Local and Trans-local beings: the cult of Guandi in Tibet

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1.

The skyline of Lhasa city is sketched out by three hills: the Red Hill (*dmar po ri*), the Iron Hill (*lcags po ri*) and the Middle Hill (*bar ma ri*). As a popular saying goes in Lhasa, the three hills form a trinity, religiously representing Avalokiteshvara, Vajrapani and Mañjushri, while politically representing Tibet, Mongolia and China (Stein 1972, 228).

The Red Hill is seen as the soul mountain of Avalokiteśvara. It became the seat of the Potala Palace and the Dalai Lamas, who are believed to be the reincarnations of Avalokiteśvara. The Potala Palace was established in the seventh century by the Tibetan King Srong btsan sgam po, who is also seen as a reincarnation of Avalokiteśvara. It was extensively renovated in the second half of the seventeenth century on behalf of the Fifth Dalai Lama.

The Iron Hill is seen as the soul mountain of Vajrapāni. When the Mongolian Khoshut Confederation took control of Tibet in the seventeenth century, the Fifth Dalai Lama entitled the Khoshut ruler Gushi Khan the "reincarnation of Vajrapāni" (Schaeffer, Kapstein and Tuttle 2013: 539). In the late seventeenth century, the Tibetan Medical School was founded on top of the Iron Hill, but it was destroyed in the twentieth century.

This article tells the story of the Middle Hill, which, as the soul mountain of Mañjushri, was gradually identified with the direction of China and the Chinese/Manchu sovereign presence in Tibet in the eighteenth century. This process was carried out through the introduction of the Guandi cult in Tibet, especially the construction of a Guandi temple on the Middle Hill by the Qing generals and officials. Guandi (Emperor Guan) was granted the status of imperial god of war by the Qing emperor. With the victory of the Qing troops, the Guandi cult gradually emerged in the battlefield and the new territory, such as the Uyghur Xinjiang and Tibet. In the imperial narrative, Emperor Guan was confucianized as the martial sage, pairing Confucius, the literary sage. Both

entertained annual sacrifice at the imperial and local level. The very presence of Guandi in the city center of Lhasa, facing the Potala Palace, reified the political zenith of Qing in Tibet. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the Guandi cult infiltrated the Tibetan Buddhist world with the traveling of the Manchu soldiers and Han merchants. Drawing Guandi lots remains popular among the locals in Lhasa until today. I point out that in this process the cosmo-political power of the emperor – both the Qing emperor and Emperor Guan – was materialized in the paintings, statues and temples, rhythmed in the annual sacrifice and daily chanting, embodied in the kneeling, prostrating, drawing lots, and reading the poems on the lots. The local world thus was embedded in the imperial ritual-political integrity.

In the Tibetan Buddhist narrative, sovereign power was normally narrated in the Buddha-emperor pattern. Following the model of the Tibetan King Srong btsan sgam po and the Mongolian Chinggis Khan, the Qing emperor was fashioned as the reincarnation of Mañjushri. Thus the Middle Hill, as the soul mountain of Mañjushri, was chosen by the Tibetan regent lama as the site to build the Guandi temple. Guandi was incorporated into the Tibetan Buddhist world in the frame of lama-demon pattern, in which Guandi appeared as a demon, was subdued by a lama, and granted a lesser status of *dgra lha*, a type of furious guardian deities. The lama-demon or monk-snake pattern is common to various Indian, Chinese and Tibetan Buddhist traditions. It is an efficient way to incorporating indigenous deities in the transmission of Buddhism. Transforming Guandi into a demon and then a guardian deity of Buddhist teaching, the universal imperial god of war was stripped off its universality, shrinking into a local deity representing China, and the China it represented dissolved into a direction or a portion of the Tibetan world.

Through the lens of the Guandi cult in Tibet, I first look at the flows of various human beings and gods between Beijing and Lhasa as well as the operation of cosmo-politics at two levels, the politics of cosmopolitan interlocutors and the politics of cosmology. I further endeavor to detect the religious narrative pattern of lama-demon, or the oppositional dualism of human-demon and good-evil, on which the cosmo-political order was formed and transformed in the Tibetan Buddhist world.

2.

At the foot of the Middle Hill sits the compound of Kundeling monastery (*dbus gtsang kun bde chos 'khor gling*), one of the four residential places of the four regent-lama lineages (Buqiong 2004). On the top of it seated the Guandi-Gesar Temple as it is called today. This temple has a typical "Chinese look" in comparison to the Kundeling monastery below. In the hagiography of the Eighth rTa tshag Rinpoche Ye shes blo bzang bstan pa'i mgon po (1760-1810), composed in 1813, Kundeling monastery was referred to as the "Tibetan temple" (*bod kyi lha khang*), and Guandi-Gesar Temple as the "Temple of the Chinese God of War *kwan yun 'chang*" (*tsi na'i dgra lha kwan yun 'chang*) (Jiayang Pingcuo 2014, 24). Obviously, the Guandi-Gesar Temple originally housed only the Chinese deity of *kwan yun 'chang*.

The very presence of Guandi in Tibetan culture has attracted scholarly interest. Pamela Crossley briefly summarizes the merging process of the cult of Nurgaci, Guandi, Gesar and Vaisravana, and suggests that by the turn of the nineteenth century such a composite cult "provided encyclopedic cross-references - rituals, narratives, iconographic – to reinforcement of the position of the Qing rulers as singular agent in the integration of the spiritualties of the Northeast, China, and Central and Inner Asia." (Crossley 1999, 245) In her analysis, nevertheless, the agentive transformation of Guandi in the Tibetan Buddhist world was largely neglected, except mentioning only the prayer composed by Janggiya khutukhtu (lCang skya Rol pa'i rdo rje). Therefore, I try to look at the process in which the Guandi cult insinuated into the beliefs and practices of the Tibetans through the evolving of the lama-demon pattern.

I borrow the concept of "superscription" from Prasenjit Duara (1988) to engage with the discussions on historical continuity and social transformation. In his discussion on Guandi cult, Duara proposes that "cultural symbols are able to lend continuity at one level to changing social groups and interests even as the symbols themselves undergo transformations. This particular modality of symbolic evolution is one I call superscription of symbols." (Duara 1988, 780) His proposal implies a dialectical relationship between histories and symbols: when the symbols seal the surface of the historical continuity, the symbolized is continuously enriched to accommodate historical changes. Therefore, through cultural archeology of the layered structure of the superscripted symbols, social transformations could be identified. More importantly, the process

of superscripting does not superseding; it coordinates the relationships between different interpretations of the symbols. To look into the new set of the relationships reveals its social-political composition. In the late eighteenth century, the Qing court defeated the Zunghars, pacified the Gurkhas, and settled reforms through the twenty-nine programs; the rapport between the central court and Tibet stepped into a new phase. It was at this moment when the Guandi cult was introduced and established in Tibet. I argue, through rearranging the relationships of Guandi and Manjusri in the pattern of Buddha-emperor and lama-demon, larger social-political transformation was accommodated.

3.

Guandi, or *kwan yun 'chang* in Tibetan, is a deified historical figure. He was originally known as Guan Yu (162-220) or Guan Yunchang for his courtesy name. He was "the apotheosized hero of the period of the Three Kingdoms (220 - 280). This period, which followed the decline of the imperial Han state [209BC – 220], has been romanticized in Chinese history as an era of heroic warriors and artful strategists […]. Since then, the myth of Guandi has become increasingly popular in a variety of media – literature, drama, official and popular cults, and the lore of secret societies." (Duara 1988, 778) During the Yuan Dynasty, a literary transformation took place, through which Guan Yu was glorified as demonstrating the full Confucian virtues – "loyalty, righteousness, devotion, and bravery" (Yang 1981, 70). Nevertheless, despite being romanticized and worshipped as the deity of warriors as well as the god of fortune and victory in popular culture, he remained popular only among the common people until the sixteenth century, when the Wanli Emperor of Ming Dynasty (r.1572-1620) bestowed on Guan Yu the title of *di* (帝, emperor) – "Saintly Emperor Guan the Great God Who Subdues Demons of the Three Worlds and Whose Awe Spreads Far and Moves Heaven" (三界伏魔大神威遠震天尊關聖帝君) in 1614. By then, Guandi made its way into the state patronage and was elevated to the position of *di* in the heavenly bureaucracy, echoing the position of the Emperor in the secular world. Guandi cult was not only popular among Han Chinese, but also was well received among the Mongols, replacing Jiang Taigong as the official god of war during the Mongol Yuan Dynasty (1279 - 1368) (Duara 1988, 783). In the Ming Dynasty, with official Guandi temples being widely established at battle sites, Guandi cult marched into Korea during the Korean wars in the late sixteenth century and was incorporated into Korean state sacrificial system in the seventeenth century (Juyinwo 2013).

Before the Manchus ascended to power, the Guandi cult had already been promoted by the Ming Dynasty in Manchuria and known to the Manchus. In 1650, shortly after the Manchus took over the imperial capital of Beijing and assumed the dynastic title of Qing, with the support of the Manchu royal house, the novel *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms (Sanguo Yanyi* 三国演义) was translated into Manchu and was reproduced as least twice, in 1721 and in 1767; a special illustrated edition was produced in 1769 (Crossley 1999, 244: n.35). By the late seventeenth century, the Guandi cult had already been widely spread among the banner soldiers who carried with them the image of Guandi to the frontier (di Cosmo 2007, 52). In 1652, Shunzhi Emperor (r.1644-61) granted the title of "Great Saintly Emperor Guan (忠义神武关圣大帝)" [1] to Guandi. In 1725, Yongzheng Emperor decreed to promote three generations of Guandi's ancestors to the ducal rank, and ordered sacrifices to be performed twice a year throughout all the official temples to Guandi in the empire (Duara 1988, 784). By the eighteenth century, "Qing court iconography and Confucian New Year's rites explicitly identified Nurgaci and the Chinese folk hero (and war god) Guan Di" (Crossley 1999, 244). This top-down promotion of Guandi cult gradually mobilized participation at local levels. From the mid-eighteenth century, Guandi Temple (or known as Wumiao 武庙, the Temple of Military Culture) was established in every county capital under the management of the bureaucratic system throughout the empire. "These temples were then brought under the command of the highest Guandi temple of official worship, the Baima temple in the capital […]. The structure was modeled on the hierarchy of Confucian temples (Wenmiao, or Temple of Civil Culture) through which the imperial state had incorporated the literati into an officially sanctioned empirewide system of reverence." (Duara 1988, 785)

This empire-wide system of Guandi cult also extended to the newly incorporated territories. In 1729, two Guandi temples were established in eastern Xinjiang in the battlefield against the Zunghars. After the Zunghars were defeated in the mid-eighteenth century, more and more Guandi Temples were constructed in Xinjiang. At least around forty Guandi temples were recorded to be built in Xinjiang during the Qing period and official sacrifices were made twice a year (Dai 1995). However, according to the statistics of Men and Guo (2011), the Guandi temples in Xinjiang were

[1] "清初都盛京，建庙地载门外，赐额'义高千古'。世祖入关，复建庙地门外，岁以五月十三日致祭。顺治九年，敕封忠义神武关圣大帝。雍正三年，追封三代公爵…乾隆三十三年，以壮缪原谥，未孚定论，更命神勇，加号灵佑。" (Qingshigao vol.84)

erected mainly by government officials and occasionally by Han Chinese merchants; among them only two were located in the Muslim area, while the rest were in the Han Chinese or Manchu communities. It easily leads to the conclusion that Guandi cult was merely a Han/Manchu insertion to the culturally heterogenous regions. As Evelyn S. Rawski argues, "[U]under imperial sponsorship, elements of Mongol and Chinese popular religion were added to Tibetan Buddhism. One example is the insertion of the folk deity Guandi into Tibetan Buddhist alters as 'sacred emperor Guan' during the Jiaqing and Daoguang reigns." (Rawski 1998, 259) The imperial sponsorship of the Guandi/Nurgaci/Gesar/Vaisravana cult was just "handy magic for dealing with the increasing violence in Turkestan, Tibet, and southwest China", and "was addressed to a discrete constituency and in the eighteenth century maintained both the coherence of that constituency and the universality of the emperorship through that discrete." (Crossley 1999, 245)

However, I want to show that the Guandi cult in Tibet was another case. In Tibet there was no policy of ethnic apartheid as in Xinjiang. Hence, the Guandi temples were located in and accessible to the mixed communities of the Tibetans, Han Chinese and Manchus. Even nowadays the Tibetans are still frequenting the Guandi-Gesar temples. It means that Guandi was not merely a Han/Manchu symbol floating on the surface of the Tibetan society. Other scholars take it as result of confusion, pointing out that "Gesar, who was identified from the fourteenth and fifteenth century with the royal family of gLing, a small kingdom in northeastern Tibet, was celebrated in epics among Mongols and Tibetans as a conqueror of demons. After the late sixteenth century, Gesar's image crept into the Buddha hall in Mongolia, where ordinary people frequently confused him with Guandi." (Rawski 1998, 259; see also Karmay 1998, 467; Maconi 2004, 372) Nevertheless, my observation suggests that it is more complicated than a singlehanded insertion or the result of confusion. As I have introduced earlier, the Guandi-Gesar Temple in Lhasa has been taken as one of the tri-power centers representing China. Therefore, the Tibetans were well aware of the origin of Guandi rather than confusing him with Gesar. Then the question follows naturally, if the Tibetans knew that Guandi is a Chinese god, why would they worship him?

Actually, Rawski vaguely and Crossley explicitly point out the fact that lCang skya khutukhtu Rol pa'i rdo rje (1717－1786) was the real promoter of the cult in Tibet. He stood for the Tibetan monastic community. According to Ralf Stein, Rol pa'i rdo rje had correspondences with the Sixth Panchen Lama Blo bzang gpal ldan ye shes (1738–1780), "featuring the identification of Kuan-ti

– Chinese god of war and patron of the dynasty – with the Tibetan warrior gods, and the epic hero Gesar. It was said that Gesar was to come back at the head of an army from the mythical land of Shambhala, in the north, when Buddhism and Tibet were faring badly. But for others, the general would be an incarnation of the Panchen Lama." (Stein 1983, 88-9) Following Rol pa'i rdo rje, several high lamas also devoted prayers to and devised rituals for Guandi. Through their collective effort, the cult of Guandi was finally ingrained in the texture of Tibetan culture. Hence, I argue that the Chinese temple in Lhasa was in fact a collaboration of the Tibetan elites and the Manchu rulers; neither the Manchu rulers nor the Tibetan lamas were bewildered by the "identical" deities of Guandi and Gesar. In fact, the sense of "identical" was created superficially for their own ends. I demonstrate in the following parts that there was a mythical transformation of the image of Guandi from a Chinese god to a protective deity from the East. In this way Guandi cult was embedded in Tibetan Buddhism and diffused among the commoners. Furthermore, I argue that the Tibetan elites purposely initiated the embedding process through which they attained spiritual superiority. They rearranged the position of Guandi in the hierarchical structure of Tibetan deities to accommodate the new social-political relationships brought by the Manchu-Qing Empire and to contain the central political influence in Tibet. In other words, at the imperial center the discourse on Guandi cult was addressed to "a discrete constituency" by the Manchu rulers; while the Guandi cult in Lhasa was rather to be addressed to a mixture of imperial subjects as a secondary Buddhist protective deity.

4.

The earliest Chinese record on Guandi Temple in Tibet appeared in a land certificate issued from Lifan Yuan (理藩院) in 1785:

> 照得三祝岗南侧箭道内有空地一所，改做菜园招人耕种，虽出产有限，但系属官地，自应量为纳租，以作万寿寺、关帝庙二处香火之费。（He 2012, 91）
>
> There is a piece of wasteland in the south of Sanzhugang, which could be cultivated as a vegetable garden. Although the land production will be low, since it belonged to the government, renting it out could still gain profits. The profits should be used for the maintenances of the Wanshou Temple [Temple of Longevity] and Guandi Temple.

The place mentioned here was the military camp of the Qing troops in the northern suburb of the Lhasa city (He 2014, 91). It means at latest in 1785 there were already two Chinese temples –

Guandi Temple and Wanshou Temple near Lhasa. Nevertheless, given that the area was mainly occupied by Chinese/Manchu soldiers, the worship of Guandi might still be confined within the non-Tibetan community. But soon, when the Guandi Temple appeared in the center of Lhasa city on top of one of the three sacred hills, it made a difference to the religious-political landscape of Lhasa.

During the Gurkha war (1788 – 1792), heavy Manchu/Han military force led by high-ranking Manchu imperial generals waged pompous campaign against the Gurkha troops in Central Tibet and its southern frontier. With the movement of the Qing troops, Guandi cult was naturally spread around. After the war, the Guandi Temple made its way from the suburb to the city center officially:

> 自進師至凱旋，凡三越月，固由聖主廟謨廣運，指示機先，大將軍運籌帷幄，靡堅不破，然究屬帝君威靈呵護之所致也。大將軍回藏，度地磨盤山，創立神祠，以答靈貺。(WZTZ 1982, 280)
>
> From raging attack to gaining victory, it took only three months. Although such a victory was due to the calculation of the Emperor and the leadership of the General, still, it owned to the blessings of the War God. Upon returning, the General mapped out the land on the Middle Hill to establish the Temple as sacrifice to the War God.

As the reason given here, enshrining Guandi in Lhasa city was to return his bliss over the imperial victory. The Chinese narrative presented smooth continuity to the tradition of erecting Guandi temples on the battlefields for bliss among the Qing troops as I have discussed above. There was no mentioning of Tibetan deities in the Chinese narratives. One may argue that it is because the Chinese records were addressed to Chinese elites whom the Manchu rulers were trying to "bribe" through inheriting the legacy of the Ming Dynasty of inflating honorary titles to Confucian deities. Indeed, since the Song Dynasty, to harness the local god's power has become an express desire of the central government, because "the awarding of titles [is] a good way to maintain a presence in local society" (Hansen 1993, 96). It was also a motivation for the Ming central court to promote Guandi from a local deity to an imperially patronized war god when Guandi entertained pervasive popularity and authority among the folks. In the early days of the Manchu Empire, it was faced with a difficult situation of dealing with different groups of different beliefs. Thus awarding tittles appeared to be an easier way to "buy" the support of cultural elites. Not accidentally, in 1652 Shunzhi Emperor granted the title "Most Excellent, Self-existing Buddha, Universal Ruler of the Buddhist Faith, Vajradhara, Dalai Lama" (大善自在佛领天下释教普同额济达赖喇嘛)

(Rockhill 1910, 17-18) to the Fifth Dalai Lama. In the same token, the Manchu court elevated the position of Gesar for the Mongols when it "became aware of a Mongolian redaction of the [Gesar] tale and as a sign of amicability had the first six chapters published in Peking in 1716 for presentation to the Khalkha leaders" (Crossley 1999, 243; see also Gauthard 2011, 176).

However, as the political situation gradually changed in the late eighteenth century, the art of statecraft and the imperial political ideology behind the cultural production also underwent transformation (Mosca 2011). The normative discourse on the hierarchy of imperial protective deity and local tutelary deities constituted the divine sovereignty rather than plotting cultural bribery. The Chinese quotation above was cited from the *Gazetteer of Tibet* (*Weizang Tongzhi* 卫藏通志). Despite that it was written in Chinese, as it synthesized a large amount of governmental documents from Lifan Yuan and the *amban* office, it is highly possible that the author is one of the Manchu *ambans* or officials of the *amban* office, who had access to the documents (Cao 2009). This Gazetteer was also not in public circulation until the late nineteenth century when it was edited and printed by Yuan Chang (1846-1900). Hence, it was likely that this Gazetteer was produced for administrative reference. As a manual of intelligence for governmental usage, it was not devised as propaganda tailored to fit the Confucian taste. Moreover, it was explicitly indicated in the preface to the Gazetteer that the quotation was based on the stone stele erected in front of the Guandi temple composed by the Manchu military Officer Fu Kang'an (1753-96). The stele was made for all the audience. It seems that the record was to advertise the grandness and all-inclusiveness of the Empire instead of winning favor from certain groups of cultural elites.

Such a gradual change in political mentality resulted in a shift of policy from bestowing titles to institutionalizing religions in its frontier regions. In the reign of Yongzheng Emperor when the state gradually stabilized, the Empire encroached in the southern and western non-Han regions. Yongzheng Emperor (r.1722-35) initiated the process of standardizing infrastructure and ritual performances. He promoted the construction of city-walls, administrative offices, military stations, granaries, prisons and the official altars and temples, and he also decreed the regular performance of all the rituals and ceremonies at the official altars and temples under the supervision of the Board of Rites. Among the standardized official temples there was Guandi Temple.[2] This policy

[2] Rests were the Land and Grain Altar (社稷坛), Agricultural deity Altar (先农坛), Natural deities Altar (山川坛), Unworshipped ghosts Altar (厉坛), City-God Temple (城隍庙), and Dragon King's Temple (龙王庙).

was carried on in the Reign of Qianlong Emperor. Against this background, the Guandi Temple in the northern suburb of Lhasa was constructed at first, and then followed with a more ambitious project in 1792. It was the apex of Manchu's power, which was not only casted in the edifice of the Chinese temples in central Lhasa, but also embodied in the containment policies of high lamas carved in the stone stele of Yonghe temple. In 1792, Emperor Qianlong composed On Lamaism (喇嘛说 lama shuo), which was translated into four languages of Manchu, Chinese, Mongolian, and Tibetan. It questioned the efficacy of Tibetan lamas and the legitimacy of the reincarnation system. Therefore, the real ambition behind the construction of Guandi Temple in Lhasa was much bigger than gaining bliss from Guandi, but to impose imperial control over the Tibetan heavenly bureaucracy as what was done in the southern regions.

5.

Parallel to the Chinese records on the construction of the Guandi Temple in Lhasa, the Tibetan records also registered a similar reason of celebrating the victory over the other (*pha rol g.yul las rnam par rgyal ba*), but with manipulative nuances. The document cited below can be read both as a historical fact and as a rhetoric metaphor: the constructing of Guandi Temple in Lhasa was a process for the Tibetan lamas to tame the foreign-ness, as my argument flows.

The hagiography of Regent rTa tshag told a complete story on the construction of the Guandi Temple in Lhasa:

> de nas dus tshes gza' skar sogs phun sum tshogs pa'i nyin/ […] gdan 'dzoms thog pha rol g.yul las rnam par rgyal ba'i dga' ston chen po rim par tshogs pa rnams su phebs bskyod dang/ krung thang sogs la mchod yon pa'i lag rtags dang / da dung srid mtha'i bar du 7gong ma chos kyi rgyal po dang / t+'a la'i bla ma yab sras/ skyabs mgon nyid sogs kyis gtsos pa'i bstan 'dzin rnams zhabs brtan mdzad 'phrin rgyas pa/ thub bstan dar zhing 'gro kun chos 'byor bde dges 'tsho ba sogs kyi slad du rin gnyis srang bdun stong skor gyi rgyu sbyor dang bcas te rje btsun 'jam dpal dbyangs kyi gnas ri bong ba ri 'am/ bar ma rir grags bar rgya bod kyi lha khang dgon sde bcas gsar 'dzugs dang dgon bdag kyang ji srid bar rje drung hu thog thu nyid la 'bul brtsis kyis de don 7rgyal dbang mchod yon rnams la'ang gser snyan du phul bar mchod yon rnams kyi thugs dgongs la'ang/ […] 7gong ma chos kyi rgyal po lha skyongs bdag po chen po khri phebs dgung lo nga bdun pa/ rgyal dbang thams cad mkhyen gzigs blo bzang bstan pa'i dbang phyug 'jam dpal rgya mtsho gser khrir zhabs sor bkod nas dgung lo so gsum pa/ rje btsun bla ma chos kyi rgyal po chen po ye shes blo bzang bstan pa'i mgon po nyid slar yang rgyal dbang mchog gi 'phrin las kyi byed por lugs gnyis kyi srid kyi khrir phebs nas lo ngo gnyis su son pa/ yongs 'dzin ces pa chu pho byi ba'i lo 'di nyid kyi nang du dus tshes gza' skar phun sum tshogs pa'i nyin […] de yang tshul ji ltar du bzhengs pa ni/ ji skad du/ skyabs mgon rgyal ba'i rgyal tshab nyid kyi gsung las/
>
> pur rgyal sa yi thig ler ni/

rigs gsum sgyu 'phrul las grub pa'i/
sa 'dzin rnam pa gsum gyi ni/
ya gyal 'jam dpal gnas ri la/
dge sbyong bsti ba'i 'os gyur pa'i/
gtsug lag khang chen khyad 'phags dang /
tsi na'i dgra lha kwan yun 'chang/
bsrung ma'i tshul du gnas pa yi/
rigs gsum lha khang dang bcas pa/
zhes gsungs pa ltar/ 'jam dbyangs dang kwan yun gyi lha khang rgyan gsum pa rgya'i lugs dang/ bod kyi lugs brtan bzhugs chos 'khor gling gtsang khang / 'du khang sogs 'og nas 'byung ba ltar bzhengs pa bzhed nas […] (Blo bzang 'phrin las rnam rgyal 1813, 182-4)

on a marvelous day […] those of high positions came in sequence to the grand celebration party for the victory over the enemy [the Gurkha]. As alms from *krung thang* [zhongtang 中堂], for sake of the longevity and the expanding enterprise of the radiations of the Bodhisattvas (*srid mtha'i bar du*) – the Buddhist King the Emperor (*7gong ma chos kyi rgyal po*), the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama (*t+'a la'i bla ma yab sras*) - as well as the regent and the dharma holders, for the spread of Buddhism, and for the spiritual merits and happy life of all sentient beings, seven thousand silver was granted to build a compound of temple and monastery in Chinese and Tibetan style on top of the hill called *bong ba ri* or *bar ma ri*, the holy residing peak of Mañjushri (*rje btsun 'jam dpal dbyangs kyi gnas ri*). Regarding the holder of the compound, though the memorial to Patron Emperor and Priest Dalai Lama, both agreed to offer it to *rje drung hu thog thu*. […] In the fifty-seventh year of the Great Master the Guardian of Dharma the Emperor (*7gong ma chos kyi rgyal po lha skyongs bdag po chen po*) being enthroned, the thirty-three year of the All-knowing-all-seeing the Victorious One (*rgyal dbang thams cad mkhyen gzigs*) bLo bzang bstan pa'i dbang phyug 'jam dpal rgya mtsho holding the Golden Seat, and the second year of the High Lama the Grand Buddhist King (*rje btsun bla ma chos kyi rgyal po chen po*) Ye shes blo bzang bstan pa'i mgon po again taking over the temporal regime (*srid kyi khri*) out of the two regimes of the Dalai Lama, in an auspicious day of the water-male mouse year […] in this way it was built, which in the words of Regent himself:

in the center of the Tibetan land,
one out of the three mountains
arising from the illusory emanation of the Three Realms,
is the holy residing peak of Mañjushri.
The supreme monastery,
the temple of the Chinese warlord *kwan yun 'chang*
and the temple in which the guardian deities of the Three Realms dwell,
are suitable for mendicants.

The Mañjushri Temple and the Guandi Temple were constructed in Chinese style, and the shrine hall and the assembly hall of the Kundeling monastery (*brtan bzhugs chos 'khor gling*) were in Tibetan style […]

This long quotation from the hagiography of regent rTa tshag tells the basic information which confirms the Chinese records: the monastic compound owns its existence to the aftermath of the Gurkha war. The leftover money from the war, 7000 *srang* of silver, as donation from the Manchu

General, was dedicated to the establishment of the temples and the monastery. The project was under the supervision of the Eighth rTa tsag Rinpoche, who at that time was serving as the regent. Moreover, it exhibits detailed outplay of the monastic compound: it includes the Chinese style Guandi Temple and Mañjushri Temple, and the Tibetan style Kundeling monastery. It also indicates the reason why the Middle Hill was chosen as the construction site – it is a sacred mountain, the holy residing peak of Mañjushri.

In Buddhism at large, the records on taming and absorbing foreign deities are pervasive and normal, because Buddhism had long been struggling with Hindu pantheon since its birth in India and with various indigenous deities during its spreading to other regions of the world; in Tibetan Buddhism in particular, after Buddhism transmit into Tibet in the eighth century, absorbing local cults was one of the main missions of Tibetan Buddhism carried out through its strong capacity of subduing aboriginal supernatural beings. A special category of Dharma Protector (*chos skyong*; Skt. *dharmapālas*) was designed to accommodate local gods. Some of the well-known gods and goodness belong to this group of guardian deities or Dharma protectors.[3] Therefore, alongside the construction of the Guandi Temple, the taming process of Guandi took place. Actually, before the construction of the Guandi Temple in Lhasa, the seventh rTa tsag Rinpoche Blo bzang dpal ldan bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (1708-1758), serving as the Khanpo of Yonghe Temple in Beijing, had requested lCang skya khutukhtu to compose a prayer for Guandi. This two-folio short prayer titled Sacrificial Ritual to Master Guan (*kwan lo ye'i gsol mchod la*) goes:

de la 'dir lha bsangs mdor bsdus gtong bar 'dod bas/ sman sna/ rin po che/ 'bru sna/ dar zab sogs dug rigs dang ma 'dres pa'i bsangs rdzas gtsang ma legs par 'du byas la/ rang nyid gsad bde 'jigs gsum sogs lhag pa'i lha gang yang rung ba'i brgyal gyis/ nam mkha' mdzod kyi sngags rgya dang/ sngags drug phyag drug dang 'bru gsum brjod bas byin gyis brlab lo/

dbang phyogs tsi na'i yul gyi dgra lha che/
thub bstan bsrung bar rang gis zhal bzhes pa/
bse yi rigs las sbrin ring rgyal por grags/
lha chen 'khor bcas 'dir gshegs brtan par bzhugs/
sha khrag bza' bca' btud brgya mtsho'i tshogs/
zag med bdud rdzir byin rlabs 'di bzhes la/
rnal 'byor dam chos sgrub pa'i grogs mdzod cing/
'gal rkyen kun zhi mthun rkyen ma lus sgrubs/
thub bstan rgyal zhir rgyal khams bde ba dang/
rnal 'byor dbon slob rgyu sbyor yon bdag bcas/

[3] see the discussion of de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1996) on different categories of the protective deities.

gzhi lam byes gsum kun tu bde zhir sgyid
bsam don chos bzhin 'grub pa'i stong grogs mdzod/
tsi na'i yul gru chen bo'i dgra lha kwan lo yer grags pa'i bstan bsrung la 'brin bcol gyi tshags bcad 'di yod/
skyabs mgan dam pa rta tsag rje drung sprul ba'i sku rin po che'i bka' gnang thob ru bcir ste/ (*lcang skya* 1995, ja 469-71)

Here I would like to make a brief *bsangs* ritual, [after] preparing clean sacrificial offerings without any contamination, such as medical plants, jewelries, cereal seeds, and silk, [after] meditating oneself as any one of the three supreme wrathful deities, [after] reciting the one-hundred secret spell, the six mantra and the six mudra, as well as the three syllables om ah hum for blessing:
The grand warlord of the vast land of China,
you swear to protect the teachings of Buddhism.
Originating from the family of *bse*, the well-known king *sbrin ring,*
[and] the followers of the superior god, please rest here.
[Here] flesh and blood accumulate like the sea,
please enjoy the sweet elixir without any contamination.
The companion who [helps] practicing yoga of the holy dharma,
[you] achieves benefiting conditions completely and exempts unfavorable conditions.
May the whole kingdom get peace and bliss!
May the teachers and disciples of yoga, the generous patrons,
no matter at home or on the road, be safe and sound!
Wish to achieve the situation in which mind matches the law with your help!
This prayer for the protector of the teachings, Guan Laoye, who is famous in the vast land of China as God of War (*dgra lha*), was composed with the request from the incarnated lama of rTag tsag rje drung Rinpoche.

This prayer tells us in detail the complete sacrificial ritual for Guandi in the beginning in the form of prose. The ritual procedure follows the typical Tibetan purifying ritual (*bsangs*), starting with burning various plants and reciting specific mantras, and then followed with reciting the prayer and sacrificing elixir to the deity. The prayer was written in the form of verses, which is also a standard form of prayers in Tibetan Buddhism. In terms of format, it moves long the tradition; in terms of content, however, it moved beyond tradition. New elements were incorporated in the prayer. It indicates that the deity the prayer and ritual are dedicated to is from China; his residence in Tibet was bounded to his vow to be a Dharma protector of Buddhism; his name is *sbrin ring*, which is a direct translation of his Chinese courtesy name Yunchang (云长), both meaning “long cloud”. Due to the official promotion, Guan Yu was popularly known as Guandi in the eighteenth century as we have discussed earlier. Hence, when lCang skya talked about Guandi with his

courtesy name, he must have been familiar with the stories of Guandi. It facilitated his task to imbed Guandi in the family of the Tibetan deities. That was probably one of the reasons the seventh rTa tsag Rinpoche requested Guandi prayer from him. As being well-educated both in Tibetan and Chinese literature, lCang skya khutukhtu carefully chose *dgra lha* as a match to Guandi.

Confucian records often left out the fact that the deifying process of Guand Yu was actually initiated by Buddhists. One of the earliest miracle stories about Guan Yu is derived from a temple stele of 820 A.D. erected in front of the Yuquan temple in Dangyang County (Duara 1988, 779), in which GuanYu was portrayed as furious demon transformed into a snake who then was subdued by a Buddhist monk and converted to a Buddhist guardian deity.[4] Such a narrative pattern of monk-snake encounters shows "the superior power of Buddhist teaching, which offered a higher understanding of reality, over unruly local gods" (Hansen 1993, 78). This pattern then "became the standard Buddhist approach to dealing with local gods. Often a monk had a dream or vision in which the deity accepted the supremacy of the Buddha." (Hansen 1993, 78) lCang skya khutukhtu built on this tradition a new Guandi-*dgra lha* legend.

Dgra lha refers to a class of gods whose stories often follow the same pattern. Although the origin of the *dgra lha* is still debated among Tibetologists, yet, it is accepted that this class of deities facilitates the crushing of enemies of the worshipers (Gibson 1985). Moreover, "all these deities are also referred to, at one point or another, by the title *dam can*, 'those who are bounded by an oath', because they have been subjugated and sworn to protect the Buddhist doctrine." (Pommaret 1994, 40) Furthermore, Guan Yu as a person was usually endowed with the image of a brave general who killed many enemies, while Guandi as a god was worshiped as the God of War and the God of fortune. In Tibetan Buddhism, "[T]the title *dgra lha*, 'enemy-god', is usually given to those deities who are believed to be especially capable of protecting their worshipers against enemies, and to help them to increase their property." (de Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996, 318) The similarity of the two is obvious. Therefore lCang skya khutukhtu immediately gave all the

[4] One still night, when the Buddhist monk Zhi Yi (A.D.538-97) was deep in meditation under a great tree on the mountain, the silence was suddenly filled by a booming voice: "Return me my head." When the monk looked up he saw the ghostly apparition of a figure whom he recognized as Guan Yu, the spirit of the mountain. An exchange followed between the two in which the monk reminded Guan Yu of the severed heads of Guan Yu's own victims. Deeply impressed by the logic of karmic retribution, the spirit of Guan Yu sought instruction in the Buddhist faith from the monk, built a monastery for him, and began to guard the mountain. Later the mountain people built a monastery for Guan Yu where they offered sacrifices at the beginning of each new season. (Duara 1988, 779)

characteristics of a *dgra lha* to Guandi by calling him the companion of yogi, because in the spiritual bureaucracy, one of the ministers of the King *dgra lha mGon po phyag drug pa* is *rnal 'byor gyi dgra lha* (de Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996, 318), that is, the protector of yogis. lCang skya khutukhtu also composed the ritual prayer for Guandi with the similar standards as for the other *dgra lhas*: as de Nebesky-Wojkowitz describes, rituals for the *dgra lha* is called the *lha bsangs*, and "for this ceremony a special book is used – the *lha bsangs* texts of the various sects to which we already referred several times – containing long enumerations of gods and goddesses, most of them of pre-Buddhist origin." (de Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996, 319) As *dgra lha* "are most probably ancient gods" (de Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996, 325) with pre-Buddhist origin, lCang skya khutukhtu traced the family origin of Guandi to the ancient *bse* family. Although in his prayer there was no mention of Gesar, however, it is noteworthy that "[T]he legendary king *Ge sar* is occasionally called 'the king Ge sar, the *dgra lha* of *Zhang zhung*'" (de Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996, 318).

Due to the influence of lCang skya khutukhtu, Guandi cult was soon widespread among lamas of Tibetan and Mongolian origins who were residing in Beijing permanently[5] or sojourning between Beijing and their parishes alternatively. In the hagiography of lCang skya khutukhtu written by Thu'u bkwan bLo bzang chos kyi nyi ma (1737-1802), Guandi appeared several times in the dreams of lCang skya (see Tuguan luosang quji nima 1988, 130-1; 145-6). In tantric Buddhism, dreams are considered as manifestation of one's personal guardian deity. Therefore, Guandi was gradually equaled to the Six Panchen Lama who was the root lama of lCang skya. This connection has been mentioned by Stein (1983, 88-9). Thu'u bkwan bLo bzang chos kyi nyi ma also introduced the story with details about a high Buddhist monk subduing Guandi in his book *The Crystal Mirror: An Excellent Exposition That Shows the Sources and Assertions of All Tenet Systems* (*Grub mtha' thams cad kyi khung dang 'dod tshul ston pa legs bshad shel gyi me long*). The story Thu'u bkwan tells also was based on the same narrative pattern of monk-snake encounter and conversion. Obviously, the deification of Guandi in Tibet, from its beginning, was not bounded to Gesar. Rather, it stressed the direction/place to which Guandi came from. In the beginning of lCang skya khutukhtu's prayer, it states that "The grand warlord of the vast land of China". It became clearer in the subsequent versions of Guandi prayers written by Thu'u bkwan bLo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, Cha har bLo bzang tshul khrims (1740-1810) and A kyA bLo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (1708-

[5] On the eight reincarnation lineages of Beijing Residing Hotogtu (八大驻京呼图克图), see Chen 2007.

68). In Thu'u bkwan's prayer, *The Thunder Which Promotes Rainstream-like Career: The History and Prayer Ritual of Guan Yunchang*, *the Great Emperor Who Subdues Demons of the Three Worlds* (*khams gsum bdud 'dul rgyal chen bkwan yun chang gi lo rgyus dang gsol mchod bya tshul 'phrin las char rgyun bskul ba'i 'brug sgra la*) (Thu'u bkwan 2000, ja 781-94), Thu'u bkwan translated the Chinese title "the Great Emperor Who Subdues Demons of the Three Worlds" (三界伏魔大帝) of Guandi directly into Tibetan. In the first section on the history of Guandi, he also stated in the beginning that Guandi is from the Period of Three Kindgom in the vast land of China (*sngo gyi dus sum hu tsi na'i yul gru chen por*). He connected Guandi with *beg tse lcam sring,* the Guadian Sisters who were said to be the demons from China (*rgya nag yul gyi dam sri mdzad*) (see Cairang 1996, 82). In this way, Guandi was purposely fashioned as a representative deity of the land of China. The three pieces of Guandi prayer composed collectively by Cha har bLo bzang tshul khrims and A kyA bLo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan basically followed the narrative structure of lCang skya's design, although their writings enriched the genealogy of Guandi by connecting Guandi with the Red Ruler of Life (*srog bdag dmar po*), who is another manifestation of the Guadian Sisters (Dong and Qi, 2013).

Then the question comes, why in all these prayers the lamas seemed to be advertising the Chinese-root of Guandi? A deeper structure of cosmopolitics lies underneath. As we have discussed, Guandi was incorporated into the *dgra lha* family. Not accidentally, King Gesar was occasionally called "the *dgra lha* of *Zhang zhung*", and the Mongolian Khan Genghis (Mol. *Činggis qaγan*), the founder of the Mongol-Yuan Dynasty, was also incorporated into the *dgra lha* family as a *dgra lha chen po Jing gir rgyal po* (de Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996, 242-3). Meanwhile he was also worshipped as the Local Deity of Ordos (*'or du su'i yul lha jing gir*) among the Tibetans. It appears that they are all connected with the direction/place they came from. Thus they became the Chinese representative Guandi, the Khams representative Gesar, and the Ordos representative Genghis Khan. The Tibetan spiritual bureaucracy was much larger than this: there are also representatives from each valley of Bhutan, most places of Sikkim, and every different Mongolian tribes (see de Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996, 231-52). In Tucci's attempt to define *bstan*, another class of furious gods to which Guandi was connected sometimes, he suggests that "They appear in fact as tribal gods. They were deities located in a particular place, generally a mountain, in some cases a whole country, over which they were considered to preside. The *bstan* was the all-powerful spirit under

whose sway other demons and entities were supposed to be. He therefore was the patron of the ethnical groups living in that very country: he was a ruler, the spiritual ruler over a district and its inhabitants." (Tucci 1980, 727) In this way, the Tibetan lamas transformed the imperial deity of Guandi into a local deity of the eastern land, through subduing local deities and subordinating them in the bureaucratic system of Tibetan deities, exerted spiritual sovereignty over the land represented by the Local Deity of the land.

The production and circulation of the prayers among the Tibetan and Mongolian lamas in the imperial capital had to be attributed to the seventh rTa tshag Rinpoche, who was serving as Khanpo of Yonghe Lama Temple between 1748 and 1750 at Beijing. The Yonghe Temple shrined Guandi statue at its east wing until the 1930s when it was destroyed in the war (Wei 1985, 65-6). Therefore, as part of his religious duty, Khanpo rTa tsag Rinpoche requested the prayer for Guandi from lCang skya khutukhtu. When the eighth rTa tshag Rinpoche studied under the guidance of lCang skya khutukhtu at Beijing from 1771-81, he must have known the prayer and the ritual. Later when he headed the Tibetan government as regent and led the construction project of the Guandi Tmeple in Lhasa, it was too easy for him to bring Guandi back.

6.

Besides the Guandi Temple, Regent rTa tshag Rinpoche also constructed a Mañjushri Temple behind it. Interestingly, the land certificate issued from Lifan Yuan also registered a pair of temples in the military camp near Lhasa – the Guandi Temple and the Wanshou Temple. These two pairs of temples formed a metaphor for the political transformation in the late eighteenth century.

Wanshou means longevity of ten thousand years, which implies that it was used for the emperor. In Beijing there is also a Wanshou Temple, a place to store Buddhist scriptures since the Ming Dynasty and a place for birthday celebration of the Manchu royal house. Hence it can be inferred that the Wanshou Temple in the military camp was constructed on behalf of the emperor. Back then this pair of temples was confined in the military camp and thus perhaps was only patronized by Chinese/Manchu soldiers and their families. Around two decades later, when the new pair of Guandi Temple and Mañjushri Temple was set up on the hill in the center of Lhasa city, it was no longer exclusive to the Chinese and Manchus. It addressed to all the frontier subjects of the Empire, including the Tibetans.

Mañjushri was the title awarded to Shunzhi Emperor by the Fifth Dalai Lama. It means "the bodhisattva of transcendent wisdom" in the late seventeenth century (Farquhar 1978). Thereafter, not only the Manchu emperors self-fashioned as the reincarnation of Mañjushri in paintings and rituals, but also the Tibetans addressed the Manchu emperors the Greatest Mañjushri (*'jam dbyangs gong ma chen po*) in official documents, or the Buddhist King the Emperor (*7gong ma chos kyi rgyal po*) and the Great Master the Guardian of Dharma the Emperor (*7gong ma chos kyi rgyal po lha skyongs bdag po chen po*) in Buddhist hagiography as quoted above. In the late eighteenth century when the Guandi Temple was established, the belief that the Manchu emperor is the reincarnation of Mañjushri had firmly taken root among the Tibetans. Obviously, the construction of the Mañjushri Temple was a dedication to the Manchu emperor by the Regent.

With the rapid spread of Guandi cult, many small Guandi Temples were built in Lhasa city either privately or semiofficially in the following years (LCSH, 48-50). Together with the presence of the Chinese style architecture, divination with Gaundi lots also became a fashion among common people. Drawing lots in Guandi temple to tell one's fortune has been a popular practice in China proper. On each wooden or bamboo lot was written a verse. Through interpreting the verse the monks are able to reveal one's future. There are two versions of lots verses in Lhasa Guandi Temple which are still in use nowadays. Through a close reading and line-to-line comparison of the two Tibetan versions with the standard Chinese version, Jiayang Pingcuo (2014) points out that the earlier Tibetan version was a direct translation of the Chinese version, while the later Tibetan version was actually recomposed by the lamas with their own understandings through Tibetan expressions and popular stories. In this way, Guandi cult stepped into the daily life of the Tibetans since the late eighteenth century.

The construction of the Guandi Temple and the Mañjushri Temple well defined the politically-sophisticated character of the regent in a precarious position. Through actively rearranging the two human-deities, Guandi and the Manchu emperor, respectively as the local deity of China and the universal king, Regent rTa tshag increased his prestige among the Tibetans as the one who closely follows the Buddhist teachings; he also consolidated his connection with imperial court as the one who well performs political loyalty. On the one hand, Guandi was given the status of a local deity that is ranked low in the spiritual bureaucracy, which ingratiated to the mentality that spiritually China, as being represented by Guandi, is subordinated to spiritual sovereignty of Tibet. On the

other hand, in a religious-political sense, the Manchu emperor was pleased with his high position as Mañjushri, echoing that of the Dalai Lama as Avalokiteśvara. In *mahāyāna* Buddhism, bodhisattvas are devoid of ethnic and cultural background; they are universal as the savior of all sentient beings. In this way, Tibetan lamas accepted the Emperor as the ruler of the universe free from his Manchu origin. Also in this way Tibetan lamas sold the idea of *cakravartin*-kingship as a source of legitimacy to the Manchus who were faced with the difficulty to rule over multiple ethnicities.

Why and how the cult of Gaundi was accepted in Tibet not only illustrates the complexity of the political reality in the eighteenth-century Qing Empire, but also demonstrates the elasticity of Tibetan Buddhism in accommodating and embracing changes. Previous studies on the Manchu-Tibetan encounters and interactions have demonstrated that Tibetan Buddhism was capable of providing the Manchus with a new set of political hegemony to counterbalance the Confucian political ideology, through which the Manchu emperors were aligned with previous bodhisattva-kings such as Srong btsan sgam po, Qubilai Khan and the Emperor Taizong of Tang (Farquhar 1978), or recast as *cakravatin* (Grupper 1989; Rawski 1998)[6]. Although advocating the role of frontier in constituting the imperial ideology tends to take a more agentive and emic perspective, however, this is still only one side of the story. Here we break down the only dimension of ethnicity in the abovementioned discussion and bring in the factor of interest groups, we see better that the collaborating process actually empowered certain actors. More importantly, through these actors,

[6] Samuel Grupper (1989) argues that "the aura of authority of the *cakravatin*" worked as mythical sources for the "multi-ethnic" Manchus to construct cultural identity and political legitimacy. *Cakravatin* provided a role model for secular rulers to perform as "a world conqueror, a universal ruler" (Rawski 1998, 248). When the notion of incarnation in Tibetan Buddhism was transferred to the secular realm and combined with *cakravatin*, it conflated with the Chinese concept of *zhengtong* (Rawski 1998, 249). *Zhengtong* was developed out of Han Confucian political ideology, referring to "the line of orthodox or legitimate succession within a royal house or family. During the Tang and Song, the term came to be applied to tracing a legitimate line of rulership from antiquity to the present" (Rawski 1998, 209). It "substituted 'political descent' for descent by blood. It asserted that legitimacy crossed over descent lines and could be transmitted from one ruling house to another" (210). when the Manchu emperors were enthroned as reincarnation of Manjusri, they took over the "mandate of Heaven[6]" from the Buddhist sage kings which helped to remove the label of "Barbarian" tagged by Confucian scholars. "Heaven" is a complicated concept appearing both in Confucianism (*tian*) and in Shamanism of the Mongols and the Manchus. In early ancient time (Xia, Shang and Zhou Dynasties), *tian* referred to a personified deity who could bring bless and punishment Similar to the Shamanism, *tian* can be irritated or flattered by the improper or proper sacrifice made through shamans. During Han Dynasty, *tian* was gradually taken as both a natural force and a divine deity who blesses the good and punishes the bad mercilessly. At this stage, the ruler (son of Heaven or *tianzi*) took the place of shamans to make sacrifice. However, regardless of the sacrifice, if the ruler is not virtuous *tian* also retaliates and hands over the rulership to another man of virtue. This is "rule by virtue". It coexisted with "rule by heredity" in Chinese political theories and realities, because Confucianism also bases heavily on filial piety (*xiao*) and emphasizes blood heredity (*xuetong*).

changes were brought into Tibetan society, which was embodied in the reformulation of Buddhist narratives and the reinvention of new Buddhist deities.

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