

# A New Look at Korean Gender Roles: Jeju( Cheju) Women as a World Cultural Heritage

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## Abstract

The Haenyeos (Jamnyeo or Jamsu)<sup>1</sup>, who have harvested shellfish, abalone, and seaweed with their original diving skills offshore, and in the deep sea for over 1700 years, have created and accumulated their achievements and challenges along the way. They were generally disregarded and the Haenyeos worked as alienated groups in small island societies. They have dominated their profession because they are more physically suited for it than men. They can dive as deep as 15 to 20 meters and stay under water for around three minutes without the aid of breathing equipment. Politically, they organized voluntary associations, called Jamsuhoi, that decide local village issues through democratic voting and decision-making. Through their power, they were able to maintain a four-month long uprising (January-April 1932) against Japanese Imperialism's illegal management of marine products of their sea villages. Economically, they were able to support their households and educate their family members through income gained by selling products to markets. It was evaluated that they greatly contributed to improving the prosperity of villages and the island economy as a whole. Since 1895, the Haenyeos regularly went abroad seasonally, to earn money at sea in such regions as China, Japan and the Korean peninsula. Their migration and settlements, especially on the Korean peninsula and Japan, are highly accepted for their special skills, and the higher economic value of the products they catch in those areas. It is possibly explained by the economic gap between Jeju Island, Korea, and Japan under the influence of Japanese capitalism. Culturally they also created and developed their folklore, traditional rituals, and festivals that commemorate their hard work and wandering, Gypsy-like life in the deep sea; a little different from the mode of Korean p'ansori music. The Haenyeos also have a gender component that contributed to developing the potentials of Jeju Island family value system as an integrated family model upon the combination of big and nexus family systems in their home. Through these discussions, this paper argues the Jeju Haenyeos serve as an example of equitable gender roles in small island societies, different from or beyond the scope of traditional Korean Confucian stereotypes.

**Keyword:** Jeju, women, Haenyeo, Jamsuhoi, Gong-dong-eo-jang, gender role

## Introduction

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1) We call a group of Jeju diving women three kinds of names such as Jamsu, Jamnyeo, and Haneyeo in Jeju Island. Even though the Jamnyeo or Jamsu is used as academic terminology, it is well known to the world as the Haenyeo. In this article, the Haenyeos used. It is known that Jeju Provincial Government used administrative terminology as Jamsu since 1966 officially.

The aim of this article is to illuminate how Jeju women represent an example of equitable gender roles beyond the scope of traditional Korean Confucian stereotypes. Women's roles in Korea were traditionally limited to being submissive, demure, domestic and dependent in all sectors of politics, economics and social spheres. This article looks at Jeju gender roles and cultural values, with particular focus on Jeju women's economic and political contributions to the island as a whole. Through this discussion my ideas come out on how the case of Jeju women offers an alternative model for modern women's gender roles in the 21st century. This is so called the Jeju Island Gender Model.

First of all, anthropologically it is remarkable fact that Jeju women created their job in the ocean, by themselves for their economic survival through their work. The Haenyeos (Jamnyeo or Jamsu), who have harvested shellfish, abalone, and seaweed with their original diving skills off-shore, and in the deep sea for over 1700 years, have created and accumulated their achievements and challenges along the way even though they were disregarded and working as an alienated working group in small island societies. They have dominated their profession because they are more physically suited for it than men. They can dive as deep as 15 to 20 meters and stay under water for around three minutes without the aid of breathing equipment. Politically, they organized voluntary associations, called Jamsuhoi, that decide local village issues through democratic voting. Through their power, they were able to maintain a four-month long uprising (January-April 1932) against Japanese Imperialism's illegal management of marine products of their sea villages. Economically, they were able to support their households and educate their family members through income gained by selling products to markets. In addition, since

1895, these daring women regularly went abroad seasonally, to earn money at sea in such regions as China, Japan and the mainland Korean peninsula. Through their income and economic management of common village sea areas, they have contributed not only to the survival of family households but also to improving the prosperity of villages and the island economy as a whole. Culturally, they also created and developed their folklore, traditional rituals, and festivals that commemorate their hard work and wandering, Gypsy-like life in the deep sea.

Secondly, let me give an explanation of how and with what power of skills Jeju the Haenyeos set up their Diaspora on the Korean peninsula and in Japan, as an exceptional case in the context of Northeast Asian Culture. These divers have migrated all over east Asia, and their migration and settlements, especially on the Korean peninsula and Japan, are highly accepted for their special skills, and the higher economic value of the products they catch in those areas. It also possibly explains the economic gap among Jeju Island, Korea, and Japan under the influence of Japanese capitalism. For example, in Japan, they spent winter in Osaka, worked the spring and fall season in Tsushima, and visited their native Jeju Island during breaks between winter and fall, thus keeping their cultural identity. They have set up their pole of Island Diaspora in all areas of the Korean peninsula, 10 places in Japan and two locations on mainland China with only their working skills, for over 110 years. Thirdly, let me emphasize that Jeju Haenyeos have a gender component that contributed to developing the potentials of an Island family value system as an integrated family model, upon the combination of large and nexus family systems in their home. We call this the Jeju Island Family Model, or Bat-geo-rae Model

(Chang Young Han.1978: 166). In a community, they keep and maintain their community values and achievements in helping community works, managing common sea field property, and making a regular, seasonal donation to the common good through their Jamsuhoi association.

### **Jeju women as an exceptional case in Korean confucian culture**

This section discusses Jeju gender roles and historical challenges to creating an island culture under a rigid Korean Confucian doctrine. Generally speaking, the doctrine of Korean Confucianism under the Chosun dynasty left the Korean society with two unfortunate legacies. These were, in the author's opinion, two sins against the ethical principle of universal equality. The first was a caste-like social system. This consisted of yangban (a scholarly upper class made up of civilian and military officials, not unlike China's mandarin), sangin (the commoner class), yangmin (law abiding citizens or "good people"), and chonmin (enslaved people). The other legacy was the belief that women are inherently inferior to men, and their treatment as such. Male-dominated Confucian ideology segregates the worlds of men and women into domains of symbolic power, with the female domain markedly subordinate to the male<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup>) As the Korean Constitutional Court ruled on Feb. 3, 2005 that "Hojuje", or the patriarchal family registry system, runs counter to the Constitution. The court said some of the provisions on civil law regulating the registry system are incompatible with the Constitution as they violate the rights of human dignity and gender equality in family affairs. This ruling was evaluated not only to end the Hojuje as a patriarchal family order, which has long afflicted many people in our society, but also to pave the way for the rights of minorities and gender equality in the future (Korea Times: Feb 4, 2005). In a major step closer to gender equality, the National Assembly Wednesday passed a revision of the Civil Law aimed at abolishing the male-dominated family registration system (Korea Times; March 4, 2005).

Under these circumstances, as Gui Young Hong pointed out, "...a woman can't and should not have any room for taking care of self. Sacrifice is considered as the most appropriate way for a virtuous woman to obey all socioculturally constructed voices (e.g., serving parents, being an obedient and dutiful wife, and being a wise and caring mother). From the perspective of virtuousness, not bearing a son and early widowhood were considered cardinal sins against a woman's (husband's) family ancestors and violations of her role and duty. Thus, heesang (self-sacrifice) has been considered as the most appropriate way for women to be virtuous" (Gui Young Hong, 1998: 64).

In contrast to this Korean tradition, Jeju Island has long been noted for its gender structure, which reverses the norms of both mainland Korea and most Western societies. Hong described two conflicting streams of sociocultural voices between the "Haenyeos" of Jeju and the stereotyped Korean women with their submissive, demure, domestic and dependent economic role. Let me say to build on Hong's observations by pointing out that Jeju women offer a unique example for the formation of more equitable gender roles.

Socioculturally, the role of Korean women was limited to following the moral conduct of virtuousness (Budeok) of Confucian doctrine. Budeok dictated that women stay at home and be loyal to significant males of three generations – father, husband, and son. They had to follow all social and cultural demands addressing womanly attitudes and behaviors (Bueon and Buyong) and perform expected duties within her husband's family, including (Bukong), producing sons on time (Gui Young Hong, 1998: 64-65). In this way, they were to be relegated to the domestic chores of child rearing and housekeeping within the boundary of family, as

one of the so-called inside people (An-sa-ram) (Bruce Cummings, 1997: 47).

In contrast to these traditional Korean roles, the Haenyeos have built up their unique roles and voice through the challenges of working and diving in the deep sea<sup>3</sup>. This is in spite of government authorities having often set measures to forbid women's nude diving and work in the sea because these activities violate Confucian norms. Through their skilled, risk-taking work, dangerous adventures in the deep sea and overseas travel beyond national borders, they created and maintained the original Jeju women's occupation (Haenyeo). Through their resourcefulness working in groups and developing physical strength, Jeju women obtained financial independence and autonomy equivalent to (and sometimes higher) than men's. They also set up and managed voluntary organizations called Jamsuhoi, which allowed them to protect their common interests and keep their autonomy. These 102 Jamsuhoi<sup>4</sup> (Haenyos' associations) in Jeju Island, economically and environmentally manage 127 Gong-dong-eo-jang, or common sea fields. Jeju Haenyeos not only contributed to the island economy but also greatly contributed to creating

<sup>3</sup> Teresa L. Cole describes Hanyeos work as " ... They emitted an eerie whistling sound as they exhaled, rising one by one to the surface until there was a head alongside each buoy. A few moments laughter and chat, and they were gone again, 7m down, in a flurry of flippers. It was more than three minutes before the first resurfaced, clutching her shells, whistling. And this they do for hours on end." *The Guardian* (Oct. 11, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> From 2004 Jeju-do Statistics, 102 Jamsuhoi own and manage 127 Gong-dong-eo-jang reaching 14,451 hectare in total size. Contrasted to sea villages, we have common meadow fields (Gong-dong-mok-jang) in the villages of mountain areas. Males of the village own and manage it collectively. Different from Gong-dong-eo-jang of the sea village, they can purchase it after a decision of common owners and it passed on from father to son. As the price of land is higher recently, they sell most of the land to others outside the family.

the Jeju island culture, typified by Sammu spirit or Samyu tradition. This translates roughly as the "Three Nothings" or the "Three Lacking Things", meaning that Jeju has no beggars, no thieves, and no gates<sup>5</sup> (Chang Hoon Ko, 2001). The corresponding "Three Abundances" of Jeju Island are said to be wind, stone and women.

Like women's roles, the men's roles in Jeju Island also differ from those on the mainland. The idea of "no beggars" in particular has strong implications for the economic independence life as a condition of all individuals because it hints that the indigenous economy fostered a separate lifestyle from that of mainland Korea<sup>6</sup>. The tradition of self-sufficiency indicates equality on the island not only between individuals but also between men and women. In this regard, it has been noted that the culture of Jeju Island developed a more matriarchal society when compared to mainland Korea. Indeed, it has been observed that women on the island are more independent-minded than their counterparts on the mainland. Many observers maintain that the Haenyeos have a substantial impact on the culture of Jeju Island, pulling it into a more matriarchal, or certainly more egalitarian direction when juxtaposed with the mainland. In 1986 Kyung Lim Seo published a survey comparing the Haenyeos' roles on Marado, Udo, with those on Jeju Island (1986)<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Jeju Island is well known to be called the island with Three Many Things (Sam-da-do), so called stone, wind, and women. Koreans understand what it means "women" in this tradition where symbolizes "Jeju women" have kept their diligent, independent, and strong image among areas of the Korean peninsula.

<sup>6</sup> Gregory Henderson ( 1968: 16) described as Cheju Island "... alone developed a unique dialects and culture, the social, religious, and to some extent, political habits of some of its 300,000 inhabitants differing somewhat from those of the mainland."

<sup>7</sup> In 1984, Marado with an area of 0.3 square kilometers consists of 25 households, comprising 45 men and 36 women. Udo of 6.8 square has 692 households, with a

Marado and Udo are tiny islands situated along the coast of the much larger Jeju Island. Both are a part of Jeju Island. Seo's work supports the view that gender roles differ between Jeju Island and mainland Korea, but also points out more subtle differences between the three islands. These differences relate to the status of women and pertain to the significance of the diving fishery to the local economy. According to Seo, the women's status in Marado, whose people are engaged in fisheries alone, is superior to men's in both the home and in the broader society. This, he says, is due to the importance of their economic achievements in the sea. As Seo writes of Marado women's impressive leadership of their village,

"The Haenyeos are, in fact, the heads of their families and representatives of their community. Their positive and responsible attitudes are assumed to be the result of competition and endurance arising from working at catching marine products under the sea for five or six hours a day. Besides their roles as heads of their households, Marado the Haenyeos play leading roles in their communities. In order to foster marine resource conservation, they limit sealine access along the coast by motorboat or ship... Marado thus is home to a unique social (gender) structure in which women are superior to men in their social and economic roles" (Kyung Lim Seo, 2002: 116-117).

On the other hand, on Udo, a small island on the east coast of Jeju Island with villages involved in both fisheries and agriculture, women's roles are more active than men in the shell fishery and related social matters, but other social matters are handled by men. On Udo it seems that the status of women is equal with men overall. It seems that Seo's survey of the lifestyle of Marado Island in 1986 is very similar to Cho Haejoang's description of population of 3,924. It has 486 Haenyeos.

life on Udo Island in the 1970's, when today's alternative economic opportunities, particularly income from tourism, were not available to Udo men.

"...Diving women are not as 'muted' a group as women in male-dominant societies are. The feminine value system sometimes even dominates the other when the daily life of the village is concerned. What makes this female diver's village significantly different from male-dominated societies is this coexistence of two value systems." (Haejoang Cho. 1979: 32).

On the main island of Jeju, women play a less significant role than women in the smaller Marado and Udo islands because of recent economic and social influences from mainland South Korea. Men in Jeju-do have increasingly expanded their economic and social activities and increasingly play a leading role in their society. In agreement with the above-mentioned surveys and research that find that female divers' communities are not societies of sexual equality but rather, "neither-dominant" (Haejoang Cho, 1979: 32) or "either-cooperative" societies is preferred (Chang Hoon Ko, 2004), where both women and men maintain their autonomy and a balance of power exists between them through their voluntary association.

The Jeju Haenyeos' gender roles have also contributed to developing the potential of Jeju Island's family system and its unique values. Jeju's integrated family model traditionally consists of the co-residence of a large and extended family in one family yard, or madang. Jeju scholars call this the Jeju Island Family Model or Bat-geo-rae model<sup>8</sup>. This family

<sup>8</sup>) In traditional Jeju Island, there are three or four nexus family within one yard. As soon as the eldest son marries, he builds his house. In it he composes his nexus family and run his household independently from his father's, even though he lives in a different house within its yard.

structure differs from the mainland Korean family model in that upon marriage, the eldest son builds his own house within the family compound and runs a separate household from that of his father, in spite of living within the same yard. In mainland Korea, the eldest son does not head his own household until after the death of his father. At a community level, Jeju people maintain their community values and achievements by helping in community works, managing common property in sea fields, and making regular, seasonal donations to the common good through their Jamsuhoi (diver's association). This family and community model is called the Jamsuhoi model.

The Haenyeos have succeeded in developing an island-based gender culture while creating and maintaining their original shell-fish diving occupation, managing common shell fishing territories "for women, by women". This has been in spite of a male-dominated Korean Confucian culture imported from the mainland throughout the Chosun period. They succeeded in setting up a model of equitable gender roles in their communities through their important economic contributions to their own households; donations to their villages through Jansuhoi; and management of common sea property. Exceptionally the Haenyeos also can't but to negotiate key Confucian Korean cultural rituals such as in the realm of chesa (Confucian ancestral memorial ceremonies) by introducing realistic and pragmatic responses such as, in some cases, a greater female participation in these rituals than on the mainland.

In summary, Jeju women have played

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In this case, we call his father's house An-geo-rae (main house) and his eldest son Bat-geo-rae (second house). If the younger son marries, he also builds his house the same way as his younger brother's, within its yard. Different from the mainstream of big families of mainland Korea, it developed a unique family system (Chang Young Han. 1978:165).

a similar gender role to males in Jeju Island contrasted to the limited role of women in the Confucian Korean peninsula. Because the Jeju Haenyeos greatly succeed in the economic contribution to their family, village and island, (compared to males) through their regular income by steady diving work, they have a strong voice and rights compared to Korean women of the peninsula. Through their voluntary organizations, they collectively protect their social and political interests. For example, they decided to struggle against oppressions by Japanese imperialism and also support migration to the Korean peninsula and Japan based on decisions of their Jamsuhoi. Even though Jeju Island and Korean women have lived under influences of traditional Confucian rule, Jeju Haenyeos changed the their status and role. Of course, they showed a limited capacity to overcome traditional chesa rituals.

**Table 1: Contrasting gender roles between Jeju and mainland Korean women under confucian doctrine**

Group Item	Korean Women	Jeju Women
Values, Norms & Culture	Miscellaneous home or house work, dependent on male-dominated values & culture.  Emphasis on women's virtuousness ( <i>budeok, bueon, buyong, bukong</i> ).	Professional activities and working outside of the house: <i>'Bulteok Culture'</i> <sup>9</sup> Valuing gender equality & emphasizing economic and cultural independence of women.  <i>Samda</i> (Jeju's 3 abundances: wind, stone & women) and <i>Sammu</i> (Jeju's 3 lacking things: beggars, thieves & gates) and <i>Samyu</i> (Jeju's 3 merits: economic independence, social autonomy, and regional (social) peace= <i>Samryeo</i> ( <i>freedom, equality &amp; peace</i> )) <sup>10</sup>
Family Relations	Authoritarian and hierarchical. Bondage of three cardinal sins of women.  Vertical structure of the grand family system, women low in hierarchy.  Men make all major decisions.	Horizontal structure of the <i>Bat-geo-rae</i> family system (consisting of a mixture of grand and nexus family in the yard).  Women make decisions relating to diving and often share decisions relating to farming.
Village Connections & Social Activities	Passive, dependent and traditionally physically limited to within the boundary of the family compound system.  Enjoying <i>p'ansori</i> (Korean traditional music: one of UNESCO Cultural Heritage, 2003) and various games for entertainment.	Civic engagement through <i>Jamsuhoi</i> common management and environmental protection of common sea fields ( <i>Gong-dong-eo-jang</i> )  Export their skills or products to foreign countries ( <i>Chul-ga-hae-nyeo</i> )

Sources: Combination of contents from Haejoang Cho (1979), Chang Young Han(1989), Bruce Cumings (1997), Gui Young Hong (1998), Soon Hee Kim (2002), Kyung Lim Suh (2002), and Chang Hoon Ko (2002).

<sup>9</sup>) Jamsuhoi have all meetings at a small place surrounded by stones of the seaside, near their sea field. The diver also makes special preparations for diving before going in the sea, changes her clothes, and takes a rest after diving. We call this place Bulteok, and the Jamsuhoi have created unique cultural practices from their life styles around it. We call it Bulteok Culture by the Haenyeos.

<sup>10</sup>) Prof. Haeun Jung (1989) translated the 'three nothing traditions ' of Sammu into Samreyo Thought positively: Individual freedom is attained from economic independence through an individual's diligent labor (No Beggar) , islanders try to improve their autonomy through practices of gender equality to householding and village economics in everyday life situations by men and women. As a result, they can be relatively equal, and are different from those on the Korean peninsula (No Thief). On the island they have peace between humans and animals, and thus, don't need to build a gate in the front of each house (No gate). In addition, ChangHoon Ko(1984) reinterprets Sammu tradition as Samyu spirit (economic independence as for 'no beggar', social autonomy to 'no thief', and regional peace to 'no gate' tradition).

**Gender components and challenges in creating an island diaspora beyond its borders: haenyeos' migration to the Korean peninsula, Japan, mainland china, and Russia.**

As the Haenyeos developed into one of the representative jobs through moving or migrating to many places on the Korean peninsula and in Japan since 1895, they built up their island diasporas beyond their original borders. After the 1876 illegal accord between Japan and Korea, as Japan proceeded with colonial measures on Jeju Island, interaction happened between the Haenyeos and Japanese developers as to their unequal relationship as stated below;

“ In the beginning, Japanese developers used Jamnyeo for collecting seaweed along the coast, in particular kajime and wakame. But from the view of Jamnyeo and their family members, they could make money doing muljil...(Hideki Harjiri,2002 : 83.)”

They started to migrate to Japan and the Korean peninsula for their economic survival and income, while subjected to discrimination from Korean Confucian culture and Japanese colonialism. Their migration and settlements, especially on the Korean peninsula and Japan, were highly accepted for their special skills, and the higher economic value of the products they caught in those areas as time passed. It is possibly explained by not only the economic gap among Jeju Island, Korea, and Japan under influence of Japanese capitalism but also by the strong drive of the Haenyeos to survive by themselves.

According to research by Sun-Ae Lee on Haenyeos activities across the sea (Sun-Ae Lee, 2002), they annually migrated all over East Asia, especially to the Korean peninsula and Japan. According to one statistics in the

1930s, 2769 Jeju Haenyeos went to nine areas of the Korean peninsula, the largest number being 1,640 (34.72 % of 4,723) in Gyeongsang province. In the first era (1895 to the 1920s), they left home and began to settle as labor workers. During the 1930's and 1960's, as Jeju Haenyeos went to the peninsula, they began to influence Korean native Haenyeos. From the 1970's to present, Jeju Haenyeos were successful at becoming recognized members of the fishing community of Korean native Haenyeos(Sun-Ae Lee, 2002:134). As a result, Jeju Haenyeos obtained a right to utilize the miyeog (*Undaria pinnatigida*) in the sea field of those areas. Through contributions to their village by their skills, they built their villages on the Korean peninsula. In the case of the Ulsan Jujeon-dong Haenyeos village, the number of Jeju Haenyeos accounts for 98 of the total 534 residents.

In Japanese areas, the migrations were composed of three periods: free migration in the first period (1895 - 1945), local migration in the second period (1945 - 1960s), and international migration in the third period (1970s - present). According to the above mentioned data, 1,728 Jeju Haenyeos went to 10 Japanese areas annually. The largest number of 705 Jeju Haenyeos (14.93%) went to Tushima (Sun-Ae Lee, 2002:133).

This section gives an explanation of how and with what power of skills Jeju Haenyeos set up their Diaspora on the Korean peninsula and in Japan, as an exceptional case in the context of Northeastern Asian Culture. Their migration and settlements, especially on the Korean peninsula and in Japan, there are highly accepted for their special skills, and the higher economic value of the products they catch in those areas. It is possibly explained by the economic gap between Jeju Island, Korea,

and Japan under the influence of Japanese capitalism. According to one statistics, since the 1930's in Japan, they spent winter in Osaka, worked spring and fall in Tsushima, and visited their native Jeju Island, keeping their cultural identity, during breaks between winter and fall. Their migration and settlements were accepted by their special skills, and the higher economic value of the products they caught in Japan. Through these kinds of processes and their efforts, they set up their pole of Island Diaspora in all areas of the Korean peninsula, 10 places in Japan and 2 locations on Mainland China with only their working skills, over 110 years. In these points, we can interpret their activities as a result of the combination of the women's strong need for survival and their bravery facing new frontiers.

### **The political, economic, and cultural values and contribution of Jeju haenyeos to Jeju island as a whole**

It was a well known story that Haenyeos contributed over 25 % of the whole island economy under Japanese imperial rule in the 1930s, by sending cash to their family members or village. Ten percent of the population was involved in the fishery sector in the middle of the 1960's, and this figure has declined to only 1.4% in December of 2002. In the case of Haenyeos, their numbers reached 23,000 in 1965 but declined to approximately 5,600 in 2002. The proportion of Jeju Haenyeos over 50 years old has increased from 13.8% in the 1970's to 85.0% of all Haenyeos today. The future is bleak for the Haenyeos of tomorrow. The proportion of The Haenyeos age 30 to 49 exhibit a steady decline from 1980 onward, from a high of 60.7% in the 1980's to 14.6% today. In the 1970's, 31.3% of all Haenyeos were under 30 years old compared to 0.6% since 1995.

There have been almost no new Haenyeos due to the fast change of industry structure, and hard work involved in the industry( Kyung Joo Lee and Chang Hoon Ko. 2006 : 429-434).

Economically, they were able to support their households and educate their family members through income gained by selling products to markets around 127 common sea fields. In addition, since 1895 these daring women regularly went abroad seasonally, to earn money at sea in such regions as China, Japan and the mainland Korean peninsula. Through their income and economic management of common village sea areas, they have contributed not only to the survival of family households but also to improving the prosperity of villages and the island economy as a whole.

Hideki Hirano (2002) in evaluating the value of Haenyeos managing their common property states:

“Behind the traditional style of workings, the survival of female fishing since ancient times, exists a fact that an unchanging environment has been inherited over generations until today. Thanks to the survival of such an unchangeable environment, female diving fishing has been able to survive. The presence of the Haenyeos suggests that their surroundings, at least, inevitable... Female-oriented and equal community, a small investment, pleasure of fishing, common property, self-regulated, continuous production: The Haenyeos communities with this wisdom and knowledge should be categorized as an indispensable social heritage (Hideki Hirano, 2004:284).”

### **Political value and contributions**

The Jeju Haenyeos have organized 102 voluntary associations, called Jamsuhoi in 127

common sea field properties that decide local village issues through democratic voting.

It is essential they organized a voluntary organization called Jamsuhoi. As of December 2000 (Chulin Yoo, 2001:295), we had around 102 Jamsuhoi in Jeju Island that every Haenyeo joins. They have lived in their village according to its regulations and unwritten rules as below.<sup>10</sup>

According to Rimwha Han's survey of Jamsu (1981-1989), everybody living in the village can be qualified to do diving (Muljil) but when Jamsu who are married and move into a village they are automatically qualified to join Jamsuhoi. If someone resides in the village and wants to do Muljil, she can do it in the village sea after she receives membership through a procedure of review. If someone moves into the village after she has lived in another village, she is regarded as a foreign person. So, if she completes the same procedure in Jamsuhoi, she can restore her membership. She should lose her qualification with the decision of a general meeting of Jamsuhoi because of violating its regulations. Every member has these obligations which are related to both current and past in the village as follows: Co-working with doing away with coarse sea weeds and grass, taking care of village sea resources and sea fields such as breeding brown seaweed, public village works such as funding construction of public schools, and village roads that the Jamsuhoi decided to do in the general meetings( Rim Hwa Han, 2006:84-88). If a member marries a person from another village or changes her residence to another village, she loses her qualification of membership. One person who has the highest skills and also the best quality of virtue among Haenyeos in the village becomes chair of the Jamsuhoi through

<sup>11</sup>) This summary is based on Rimwha Hahn's survey on the unwritten rule and regulations of 20 Jamsuhoi of eastern parts of Jeju Island from 1981 to 1989.

procedures of unanimous recommendations in a general meeting. She represents her Jamsuhoi. Members of Jamsuhoi have the right to freely speak their opinions to her Jamsuhoi about the work of the village. But the Sang-Jamsu (group with highest quality of diving skills) has the priority to speak about it rather than the Jung-Jamsu (group with medium quality of diving skills). The Jung-Jamsu (group with medium quality of diving skills) have preference over the Ha-Jamsu (group with lowest quality of diving skills) in their turn of speaking about issues. All decisions are made by the unanimous vote of all members. If there are difficult situations because of disputes and disagreements about special issues, the chair makes a final decision.

It seems that Jamsuhoi operates as a kind of citizen assembly of ocean areas by women and for women. It contributed not only to the improvement of democratic life of the Haenyeos but also the common interest of the Haenyeos against illegal interference of outer forces and power. (Chang Hoon Ko, 2002).

It is a great example that they had participated in a four-month long Uprising (January-April 1932) against Japanese Imperialism's illegal management of products of their sea village.

One of the most noteworthy events during the fight against the Japanese can be said to be the 1932 Jeju Haenyeos' Uprising based on Jamsuhoi and the assistance of the related organization. When we generally speak of the the Haenyeos' uprising, it means the first demonstration of 1,000 Haenyeos on January 7, 1932 in Sae Hwa village, the second demonstration with 500 Haenyeos on January 12 and about 300 Haenyeos demonstrating in January 27, 1932 on Udo Island. The Haenyeos put forth seven demands including the opposition against the Japanese designated

sales of sea products, the deposit money being kept by the producing people and 11 demands made by the Hadori Haenyeos. In the end, the governor gave way to their demands and promised to take care of their wishes within five days. The Haenyeos swore that they would retaliate violently if there was no complete resolution within the said five days( Chan Sik Park, 2006: 124-134). During this period, the police arrested 11 people on Udo Island and three people were put in jail and the rest were released. The Jamnyeos' Uprising had the effect of being an anti-Japanese movement representing the Korean peninsula. The Haenyeos began a fight for the rights of the fishing sector workers and it became an anti-Japanese fight. This was a dire situation, which led to resistance by the people. Even amidst the cruel and merciless countermeasures by the government, it can be said that they recognized their right to protect their common interests by themselves and for themselves through those three uprisings. The Korean government has recently given honor to the Haenyeos's uprising and the Haenyeos after 65 years.

### **Cultural value and its conservation**

Hekyung Cha (2002), noted in her study that original songs were created, shared, and sung by the Haenyeos during their work in the deep sea, such as background singing while catching fish or carrying Muljil. As for these activities, there are two good examples of songs: one is the "Oar Rowing Sound Song" created while they were rowing the ferry boat; the other is the "Life Buoy (Tae-wak) Song" during their swimming and work in the deep. The former is famous to be sung by Haenyeos when they go to the Korean peninsula and other foreign countries on a boat for their work. These represent their primitive labor, sentiments, and

hard work. They always sing a song together as a format of pre and post singing with contents of a meaningful story. They shared and exchanged their sentiments between and among themselves through singing different songs. They have many song topics such as the expression of their sentiments, the purpose and spirit of labor, tragic fate, and their beliefs and perspectives and so on. In addition, they created ritual ceremonies at a time when they started work in the deep sea, during the work, and after coming back to their harbor with ritual performances together. Through their songs and rituals, they have kept and encouraged their cultural identity with accord to common work ethics and an abundant imagination of the Haenyeo's life in the deep sea. They also created and developed folklore, traditional rituals, and festivals that represent their hard and wandering life in the deep sea and beyond borders, like a Gypsy - one in the wild field.

In comparing with the p'ansori (a traditional popular song in 19<sup>th</sup> Korea: one of UNESCO's world cultural heritages) that emphasized Confucian virtues and had one singer and one drummer, the singer narrating both male and female (Bruce Cummings, 1997: 58), the Haenyeos' songs emphasized pride of labor, hard situations of island life, individual fate and so on. Contrasted to the fact that in 1993, the film director, Kwon Taek Im revived its traditional song to the world through his famous film *Supyonje* (the story depicting a wandering performer who blinded his daughter so that she would stay with him and discover the soul of her art (Michael Breen. 2004:8), songs of Jeju Haenyeos await great artists to give rebirth to those melodies into modern art.

### **Some applicable principles to modern gender roles**

This paper argues that the Haenyeos offer four principles as an alternative to modern women's gender role options for the 21st century. Even though only around 10,000 Haenyeos have kept and shared with their tradition for their survival in Jeju Island and some parts of Korean peninsula; staying isolated and disregarded with a cluster of jobs.

#### **Principle 1: Myth that the success of economic survival and contribution by the Haenyeos set up an equitable gender society is disregarded, alienated, and disappeared without real assessment on their value.**

In my observation, they had created and kept a new job: "the Haenyeos", for their survival under the worst work situations in an isolated island society and for their economic survival by women themselves through hard work. If women failed to survive as economically independent, they couldn't support themselves and their family members. Through money-making activities and their work, they basically succeeded in not only keeping their family but also supporting their children's education. In order to guarantee their income, they founded a common organization and held common property (so called common sea field) near their village in the name of their Jamsuhoi. Through their economic efforts they contributed to the village and island economy collectively as a whole. They have shown an example of "either-cooperative" society where women both maintain their autonomy and balance power between them through their voluntary association beyond obstacles of Confucian doctrine.

#### **Principle 2: The Haenyeos witness that if they run their voluntary assembly (Jamsuhoi) by women, they can keep equitable gender roles and autonomic power politically.**

Politically, it is wonderful that they created a voluntary organization called Jamsuhoi whose name can be described as the Association of The Haenyeos of Jeju Island. As of December 2000 (Chulin Yoo, 2002:295), we had around 100 Jamsuhoi in Jeju Island that every Haenyeo joins. They have lived in their village according to its regulations and unwritten rules as I already mentioned, in detail. It can protect common interests, for themselves by themselves. Through these organizations, they educate new comers to their skill and virtue, manage their membership and common property, sell their products to markets and decide everything by voting democratically. By accumulating their traditions of democratic practice in every day life situations, they can set up and keep gender and political autonomy for their common interests and causes, by themselves and for themselves. So, it is essential that the Jeju Provincial government support the development of the Jamsuhoi into independent voluntary associations, which apply to modern societies with recognition of it as one example of the gender roles concept.

#### **Principle 3: Women's economic and social contribution to family and community make society an "either-cooperative" society .**

It is so interesting to indicate that women in Marado, a village engaged in fisheries alone, are superior in both the home and in society, due to their importance in the economic establishment (until the 1980s), according to Suh's survey. This paper argues again that the female diver's community is not a society of

sexual equality but rather “neither-dominant”<sup>12</sup> or toward an “either-cooperative” society where both women and men maintain their autonomy and balance of power through their voluntary association,

We can emphasize that the Haenyeos had a gender component that contributed to developing the potentials of an island family value system as an integrated family model upon the combination of a large nexus family system (Bat-geo-rae Model) in their yard and creating an island culture such as the Sammu tradition or Samyu spirit (Jamsuhoi Model). If we can apply these principles of gender roles in modern societies, we should institutionalise this model into real practice in local government agencies such as invitation of bureau of the Haenyeos in a department of women policy in the Jeju Provincial Government.

**Principle 4: There are no viable cultural identities without the efforts of artists.**

Culturally, the Haenyeos have created, shared, and kept their songs, rituals, and customs that have formed their cultural life styles to the present day. If we make an effort to keep or modernize their songs and rituals through lyric, opera, symphony, ballet, documentary films, and so on like the Korean traditional song (p’ansori); it is possible for us to apply and share the cultural value of their life style in the deep sea such as Song of Sumbisori. We learned that they shared and exchanged their sentiments between and among themselves through singing different songs. As they created and formed a culturally

<sup>12</sup>) Gwisook Kwon (1996) pointed out that, even though Cho illuminated the positive side of strong images of Jeju Haenyeos in their myth, she criticized that Cho ignored the real negative effect of male dominated ideology behind its myth.

distinct identity through songs, rituals, and life styles amidst their ocean life, it is important to cultivate the customs and heritage of the Haenyeos and apply it to the cultural diversity and viability of women’s life in modern times. Recently we had some films illuminating life aspects of the Haenyos such as the Royal (mermaid) Princess (Ineo-gongjoo: 2003 Korean Film), Jeju Haenyeo, Ms. Yang (Japanese film: 2004 grand prize winning documentary film by Japanese Ministry of Culture)<sup>13</sup>. Notwithstanding these efforts, we need more artists who highlight not only a real meaning of life of the Haenyeos, but also modernization of their unique culture linked to the universal vale of women life and culture.

**Conclusion: Towards positive dreams in the midst of pessimistic scenarios of Korean gender roles.**

Recent poll statistics support that Jeju women play the leading gender role among other areas of the Korean peninsula such as sharing households, women participation in economic activities, entrance rate of women into high schools, highest divorce rates and so on (Jeju-do Center for Women Education and Culture, 2004). It indicates a philosophy and lifestyle that Jeju the Haenyeos give impetus of composing a viable gender culture in Jeju Island and Korea.<sup>14</sup> There are 127 Gondong-eo-jang, and 102 Jamsuhoi who helped pioneer modern Korean gender roles in economic, social, and cultural sectors, who are not only “threatened by modern aquaculture, their profession is not expected to last another decade” (Time: April

<sup>13</sup>) Korean Broadcasting Company is also preparing a new documentary film titled “ The Last Jamnyeo (Haenyeo)” as particular job in the vein of ocean civilization, which will be on the screen in 2006.

19, 2004) but also sharing with a crisis of “the pervasive sense that the end of something is near” (New York Times: Feb.15, 2005) among themselves. If the Korean and international societies register the culture of the Haenyeos into the UNESCO Cultural World Heritage and apply for the preservation of their values, this can serve as a rebirth as a cultural engine to refresh and recreate Korean traditional gender roles into a more equitable one in the Asian bloc. It is most important that they take pride in their job through awareness or recognition by Korean and international societies in conserving their cultural traditions and economic resources within a framework of a 10-year preservation plan. They can keep their Gondongeojang clean and flourish by way of a protection policy of ocean or undersea environment, and also get support for curing Jamsu disease from Jeju Provincial Government funding. Additionally, a Jamsu School will be built to educate or help the next generation to have jobs as Haenyeos.

In the long-term perspective, the Jeju Provincial Government has a plan to construct a “World Haenyeo Culture Park” on Udo Island, which will be a place not only to preserve originality of Haenyeo culture and folklore traditions, but also to develop these into a modern form or style. It is expected an educational function will help the younger generation to be educated or experience original culture and skills.

If we are willing to push those kinds of preservation policies or cultivation of the Jeju Haenyeos with a combination of short and long

term perspectives, we can say in the midst of the pessimistic scenario of Jeju women gender roles, we can project a positive island dream<sup>15</sup> with a real future in line with higher expectations “...but, again, Jeju (women) have and will surprised us more than once before.”(Time: April 19: 2004).

<sup>14</sup>) According to a survey by Chejudo Center for Women Education and Culture(2004), it indicated the most highest region of gender role among all local states: sharing gender role 11.0% higher rather than average rate of all provinces (Cheju: 94.8%, mean: 83.8%), rate of women participation in economic activities (Cheju: 62.4%: mean: 48.9%, Canada: 60.7%, Germany: 48.9%), rate of women entrance into high schools (Cheju: 90.5%, mean: 79.7%)

<sup>15</sup>) Chang Hoon Ko(2005) describes their dream in his poem titled as “A Jamnyeo dream of a new Miracle of Peace” as such ; “ ...they always prepare for her coming here to make a new voyage to a miracle island over another ocean . But, again, she can create another I-eo-do country ( paradise island in their imaginary world) native in the Island when she’s knocking on to a door to a fifth season with all mighty faith, hope, and love. Towards a myth of perpetual peace once again in the perpetual ocean beyond the uncertain, unclear, and unstable universe”.

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