Jamnyo’s1 bulteok - <place of fire> for Jeju women divers
- A Healing Culture -

A paper presented at the 3rd Jeju World Peace Academy &
the 18th Peace Island Forum, Jeju,
December 1, 2018

Ok-kyung Pak, Ph.D.

Abstract

This paper is based on the author’s book, <The Jamnyo (Jeju women divers) of Korea, Neo-Confucianism and Dual Mythology> (2018). It was published in English and French version by the Cultural Foundation Barbier-Mueller Museum in Geneva, Switzerland. The particularity of the book is that it is the first of its kind that introduces in foreign language Jeju academic discourses (published since 1950’s, but not known outside of Korea) on various topics, such as Jeju women divers, mythology, kinship system, shamanism and the influence of the Neo-confucianism on Jeju, imported from the mainland, combined with data collected among a divers’ community in the small island of Udo, Jeju in 2016.

This article presents two stances of the author regarding Jeju: (1) a feminist point of view on Jeju women divers and their contribution to Jeju society by presenting the island as a <women centred society>; (2) an activist point of view by presenting the history of Jeju and its people as a struggle against the centre by the periphery and dominated by different colonial powers over 1000 years. The article proposes jamnyo’s fireplace (bulteok) as a social model for healing.

Key words:
jamnyo, Udo, eco-feminism, kwendang, neo-confusianism, colonialism, struggle between the centre and periphery, shamanic ritual

1) Jamnyo (meaning women who dive) refers to plain divers - diving without an oxygen tank - on Jeju. Different terms are also used to refer to women divers such as Jamsoo (meaning women who work in the sea) and Haenyo (women of the sea). Academic debates have tried to unify the term without success. According to one author (Chun 1992, pp. 487-493), "Haenyo is a colonial term created by the Japanese administration, in contempt of Jeju divers, during the colonial period. Therefore, terms such as 'jamnyo' or 'jamsoo' should be used as a way of decolonizing Jeju identity." According to other authors (Cha and Ko 2005, pp.17-18), Haenyo is preferred, since this term has been used more frequently by observers, outsiders and academics. In this book, the term jamnyo is used.
Introduction

On December 1, 2018, a conference was held in Jeju to mark the painful memory of the 70th anniversary of the April Third (4.3) Event when 30,000 Jeju people were massacred. Although the massacre was committed by the Korean army, the controlling force behind it was the American army – the colonial power. In commemoration of this tragic event, Jeju people are reminding themselves that such an event should never be repeated. They are looking for a healing.

This paper is a summary of the author’s book published in September, 2018 by the Cultural Foundation of Barbier-Mueller Museum in Geneva, Switzerland (www.barbier-mueller.org). This organization funded my research project and fieldwork in Jeju in 2016. The title of the book is <The Jamnyo (Jeju women divers) of Korea, Neo-Confucianism and Dual Mythology>, 176 pages including 140 photos (most of them taken by the photographer, Ko Sung-mi). The book is also available in french version under the title of <Les plongeuses jamnyo (haehyo) de Jeju, Corée.>


Broadly speaking, the book is a summary of Jeju academic discourses on various topics, such as Jeju women divers, Jeju mythology, Jeju kinship system, Jeju shamanism and the influence of the Neo-confucianism on Jeju, imported from the mainland, combined with data collected among a divers’ community in the small island of Udo, Jeju in 2016. Jeju scholars have published so many fascinating stories–books, but they are all in the Korean language, hence not accessible to foreigners who do not read Korean. This book is the first of its kind in English synthesizing what has been said about Jeju society by Jeju people in different fields, since the 1950’s when <Jeju Studies> was created by initiatives of Jeju scholars on the island. Synthesizing studies done in different fields of society is important since social life is not a collection of segregated parallel chimneys. Cross cutting parallel chimneys of knowledge on Jeju give a new unsuspected perspective. Jeju scholars tend to focus on one field of their specialties (e.g. mythology, shamanism, divers, etc.), missing out the holistic view of the society, or the total social fac, in the language of French sociologist Durkheim.

On another level, this book maybe said to present a kind of feminist viewpoint, which is rare in jeju scholarship. By presenting the kwendang exchange system (Jeju kinship system) in which women xxxx, this book projects Jeju as a "women centred society" in a patrilineal Neo-Confucian system. By comparing the kwending system with a <matrilineal society> of Indonesia2 (which the author studied 40 years ago for her doctoral thesis), the book sheds light on women’s central role in maintaining Jeju society often neglected among Jeju scholars. The significance of this interpretation is commented by prof. Saladin d’Anglure as follows in his forward to the book: "it is rare in the field of anthropology to be able to analyze in the way the author did – the evolution of matrilineal society by taking into account both the political history and the patrilineal development of the field studied.) Jeju’s political history was, in fact, coloured by the author’s earlier <discovery> of the Minangkabau matrilineal system: In fact, she was not merely describing Jeju but...
she was recognizing the problem of the Confucian gender system – the Korean way of perceiving the gender relationship; she was bringing the Minangkabau critique of the Jeju system with her on the day of her arrival in Jeju.

**Position of this paper: Colonial mentality annihilating women divers**

My first contact with the Island of Jeju was in 2010 when I went to visit my mother who had chosen Jeju for her homecoming when she returned to Korea after almost forty years of immigrant life in Canada. My mother felt it was important to go back to her own country, to live and contribute to the peace of the world in her own way by working for the unification of North and South Korea. She thought that the best place for this was the island of Jeju, named “Island of Peace” by the Korean government in 2005 as a way of (politically) healing this island, which has suffered so much oppression and so many tragedies.

Two topics that attracted my attention at the beginning of my contact with Jeju were the question of “Jeju identity” and the Jeju people’s preoccupation with the rapidly decreasing number of women divers. These topics are often discussed in the Jeju media, and also among jeju academics. The discourse on Jeju identity may be summarized as follows: (a) The roots of Jeju culture are in Northeast China, with some influence from Southeast Asia, including Indonesia; (b) Jeju culture is a compromise between Neo-Confucian principles that shaped the last monarchy of Korea (the Choseon Dynasty (1392–1910)) and the island “reality” (the harsh natural environment) of Jeju, which is very different from that of the mainland. The discourse on women divers was on the welfare of aging divers, followed by their decreasing number and how to protect the profession of divers.

These two discourses are not mutually exclusive in my view, but they are presented as different topics. Women divers are certainly a part of the Jeju identity and one cannot imagine island identity without them. The diving in the sea and the mythology of the sea are the foundation of the island’s identity. Nobody can deny that. The discourse on Jeju culture as a “compromise” between the Neo-Confucian values of the mainland and the reality of Jeju Island shortcuts the core issue of its island identity and women divers in its centre. It appeared to me that this type of discourse relating to the topic of Jeju identity belittles (consciously or unconsciously) the divers, whom Jeju society looks down upon as “uneducated women” of “low status”, rather than seeing them as the central force of Jeju society.

What is in play here is a deeply seated colonial mentality, i.e. dependence on colonial values of the status quo (in this case, Neo-Confucian ideology) on one the hand and prejudice against uneducated women looked down upon in Neo-Confucian values. Jeju identity is not based on what Jeju has (divers, sea), but rather with what it does not have – imported values (Neo-Confucianism) from outside. It is ironical that women divers defended jeju from the Neo-Confucian and Japanese colonial domination. While this has been pointed out by quite a number of scholars of Jeju Studies (Kim, Chang–min, 1992, 1999; Kim, Hae-sook 1999), it was never presented as a position to support ‘women’s central position” in Jeju society.

This paper hopes to put back Jeju women divers in the central position where they belong (hence the term ‘women centred society’) (see. Pak 2018, pp. 28–29) and shows that their life style, values and philosophy are a future model of Jeju society. They provide a ‘healing culture’ that contemporary Jeju people are looking for vainly elsewhere such as in consumption based western life style, fusion food, western life style…

**Jamno’s place in Jeju society**

Jeju is called the “island of three abundances” – wind, rocks, women. This saying summarizes difficulties of life on this island 100 years ago. In addition to the abundance of wind and rocks, the island was short of drinking water and fertile land, which were burdens of the island population, but specially for women.

**(Fig. 3 Jeju women carrying water on their back, circa 1900)**
The island’s harsh natural environment necessitated women’s labour and their active role outside their homes (Song 1998, p. 394). In Jeju, the labour of women in small-scale farming (barley, sweet potatoes, garlic, spring onions and peanuts) was essential for survival. With a small-scale “female farming system” (Boserup 1971), in place because of the rocky volcanic soil, the labour ratio of female to male is 8:2 for millet cultivation in summer, which is exactly the opposite of the ratio for rice cultivation in paddies on the mainland, where the labour ratio needed is 3:7 and 4:6 for dry fields. Jeju women spend more time in the fields than at home, constantly weeding as weeds grow quickly in the warm, humid climate. The type of soil on Jeju allows the women to do everything in the fields by themselves, except tilling the soil, which is done by men with oxen or horses.

In coastal villages, women’s diving was a mode of production based on female labour, which – before the beginning of the industrialization of agriculture and fishing – almost exclusively enabled families to survive. Women dived to earn money or to barter their catch for the two most valued commodities, white rice and cotton, which were not produced on the island. With their diving, Jeju women were not only away from their homes and the fields, but also away from their village. Jeju women left their houses in the morning with the morning star and returned home with the evening star. On this island, with very little cultivable land and a harsh natural environment, courage was necessary for women to break out of the socially accepted convention of women’s place being in the home, according to Neo-Confucian principles which dominated Jeju during the Choseon Dynasty (1392–1920). The mainland’s usual gender division of labour could not provide for the greater amount of outdoors work needed for survival on the island. Under these ecological conditions, the “ability-oriented worker” theory, irrespective of sex, offers an excellent explanation (Han 2005, p. 32).

Unlike on the mainland, women’s place in Jeju is outside the home – in the dry fields, the sea, the village market and beyond the village. William F. Sands, an American diplomat and advisor to the Korean court, who came to Jeju to report on the 1901 rebellion, called Jeju “a real Amazon community”. Sands wrote: “Men in Jeju had an inferior existence, while women were all powerful. Women were heads of the family and owners of the property. Children had their mother’s family names and women never lived with a husband” (Sands 1931). Although Sands’ description of Jeju women was not exactly correct, his impression on their activities and energy had some truth to it. Another foreigner A. A. Pieter wrote in The Korean Repository in 1899: “Jeju is the Sicily of Korea. On the streets there are three times more women than men and they are much more beautiful and stronger than the women of the mainland. Their facial expression is full of hope and radiance. They looked at me face to face, unlike the mainland women who turned their face away” (Pieter 1899).

The self-confidence on the faces of Jeju women noted by outsiders is expressed in the ballad:

Dear, dear, speak frankly
people might think you are thousand miles away it
dawns even if you are not there
it dawns even if there is no rooster
I can live without rooster and you
(Chae 1997, p. 59).

This lively image and spirit of the women of Jeju are best presented through the life of Jeju women divers.

Bulteok (fire place) – the symbol of Jamnyo’s social model

Bulteok is a place, open to the sky, surrounded by a stone wall, located near the sea. On coming ashore, the divers dry their wet bodies around the fire, protected from the wind. Apart from its meaning as a space, it provided the original location for the current divers’ association. It is a space for the management and maintenance of the divers’ community, and knowledge and skills are passed...
onto the younger generation. Men were not allowed there. It was a place for sharing information, resting, discussing issues, and making decisions about when to dive, when to stop working, what the market price of their catch should be, and when they should have days off to prepare for big village events (e.g. wedding, shamanic rituals). Buelteok is symbolic of the divers’ democratic world and their value system. This system is no longer active at present (2016) in Jeju and replaced by buildings with kitchen and rooms for resting and changing clothes.

Buelteok survives as a symbol in the divers’ rule of order in ranks, which is strictly observed. To maintain its collective nature, the divers’ community established regulations for its organization. Diving is done collectively, but what is caught depends on an individual’s skill and capacity. To maintain order within the divers’ community, a hierarchical status was created. Three levels are: “high status” (sang-gun), “middle status” (jung-gun) and “low status” (ha-gun). It depends on a diver’s ability and number of years of experience. A “high-status” divers’s productivity could be more than three to four times that of “low-status” one (sometimes called baby divers). Among the sang-gun (high status), the elder with most experience and the best reputation is considered the most important leader and is respected. This ranking means that the divers’ occupation requires intensive training. Diving is an underwater survival activity in which divers risk their lives. Through training, divers ensure that accidents are minimized, that the community works together, and divers take responsibility to protect each other while under water. If bulteok did not exist, Jeju divers would have worked as individuals, but not as a community, transmitting their knowledge and skills from generation to generation.

Community vs. individual survival: Divers’ fierce struggle to maintain a community with mythology (a common ancestress) and regulations protection of natural resources

Jamnyo own the sea collectively, and what is gathered from the sea is to be shared. Because they are the descendants of one ancestress – dragon goddess of the sea (Yowang Halmang) – they have the right to harvest marine resources in the sea. An anthropologist, An, Mi-Jeong, who did fieldwork in the village of Gimnyung, drew an interesting chart showing the mythical ancestor-bound relationship between the divers, the goddess of the sea and the village shamanic shrines. (refer to pak, 2018, ch. 3, fig. 21). According to An (2005, pp.xx), the relationship between deities (of the earth and the sea) is represented by the relationship of descent and marriage. The relation of descent is limited within the boundary of the earth or the sea. It is through marriage that the territory of the earth and sea communicate. The deities of the earth are set up in the village shrine as partners of the deities of the sea. Deities of the sea also become mythical ancestress of the divers. In other words, several concepts structure the relationship between the divers, deities of the sea and the earth. The concepts of marriage and migration are used for movements from the sea to the earth, and the
concepts of descent and diving work are used for movements from the earth to the sea. Jamnyo hold shamanic rituals to ask their ancestress (the goddess of the sea) for an abundant harvest, protection of their life in the sea and praying for the well being of the family members and village people. Their mythical ancestor-descendant relationship is not just imaginary, but a model of a relationship between nature and human beings (Kim, Chang-min 1999). The divers’ world is one of “symbiosis between the nature and human beings” (Cho 2016), with egalitarian principles, mutual assistance, a recognition of ability, financial autonomy based on industriousness and practicality, determination and competition. In modern language, divers’ life style and philosophy maybe said to be <eco-feminism>…

The problem of the depletion of natural resources is an issue faced by the divers. In order to avoid the depletion of marine life, divers do not use oxygen tanks, which would allow them to stay underwater longer and harvest more. Like farmers who plant seeds in the ground and harvest crops, divers plant the seeds of marine life such as abalone and trumpet shells in exactly the same way as farmers do and then gather their harvest from the ocean floor. They do this in order to protect and preserve natural resources. This act of planting seeds on the ocean floor is portrayed by the divers’ shamanic ritual held every year, praying to the dragon goddess of the sea for an abundant harvest (see Pak, 2018, chapter 4). The fortune of an individual must not surpass the fortune of the community. The cornerstone of wealth is not the individual diver’s skills and ability to work, but the natural resources that must be preserved. In the divers’ world view there has to be equity between an individual’s income and the collective’s income. The divers’ community decides on the working day, and they go into and leave the sea together. The sea is a natural resource for all the divers and the wealth obtained from it should be equitable, that is a balance of ongoing natural resources and the income gained from it. Today’s income should not deplete the natural resources. This notion is seen in the motto of one village fishing association: “Collective existence; collective profit; collective management” (An 2008, p. 277-278) is the moral backbone of divers’ world.

World view and life style of divers and Neo-Confucian values

The divers, above all, use their bodies to do their work. So physical strength and physical work are essential in divers’ life, so that they be able to adapt to the conditions of the ocean. Knowledge of under-sea life and body condition of self is valued. They do not enter the sea until they have evaluated the current and the direction of the wind. They acquire the ability to recognize the underwater topography and the strength and direction of the wind, as well as knowledge of the underwater ecology, seasonal changes in the sea, and learn how to adapt their bodies to the current conditions in the water and hold their breath through years of diving experience (An 2008, p. 273). The more skilled a diver is, the longer she can work and the more she can earn. In addition to these skills, the attributes that make a good diver are a large lung capacity, the ability to endure the cold, and the mental capability to be selfless. Physical work and diligence are valued. In this sense, a diver’s life is very much individualistic. Yet, divers’ life style is marked by collectivism. A diver never enters the sea alone, since it is dangerous. Diving is always in
a group and with a partner.

Also, as mentioned in the earlier section, the divers’ world is marked by the collective ownership of the sea-field and egalitarian sharing of sea products collected. It could be said that divers rely on the sea-economy mechanism or <sustainable sea economy> (protection and nurturing of marine natural resources), since they have the wisdom to understand that it is the only way that they can survive. It is a model for relationship between human beings and nature. Divers’ collective community relationship, which is at the same time a kin relationship, is egalitarian. What is protected is not the interest of an individual or its family, but the collective interest and common good.

This worldview of divers is very much the opposite of the worldview of Neo-Confucian principles, whose corner stone is individual patrilineal lineages. The patrilineages represented the social organization of the Korean upper class. The elite of Choson Korea constituted a relatively small segment, perhaps not more than 10 per cent of the total population, but, drawing on patrilineal descent and heredity, they monopolized the political process, economic wealth, and Confucian learning (Deuchler 1992, pp. 6–12). The knowledge of Neo-Confucian principles was valued, and the state examination for recruitment of bureaucrats were based on the Confucian literature, but it was not accessible for the lower class and women. More bureaucrats produced, higher became the status of the family\lineage. Patrilineal lineage ancestors of high status are important assets to their lineage descendants. Married women are excluded from the membership of their patrilineages and also their access to the family wealth. This condition of women is at the base of Neo-Confucian ideology, specifying women’s three duties to three generations of men – father, husband and son. The economic basis of ancestor worship was land held in common, which was usually administered by the most direct male descendent of the family.

Although Neo-Confucianism is a philosophy of agnation, it regards the union between men and women as the root of all human relations. In cosmological terms, heaven (yang) dominates earth (yin); and male (considered yang) has precedence over female (yin). The clear hierarchical order between the sexes is thus cosmologically sanctioned and is imperative for the proper functioning of the human order. In the Confucian view, the law of nature accorded women an inferior position. The hierarchical order is not only for gender, but also applies to the functioning of all of human society. Neo-Confucian principles are based on an organic relationship between human life and natural phenomena. At the cosmic level, observing the natural order, the emperor was placed at the centre of the state by heaven’s blessing. Proximity to the emperor meant proximity to the primary influence of heaven’s blessings. To achieve harmony and happiness, men must realign the social order to the cosmic order of which they are a part.
law prevails in the universal order that subordinates human kind to the earth, and earth to heaven and heaven’s munificence flowed to humanity through the earth. In short, the law of nature was seen as hierarchical and elitist in heaven, on earth, and amongst human beings. The social consequences of these interpretations of the natural order legitimized an arrangement by which classes of people were deliberately structured hierarchically by the state, leading to the inequitable, yet humane distribution of heaven’s blessings amongst them. This law of nature is hierarchical and elitist, legitimizing a hierarchical status system in society. It emphasizes the importance of the family over the individual, and the importance of clan genealogies (each family’s social rank within the hierarchy of “respectable people”).

The authoritarian structure of Neo-Confucian family organization with filial piety as its central principle and the Book of Rites (Ye ki) as its guiding doctrine, was the foundation for the people’s submission to the central government of the state. Social control and prosperity depended on strict adherence to the accepted rites at all levels of the highly stratified Neo-Confucian society. The application of Neo-Confucian doctrine, rooted in traditional Confucianism, with its worship of ancestors and the concept of “filial piety” to relationships within society, led to these relationships being equated with the cosmic relationship of heaven, and those throughout nature. The Book of Rites provided rules for propriety in relationships between human beings and nature.

The above brief discussion contrasts jamnyo’s value system that shapes their world and Neo-Confucian worldview. The contemporary discussion on the future direction of Jeju and the world in terms of the protection of ecology, democracy is much more along the line of jamnyo’s value system than that of Neo-Confucian ideology.

Jamnyo’s role in the struggle between indigenous ideology (shamanism) and the outside forces (Neo-Confucian ideology)

The history of Jeju is a history of colonialism. The name of the island (Jeju) itself carries the mark of colonialism. Jeju means (the district across the water), a name given to the island by Koryo Dynasty (960–1392) in 1105 CE. Before the annexation, Jeju was called Tamna.

During the five-hundred-year reign of the Choseon dynasty, Jeju was the military fortress of Choseon. 285 governors were appointed to Jeju to govern the island. In addition, the defence system for Jeju consisted of nine naval outposts, twenty-five beacon fire stations, and thirty-five frontier beacon stations along the seashore for protection from Japanese pirates. Another method of integrating the island and its people into the Choseon dynasty was through the formal and informal inculcation of Neo-Confucian philosophy. The Chosen dynasty’s leadership attempted to improve conditions of a new nation through good government. Virtue was identified with “leadership”, and virtuous leaders had to be properly educated according to Neo-Confucian principles. Education rather than force was the ideal means to achieve the physical, social and ideological transformation of the island. Government supported and staffed Neo-Confucian academies of learning and shaped the islanders according to their ideals of proper living. The role of Neo-Confucian scholarly officials who were exiled to Jeju was important in making the island liveable for exiled scholars. Jeju local elites who absorbed Neo-Confucianism played an important role in transmitting and integrating the new philosophy within society.

In the late Choseon dynasty (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), the imposition of Neo-Confucianism was intensified through the purification campaign of 1702 (burning of 129 shrines and two Buddhist temples), called “the burning of five hundred shrines and five hundred temples” (fig. 6). The island was isolated and its economy stagnant, reaching its lowest point, and the law prohibiting the islanders from going to the mainland (1629–1839) as well as the ban on fishing, only made things worse. The island of Jeju was a prison with open sky. A series of rebellions broke out on Jeju (1813, 1862, 1893 and 1901). Alongside these rebellions, another type of a quiet rebellion was going on in Jeju. It was Jeju jamnyo’s shamanic practice, a challenge to the Neo-Confucian authoritarianism.
One of the first records to mention the jamnyo appears in the Jeju Pungtoghe (Record of the Jeju climate) written by the Jeju governor in 1629. In this account the governor, Yi Geon, calls the jamnyo “lowly creatures”, since they were almost naked. He implemented a regulation, prohibiting women and men from diving together in the sea. His ruling against nudity derived from Neo-Confucian morality according to which men and women should not be seen naked and they should not be in the same confined space. He did not know that nudity allows much more freedom to move under water.

Jeju is called the “home of gods and goddesses” and shamanism is quite prevalent. The shamanic rituals are performed by women. Furthermore those who participate in shamanic rituals are mainly women, and most of them are divers. (Jin 2008). This was still the case in 2016. Village shamanic rituals are handled by the women divers of a village.

Shamanic shrines, established usually at the time of the founding of a village, are located in its centre and the shrine god or goddess is believed to be an ancestor or ancestress of the inhabitants of the village. Rather than the usual gods and goddesses descending from heaven as in the mainland, non-authoritarian, egalitarian gods and goddesses arriving from the sea, or an imagined land, are much more common on Jeju.

Myths are mostly about community life such as the founding of a village, the division and expansion of a village, or the organization of fishing and farming. Although a shamanic myth is considered to be a simple story of the life of a god or goddesses, the shaman’s incantation also has the function of dissolving the anger of that god or goddess, thus banishing an evil spirit and calming the people’s bodies and souls. It is believed that the sacred words and actions of gods and goddesses are transmitted through shamanic myths. Therefore these are a code of law, the same as sacred books in other religions. Such myths are a source for the history of Jeju too, since they include historical events such as the peasant rebellions of the nineteenth century, the oppression by central government officials, and also details of the people’s daily existence and village life. However, all of this is told in the form of stories about gods and goddesses (Jin 2005, pp. 58–59). Some scholars argue that shamanic myth is a metalanguage of Jeju culture (Yoon 1995, p. 11). According to this author, the patrilineal forces and the female heroes of myths challenging the system of patriarchy are in a continual state of confrontation representing the resistance to mainland domination.

The evil gods are generally from the mainland since that is usually the source of evil for Jeju people (Moon 1989, p. 31). The misfortunes suffered historically by the people of Jeju were due to their subordination to the mainland, placing them at the periphery. This situation has not changed today. Together, the shaman and shrine gods and goddesses symbolize Jeju inhabitants overcoming, or attempts to overcome, their subordination, the evil god. Village inhabitants attending the ritual cry with the shaman. Their lament is not only about their own life, but also the tragic history of their ancestors and their present situation, which cannot escape this tragedy. Thus, historical consciousness is dramatized through a communal ritual about the whole community and it strengthens the collective consciousness. Village shrine tales (pon-puri) and the shamanic rituals held in the shrines negate the authority of Neo-Confucian ideology and the patriarchal system. In shamanic epics chanted by the shaman with her clients (jamnyo), their principal ancestors are female. They challenge the authority of the central government. Village shamanic rituals are expressions of historical consciousness and a way of narrating the history of the relationship between Jeju and the mainland (Kim, Chang-min...
The combative nature of the ritual is evident from the ritual scene and some of the shaman’s clothing. The shaman raises a long bamboo pole and several small poles on the outside ground where the ritual is held, as a symbol of 1,000 flags and 3,000 armed combatants. The shaman sometimes appears in army uniform with the sword of a deity (Kim, Chang-min 1999a; Hyun 2002, p. 159).

The burning of 500 temples and shrines in 1702 in Jeju by a governor sent by Choseon monarch mentioned above is not surprising. Shamanic rituals practiced by jamnyo and Jeju women were formidable enemy to Chosen ruling class which could not win with their Neo-Confucian ideology.

**Divers’ contribution to Jeju economy during the Japanese colonial period (1910-1942)**

The Japanese colonial period was a time of intense suffering for the people of Jeju and Jeju economy. After the Japan–Korea Treaty was signed in 1876, Japan turned its attention to Korea and Japanese fishermen started entering Korean fishing grounds. In 1880 Japanese divers had 137 fishing vessels, catching 200 guan (120 kilos) of abalone every month and thus the Jeju jamnyo’s catch was drastically reduced. By 1883 the Japanese could legally fish in the sea around Jeju and the Japanese fishermen were catching a tenth of the jamnyo’s total catch of abalones. At the same time, Japanese merchants started paying the divers cash for their catch. From then on jamnyo started leaving the island during the slow season (March to September), because of the dearth of marine life due to the Japanese diving ships’ overfishing and also the communication Jeju people had established with the outside world. This migration started in 1880. At first it was to Japan, then to the south of the Korean Peninsula (first to Pusan in 1887) and later to China and Russia (Chingtao, Daren, Vladivostok). Jamnyo’s stories tell how they were able to accumulate a big sum of money in several months and come home to build a house, pay their children’s school education and pay off their husbands’ debt. In the 1970s this migration stopped with new sources of income from the development of tourism and tangerine farming on Jeju, which provided waged employment for women (Hur 2002).

Towards the end of the 1920s, under Japanese colonial rule, socialist ideas surged like turbulent waves and anarchist ideology advanced like a storm through the Korean Peninsula. The anti-Japanese movement, which was considered nationalistic in the beginning turned into a left-wing movement. These ideas also reached Jeju and were disseminated in secret. The most important thing for the Jeju communist organization to do was to build a night school in every village for the ideological education of young people and women, to eliminate the illiteracy of the jamnyo and awaken their class consciousness. The problem was that while Jeju families depended on the women divers for survival, these women got very little compensation for their hard labour because the Japanese government maintained that the sea was the property of the nation and the administration’s
The jamnyo’s anti-Japanese movement can be defined in one phrase: professional women workers resisting the exploitative Japanese policy and standing up to the Japanese administration. This movement was exceptional in the social environment of Korea in 1932 when the Korean people were fearful of the Japanese police with their long swords slung from their waists. The divers not only held a demonstration, but also attacked a Japanese police station. It was the first event of this kind, not just on Jeju, but also on the Korean Peninsula. The number of divers who participated in these demonstrations is said to be 17,130. It was part of a large, long-term, anti-Japanese struggle that included some 280 meetings.

**Jeju Jamnyo’s Bulteok – social model of healing culture**

In 2016 I saw this daring spirit of jamnyo, reincarnated in a social movement in Jeju, reconfirming the local identity as a women-centred society. The location of this movement is a huge 300-hectare museum park called Jeju Stone Park, with a collection of several thousand naturally carved stone sculptures, placed in the shape of a giant recumbent woman called Seolmundae Halmang – giant goddess. The purpose of the park is to maintain Jeju’s “creation mythology” of this giant goddess, that was being slowly forgotten in Jeju’s collective memory. Every year since 2007, for two weeks starting on the 15 May, the park celebrates the Giant Goddess Festival, with nine priestesses presiding over the ritual. The conceptual designer and managing director of the park, Paek Un-Chull says: “I think women should preside at the ritual because the theme of the park is the giant goddess Seolmundae Halmang who created Jeju Island.”

![Fig. 11 Monument commemorating the night school in Udo. (photo by Kho, 2015)](image1)

![Fig. 12 Jamnyo’s anti-Japanese movement monument in Sehwa (photo by Kho 2016)](image2)

![Fig. 13 Bird’s-eye view of the Seolmundae Halmang Complex, (photo by Jeju stone Park 2012.)](image3)

![Fig. 14 Nine priestesses in front of an altar (photo by Jeju Stone Park2010)](image4)
In my view, the large heart of the giant goddess for Jeju people reincarnates the fierce spirit of jamnyo for their children. As pointed out by an anthropologist, Professor Chun, who used to lead the festival, “Life is what people make of it and it starts with the ideas people have always had”. The reason for celebrating and discussing over and over the story of Seolmundae Halmang is to “rediscover the core of Jeju people’s existence” (Chun 2011, p. 12). The park director’s perception of women and the giant goddess’s role in Jeju society is somewhat similar to the eco-feminism formulated in the 1970s (Lee 2012, p. 61), combining ecology and feminism. Feminists realized that the patriarchal system, which oppresses women through discrimination, is connected to the capitalistic mode of production which destroys nature indiscriminately. They defined the oppression of women and oppression of nature as twin oppressions to which they are opposed (Park 2005, as quoted by Lee 2012, p. 60).

The idea of eco-feminism corresponds closely to the history and value system of jamnyo discussed in this book. Women divers fought against Japanese colonialism, a part of Japan’s ambitious “Pan Asianism” plan (Aydin 2008), and abusive exploitation of nature, the sea, which is the source of jamnyo’s livelihood. The problem of excessive use of natural resources by the Japanese colonial administration, which allowed scuba diving and the exploitation of jamnyo’s labour through deliberate wage control, were issues that jamnyo had to face in the beginning of the twentieth century. Now in the twenty-first century they have to face other problems such as sea pollution. If it were only a question of the quantity produced as in a market economy, the catch of one scuba diver would equal that of twenty divers (Yu 2016). By avoiding the use of scuba diving on their traditional territory and by planting seeds every year, jamnyo preserve and protect the natural resources. Jamnyo’s collective decisions allow the natural resources to be continuously revived. The basis of jamnyo’s wealth is not individual capacity or the quantity of the marine products caught, but the continuous revival of the resources. The unstated watchwords that jamnyos live by are co-existence, co-prosperity and common benefit (An 2005, p. 279). Individual benefit should not surpass the communal benefit. As pointed out by Cho in 1979, divers show us a possible model of life, a symbiotic relationship between humans and nature.

The importance of this symbiosis model for the survival of the planet and humanity, and local solutions for global disorders have been repeatedly pointed out by renowned scholars and scientists, such as Vandana Shiva and Merchant. As the world experiences more climatic changes, as small, isolated communities are threatened by more extreme conditions and the continual onslaught of neoliberalism, it is groups like the women of Jeju who can offer models for renewal. The jamnyo of Jeju have centuries of wisdom, modestly taking from the sea only what was needed to feed the family. The balance found in Jeju province, the neither-sex dominant model, serves as a reminder and a beacon. Jamnyo’a buleteok is the symbol of this wisdom and healing culture model.