

³⁸ KS 1876, vol. 3, 51b. 高尚鎮壯年艱嗣，乙亥秋發願，印施《敬信錄》一百部，開印之月，有孕男。而妻李氏後，血證沈綿瀕危，尚鎮虔叩帝前，妻病頓愈，又印施《覺世真經》一千卷。

Thearch of Literature to sincerely publish the sacred teachings of *Records of Cassia Palace* and *Collection of Various Fragrances*. In consideration of completing them as soon as possible, we humbly [report] our plan. A faithful official Kim Ch'anghŭi had wished to read the sacred texts carefully, and suggested, "[Because] the collections of Three Sages' [texts] have a great relation to Enlightenment, we must cut out superfluity. If we only select the sacred scriptures, lessons, hagiographies, miraculous stories of the Three Sages, and make efforts to simplify them down to the essentials, appositely anticipating that [Scripture of] *Awakening the World* will provoke the faith, then their circulation will have no obstacle." (SGJ, 27a-27b)

臣弟子劉雲李瑄淳白：三聖開化藏之役，既伏承文帝聖旨，祇刊《桂宮誌》《衆香集》之聖教，以爲從速撰成，伏計矣。信官金昌熙發願參閱於聖典，而獻議言：“三聖合集，大有關於開化，須去煩冗。惟輯三聖聖經聖訓本紀聖籤靈驗，務在簡要切實，而期《覺世》起信，流通無礙”云。

Two elite officials in Kojong's court, Kim Ch'anghŭi (1844–1890) and Sin Chŏnghŭi 申正熙 (1833–1895), worked together on the publication. In the same year, 1881, Kim wrote a preface to the Lüzu corpus (CHJ) and Sin wrote a preface to the Wendi corpus (KGJ).

As stated previously, in 1878 Kim Ch'anghŭi was the former President of Sŏnggyun-gwan Academy and the third minister of the Board of Personnel (*ijochamŭi* 吏曹參議). His career covered all Six Boards and he received the honorable posthumous title, "Duke of Superior Literature" (*Munhŏn-gong* 文憲公). Sin Chŏnghŭi was a military elite, who held many important positions such as Commander of the Forbidden Guard, Commander of the Military Training Corp, and, in 1881, Minister of the Board of Punishment (*hyŏngjo-pansŏ* 刑曹判書). Significantly, these elite officials were actively involved in supporting the publication, with the explicit intention of promoting Enlightenment.

In 1877, the Formless Altar published a digest of the Corpus of the Three Sages titled *Precious Book of the Three Sages* (*Samsŏng bojŏn* 三聖寶典, abbr. SSBJ).³⁹ Probably, the *Scripture of the Three Sages' Admonition* (*Samsŏng hun'gyŏng* 三聖訓經, abbr. SSHG) printed in 1880,⁴⁰ was also published by the effort of the Enlightened, those who shared the ideal of salvific enlightenment. Both are concise books of less than seventy pages that contain the essential texts of the Three Sages and share the core theme of Enlightenment (Tables 1 and 2).

[Thearch Kwan] received the command from the Heaven, along with the other two Thearchs of Literature and Succour, to get their official duty to enlighten [the world] and promulgate [transformation] through spirit-writing phoenix.

[關聖帝君] 受天敕，與文昌孚佑兩帝君，職任開化，鸞乩宣誥。

[The Thearch of Literature] together with Thearch Kwan and Patriarch Lü, received the heavenly command to enlighten [the world] below Heaven.

[文昌帝君] 與關帝呂祖，同受天敕，開化天下。

[The Thearch of Succour] served the command from the Heaven, received his duty to promulgate transformation with the other two lords of Thearch of Literature and Thearch Kwan. Thus, he traveled to the eight ends [of the world] to establish the salvation and complete all wishes of ordinary people.

[孚佑帝君] 乃奉天勅，受宣化之職，與文昌關聖二帝君，周遊八極立度，盡凡夫之弘願。 (SSHG 1880, 1a-1b)

³⁹ MC1, Yŏngisŏ 緣起序, 1b. On the 18th day of the 12th month [1877], "Precious Book was dedicated to the Altar 寶典獻壇." Annotation: "It means the *Precious Book of the Three Sages* (SSBJ). We received the command of the Sacred Thearch of Subduing Demons (i.e., Thearch Kwan), and proceeded together towards publication and distribution 三聖寶典，承伏魔聖帝命，彙進刊布." It states that the Formless Altar members finished publication of the *Precious Book* to the Altar in 1877.

⁴⁰ SSHG has no preface to inform us of the editor, but it has the same colophon (光緒六年庚辰季春刊印) as KHJS, which was printed by Kojong's edict. Both were Kojong's collection and reproduced in HC 1986, vol. 2.

In these books, the Three Sages are defined clearly as the celestial agents who enlighten the human world through spirit-writing. This conception of Enlightenment had nothing to do with industrialization or westernization. On the contrary, it advocated cultivating the morality of the Three Teachings, emphasizing traditional values, such as loyalty and filial piety.

In addition to the endeavors promoting Enlightenment, the healing activity of the Three Sages also gave momentum to Kjong's initiative to circulate the scriptures in the spring of 1880. The printing arose from a hybrid of fear of demonic plague and aspiration towards the salvific power of divinity.

In the summer of 1879, cholera had spread from Tongrae 東萊 (present day Pusan) to Seoul. Smallpox followed that winter. Even the Grand Queen Dowager Cho got sick, and the Crown Prince suffered from smallpox. Curing the royal family assumed the utmost urgency. The Administrator of the Shrine delivered the divine prescriptions to the Palace: a stamped seal script "*chöigae* 最改," which means "Best Improvement," pear juice (*lijŭp* 梨汁), and the sandalwood incense (SGJ, 52a). Similarly, at the outbreak of smallpox, the shrine delivered the stamped seal script "*chu* 珠," which means "pearl," and a compound medicine for reviving the meridians (*saengmaek-san* 生脈散) (SGJ, 58a-b). Fortunately, most of the royals recovered from their illnesses, but one of Kjong's sons died in the first month of 1880, probably of smallpox.

The sacred names (*söngho* 聖號) of the Three Sages were believed to have talismanic power. Kjong ordered the printing of hundreds copies of these names (SGJ 1880-2-21, 64b-65a). Because of a continuous outbreak of bewildering illness (*palchak-ji-goe* 發作之怪) at the Palace, Kjong requested an exorcism. The Administrator of the Shrine received the response that the Three Sages would rush into the Palace with their weapons in order to ward off the demonic spirits of disease.⁴¹ SGJ is the only source that testifies to Kjong's edict to print the scriptures, in the apotropaic context and the hope to redeem his world and his people.

[1880-3-11] I entered the Palace and attended on [his Royal Majesty], to deliver the Thearch's will, and informed of the exorcism on the last night, as well. I received the edict to print and distribute several scriptures. [The Royal Majesty] asked whether or not there are the woodblocks of *Anthology for the Pious Faith* (JXL) and *Folios on Retribution* (GYP); thus, I replied and came out. (SGJ, 65b)

入侍大內，仰稟聖意，亦聞夜間掃氛之事。承諸經印布之教。而下詢《敬信錄》《感應篇》板本有無，故仰對而出。

[1880-03-12] I entered the Palace and attended on [his Royal Majesty], to dedicate JXL and KHJS. Then, there was a royal edict to print and distribute them. There was another edict to find and present GYP.⁴² (SGJ, 66a)

入侍大內，進獻《敬信錄》《過化存神》，則有印布之教。又《感應篇》求進之教。

Again, the revelation of the deities determined every detail of the publication process. Thearch Kwan commanded that an inscription at the start of the scriptures, "Royal Majesty, who dominates the heaven and magnifies the destiny (of dynasty), creates the axis [mundi] and strengthens morality,⁴³ commanded to print the true scripture, [in the purpose of] spreading enlightenment to the eight areas of the country" (*tongch'ön lyung'un, chogük donryun, chusang chönhä, myöngin chingyöng, puhwa p'alryök* 統天隆運，肇極敦倫，主上殿下，命印真經，敷化八域, SGJ 1880-3-19, 66a). Continuously, "[in the purpose that] enlightenment reaches plants and trees, blessing spreads in every direction [of the

⁴¹ SGJ 1880-2-18, 64b, 入侍，下詢大內雜氛掃除事。SGJ 1880-3-10, 65b, 有三聖與周爺，奉刀同進蕩滅之教。

⁴² Chöi Söngwan published GYP as the classical Chinese version in 1848 and the Chinese-Korean bilingual version as the *T'aesang kamüng p'yön tosöl önhäe* 太上感應篇圖說諺解 in 1852. The 1880 edition was reproduced in HC 1986, vol. 3.

⁴³ The first eight-character phrase was a revered title of Kjong, dedicated by court officials in 1872 (CWS 1872-12-24). It was incorporated in his posthumous title: 統天隆運肇極敦倫正聖光義明功大德堯峻舜徽禹謨湯敬應命立紀至化神烈巍勳洪業啓基宣曆乾行坤定英毅弘休壽康文憲武章仁翼貞孝太皇帝。

world]” (*hwap’i ch’omok, noegŭp manbang* 化被草木, 賴及萬方) was added (SGJ 1880-3-22, 66b). There are plenty of books with these inscriptions in the present libraries of Korea, Japan, France, England, and the United States (HC 1986, v. 2-3; Figure 10). This record not only provides insight into the context of the publication, but also reveals that the celestial duty of Kojong overlapped with that of the Thearch.

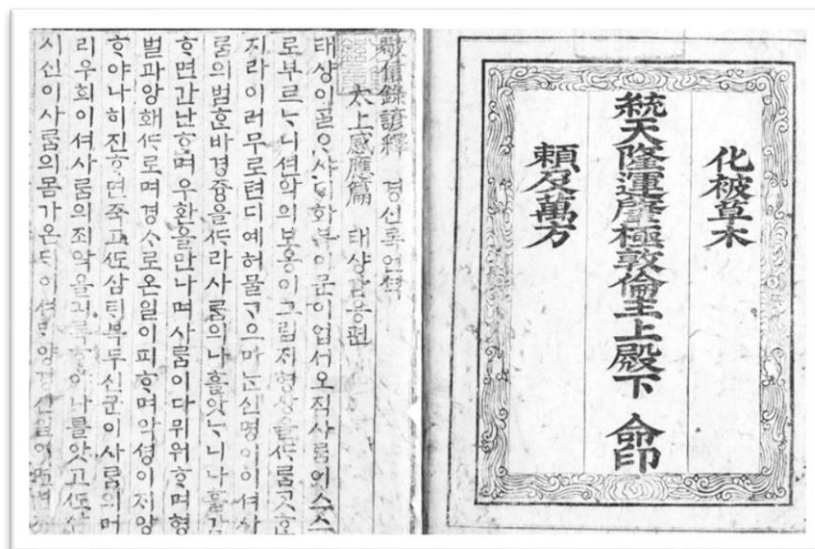


Figure 10. Spirit-Written Inscription in Morality Books (Kyujang-gak Library) Printed by Royal Edict in 1880 (Collection of Kojong’s Library).

After the distribution, there was a reward from the Jade Emperor:

[1880-07-06] The Highest Thearch, Jade Emperor issued an edict: “The King of your country, from now onwards, his mind to enlighten-transform people will become greater.” Thus, the Highest Thearch acclaimed his great virtue and commanded us as follows: To the King of your country, endow the reward by prolonging his life one cycle (twelve years); to the Queen and the Crown Prince, also extend one cycle (twelve years) of life. ... Later, you can tell this edict of the Highest Thearch to your King. (SGJ, 71b)

玉皇上帝勅教內: 汝之國王, 自今以來, 化民之心甚大. 故上帝讚其大德, 命於吾等: 汝之國王, 賜賞增壽一紀, 國母元儲, 亦各增一紀之壽. ... 後上帝勅旨, 傳宣汝之國王, 可也.

The distribution of the books was under the Enlightenment project that aims for the moral edification of people. Morality books were published in both languages of Chinese and Korean for uneducated people, including women and children. Furthermore, there was another kind of reward to those who performed spirit-writing.

[1880-7-24] (Instruction and divination received in the dream of Kim Hŭijŏng).

Deep inside the peak, turning along the lane,

I passed the root of the mountain.

A house was there, among the woods in the bloom of golden flowers.

I asked: Where is the noble master?

Then in the remote valley, downside the brook,

the brushwood door was opened up. (SGJ, 72b)

庚辰七月二十四日(金熙鼎夢中下賜戒訓占)

峯深路轉過山根, 家在黃華爛漫樹, 借問高人何處在, 僻溪澗下關柴門.

The interpretation of the divination reads: “The one who has a will to follow the Dao seeks his master first, despite the distance of thousand miles so that he completes his sincerity. This sign is the symbol of transformation from the profane into the sacred.”⁴⁴ The best reward for the devout follower is to attain the ultimate goal, that is, the transformation from the profane to the sacred (*hoebŏm chaksŏng* 回凡作聖). The oracle poem was a promise of this.

6. The Project of Enlightenment and Reform

The *Collection of Sacred Spirit-writings* (SGJ) ends on the 14th day of the 10th month in 1880. The last records were teachings addressed to Kojong and a blessing for the crown prince: they stated that the king should do his best to save his people, and the prince had the nature of a Sage King (*sŏnggun* 聖君). Thearch Kwan recounted again: “It has been a long time since we, the Three Sacred Thearchs, [first] undertook the task of Enlightenment, but it is rare to meet someone who understand it (吾三聖帝, 奉勅開化之任, 久矣. 然知者, 鮮矣)” (SGJ, 75a).

This passage begs the question: what did these revelations mean to Kojong himself? What kind of changes would be expected by him in order to implement this program? How did the spirit-altar injunctions relate to Kojong’s competing visions of state reform? During the succeeding years, Kojong’s veneration of Thearch Kwan intensified. Queen Min, for her part, favored a female shaman, who was titled the Lady of Perfected Numinosity (Chinryŏng-gun 眞靈君). This shamaness was the mother of the court official Kim Ch’angryŏl 金昌烈, who herself claimed to be the daughter of Thearch Kwan (CWS 1894-07-05; Kim T. 1922, 347c).⁴⁵

In 1883, the construction of a new Kwanwang Shrine in the northern part of Ch’angdŏk Palace was completed. The Union of Loyalty and Righteousness (*ch’ungŭi-gye* 忠義契) was organized for the North Shrine (Park 2009), where Kojong found shelter from the Qing armies after the failure of the 1884 Regime Change. In Kojong’s reign period, three more shrines of Thearch Kwan were built in Kanghwa Island, which was the first port opened to foreign powers.

In 1885, Kojong dictated a ritual code stipulating that both the king (himself) and the crown prince should worship to Thearch Kwan at the North Shrine, directly following the rite to Confucius at the Literary Temple (Munmyo 文廟) (SJW 1885-4-13). Apparently, the Kwanwang Shrine served as the symbol of military capability; quite clearly Kojong’s intention was to consecrate equally both sages of literary and military potency.

In the historic 1894 Reform (*Kabo Kyŏngjang*), Kojong declared a new name for his reign year: *kaeguk* 開國, “Opening of the [New] Country.” His reform had started from the military system in the early 1880s and changed the systems of administration, economy, education, social classification: it abolished slavery, torture, severe punishment, and discrimination between civil and military officials. Kojong gave an address on this topic in 1895:

I reformed the state government, in order to initiate the foundation of independence and build up the work of national restoration. . . . We will carry out the plan for beneficial utility and prosperous livelihoods, with impartial and righteous governance. . . . so that my children [i.e., the people]. . . . may live in peace and delight in their occupations. . . . Let all know that Reform and Enlightenment truly originates from [the heart of caring] for the people. (CWS 1895-5-20)

⁴⁴ SGJ 1880-7-24, 72b 解曰: 有志慕道, 先訪其師, 不遠千里, 以遂其誠. 此卦回凡作聖之象. It is poem No. 27 from the *Sacred Lots* (KS 1876, vol. 3, 61a), which was spirit-writing of Thearch Kwan, received by Chŏng Hakku in 1876 (KS 1876, vol. 3, 85b).

⁴⁵ As for the North Shrine, most scholars discuss it in the category of popular religion, especially based upon Murayama’s study of 1920s critics of what they regarded as superstition during Kojong’s reign (Murayama 1935, pp. 435–39; Jang 2004, pp. 417–18; KGS 1929). According to these figures, the North Shrine was built by Queen Min, who indulged in shamanism. However, the construction and function of the North Shrine should be reconsidered in the context of the Enlightenment project of Kojong.

維新國政，肇獨立之基，建中興之業... 以公平正大之政，行利用厚生之方... 俾朕赤子... 安生而樂業... 咸知更張開化之宜出於爲民也。

“Reform and Enlightenment” (*kyōngjang-kaehwa*) was his own terminology that linked the social reforms with all the ideals of independence, wealth and strength of the country, impartiality and righteousness of governance, and the comfort and welfare of the people. With the foundation of the Great Han Empire (1897), nominal independence of the Chosŏn from the Qing was completed.

After Kojong himself became the Emperor, he declared himself as “the Sovereign of Confucian Religion (*yugyo chongchu* 儒教宗主)” (CWS 1899-4-27), and successively elevated the official rank of Kwan from King to Thearch (SJW 1901-7-12). Kojong had a clear vision that religion—characterized as the Fundamental Teaching (*chonggyo* 宗教)—is the pivot of civilization.

Imperial Edict: Every country in the world reveres a Fundamental Teaching [religion] without exception of using it as the center, because it refines human mind and results in the [righteous] way of rule... As for the religion of my country, is it not the Way of our Confucius? (CWS 1899-4-27)

詔曰：世界萬國之尊尚宗教，靡不用極，皆所以淑人心而出治道也... 我國之宗教，非吾孔夫子之道乎？⁴⁶

In his memorial address elevating the title of Thearch Kwan, Kojong praised him as “the spirit of loyalty and righteousness,” possessing a “nature of impartiality and great strength,” who had “secretly supported (*yinzhi* 陰鷲)” his country, with numerous “manifestations of the divine power” (SJW 1901-7-12).⁴⁷ Most of the significant phrasing in this decree came from the scriptures that Kojong himself commanded to be printed and distributed. In 1902, the following year, he built one more shrine for Thearch Kwan. Named “*sungŭi* 崇義” (Veneration of Righteousness) in the West, it completed the four cardinal points surrounding the Palace. In Kojong’s view, Thearch Kwan was devoted to the pivotal part of military modernization program, which was inevitable for the independent country.

As such, this potent military deity was in no way in conflict with state reform or the development of technology and industry. Kojong’s modernizing reforms were preceded by deploying religious symbolism, thereby providing divine sanction to and impetus for the reorganization of government institutions.

The cult of Thearch Kwan became very popular, often receiving newspaper headlines in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. When the South Shrine was burnt down in 1899, both officials and commoners willingly contributed to restoration efforts,⁴⁸ a striking contrast to the widespread reluctance to constructing the shrine three hundred years earlier. It is remarkable that *The Independent* (*Tongnip Sinmun*) applauded people’s volunteering to restore the shrine, in light of the newspaper’s promotion of scientism and anti-superstition discourse since its foundation in 1896.⁴⁹ It was the main propagandist of the new civilization, impressing on people of importance of science, progress, and modern education, but it employed a very different tone with regard to the Kwangwang shrine.

Around the shrines, people organized associations and unions to support worship and prayed for personal prosperity in the 1870s (SGJ 20b; 30b). On festival days, Kwanwang shrines were frequently crowded with people.⁵⁰ After the fall of the Korean Empire (1910), most Kwanwang shrines were destroyed, except the Eastern one. People who supported Kwanje worship opposed the demolition.⁵¹

⁴⁶ I am grateful for Prof. Younseung Lee, who informed me on Kojong’s intention to establish Confucianism as a state religion.

⁴⁷ SJW 1901-7-12; CWS 1901-8-25. 精忠節義之靈，凜凜然亘千秋而不泯，中正剛大之氣，浩浩乎包六合而往來，陰鷲朕邦，屢顯神威。

⁴⁸ *Tongnip Sinmun* 獨立新聞 20 February 1899. “Volunteering in Restoration.”

⁴⁹ *Tongnip Sinmun* 7 April 1896. “Ghost Worship and Idolatry.” It stated that the ghost worship and idolatry should be banned in the entire country, including not only the icons in ordinary people’s house but also the paintings in the state offices. It maintained that the prohibition helps making a progress of civilization.

⁵⁰ *Maeil Sinbo* 每日新報 3 May 1914. “The Overcrowded South Kwanwang Shrine at the Spring Festival.”

⁵¹ *Shidae Ilbo* 時代日報 24 April 1924. “The Demolition of Kwanwang Shrine: People are against it.”

Intellectuals also expressed their remorse, identifying the destruction of shrines with the decline in the state power, even while claiming: “every superstition should be expelled.”⁵² In the Japanese Imperial Period (1910–1945), the state no longer administered the East Shrine. In the 1920s, common citizens organized a religious sect called Kwansŏng kyo 關聖教—“The Teaching of Sage Kwan”—at the East Shrine. The practice of divination of Numinous Lots fueled the popularity of the cult. In the mid-1930s, thousands of people continued to visit the Kwanwang Shrine for oracle poems on New Year’s Day.⁵³

Discourses on Enlightenment ideas lend themselves to binary thinking. On one side stood the reformers of “the Enlightenment Party” who strove for institutional innovation and the liberation of human reason from superstitions. Some of them received a modern education in America and converted to Christianity, some of them maintained the Confucian value system connected with nationalism. On the other side were those involved in the spirit-writing practice and the Three Sages cult, who asserted that moral recovery would lead to a peaceful and prosperous future. The reality is much more complex.

Pak Yŏnghyo, the leader of the reformers, said: “Enlightened people are few, stubborn people are many 開化人少, 頑固人居多.”⁵⁴ Yun Chiho 尹致昊 (1865–1945), a modernization leader and Christian educator, criticized the superstition of Kojong and Queen Min while devoting his life to “the production of useful literature for the Enlightenment of the common people” (Yun 27 December 1894). His ideal goal was “the civilized world” (Yun 30 December 1892) and his model was “the perfect enlightenment of Japan” (Yun 28 December 1896). Pak Yŏnghyo’s Enlightenment also might have been directed toward the “civilization” of the Japanese model.

On the other hand, ordinary people understood “Enlightenment” as a moral reprimand. As for the fire at the South Shrine in 1899, *The Independent* observed scornfully that “an insane woman” aged 53 testified that “Duke Kwan (Kwangong 關公) had set the fire on purpose for the Enlightenment.” According to her, “Duke Kwan’s spirit left right away from the South Shrine and came out for the Enlightenment. In just a few days, the Enlightenment will be completed to [burn and] blacken even the feet of children.”⁵⁵

Such horrifying images of retribution are consistent with the eschatology of the spirit-written texts. Although intellectuals mocked this conception of Enlightenment, the episode provides evidence that Thearch Kwan was considered as a deity sufficiently potent to enlighten the world. As seen in the above, the main scripture of Thearch Kwan, the *Scripture of Awakening the World* was provided in vernacular Korean and widely recited among ordinary people. Its teaching is that one should awaken oneself to embody ethical values. This kind of Enlightenment could be more widespread and entrenched in people than another notion of Enlightenment that placed more emphasis on the scientific progress. Even after the encounter with the new concept, imported from Japan, the idea of moral enlightenment prevailed among many people; it was not limited to the lower class.

Sin Kisŏn 申箕善 (1851–1909), an eminent military elite who had supported Kojong’s reform in the 1880s, espoused his vision of moral enlightenment. He criticized the 1894 Reform, particularly for its reliance on Japan:

⁵² *Shidae Ilbo* 24 November 1924. “Misfortune of Kanwang Shrines”; “Must Expelled Kwanwang Shrine (The Hall of Superstition).”

⁵³ *Koryŏ sibo* 1 March 1939. “New Year Fortune Telling: Over Five Thousand People for Divination (關王廟買占人五千名突破).”

⁵⁴ 1884-12-9, The testimony of Yi Chŏmdol (a servant of Kim Okkyun) in interrogation after the Kapsin Regime Change (Park 2009, p. 36).

⁵⁵ *Tongnip Sinmun* 21 February 1899. “A Funny Story.” 광공님씩서 기화를 하시라고 부러 불을 노흐섯다...광공님의 혼은 그날 즉시 남묘를 썬나서 기화 식히려 나오섯는디 불과 몇칠 후면 어린 우희 발등 썬지 식캬앗도록 기화가 되리라.

That which is called Enlightenment is nothing but the expansion of the public [impartial] way [of discussion] and abolishment of personal [partial] opinion, so as to cause both officials and the people do their work rightly, thereby opening the source of beneficial utility and prosperous livelihoods, and do everything for enriching the country and strengthen the armed forces. ... If they (Japan) had come with good intentions, ... they should let our Lord and officials concentrate our minds and cultivate our roots, to make both domestic and foreign affairs organized and clear; according to public opinion and aiming at the right timing, [we can] gradually gain the momentum of self-government and steadily achieve the concrete reality of Enlightenment. (CWS 1894-10-3)

夫所謂開化者，不過曰恢張公道，務祛私見，使官不尸位，使民不遊食，開利用厚生之源，盡富國強兵之術而已... 彼果出於好意也... 我君臣，得以聚精會神，培根端本，內理外靖，因民心酌時宜，漸鞏自主之勢，徐就開化之實。

Sin Kisŏn thought of Enlightenment as the ultimate goal to be reached through integrity and impartiality for the public good; a vision firmly rooted in Neo-Confucian praxis. He was the one who wrote the praise for the West Shrine of Veneration of Righteousness in 1902 (SJW 1902-10-24).

The conservative elder official, former Prime Minister Cho Pyŏngse 趙秉世 (1827–1905), also thought of Enlightenment as a kind of utopian ideal. In his mind, Chosŏn possessed the method of attaining it through legal and institutional framework. He said:

As for so-called Enlightenment, this official knows nothing about what it is nowadays. Nevertheless, in my foolish opinion, from the period of Ancient Kija [Chosŏn] to Our Dynasty, the National Code has been brilliantly constituted, being the means by which people have been blessed and nurtured. The Way of Enlightenment has been already qualified without remainder, such as *Comprehensive Compilation of National Code* [*Taejŏn t'ongp'yŏn* 大典通編, 1784] and *Six Codes of Ordinances* [*Yukchŏn jorye* 六典條例, 1866]. However, the Way of Governance is not in inoperative laws, but in its concrete implimentation, so as to moderate control and to protect and cherish people. Only after that will our country get closer [to the ideal of Enlightenment]. (CWS 1902-10-5)

今所云開化，臣未知何件事。而臣之愚見，自箕子以來至于我朝，典章燦備，生民休養，開化之道，已盡無餘。《大典通編》《六典條例》，此其具也。然而爲治之道，不在徒法，在乎實行，制節用度，保愛生民，然後國其庶幾也。

Seeing through the records of SGJ and reviewing official historical sources, there is no fundamental division or binaries of elite and ordinary, literati and military men, official and popular, rational and superstitious in the entities of religio-ethical Enlightenment. The old religious ideals and canonical values interacted with the apprehensions of war and catastrophe, simultaneously with the new visions of previously unexperienced civilization. In the process of the never-ending interaction among various agents in diverse social strata, the idea of Enlightenment was floating and evolving.

7. Conclusions

In this article, I have demonstrated the way in which spirit-written texts were published and distributed under the Enlightenment project in the late Chosŏn period. These publications provided both vernacular Korean translation for the those ignorant of Sinograms as well as Classical Chinese for the literati. Its predominant purpose was to urge people to restore fundamental ethical principles.

Enlightenment (*kaihwa/kaehwa*) had various strata of meanings in Buddhism and Daoism, particularly in a soteriological context, and was even consonant with the Confucian concept of edification (literally “teaching and transformation”; *jiaohua/kyohwa* 教化). Spirit-writing played the role of a furnace in which to meld the Three Teachings and to transform Chinese-oriented gods into universal deities standing for transcendent standards of morality. It should be observed that the members of spirit-writing altars in Chosŏn had no emic identification as “Daoist,” belonging to any

particular sect—this is the same as many spirit-writing practitioners in China. Rather, they shared an identity as “the Enlightened” who strove for enlightening “Dao” as the fundamental Way of humanity.

In case of European Enlightenment (Aufklärung), Reinhart Koselleck and Horst Stuke have sketched different forms of the ideas, and even dissent, regarding the core concepts (Koselleck 1988; Stuke [1975] 2014). According to their works, the impetus of the Enlightenment was to ensure an individual basis of morality. Consequently, it was inevitable that Enlightenment discourse would contain an element of utopian idealism.

I found some parallels with the European case in the varying discourses of Enlightenment among Chosŏn intellectuals. There was also an aspect of utopian idealism, especially with regards to morality. Even the famous thinker of Enlightenment Party, Yu Kilchun 俞吉濬 (1856–1914)—who was greatly influenced by Fukuzawa—presupposed an ideal state of Enlightenment, which would be based in perfect morality and therefore “exceedingly good and extremely beautiful 至善極美.” In his six-stage classification of Enlightenment, the first stage is the Enlightenment of behavior (*haengsil* 行實), which implied the embodiment of the ethical virtues of the five constant human relationships (*oryun* 五倫) and ultimate understanding of moral principle (*dori* 道理). The rest are, in order: education, politics, law, mechanics, and the utility of material goods (Yu 1895). Yu Kilchun considered the ideal type of Enlightenment as something balanced between traditional-universal ethics and new institutional benefit.

Although the anti-superstition campaign was one of the vocal critics in the new field of public opinion such as newspapers, the sole dominance of *kaehwa* (Enlightenment) weighted on the scientification and disenchantment is a sort of modern East Asian delusion or myth. In reality, “marvels and wonders” from the divine world had never ceased to give powerful momentum to social changes. Recent studies pay attention to the struggles of modern intellectuals to find compatibility between science and religion both in East and West.⁵⁶ As Paul Katz has observed, “Be it Western Enlightenment or Chinese modernization,” the processes of modernization “cannot be fully understood outside the context of religious beliefs and practices” (Katz 2015, pp. 279–80). In early modern China, “spirit-writing not only shaped the lives of individual elites but their collective activities as well” (Katz 2015, p. 280). The same holds true for the late Chosŏn period.

The spirit-writing practice and publication of morality books in the late Chosŏn provoke a reconsideration of the spiritual movement that had emerged—and were even requested—in the dynamic flux of the era, faced to World Powers and the Christian religion in the border between premodern and modern. From the young leaders of the progressive party to the conservative elder officials, from royal members to ordinary people, all social strata of people actively transacted with the ideas of Enlightenment diversely. However, the religio-ethical thinking of Enlightenment was in no way incompatible with the picture of Civilization with powerful and precise mechanics. Many future studies are needed, especially on the relation of Enlightenment with the Neo-Confucian heart-mind theory and self-cultivation practice.⁵⁷

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⁵⁶ As for this issue in the European Enlightenment, see (Saler 2006). Significant studies on this issue in Europe and East Asia are listed in footnotes 4 and 5 in (Katz 2015, p. 279).

⁵⁷ The privatization of moral judgment is an important subject. Spirit-writing practice liberated people from formal religious institutions and clericalism and resulted in the individual encounter with one’s heart-mind—the unconscious dimension of humanity—from where spirit-writing descend. Recently, Daniel Burton-Rose showed the evolution of spirit-writing practice from the clan and community base into individual dreams and the self-fashioned practice. (Burton-Rose 2020). It should be studied the relevance between the contemplation on individual minds and East Asian modernization of morality.

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