



J e j u, the Island of Women

Jeju women had to be strong to survive on an isolated island

J · e · j · u · I · s · l · a · n · d

Jeju, despite its beautiful scenery

Isolated for 600 years

Destination for the exiled

Jeju women had to be strong to survive on an isolated island.

Coping with the harsh environment, they had to support their families.



Resilient Jeju women!

They were not born strong.

They had no choice but to be strong to adjust to the harsh environment.

It could be maternal power.

Dreaming of women's happiness and well-being ...

Publisher Woo Keun Min, Governor of Jeju Special Self-Governing Province
Jeju Special Self-Governing Province, www.jeju.go.kr

Planning Women and Family Policy Division of Jeju Special Self-Governing Province
Jeju Women Policy Research Center of Jeju Development Institute

Edited and Designed by Jeju Weekly, www.jejuweekly.com

Published Date May, 2011

1. Jeju in the eyes of foreigners

Jeju is an island of emotion. Jeju people, particularly, feel rewarded more than anyone else. Feeling rewarded means both a sense of pride and pain. Haenyeo, Jeju women divers, feel the emotion. They are the *proletariat* of the fishing industry. No matter what the weather is like, they dive into the sea to catch clams. Most haenyeo today are old but they are still active working as their life-long jobs have been rewarding for them. Their sacrifice to support families has made it possible for their daughters to live better lives.

- Jean Marie Gustave Le Clezio, French writer, Nobel Prize laureate in Literature, 2008

Stonewalls in Jeju resemble ones found in the Bretagne coast of France. Jeju stonewalls contain aesthetic value — but grade school students in Jeju usually do not consider them a topic for their drawings. *Oreum*, a volcanic hill with a crater, and stonewalls in Sicilia, Italy are often said to be similar to the ones in Jeju but different in color. The stonewalls standing along the fields and seashores are just beautiful.

- Tzruda Goro, Japanese painter

Certainly, the magnificence of Halla Mountain overwhelms us like huge sea waves. I feel a very special and powerful emotion whenever I stand at the peak of the mountain. It is the same emotion when we stand in front of the gigantic ocean, or before a great masterpiece of a renowned artist.

- Siegfried Genthe, German geographer, the first foreigner who climbed Halla Mountain and measured the height of the mountain (1,950m)

Jeju shows geological diversity as well as world-class geological heritages including *Seongsan Ilchulbong*, *Manjanggul*, Songak Mountain, Jeju Stone Park, and *Suwolbong*. Jeju boasts its unique characteristics having tremendous educational values such as its geological diversity and heritages, bio diversity, legends, agriculture and tourism. In particular, the peak of Halla Mountain and its surrounding *oreum* have no rivalry for beauty and values.

- Patrick McKeever, Chief of Global Geoparks' Committee, his evaluation on Jeju geological heritages



1



2



3



4

- 1 Halla Mountain in spring
- 2 Baekrokdam, the crater at the peak of Halla Mountain
- 3 Halla Mountain in autumn
- 4 Halla Mountain in winter

Jeju and Halla Mountain are inseparable; Jeju represents Halla Mountain and vice versa. Halla Mountain is an absolute being to the Jeju people. It makes them feel comfortable as it is a spiritual pillar. The breathtaking scenery of Halla Mountain and its 360 volcanic cones (called *oreum*) come in different colors against seasonal changes, depicting the passage of the time.

2. Self-motivated Jeju women

What are Jeju women like? They lead their lives with a strong sense of self-esteem and independence. They do not rely on their male counterparts. It is their strength and experience that pulls them through the wilderness of life. Head on, they meet life's challenges.

Wisdom is a survival tool for Jeju women; it means a world more than schooling or one's family background. To live with their neighbors in harmony and peace means everything to them.

They developed this sense of community a long time ago. That is how they learned "belongingness." During the *danggut*, a local ritual conducted by shamans, they would gather and exchange stories of joy and hardship, which strengthened their sense of teamwork and fellowship.

This sense of community and belonging is unparalleled by other villages. Jeju women divers still consider the sea a territory for survival since this occupation of necessity was first practiced. They called the sea *badangbat*, a type of farmland and fishing skills were passed on from generation to generation.

Jeju women were also very creative and were pioneers on the island. Because of their strength and ingenuity, they now symbolize history, culture and the future-oriented values of Jeju.

Jeju is also known as *the island of three plenties*: stones, wind, and women. The history of Jeju is filled with stories about people who cultivated the barren lands and fought against harsh winds and droughts. Jeju is in the path of typhoons that often hit hard and devastate the island.

Pulling through the rough natural environment was an undeniable reality Jeju women had to face.

The history and culture of Jeju are deeply connected to the lives of women. The island's stories reflect how Jeju women were shaped strong.

According to history, there were more women than men. *Tamna*, the earliest name for Jeju, put more value on seaborne trade. Men spent most of their lives on the sea, traveling along the southern Korean peninsula, China, and Japan. And women had to stay on the island.

Early in the 12th century, when the mainland was home to a number of civil uprisings, *Tamna* was incorporated into the *Goryeo* dynasty, and those who revolted were usually exiled to Jeju.

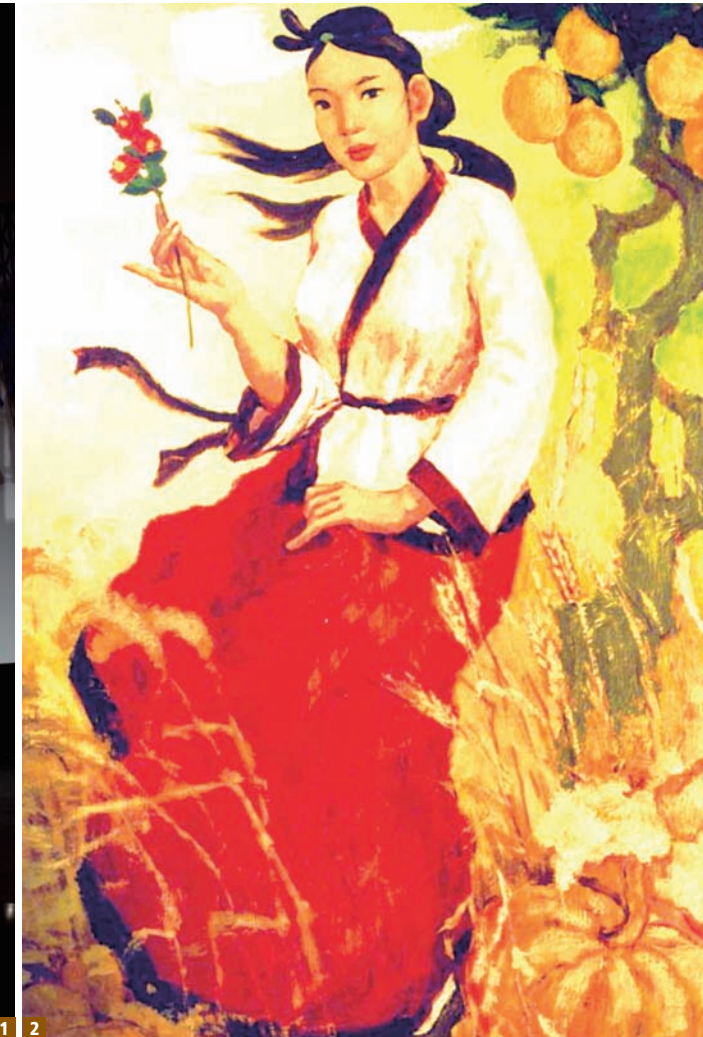
In 1629, the *Joseon* dynasty forbade anyone to leave the island without permission. The Jeju people became isolated, and as men escaped the island to avoid becoming forced laborers, women had to take up their responsibilities. Women served in the army and were forced to send tributes to the kings. Jeju women never avoided those duties. They protected the Jeju community even during civil wars, invasions by foreign powers, and massacres.

Jeju women also became the symbol of gender equality.

Confucianism prevailed in Korea since the *Joseon* dynasty, transforming the country into a patriarchal society. But this did not happen on Jeju. Conducting rituals by shamans were considered more important than ancestral rites. The tradition of trimming the weeds and grass from the tombs of ancestors was still shared. When it came to dividing inheritance, gender was not considered, allowing Jeju women to maintain economic wealth. Even after marriage, women were able to frequently visit their families to care for them.

Jeju women, in a way, were helping to awaken others to the idea that women are equal by overcoming social prejudices. Man Deok Kim became rich but gave the fortune back to her community, and she did not surrender to the reality which banned her from moving to the mainland. Yoon Ae Hong died for her lover, fighting against unjust authorities. Jang Deok was the first female medical professional on Jeju. There were a number of women soldiers fighting against foreign invaders. Women divers protested the Japanese colonial rule. Si Sook Kim actively engaged in the national independence movement and for labor justice. Pyung Kook Kang devoted herself to improving women's status in Korea. Jeong Suk Choi was the first female superintendent of education in Jeju. All of them left invaluable traces behind, a legacy of women's history of Jeju.

We all share something with the goddesses from the island's myths as well as with the women in Jeju's history. In part, they are our grandmothers and our mothers. Creativity, bravery and wisdom represent Jeju women and serve as a driving force to live today. They will be a valuable asset for the Jeju Special Self-Governing Province and the Jeju International Free City in the 21st century. They opened an era of gender-equality and showed us what direction Jeju should follow.



- 1 Youngdeug Gut
- 2 Jacheongbi
- 3 Gut in Jeju

Local *gut*, a type of exorcism conducted by shamans, is considered superstition by nonbelievers. If an ill person recovers after experiencing a *gut*, can it be viewed as a type of psychotherapy? Is it fair to label the effect of a placebo as scientific and *gut* as superstitious? The *gut* of Jeju represents dreams, faith and culture.



3. A goddess created Jeju

Have you ever seen Jeju from the air? It is a Green emerald in the middle of the cobalt blue ocean. White waves bash against black volcanic rocks that line the seashore. It is the most beautiful jewel on earth. Legend has it that a giant goddess named *Seolmundae Halmang*, "grandmother" in Jeju dialect, created this beautiful island.

Jeju is an island south of the mainland. An old document states that it was once an independent maritime kingdom, and was home to castaways. Hendrik Hamel was one of these lost souls who, when his ship was badly damaged at sea, was forced to come to Jeju in 1665. When he returned to his native Netherlands, he introduced Jeju and Korea — at that time called *Joseon* — to the Western world.

The strong wind played a key role in deciding the fate of Jeju's citizens. Some sailors, against their will, drifted and reached countries they had never heard of. After, they spread word of what they saw and what they experienced to not only locals but also to people on the mainland.

Now, Jeju is a famous tourist attraction for more than 8 million tourists each year.

The sea no longer separates the island from the mainland. More and more people visit Jeju, and to their amazement, Jeju reveals her hidden beauty to them.

Jeju is an oval-shaped island with Halla Mountain standing 1,950m tall in the middle. More than 360 volcanic cones called *oreum* have been mapped.

They clearly show that there was a powerful volcanic eruption hundreds of thousands of years ago here. *Oreum* are located sporadically around Halla Mountain.

Some liken them to dew hanging on taro leaves, while others describe them as dishes placed on a dinner table. Musicians describe them as best they see it; as a brass wind instrument.



Seolmundae Halmang



Halla Mountain and *oreum*



1



2



3

Seolmundae Halmang created Jeju in a boundless ocean

Jeju people grew up listening to their parents telling them the story of how Jeju Island was created.

In the beginning, there was a gigantic goddess named *Seolmundae Halmang* who made the island. She put Halla Mountain in the middle and other small islands around Jeju to help her do the laundry. Meanwhile, islanders prayed to her to connect the island to the mainland. This was not a difficult task for her but in return, she asked for silk to make cloth.

So, she began to connect the island to the mainland, and at the same time, the islanders made every effort to sew silk. However, the islanders failed to meet the deadline, and ever since, they have not seen their dream of a connected peninsula come true. Some locals in a northern sea village believe that the cape located in the village is a leg of the goddess who was working on connecting the island to the mainland. Also, *oreum* are believed to have been formed by the soil that had been unknowingly collected in the torn hem of the goddess's skirt, which then fell to the ground.

Another legend has it that on one spring day, while *Seolmundae Halmang* was busy making soup in a huge cauldron to feed her 500 children who were out hunting, she accidentally fell into the pot. On returning home, the hungry sons ate all the soup, only later to realise that it was made from parts of their mother. Out of remorse, they wailed and wailed and wailed, until they eventually turned to stone by their sadness. That is where the Five Hundred Generals' Rocks gets its name. There was one son though, who had thought his mother had left the cauldron and would not eat the soup until she arrived. Devastated by her demise, he went alone to *Seogwipo* beach and later became a huge rock, which is now known as *Oedolgae*.

1 Seongsan Ilchulbong

Ever since being designated a Geopark, the number of visitors to this site has remarkably increased.

2 Volcanic cones called oreum

There are more than 360 *oreum* in Jeju.

3 Sanbang Mountain and Halla Mountain



Halla Mountain, the Olympus of Jeju

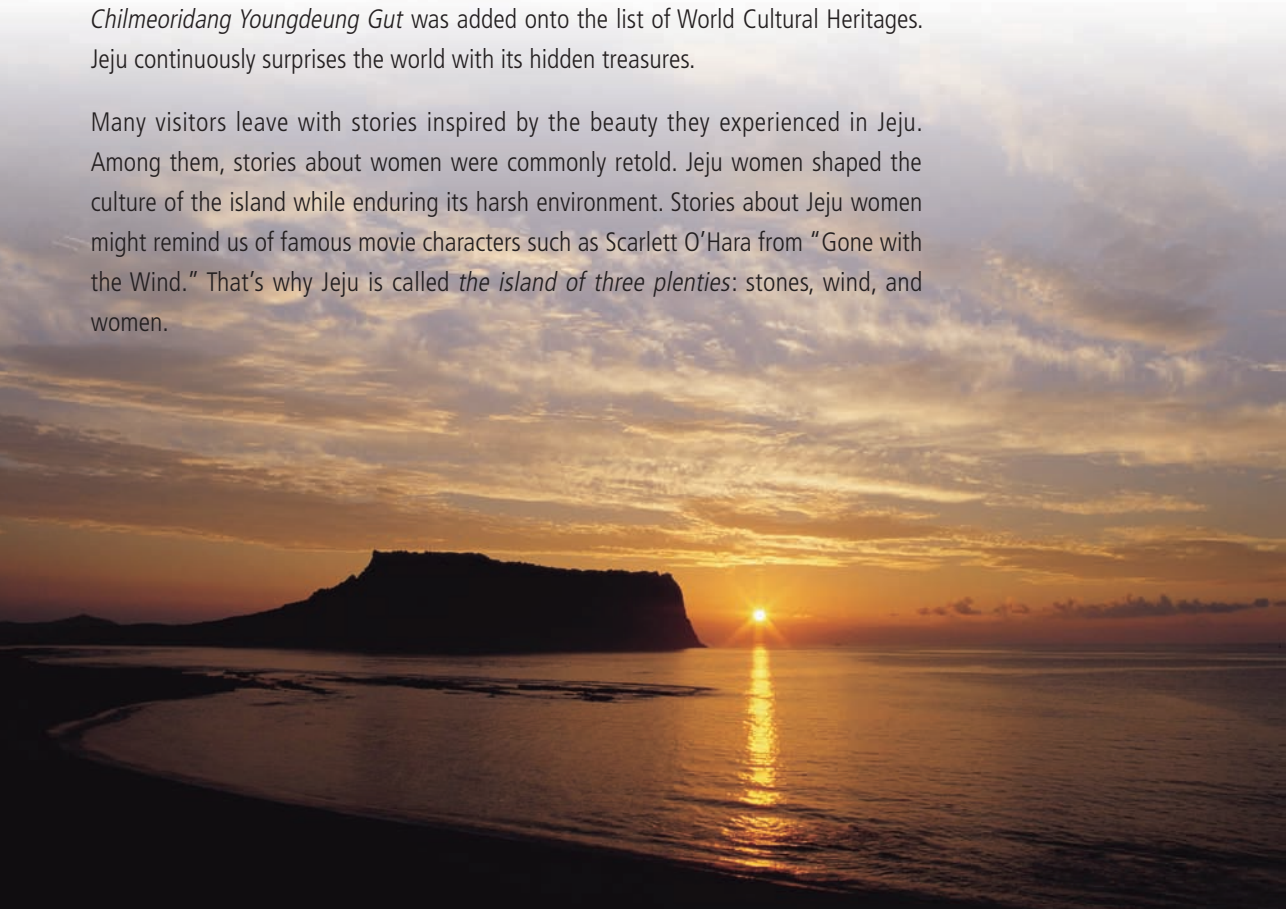
Jeju people are skilled storytellers. There are more than 18,000 stories about gods including *Seolmundae Halmang*. The people of Jeju were attentive to everything they saw and heard and they then transformed them into great stories. *Yeongsil* is the largest crater among the ones located around Halla Mountain. It measures over 1 km in diameter. It looks like a huge cauldron when seen from a distance. The rocks surrounding the crater seem like bones. Jeju people likely created the *Seolmundae Halmang* story looking at the island’s strange rocks and bizarre stones.

There are countless myths about all the villages of Jeju. They are about gods that created the heavens and the earth, those that managed farms, tended domesticated animals, took care of babies, protected lovers, and kept homes safe from evil. That’s why they call Halla Mountain the “Olympus of Jeju.” Some people say that there are still 18,000 gods living in and around the mountain.

The nature of Jeju is a mysterious treasure box

Every place in Jeju is valuable and mysterious. UNESCO designated Jeju as a Biosphere Reserve in 2003. In 2007, Jeju was registered as a World Natural Heritage under the subtitle of “Jeju Volcanic Island, Lava Tubes.” In addition, Jeju was given another honor when it was christened as a Global Geopark. In 2009, *Jeju Chilmeoridang Youngdeung Gut* was added onto the list of World Cultural Heritages. Jeju continuously surprises the world with its hidden treasures.

Many visitors leave with stories inspired by the beauty they experienced in Jeju. Among them, stories about women were commonly retold. Jeju women shaped the culture of the island while enduring its harsh environment. Stories about Jeju women might remind us of famous movie characters such as Scarlett O’Hara from “Gone with the Wind.” That’s why Jeju is called *the island of three plenties*: stones, wind, and women.



1 Manjanggul

2 Dangcheomul Donggul

It was formed approximately 320,000 years ago. Mother Nature has been doing her thing for over hundreds of thousands of years.

3 Lava tubes

4 Yongcheon Donggul

It was formed approximately 400,000 years ago. Cave experts from around the world have been praising it as the “best of the best” in Jeju.



<Left>

Seongsan Ilchulbong

Ever since being designated a Geopark, the number of visitors to this site has remarkably increased.

4. Love stories in Jeju

People always enjoy love stories. In love stories, people meet and part, love and hate, and experience sorrow and joy. Even those on their deathbed reminisce about passionate love.

A story of goddess *Jacheongbi*

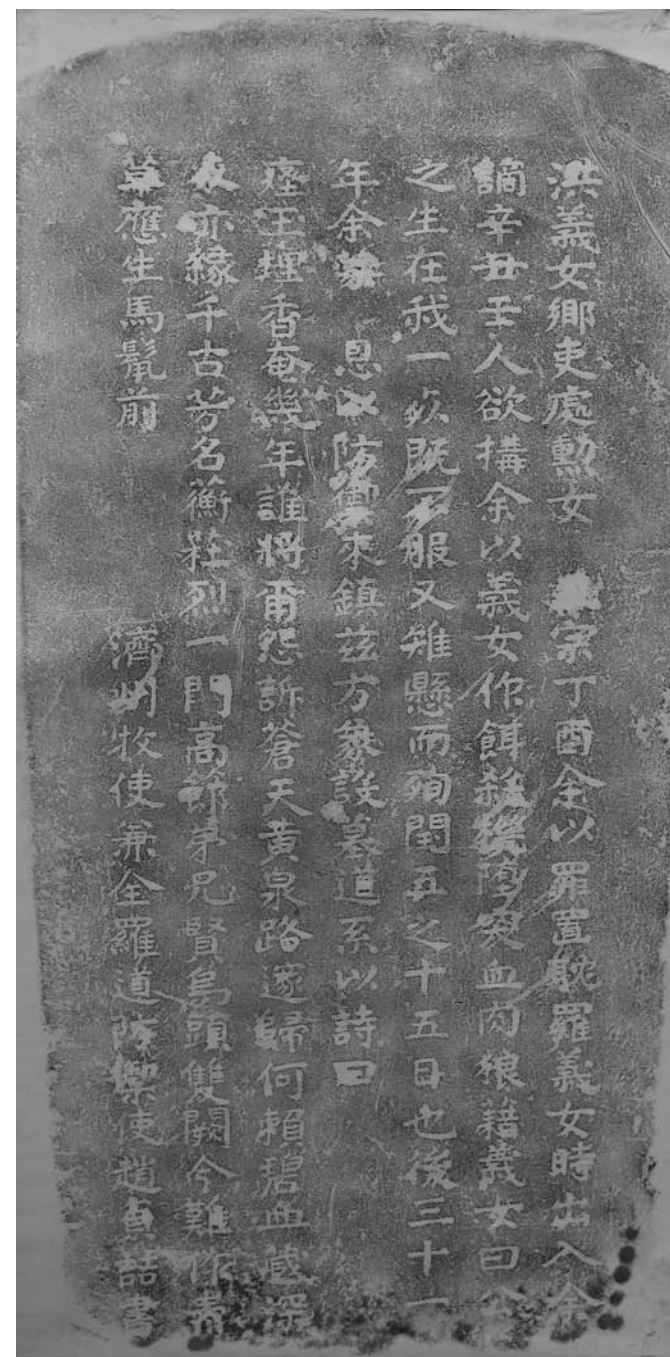
There are many love stories in Jeju. A story about a goddess, *Jacheongbi* and a lad, *Moon*, is one of them. One day, while *Moon*, the prince of the heaven kingdom, was hurrying to *Seodang*, a village school, he stopped by the local well and asked *Jacheongbi* for a ladle of water. She put a willow leaf in the ladle so the water would not upset his stomach, and he was moved by her act. She too had a crush on him, and to spend more time with him she disguised herself as a man and they went to school together for three years. As the time arrived when he had to go back to heaven, she confessed her love for him. Unfortunately, he was destined to marry someone the king of heaven had chosen for him. He promised that he would come back for her when the peach trees blossomed, but he did not come back. However, she waited for him. She started her journey to see him and they finally met again. After a short moment of joy, jealous young gods killed him for she was so beautiful.

The only way to revive him was to pick a flower of life at the border between heaven and earth.

Although she could save him with the flower and marry him, she herself came back to earth alone and took to farming.

Yoon Ae Hong

There is another love story about Jeong Cheol Cho (1751 – 1831) and Yoon Ae Hong. Cho was a young man when he was exiled to Jeju for being suspected of attempting to kill *Jeongjo*, the 22nd king of the *Joseon* dynasty. On Jeju, Hong took good care of Cho.



The first thing he did was visit Hong's grave to pay tribute to her.

However, those who had exiled him tortured Hong severely to get clues to kill Cho. She never surrendered and finally hanged herself. After he served 27 years in exile, he moved back to Seoul, and was promoted to a high post in the government and came back to Jeju as governor. The first thing he did was visit Hong's grave to pay tribute to her. And he expressed his appreciation to people who secretly helped him during the exile.

The street where the grave was located is now called Hongrang-ro to remember her decent deeds.

Every spring, the cherry trees are in full bloom along the street. Sometimes, a couple of birds are seen flying over the street. Some think that the birds might be Cho and Hong. Hong represents the spirit of Jeju women fighting against injustice.

A couple of rocks

There are two rocks called *bubuseok*. They stand next to each other. One day, heavy rain swept through the village and separated the rocks. Then, bad things began to happen in the village.

People believed that they had to put the rocks back together again to prevent further disasters. Once they were returned to each other, nothing bad ever happened in the village again.

Later, people called them *bubuseok*, because they believed that nothing could separate the eternal love of husband and wife.

5. Life of a woman

We experience so-called rites of passage in our lives. A man is born, grows up, gets married, has children, and dies. Descendants conduct ancestral rites to remember their forefathers. We may ask where was the cultural origin of Jeju women? The answer can be found in the myths of Jeju.

Love and marriage

Seolmundae Halmang qualified as a goddess because she gave birth to 500 sons. *Jacheongbi* is the goddess of love and farming. It is believed that the people of Jeju have inherited the creativity and passion of *Seolmundae Halmang* and *Jacheongbi*. *Gameunjangagi* is a goddess with an adventurous spirit. Jeju women have a strong will to be independent from their parents starting from their teen years.



- 1 A bride and groom in Jeju in the 1950s
- 2 Jeju women are invincible; women divers breast feeding their babies



Pregnancy and childbirth

Jeju people believe that their babies come from *Samsin Halmang* who was believed to control childbirth and protect children. Parents strongly prayed to her for the well-being of their children.



Death and commemoration

Jeju people used to dance together before the graves during funerals to pay tribute to the deceased. The fact that they danced together to appease the dead — so their ancestors could leave this world without regret — and, at the same time, believed the dance would relieve families of their sorrow is quite paradoxical. In order to prevent horses and cattle on the range from damaging the tombs, Jeju people surrounded the tombs with stone fences and placed stone statues called *dongjaseok* before them to protect the souls of the dead.

- 1 Traditional tombs in Jeju
- 2 Stone statutes guarding the tombs



- 1 In their youth, Jeju women inherited resiliency from their mothers.
- 2 A traditional Jeju kitchen called *jeongji*
- 3 Jeju women work all the time.

Being born a woman in Jeju meant the beginning of a difficult life. She had to support her family while carving out her own future from nothing. She adapted to the harsh natural environment but, sometimes, she had to confront nature head on. It seems that the strength of Jeju women has to do with the demographic dominance of women in Jeju.



Land of goddesses, the future of Jeju

The strength and bravery of Jeju women are still alive everywhere in Jeju, which are believed to have made what Jeju is today. These traits will serve as a driving force to maintain Jeju in the future. Among goddesses in Jeju, *baekjutdo* is particularly remembered and worshipped, because she did not turn into a male god, but kept her own identity to protect towns and villages in Jeju.



1 Biyang Island and Hyeopjae Beach Jeju has gained in popularity as a tourist attraction.
2 Typhoons in Jeju In order to adjust to the environment, Jeju women had to be strong.
3 A model of the Dutch commercial ship *De Sperwer* (the Sparrowhawk) sailed by Hendrik Hamel.
4 Taewoo a traditional Jeju fishing boat

6. Maritime frontiers, Jeju women divers

The origin

Women divers are synonymous with Jeju. They collected valuable sea products including abalone, turban shells, sea cucumbers, seaweed, agar-agar without oxygen tanks. Divers are known to live along the sea villages of the Korean peninsula. They are believed to exist before history was recorded. The number of divers on Jeju once reached 30,000 and they swam to China and Japan. Currently, there are 5,000 divers in Jeju.

Symbol of women divers

Wet suits: designed to minimize water resistance and maximize job efficiency.

Rowing songs: sung by women divers while paddling to the point where they would dive.



i eo ssa na - - - - jyeo ra jyeo ra



ap san cheon a - - - - nal ttaeng gyeo ra -



dwit san cheon a - - - - nal mir eo ra



eo seo ya sok hi - - - - mul jil ga ja

Sumbisori: divers make this hard sound once surfacing and releasing the after from their lungs. It sounds like a whistle.



Jeju women divers

For Jeju women, and women divers, Jeju's sea was a farmland.

Farming the sea

Women divers worked both on land and at sea. Once they dive, they usually hold their breath from 30 seconds to 2 minutes. On average, they spend 15 days a month diving. It is amusing that they dive during the winter, and even when they are pregnant. They started learning to swim at the age of 7 or 8. When they turn 10 years old, they begin to dive. In their mid-teens, they are able to dive by themselves. In their 40s, their days consist of diving to the seabed. Usually, they dive into their late 60s. There are a few divers still working into their 80s. The women divers are classified into 4 groups: *hagun* (beginner), *junggun* (intermediate) and *sanggun* (master). The best of the best are called *daesanggun*.

They expand their territory to Japan, China and even Russia

From the late 19th century, Jeju women divers worked the Korean peninsula, Japan, China and even in the Russian sea. They hold annual rites to wish for a good harvest. *Jeju Chilmeoridang Younddeung Gut*, the 71st Jeju Intangible Heritage, was designated a World Intangible Heritage in 2009. The primary goal of diving was to make a huge profit. They could not only support their families, but contribute to the local economy.

Jeju women divers represent a sense of community and solidarity

Jeju women divers have a strong sense of community and solidarity. They are always together when they are at sea, even after they retire. For old and sick divers, they arranged a specially designed sea area called *Halmang Badang* where the water is shallow enough to allow the old and sick to work and earn money. It shows how warm-hearted Jeju women divers are toward the socially disadvantaged. There is also an area called *Hakkyo Badang*. They donate profits generated from there to the local schools to support students. This is indicative of their long tradition of being committed to the social welfare and education of their community. In addition, they are very active in helping poor colleagues by establishing the *Jamsugae*, a type of public fund.

7. Distribution, a way to save the world

Jeju women were warriors to protect the island by themselves. When men were absent from the island — for fishing, trading, or escaping forced labor — Jeju women stepped up and filled in. They had to serve the army and dive into the deep sea to collect abalone. As shown in the case of Man Deok Kim, who accumulated wealth through commerce and distributed it to the poor, lots of unknown *gisaeng* singing and dancing girls at the public pub, and female shamans, who fought against foreign invaders and saved Jeju Island.

Women soldiers, Joan of Arcs of Jeju

According to historical documents, there were women soldiers in Jeju. Sang Heon Kim, a government official during the *Joseon* dynasty, visited Jeju with a plot of treason, and wrote in his book that there were 500 male soldiers and 800 female ones. Male soldiers, *yeojeong* in Jeju dialect, were rare. In the case of emergency, healthy women soldiers, *yeojeongs*, were selected to guard the village. The same was true for coastal defense and it was the women who were responsible for that.

Many men ran away due to compulsory labor, and in order to fix this, kings ordered Jeju women not to leave the island without permission. The edict lasted for almost 200 years.

Along with the onset of the cold war, a tragic incident known as the Jeju 4·3 Massacre occurred in 1948, where more than 30,000 innocent civilians were killed. Jeju women did not leave their community and kept their families safe during these brutal massacres. During the Korean War, many Jeju women voluntarily joined the Marines, which was very rare at that time.



1



2



3

- 1 Jeju women took part in the Korean War
- 2 The 4-3 Massacre is traumatic for the people of Jeju
- 3 The police started the 4-3 Massacre

Over 30,000 Jeju citizens were killed during the 4-3 Massacre, one of Korea's modern tragedies. It wasn't until recently that investigation into the incident was launched. The 4-3 Massacre had been a traumatic event to the Jeju people up until this investigation. Jeju people have been dreaming of an ideal society where everyone lives in peace and harmony.

A good example of *Noblesse oblige*
Man Deok Kim



Reduction of hunger by sharing fortune

Born in Jeju, Man Deok Kim (1739-1812) is known as a philanthropist as well as a businesswoman during the *Joseon* dynasty. In her late teens, after her father died, she became a *gisaeng*, a Korean woman trained as a professional singer, dancer, and companion for men. Later, she started her own pub near a port by selling Jeju specialties such as horsehair, seaweed, and abalone. She accumulated a tremendous fortune. Having watched so many Jeju people die from the devastating drought of the 1790s, she saved many lives by donating a huge amount of grain and other supplies. The king heard of her good deeds and praised her. Although she belonged to the lowest class in society, by doing business which was neglected by Confucianism, she became rich and gave the fortune back to the community. She overcame all obstacles before her including an official order to ban anyone from leaving the island. She dreamt of a community where all people took care of each other.

She truly manifested sacrifice and sharing, characteristics of Jeju women.

For the oppressed

In 1901, there was a conflict between Jeju's native culture and Catholics. Yoon Sik Kim, who reported the chaos, said that he noticed a number of women actively engaging in civil uprising. During the uprising, the main gate of Jeju castle was usually blocked by the local government. It also meant that access to food was completely denied. Then, the socially vulnerable including pregnant women, children and seniors suffered from starvation, some resulting in death. Even in this situation, women as leaders stepped up to open the gate. They were called *jangdu* who, according to tradition, organized and filed a civil request, but had to sacrifice their lives once the requests were accepted. We find the spirit of *jangdu* in the history of Jeju women. At that time, William Franklin Sands, who was assigned to resolve the uprising by King Gojong, called Jeju "a Kingdom of Women."

"Jeju can be called the Amazon as women dominated the society... they were always ready to exercise their rights and, practically, possessed the power to do so."

Jeju women do not depend on men. Rather, they work harder than men. Therefore, they do not surrender to them. Sometimes, they actively engage in community affairs.

8. Peaceful Amazons

Wind of peace blowing from the land of beauty

Jeju women always had ideals even though they had to cope with horrific adversities from both home and abroad. They pursued a land where peace and life prevailed. The people of Jeju usually possessed the thought of leodo or, an utopia, and they constantly hoped for one to save them from their plights.

Today, Jeju women do not stay in Jeju. Rather, they go beyond Jeju, and keep reaching out to the world by establishing networks with other women living in other parts of the world. This movement is based on the spirit of peace, co-prosperity, and sympathy toward others. Along with their neighbors, Jeju women are willing to be peaceful Amazons.



Jeju Island in brief

Size: 1,848.5 km²

Population: (As of December 2010) 577,187

Females: 288,270 / Males: 288,917

