

Split Spirit of Place, Yanghwajin

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Abstract. In 1866, a massacre of Catholics happened at Yanghwajin which was a port and a military post. More than a hundred of Catholics were killed at the top of a hill that was later named 'Jeoldusan', which literally means 'a decapitating hill'. Soon after, Jeoldusan became a holy site for Catholics and the name was substituted from 'Yanghwajin'. A missionary cemetery was built in 1886 near Jeoldusan and a shrine and museum was built on Jeoldusan in 1967, which earned an architectural reputation. In the course of the rapid development of Seoul in 1970-80's, Jeoldusan became an important traffic spot with expressways and subways. By reviewing documents and interviewing the visitors and passersby, it is revealed that there are big differences in recognition of this place among several groups of people. They showed a split understanding on the place according to their religions and knowledge of the history of this place.

In 1997, the Seoul Metropolitan Government designated a famous hill, a shrine and museum atop it and its surrounding area as a cultural property in the name of 'Yanghwa Ferry and Remains of Jamdubong'. People who were interested in this place wondered about the designated name because this place had been widely known as 'Jeoldusan'.

1. History of Yanghwajin

This place was called Yanghwajin(楊花津) in the Joseon dynasty(1392~1910), located at the west of Seoul near the mouth of the Han River. This place first appeared in the written record of the Goryeo dynasty(918~1392), Goryesa(高麗史). In the Joseon dynasty, this place was designated as one of the five main ports and military bases in the outskirts of Seoul. Yanghwajin was a military base for training the naval forces and was very important as a node of maritime traffic connecting the southwestern part of the Korean

peninsula with Seoul. Since this place was a port and a crowded place, it is not surprising that Yanghwajin was occasionally used as an execution ground.

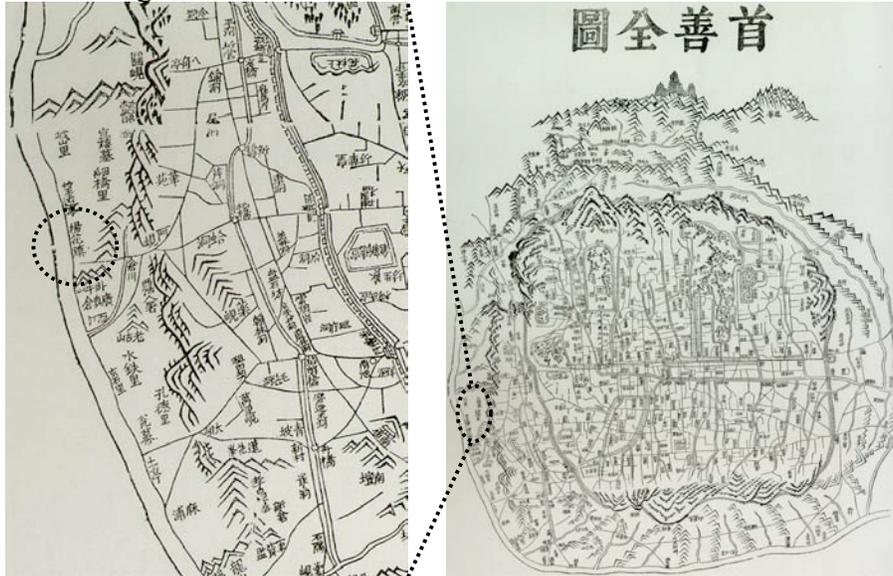


Figure 1 Suseonjeondo (首善全圖), 1849: an old map of Seoul, capital of Korea): circle in the left figure indicates Yanghwajin

Meanwhile, this place had a beautiful landscape where the local gentry enjoyed boating. In the late Joseon dynasty, Yanghwajin was used as a place for a reception and ceremonial events of the Chinese envoys.

It was not until the late 19th century that Western civilization came to the traditional Korean society. The Joseon court, however, maintained the strict policy of rejecting new civilization until eventually being enforced to open her ports to Japan in 1876.

Heungseondaewongun, the father of the King Gojong, took the role of a regent and declared against Catholicism under the reason of destroying traditional order of Korean society. In the year 1866, he proclaimed a law banning Catholicism followed by a massacre of about 8,000 Catholics including nine French priests were killed.

French priest Félix Clair Ridel, who came to the Joseon dynasty for missionary work, informed the news of this massacre to French admiral Pierre Gustave Roze who stayed at Tienjin(天津), a port in China, with French troops. Then the French troops invaded the Joseon dynasty. The French troops tried to attack Seoul along the Han

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River but stopped due to the strong resistance of the Joseon troops at Yanghwajin.

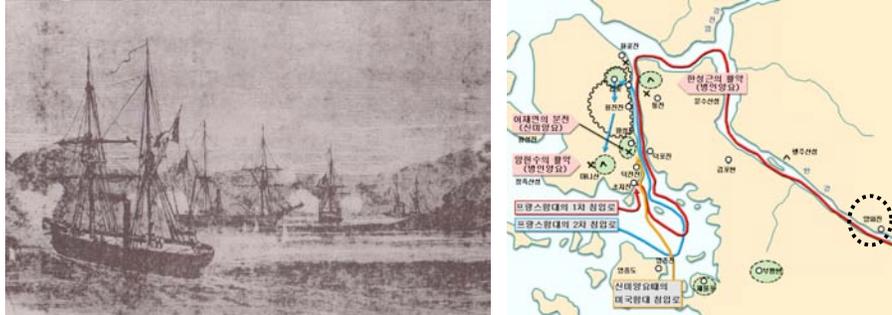


Figure 2 (left) the French fleet was defeated and retreated in 1866 / (right) combat areas of the war in 1866, the circle indicates Yanghwajin

Later, Heungseondaewongun ordered to kill many Catholics at Yanghwajin to show his volition of rejecting Catholicism to the French troops and priests and Catholics in the Joseon society. For this, about 177 Korean Catholics were executed at the crowded port of Yanghwajin. The specific spot is quite controversial but widely known as Jamdubong(蠶頭峰), a hill located at the port. Later, the hill was named 'Jeoldusan(切頭山)', which literally means 'a decapitating hill'. Contrary to the volition of Heungseondaewongun, the hill of Jeoldusan became a holy site for Catholics after this massacre.



Figure 3 (left) (imaginary picture) Catholics martyrdom at the hill of Jeoldusan / (right) the hill of Jeoldusan

2. Becoming a holy ground

After the missionary work was allowed in 1886, the Yanghwajin foreign missionary cemetery(楊花津 外人墓地) was built near the hill of Jeoldusan in 1890. The King Gojong granted this place to the dead bodies of foreigners who helped to modernize and

develop the Joseon Kingdom in various fields in the late 19th and early 20th century. Nowadays there are about 500 tombs of foreigners who are from 13 countries, including the United States of America, the United Kingdom, etc. This missionary cemetery is now managed by the Protestant community organization.



Figure 4 Yanghwajin foreign missionary cemetery(楊花津
外人墓地)

A monument to commend the martyrs of 1866 was built in 1958 at the top of the hill of Jeoldusan by Korean Catholic Church. The Catholic Church thought that building the monument at the top of the hill was the best decision to create a propagandistic effect of the martyrdom and Catholicism (Yoon 1999). For the access of the believers, it also expected the construction of expressway near the hill of Jeoldusan in the future (Institute of Korean Catholic history 2003). However, the monument was destroyed by lightning in 1965 and therefore a new monument was needed to keep this place sacred and meaningful.

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Figure 5 (left) a monument built in 1958 / (right) a shrine and museum built in 1967

There was a design competition for the Jeoldusan martyrs' shrine and museum in 1966. The competition guideline was not to change configuration of the ground of the hill of Jeoldusan. Among the submitted design proposals, the work of HeeTae Lee was selected. He located the chamber which stores the remains of the martyrs at the top of the hill of Jeoldusan and designed an altar above this chamber. This new building soon became a landmark for its unique form and earned a wide reputation among architectural society. Majorities of critics said that this building was a masterpiece of a new interpretation of traditional Korean architecture and its realization in terms of modern building construction system. Nowadays, the building itself is regarded as a monument (Jeong 2003).



Figure 6 (left) plan & roof plan of shrine and museum/ (right) bird's eye view of shrine and museum

3. A place surrounded by expressways and subways

In the course of urban development of Seoul, many expressways and subways were planned in the 1960's. The area near Yanghwajin was supposed to be on a traffic node crossing several expressways in the future. The expressways were built on the ground and one of them passed through the area of Yanghwajin. By negotiations with the Seoul Metropolitan Government, the expressway was transformed into an underground road. Still, other kinds of expressways and roads surrounded the area of Yanghwajin (Mapo district 1984, 1992).

To construct a subway route #2 which circulates Seoul, the area of Yanghwajin was considered to be one of the suitable places to make a bridge over the Han River (Seoul Metropolitan Rapid Transit Corporation 1989, Seoul Metropolitan Government, division of construction 1991).



Figure 7 many expressways were planned to be built around the area of Yanghwajin. The smaller circle indicates the hill of Jeoldusan and the bigger circle indicates the approximate area of Yanghwajin.

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In the case of subway, the Dongsan bridge was constructed connecting the area of Dongsan and Hapjeong across the Han river. The bridge and subway line split the area of Yanghwajin into two. One is the area of Yanghwajin foreign missionary cemetery and the other is the area of the hill of Jeoldusan and the Jeoldusan martyrs' museum and shrine.

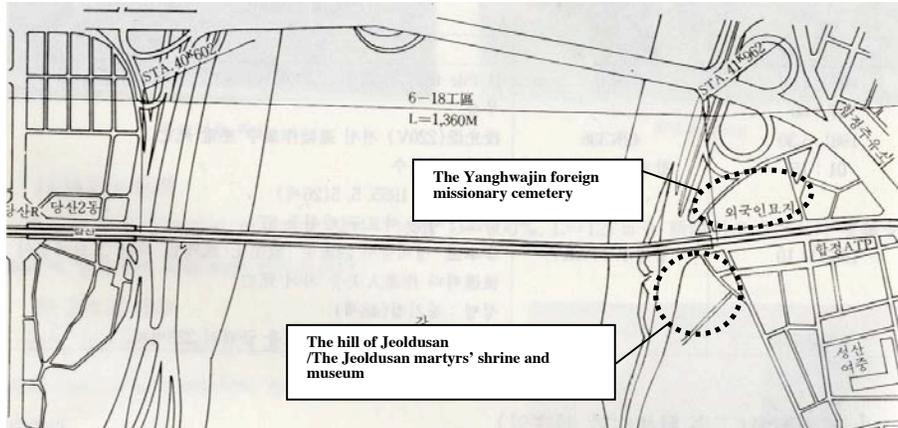


Figure 9 the whole Yanghwajin area of nowadays

4. Three viewpoints of Yanghwajin

4.1 Recognition as ‘a place of martyrdom’

Among the features of Yanghwajin area, ‘a place of martyrdom’ gained an explosive attention when Pope John Paul II visited Seoul and stopped by the Jeoldusan martyrs’ shrine and museum in 1984. Pope John Paul II mentioned the sublimity of martyrdom while visiting the shrine and museum. Newspapers and televisions discussed the historical facts of martyrdom of 1866 in detail. Although Yanghwajin area had been widely known as the place of martyrdom, this visit of Pope John Paul II deepened the recognition of ‘a place of martyrdom’ among the public. The Jeoldusan martyrs’ shrine and museum is famous now that almost one hundred thousand pilgrims visit this place each year from in and out of Korea every year.

4.2 Recognition as ‘a place of the dead’

Although the foreign missionary cemetery deepened the holiness of Yanghwajin area, it is also recognized as one of the unwanted facilities, just like other common cemeteries.

Furthermore, in 2007, the organization of the Jeoldusan martyrs’ shrine and museum decided to build a charnel house inside a new building near the shrine and museum. Residents who live near the hill of Jeoldusan were against this decision because a charnel house reminds them of death and is regarded as inauspicious. There were also concerns about the possible devaluation of real estate near the hill of Jeoldusan and traffic jams due to the visitors to this charnel. They took their problem to the court of law. At the first trial, the organization of the shrine and museum was acquitted and the second trial is still in progress (Shin 2007).

4.3 Recognition as ‘a place of port and a military base’

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Figure 10 A restoration of a stylobate of a building which was at the military base of Yanghwajin area

In 2006, the new mayor of Seoul announced a project named ‘Han River Renaissance’. The content of this project is to remodel the riverside of Han River to achieve higher accessibility from both the river and the land. To be an attractive place where people would like to access, each riverside area would be developed with new programs, facilities, etc. In the case of Yanghwajin area, newly inserted facilities would be the reconstructed buildings of port and military base in Yanghwajin area. The Seoul Metropolitan Government recognized that this area is related to historical facts and it focused on restoring the barracks, bases, port, etc (Yonhapnews 2006). This area will become a place for sightseeing of the early modern Joseon dynasty after all.

5. Efforts for reconciliation

Because the Yanghwajin area is on the riverside, a high-rise apartment building can command a panoramic view of the Han River. In 1996, a high-rise apartment building was planned to be built next to the hill of Jeoldusan and the Jeoldusan martyrs’ shrine and museum. The organization of the Jeoldusan martyrs’ shrine and museum thought that this plan could be a threat to conservation and management of this place. As a solution, they requested the Seoul Metropolitan Government to designate the Jeoldusan martyrs’ shrine and museum and its surrounding area as a cultural property. They intended to control the height of buildings nearby by designation.

In 1997, the hill of Jeoldusan and its surrounding area including the building of the Jeoldusan martyrs’ shrine and museum were designated. Still the designated area did not include the whole area of

Yanghwajin. The area of Yanghwajin foreign missionary cemetery, which is operated by the related Protestant organization, was excluded. The area of military base was also excluded. These exceptions were due to the difference of governing organization of each place.

To our concern is that the designated name of this area is decided as ‘Yanghwa Ferry and Remains of Jamdubong’. Why was this place not denominated as ‘Jeoldusan’? One of the reasons is relatively short history of martyrdom compared with histories of other places designated as cultural properties. No place of martyrdom was designated as a cultural property until then. The fact that this place used to be a ferry for a long time is more suitable for designation. Another reason is not to confine the right of using this place to a specific religious organization. Because the name ‘Jeoldusan’ carries a meaning related to Catholicism, ‘Jamdubong’, which literally means the shape of the hill, was selected instead. Although the meaning related to Catholicism is excluded in the designated name, it is explained in detail on the notice board located at the hill of Jeoldusan.

To be short, it can be said that there were attempts to reconcile the spirits of this place.

6. Social construction of intangible spirits and its influence on tangible place

As we can see from the case of Yanghwajin area, there can be plural spirits of a place. A spirit is generated and strengthened by historical events. A spirit is also related to each group of beholders who think highly of historical events and members of a group are not always different from members of another group. When it comes to a decision making related to a place, groups of beholders try to reconcile the virtues of spirits. Although the desirable result of this reconciliation is to integrate the plural virtues of spirits, the integration is not so easy due to religious, political, social and economic differences of each group of beholders. Once the reconciliation is done, a new institution is made and this not only affects the tangible places but also affects the intangible spirits. It strengthens or distorts the existing spirits or generates a new spirit.

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