

Two Perspectives on the 1895 Assassination of Queen Min

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Abstract

The Eulmi Incident (1895) refers to the assassination of Queen Min, committed by a gang of Japanese and Korean criminals, who broke into Gyeongbokgung palace and killed the queen on October 8, 1895. In addition to the factual details studied so far, the political ramifications that ensued after the incident also need to be examined. Many important questions remain unanswered. Did the political environment really change after the Queen's death, in a fashion that was favorable to the Japanese? What kind of factions came to power after the incident? And what were the positions and initial reactions of the foreign diplomatic ministers in Seoul regarding the incident? Answers to these questions will prove very relevant, as they form the basis for later historians to examine our own perspective and mindset regarding the situation then. These three questions need to be answered if we are going to reexamine and verify the objectivity of our viewpoint and understanding of the incident. This paper focuses on the activities of the Diplomatic Corps Conferences convened in the aftermath of the incident to illuminate the truth behind the Eulmi Incident, the perspectives of the diplomatic ministers of the Russian and Japanese legations with regard to the post-incident developments, and their diplomatic activities aimed at furthering their own imperialist interests.

Keywords: Queen Min, Eulmi Incident, Miura Gorō, K. I. Waeber, Diplomatic Corps Conferences, Kim Hong-jip cabinet, diplomatic policy

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Introduction

The Eulmi Incident refers to the assassination of Queen Min, which was committed by a gang of Japanese and Korean criminals who broke into Gyeongbokgung palace, under the order of the Japanese diplomatic minister in Korea, Miura Gorō, and killed the queen on October 8, 1895. Despite being extensively studied by modern Korean historians, examinations of this tragic incident have mostly concentrated on the secret and meticulous planning by the Japanese of the assassination, the cruelty of their actions, and how tragically the queen met her death. In other words, very little research has continued beyond the moment of the assassination. The incident is remembered mainly as a tragedy that marked the beginning of Korea's complete subordination to Japan.

Yet, the political ramifications following the incident warrant examination. Specifically, did the political environment really change after the queen's death, in a fashion that was favorable to the Japanese? Which faction came to power after the incident? And what were the positions and initial reactions of the foreign diplomatic ministers in Seoul regarding the incident? Answers to these questions will be very relevant, as they form the basis for us to examine our own perspective and outlook regarding the situation at the time. These three questions need to be answered in order to reexamine and verify the objectivity of our viewpoint and understanding of the incident.

In domestic terms, the Eulmi Incident enabled the Kim Hong-jip cabinet to place King Gojong under its duress, and thereby seize control of political affairs. In international terms, it was an important event as it triggered the beginning of a diplomatic confrontation between Russia and Japan over control of the Korean peninsula, and forced Russia to revise its policy regarding matters related to Korea. However, previous studies on this incident, both domestic and international, tend to concentrate on elaboration of the incident's unfolding, instead of analyzing the shifts that occurred in diplomatic relationships between foreign countries after the incident.

Previously, Japanese historians avoided dealing with this Eulmi

Incident issue, as it was a shameful act executed by their own people. Although they have tried to elaborate on how the incident itself unfolded, records created by central characters such as Miura Gorō, Sugimura Hykasi, Gikuchi Genjo, and Gobayakawa Hide, who were all directly related to the incident, were mainly consulted.

These figures mostly attributed the Daewongun as being behind the Eulmi Incident and planning all the details.¹ Yet in the 1960s, Yamabe Gentaro revealed that the Japanese Minister Miura, who was serving in Korea at the time, had planned the assassination and that the Japanese garrison in Korea was used for the operation. Furthermore, in the 1980s, the Korean historian Park Jong-Geun, who lives in Japan, proved in his studies that Japanese Minister Miura planned the assassination and executed his plan by mobilizing Japanese troops, diplomats, the consulate, police, and assassins.² Modern Japanese historians agree that Minister Miura planned and implemented the assassination of Queen Min, but acted without any higher authority. Studies that support this view of the incident are based on Japanese diplomatic documents and other memoirs written by Japanese people, and their position clearly shows the intention to place blame only on the diplomatic legation in Korea and no one else.

Recently in Korea, historical dramas and musicals, which portray Queen Min's (posthumously Empress Myeongseong) life in great detail, have heightened Korean people's interest in this tragic incident. Korean historians have also initiated more detailed studies on the Eulmi Incident, in order to reveal the complete truth behind the incident, including the identity of the person ultimately responsible for the death of the queen.

Most Korean scholars in their studies 1) confirmed that neither the Daewongun nor the Korean Training Unit (Hullyeondae) was involved in the incident, 2) and instead emphasized the role played by the Japanese government in the assassination, 3) and concentrat-

1. Miura (1925, 329-341); Sugimura (1932, 175); Gikuchi (1931, 412-414); Gobayakawa (1962, 339-340).

2. Yamabe (1966, 119-124); Park J. (1982, 232-247).

ed on confirming exactly how the assassination proceeded.³ In other words, the Korean scholars tried to emphasize the tragic nature of the incident and the barbaric actions of the Japanese involved. Their works definitely contributed to the overall revelation of factual details of the incident.

Yet the Korean scholars did not have the opportunity to fully examine all the diplomatic materials held by foreign countries, so some factual details remain missing from their works. Especially, the Russian diplomatic documents relating to the actions of Minister K. I. Waeber, who among all the foreign representatives responded to the incident most actively, have not yet been examined by the Korean scholars. As a result, the actions of the minister of the Russian legation in Korea, and the foreign policies of both the Russian legation and the Russian government at the time of the Eulmi Incident, have not yet been thoroughly examined and crosschecked with the contents of other materials. Nor have the policy and actions of the Japanese legation in Seoul after the Eulmi Incident been examined.

George A. Lensen closely examined the records of the Diplomatic Corps Conferences to explore the changing relations among the powers after the assassination incident.⁴ However, his focus was on the apparent diplomatic activities of the foreign representatives rather than on their secretive motives such as the organized plan for the Japanese minister to conceal the truth of the incident, the reasons behind the Russian minister's active involvement, and the diplomatic cards hidden in the Japanese government. Moreover, Lensen's study does not clarify the sharp confrontation between the Russian and Japanese ministers in their debate over the political stability of the Korean peninsula, derived from their conflicting perspectives on the incident and differing intentions in their negotiating and debating activities.

Among the studies that have been done by Russian scholars, the Korean Kim Ryeo-Ho, who lives in Russia, examined the "A. I. Seredin-Sabatin Report" and tried to determine the course of events

3. Choi (1992, 6-26); Kang (1992, 31-67); Lee (1992, 70); Sin (1998, 53).

4. Lensen (1982, 544-569).

during the incident by examining that material. According to him, although Russia threatened Japan that it would interfere if Japan denied the return of the Liaodong peninsula, Russia was neither active nor determined regarding the Korean matter.⁵ In the meantime, B. B. Park used Russian diplomatic documents to examine the relationship between the Russian minister Waeber and the Russian central government around the time of the incident. She argued that after the Eulmi Incident, Russia's foreign policy aimed at the stabilization of Korea and the retreat of the Japanese troops.⁶

The Russian scholars' opinions over Russia's Korean policy after the Eulmi Incident are somewhat divided between those who think it was active and those who think it was passive. We need to confirm which opinion is more accurate. Importantly, Russian scholars only examined part of the Russian diplomatic documents, which limited their evaluations of the data regarding the Eulmi Incident.

The scholars in Korea, Japan, and Russia all failed to examine the materials from the "Diplomatic Corps Conferences" that were held in October and November of 1895, which reveal not only details pertaining to the Eulmi Incident, but also the activities of the foreign representatives who were in Korea at the time. George A. Lensen and B. B. Park did not pay due attention to the underlying themes of the critical conferences held on November 25 and 26. As a result, their studies failed to analyze the compromise between the foreign representatives and the Kim Hong-jip cabinet to work out the measures for stabilizing the precarious politics in Korea after the assassination incident.

Previous studies concentrated too much effort on digging up details and finding out the "truth," and did not fully consider the importance of examining how the internal situation of Korea was affected by the incident. These Diplomatic Corps Conference materials were inserted in the diplomatic documents of the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia and Japan, thereby rendering them difficult to obtain and interpret.

5. Kim (1998, 78-79).

6. Park B. (2002, 160-161).

The objective of this study is to analyze the activities of the Diplomatic Corps Conferences, which gathered all the foreign representatives in Korea on October 8, October 25, November 5, and November 25 and 26 of 1895. Regarding the Diplomatic Corps Conferences, U.K., U.S., Russian, and Japanese documents described them as "conferences of foreign emissaries," "diplomatic corps conferences," "gatherings of foreign representatives," and "emissaries conferences," respectively. Considering the general nature of the conferences, it would be appropriate to refer to them as "Diplomatic Corps Conferences." Such conferences were arranged and held when a representative of a particular country suggested a gathering of representatives to discuss a particular issue related to the diplomatic relationship between that country and Korea. A conference of all the foreign representatives in Seoul was considered as an official Diplomatic Corps Conference, while that of only some was considered as an unofficial Diplomatic Corps Conference. Early in June 1892, all the foreign representatives in the Seoul area had organized a society of representatives in order to cultivate mutual friendship, but the purpose was perverted to one of interference in the internal political matters of Korea.

At the time, the foreign diplomats in Korea frequently met with King Gojong, and secured the interests of their home countries by citing the "most-favored-nation treatment" dictated in the treaties they signed with Korea. They were all trying to follow the orders of their own governments. However, as telegraphy was not well established at that time in Korea, the foreign representatives in Korea often had to make decisions on their own in response to emergency situations.⁷ The representatives from foreign countries were therefore capable of imposing significant influence on the domestic situation in Korea.

From October through December in 1895, after the Eulmi Incident, the representatives of foreign countries discussed several issues

7. For example, K. I. Waeber led the central government to intervene after the Eulmi Incident, and U.S. diplomatic minister Sill omitted his interference in his reports regarding the Chunsaengmun Incident on November 28 the same year.

at the “Diplomatic Corps Conferences,” such as 1) revealing the truth behind the Eulmi Incident, 2) securing the protection of King Gojong, 3) dealing with the Daewongun, 4) dissolving the Training Unit, and 5) deciding the foreign countries’ response to the Eulmi Incident.⁸ In the Diplomatic Corps Conferences, all important issues related to Korea’s internal situation around the Eulmi Incident were discussed. In particular, the Japanese and Russian diplomatic legations raced each other to devise proper responses to the imminent issues, and also secure their interests and consolidate their positions.

This paper examines the Diplomatic Corps Conferences, the truth behind the Eulmi Incident, the perspectives of the diplomatic ministers of the Russian and Japanese legations viewing the post-incident atmosphere, and their diplomatic activities. Various previously unused or unanalyzed diplomatic documents of Russia, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States regarding the Eulmi Incident are examined. The examination focuses on 1) the foreign countries’ efforts to reveal the truth, 2) conflicts between the Japanese Minister Inoue and the Russian Minister Waeber over the issue of stabilizing the conditions inside Korea, and 3) the compromises that were reached between the foreign diplomatic ministers and the Kim Hong-jip cabinet over securing initiatives regarding the internal Korean political situations.

Foreign Countries’ Efforts to Reveal the Truth Regarding the Eulmi Incident

Quarrels over the Truth between the Japanese Minister Miura and the Russian Minister Waeber

Regarding the gathering of the Diplomatic Corps Conference held on October 8, 1895, the day of the assassination, K. I. Waeber said, “I suggested the gathering of this conference in order to listen to the

8. “The diplomats were harassed and anxious, and met constantly to discuss the situation” (Bishop 1898, 75).

thoughts of Minister Miura regarding the Eulmi Incident, and so the conference is gathered.” Thus, Waeber led the conference, and Miura responded. The list of participants to this conference included not only Miura but also Hioki and Sugimura, both secretaries of the Japanese legation, Russian minister K. I. Waeber, acting U.S. secretary H. N. Allen, U.K. consul W. C. Hillier, German consul F. Krien, and French consul G. Lefevre.⁹

On the day of the assassination, Allen had arrived at the Russian legation to meet with Waeber, who had already received a report from former Vice-Minister Yi Beom-jin of the royal household department and A. I. Seredin-Sabatin. Waeber departed for the palace at dawn, along with U.S. secretary Allen.¹⁰ Inside the walls of the palace, Waeber and Allen witnessed more than thirty Japanese armed with long swords and club swords.¹¹ A moment later, Waeber and Allen ran into Minister Miura inside the palace. Regarding the incident, Waeber and Miura disputed each other, and both agreed to convene a Diplomatic Corps Conference at 3:30 p.m. that day.

On that day, Waeber and Allen stayed at the palace until about 12:30 p.m., and notified the British and German consuls that a conference was scheduled to be convened.¹² Waeber and Allen suggested that Hillier and Krien should go to the palace as well, saying that it was necessary to do so if they were to ensure the safety of King Gojong. Waeber also suggested that they all should visit the Japanese legation together. The British and German consuls had not been able to join Waeber and Allen in the morning, and at 2 p.m., the foreign representatives including the British and German consuls met with King Gojong. On this day, British consul Hillier as well heard the testimony of Seredin-Sabatin at the house of German Consul Krien, and after returning to the British consulate, Hillier sent a memo containing the Seredin-Sabatin testimony to his government.

9. Archives of Foreign Policy of Russian Empire (AVPRI). F. 150. Op. 493. D. 6. L. 78.

10. AVPRI. F. 150. Op. 493. D. 6. L. 60-61.

11. NARA. M. 134 Roll. 12 No. 156, 9-11.

12. AVPRI. F. 150. Op. 493. D. 6. L. 61.

At the Diplomatic Corps Conference held on this day, diplomatic minister Miura remained relatively calm, and explained himself in quite a straightforward fashion. He described the situation at hand as “a clash between a group of people demonstrating, and the police,” without directly commenting on the incident.¹³ Moreover, Miura argued that, “This incident happened because the disgruntled Korean soldiers in the Training Unit wished to reveal their support for the Daewongun.” At these comments, Minister Waeber, on behalf of the rest of the members of the Conference, argued that 1) the Japanese troops escorted the Daewongun to the palace, and 2) about 50-60 Japanese armed with swords were involved in the incident, based on the testimonies of an eye-witness.

At the accusation, Miura argued that “1) none of the people who escorted the palanquin of the Daewongun were Japanese soldiers, 2) and the Japanese who apparently wore civilian clothes and were armed with swords must have been workers enlisted in the army or some clerks who tried to get inside the palace during the chaos.” Countering this argument, Waeber argued, based on a witness’ testimony, that “1) the Japanese broke into the queen’s residence and murdered court ladies, 2) at least two Japanese officers were spotted at the residence of the queen, and 3) one Japanese person directed the entire operation at the queen’s residence.” Waeber also said that the witness he mentioned was a European, and expressed strong trust in the validity of the witness’ testimony.

Regarding the Japanese people who were reported to have been inside the palace, Miura argued that “they might have been servants or messengers of the Japanese garrison officers, who might have been authorized to have weapons and follow their commanding officers into the palace.” However, this argument was indeed a lame excuse. Yet Miura kept denying the involvement of Japanese soldiers or other Japanese people in the incident, and maintained that there was nothing wrong with the actions of the Japanese soldiers inside the palace. Miura also argued that only the testimonies that came

13. F. O. 405. Part VI. Inclosure in 3 No. 8, 44; AVPRI. F. 150. Op. 493. D. 6. L. 62.

from the Japanese soldiers were valid, and summarily dismissed the other testimonies offered by Waeber. At this response, Waeber reminded him that “the objective of this conference is to exchange opinions of the participants” and that “Miura is merely repeating his own arguments without listening to those of the others.”

On this day, the European and U.S. representatives, including Waeber, revealed that “the Japanese people are suspected to have been involved in the Eulmi Incident, and the truth behind this incident is not unrelated to the interests of the Japanese government.” Waeber and the other representatives also argued that “Japanese soldiers were mobilized in the execution of the incident, and the truth behind this incident should be vigorously pursued.” Moreover, the European and U.S. representatives argued that “the Japanese government should be strongly held responsible for sending troops into the situation.” In addition, Waeber disclosed the fact that “King Gojong asked for the removal of the Training Unit from the palace,” and officially requested that “Miura should exert his influence on the Training Unit.”

At this request, Miura agreed that “this minister also believes that this case deserves a thorough investigation. The things that are said by Minister Waeber do not concur with the facts included in our reports filed by the garrison officers, but they will be investigated as well. I will recommend the replacement of the Training Unit to the government.” Waeber expressed his deepest frustrations over the fact that “the minister of the Japanese legation essentially allowed this incident to happen, when the legation had the power to maintain the safety and order in the region.” With this expression of frustration, the conference was adjourned.

Through this heated debate with the Japanese minister, Waeber was able to secure Japan’s promise to pursue the truth behind the incident, and also the Japanese minister’s concession regarding the issue of replacing the guard unit for the palace. The accomplishments of this conference can be summarized as follows: 1) Miura acknowledged that it was necessary to start investigating the Eulmi Incident. 2) It became clear that it would no longer be appropriate for the

Training Unit to continue guarding King Gojong's palace. 3) It also became clear that it was crucial to conduct a thorough investigation of the Japanese involvement in the incident.¹⁴ Waeber and the other representatives not only maintained a stance pursuing the revelation of the truth, but also strongly suggested that the Japanese minister was deeply responsible for the incident and other related situations.

Activities of the Foreign Representatives, Including Waeber and Miura

After the Eulmi Incident, the foreign representatives quickly made reports to their respective governments regarding the incident itself and the expected future implications. The European and U.S. representatives, including Waeber and Allen, who participated in the conference all believed that the incident was staged and executed by the Japanese.

British consul Hillier informed Waeber that he sent a message to London saying that "the Japanese are involved" right after the incident.¹⁵ On October 10, 1895, British Minister Ernest Mason Satow in Tokyo also stated, "Sixteen or seventeen Japanese were involved in the incident, and they assassinated the Joseon queen," in his report of October 16 on the Japanese involvement. The involvement of the Japanese became a widely believed fact. Satow, quoting the remarks of the Japanese foreign minister, also reported to his government that "Miura should have minimized the Japanese involvement in the Joseon situation, and should have expelled the assassins and prevented the incident from ever happening."¹⁶

Acting U.S. secretary Allen also informed Waeber that he sent a message regarding the Japanese involvement to the U.S. minister to Korea, John M. B. Sill, who was on leave of absence in Japan at the

14. AVPRI. F. 150. Op. 493. D. 6. L. 79-81; *Diplomatic Documents of the Japanese Legation in Joseon*. Vol. 7, 207-208.

15. AVPRI. F. 150. Op. 493. D. 6. L. 63.

16. F. O. 405. Part VI. No. 79, 37-38.

time.¹⁷ Also, on October 13, 1895, Allen reported the perjury committed by Miura to the Secretary of State G. R. Olney, with details. Parts that were deemed related to the perjury involved such issues as "1) the Japanese troops' escort of the Daewongun, 2) the fact that it was three o'clock in the morning when the Japanese troops appeared at the palace, 3) and their breaking into the palace." According to Allen, "Miura forced Joseon Foreign Minister Kim Yun-sik to write that the assassins were in fact Joseon people who wore Japanese clothes." This confirms that Miura tried to hide the Japanese involvement, and that he was capable of influencing the Korean cabinet. In addition, Allen said that "if the Japanese government refuses to punish the people involved in the incident, Russia might decide to intervene," and reported that "the Russian fleet has already left for Joseon."¹⁸ We can see that Allen was also concerned about the possible Russian intervention, because of the situation.

Right after the Eulmi Incident, Waeber not only reported the situation to his government, but also argued the necessity of Russia's direct intervention in the Korean situation. Waeber argued to Russian Foreign Minister A. B. Lobanov-Rostovskii that "in order to achieve the necessary level of stability inside Joseon, the Russian government should employ a much stronger policy concerning the Joseon situation."¹⁹

Waeber's suggestions were quite strong because of the Korean policy that Russia had maintained for quite a while. Waeber himself, when he was newly assigned to the post of diplomatic minister to Korea ten years previously, had described his mission as one "of maintaining peace and an amicable relationship, and also of actively securing the happiness of the king and his country." Waeber also said that "if other foreign countries choose not to interfere with Joseon matters, Russia will also honor the status-quo." Above all, Waeber perceived the situation as one in which "Japan managed to violate the

17. AVPRI. F. 150. Op. 493. D. 6. L. 64.

18. NARA. M. 134 Roll. 12 No. 158, 3-14.

19. AVPRI. F. 150. Op. 493. D. 6. L. 94.

peace and stability of Joseon a total of four times” from July 1894 to October 1895. The occurrences he mentioned were the Japanese troops’ breaking into Gyeongbokgung palace (July 1894), the Japanese’ turning power over to the Daewongun during the Gabo reforms, Bak Yeong-hyo’s participation in the political reforms of the Korean government, and the Eulmi Incident. Waeber’s view of the situation at the time was a clear sign of the Russians’ readiness to adopt a more active policy regarding the Korean situation in the future.²⁰

Waeber continued his diplomatic efforts in his dealings with Miura and the Japanese legation in and out of the country. Waeber requested to Korean Foreign Minister Kim Yun-sik that the truth behind the queen’s assassination should be fully revealed. In the process, he put pressure on the Kim Hong-jip cabinet. Also, Waeber asked Allen to join him in his diplomatic efforts to deal with the Japanese legation.²¹ When he was visited by diplomatic minister Komura, who arrived in Korea on October 16, Waeber said that “The Daewongun was escorted into the palace by Japanese military officers. And the Japanese troops led the assassins and the insurgents inside the Joseon army.” He also emphasized that the Japanese were responsible for the Eulmi Incident.²²

In the meantime, Miura revealed to acting Japanese Foreign Minister Saionji on the morning of October 8, 1895 (right after the Eulmi Incident) that “in appearance it was an incident committed by the Joseon people, but in fact Japanese are involved and I let it happen.” Miura also said that the incident occurred because “the faction of the royal family became too strong and overwhelmed the government, to the extent of ignoring protocols and draining the budget.” Miura also said that the royal family faction “sent a request for protection to Russia,” and that “the queen always tended to depend on foreign countries.”²³ This confirms the admission by Miura that the Japanese

20. AVPRI. F. 150. Op. 493. D. 6. L. 225; AVPRI. F. 191. Op. 768. D. 25. L. 300.

21. F. O. 405. Part VI. Enclosure in 3 No. 128, 106-107.

22. NARA. M. 134 Roll. 12 No. 160, 6.

23. *Diplomatic Documents of the Japanese Legation in Joseon*. Vol. 7, 206-207.

were frustrated with Queen Min, and that frustration resulted in the Eulmi Incident. It is also clear that Miura wished to eliminate the royal family faction, including the queen, and thereby expand Japanese influence in Korea.

In fact, right after the Eulmi Incident, Miura actually ordered Consul Uchida to deal with the aftermath of the incident and said, “1) It has been arranged that affairs involving the Joseon government will be handled by the Daewongun; 2) The incident will be described as an incident committed by a Japanese who was a personal acquaintance of the Daewongun and responded to the Daewongun’s request; and 3) If things do not go well, some of the people involved will be severely punished, and the rest of them (roughly twenty) will be expelled. I (Miura) do not have a problem with some of the personnel involved in the incident being severely punished. 4) The Japanese newspaper correspondents here respected the wishes of the legation, and how to communicate the incident has already been discussed and decided.”²⁴ These orders reveal that Miura directed the entire operation, and that he had been in talks with the Daewongun to plan the incident, and also that he tried to deal with the aftermath as planned beforehand.

Compromise between the Foreign Representatives and the Kim Hong-jip Cabinet over Stabilizing the Situation

Waeber’s Plan for the Situation and Inoue’s Response

U.S. minister Sill returned to Korea after a leave of absence, and reported the urgency of the situation to Secretary of State G. R. Olney, saying that “the king is currently incarcerated, and it is not safe for him.”²⁵ Under these circumstances, a Diplomatic Corps Conference of foreign representatives, including Sill, was convened on October 25, 1895. The participants of this conference included Sill

24. *Diplomatic Documents of the Japanese Legation in Joseon*. Vol. 8, 89.

25. NARA. M. 134 Roll. 12 Enclose 1 No. 164, 1.

(U.S.), Gomura (Japan), Waeber (Russia), Hillier (U.K.), Krien (Germany), and Lefevre (France). Waeber proposed a direct solution for the Korean problem at this conference.

In evaluating the internal condition of Korea after the Eulmi Incident, Waeber revealed that it was his judgment that “the Kim Hong-jip cabinet is trying to separate the crown prince from King Gojong, and is threatening the safety of the king.” After the Eulmi Incident, the Kim Hong-jip cabinet proposed the declaration of King Gojong as the emperor without his consent, and tried to separate the crown prince from King Gojong. Waeber therefore suggested that the political and social order in existence before October 8 should be restored, indicating that Waeber refused to recognize the shift in power which had occurred after the Eulmi Incident.

At the time, Waeber believed that the real power had been seized by the military minister in the Korean court. He thought that “in order to secure the safety of the king and the palace, the minister of military affairs should be removed,” and concluded that “Military Minister Jo Hui-yeon (who was also involved in the Eulmi Incident) was in de facto command of the Joseon officers and troops.” He further considered that Jo Hui-yeon, who had broken into the palace, was retaining power illegally. It was therefore Waeber’s argument that “diplomatic minister Komura should mobilize the troops and remove the officers and troops under Jo Hui-yeon’s command.”

Waeber suggested some options to secure the safety of King Gojong. First, Jo Hui-yeon and two other lieutenant commanders should be arrested. Then fifty troops would be dispatched to disarm and dismiss the guards at the palace. He even stated, “I myself could personally lead those troops and dismiss the Training Unit and relieve Military Minister Jo Hui-yeon,” thus literally suggesting the use of armed forces to secure King Gojong’s safety. At the same time, Waeber was concerned with the potential role that the Daewongun could play in all of this. He reasoned that if the Training Unit was neutralized, the power of the Daewongun would also be weakened. In other words, Waeber was determined to personally involve himself in the situation, in order to secure the safety of King Gojong.

To the active proposal of Waeber, Diplomatic Minister Komura maintained a cautious attitude. Komura said, “I believe that won’t be necessary, but if it does become necessary, I will not oppose it. Yet quick actions right now might stir up more trouble, so let’s monitor the situation for a while.” Komura also said, “This matter is of grave consequence, so I would like to deliberate upon it, and secrecy will be maintained,” while showing a reserved attitude.²⁶

Under orders from his government, Komura remained reserved. Prime Minister Ito instructed Komura before he departed for Korea to “consult with the aides on the possibility of a compromise, using the Daewongun’s exit from the cabinet and return to his refuge.”²⁷ It seems that the Japanese government was viewing the resignation of the Daewongun as a potential negotiating chip with the European and U.S. representatives. In other words, it can be said that the Japanese government believed that by using the Daewongun as a scapegoat they could 1) protect key personnel who were involved in the Eulmi Incident from being exposed, and 2) minimize exposure of the Japanese involvement.²⁸ Therefore, Komura was in no position to take an active stance regarding anything, except contemplating the option laid out for him, which was to use the Daewongun.

On November 5, 1895, an unofficial gathering of some of the foreign representatives at the Japanese legation was convened. Sill, Waeber and Hillier paid a private visit to Inoue and Komura, to discuss options for securing King Gojong’s safety. In this conference, U.S. Minister Sill strongly requested that Waeber’s proposal to secure King Gojong’s safety be accepted by the Japanese government. The U.S. representative said, “1) The king is under complete control of the troops guarding the palace, the military minister, and reckless officials who threaten the king’s life whenever he iterates things that do not suit their position, and therefore is deprived of his freedom. 2) So a plan is proposed to rescue him from imminent danger, and that

26. *Diplomatic documents of the Japanese Legation in Joseon*. Vol. 7, 221.

27. F. O. 405. Part VI. Inclosure No. 96, 68.

28. F. O. 405. Part VI. Enclosure 3 No. 136, 126.

plan involves forcibly expelling all of them from the palace, and immediately positioning Japanese troops at the palace.” In other words, he accused the Training Unit and the military minister of threatening the life of King Gojong and argued that Japanese troops should guard the palace. On this day, representatives of these three countries proposed a detailed option to secure the safety of King Gojong, which would involve “the Japanese troops’ removing of the Training Unit from the palace, in addition to their own removal, after King Gojong’s drafting of a new garrison.”

Special emissary Inoue, who had been dispatched to Korea, maintained the formal position of the Japanese government in his talks with foreign representatives. He flatly denied the Japanese government’s involvement in the incident, and blamed the Daewongun as the mastermind behind the incident.

Nevertheless, Inoue was apparently having trouble rejecting the strong suggestions of three of the foreign representatives. On this day, with Komura, Inoue made it clear that it was “the solid position of the Japanese government that it would refrain from resorting to forcible actions.” Yet Inoue also said that “under the current circumstances, we do not have any options other than guarding the palace with Japanese troops.” Therefore, he revealed that “if a decision is made to pursue this option at the request of the Joseon King and the suggestion of the foreign representatives, nothing should be worried about important consequence.”

Most of all, Inoue expressed his opinion that “removing the Daewongun from the palace is the top priority, and everything else can go forward after that.” In other words, Inoue agreed with the necessity to secure King Gojong’s safety, and to remove the Daewongun from the palace as quickly as possible. It was therefore Inoue and Komura’s final judgment that mobilizing the Japanese troops for the safety of Gojong at the request of Gojong and the foreign representatives was indeed a plausible option. They ordered the commander of the Japanese troops in Seoul to prepare for mobilization. This compromise was based not on the order of the Japanese government but on their personal discretion, indicating that despite attempting to deal

with the Eulmi Incident based on their government’s order, they were forced to accept a compromise because of the strong request of the three representatives stationed in Korea.

On this day, the Japanese, Russian, British and U.S. representatives agreed to cooperate with each other very closely in removing the military minister and the Training Unit, in order to safeguard the king’s safety and maintain order. They each promised to notify their respective governments of the results of the gathering.²⁹

Later, U.S. Minister Sill actively sought for the authorization of the U.S. government regarding the use of Japanese forces, but the U.S. government warned Sill not to interfere in Korean domestic political issues anymore. In contrast, the Russian government decided to show a more active stance regarding the Korean issue, and respected the judgment of the Russian representative in Korea. On November 8, 1895, the Russian Foreign Minister Lobanov-Poctovskii sent a message saying that “if Waeber himself is sure that liberating King Gojong from the traitors is the right thing to do, then the government will authorize all methods necessary to do so.”³⁰ The acting Japanese Foreign Minister Saionji said, regarding mobilizing Japanese troops inside Korea, “It is the view of the Japanese government that mobilizing the troops rather quickly would heighten unnecessary risks, and we fear that the consequences would be grave,” and instructed the diplomatic minister in Korea to honor, respect and abide by the position of the Japanese government.³¹ So Inoue’s option of intervention with Japanese troops, based on the diplomatic agreement reached between the representatives of several foreign countries, was never realized because of the objection of the Japanese government.

In the end, the clashes between the Russian and Japanese ministers came down to the issue of whether to restore the old cabinet or

29. AVPRI. F. 150. Op. 493. D. 6. L. 221-223; *Diplomatic Documents of the Japanese Legation in Joseon*. Vol. 8, 132-133.

30. AVPRI. F. 150. Op. 493. D. 6. L. 152.

31. *Diplomatic Documents of the Japanese Legation in Joseon*. Vol. 7, 262-263.

maintain the new one. Waeber requested that the Daewongun be house-arrested in order to stabilize the situation, that the existing political and social order prior to October 8 be restored, and that the list of people associated with the Eulmi Incident be publicly released. Responding to that, Inoue had the Daewongun arrested in his own house on the order of King Gojong, and tried to come up with measures to maintain the statuses of the officials and the laws during the post-October 8 period.

Compromise between the Foreign Representatives and the Kim Hong-jip Cabinet

After the Eulmi Incident, major political events started to unfold, like the dismissal of Jo Hui-yeon and Kwon Hyeong-jin from office, the Daewongun's retreat from the palace, the restoration of the dethronement of the deceased queen, and the punishment of the perpetrators of the incident. Komura had argued to Korean Prime Minister Kim Hong-jip in November 1895 that "the dismissal of Jo Hui-yeon and Kwon Hyeong-jin is one of the most important requirements, along with the Daewongun's retreat from the palace, the restoration of the queen's status, and the punishment of the perpetrators. And the Joseon government should act quickly." Komura also said that "if the Joseon government wastes time instead of dealing with these issues, it is highly possible that the government will be forced to do so by foreign countries." This indicated that Komura warned Kim Hong-jip of possible interference in Korean matters by Waeber and the other representatives, and was also concerned with the possibility that the Kim Hong-jip cabinet might actually collapse.

Under such circumstances, compromises between Waeber, the other representatives and the Japanese diplomatic minister, and between the foreign representatives and the Kim Hong-jip cabinet, were sought in order to stabilize the Korean situation. First, the foreign representatives had a gathering at the U.S. legation on November 25, 1895 and at the Royal Household Department Office on the 26th, and discussed the final settlement in order to stabilize the Korean situ-

ation, which had been severely unsettled by the Eulmi Incident.

First, regarding the issue of restoring the status of the dethroned queen, Russian Diplomatic Minister Waeber offered his position on November 25, as "a matter of course." U.S. Diplomatic Minister Sill also argued that "the order of dethroning the queen (*pyebiryeong* 廢妃令) was not valid in the first place." Yet Japanese Minister Komura argued, "It does not matter whether the foreign representatives either acknowledge or refuse to acknowledge the validity of the order to dethrone the queen. The order is valid in terms of the public." He also argued that the foreign representatives should give their formal consent regarding the restoration of the queen's status. On November 26, foreign representatives again discussed the issue of the validity of the original order to dethrone the queen, yet they failed to reach a conclusion.³² On that day, Waeber met with King Gojong after the conference at the royal household department office and told him that "the European and U.S. representatives have never recognized the validity of the queen's dethronement order," and conveyed the foreign representatives' strong determination to deny the fact that the queen had ever been dethroned.³³

Second, regarding the issue of the Daewongun's retreat from the palace, on November 25, the foreign representatives judged that "if it can be done without too much trouble, then it is worth trying," and agreed to the matter. Yet on November 26, although Waeber forwarded the request asking for "the Daewongun's retreat," the other foreign representatives hesitated to implement their agreement, fearing that it might cause unforeseen troubles. Komura then said, "doing all the important things at once might turn out to be harmful to the peace and order we all wish to maintain, so let us discuss this matter further, at a later time." All the foreign representatives agreed to that.

Third, regarding the dismissal of Jo Hui-yeon and Kwon Hyeong-jin and punishment of the perpetrators of the incident, the foreign representatives judged on November 25 that "the current Joseon gov-

32. *The Diplomatic Documents of the Japanese Legation in Joseon*. Vol. 7, 69-71.

33. AVPRI. F. 150. Op. 493. D. 6. L. 183.

ernment is not capable of executing such a task.” Waeber, who met with King Gojong on November 26, said that “King Gojong welcomed the foreign representatives, but he was not able to speak at all (due to being under close observation).”³⁴ Thus, the European and U.S. representatives thought that the Kim Hong-jip cabinet might try to maintain the new political and social order that was created by the Eulmi Incident, and that the intervention of the Japanese troops might indeed be a very realistic approach to the situation.

The European and U.S. representatives were questioning the legitimacy of the Kim Hong-jip cabinet which was organized after the Eulmi Incident, and even the Japanese diplomatic minister was worried about the probable collapse of the cabinet. The Kim Hong-jip cabinet was therefore forced into a corner and realized that it should seek a compromise over the political issues with the foreign representatives.³⁵ During this emergency situation, on November 26, the Kim Hong-jip cabinet confirmed the restoration of the queen’s status and the dismissal of Jo Hui-yeon and Kwon Hyeong-jin from office. In the process, the Kim Hong-jip cabinet forced King Gojong “to declare the innocence of the Training Unit, and praise them for their hard work and also compliment the Training Unit Officer himself,” which was part of their plan to prevent the destabilization of the Training Unit.

At the time, the foreign representatives welcomed the decision to dismiss the military officials. In Komura’s explanation for why they accepted dismissal, first they would have expected to be asked to resign, as one of the options to deal with the aftermath of the incident. Second, they could not afford to become a political burden for the Kim Hong-jip cabinet, which actually shared the same fate with them. Third, he presumed that the Kim Hong-jip cabinet would have

34. *Diplomatic Documents of the Japanese Legation in Joseon*. Vol. 7, 70-71; AVPRI. F. 150. Op. 493. D. 6. L. 182.

35. “The diplomats were harassed and anxious, and met constantly to discuss the situation” (Bishop 1898, 75). Also, “the situation became more and more strained until at last it became evident even to the Cabinet that something must be done to relieve the situation” (Hulbert 1905, 298).

promised them some profit for their consent to be dismissed.³⁶

As we can see, the European and U.S. representatives, the Japanese minister, and the Kim Hong-jip cabinet had to make a compromise over establishing the new order. The Kim Hong-jip cabinet was conscious of its vulnerability, due to being created with the help of the Japanese after the assassination of the queen, and its consequent need for the support of the European and U.S. representatives. Komura was careful because Japanese diplomats were involved in the incident, so he was cautious in interfering with Korean matters. He was also concerned that Russia might decide to interfere more actively. The European and U.S. representatives were able to monitor the situation and present a solution more quickly, but in order to implement a military solution they needed the order from their home governments, so it was not easy for the U.K. and U.S. representatives to actively intervene. In the end, the European and U.S. representatives, Japanese diplomatic minister and the Kim Hong-jip cabinet reached a compromise with each other, and decided to restore the status of the queen and dismiss Jo Hui-yeon and Kwon Hyeong-jin from the government. Yet the Training Unit, which was involved in the incident, was still guarding the palace, so no real resolution for the situation was achieved.

Conclusion

Japanese Foreign Minister Mutsu Munemitsu, who played a key role in the Japanese foreign policy in the aftermath of the Sino-Japanese War, was of the opinion that “the Korean administration ought to be reformed to satisfy the Japanese political needs and serve the Japanese interests.” In drafting the Shimonoseki Treaty, Mutsu argued that “one important aim of the Sino-Japanese War was the independence of Korea, yet Japan should demand the concession of the Liaodong Peninsula and others from the Qing Dynasty.” Mutsu’s remarks

36. *Diplomatic Documents of the Japanese Legation in Joseon*. Vol. 7, 71.

reveal the top Japanese leaders' scheme first to separate Korea from the Qing's territorial domination, and then to occupy Korea fully for use as a springboard for the future continental advance. In short, the Japanese government apparently supported the independence of Korea, while really imposing a protectorate system on Korea.

On the other hand, Tsarist Russia after the Sino-Japanese War pursued the policy of maintaining the status quo in Korea to avoid any armed conflict with Japan. Nevertheless, such a policy of maintaining the status quo was contingent on the overarching condition that Japan should refrain from actively intervening in Korean affairs. Therefore, when Russian Foreign Minister Lobanov-Poetovskii charged, after the Triple Intervention in 1895, that "Japan exerts pressure on the Korean government to employ Japanese officials at the key posts," it was meant as a strong warning against the Japanese attempt to control the Korean administration.

Despite this warning from Russia, the Japanese minister Miura pushed ahead with his plot to assassinate Queen Min in October 1895. The incident precipitated a sharp diplomatic conflict between the two powers over the issue of Korean affairs, and also increased the active involvement in Korean affairs of Russian policy toward Korea.

After the Eulmi Incident, the Russian and Japanese diplomatic ministers clashed with each other over revealing the truth behind the incident, and deeply involved themselves in the Korean political situation of the time. Japanese minister Miura had already been in contact with the Daewongun, and planned the incident all along. Moreover, he dealt with the situation after the incident, as had already been planned.

Russian minister Waeber uncovered the truth regarding the incident and, from October through November, 1895, he led the discussions at the Diplomatic Corps Conferences over issues such as the Daewongun's dismissal from the palace, restoring the status of the dethroned queen, dissolving the Training Unit, and punishing the perpetrators of the crime. He argued with the Japanese minister at the conferences, and forced the Japanese minister to acknowledge

the necessity of finding out the truth and replacing the Training Unit. Most of all, he strongly accused the Japanese of being involved in and responsible for the incident.

At the time, Waeber recognized the Korean military minister Jo Hui-yeon as being at one of the centers of power after the Eulmi Incident. So Waeber suggested that the "Japanese minister should use the Japanese troops to remove the Korean officers and troops under the command of the military minister." He also said that he himself would command the troops and dismiss both the military minister and the Training Unit, suggesting an option that would involve the armed forces to secure Gojong's safety. Unlike the U.K. and U.S. representatives who maintained a non-interference stance, the Russian government had already decided to actively interfere in the Korean matter, and supported the judgments of its representative sent to Korea.

At the time, the Japanese government ordered the Japanese legation's minister to use the retirement of the Daewongun as a negotiating chip with the European and U.S. representatives. In that situation, Inoue, a special emissary from Japan, suggested the following compromise, with the consent of other foreign representatives: "In order to secure the safety of King Gojong, the mobilization of the Japanese troops is an option, and the Daewongun's house arrest could be arranged." Yet this suggestion to mobilize the Japanese troops was not authorized by the Japanese government, but was his own improvised idea. His plan for the Japanese troop's intervention under the diplomatic agreement of foreign representatives was vetoed by his own government.

At the time, one of the points that were debated between Russian and Japanese ministers in the Diplomatic Corps Conferences was over the issue of either restoring the old cabinet or maintaining the new cabinet. With this conflict continuing to destabilize the Korean situation, the foreign representatives and the Kim Hong-jip cabinet had no other choice but to find a compromise for restoring order after the Eulmi Incident. In the end, the European and U.S. representatives, the Japanese minister and the Kim Hong-jip cabinet all agreed

on the “restoration of the queen’s status and the dismissal of the military minister Jo Hui-yeon from office.”

However, as the Training Unit that had been used in the Eulmi Incident was still guarding the palace, this was not a fundamental solution to the situation. In the end, the uneasiness of the political arena led to the Chunsaengmun incident of November 28, 1895, when the opponents to the Kim Hong-jip cabinet attempted to rescue Gojong from the Training Unit.

The chronology of events presented in this paper confirms that the existing perspective of the Eulmi Incident, which supported the belief that the Japanese totally controlled the situation after the incident as they wished, is not correct. Furthermore, the planners of the assassination were significantly flawed in thinking that the death of Queen Min would weaken the Russians’ influence in Korea. The Eulmi Incident only destabilized the internal Korean political condition, while contributing to Japan’s isolation in international society.

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