



Jeju Island  
Rambling

*Self-exile in Peace Corps, 1973-1974*

David J. Nemeth

# Jeju Island Rambling:

Self-exile in Peace Corps, 1973-1974

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David J. Nemeth

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*To Hae Sook and Bobby*

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# Preface

I am a Lucky guy. How I got this way is no longer a mystery to me. Based on my personal experience I can highly advise this path to others in search of Luck: Strive to always be in the right place at the right time, facing the right direction, while doing the right thing -- and the Luck Wagon will come around.



For example: Early January, 2013, was a time when the Luck Wagon swung by again to pick me up. On that memorable occasion *Jeju World Wide* Managing Editor Todd Thacker published an essay I wrote about my arriving by airplane to Cheju (nowadays Jeju) Island, as a Peace Corps Volunteer in February of 1973. Todd asked to see more short manuscripts from me mining the same nostalgic vein. His request and encouragement propelled me into a productive writing mood. Once I pried open that old crate of Peace Corps memories, so much direct and tangential material spewed forth there was no shutting the lid on it. For the entire year of 2013 I submitted an essay a week to total 52 essays.

Around June or July of 2013 I began to imagine that my online weekly essays might eventually be revised into chapters for a book project. At the end of 2013 Todd committed to republishing the 2013 essays, again weekly, during 2014. He also kindly consolidated the 52 digital essay files as edited and published for *JWW* readers to one digital file, and sent that file to me. It is this file I have since massaged into a publishable book project and titled *Jeju Island Rambling: Self-exile in Peace Corps, 1973-1974*.

Luck begets Luck. It was certainly another Lucky Day for me back in 1971 when I decided to apply for the opportunity to become a United States Peace Corps Volunteer. This book describes some of the selective detail and outcome of that fortuitous decision. After reading my book you may agree that I am a Lucky guy.

# Chapter 1

## Flying to Jeju in 1973

I first arrived to the Blessed Isle in February of 1973. After three months of training on the mainland, mostly in the city of Chuncheon, in mountainous Gangwon province, the Peace Corps (KPCV) had found me enthusiastic and fit enough for assignment to remote Jeju Island. My ride that day was a vintage KAL Fokker Friendship F-27. Long out of production — but guaranteed reliable. A choice of North Korean hijackers, I learned later. Insurance, in any event, could be purchased at a kiosk in the airport. The Korean gentleman in the seat next to me beamed “It has Rose Rice engines!” And they roared mightily, I might add.



Figure 1-1: KAL Fokker Friendship F-27 circa 1973.

My first glimpse of Mt. Halla was just short of two hours out of Gimpo. The little Fokker seated 32 passengers. I had an under-wing window seat (mainly because I had won my first of many Korean cross-tarmac domestic passenger race-to-plane events, as related below). Losers (numbering 16) had aisle seats and no opportunity to enjoy a lot of marvelous Korean village agricultural terrain along the flight path. This plane flew non-stop twice a day. Tickets were expensive. Demand was high. Sunshine or storm, I learned, its seats were always sold out in advance of its flights. Once seating had been sorted

out, takeoff was swift and uneventful. The day was not only crystal clear, but cold, and windy to a fault. An hour or so into the flight the high-decibel drone of the turboprops hanging adjacent the fuselage had mellowed to a relaxing hum. Their at-first-worrisome vibrations within the passenger cabin had morphed into an unexpected asset – a free massage.

Too soon the mainland and then most of the south coastal archipelago gradually retreated from my sight line. I focused my attention on the big island looming larger with every passing second. The Fokker then began its descent. Whitecaps danced atop what appeared even from 10,000 feet altitude to be monster waves.

These Straits of Jeju had from historic times posed a challenging crossing for sea craft of all sizes. In 1973 the Busan and Mokpo ferries were an inexpensive alternative to crossing the Straits via air, but likely as not proved hell for all landlubbers. Dramamine, for those who had access to it, was no match for the rolling seas during a ferry passage to Jeju. That is why low-paid Peace Corps Volunteers working on the mainland rarely enjoyed their visits by ferry to Jeju. By the time they recovered from their seasickness, which took several days, it was time for them to return to the mainland. That said, flying the Fokkers — the expensive option — could itself prove to be a stomach-churning and harrowing experience.

Approaching the island at a rapid rate of descent now, the pilot conducted a fly-over of the landing strip at fairly low altitude prior to his final descent. On that particular day there was no snow accumulation at or near sea level. This made me very happy because it justified my good sense to choose for my Peace Corps Korea volunteer site the year-round-warmest place possible. I had always dreamed of living on a Pacific Island, and here I was right where I wanted to be! Granted, it was no Tahiti, but ... was Jeju Island not widely known as “The Hawaii of Korea”? The complex answer to that question requires an entire chapter of its own, and so I will save it for another occasion.

At least one fly-over prior to landing was explained to me later as a standard procedure at Jeju City airport and precaution against aircraft/stray animal collisions on the runway. The ritual was said to be a relic practice left over from primitive flight plans drawn up two or three decades previous, when free-ranging pasture animals ubiquitous on the island had priority over occasional airplane landings.

Out the window, Mt. Halla was snow-capped and majestic to behold so close at hand, and unforgettable from my airborne perspective. I composed a letter home that very night wherein I described to my parents my first impression of Mt. Halla as “heart-stopping, drop-dead awesome.” As it happened, a decade after I wrote that letter a military transport plane slammed into the flanks of the awesome volcano during foul weather, killing all aboard.

I have the greatest respect for the brave pilots whose hazardous missions bring them again and again at close quarters to challenge the capricious winds of this soaring yet unforgiving peak.

Beneath the aircraft I could see what I thought to be a heavy military presence at the perimeters of the city airport and at both ends of the main — and at that time the only — runway. I was startled when

that informative stranger sitting next to me reached over and slammed down the window shade before I could get a shot off with my inexpensive Kodak camera. Somehow, lost in all the grandeur and what I perceived as the peril of my kaleidoscope experience, I had missed a very important message: *All window shades in the passenger cabin during domestic flights must be tightly secured during aircraft ascents and descents for reasons of national security!* Only a fool or a spy would ignore this regulation in 1973. My bad.

Later I learned from other Peace Corps Volunteers on the island that over the previous decades several domestic passenger aircraft had experienced hijacking attempts by North Korean agents. As recently as 1971 a hijacked Fokker bound for Gimpo crash landed onto a beach near Sokcho. The grenade-wielding perpetrator and the aircraft's co-pilot were reported to have perished in an explosion near or on impact.

My national security faux pas was pretty low on my list of concerns as our pilot attempted to make his final approach to a safe landing. The passenger cabin was groaning, lurching, pitching and yawing as the pilot wrestled at his controls against the force of heavy lateral gusts of wind that became more violent as our airplane wheels approached the surface of the airstrip. I feared a wing tip might be plowing up the asphalt before even one tire gained some purchase. Among the passengers aboard the women sighed and moaned "*Aigo! Aigo!*" ("Oh my! Oh my!") In stark contrast the men exhibited remarkably stoic composure.

"What is it about Korean men?" I am often asked by non-Koreans. One characteristic I have discovered and respect is that they always seem persevering against adversity, and strike dramatically patriarchal poses in their Moments of Truth.



Figure 1-2: Moment of truth (artist and title unknown).

This dramatic old painting (above) serves nicely to emphasize (exaggerate?) my impression: I am certain that my pilot, and all the pilots flying the Fokker Friendship route to and from Jeju Island during the early 1970s, were of this same ilk.

That memorable landing — successful, and quite the normal state of affairs for landing conditions on Jeju it turns out, made me vividly aware that the high cost of securing wintertime warmth off the tip of the Korean peninsula for any length of time is marshalling the wherewithal that it takes to learn to embrace rather than fear the risks of negotiating a daily regimen of Jeju’s notorious Winds, Women and Rocks. By succeeding I came to discover Calm amidst the Winds, Generosity amongst the Women, and Refuge within the Rocks.

To sum up: Korean Air Lines was flying small propeller planes on commercial flights to Jeju from the old Gimpo International Airport back in 1973. Some of the implications of this early modernization of commercial aviation in South Korea contributed to unexpected culture shocks for the average naïve-yet-adventurous American Peace Corps Volunteers — like me.

Airport etiquette appeared especially madcap to me during my first flight experience. There were *no seat assignments* for example! The departure lounge at Gimpo at that time had ceiling-high panoramic plate-glass windows facing the runways. At least half of the passengers corralled there were decked out in their finest traditional *hanboks*.

Stress was much higher among the waiting passengers than I expected. So I surmised on scant evidence that most of the passengers had never flown in an airplane before. Wrong! For good reason all these passengers headed for the Honeymoon Island milled restlessly about with their eyes riveted on a tiny, empty aircraft out on the tarmac at, say, 100 yards distance beyond the locked doors of the departure lounge. This was the Fokker. I assumed correctly that it was waiting there for us to board. So what was up? I looked about the tarmac for the arrival of our transit bus from the holding pen to the aircraft. Suddenly the door was unlocked from the inside. The crowd poured out on a dead run in the direction of the Fokker. Lucky I was near the door and no fool, for I immediately grasped the seat-selection situation for Korean domestic flights: It was to be “First come, first served” or else “Tough luck!” I broke into a sprint. Newlyweds, *ajumeoni* (middle aged women), and even one or two grandmothers, adorned in — yet hamstrung by — their colorful costumes, pushed and shoved — and a few of them even slipped and fell into the snowmelt and the muck on the tarmac. Ninety yards. Eighty yards. Seventy yards . . . .

Long story short: That is how I won my window seat on the little Fokker on a cold day in February, 1973.

## Chapter 2

### Hwasun Memories (Part 1)

On the strength of my indelible memories and impressive mental images formed during the summers of 1973 and 1974, Jeju Island remains my favorite place experience on this earth. My favorite spot to relax in solitude on Jeju Island at that time was the wide sandy stretch of beach to the west and adjacent to Lower Hwasun Village. A close second were the hidden and nearly inaccessible waterfalls and plunge pools along the steeply inclined narrow canyon floor just below Gwaneumsa Temple. Both of these peaceful retreats have changed dramatically since my first visits. Change is inevitable, and I accept that.

Hwasun was such a peaceful place when I first discovered it in 1973 — purely by accident! It was late spring. I was on a nearly empty westward-bound provincial bus circling half the Island from Jeju City westward toward Seogwipo. It was a fresh spring weekend in March. We had just passed through Moseulpo Town when the bus began to make strange noises, advancing only in fits and spurts. The bus then broke down and rolled to a stop. We were in “upper” Hwasun Village.

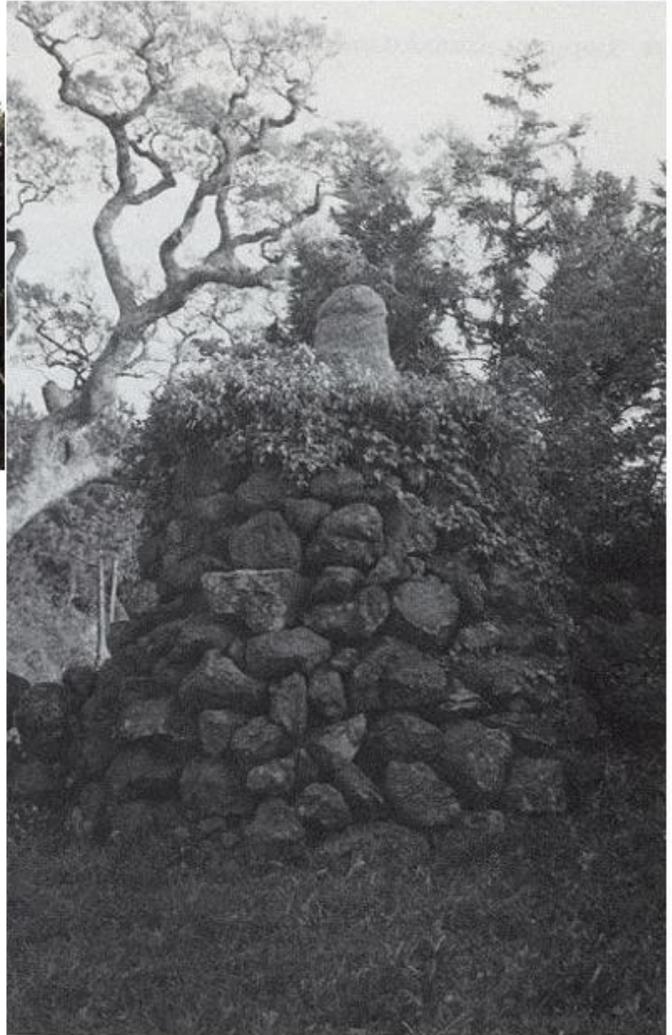
I disembarked and, anxious to hike about in an unfamiliar place, headed down a path toward the seashore of “lower” Hwasun Village. The path was unpaved and narrow, barely wide enough for small garden tillers much less small vehicles or the bravest of taxis. Barely two minutes off the bus and I could already tell I was in for a special treat! At that point the path took a sharp turn amidst a sharp decline in front of a small farm house located in the shade of a grove of marvelous old trees. At that dark and shady place there were two high rock piles, one on each side of the road. I later discovered these types of stonepiles were called *duk* and/or *oruseokmok*. Each one supported what appeared to be a small stone grandfather (*dol harubang*), and these grandfathers were positioned atop their stone piles facing each other across the pathway.

As I approached them, I encountered some inexplicable force of resistance in the pathway that slowed my pace to a halt. This was, as I grew to understand, a spirit gate. It was constructed at that point in the pathway as protection against unwanted outsider entry into lower Hwasun Village. Upper Hwasun Village was behind me, but suddenly irrelevant, as it was both physically and socially outside the

sacred perimeter formed by this symbolic gateway. I was entering a world yet immune to advancing modernizing outsider influences intent on systematically corrupting ancient island ways. There I stood paused in awe, with one village guard on my right...



1973



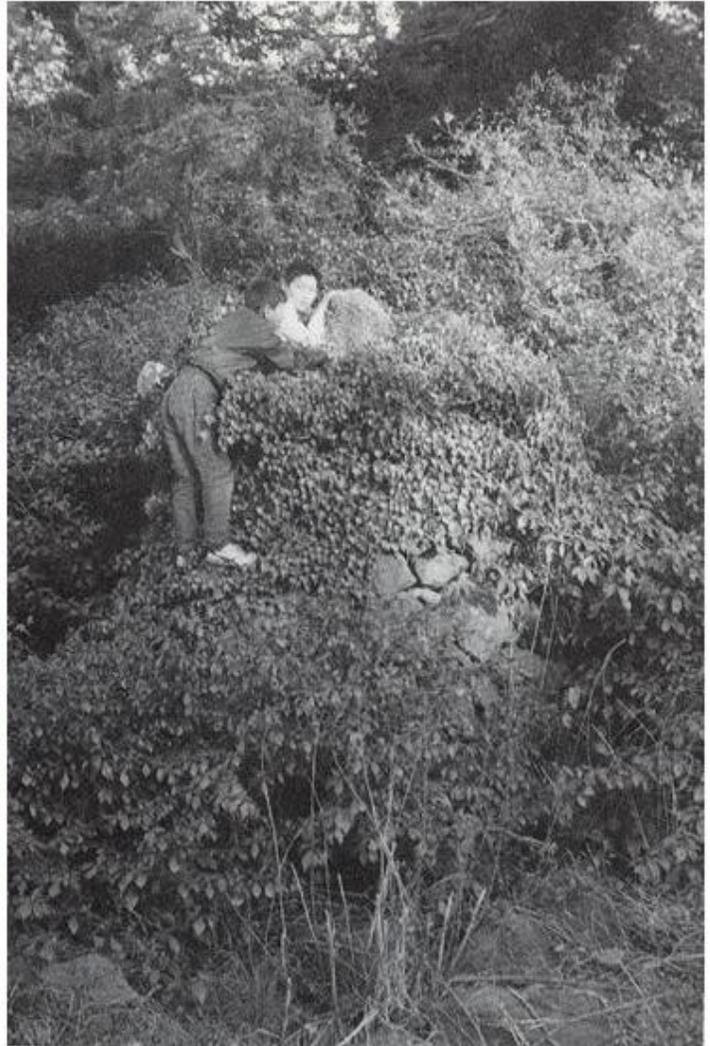
1979

Figure 2-1: The Hwasun village guard on my right, photographed in 1973 and in 1979.

... and another on my left, almost impossible to discern amidst the darkened foliage.



1973



1979

Figure 2-2: The Hwasun village guard on my left, photographed in 1973 and in 1979.

I stood in my tracks, momentarily suspended between two worlds. Suddenly I lurched forward, free to continue my descent around the curve and straightaway thereafter for a few minutes until glimpsing the first dwellings of Lower Hwasun Village. I saw no one up to that point except for an old woman who stared at me quietly from her front yard vegetable garden as I passed outside the low wall of her small *chogajib* (grass-roofed hut) within the grove. I learned later that she was herself guardian of the guardians of the grove, alert against vandalism and theft of the earth, stone and wood that comprised

the sacred grove. These were in fact spirit trees, and a few of them were hundreds of years old, and twisted into awesome shapes. □

Lower Hwasun Village in 1973 was modest in size, with no evidence of the sorts of tin sheet and cement invasions of the Korean government's *Saemaul Undong* (New Village Movement). It was still an Old Village, faithful to the past. Residents appeared to be both fisher folk and farmers, with small plots. Fresh water was abundant, and there was a spacious estuary at the village coastline, fed by an energetic flowing spring. The villagers had constructed a stone enclosure for modest bathing between themselves and the wide, deserted beach to the west. The beach was endowed by the sea with deep white sands so abundant that they climbed inland and upward as far as gravity allowed upon the lower slopes of a remarkable high stone cliff. The cliff paralleled the surf for about a half mile, forming a sort of amphitheater that pinched off in the distance where it finally marched off into the surf head-on. Lower Hwasun was all but inaccessible overland from that direction.

It was the same sort of landscape to the east of the village, though the beach was shorter, the cliffs lower; and altogether less spectacular, though still dramatic. Directly between the village and the surf was a small stone harbor, part natural and part extended and enhanced by decades of human effort and the addition by hand of thousands of boulders. This formed a breakwater capable of protecting a few small fishing boats at best. Lower Hwasun in 1973 seemed a fantasy village, apart from the world, with no great aspirations to be more than it was. It seemed to me a paradise. Beyond the modest harbor and breakwater was a broad bay opening on to the empty and foreboding expanse of the North China Sea. Beyond this breakwater and this bay was, for all islander intents and purposes, the end of the world and certainly no place anyone would want to be during a typhoon.

# Chapter 3

## Hwasun Memories (Part 2)

I had seen enough. I adopted this remote spot on Jeju Island as my summertime hideaway. As often as possible I would pass the days and evenings away alone, beneath a small makeshift shade perched halfway up the sand dune facing the sea. The sea at Hwasun had remarkable clarity. I bought a mask and fins and a snorkel. The sandy bottom of the bay was crowded with clamshells. The waves were usually good for body surfing, and offered sizable board-surfing waves on occasion (but alas, Jeju at that time had no surfboards). The summer typhoon season introduced jaw-dropping 40-foot waves on a big day. Some say the site of the famous 1653 wreck of the Dutch ship *De Sperwer* was at the west end of Hwasun Beach. I contemplated that possibility and many other things both small and profound while watching these monster August waves crush the beach at Hwasun and sipping OB beer and chewing on dried octopus. Those were marvelous days.

With my thoughts as friends, the view ever mesmerizing, and many adventurous experiences waiting for me, I was far from lonely on any given day, though never entirely alone. While very few villagers roamed my strand of beach, having no reason to do so, they were invariably friendly when I passed through their village coming and going. There was a small wine house where I sometimes lazed about learning some Korean and local dialect, and where I purchased my simple food staples of beer and fish jerky. Occasionally mainland Korean tourists or urban islanders appeared, but left quickly and seemed bored, as there were not enough other tourists at that time to attract tent vendors. Hwasun in spite of its attractiveness to me, was at that time about as remote an alternative coastal destination from Jeju City and Seogwipo for others as could be found anywhere on the island. Other attractive beaches that were more accessible, and with crowds: my general impression was that Korean beach-goers enjoyed socializing not solitude, and thus they deliberately avoided distant, isolated and solitary beaches like Hwasun.

The exception to the above was the members of the American military who organized occasional rappelling expeditions to Hwasun's high ocean-facing vertical cliff sides, looming above the sands, both for training and recreation purposes. These military were from their small base at Moseulpo, 20 minutes by bus to the west. The base was for rest and recreation purposes, and the Vietnam War was still raging, generating a lot of serious mental and physical fatigue among the troops. I heard some

amazing war stories from these soldiers, who sometimes strolled the beach and out of curiosity and paid me visits in my little sun-shelter high upon the sand slopes. For example, I will never forget the stories of an Army sniper who specialized in assassinating Viet Cong village leaders with a bow and arrow. He was very psychologically disturbed from his experiences, and so was sent down to Moseulpo to recuperate for a few summer months.

Another interesting fellow I met at Hwasun was a young, tall, muscular Australian, with blond hair that hung halfway down his back. He worked on the Catholic Sheep Farm and Woolen Mill at Hallim, a town on the north side of the island. He was known variously on Jeju Island among the handful of American Peace Corps volunteers and expatriates there as “The Aussie Army,” “Conan, The Ghost,” or just plain “Arnold.” When off the farm, he was notorious for appearing out of nowhere; always at a distance, and never approachable. He would disappear as quickly and mysteriously as he would appear. He was thus a legendary figure.

Rumors were that he had done something very bad in Australia, and so was serving out his time on Jeju Island, supervised by the Catholic clergy. His drunken escapades in dockside Jeju City pork and wine houses were heavily rumored but apparently never witnessed by the rumor-mongers. One story was that it took 15 minutes and a dozen policemen to separate Arnold from three American Navy Seals on July 4, 1972, during a midnight alleyway brawl. He was hardly scratched, the story goes. Two of his nicknames arose from his resemblance to the mighty Austrian bodybuilder Arnold Schwarzenegger, then famous for his movie role as “Conan the Barbarian.” The third nickname, “Aussie Army” derived from his surprise performance during a remarkable mountain climbing contest held shortly before I arrived on the island for the first time.

# Chapter 4

## Hwasun Memories (Part 3)

Sometime during the 1960s and early on in the Vietnam War, the American officers at the military base in Moseulpo were challenged to an annual test of endurance and strength by the Korean officers, some from the fierce Tiger Division, who were stationed at their own small base in Moseulpo Town. Two teams, one from each military base, would race up Hallasan on a chosen day once a year, from shoreline to the highest peak. The first team to the top would be the winner. The rivalry was intense, fueled in part by the stressful Vietnam experiences of Korean and American soldiers who each claimed to have the toughest troops.

If my recollections are valid after all these years, I remember that when I arrived in 1973 the rivals represented by their two platoons had already raced to the mountaintop six or eight times previously, and the victories were about evenly split between them. The exception was the year when something entirely unexpected and unusual occurred. That year, memorialized as “The Year of the Arnold” by some members of the expatriate community on the island — I believe it was 1971 — at dawn, when the two teams met at the seashore for their big race, the reclusive Australian youth from Hallim suddenly and unexpectedly presented himself as a “champion” representing the Hallim Farm and Woolen Mill. It was no secret that the Catholic Fathers at Hallim, mostly Irish, were occasional visitors to the Officers’ Club at the American base at Moseulpo. The Irish priests liked Jeju Island because its stony, green landscape reminded them of Ireland. The Irish had first introduced a profitable sheep and wool export economy to Jeju Island. At the Hallim postal office, English-language return addresses on envelopes were often written as “Cheju Ireland.” It was an inside joke for the expatriates in Hallim.

The Koreans and Americans were at first bewildered over how to proceed with the race, but then agreed that the Australian youth could enter the race as long as he promised not to “get in the way.” At the pistol shot, the racers with their backs to the sea began to sprint to the mountaintop. At the end of the day there was only one winner: The Australian; The Arnold. He had left the Korean and American army teams in his dust. Thereafter he was nicknamed “The Australian Army” but his victory was in fact a Victory for Peace as he had no connection whatsoever to any military organization.

And so on a quiet day at Hwasun in the summer of 1973 I met “Conan the Ghost” walking up the beach when I was walking down the beach. “G’day!” he said. I said “Hi!” -- and that was that. He was indeed a giant, straight off the cover of a fantasy or romance novel, but in person he seemed a gentle giant.

The Peace Corps originally sent me to Jeju Island in 1973 and I discovered Hwasun beach shortly after my arrival. After two years I departed, but then returned to Jeju several more times to work and to conduct research. I always returned to Hwasun and witnessed its changes, most of which I found distressing.

By 1985, Lower Hwasun had entirely lost its magic. The guards at the village gate and the old woman’s hut had all been vandalized. The stone piles remained, but the stone grandfathers were gone, replaced by substitute stones of no distinction. *Saemaul Undong* had come and gone and had put its heavy hand on the Hwasun landscape. Thanks to road improvement, access to the village was simple and direct. Horn-honking dump trucks and buses competed with taxis for road space. The roadsides were littered with glass, plastic and Styrofoam. Grass roofs were almost entirely gone, and most of the villagers lived under plastic and tin sheeting and tiles. There was neon! Cement was everywhere in evidence. The harbor had been enlarged significantly. The spring-fed bathing spa had deteriorated, as the spring that once led through it had been rerouted. Commercial vendors crowded the beachfront. Chicken bones floated in the tide pools.

Yet, my older and fonder memories and images of Lower Hwasun overwhelmed the still-modernizing changing landscape I saw before me. I will still go back, secure in my memories, even though I will be motivated more by morbid curiosity than by any hope of ever rediscovering the unparalleled magic and solitude of pristine Old Hwasun as I once knew and experienced it. Call me a romantic.

Looking ahead, I accept that change on Jeju Island and at Hwasun beach and harbor are inevitable. But I draw the line at an obvious travesty: I cannot imagine that a major naval base accommodating aircraft carriers and giant cruise ships is now being considered just eastward from Hwasun Beach, or that this plan has the support of the majority of Jeju Islanders! If so, the new Hwasun landscape seems destined to become an “Okinawa North,” together with all that this nasty label implies: physical, cultural and spiritual disharmonies at a vast scale. I oppose this and any sort misguided development planning and preposterous mismanagement of Jeju Island resources.

## Chapter 5

### The ‘Resting Cow’ unveiled (Udo Island part 1)

Off the northeast coast of Jeju Island is a six-square-kilometer exposed lava slab surrounded by sea named Udo (“Cow Island”). It is called Cow Island because when observed from a distance and from a certain perspective it supposedly resembles a “resting cow” in profile. I’ve viewed Udo from afar and from many perspectives on many occasions and attempted to “see” that resting cow: I have squinted my brow till it hurt, and screwed up my eyes considerably while cocking my head from side to side like a bobble-head doll. All in vain.

Meanwhile islanders and even mainland Koreans standing next to me have been able to make out that resting cow with no trouble whatsoever: “Look! There is its head” they would exclaim, pointing with extended arm and finger. “And there! Right there! See? That’s a cow leg” ... and so these futile conversations degenerated as affirmation after affirmation piled high upon my frustration. There is one volcanic cone that rises up at the southern extreme of Udo and which everyone insisted was the hip of the cow. As many times as I had viewed that cone I had never seen a cow attached to it. Then one day I came across a bird’s-eye view of Cow Island depicted on a 300-year-old geomantic (*p’ungsu*) map.

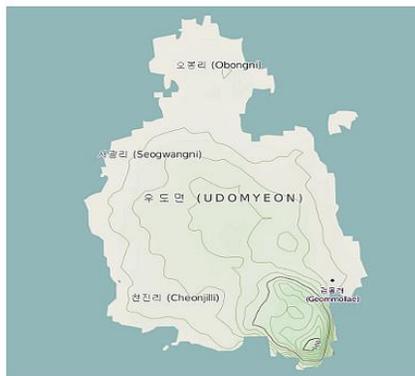


Figure 5-1: A three-century old *p’ungsu* map of Udo, a.k.a. “Cow Island.”

Figure 5-2: A topographic map of Udo.

There was the cow! The head was obvious, as were the legs and a protruding hip. I was impressed that a geomancer 300 years in the past could without wings so clearly capture on his map the aerial view of the shape of the resting cow.

The story of Cow Island grew more mysterious and mystical as I showed the map around on the island and asked questions about it. Several islanders believed the cow was alive and that islanders, generation after generation, were like so many ticks parading through its hide. Some believed their harvests of barley, sweet potatoes, garlic and peanuts might fail unless they killed every snake they found on the island that might otherwise disturb this resting cow; *their* resting cow.

At first I thought these irrational tales all amounted to a complex yarn invented to dupe impressionable outsiders like me. Especially when I heard that the island of Udo was uninhabited until designated as an official Joseon government cattle pasture. In that case the shape of the island would fit the function of the island merely by coincidence. But one of the most significant things I learned during my Peace Corps service on Jeju Island was that coincidences encountered there, when interpreted by its tradition-bound inhabitants, were *always* meaningful.

Udo is located 3.5 km off the Jeju coast. This distance is an easy swim for a pro I would guess, but I have never met anybody who had stroked it over there. “Why would anyone do that?” was the response when I asked a few of the local *haenyeo*. Besides, the currents there are treacherous — or so I’ve been told.

Anybody bound for Cow Island way back in 1973-4 could pay to be ferried over in a retired fishing boat that ran in and out of Seongsan Village harbor twice a day, in fair weather. I recall there were only eight or 10 passengers per trip each way during my numerous crossings. And these were mostly residents of Udo transporting their goods and supplies.

Few tourists ever bothered with a visit to Udo in the old days. The islet had few daytime amenities — and no reliable overnight public accommodations. However, if you were an American stranded on Udo while waiting out a storm, curious Cow Islanders would open up their hearts and doors for you, and you could teach their kids a little English in exchange for some hospitality. The majority of Udo Islanders were subsistence farmers and fisher-people with little in their larders to share. But garlic soup and seaweed is not that bad a supper, even when you are not famished.

I suppose more members of that robust breed of jaded “been there, done that” world travelers might have assigned an Udo visit into their itineraries if they had heard or read about the unique barefoot experience to be had on Popcorn Beach there. Here zillions of alabaster bits of gravel the size of grapes waited to lodge between one’s toes. On close inspection I’m here to report that they looked just like little monkey-brains. Seobin Baeksa (White-Sand Beach) is the unimaginative official name for this surreal stretch of sand. The government claims the white pebbles are some sort of coral. I asked an Udo Islander about this and he said that the small white balls are all that is left of the bones of 10,000 butchered cows dumped on the shore there in times gone by. Great kidders, those islanders!

I met many kind-hearted, generous Udo Islanders during my Peace Corps days. That said, I will never forget the day I was suddenly set upon by an angry gang of Udo *haenyeo* who shared intent to do me great bodily harm.

## Chapter 6

### Close encounters of the *haenyeo* kind (Udo Island part 2)

If you look closely at the Udo Island geomancy map below, you will find a representation of the location of a remote, deep water cove just to the right of the resting cow's hind leg. The cove is a blowout on the flanks of the cinder cone.

A visitor can hike to observe where the sea has carved into the ancient blowout. On the map, the site is located several hundred yards directly below the hip of the cow. The high cliffs around the cove form a narrow amphitheater and during most daylight hours the surface of the inlet is in the shadow of the cliffs. However, between about 3 p.m. and dusk the afternoon sunlight shining out of the west lights up the blue, crystal-clear sea water there to great depths. The surface waters within this cove are usually still and nearly as serene as a Swiss lake, a Polynesian lagoon, or a Mayan sinkhole. This is because few ocean waves can intrude very far into its sheltered recess. There are no beaches ringing the cove. The cliff walls are nearly vertical. The cove is almost inaccessible except by boat.

If one felt obliged out of curiosity to go by land in order to experience the cove at sea level — and few did in the early 70s, they would encounter a steep and challenging descent to the sea from the brinks of the surrounding lava walls. Access was a challenge. There were no paths leading down to the cove in the old days. Luck provided my footholds and handholds all along the declines and ascents, and some of these were razor sharp. Whatever the heat of the day, protective long pants, tennis shoes and a pair of gloves constituted essential climbing equipment.

I ventured to the cove for the fifth or sixth time one sweet summer day in 1974. My knapsack contained beer, dried squid, peanuts, a mask, a snorkel and a pair of fins. In my hand I held a lightweight, bamboo spear-gun equipped with a sturdy rubber-band wrist launcher. The spear was tipped with a small jagged metal trident.

It had been my experience up to that point and just about everywhere on Jejudo and on Udo that when locals encountered me approaching them along their beaches they broke into smiles — until they saw

that spear gun. Did they think I was dangerous? I never thought the question through until after the near calamity on Udo, in that cove, that I am about to describe.



Figure 6-1: Topography of Udo Island. (Source: OpenStreetMap.org). The cove is located at six o'clock.

It was a clear, warm and windless afternoon. I had climbed down the steep cliffs to a familiar narrow ledge about two feet above the waterline within the cove. The tide was rising, so I would not be forfeiting safe access to the ledge during the next few hours I planned to spend in the water.

I could see small colorful fish in the turquoise waters below the ledge. Light blue waters at and near the sunlit surface turned to dark blue waters at greater depths. I assumed there was a bottom down there somewhere, but could never detect one beyond where the midnight blues turned into an ink-block black. I left the ledge and slid into the wet abyss.

I swam about the cove with no particular destination: To and fro. Up and down. Time stood still.

My spear was mainly a defensive weapon against what I imagined to be the threat of aggressive, larger, fish. I never had to use it. I had heard or read somewhere that Korean *haenyeo* — or perhaps it was the *ama* diving women of Japan — in former times dove naked, and had giant eyes tattooed on their buttocks to scare away predator fish and sharks. Exciting; but I saved any swimming naked on Jeju for my secret plunge pools located in deep ravines found inland on the main island.

Out of nowhere the loud roar of a diesel engine interrupted the tranquility of my surroundings. I was nearly scared out of my wits to see a medium size fishing boat careening around the steep cliff at the corner of the cove. Its bow was upraised, bouncing as it rapidly bore down on me at full speed. I was at that moment dog-paddling in open water and about 50 yards from the safety of my ledge.

The hurtling craft sped at me. The roar of the engine amplified by the echoing cliffs surrounding the cove was deafening. Black smoke belched from the engine exhausts. I tossed my mask and dropped my spear and swam like hell for the ledge. Every fifth or sixth stroke I spun onto my back to assess those in hot pursuit of me, and calculated of chances to outrace them. I was kicking like crazy but the gap between us narrowed till escape seemed futile. Most certainly I would be swept under the bow, crushed, and then blended into smithereens by the propeller!

I had but seconds left and was into my Hail Marys when the boat suddenly spun sideways and careened to a sudden halt within 10 yards of me. Two or three hollering *haenyeo* also wearing fins and armed with the pronged and hooked tools of their trade leaped from the deck near the bow feet-first into the waves kicked up by the frothing, tossing boat wake. Other *haenyeo* still on board seemed prepared to follow suit. Meanwhile I was swallowing salt water and yet at the ready to try and fend off their assault with my bare hands. There I was; in a paradise gone awry: adrift, outnumbered and drowning.

”What the hell!” I challenged my assailants as they closed in around me.

A few minutes later I was back on my ledge and all alone with my thoughts. As suddenly as they had appeared into my peaceful world, they had departed it. Some left cursing while others laughed. They had scared me, but their original intention was without a doubt to beat me up. It was on the verge of doing so they first heard me speak English, and there close-at-hand they could clearly see that I was no Korean. Just another dumb American out of bounds.

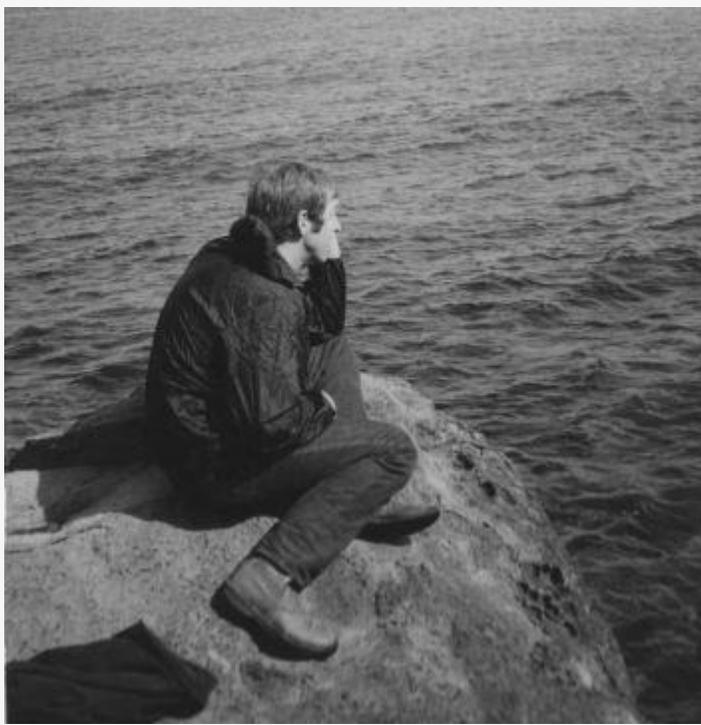


Figure 6-2: The author, aged 31, gazes at the sea from the Udo coast in 1973.

What many did not understand at the time and what I learned the hard way in that cove was that the traditional *haenyeo* of Jeju and its surrounds were still proud, rugged hunters and gatherers who did not tolerate the intrusions of outsiders and competitors trespassing inside the boundaries of their wet turf, submerged gardens and fish farms. Mental maps of underwater fields and boundaries were indelibly drawn by custom and shared experience inside their *haenyeo* heads.

Those boundaries of village *haenyeo* underwater territories were known to and shared by all *haenyeo* everywhere on Udo and Jejudo, and respected by most. Food and other resources to support *haenyeo* families were scarce offshore, and increasingly so

toward recent times and within those strict boundaries. Conceivably, every offshore underwater inch was claimed early on in history by village *haenyeo*, then exploited and also policed by them thereafter to prevent poaching by outsiders.

On that unforgettable day trip to Udo I got a good scare for a good reason. I was totally naïve, reckless and disrespectful of the islanders and should not have been treading about in their territorial waters with my diving gear and fishing spear without their permission. I was in the wrong place at the wrong time doing the wrong thing.

Things have changed dramatically on Udo in the past 40 years. Anything goes these days. Udo island *haenyeo*, if they still exist, probably don't police strangers in their underwater territories anymore because there is not much left worth protecting in the area.

More than one million tourists visit Udo every year these days and they travel to and fro from Jeju Island on speedy car-carrying ferryboats. That just doesn't seem right to me. If those numbers are correct then the trip to Udo from Jejudo must be something like the trip from Manhattan to Staten Island. Or so I am thinking.

# Chapter 7

## Mr. Bu's Jeju Island *dojang* (Part 1)

A good portion of my youth was spent on sandy beaches in Southern California. Perhaps that is why I felt so at home during my Peace Corps days on Jeju Island. Hwasun Beach, for example, reminded me a lot of Zuma Beach, north of Malibu, where mesmerizing and spectacularly-carved clear-water breakers pounded the white sands day in and day out.

In a previous column I made mention of “Arnold” the Aussie strongman, champion from Hallim Town, and shared one of his legendary exploits. “Arnold” reminded me of bodybuilders and weightlifters that had caught my attention and earned my respect ever since I was a child at play at the original Muscle Beach, located south and adjacent to the gnarly Santa Monica pier.

I grew up there amidst the cigarette butts and sand admiring the aesthetic of musclemen and acrobatic daredevils close at hand. The bravest would sail on the swinging rings 30 feet above the sand then dramatically dismount in triple-flips with twists. Some were professional stunt men. I also reveled in their macho representations as pulp fiction superheroes in the funny books and on the silver screen. Charles Atlas ads, for example, were in all the DC and Marvel comics to which I was addicted in my childhood.

Many of the athletes and show-offs at Muscle Beach worked for peanuts as extras in Hollywood movies and bunked in the “Muscle House,” an inexpensive rooming house for “health fanatics” just across the boardwalk from Muscle Beach. At an early age I willed myself into believing that I might grow up to become one of them. By the time I reached their age Muscle Beach had been moved from Santa Monica Pier to Venice Beach, near the original Gold's Gym. By that time the Muscle House had changed owners and abandoned its romantic *raison d'être*.

I would often walk the hardscrabble shoreline in Jeju City back in 1973-1974 recalling such childhood memories. And now at an advanced age I am here writing my recollections of Jeju City! How odd. Although I moved inland from Santa Monica while still young, I did succeed in becoming a bodybuilding weightlifter during high school and have continued pumping iron since for the best part of 50 years. While this particular essay is grounded firmly in my Jeju Island Peace Corps experiences, a bit

more background context helps set the stage.

I caught the body-building bug in high school from a big kid named Larry (wait for it!) Stonebreaker. He was huge, and he rode a black British BSA motorcycle. Around the schoolyard he often wore his older brother's gaudy size-3X silk reversible military tour jacket with dragons and tigers and "KOREA" embroidered on the back.

Larry looked and acted every inch his name. No stone was safe. Our school was full of stock characters straight out of the movie "Grease" (which was in fact filmed in part right across the street from my high school). There was a plethora of toughs among my fellow students, but Larry was the toughest.

The year was 1958. The tune "So Tough" by the Cufflinks was at the top of the hit parade. Tough attitude was everything and you would encounter it everywhere: in school, at the Big Boy drive-in restaurant, at the drive-in theater ... everywhere. Looking back, it seems every high school boy with attitude carried a switchblade knife. Stonebreaker alone in my high school "didn't need no stinking switchblade" He could melt one down with one stare — or so it seemed to me at the time.

Larry hung around with a stocky little guy named Toby. They were tight and inseparable like Steinbeck's George and Lenny. Mainly, they were muscular and lifted weights — and I wanted to be *just like them* — and also to wear a jacket just like Larry's that featured on the back in big letters some unknown far-away land named "KOREA".

I looked up "Korea" in a geography book in the high school library and acquired a notion to visit that place one day. The book said Korea was shaped like a rabbit and the map verified it was so. I saw the rabbit ears pointing north and the business end pointing south. Also, there appeared to be a sizeable piece cottontail about 80 or so kilometers off the south coast of the Korean peninsula that was named "Quelpart" on the map in the book. I asked around at school about that: "Where's Quelpart?" I asked my teachers. I also asked the librarian. I asked my dad, who was worldly.

Nobody had ever heard of it.

# Chapter 8

## Mr. Bu's Jeju Island *dojang* (Part 2)

I arrived on Jeju Island (named “Quelpart” for disputed reasons by early European explorers) in February of 1973. I was “sent down” to the island to serve as a Peace Corps Volunteer. If “sent down” sounds like punishment, then the joke was on the Peace Corps! Jeju City was to be my base of operations for most part of the next two years, during which time my impertinent curiosity took me here, there, and about into almost every nook and cranny on the island.

I usually roamed about Jeju Island alone, by choice. There was a Cat Stevens song from 1971 that stuck in my head a lot of the time during my Peace Corps training. That song was titled “Moon Shadow.” At some point early on in Korea I concocted an imaginary companion named “Moondoggy” that would shadow me around Korea wherever I ventured.



Figure 8-1: Moondoggy; my imaginary companion.

Moondoggy had the shape of an Al Capp “Shmoo” and was blue — with spots. He had antennae tipped with eyeballs. He looked very much like a dog that might have come from the moon. So I was never alone on Jeju, much less lonely.

What a stroke of luck! My high school fantasy had become reality. Moreover, to my surprise and joy I discovered that weight-lifting competitions were one of the oldest recreational traditions on the Island.

There was a stone object that everyone lifted for sport in the old days. Apparently every village had a “lifting stone” dedicated for use in local tests of strength. The stone was called a *tudum dol* in Jeju *mal*, the indigenous islander language. I asked a few island elders to describe the old stone-lifting competitions to me from memory. I have since published on this esoteric (but what I believe to be profound and significant) topic elsewhere, and so I will not repeat myself here — beyond just a few remarks.

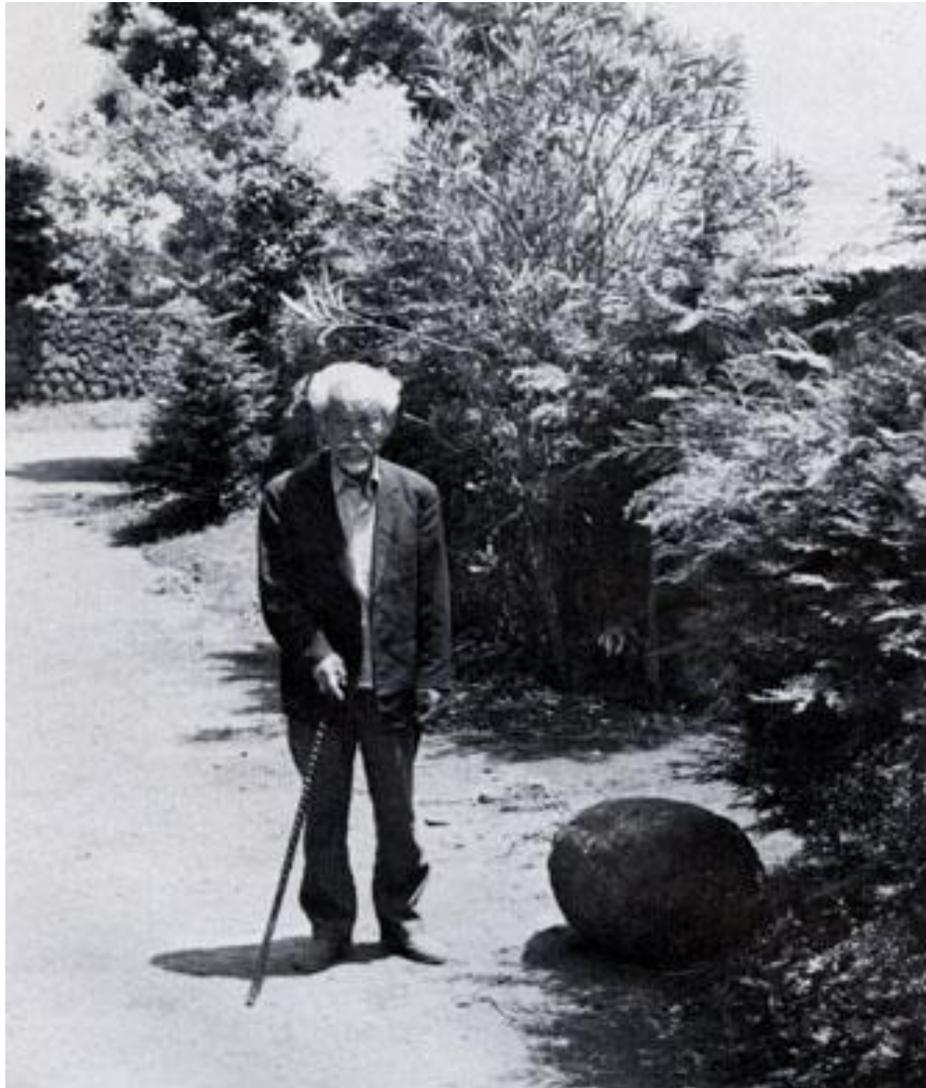


Figure 8-2: A *tudum dol* in Seongup Village. Resident, Mr. Song describes its significance.

Both men and women participated in the stone-lifting competitions I learned, and the women were often better at it than the men — or so some said. I estimated that I had arrived about 60 years too late to personally observe the last of these customary islander weight-lifting competitions.



Figure 8-3: A *tudum dol* in Hallim Town. Resident Mr. Pak validates its significance.

I later discovered that stone-lifting competitions were once ubiquitous events in locations worldwide during the Agricultural and early Industrial Ages. Traces and records of stone-lifting competitions are found for example in Germany, in Scotland, in Japan, as well as on Jeju Island.

Another thing: not every stone was designated as a lifting stone by the Islanders. Only certain stones anointed for that purpose were lifted for sport. The chosen ones had to be roundish, and the rounder the better. Plunge-pool stones from the deep ravines of Mt. Halla were prized the most. Photographed here is the near perfect-shaped and right-sized vintage lifting stone that once dwelled in Gosan Village.



Figure 8-4: The impressive rotund *tudum dol* of Gosan Village.

I pause here to wonder just where it might be today. Readers of this chapter residing on the island might be able to look around and answer this question for me.



Figure 8-5: A youngster accepts the challenge of the long-neglected Seongup Village *tudum dol*.

## Chapter 9

### Mr. Bu's Jeju Island *dojang* (Part 3)

It did not take me long to discover what appeared to be a body-building/weight-lifting *dojang* in Jeju City. Call it a “gym” if you don't think body-building/weight-lifting is a martial art. However, “*dojang*” translates into English as “the place of ‘the Way’” and so, to the extent that the gym I discovered is the “place of ‘the Way’” to learn body-building, it qualifies as a *dojang*.

Or. Perhaps what I thought to be a *dojang* at that time was merely a hangout or clubhouse — or even something more sinister having to do with the organized informal or underground economies on Jeju Island at that time. The trash collectors, the sidewalk vegetable vendors, even the shoeshine boys, were organized, bossed around, and territorial I discovered.

The *dojang* was located on the third floor of a four-story warehouse near the waterfront in the heart of the red-light district. The ground-floor of the warehouse was mainly prostitute cribs. I don't know what was behind all the locked doors I encountered on the second floor. In contrast, most of the third-floor rooms were not secured and easily accessed. These rooms contained a lot of brooms, mops, and plastic jugs of chemicals. In most of these third-story rooms there were rows piled high of hemp bags stuffed with what my nose told me was dried sea food.

The *dojang* itself was the first door up the staircase on the third floor, just opposite the stairwell. The door to the *dojang* was always open. There was a naked bulb hanging above the top step that burned around the clock. Just inside the open door of the *dojang* there was a wooden chair visible from anyone standing on the last riser at the top of the staircase. The chair faced a wooden desk. That desk, however, was hidden from view until finally crossing the threshold of the *dojang*. The chair was always occupied. No one could come up the stairs without being seen by whoever happened to be occupying the chair at that time. That person would most often be Mr. Bu, the owner and manager of the *dojang*.

Mr. Bu was short, dark, and curly haired. He was built like a fireplug. I observed over many months that he ran a tight ship and was a strict disciplinarian – and perhaps a tad sadistic. He received plenty of respect from his students. I was not a student. I just paid to lift weights in his gym.

Mr. Bu invariably wore a muscle-revealing “Hey Stella!” T-shirt. He wore it in the spring, in the summer and deep into the fall. In the dead of winter he covered the T-shirt with an old brown leather jacket. There was a battered one-*yeontan* (briquet) coal stove next to the chair. A tarnished stovepipe led from behind the stove top straight up to the ceiling. From there it stretched toward its terminus at the closest window, where it disappeared through a plywood board.

If you have read Charles Dickens and know of Fagin, and if I told you that my *dojang* was “a Fagin’s Den,” then you might imagine more easily visualize the unusual premises I will be introducing to you in the next chapter.

# Chapter 10

## Mr. Bu's Jeju Island *dojang* (Part 4)

It was a “Fagin’s Den.” Mr. Bu’s dim-lit hideaway was dark yet spacious, functional yet austere according to his meager means and unpretentious design. It was part man cave and part tree house for boys. Therein grunts, sweat, swearing and testosterone dominated the sensory landscape. In addition, ragamuffins and street urchins, boys and a few girls, constantly on secret errands, ran up and down the warehouse stairs and in and out of the *dojang* throughout the average day and far into the average night.

My regimen was to spend between one and two hours a day exercising in the *dojang*. I usually exercised in the late afternoons. I dropped by occasionally and unexpected from time to time. There were always a few to a half-dozen or so club members either working out or milling around the desk. Most were just kids. I didn’t know who came and went or what went on when I was not there.

I came to recognize several of these kids as familiar faces because they would frequent the same alleyway row of rough *makgeolli* (Korean rice wine) bars and pork rib dives that were my favorite hangouts after dark. These establishments were located just beyond the back door of the warehouse and accessible by a pedestrian bridge across a pungent open sewer that fed into the boat harbor, itself located several hundred yards downstream.

These cheap rib and wine houses had what I thought at the time was “real character.” I spent many enjoyable, solitary evening hours in a chosen few of their smoky, low-ceilinged attics, casually soaking up all the sensational aspects of waterfront local color with my rice wine. Into these decadent dens came the *dojang* boys and girls to sell gum and to gather discarded pork and beef ribs, and chicken bones, tossed by customers upon the floor. Management would eventually holler at the kids and stage a poor performance of chasing them out. These were rough joints in a rough neighborhood full of roughnecks. But the locals were tight and righteous according to their own rules. Nobody was going to let anybody starve to death in this earthy neighborhood.

Back to the *dojang*: Compared to gyms back in the USA Mr. Bu’s gym appeared poorly equipped. Indeed, none of the equipment reflected light. There was no chrome or even stainless steel anywhere in

the place. Instead there was mainly cement, some wood and at most a bucket full of iron. Mr. Bu's *dojang* resembled more a medieval dungeon than anything close to a private gym in America. Yet, what little weight-lifting equipment that was there easily surpassed my "sufficient and necessary" list for what it required for me to systematically build muscle and be buff.

Granted, the workout benches wobbled dangerously. The weights I lifted were imperfectly round discs cast in pairs from primitive cement molds. The paired discs were of different sizes, and thus had different weight values. All the discs were thick. Each disk had a round hole in its center just large enough to accommodate the insertion and removal of the ends of a six foot-long 1-1/4 inch steel water pipe with its center wrapped in medical tape.

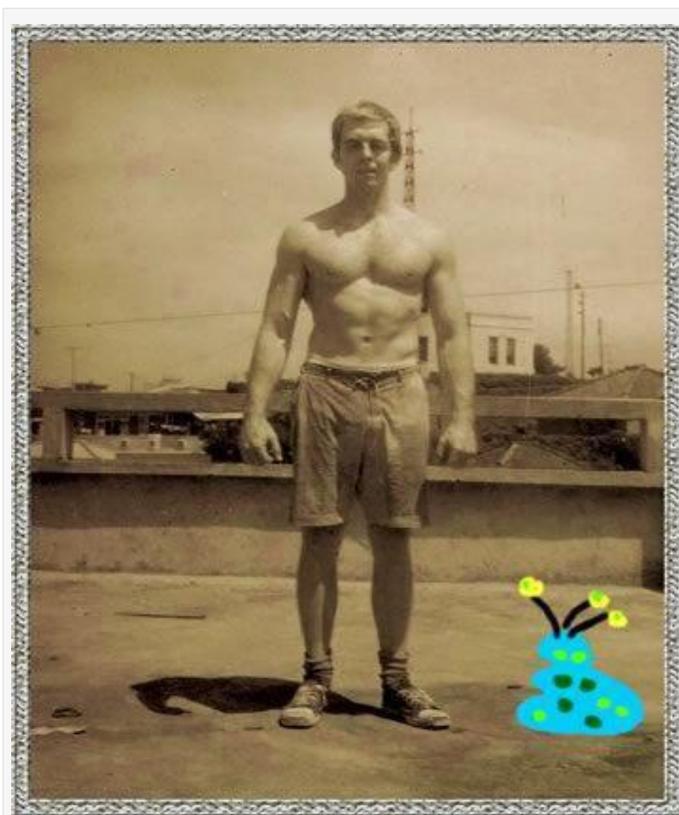


Figure 10-1: The author on the roof of Mr. Bu's *dojang* with Moondoggy, 1973

The floors in the gym were also cement. If you dropped cement discs hard on the cement floor, odds were that the discs would shatter. The bucketful of iron contained a few pairs of mostly lightweight, rust-stained iron dumbbells. There was no shower in the *dojang*, but I think Mr. Bu and the boys had a shower located somewhere on the first floor that they used. But they never took me there. That was about it. The whole place was day lit through a few windows. The walls and ceiling were also cement.

Above that ceiling was a roof, accessible from an extension of the same staircase that led to the door of the *dojang*. There was an unlocked door from the top of the stairway that opened onto the roof. Between exercise sets on hot summer days, when there was no breeze blowing off the harbor to cool the *dojang* through its few open windows, I would climb up to the rooftop to escape the stifling heat and the pungent stench of sweat mixed with whatever it was that was stockpiled in those third-floor rooms stacked with bulging burlap bags. From the high roof top I could wander the edges of the warehouse to view the four quarters and the goings-on of the city folk below.

Far to the south loomed majestic Mt. Halla. Near to the east rose a verdant volcanic cinder cone named Sarabong. To the north, stinking of diesel oil and fish was portside. To the west lay the bulk of Old Jeju City through which Chilsung-ro (Seven Stars Road) was the principal pedestrian path wending away from the tawdry foot of my warehouse gym to eventually become, at safe distance, the major upscale shopping district in Jeju City at that time.

Life was good. I looked and felt like a Greek god surveying his world from atop some Mount Olympus.

# Chapter 11

## Unexpected encounters with snakes, spiders and 10,000 crickets (Part 1)

How long is the coastline of Jeju Island? Ask anyone with an Internet connection and they will tell you that the official circumference of Jeju Island is 263 kilometers. This is mostly a “convenient truth” and fodder for armchair geographers. So instead ask anyone who has attempted hiking those many stretches of the island littoral at the high tide line. Their experience should validate the conjecture that the Jeju shoreline on close inspection is *infinite* in length. Its jagged edge is ill-defined and anyway zigs and zags and reverses directions so often that it becomes a fractal foil for defeating any measuring device, no matter how sophisticated. On even closer observation the shoreline length actually *increases* in length. Frankly, the question posed is more likely to inspire a zen koan (*kong'an*) than a scientific explanation. Is it little wonder then that mystic tourists from around the world can spend their entire vacations on Jeju Island standing alone at the water’s edge just above the splash zone peacefully contemplating the Natural Order?

And how vast in essence is the island’s gorged, gouged, pocked and pitted surface? 1,846 km<sup>2</sup>? Hardly. “Of infinite size” more accurately the dimension as hiked along any trajectory across Mt. Halla’s crazy quilt of hills, crags, canyons and hollows, where there may be unexpected encounters waiting around every corner.

For example, one summer day in 1973 I was hiking up the rugged middle reaches of Tamna Gorge and discovered on a high shelf in the canyon wall the secluded mouth of a narrow crawl space that wound its way into total darkness. It then abruptly opened in a natural subterranean amphitheater lit by a score or more of burning candles. Most probably I had entered into an un-collapsed segment of a lava tube that some islanders had converted into a shrine of some sort. If so, then I had just missed or perhaps interrupted a rite of some sort. Shades of Gunga Din!

Whoever had lighted those candles had just prior to my arrival either exited by another path or temporarily retreated further into the mountain. Imagine my frustration. My flashlight batteries were weak and it was late in the afternoon so I decided to return to explore the extent and depths of the cavern more thoroughly on another occasion.

A few weeks later I retraced my steps up the same deep and tortuous canyon — but this time more

stealthily. I was a stone's throw short of reaching the mysterious cavern when I suddenly heard voices at close range off to my right. I immediately sat down on a large stone; one of many strewn about the canyon floor by the frequent flash flood waters that careened and thundered down the gorge seaward whenever it rained long and hard upon the mountain.

Three gray-haired women in robes were busy preparing a meal within a low-walled, elevated stone circle. There they chattered away in the Jeju dialect; too preoccupied to notice my arrival on the scene. So there I sat stone-still, observing them from a distance of 10 yards for perhaps 10 minutes. Anticipating the inevitable, I was prepared to face some rough language delivered at high decibels. But, when the three women finally took notice of me there was no commotion made at all. Instead they briefly convened an ad hoc confab entirely in whispers. And then, to my complete surprise, they beckoned me over to join them. They were entirely hospitable and good natured during the hour or so we spent together. They spoke no English and I had but six months of Korea-language training under my belt at that time. Still, I gathered among other things that they were sisters and also *haenyeo*. Then they packed up and left.

Before leaving they tidied up the stone circle, which I learned was a shrine to their Mountain God. As we ate we faced a rectangular slab of stone temporarily propped up against the inside of the low wall surrounding the shrine enclosure. There was a food sacrifice neatly laid out in front of this tablet: fruits, vegetables, fish, what appeared to be condiments — and a large bottle of *soju* (an alcoholic beverage). These jovial, gracious women had apparently been imbibing from that bottle during their preparations.

The tablet positioned before us was about 20 inches high, a foot wide and an inch thick. Carved into the slab facing us, written in *hangeul*, were the symbols for “*SAN*” [Mountain] and “*SHIN*” [Spirit]. As their final duty prior to departing the three deposited the sacred slab face down into a shallow repository. The repository was a perfect fit for the slab and my guess is that it was probably originally excavated into the floor of the stone circle decades if not centuries in the past. They performed this task with exaggerated care while chanting words I did not understand.

Perhaps I am overly suspicious (not to mention superstitious) but what I remember most about this seemingly random surreal encounter with these members of this Mt. Halla *Sanshin* cult was that, firstly, they did not try to hide from me the secret location where they hid the tablet, and secondly, that despite their generosity these women never greeted me nor bid me farewell. While not mistreated, I felt less than human in their company and more like an experimental ingredient in their ritual stew. My imagination began to spin out scenarios: Perhaps they thought I was sent to join them? Perhaps I *was* sent to join them?

The experience anyway had played out in its entirety like a television docudrama. Pre-scripted? If so, my role was “the oblivious stranger.” Thus, though well-fed, I nevertheless felt manipulated. I felt I was missing something. Left alone there after their departure and contemplating these thoughts, I had to count my fingers and my toes to convince myself that I was still intact. The encounter was real enough as I have described it here. As for my wild interpretations: perhaps they were simply the result a strong *soju* doing its work on my fertile imagination that hot summer afternoon long ago.

A few months later I had an unexpected encounter of a more threatening sort. In the dense forest zone of Hallasan and just east of the peak there were at that time many fly-by-night mushroom farms, all remote and hidden away like moonshiner stills in the heart of Appalachia. I am sure these have all been regulated out of business by now.

In 1973, odds were good that if you ran across any barely perceptible path within the high forest and followed it to its terminus you would either wind up at a mushroom farm or out on Jeju's 1131 highway (also known as the 5.16 Road), a serpentine highway that was the first tarmac to transverse the island over Mt. Halla to connect Jeju City with Seogwipo Town.

I was trekking along one of these faint footpaths through the forest litter on a cool, clear day around noon when I nearly stepped on a viper. It was lounging at a warm spot on the trail where a spear of sunshine had poked through the forest canopy all the way to the ground. It lunged at me half-heartedly and the maneuver sent me sprawling onto the forest floor adjacent to the path. As I scampered again to my feet to get my bearings, this viper, a short-tailed *mamushi* -- the dreaded "three step snake" of Jeju Island (called this because of its fast-acting, deadly venom) -- coiled to strike again. But I was safely out of range. So I reached into my knapsack for my little Kodak camera and snapped a shot at close range, and then moved in for another. But the shy viper was already on the move and had dived into its hole before I could snap another.

It took two weeks to get that roll of film developed. And when the day of delivery arrived at the photo shop I rushed down the block and down the stairs of the nearest tea room to scrutinize the twelve photos on the roll searching for the proof of my snake encounter. Even in the dim light of the *dabang* I could discern that eleven of the photos displayed details of Mt. Halla's hidden mushroom gardens. The twelfth image presumably captured the snake amidst a chaos of forest litter. But I needed to move to a place with more light to be sure.

So I left the dark environs of the tea room and went next door to a donut shop where the light was better. I sat down and took out the photo turned it every which way without finding the snake. Several high school girls in uniform were gathered around a table next to mine. In desperation I passed the photo to one of them and asked her slowly in English "What ... do ... you ... see?"

I had picked the right student. She responded in turn: "I ... see ... a ... SNAKE."



Figure 11-1: a snake in the grass; “Can you see me?”



Figure 11-2: “Can you see me *now*?”

## Chapter 12

### Unexpected encounters with snakes, spiders and 10,000 crickets (Part 2)

“How far is it from your *yo* (folding floor mattress) to your *byeonso* (latrine; outhouse)?” he asked me.

“He” in this instance was a returned Peace Corps Volunteer who had also once served in Korea. His first name was Don but his surname now escapes me. His volunteer group had arrived in Korea in the late 1970s. My own had arrived in the early 1970s. We were in a sports bar at the Washington National Airport trading stories from our service days. It was 1988.

I had never met Don before, but every returned Peace Corps Volunteer could answer the particular question he posed with remarkable precision. It is one of several “proof-of-endurance” questions that returned Vols as strangers always ask each other in order to establish cred and bragging rights. The lead-in question is invariably “Where did you serve?” Don had served in Suwon near Seoul while I had served on *Jeju Island*. Ping! Point going to Nemeth!

Peace Corps headquarters in Seoul sent volunteers “down” to South Korean urban and rural destinations from 1966 through 1981. Few volunteers requested to serve “way down” on Jeju Island in the early days. There were rumors... For example, it was hardly a secret among volunteers in training that Jeju of all sites had more than its fair share of venomous snakes and spiders.

Before Peace Corps officially assigned me to serve on Jeju Island someone on the training staff pointedly asked me how I felt about centipedes, spiders and snakes, to wit, “Do you have any phobias about living or working where their occasional distractions might discourage or prevent you from performing your assigned duties?”

“Just how bad could it be?” I asked myself before responding “No.” In truth, I was uncertain. I recall visiting my Uncle Fritz in south Florida at age eight. He told me a “true” story about a toilet and a spider that still makes me squirm. Does taking the simple precaution to lift a toilet seat in search of a spider before sitting down qualify as a phobia? As it turned out, living amidst spiders on Jeju Island all

during my term of service was *almost* unremarkable.

In 1973 there indeed were spiders galore, but no toilet seats. However, it was my sad experience that even *one* spider lurking in the wrong place at the wrong time can create a terrible distraction and leave a normal person teetering on the lip of lunacy.

“The short way, at a walk, was 65 steps or 35 seconds. The long way was 85 steps and 45 seconds” I replied to Don’s question, then added: “But I was usually on the run!” We laughed. Stomach disorders and intestinal parasites were the shared experience of *all* KPCVs in those days, no matter where they served. Don was duly impressed with my reply. I could almost read his mind: “This Nemeth has *endured!*” He continued to pursue the question: “Two paths to the outhouse, eh? Why didn’t you just take the shortcut *all* the time?” Suddenly swamped with many vivid memories I had long repressed, I paused, then replied.

“Well, Don, there was this spider...”

When I arrived on Jeju Island in February of 1973, I had a worksite but my place of residence had yet to be arranged. So I spent my first week on the island in a humble *yeogwan* (hotel) before Mr. Kim, my local on-site sponsor and co-worker, walked me and my gear over to a *hasukjib* (boarding house) in Old Tapdong, near the seawall, where a small, single room awaited me.

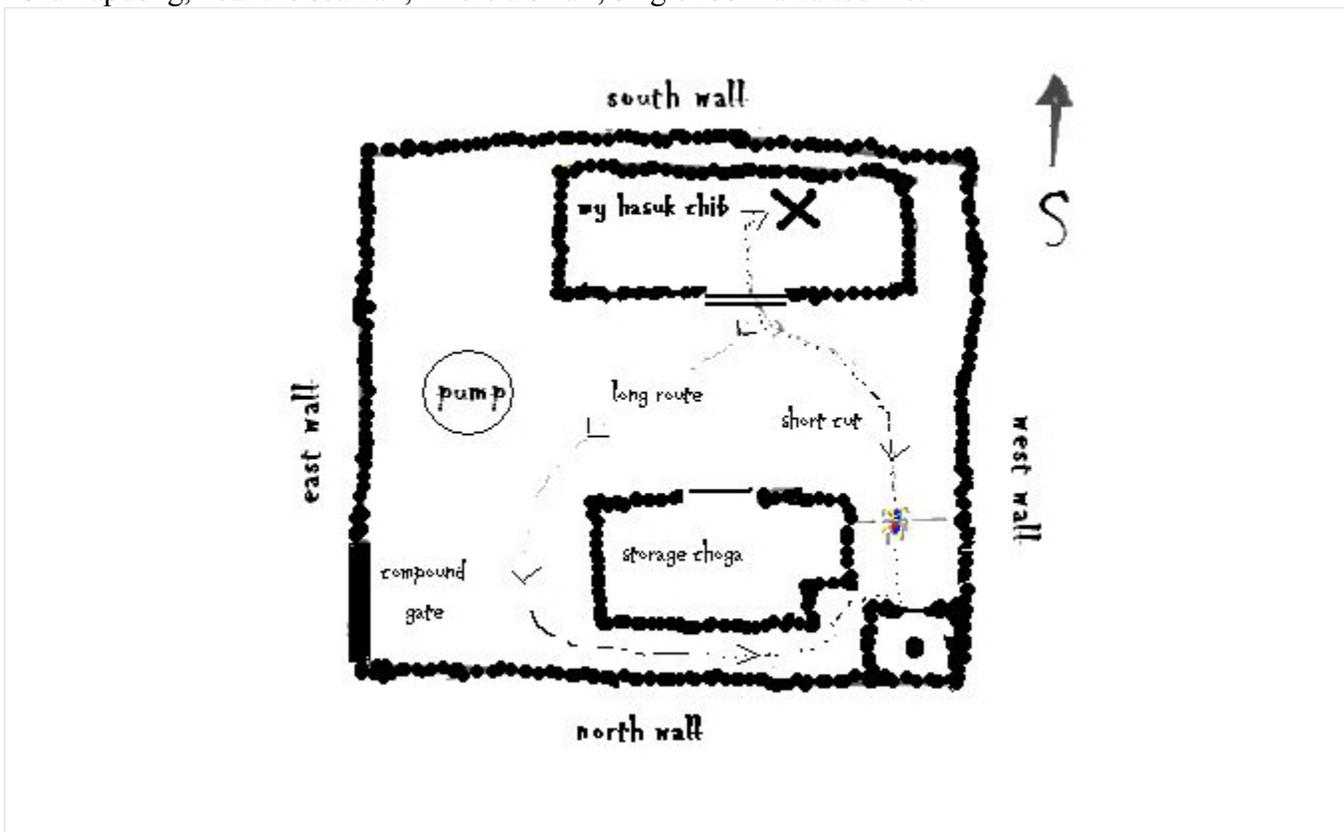


Figure 12-1: Compound layout of my *hasukjib*.

The *hasuk* was an impressive old *chogajib* (grass-roofed residence) with spartan amenities located within a spacious lot surrounded by high lava block walls that formed a square perimeter. The owner, as I eventually discovered, was a businessman residing in Seoul. He rarely visited the island. His wife managed the boarding house. She had four children, all of school age. Imagine their joy in that day and age on Jejudo to hold captive in their *hasuk* a rare native English speaker!

There were eight rooms in the boarding house. Four of these faced the central entryway. The sliding rice-paper doors of these rooms opened onto a magnificent old hallway. Well-worn wooden planks comprised its floor. These were untouched by shoes and polished with decades — perhaps centuries — of gentle wear and loving care. My room was one of two of the four rooms located innermost within the *hasuk*. It was a choice spot both winter and summer. The floor of my room was oiled paper over a clay *ondol* (under-floor heating). Room furnishings comprised of a wall socket, a ceiling lamp and one tall bedding-storage cabinet with several drawers and a clothes-hanging rod within. Given my basic needs and few material wants, along with the simple proclivities of my temperament, my boarding house room was, all considered, quite lovely. It seemed heaven on earth — except when I had to journey outdoors to wash up and/or void my bowels.

The communal water pump for the boarding house was located at 10 paces from the *hasuk* entryway and in the center of a cement circle measuring about four feet in diameter. The pump was the principal feature in the courtyard. Beneath the cement circle, I assumed, the pump tapped into a well sunk into a freshwater spring. There was a pipe leading to a showerhead attached to the pump and rising above it.

From the courtyard I could glimpse above the eastern wall of the compound the smokestack of the closest public bath, well within walking distance. My habit once I had settled into boarding house life was to frequent the public bath adjacent to my workplace. Other occupants of my *hasuk* either used the next-door neighborhood bathhouse or, in fair weather, used the pump and shower within the *hasuk* compound. Sometimes, and especially during the dog days of summer, I would return to my boarding house unexpected during mid-day, pull open the solid wood entry gate leading into the compound, and discover a half-naked woman boarder — or the buxom manager herself — standing barefoot on the cement circle beneath the shower. On such occasions these women kept their towels within reach to drape over their shoulders until I crossed the courtyard and entered my room.

I bring this up mainly because in 1973 when a guy entered into a typical men's public bath house locker-room, there invariably would be a vintage oil painting of a reclining semi-nude woman positioned prominently high on a wall facing the entrance. These paintings were not all that different from the semi-erotic saloon art nude paintings commonly nailed to the wall above the long bar facing a room full of cowboys in boisterous saloons throughout the 19th-century American West.

Men and boys from my *hasuk* patronized the local public bath in gangs, usually in the evenings. I rarely saw men at the courtyard pump for any purposes other than washing their hands and faces, or brushing their teeth.

Beyond this pump was another unoccupied *choga*, used as a communal storage shed by the owner as well as the occupants of the *hasuk*. I had nothing to store there, which gave everyone else more space for their own possessions. Located about 10 feet behind the storage *choga* was the northernmost long black wall of the compound, piled high with lava stones, with the gaps between the stones filled with clay so outsiders could not peer into the compound through the wall. Behind the high wall at a distance of perhaps 100 yards was the Jeju City seawall and breakwater, and beyond that the open sea. Between my *hasuk* and the shore, ranging away cheek to jowl, were numerous other *chogas* interspersed with a few tile-roofed residences.

Standing at the pump and facing the storage *choga* and the high wall behind it, were located 1) at the extreme right, where the northern and eastern compound walls converged, a single access gate into the *hasuk* grounds comprised of two massive wooden doors; and 2) at the extreme left where the northern and western compound walls converged, an enclosed squat toilet. Access into the outhouse entailed tugging on a short rope nailed to a plywood door that was hung on hinges.

“*Dwitgan*” (in Korean vernacular) was a common term used at that time for an outhouse. All the *hasuk* residents shared this single facility. The shortcut to the *dwitgan* from the boarding house was a straight shot out its entryway: 65 steps and 35 seconds. The final 30 steps before a boarder reached the *dwitgan* door was a narrow passageway between the western compound wall and the west-facing wall of the storage *choga*. The passage was a yard wide. I could begin to smell the outhouse at about step 25. Within the *dwitgan* door the stench rising from the pit was stifling on my first visit. By my hundredth visit I was entirely habituated to the odor.

The day I moved into the boarding house I was given a tour of the grounds by management. She walked me to the outhouse via the long route: 85 steps and 45 seconds. The following day, I discovered the shortcut on my own. That is when and where I first observed at eye level the enormous *mudang geom*i (sorceress spider) that I would go to war with on and off throughout the spring, summer, fall and into the following year.

Her orb-shaped and dramatically-engineered golden web straddled the pathway between the *hasuk* and the outhouse. She blocked my way entirely. She was insolence objectified. No wonder everybody in the boarding house took the long path to the outhouse.

Scientists, I soon learned, call her *Nephila clavata* (“golden orb web-weaver”).



Figure 12-2: *Nephila clavata*, a.k.a “golden orb web-weaver, a.k.a. sorceress spider, a.k.a. harlot spider, a.k.a. “whore!”

I took to calling her “Whore!” This was in fact the direct translation of *Jorōgumo* (harlot spider) from Japanese folklore, where her species is legend.

On our first meeting she occupied the very center of her web as I approached, and remained there defiantly. I was awestruck by her audacious shape, size, color and demeanor. She was a good two inches across at that time, dark blue, with yellow pin stripes running up and down her hairy legs, and she sported a shocking red beauty mark. She had spiny legs and claws arranged menacingly. She was disgusting... And yet...

Her golden orb was securely anchored to the stalks and branches of winter vegetation high and low, all hugging and clinging to the black stone walls on both sides of the narrow path. There was just no avoiding her giant web except to retreat back up the path and circle around the storage *choga*.

Retreat? Never! I picked up the nearest stick and entirely demolished the web within 10 seconds. I did not want to kill her. I was Peace Corps. I just wanted to teach her a lesson. My stick resembled a cone of cotton candy when I was finished with the web. This, I tossed it over the fence. Her highness was somewhere within the sticky ball. I felt pretty good. The path was mine. I had performed a public service. I marched triumphant to the privy.

# Chapter 13

## Unexpected encounters with snakes, spiders and 10,000 crickets; “Harlot’s Web: The Battle Intensifies”

My victory was short-lived. I slept well, woke up at dawn with a full bladder and headed for the outhouse via the shortcut. Guess what? The orb weaver was back with a new web. She occupied the very center of the orb again. We stared at each other eyes to eyes.

It was as if nothing had changed; as if yesterday never happened. Who would stand aside today? I blinked first. I had to pee so bad that I had to turn on my heels in a mad rush to the privy via the long route around the east side of the storage *choga* (grass-roofed building). As I turned the first corner at a trot I spied the manager’s room alit and the hallway sliding door ajar. I presumed she was watching me. I wondered why? A man on the way to the privy couldn’t be all that interesting.

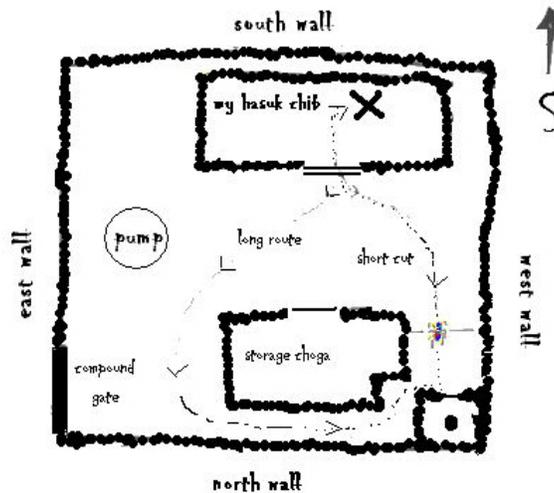


Figure 13-1: My *hasuk* compound map.

I yanked the rope on the outhouse door. An eye-watering wafting stench emerged from the pit to greet me. I quickly did my business and emerged from the privy with dark thoughts of revenge. Meanwhile, before me on the shortcut path, my eight-legged nemesis rode high and happy upon her gilded web. She and her newest creation glistened with the morning dew at daybreak. The aesthetic of the view ahead along the narrow path that framed the courtyard, as seen through her shimmering orb's web lattices in the dawn's early light, was breathtaking. But I had no camera, nor was I in any mood to snap a photo. So what if the harlot spider was a bit of a talented artist and engineer? In my opinion she was mainly a show-off and a nuisance. Her back was to me. Did she know I was there? Did she care?

I picked up the nearest stick, and for the first (but not the last) time bellowed "Whore!" as I charged at the web with my right arm and weapon aloft, making great circular motions like a swashbuckling Scaramouch. It took me about 15 seconds to demolish her web. When I had finished, the stick again resembled a cone of cotton candy. One thing that I noticed as I tossed the big-spider-ball-on-a-stick over the west wall of the compound was that it seemed slightly larger and heavier than it had the previous night. This got me to thinking. Perhaps I had initially underestimated my adversary? If so, I should better gather my thoughts and learn a few things prior to future encounters.

Subsequent days, weeks and months, proved me correct. I had a sneaking suspicion that the spider was indeed getting bigger and her web stronger every time I tore it down. This was disconcerting and I surmised could lead to no good. And other strange events were occurring in and around the outhouse related to the spider. Some of these I could not fathom.

For one, boardinghouse management was becoming perplexed and perturbed at my erratic behavior around the outhouse. Word got back to my workplace and to my sponsor/colleague, Mr. Kim. He began to display an exaggerated concern for my health and welfare. I reassured him I was fine, but then inexplicably, my workload was reduced and I was invited to go home early to rest and eat. Simultaneously, Mr. Kim had begun to complain of an ulcer.

Surely this was not my fault. Was I not successfully living a normal Peace Corps down-country volunteer life? Acclimatized to my new environment? Persevering against any and all adversity? Fitting in? I was certainly keeping busy: I had my day job, my gym, my nights out on the town, and my weekends to trek about the island. Case closed. There was nothing wrong with me.

Something else: I had not been a resident of my boarding house for even three months when I suddenly noticed one morning that there were no loose branches laying about the outhouse when previously there had been sticks aplenty. Spring was fading into summer. The flora and fauna populations of Jeju were exploding with vigor and vitality. The outhouse was also abuzz (if you catch my drift). Meanwhile the harlot's web (even if aloft for a short time) would grow heavy with flies, moths, crickets and such. The bushes and trees already hugged, and now began to drape over, both outhouse paths. So why were there no sticks lying about? Something was up.

My first thought was to attribute fantastic agency and intelligence to my adversary, the orb weaver, who had in fact grown remarkably larger in size since our first encounter. I had been asking around about the peculiarities and habits of her sort and discovered that, for one, she is prone to eating her dismantled webs (not to mention eating her little husbands!). Ingesting so much protein is necessary for her to amass the energy and materials to spin more prolifically and elaborately day after day. This would explain why my harlot spider had taken on girth and extended her reach in such a short time since my arrival. She was a good three inches across by June. The more I barged through her web the bigger she grew.

This would also explain why, day after day, week after week, her golden orb had become more resilient to my attacks. Rumor had it that the web strands spit out by the orb weaver could achieve the tensile

strength of steel! Holy Spiderman! Hearing this, I imagined the harlot might eventually weave an orb as substantial as the Eiffel Tower along the shortcut between my boarding house room and the outhouse *if* my daily destruction of her web were to continue on for, say, a year or more. Thus I surmised that the harlot would 1) eat her way out of the shambles of a web I left in the wake of my daily attacks, 2) cough up an even bigger and better web for the next morning, and then 3) hide all the sticks and branches leading to the privy, all in anticipation of my next return. Removing the sticks and branches every day was her intelligent plan to disarm me. It was all becoming perfectly clear.

But it turned out that it was the boarding house manager who had suddenly made it her business to deprive me of my access to web-busting sticks. She collected them daily while I was at work. She disapproved of my aggression toward the harlot spider. This I discovered during a climactic meeting between us over the issue. I had to sit politely through my landlady's elaborate yarn (translated into bad English by her eldest daughter) about how the shortcut path to the outhouse was actually "protected" by the spider, and how everyone in the compound considered it fortunate for themselves that a luck-and-wisdom-bringing-orb weaver had long ago chosen that particular place on the premises to occupy, and how they all respected the spider, and so on and so forth. She neglected to mention that, in addition to all this folklore and myth, having a giant carnivorous spider that loves eating flies, moths and crickets and hangs out adjacent a privy is perfectly logical.

Management concluded her gentle reproach by more or less warning me as a newcomer to also respect the territorial rights of the spider and to take the long way to the outhouse in the future. She also asked me not to shout "Whore!" every time I went to the privy — and especially in the early hours of the morning.

## Chapter 14

### Unexpected encounters with snakes, spiders and 10,000 crickets (Part 4)

After my eviction I moved to the south side of the island.

From there I traveled back and forth over the high volcano via the 5.16 Road to my workplace in Jeju City. My frequent commute was neither a grind nor as boring as you might think. In 1974 a one-way minibus from the south coast to the north coast took well over an hour, and cost something like 800 won, which at that time was a dollar or so, American. If this sounds expensive, consider that included in this price was a white-knuckles adventure ride you might pay a fiver for at any quality amusement park in the U.S.

Standard-size highway buses were far too large to maneuver the narrow roadway and hairpin curves of the 5.16 Road back then. These big buses were restricted to circumnavigating the island at low elevations. If you were on a tight schedule and/or wanted to cross the high volcano in a timely fashion using public transport your options were minibus, taxi — or forget it. From November through March even these options were often either unavailable or narrowed considerably due to the fairly high frequency of hazardous snow and ice conditions along the 5.16 Road at the higher elevations. Sometimes the 5.16 Road shut down entirely due to snowstorms, perhaps for days at a time. It was a crap shoot. Sometimes when a storm threatened you just had to bet your life that your vehicle driver was experienced and sober.

Incidentally, the most beautiful sight I have ever seen was the view of Jeju City at 2 a.m. in the morning from high atop the 5.16 Road in the aftermath of a snowstorm. I was hiking down the roadway toward the city with my taxicab driver after he had hit a patch of black ice and spun his vehicle off the roadway into a pasture. We decided to abandon the vehicle and walk back to civilization. We were still above the snowline but the temperature was actually mild and a balmy wind was blowing. The setting was unnatural. The scene was vivid and unforgettable. Already the snow on the asphalt had melted away. It was silent and moonless. The night sky was crystal clear with a multitude of stars flooding the firmament. Before us, beyond the city lights, hundreds of squid boats filled the inky sea. These boats were equipped with powerful squid lamps. They all blazed away as a spectacular star-like panorama in the distance both near and far off shore. Where the sky and ocean actually merged that night was imperceptible. There was simply no hint of a visible horizon: city lights on the land merged seamlessly into shrimp boat lights on the ocean then into countless points of stars drawn upon heaven's blackboard. Words fail me here. The moment was existential. Perhaps only those poetic terms uttered by Roy Batty in *The Blade Runner* can begin to capture its profound and fleeting sensuality of that

dramatic moment: “I’ve seen things you people wouldn’t believe: Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion; I watched c-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time ...”.

As well as I recall fondly my romantic “night of the 10,000 stars” I also remember with a tad of horror my far from romantic “night of the 10,000 crickets” that occurred about six months later. I have a bit of a bad history with crickets that helps explain my dislike of them prior to my arrival on Jeju Island. Crickets in the wild, at least during some phases of their life cycle and under certain conditions of environmental stress, are swarming creatures.

I was once apprenticed part-time to a semi-itinerant bakery-bowl-and-kitchen-utensil-repairman named Tom. For several months of each year we would drive through most states west of the Mississippi soliciting for work and repairing the bowls and utensils outside and on the premises of our customers. We often stayed in motels, but one night we decided to sleep in a dry, deserted roadside picnic area along a rural highway in the Four Corners region of the American Southwest.

Tom decided he would sleep in the back of his big Ford station wagon. The picnic table under the stars looked comfortable to me. I threw my sleeping bag upon it, took off my shoes and socks, and promptly slept. In the middle of the night I suddenly awoke to discover that the surface of the entire picnic area, the roadway, and as far as I could see into the night, was in motion, undulating, and a shimmering iridescent black. Half-asleep, I panicked and leaped off the picnic table and onto the ground, which I discovered, was alive with immature Mormon crickets on the march. Scores of them instantly turned into liquid under my bare feet while others began to crawl up my legs. I leaped back upon the table top and swept them off. Meanwhile Tom had locked himself in the station wagon and was honking the horn like crazy. That was a bad night and a hell of a lot of crickets. I joined the Peace Corps shortly after that, expecting never to experience crickets running amok ever again.



*Figure 14-1: A Jeju privy circa 1974.*

I now fast-forward to the middle of a hot, dark night on Jeju Island during the summer monsoon of 1974. Everything was damp. I was spending the night in a modest house occupied by a caretaker who lived on the remote grounds of a hillside tangerine plantation. I had been drinking rice wine with a few of the locals at a crude tavern near a bus stop earlier in the evening. I was suffering a bit of stomach distress and so reluctantly grabbed the umbrella and the flashlight stationed near the door, slipped on my outdoor sandals, stepped outside, and headed between trees along a crude path to the outhouse. I couldn't get the flashlight or the umbrella to work, and so stumbled forward as best I could. The walk took about a minute. I could barely see the ground in front of me. The privy was crudely constructed of volcanic rocks piled high and had a tin roof and no door. It was as dark outside as it was inside, but I had used the privy previously and so knew where the hole was and parked myself over it and squatted. I put the umbrella down slowly and then switched the flashlight from one hand to the other. I lost my balance briefly and in that split second the flashlight hit hard against the inside wall of the privy.

Suddenly the flashlight became operational again and beamed brightly. What happened next nearly gave me a heart attack! Unbeknownst to me, packed all along the three interior walls of the outhouse was a multitude of *crickets* that had parked themselves inside the privy to keep out of the rain. Startled by the flash of the light they all jumped in unison from their positions. I was pelted all at once from three directions by 10,000 crickets and my screams penetrated the darkness.

The following evening at the bus stop wine house all the locals within range of my screams had a good laugh at my expense. They are probably still telling the story.

The safe and sane travel option for a south coast islander to the north coast in any season was around the volcano and not over it. Some south coast residents rarely traveled north. Why depart paradise, even for a day? I met an old grandma on the bus on one occasion headed for a hospital appointment in Jeju City. She was accompanied by her granddaughter who claimed that the old lady had never been to the north side of the island during her lifetime! Hard to believe.

The minibuses were on tight schedules, yet all of them were underpowered and crawled like turtles when they were headed uphill. But then they leaped like jackrabbits for the downhill stretch to make up for time lost. These minibuses shared the narrow roadway with speeding taxicabs and occasional trucks. Their drivers also seemed to be racing against time to keep to their schedules and perhaps save their jobs. In addition there was, come summer, a gaggle of overloaded small trucks on the 5.16 Road headed in one direction or the other to participate in periodic (five-day) markets. Especially in August it seemed that the 5.16 Road was paved with broken watermelons, grapes and berries. Enough of these overboard fruits and vegetable on a sharp curve could make the roadway there as slippery as winter's black ice.

Given its sinuosity, the 5.16 Road downhill was even more treacherous than uphill. The overheated asbestos brake pads on the minibuses stunk up the fresh mountain air more often than not — but I never heard any passengers complaining about that for it is better to have stinky brakes than no brakes at all. All considered, the 5.16 in 1974 was a gut-wrenching carnival ride of a road; a seemingly haphazard chain of switchbacks galore. At high elevations were stretches of asphalt threading through the alpine forest of Hallasan that had all the sophisticated engineering required of a go-kart track. But there were no bales of hay strategically stationed at every curve. Instead there was nothing at all to keep overzealous and fatalistic taxi and bus drivers from taking their fares airborne when overshooting the hairpins. Guardrails would come much later to the 5.16, as would the ironing-out of its most dangerous curves and the widening of its narrow roadway.

Many minibuses eventually went astray or simply broke down along the 5.16 Road. Miraculously, none of mine ever took a tumble into the roadside bush or rolled over the brink and on down the mountainside. Front page photographs on the island newspapers occasionally captured the results of frequent vehicle disasters along the 5.16.

If there is truth to the claim that Jejudo is the “Hawaii of Korea,” the best evidence based on similarities in climate would be more likely encountered along the central portion of the well-sheltered south coast of Hallasan; there instead of anywhere along the unprotected north coast of the island that faces Manchuria and Siberia across the naked expanse of the Jeju Straits and Yellow Sea.

Sogwip’o “Town” (as we used to call it and spell it in the early seventies) was at that time still mostly a quiet, laid-back, portside community of fisher-folk, shopkeepers and petty agricultural entrepreneurs. The town occupied what was unquestionably the most pleasant and unique subtropical pockets of paradise on the Island. Spring-fed mountain streams burst from the mountainside to form the eastern and western boundaries of the town. These spilled over high cliffs to fall directly into the crystal clear waters of the East China Sea. In those environs the population of Sogwip’o Town has been hunkered down to a productive living for centuries, pinned between the southern flanks of the high volcano and a few, small steep-sided offshore islands that took the brunt of the force of summer typhoons and spared the port from all but the worst of them.

I’m not sure who were the original inhabitants of Sogwip’o Town but the Chinese dynastic histories report that Seo Bul, a Chinese explorer, was sent into the East China Sea from the Jiangsu shore by “The First Emperor” in search of the “Islands of the Immortals” and the “Plant of Immortality.” The histories claim he made one or more successful landfalls during his voyage. Jeju Island is most likely among these because it is the first major landfall due east from Jiangsu. Moreover, “Sogwip’o” translates into English to mean “Port of Return to the West.” The Chinese histories report that Seo Bul eventually returned “to the West” and to China to report to the emperor. He had not found the “Immortal Plant” but was strongly encouraged to try again. This time he successfully requested to provision his expedition with “young women, tradesmen, artisans, and the seeds of the five grains.” He departs. No more mention is made of him in the historical record.

*If I was Captain Seo Bul and lucky enough to sail ashore where Sogwip’o is located today, and if I had a shipload full of young women and the five seeds, and if I didn’t have the foggiest what the “Immortal Plant” looked like or where to find it, I would burn my ship and hunker down in that sub-tropical paradise to sow and reap then sow some more. Doesn’t that sound far more reasonable than returning “to the West” a second time, and again empty-handed, to face a disappointed emperor?*

## Chapter 15

### The ‘China Smith’ of Cheju Island (Part One)

I met my father for the first time when I was three. The War in the Pacific had recently ended. Dad, an Army Captain in full uniform with medals all a-dangle, barged unexpected through the front door of my grandfather’s house in Columbiana, Ohio and grabbed my screaming mother. I ran like hell.

Dad and his unit had spent the war years mainly dislodging entrenched Japanese from their Solomon Island pill boxes and strongholds. From Guadalcanal to Bougainville his division fought tooth and nail up the island chains toward the Japanese Homeland. Dad pre-war was a college boxer/football player of some repute and was looking ahead to a promising professional sports career when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. He enlisted immediately and was shipped to the South Pacific. He spent some time on Fiji. Then the Army deployed him to Henderson Field on Guadalcanal as an MP. While there, Dad became the personal bodyguard and jeep driver for General Alexander “Sandy” Patch.

When Patch was reassigned to the European Theater to beat back the Germans he invited his bodyguard along. Dad opted instead to stay behind and “slug it out” with the Japanese “all the way to Tokyo, if that’s what it took” as he once told me with patriotic conviction. On Aug. 6, 1945, a crew of U.S. airmen dropped “Little Boy” on Hiroshima. Three days later “Fat Man” fell on Nagasaki. Japan surrendered almost on the eve of an Allied invasion of Japan via Cheju Island, which was a strategic stepping stone at the threshold of Japan proper. At that time 10 Japanese Army divisions comprised of 100,000 defenders were deeply dug into the flanks of Halla Mountain anticipating the imminent arrival of the Allied strike force. But the Allied invasion of Cheju Island was called off and the American troops instead headed back home to the States. We live in a small world with no shortage of irony: my Dad, who volunteered to join the Army in 1942, seemed on track to set foot on Cheju Island long before my own arrival there as a Peace Corps volunteer in 1973.

My sister keeps a photo of my Dad from his Army days on Bougainville. He is bare-chested, wearing a grass skirt, and smiling. A lot of blood was spilled in the Solomon Islands campaign but he never spoke of it. He earned the Purple Heart, but never said how. I like to think that at some dramatic juncture during my Dad’s wartime service he looked into his shaving mirror and promised to himself: “If I ever live through this mess I’m going to go back to Ohio and grab my wife and kid and make something of myself!”

This is exactly what he did. Thanks to the GI Bill he quickly carved out a career that took us from Pennsylvania to the West Coast in 1948. We moved into a new house on Victory Boulevard in the San Fernando Valley in 1950. A year or so later a truck pulled up out front and delivered our new Admiral television set. I was 10 years old. We plugged it in. We spun the dials for weeks, exploring our options. Dad became a fan of “Victory At Sea” and began to revisit the war he thought he had left behind. Mom got hooked on “I Love Lucy.” I searched for exotic adventure personified.

In the summer of 1952 I found what I was looking for. His name was “China Smith.”



Figure 15-1: “China Smith” on an Admiral television set circa 1953.

Anyone of any age having a pulse in 1952, much less having a raging river of wanderlust flowing through their veins, probably sat mesmerized when Dan Duryea appeared in the role of “China Smith”

on the tube. His presence, the characterizations of his fellow actors and many other aspects of the production and execution of the program easily explain why the “China Smith” television action-adventure series had such a huge following for several years.

In the program, Smith is a con man on the run, an Irish-American expatriate who negotiates a dangerous living in and around the South China Sea between a cloudy past and an uncertain future. Smith is back-alley street-smart and moves furtively about in the shadows amidst the informal and underground economies of the Far East. He hires out as a private detective from time to time. Sentimental, yet a bit of a sleaze, he survives on other people’s money, their short memories and their forgiveness. Many of his acquaintances and customers – both men and women – are rogues, and so he confronts life-threatening crises week after week.

His vagabond bases of operation are hideaway “offices” located deep within the warrens of tiny urbanized near-mainland islands – Singapore, Hong Kong and Macau. Although Smith projects semi-professionalism, perhaps competence, and a trace of a genteel background, he goes about disheveled in a loosely-fitting white tropical suit, wearing both a tie and Panama hat. He smokes and drinks heavily, mostly in dark dens of iniquity.

Given Smith’s lanky, taciturn, tough-guy demeanor and the context of his everyday surroundings, a stranger could be forgiven for guessing that he is something of a soldier of fortune. But no: China Smith may be a devil-may-care-adventurer with an eye for beautiful women, but he is devoid of that black hole in the mercenary ethos that abides any sort of torture, rape, pillage and/or murder in exchange for money.

At age 10 I already lived vicariously in awe of a slew of comic book portrayals of American hard guys who shared a Boy Scout ethos and carved out dangerous, exciting, adventurous and mysterious lives for themselves abroad in exotic places, including Asia. My Uncle Pete in Youngstown kept boxes of comic books and reams of cartoon serials clipped from Sunday newspapers dating from the 30s stashed in boxes in his attic that he would let me rummage through and read whenever I visited. There was Captain Easy, Terry (and the Pirates) and many more. None of these action-adventure characters in my estimation had a fraction of the combined panache, mystery and cleverness that I admired so much in the China Smith character portrayed by Dan Duryea. I found Smith authentically human and a breath of fresh air in a comics-world overpopulated by superheroes. It was *his* appearance and *his* story as presented in this new-fangled electronic media format called television that arrived on my doorstep in the early 50s that sucked me in and made me a fan for a lifetime. Even as a child I figured that if I could not *be* China Smith I might look forward to meeting him or his spitting image somewhere, somehow, some day.

Imagine my surprise and relief to encounter China Smith lurking about in Cheju City a few months after being sent down to the island by Peace Corps:

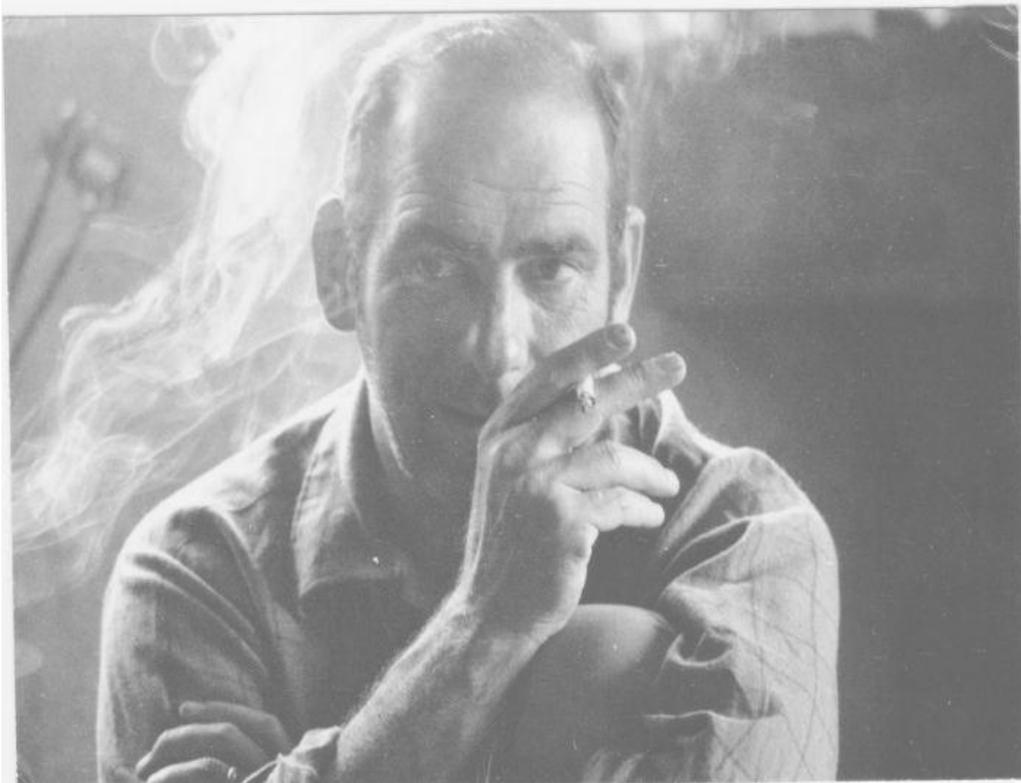


Figure 15-2: The “China Smith” of Cheju Island. Photo contributed by Jim Shon, Cheju PCV (circa 1971)

## Chapter 16

### The ‘China Smith’ of Cheju Island (Part 2)

The northern reaches of the East China Sea have been a hotbed of piracy since ancient times. Fragmented coastlines with secluded coves and roadsteads adjacent to merchant sea lanes have been especially prolific incubators for piracy. Early Portuguese maps of East Asia represent the Korean archipelago as “Ilhas dos ladrones” (Islands of the Pirates).



Figure 16-1: “Ilhas dos ladrones” as it appears on Ortelius’ map of Japan and Korea (1595).

In the Korean archipelago we should expect to find all sorts of adventurous, perhaps shady, characters in its historic seaports; for example in Mokpo, Masan and Pusan. What about Cheju City? When I arrived there in February of 1973, I was counting on it.

Should I have even been surprised to run into the likes of “China Smith” from my childhood fantasies in Cheju City? I knew, for example, that as with most remote southern islands in medieval East Asia (for example, Hainan in China and southern Kyushu in Japan) Cheju Island was the most notorious Korean repository through the ages for its exiled criminals and disgraced officials. The descendants of some of these may still be about, I figured. These would provide the appropriate context of a romanticized human milieu for an adventurer like China Smith to rub shoulders with. The inescapable conclusion I drew in 1973 from the historical record and through the lens of my fertile imagination was that Cheju Island has always been — and should therefore remain — a magnet and repository for marginal types.

Although his visage was more Humphrey Bogart than Dan Duryea, the exotic stranger I encountered on the streets of Cheju City shortly after my arrival tentatively fitted my expectations of the China Smith of my childhood. I spied him on first occasion around dusk in the month of March or April when he was emerging from an alleyway onto Chilsung-ro (Seven Stars Road). Window-shoppers and after-school students were thick on the ground. He paused to slowly survey the scene, both up and down the promenade, and then darted seamlessly into the crowd.

I took chase but the stranger disappeared before I could catch up and introduce myself. Had he noticed me and fled? Fair-skinned Europeans and Americans were very rare in those days. Tall ones were hard to miss. I probably stuck out above that crowd like a whitewashed lighthouse. How could he not see me?

Several weeks later I passed by him in the jam-packed labyrinthine Dongmun Public Market. He and I were walking in opposite directions. I was being hustled forward by a small group of co-workers toward some obscure restaurant and a night of revelry. I actually bumped shoulders with the elusive stranger before I realized who it was. Again I missed my opportunity: “Who was that guy — the foreigner?” I could only shout this out over my shoulder to my colleague, Mr. Kim, who was pushing me ahead and anxious to get the party started.

“That is Mr. Dustin!” he replied. So, my “China Smith” of Cheju Island finally had a name!

“Mr. Dustin” turned out to be Mr. Fred Dustin, man about town and visiting professor at Cheju National College (now University), but considered by one and all to be a mysterious expatriate and an indefatigable entrepreneur. To make my long “China Smith” story short here, I eventually tracked him down to his favorite watering hole and more or less forced myself upon him there. He, but for my presence, would normally have been sitting in solitude at the long bar there in the dim light, in peace.

What did I learn from our meeting? He had a taciturn, tough-guy demeanor...

Our initial meeting that night was brief, lasting perhaps half an hour. Mainly, I spilled the beans about myself while he sat there politely smoking a Marlboro while nursing a cold OB beer in silence. He appeared to be listening, but who knows? I divulged that I was the latest Peace Corps Volunteer sent down to Cheju. He raised one eyebrow in response. I braced for a sarcastic “Thank you for your sacrifice!” but none was forthcoming.

Several months later Fred and I were no longer strangers — but not yet the old friends we are today. In late 1973 he invited me and all the other island Peace Corps volunteers to a pleasant holiday dinner in his apartment and this photo was snapped:



Figure 16-2: KPCVs residing on Jeju Island in late 1973. These Volunteers included (kneeling, left to right) James, Cindy and Steve and (standing, left to right) Tom, Jack and me. Our host, Fred (“China Smith”) Dustin is standing at the left.

## Chapter 17

### The ‘China Smith’ of Cheju Island (Part 3)

To me Fred will always be the “China Smith of Cheju Island” though my imaginary association of an unsavory television character with the gentlemanly “real deal” has turned out in the long run to be completely self-delusional and mostly an elaborate fiction crafted of childhood fantasies.

My own opinions aside, most Cheju Island PCVs over the years that Peace Corps Korea existed (1966-1981) had ample opportunity to form their own opinions about Fred. I’ve recently been conducting a little survey on the topic among Cheju Island Peace Corps Volunteers. One example response to my question “What do you remember about Fred Dustin?” is a direct quote provided by Jim Shon, a “K-12” (circa 1970):

“OK Fred. Among my colleagues at the time, few seem to remember Fred as much as I do. Part of this is that I remember meeting with him several times, and later, when I arranged a sister state relationship between Hawaii and Cheju, we had a number of conferences. I remember one when Fred was one of our most knowledgeable panel members. I’d have to dig thru my papers but I think he did a paper on Cheju’s Mongolian small horses. But for most of the time Fred was a man of mystery. I have this picture of him with his chiseled face engulfed in pipe smoke... our man in Kimnyoung... He was the American who seemed to have connections and relationships that were beyond the norm. He seemed to own land when that was not possible. He lived out on a rural place near the caves, a nice hot hike from the bus stop. He claimed to be selling eggs to the hotels. I do remember a debate among some Americans as to who he was, and speculation that he was actually CIA!!! (But actually many of our Korean teacher colleagues and their friends thought WE were CIA, since we spoke Korean. For them, being CIA was a compliment!! It was the height of Viet Nam and Koreans were very much into supporting the war.)”

Another CPCV (a K-30, Edith Jensen, circa 1975) recalls:

“OMG, I remember Fred! We went to his place for pheasant and ended up with grilled cheese sandwiches. LOL”

A final example. Charlie Kelly, a “K-41” recalls:

“I was a PCV on Cheju-do back in 1977-78, and taught at Cheju University [Jeju National University] (I have a hard time using “J”), and have to say my times in Cheju were pretty wild. I was a regular at the bars, mostly subsisting on *soju*, and everyone once in a while would bump into Fred who was always kind enough to buy me a beer or two. Seems like Fred had his favorite restaurants, one being a *teppanyaki* place (forgot the name), where he’d like to hold court and opine on things. Also, I remember his place out in the country, and it was nice to hang there every once in a while, again because he was always generous with his beer. I considered Fred to be a role model of sorts, in a not so positive way, as to what happens if you stay in Korea too long! Ha. I remember a professor Park (a youngish professor who was very much the ladies’ man) telling me he really didn’t know how to deal with Fred. Was he an American? A Korean? Or what? He was very hard to place, which as I get older and on in years, can totally appreciate. Let’s say, Fred was his own man who lived by his own rules, and was all the better for it. I saw an article awhile back about the maze on Chejudo that Fred made. Awesome stuff! Good luck assembling memories of Fred, and wish him my best.”

Charlie’s statement here reminds me that when I was on Cheju in 1973-74 Fred had not yet moved full time out to his “ranch” (which is now the site of his world-famous Jeju Kimnyoung Maze Park). Edith mentioned that circa 1975 Fred was experimenting with raising pheasants for sale on that property. Later he would raise chickens, plant tangerine trees, and grow kiwifruit vines as an experiment. God knows what else! Fred was a pioneer entrepreneur and intrepid to the core. Also, let it be known that most CPCVs in my experience preferred toasted cheese sandwiches to pheasant any day and twice on Sunday. This, Fred knew well and so acted accordingly.

I visited Manjang Cave (adjacent to Fred’s spread) several times during 1973-74. To save taxi fare and forego the bumpy ride into the bush, I got off the bus at Gimnyeong village and hiked uphill for about an hour. I enjoyed the walk. Sometimes I hitchhiked.

Back then, good-natured gangs of rowdy rural women working in the rapeseed fields above the village would wave, shout out, make obscene gestures and laugh like crazy as I passed by. They didn’t get to the city very much back then. Americans passing through on foot were still exotic fare. One of the greatest contributions made by Peace Corps men and women to the toiling rural folk back in the day was our amusement value: I was always good for a laugh; at the same time, I could dish it right back -- and did. “When in Rome ...”

Well, let me say to Fred here, in case he reads this book, that Charlie Kelly and all the Cheju Peace Corps Volunteers send their regards and Best Wishes! We are meanwhile trying to compile a complete list of CPCV Volunteers and collect more Fred stories. My rough estimate is that close to 60 PCVs served on Chejudo between 1966 (when PCK was launched) to 1981 (when the U.S. State Department finally threw in the towel). More than 1,800 Peace Corps Volunteers had served in Korea during that time.

Charlie seems to have captured the general consensus of the Volunteers back in the day who have thus far responded to my invitation to offer their current opinions about Fred: “Let’s say, Fred was his own man who lived by his own rules.”

I agree. My own experience with Fred during 1973 and 1974 sums up to my opinion that “What you saw was what you got.” I saw a lot of the “China Smith” in him, but that view matured over subsequent decades. Fred Dustin it seems was significantly more rumored than known. He was an enigma to many and remains so. He was in my days of Volunteer service on Cheju Island, anyway, very much a diamond in the rough and a work in progress.

# Chapter 18

## ‘Name that *Oreum!*’ (Part 1)

(This chapter needs a “little ‘splainin’” up front: These book chapters originally appeared as 52 weekly essays during the year 2013 on Todd Thacker’s *Jeju World Wide* English-language news blog site. This was the 18<sup>th</sup> essay among them. It occurred to me on completion of essay #17 that it might be fun to run a contest for the *JWW* readers. I uploaded a photo of a volcanic cinder cone onto Todd’s blog and challenged readers to guess its name and location. I guessed that readers would assume that the photograph represented a cinder cone on Jeju Island, of which there are 360 (depending on who is counting and what they think qualifies as a cinder cone). A typical cinder cones on the island is known as an “*oreum*” in *Jeju mal* (the islander language). I was inspired to run the contest because I wanted to indirectly address a tragic historical event on the rugged volcanic island (the Jeju Island Rebellion, also known as *Sasamsagun*, or “March Fourth Massacre”) and to do so by deploying a remarkably analogous but little-known tragic event that took place nearly a century earlier amidst a rugged volcanic cinder cone landscape in a remote corner of northern California ... ).



Figure 18-1: Photograph of a mystery volcanic cinder cone.

AND THE WINNER IS...

Alas, the contest ended without one correct guess! Nevertheless, I dedicate this column to those who might have guessed Darangshi *Oreum*, which some say means “moon-like” but which antique *p’ungsu* maps identify as “noble.” This was back when “noble” meant something.

Whichever the true meaning, the view from the top of Darangshi Oreum toward the east at sunrise is rumored to equal or surpass the famed beauty of the rising sun as viewed from atop Seongsan Ilchulbong (Seongsan Sunrise Peak).

Since its creation, isolated Darangshi Oreum has stood much higher above sea level than Ilchulbong and so has offered hikers a more nuanced and spectacular view of Nature’s bounty on the eastern flanks of Mt. Halla. Inland, Darangshi Oreum overlooks and rises nobly above the present-day Seongsanpo tourist mecca clinging in the distance to the coastline to the left and at the foot of Ilchulbong.

And beyond? On a clear day you can see where Udo (Cow Island) forms a black lump far below the high horizon, where the blue of the sea finally meets the blue of the sky.



Figure 18-2: Nobody won, but Darangshi Oreum (above) would have been a good guess.

I have never been atop Darangshi Oreum at dawn, but can attest here from vivid memories that the awesome dance of a ripe agricultural landscape to the tune of a windswept summer afternoon, viewed topside from Darangshi Oreum, is nothing short of poetry in motion. A geomancer – some say the legendary T’ak Ok-chong from China – drew this marvelous map capturing what he expertly perceived of as the topographic virtues of Darangshi Oreum on a forgotten day hundreds of years ago:

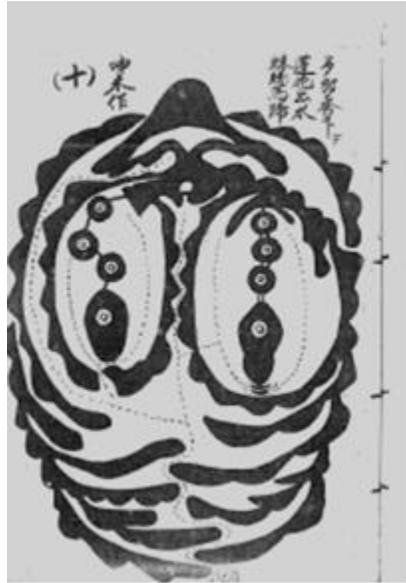


Figure 18-3: *P'ungsu* map of Darangshi Oreum drawn several centuries ago and attributed to the Chinese geomancer T'ak Ok Chong.

He appended to his map a poem\* which in English-language translation reads:

*Under Da Rang Su  
The lotus blooms upon  
the water.  
The silkworm threads  
the horses hooves.*

\* *This poem was translated for me from Hanja to English many decades ago by my scholarly Islander friend (now Professor) Kim Ji-hong.*

This map and poem in celebration of the noble “mountain” named Darangsu is Leaf #10 from a bound manuscript titled “Description and Drawings of Propitious Places (Mountains) of The Blessed Isle.” The manuscript is a hand-drawn copy of a copy of a copy, and so on, going back at least several hundred years. Mr. Ko Hee-kon of Gangjeong Village (near Jungmun) claims to have created this most recent copy of his family’s heirloom manuscript in 1965. His daughter loaned me the manuscript when word reached the family that “a strange American” was interested in such things. I searched out a photocopier (which were rare as hen’s teeth on the island in the 70s) and made my own copy of the entire manuscript atlas including the Darangsu map.

I might write an entire book in a more abstract and academic voice someday about the deep-roots of Jeju Island nativism in opposition to outside influences demonstrated throughout the islanders’ recorded history. Both Darangshi Oreum and Gangjeong Village would be case studies in that book. What they share that I want to write about here and in a few subsequent chapters is their roots in a volcanic landscape that natives revere as mystic Hallasan, upon whose flanks they carved a productive

livelihood from acidic lava flows and beds, fissures, caves and 365 volcanic cones, one of which today is called Darangshi Oreum. Jeju Island is at many scales a “heroic stronghold” worth discussing.

Are remote volcanic landscapes exemplifying the historic heroic strongholds of rebellious nativism movements unique? This brings me back to the “Name the Oreum” photograph and the contest. If anyone had guessed “Darangshi Oreum” -- or any of the other 364 *oreums* on the island, they were not “thinking outside the box” (i.e. “thinking beyond the island) – as the following several chapters will reveal.

# Chapter 19

## ‘Name that *Oreum!*’ (Part 2)

“This looks familiar” I said to myself on my first hike into the rugged interior of Jeju Island in the spring of 1973.

My destination was the steep-sided Sangumburi Crater, said to be unique. I had been told (by unreliable sources as I later discovered) that there were government plans underway to create a sort of “wilderness zoo” inside the crater.

My sources claimed or implied that were I to hike out to Sangumburi on a Saturday morning, I would arrive to discover a perfectly-round crater, spectacularly deep and wide, having interior cliffs so steep that perhaps only mountain goats could successfully negotiate the climb from crater lip to floor and back. The flora inside Sangumburi was said to be lush; a “subtropical jungle where snowflakes never fell.”

Hearing more of this astonishing tourism development scheme, I couldn’t wait to get to Sangumburi crater and assess the potential of the unprecedented project firsthand. The government’s plan writ large entailed all sorts of medium-to-large wild beasts being brought live from around the world (but mainly from Africa). These exotic species would be carefully lowered into the vast Sangumburi crater using winches, chains and pulleys, once there to be set free to act according to their instincts: to fight, to attempt to flee; whatever. Intent on self-preservation, they would no doubt be totally oblivious to those thousands of tourists who would be observing them from afar and above on a daily basis.

In Jeju Island’s “Lost World Wilderness Park” the beasts from abroad would ideally go about their daily lives playing out real predator and prey scenarios for the amusement/entertainment of paying customers amassed at the crater rim. Who could resist the urge to peer down at a Darwinian spectacle constantly unfolding at a safe distance inside of Nature’s own volcanic gladiator stadium?

Humans stationed around the rim would drop their *baek won jjari* (100 won coins) into 360 degree pay-to-view large, shiny telescopes on swivels. Once paid they would have a 60-second opportunity to visually experience natural mayhem while at the same time hearing the rule of tooth and claw roaring, howling and screaming away amidst the foliage within the bloody pit.

Unfortunately I never made it to Sangumburi on that Saturday morning back in 1973. I discovered about halfway there that it was too far a destination for a day hike. I was well past Manjang Cave and headed inland across the northeastern flanks of Hallasan when I gave up and reversed my course. Along the way I did experience some of the ups and downs of a few of the volcanic cones (*oreum*)

there. It was while doing so that I fondly recalled having had experienced their same kind of geology similarly close at hand and underfoot before, as a younger man, when camping out in the American West.

On Jeju Island these “hills” known to be of volcanic origins are called “*oreum*.” In the American West, and especially in its northwestern-most extents, the same sort of hills are called “buttes” in the local vernacular.

The butte I came to know best out West as a youngster is named “Old Schonchin’s Butte” or simply as “Schonchin’s Butte.” It is a prominent peak within northern California’s Lava Beds National Monument.

Where volcanic terrain and human history converge, I have now come to learn over a lifetime of study that these cinder cone landscapes — for example, Old Schonchin Butte in California and Darangshi Oreum on Jeju Island — more often than not embody a remarkable class of storied humanized landscapes I have come to call “heroic strongholds.” They are spirited places that speak to avid listeners of human strengths and weaknesses, heroics and betrayals, depravations and valor, corruption and camaraderie. As we know, it all depends on *who* is telling the story that determines which of the combatants get to enter the pantheon of heroes and which must instead wander in silence eternally as discredited, forgotten, or misrepresented angry ghosts.

I will write briefly here about heroic strongholds, about Old Schonchin Butte and about the Modoc Indian War (1872-1873). My story applies to Jeju Island’s volcanic terrain and associated history mainly by analogy. I will leave it to my Jeju Island readers to connect the appropriate dots I insert here and there into my storyboard that might reveal significance of my story as provocative analogy.



Figure 19-1: “Old” Schonchin Butte, Lava Beds National Monument, in north-eastern California, site of the Modoc War.

Old Schonchin Butte began to appear on maps following the notorious Modoc Indian War, which reached its climax in April of 1873, or, 100 years exactly prior to my arrival to Jeju Island as a Peace Corps Volunteer.



Figure 19-2: Captain Jack, War Chief at the height of the Modoc War, here portrayed by Charles Bronson in the film “Drum Beat” (1954). Warner Bros.

I believe that I would never have passed muster to enter Peace Corps if I did not have my many years of experience as a Boy Scout on my resume. Some complex algorithm in Peace Corps Headquarters in Washington D.C., predicted that “successful” Peace Corps Volunteers in the early years of Peace Corps (founded 1961) quite often are ex-Scouts (both Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts). Ironically, the same algorithm indicates that ex-Scouts quite often make good military recruits. Go figure.

Anyway, it was during my early Boy Scout experience, perhaps in 1956, that the boys in my troop drove north and camped out for a few days and nights in the Lava Beds National Monument, which is located in isolated northeastern California. While there we climbed Old Schonchin Butte and looked out over the Modoc War Chief Captain Jack’s “Stronghold.” Later we visited “Captain Jack’s Cave” in the heart of Jack’s Stronghold where the last days of the Modoc Indian War played out.



Figure 19-3: Captain Jack's Cave within Captain Jack's Stronghold, Lava Beds National Monument.

In the next chapter I'll explain what I learned about that terrain and its history from the park rangers and from experts sitting around the campfires during that visit.

## Chapter 20

### ‘Name that *Oreum!*’ Part 3

The next time you pull an American \$50 bill out of your tote bag take a close look at that man in the middle, Ulysses S. Grant. I am about to share with you here my story about this militarist past-President’s expensive, frustrating, punitive little war waged in 1872-1873 against a small band of Modoc Indian rebels. They had tasted reservation life and didn’t like it. Now they were fighting a last stand for their collective destiny (togetherness in the near and distant future) within their ancestral homeland.

If the Modocs had won this impossible war, America might be a very different place today. Imagine, for example, a counterfactual history in which a Modoc war chief named “Captain Jack” has replaced Grant on that banknote.

But don’t let me get ahead of myself. In the spring of 1873, 50 or so Modoc warriors (the “Hot Creek” branch of the Modocs) and their families were holed up and secure in a natural fortress in a volcanic wilderness. They were under siege, but making an impressive statement to the entire country about the virtue of staunch perseverance against overwhelming adversity.

While Grant sat in the White House, many thousands of miles away in the Pacific Northwest, in the remotest northern reaches of the State of California, the Hot Creek Modocs were holding off a deadly coalition comprised of the American Army, combined California and Oregon militias, diverse long-time tribal enemies — and Manifest Destiny itself (which appeared to be slowing towards a halt in the Far West as long as the Modocs blocked in the Pathway of Progress).

Meanwhile, restless packs of dirt-poor farmers, miners, business entrepreneurs and property speculators, all of whom coveted the considerable natural resources of the Modoc homeland, had hastily gravitated from afar to the safer perimeters of the battlefield. There, they chomped at their bits in anticipation of an Army victory and the slaughter of the Modocs. This would leave them free to swarm into the void of the battle’s aftermath to stake their various claims to the forfeited Modoc homeland.

But the Modocs were physically and psychologically prepared to fight and win. Before the public eye then, Civil War hero and now President of the United States General Ulysses S. Grant unexpectedly found himself and his corrupt administration being publicly humiliated by the example of valor and fortitude set by these besieged but feisty Modocs.

Reporters and camp followers on the battlefield, who fairly outnumbered all those cavalry riding against the elusive, lethal Modoc defenders, contributed blow-by-blow accounts of the siege and kept newspaper subscribers across the continent on tenterhooks while awaiting the latest updates from the war zone.

Grant was concerned and annoyed because the nation was becoming divided as to the justness of this (in his opinion) mismanaged, trifling war. No few Americans in that day and age were unsentimental racists and wanted the “savage renegades” wiped out as ruthlessly as deemed necessary. But an increasing minority of the general public — Quakers, romantics, idealists and such — perceived the Modocs more sympathetically: Their Modocs were “noble savages” and the “last of the Mohicans” of their present era. They dared to reject the yoke of an exotic industrial civilization encroaching into their own backyard. The Modocs were striving to achieve on their own terms the impossible Native American dream of true sovereignty and self-determination. This was no doubt a dream shared secretly by God only knows how many other peoples in America resigned and consigned to laboring under their industrial yoke in the employ of total strangers.

The Modocs were an ancient people intimately adapted to and in essence inseparable from their extensive homeland of lakes and lava. They could not have known the extent to which future generations might construe their valiant fight at the Stronghold as a pivotal juncture in history of the pioneering American West. But they fought as if they did.

Nature mysteriously seemed to be on the side of the Modocs during most of this battle in the lava beds. When the aggressors rolled in their howitzers and prepared to attack in force, a heavy snow fell to thwart their plan. And when the snow melted away and they actually attacked, fog intervened to give the Modoc warriors a demonstrated military advantage. Thus, again and again during the early months of 1873 U.S. Army assaults on the Modoc fortress went awry. Sporadic thrusts of government and mercenary troops into the Stronghold were all beaten back. The intruders suffered high casualties.

Meanwhile, within their Stronghold, the Modocs were riding a spiritual high under the influence of their own special brand of mystical nativism. They had a charismatic shaman named Curly-Headed-Doctor who had mesmerized the warriors and their families into believing an optimistic prophecy about the outcome of the war. He persuaded that a miracle was close at hand, and so convinced the warriors to fight on valiantly.



Figure 20-1” Curly-Headed-Doctor, Modoc shaman, 1873. (Frankly, given a million years I couldn’t distinguish him from an indigenous Jeju Islander. Could you?).

Above all, the Modocs had come to believe in the prophecy of victory that would be secured through the efficacy of their ghost dance and drum ritual. The ghost dance originated with the Paiutes, whose ancestral lands bordered Modoc territory several tens of miles from the Stronghold, to the east.

Curly-Headed-Doctor had learned the ghost dance ritual from the very shaman who had invented it. They had fought side by side against the U.S. Army five years previous, at the Battle of the Infernal Caverns. The terrain there (as the name implies) was similar to the surroundings at Captain Jack's Stronghold. For both the Paiutes and the Modocs — and later as well for the Sioux in the Dakotas — the ghost dance proved to be some powerful medicine-- in the short run.

Indeed, modern students of the Modoc War have generally concluded that the ghost-dance-and-drum ritual was for the Modocs a most powerful psychological weapon irrespective of the material forces being waged against them. Some even say that the Modoc War boiled down to a religious war between the traditional spiritual powers of an indigenous shamanism against a modern material aggression of industrialism closely associated with the white man's Christianity.

How demoralizing it must have been for the thousand armed aggressors of all stripes surrounding Captain Jack's stronghold — who had yet to win a single battle — to have to stand on guard on pins and needles night after night within earshot of the eerie chorus of the Modoc ghost dancers.

Somewhere deep within the labyrinthine volcanic Stronghold, amidst the myriad knobs, caves, crags and ravines, was a ceremonial circle that none of the aggressors had yet to see, but could only fearfully imagine. From the center of that circle emanated the foreboding drum beat and chant of the ghost dancers prepping for their next fight. Encircling Curly-Headed-Doctor the dancers held hands and shouted out while shuffling back and forth as the Spirits moved them, entranced, until they dropped from exhaustion.

“What did you see?” Curly-Headed-Doctor would interrogate those who had fallen while yet bedazzled.

“It is just as you prophesized!” They would reply.

Thus, in semi-consciousness the ghost dancers all reported back similar results experienced during their vision quests. In a nutshell, they agreed that their deceased brethren now in the Spirit World would soon reassemble in the ancestral homeland to live on through eternity in peace. Coincidentally the White Man will have suddenly vanished, inexplicably, from the Earth.

“Boom! Boom! Boom!” went the drum. Shuffle, shuffle. Shuffle: on they danced; meanwhile chanting repeatedly all through the night. How could an Army private from, say, Ohio facing the mystery of the Stronghold begin to fathom what he was up against come daybreak? He could not sleep. He was terrified.

How appropriate that the only Hollywood movie to date that revisits the action of the Modoc War is titled “Drum Beat.”

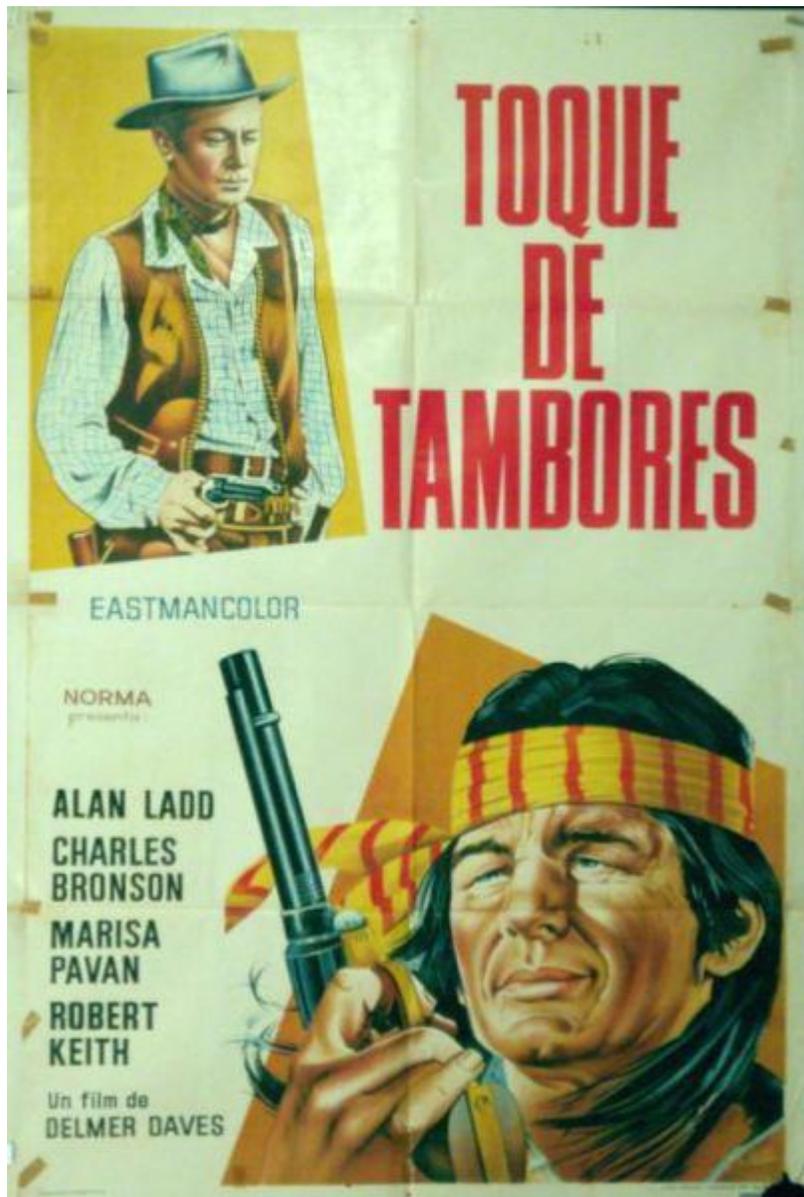


Figure 20-2: Argentine lobby poster of “Drum Beat” (1954) featuring Alan Ladd (representing Manifest Destiny) and Charles Bronson (representing Modoc Resistance).

# Chapter 21

## ‘Name that *Oreum!*’ Part 4

Anyway, sitting around that blazing campfire in the summer in 1956 we Boy Scouts listened intently as the park ranger wound down his story of Captain Jack’s Stronghold.

Captain Jack, Curley-Headed-Doctor and the other reservation-jumping Modocs had entrenched themselves in their lava-beds Stronghold near the south shore of Tule Lake. Negotiations ensued toward coaxing the Modocs to surrender and return to the distant reservation from which they had fled. Captain Jack demanded that any peace treaty guarantee Modoc sovereignty over their ancestral homeland, which more-or-less centered on their Stronghold. The government steadfastly refused any compromise. Meanwhile, Curley-Headed-Doctor, the Modoc shaman, had convinced the Stronghold defenders that the soldiers would vaporize if the Modoc warriors killed the leader of the Army troops, a high-ranking General named Canby. Captain Jack himself then murdered the surprised Canby under a truce flag.

“Shot him in the FACE!” the ranger shouted, which caused all of us Boy Scouts gathered around the crackling hot campfire to nearly leap off our logs in terror! Marshmallows and hot dogs flew in all directions. When we had settled back down the ranger continued in a subdued, patriotic voice: Never before or after in the history of the Indian Wars did such a high ranking American military officer lose his life to an enemy combatant. The treacherous Captain Jack thereby made his mark in the White Man’s history books, and in the act of murdering Canby had sealed his own fate and that of his people.

Well, suffice it to say that Canby’s murder was the end of negotiations between the U.S. Army and Captain Jack, and thus began officially the Lava Beds (Modoc) War. This was the fall of 1872.

By January of 1873, and owing to the fact that the besieging U.S. Army had thus far failed to win *a single victory* for United States President Ulysses S. Grant in a fair fight with the Modocs, the decision was made by Canby’s replacement, an incompetent named Colonel Gillem, to postpone hand-to-hand combat for a while and instead seek to deprive the defenders of the Stronghold from their ready access to fresh water from the lake. That accomplished, they would attack their thirsty, half-dead adversaries and smoke them out of their Stronghold caves or suffocate them all where they hid.

The first half of Gillem's plan actually succeeded. However, Captain Jack cleverly sneaked all his warriors and their families out of the Stronghold without engaging the Army in any decisive battle. The park ranger emphasized that General Gillem was judged incompetent by his superiors because he failed to wipe out the Modocs in their Stronghold, as ordered. He was held responsible for letting them escape and thus for prolonging the War.

Meanwhile news of General Canby's murder had reached President Grant in Washington. Grant turned for advice to his old military comrade General Philip Sheridan. It was no-nonsense Sheridan that had carried out the scorched-earth policy that brought Johnny Rebel to his knees and forced a final solution to the Civil War. Sheridan under the Grant Administration was now General-in-Chief of subduing the Plains Indians. It was while doing so that he invented the aphorism "The only good Indian is a dead Indian." Grant agreed, and acted decisively on that proposition.

A Colonel Jefferson Davis was straightaway ordered to replace the disgraced Gillem in the field. Davis initially planned to track down and kill as many of the escaped Modocs in the lava beds wilderness as possible. He estimated he would be chasing down about 40 seasoned Modoc warriors, and their families. His plan was a cultural genocide: Any principal warriors that survived the final battle would be hanged to death; all lesser warriors would be sent to Alcatraz Island military prison in San Francisco Bay (the Guantanamo of its day); women and children would be dispersed to disparate Indian reservations throughout the West to be assimilated into other Native American tribes. Within decades no vestiges of a Modoc people or its culture would remain on Earth.

However, by the time Davis finally reached the Lava Beds to relieve Gillem he found the troops pursuing Captain Jack's Modocs in near-total disarray. They were battle-weary and demoralized to the extent that Davis had to delay his timetable in order to kick some butt among those under his command and re-instill some discipline in the ranks, and this decision altered his timetable. But credit Davis for carrying out Grant's orders as best he could. He eventually engaged the Modocs successfully in a skirmish in the remote volcanic wilderness, at a place since called "Captain Jack's Ice Caves." History records that after Davis arrived on the scene it was the Modoc's turn to become demoralized.

It took less than a month for half the warriors to defect to the Army as prisoners-of-war. Jack and Curly-Headed-Doctor and a few other warriors tried to hold out as long as they could against the inevitable, but then finally decided to surrender to save the lives of their women and children. Captain Jack's surrender was dramatically captured in a news magazine illustration published shortly following the event:



Figure 21-1: "Surrender of the Modocs." A magazine engraving from 1873.

We view above an anonymous engraver's dramatic interpretation of the last surrendering Modoc braves emerging from the lava beds wilderness with their families. They emerge from their wilderness hideaways between portals of defeat and into the darkness of a future unknown. The vast scope of their ancestral homeland and past history as a sovereign people shines only as a distant backdrop to current events. As interpreted by the press, the Modoc War unromantically ends with a whimper instead of a roar.

Our Boy Scout troop was based in a suburb of Los Angeles, so on leaving the Lava Beds National Monument the next day we thanked the park ranger for the tour and campfire tale then headed south, via the Pacific Coast Highway. We drove through San Francisco and stopped at the south end of the Golden Gate Bridge to view the Bay. There is a parking lot there for that purpose. Our scoutmaster brought binoculars and we took turns looking at Alcatraz Island, where some of the defeated Modoc warriors ended up, serving life sentences for losing a lopsided fight.

The Army hanged Captain Jack. Curley-Headed-Doctor died of natural causes on an Indian reservation in Oklahoma. Some descendants of the defenders of Captain Jack's Stronghold survive to the present, but they are not recognized by the U.S. Government as members of a registered Native-American Tribe. So, Colonel Davis appears to have effectively accomplished the cultural genocide of the Modoc people as President Grant intended.

My visit to Captain Jack's Cave in 1956 proved prescient to my experience on arrival on Jeju Island as a Peace Corps Volunteer in 1973. As I have noted, the volcanic landscape "seemed familiar" on my arrival. In particular, the cinder cone "*oreum*" fields of Jeju reminded me of the cinder-cone "butte" arrays of northeastern California. The lava tubes and caves populating the lava beds that form the foundations of the cones in both northern California and on Jeju Island were likewise similar. As were their roles in human settlement history as life-supporting ecosystems and as pre-historic and historic battlegrounds and "heroic strongholds."

Old Schonchin's Butte and Darangshi Oreum are unique places, but much can be learned from comparing and contrasting their terrains and histories. By experiencing both the Lava Beds National Monument and the flanks of Mt. Halla it is not all that difficult for an attentive observer to connect the caves and parallel histories of both places and reach some profound conclusions about man's inhumanity to man.

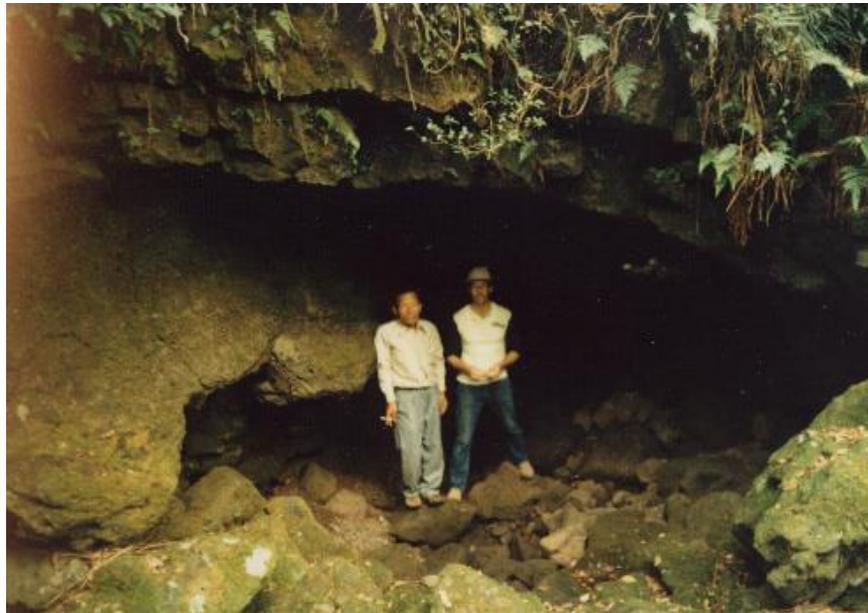


Figure 21-2: The author and Mr. Yang at the mouth of lava tube cave in the vicinity of Darangshi Oreum.

## Chapter 22

### ‘Name that *Oreum!*’ Part 5

With the roundup, execution, imprisonment and exile of the Modoc survivors of the Lava Beds War, Manifest Destiny in northeastern California returned with a vengeance to fill the void created by their defeat. Land-hungry farmers, hard-luck miners and greedy profiteers of all sorts moved in to carve up and capitalize on the resources of the vast abandoned homeland of the Modocs.

According to an Army rumor, some callous impresarios dug up Captain Jack’s corpse, severed the head, embalmed it and put it in a bottle for public display under canvas tents throughout the Northwest for a fee. Many settlers paid to verify for themselves that the menace of the Modoc warpath was finally behind them. Later someone allegedly shipped the head to Washington, D.C., so that President Grant, General Sheridan and the cadets at West Point could gloat over their victory.

Jack’s Stronghold in the lava beds at the turn of the century became an indoor amusement park as the rock-strewn entrance of Captain Jack’s Cave was cleared to allow for safe public access to its frigid underworld. An ice rink deep inside the cave offered recreation to a paying public. Later, during Prohibition, some of the Stronghold caves and lava tubes served as hideaways for whisky-stills and for squirreling away countless barrels of illicit booze. Thus the excesses of the Roaring Twenties reached even into the remoteness of the lava beds wilderness.

Then, during the Great Depression, Captain Jack’s Stronghold became the centerpiece for a novel federal enterprise named Lava Beds National Monument. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was deployed to the Tule Lake region of northern California to build a durable transportation and communications infrastructure for the convenience of future decades of automobile tourists. These amenities spurred economic growth and commerce along all access routes into the Monument.

I happened to meet an elderly gentleman named Bob Dorr in Toledo, Ohio (where I now hang my hat) who as a teenager had served with CCC on several Great Depression-era construction projects in northern California. He told me that he had helped build a sturdy and commodious fire station and lookout tower atop Old Schonchin Butte. Remnants of that solid structure remain to this day. We Boy Scouts had hiked up the butte to admire its lookout station in 1956.

Coincidentally, and most convenient to this discussion, similarly small fortress-like lookout towers have also been part of the traditional Jeju Island *oreum* (cinder-cone) landscape for many hundreds of years. Their locations and distributions on the island indicate that they were not built for detecting range fires on the pastoral flanks of Hallasan, but instead to forewarn islanders of approaching pirates and other unexpected seaborne intruders.

Early Western explorer and traveler accounts to Jeju Island include first-hand impressions of the Jeju Islanders and their habitat, and many take note of these fortified “lookout mountains” ringing the coast. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could visualize these hilltop towers in their glory through the eyes of those who observed them, say, 15 generations ago? Yes it would, and so we can.

In 1702 the mainland Yi Dynasty administration on the Korean peninsula grew decisively impatient with those restive, resistant and sometimes rebellious indigenous Jeju Islanders governed by its colonial administration. After several centuries of Yi Dynasty rule the civilizing influences of Korean Neo-Confucianism still had not captured the hearts and minds of the indigenous islanders. Instead, Animism, Shamanism and Buddhism remained popular on the island. The mainland government decided that these religions were the wellsprings of public disorder and disobedience on the island. How could the islanders be pacified under those prevailing conditions?

In view of mainland Joseon Dynasty government concerns, a magistrate named Yi Hyong-sang was sent down to the island accompanied by a substantial military escort in order to destroy all the “heretic” Buddhist temples and Shamanist/Animist shrines. These sites of “pagan” worship were long-entrenched in and widely distributed throughout the island.

Upon his arrival, Yi immediately launched a spectacular and systematic search-and-destroy campaign. He made sure all his official accomplishments were entered into the historical record as both textual and visual documents. It is thanks to the compilation and preservation of these official illustrations that we actually observe a typical fortified watchtower atop a Jeju coastal *oreum* as drawn by an artisan accompanying Magistrate Yi’s campaign:



Figure 22-1: Magistrate Yi Hyong-sang inspecting the herds on Jeju Island, near Hallim. Note the watchtower on the *oreum*.

The lookout tower (lower left-hand corner) was not the topic of the painting, of course. It is just a landmark feature and locational marker for the event taking place at the time. Indeed, the drawing is more of a map than a painting. Its topic is one event during the glorious campaign of Yi Hyong-sang to purge Jeju Island of its Buddhist temples and Shamanist/Animist shrines. The fortified watchtower is but a small part what he and his retinue observed there during his destructive tour around the island.

This particular map (and we see here only a selected portion of the complete document) has a lot going on which may be of historical, cultural and economic significance to today's readers curious about Jeju Island culture history. For example, Magistrate Yi observes a nervous tribute herd of Jeju horses. The best of this horseflesh will be rounded-up and transported according to a specific annual calendar date to Udo ("Cow Islet") and then to Seoul, and from there to China. The runts will be culled from the tribute herd and thereupon fall into the hands of the islanders themselves; perhaps to serve as beasts of burden and plow horses. What else is going on? We see two herders at the top of the map, and a *choga chib* (grass-roofed houses) at the bottom.

We also observe Magistrate Yi surrounded by his multitude of escorts and functionaries in the lower right-hand corner. The colorful banners of all shapes and sizes assert Yi's rank and authority. His spectacular approach on the scene was no doubt discerned by local villagers and government officials from afar. Some of them bow down in subservient welcome before the Magistrate's canopied chariot. Meanwhile a wall of soldiers protects Yi from the equine herd in case of a stampede: We can only imagine the extent of the clamor and clang of horns, gongs and drums that might cause this to occur.

While the texts that accompany these illustrated maps may not specify the strategies of Magistrate Yi's search-and-destroy campaign in great detail, some remarkable drawings in the collection indicate that indigenous islanders were persuaded to lead Yi's soldiers to their hidden shamanist and animist shrines. For more insight, please study this map carefully, for we shall discuss it in detail in the following chapter:

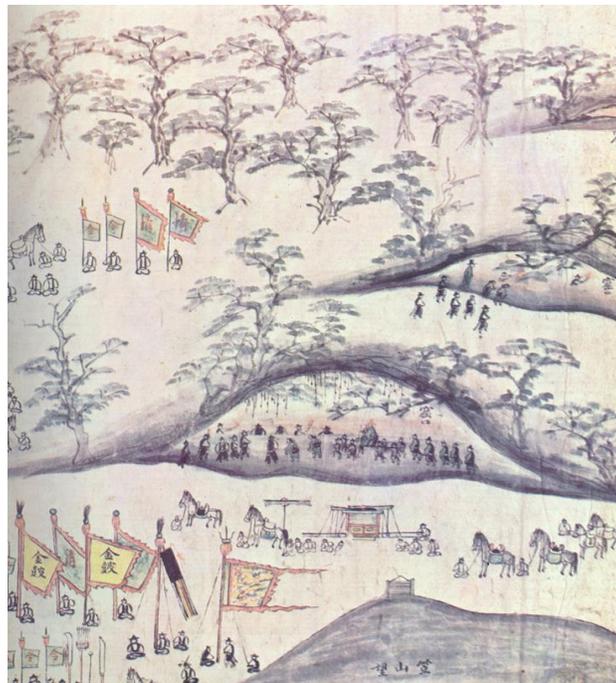


Figure 22-2: Magistrate Yi's "search and destroy" task force at work (small image).



Figure 22-3: Magistrate Yi's "search and destroy" task force (large image).

## Chapter 23

### ‘Search and Destroy’ on Jeju Island, circa 1702 (Part 1)

Magistrate Yi Hyong-sang’s draconian Neo-Confucian “reformation” of Jeju Island in 1702 attempted to systematically purge the island of all Buddhist, Shamanist and Animist temples and shrines. As we Peace Corps Volunteers assigned to the island from 1966-1981 can attest, 1) he either was not very thorough in his efforts or 2) Buddhism, Shamanism and Animism have enjoyed a remarkably healthy recovery after Yi returned to Seoul.

Evidence that Buddhist temples and Shamanist and Animist shrines were once again thriving could be encountered everywhere on the Island in 1973-1974 during my own Peace Corps service there. I photographed this active shrine one day while hiking, when I stumbled across its remote location at the hidden mouth of a lava tube accessing a well.



Figure 23-1: A *halmang-dang* (goddess shrine) southwest of Kimnyoung Village, 1974.

Ironically Neo-Confucianism, all-powerful and aggressively exclusivist in 1702, seemed everywhere passé or in a hopeless tailspin on the island in 1974. Not only was there a robust presence of all the ancient and medieval Jeju religions across the rural landscape, but I also discovered Christianity booming among the island’s urban populations. I was surprised to encounter a few teams of Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses at the five-day markets, frequenting bakeries and walking the city streets while evangelizing door to door. In 1973 even the Baha’i faith seemed to be successfully recruiting some students at Jeju College.

However, back in 1702, Neo-Confucianism in the person of Magistrate Yi was clearly intent on systematically searching out and destroying every visible trace of any place of worship for Buddhists, Shamanists and Animists, even in their most remote locations. His intention was to sow the seeds of his Neo-Confucianism into the voids created by his successful “search and destroy” campaign. The ruthless process of the purge was captured in spectacular detail on maps drawn by a talented artisan who accompanied the destructive juggernaut of Magistrate Yi’s clockwise circumnavigation of the island. His name was Kim Nam-kil.

What better documentary evidence of the thoroughness of Magistrate Yi’s “search and destroy” campaign than this map scene drawn by Kim?



Figure 23-2: One complete map example of Magistrate Yi’s “search and destroy” mission, drawn in Jeju Island cave country by the artisan Kim Nam-kil (1702).

We can come to appreciate the story this illustrated map tells in both its entirety and in its detail. Let's begin where we left off last week and note the lookout tower on a coastal *oreum* visible in the lower right-hand corner. I previously described this ubiquitous artifact of the Yi Dynasty Jeju Island colonial era as a "fire-tower," a "lookout tower" and a "fortress." However, the Korean-language term that most accurately describes this structure is *bonghwadae* (fire beacon tower). We can conclude from their frequent appearance on Kim's maps, all drawn during Magistrate Yi's nefarious tour of the island in 1702, that they were ubiquitous landmark features in the culture landscape at that time.

Fire beacons were probably perched atop all seaside *oreum* during Yi Dynasty colonial rule. When the Yi Dynasty was founded in the 14th Century, Japanese pirates (*waegu*) were already raiding coastal settlements on the Korean peninsula, in the Korean archipelago and on Jeju Island. The *bonghwadae* was obviously invented and deployed by the Jeju Islanders more than 700 years ago to be able to warn residents of seaborne approaches by both foes and friends. Given their significant purpose, rudimentary beacon towers had good reason to exist long on the island before the Yi Dynasty colonial period. Over time they evolved into a more sophisticated and elaborate defense communications system.

Jeju Island's fire beacons are described in the records of early Western explorers voyaging in the vicinity of Jeju. By paraphrasing a potpourri of these explorer accounts I can provide my readers with a paraphrased description of their observed operation in the context of their natural surroundings: This island is composed of innumerable hills of various shapes and sizes, such as cones, saddles and tables. Most of these hills have forts built on their summits. From these, fire lights are displayed every evening. The rapidity with which these signals are answered is astonishing. We have seen the whole coast illuminated by these fires in less than five minutes. Each hill seems like a little volcano, suddenly bursting out with its dense white columns. We perceive the smoke of the beacon fires in every part of the island; we find the islanders keeping vigilant lookout from the summits of all their high hills. Little guards in little square forts always seem to be moving about; At stated hours, both near sunset and during the night, signal fires pass from hilltop post to hilltop post in succession, beginning with the post nearest to our ship; During daytime this method of communications by fire beacon is affected by smoke, which is cleverly performed by throwing wet chopped straw — and sometimes rice husks — onto the fire. Members of our crew attempt in vain to interpret the messages communicated via these curious, intricate smoke signals.

Enough of these beacon towers. Let's move our discussion to other aspects of Kim's map, displayed above. As map interpreters our eyes seem to take us from the bottom of the canvas to the top by guiding us through steadily increasing elevation into the remote, unpopulated volcanic hinterlands that rise upon the flanks and flows of Mt. Halla. Along the way we pass into some partially forested cave country. We discover there that Magistrate Yi's well-equipped and organized expeditionary force has established a secured perimeter around some suspicious shrine sites and that some of his armed escort has already entered deep within some of these caves bearing torches.

The cave in the foreground is a hub of activity. Yi has disembarked from his large canopied chariot and mounted a smaller palanquin in order to personally direct his search and destroy operation. We observe what seems to be a smaller strike-force taking the hunt deeper into the interior of the cave. However this "S.W.A.T. team of sorts" appears to be encountering no resistance. Perhaps if we zoom into the map we can affirm that the military action for possession of this particular cave is a far cry from the battle for Captain Jack's Stronghold and Cave as discussed in some of my previous chapters. Magistrate Yi seems quite safe even though he is close to the front lines of any potential combat that might break out at the cavernous shrine site. We infer from the evidence at hand that Magistrate Yi will likely *not* suffer the unexpected and tragic fate of U.S. Army General Canby when murdered on the threshold of Captain Jack's Stronghold by its indigenous defenders.

In the complete map above there are actually three suspicious caves and possible shrine sites depicted by Kim. Clues that the cave in the foreground is being actively purged of its shrine become more telling on our closer inspection of the map details. The middle cave in the map at a higher elevation into the hinterlands appears to be newly discovered. An inspection seems barely underway. The third cave is marginal to the map, and only half revealed by it. My guess is that its location has not yet been found out – but the implications on the map are that it soon *will* be.



Figure 23-3: A magnified portion of the map of Magistrate Yi’s “search and destroy” mission in Jeju Island cave country, as drawn by Kim Nam-kil (1702).

The talent of artisan Kim, and especially his skilled eye for detail in 1702, are accomplishments we Jeju Island history-and-geography buffs in the present can really appreciate as we scan his map closely after the passage of several hundred years. Is what we slowly gaze upon and contemplate here the depiction of a “heroic stronghold”? Not *intentionally*, I would have to conclude: artisan Kim was probably every inch the anti-Shamanist/Animist Neo-Confucian that Magistrate Yi was in the year 1702.

In a previous chapter I defined “heroic strongholds” as spirited places that speak to avid listeners of human strengths and weaknesses, heroics and betrayals, depravations and valor, corruption and camaraderie. With this definition in mind I can also conclude in the affirmative that artisan Kim’s illustrated map depiction can be interpreted as an *unintentional* portrayal of a heroic stronghold. There is a story that could be told based on a sympathetic interpretation of artisan Kim’s map about “a peaceful cave shrine founded by indigenous Jeju villagers in their island homeland as a sacred place for

worship. It came to pass that in 1702 this shrine and others like it were deliberately destroyed by a hostile colonial intruder; a militant magistrate named Yi Hyong-sang. However, the villagers persevered in their beliefs and eventually overcame the adversity of Yi's intolerant aggression and rebuilt their shrines." This is an untold story of this, a heroic, landscape. This is the story I would tell while standing on the threshold of the humble cave shrine I photographed in 1974 and displayed at the beginning of this chapter.

Thanks to electronic magnification of the map and the opportunity it provides for a closer inspection of the individuals in the cave and their activities, as well as their modes of dress and body language, it becomes easier for us to discern the betrayals instead of the heroics in artisan Yi's depiction of the events. A case in point: The presence in the scene of what appears to be a few unarmed villagers, centrally positioned by Kim, and depicted (at least in the middle cave) with their heads hanging low. Are these women? Men or women, these villagers apparently have either 1) been captured inside their shrines, or 2) been "persuaded" by Magistrate Yi to lead his search and destroy team to the locations of their secret cave shrines sites. If the latter, then have not these individuals betrayed the locations of their people's most precious sacred spaces and thereby doomed them to destruction?

## Chapter 24

### ‘Search and Destroy’ on Jeju Island, circa 1702 (Part 2)

The last chapter ended on a curious note. I was discussing an illustrated map drawn by Kim Nam-kil in 1702. Kim was artisan in the entourage of a Neo-Confucian Magistrate named Yi Hyong-sang. Kim’s illustration commemorates Yi’s “search and destroy” campaign against Shamanist/Animist shrines as it plays out upon the volcanic northeastern flanks of Mt. Halla and deep into the upland *jungsangan* hinterlands of its cave country. There are three caves depicted on the map. Each cave seems to represent a distinct three-part phase of Yi’s search and destroy process: discovery (the uppermost cave, apparently as yet undetected); subjugation (the middle cave, under active attack); interrogation (the cave in the foreground, where Yi himself is depicted upon his palanquin and seems to be directing mopping-up operations).

So here again is that provocative portion of Kim’s map that especially begs for our interpretation. Any reader is invited to zoom in on the details here and reach their own conclusions on any aspect of the dramatic scene.



Figure 24-1: Magistrate Yi at the scene of the crime.

Figure 24-1 is a magnified portion of the map of Magistrate Yi Hyong-sang's "search and destroy" mission in Jeju Island cave country, as drawn by Kim Nam-kil (1702). The "cave of subjugation" is at top and the "cave of interrogation" in the foreground.

My own close inspection of the map has discerned what appear to be four village women at the mercy of what a feminist might describe as "Magistrate Yi's patriarchal mob." Two of these women are portrayed in the "cave of subjugation" and depicted by artisan Kim with their heads hanging low.



Figure 24-2: "Cave of Subjugation." Captured at their illegal shrine? Two dejected village women witness its desecration at the hands of Yi Hyong-sang (representing the Neo-Confucian patriarchy).

Why are their heads hanging low? As I ventured to guess in the previous chapter, these women may have been surprised while worshipping at the shrine and captured there by Yi's military strike force. Their heads may hang low because their sacred shrine is going up in smoke around them. Meanwhile a fresh wave of soldiers runs toward the action. All of these men appear to be carrying swords. I suspect that the tall Neo-Confucian official striking a stoic posture over the process of subjugation and purge is the specter of the wrath of Yi Hyong-sang himself.

Or perhaps these women hang their heads in shame or fear, because they have betrayed the location of their shrine and led Yi's troopers to the site. Whichever the case, the women are well aware that they will suffer rough treatment after the smoke clears – and some gloomy indications on Kim's map are that this experience of interrogation will be painful. So, the women await the inevitable and meanwhile hang their heads.

Here are those grim indications as depicted by Kim in "the cave of interrogation" where I discern a brute with sword drawn inflicting punishment on a village woman. His sword appears bloodied. The poor woman facing the swordsman seems aggressively poised and drips crimson from her mouth and jaw:



Figure 24-3: Interrogation and punishment of Jeju Island women at the scene of a Shamanist/Animist shrine.

My readers will have to decide for themselves whether or not I am reading too avidly into this gruesome scene. I speculate that these are Jeju Island village women in part because they appear to be carrying traditional water jugs in baskets (*mulheobeok*) on their backs. Kim's paint palette seems to have been rich and discerning for I think he has also successively depicted these women wearing their traditional persimmon-dyed, orange-hued *galot*.



Figure 24-4: A Jeju Island village woman transporting a traditional water jug in a basket (*mulheobeok*) on her back. Photo by Klaus Moser-Maync, 1964 (Reproduced here with permission).

Magistrate Yi committed dastardly deeds in the wilds of Jeju for both obvious and subtle reasons. Joseon Dynasty governance over the island, after centuries of its colonial management, remained tenuous. Previous magistrates from within Jeju City walls had exerted only nominal authority and control over indigenous islanders outside those walls who were prone to rebellion. That population was uniquely and aggressively matrifocal (if not outright matriarchal). It was time to act. Another reason is more subtle: the Neo-Confucian patriarchy on the peninsula felt disrespected by, and was jealous of, the independent womenfolk of Jeju who empowered themselves in part through the spiritual agency of their ancient, peculiar and secretive Shamanist/Animist shrines.

Thus motivated, Magistrate Yi Hyung-sang representing the Neo-Confucian patriarchy girded up his loins to do battle at the isolated place known disparagingly by mainland Koreans as “Over There” (Jeju). Nominally, his fight was against pagan shrines. However, artisan Kim’s illustrated maps reveal him taking special pride and pleasure during his subjugation of an independent, self-sufficient, proud and defiant body of Jeju womenfolk. “Subjugation” means to bring under control and governance, to subdue, to make submissive, and to enslave. It is this sort of epic drama that is depicted “during the act” by artisan Kim in his celebration of Magistrate Yi’s “cave of subjugation” (Figure 24-2, above).

The year is 1702. A colonizing patriarchy penetrates into Jeju Island’s matriarchal caves in order to subjugate robust and independent womenfolk and render them submissive. Sigmund Freud, better than me, might have done this story justice.

## Chapter 25

### ‘Search and Destroy’ on Jeju Island, circa 1702 (Part 3)

Last week’s column revealed Magistrate Yi Hyong-sang’s rough treatment of some of Jeju Island’s rural womenfolk during his “search and destroy” campaign of 1702. We can tentatively conclude from the evidence at hand that he was at minimum a cad. He not only searched out and sacked their places of worship but, if I have interpreted correctly Kim Nam-kil’s artistic rendering commemorating these events, he personally supervised over the violent interrogation of these women.

Yet, my guess is that Yi was not a misogynist. He did not *hate* women. I suspect that, like most of the early 18th century Neo-Confucian high-ranking males employed in the Joseon government bureaucracy, he loved the company of subservient women who knew their place and performed as expected. Jeju Castle, for example, had plenty of *gisaeng* entertainers at the ready to help government elites wind down after a hard day at the office spent riding herd over the island hoi polloi. Magistrate Yi and other rich and powerful muckety-mucks residing in Jeju Castle no doubt enjoyed the company of these women and patronized them. I learned this from watching Korean historical soap operas and not from any history books. Nevertheless, ruling patriarchal elites, past and present, far and near, are all born cut from the same lusty cloth; so I believe it to be true.

Magistrate Yi meanwhile had good reason to appreciate Jeju Island’s rural, village-dwelling, hard-working womenfolk – women divers, for example. The productive economy of the island and the comfy jobs of colonial magistrates there were intertwined. Yi, for example, depended on women divers under his supervision to meet his stiff quotas for producing selected tribute items favored by and bound for the Joseon King and his Court in Seoul: abalone, turtle, dried fish, octopi, seaweed, coral and more.

So, Magistrate Yi did not appear to *hate* Jeju womenfolk. Instead he appreciated their productive efforts and usefulness. There were many thousands of Jeju women divers in 1702. From Yi’s perspective the Jeju womenfolk under his colonial administration were *in place* when they were hard at work and in compliance with his strict production quotas for tribute goods. However, coastal village women were *out of place* (and not working) when they were worshiping in their Shamanist/Animist shrines and thus acting in defiance of his expectations and demands. Any downtime spent in pagan worship that diverted diving women from their productive work was disrespectful of the King’s needs for maximizing his

share of the fruit of their labors. Magistrate Yi strived to make this distinction between women *in place* and *out of place* perfectly clear to the Jeju womenfolk in 1702.

In sum, Magistrate Yi perceived the Jeju women divers as *out of place* here:



Figure 25-1: Coastal village womenfolk as depicted by Kim Nam-kil cave shrine, 1702.

And he perceived them as *in place* here:



Figure 25-2: Illustrated map highlighting Jeju women divers drawn by Kim Nam-kil, 1702.



Figure 25-3: Close-up of working women divers on exhibition for Magistrate Yi Hyong-song.

Magistrate Yi's inspection of the island during 1702 was not all "search and destroy." His activities also included observing islanders at work throughout the entire island habitat, which consisted of coastal, inland and mountain zones. We have already listed some of the tribute goods produced for the King by the women divers. Tribute goods produced by island labor in the inland (*jungsangan*) and mountain zones included: horses, cattle (and especially black cows and black cow hides), felt, mushrooms, torrey nuts, tangerines, citrons, orange peel, persimmons, yams, garden seeds, assorted wood products and barks, roots, herbs, orchids, scents and insects. There was small if any demand in Seoul for Jeju millet, beans, buckwheat, barley and corn and these were the main subsistence food grains that helped keep the mass of the indigenous colonial workforce on the island alive, day after day, in the service of the King.

In Figure 25-2 above we discern some village women divers at work in a small cove just west of Jeju Castle, at famed Dragon Head Rock (Yongduam). Thus Artisan Kim ascertains the existence of women divers on Jeju Island on only one of his illustrated maps. Figure 25-2 also features a small sea-going sailing vessel in the foreground as it approaches Yongyon Gorge at the mouth of Hanch'on ravine. Some village *chogachibdul* (grass-roofed houses) appear in this scene along the left margin and range away from the coast. A portion of an *oreum* (volcanic cone) is at the top left-hand corner. Top right features a beacon tower (*bonghwadae*). The entire right-hand side of the map depicts the rugged seashore facing the Jeju Straits. Central to the scene are five diving women hard at work. By zooming in on the map in Figure 25-3 their diving floats, among other things, become obvious. Three of the divers appear to be paddling earnestly with their gear towards the left bank of the cove. The other two, under Dragon Head Rock, are in the act of diving. Artisan Kim does a fine job of depicting one diver well-submerged while the other diver is at or near the surface.

Which brings us to the topic of the long tent: My second-best guess is that Magistrate Yi while at leisure observes the divers at work from within the protective cover of this tent. However, why doesn't artisan Kim depict him there more obviously, sitting along with some of the members of his bodyguard and entourage? My best guess is that this tent provides temporary changing rooms devised for the sake of modesty and Neo-Confucian decorum. I assume that the diving women enter the water from these rooms on the special occasion they are to perform in the presence of the Neo-Confucian Magistrate, who is officially representing the King of Joseon. This formal occasion provides the women with the opportunity to display their skills, not their nudity, to the Magistrate.

In any case, the women divers depicted by artisan Kim in his drawing are wearing bathing suits. Their attire vaguely resembles these models' costumes:



Figure 25-4: “Sirens of the Deep” The iconic postcard pose struck here features supposed “authentic” Jeju women divers at Dragon Head Rock, circa 1970.

## Chapter 26

### ‘Search and Destroy’ on Jeju Island, circa 1702 (Part 4)

I confess that I was naïve to anticipate that the ladies posing in this iconic tourism portrayal of Jeju women divers (Figure 25-4) would resemble those I would encounter on the island when I arrived as a Peace Corps Volunteer in early 1973. How many other men over the past 50 years have expected the same when they bought their ticket to the island?

I am obliged to digress a bit here into Western civilization’s “Legend of the Sirens.” The Sirens of Greek mythology were described as dangerous and beautiful creatures, femme fatales that played in the sea sprays along the rocky reefs and shorelines of uncharted islands. When ships approached the Sirens deployed their enchanting musical voices to coax the crazed members of their crews within earshot to shipwreck. Homer wrote of these Sirens in his ancient epic poem *The Odyssey*.

I saw Kirk Douglas play the brave Ulysses on the big screen in Technicolor in 1953 at the Reseda Theater in southern California. Ulysses orders his crew to tie him to the mast and then stuff their own ears with wax so he alone could hear the Siren song without succumbing to their spell and forfeiting his ship to their wiles. Some scholars believe the Siren Song was birdlike and the Sirens were shape-shifters and able to transform themselves as needed into wanton beauties. This is how the artist John William Waterhouse in his dramatic 1891 painting depicted Homer’s Sirens enticing Ulysses while he is bound to the mast:





Figure 26-1: A portion “Ulysses and the Sirens” painted by John William Waterhouse, 1891.

We count four Sirens in this portion of the Waterhouse painting. Most scholars claim that there were only three: Parthenope, Ligeia, and Leucosia. Perhaps it is by mere coincidence that the iconic pose that celebrates Jeju women divers at Dragon Head Rock and appears on postcards, porcelain plates, ashtrays and all manner of tourist kitsch as far back as I can remember also portrays a trio of femme fatales.

I refer to them in this chapter as “Sirens of the Deep” because that is what the National Geographic Society called them when it sent its made-for-television “Explorer” series team to Jeju Island to film their story in the early 1990s.

One of my unfinished adventures in life and very near the top of my long “bucket list” (of things to do before I ‘kick the bucket’) is to discover and tell the story of the Siren that corresponds to “Legeia” among the three appearing in the iconic image of Jeju women divers at Dragon Head Rock.



Figure 26-2: The alluring “Ms. Legeia” of Dragon Head Rock.

Why? Call me crazy but I have a notion that this face has launched more than a thousand (male) tourist voyages to Jeju Island during the past 40 years. I bet that if I wandered through a public market on Jeju Island today -- just as was my experience as I wandered through public markets there during my Peace Corps days -- that the face of Ms. Legeia of Dragon Head Rock might be found stamped on something or other in nearly every stall selling tourist trinkets and postal cards.

But what I really want to do is track down the model posing in the iconic photo above and to share her story with the world. I am thinking that she probably never got paid much more than a thin dime for her famous pose — and since then has earned no royalties. Perhaps Legeia of Dragon Head Rock could not even swim?

## Chapter 27

### ‘Search and Destroy’ on Jeju Island, circa 1702 (Part 5)

In addition to “Ulysses” (1954) another Hollywood blockbuster that shaped my expectations for Jeju Island – and particularly its famed diving women culture – was the James Bond thriller “You Only Live Twice” (1967). That film brought the adventurous Bond to live in disguise on some remote East Asian archipelago among passionate female pearl divers. With this movie fresh in mind while aloft in my Korean Air Lines turboprop en route to Jeju Island in 1973, I fantasized a bit about the Bond-like welcome I just might receive on my arrival there.

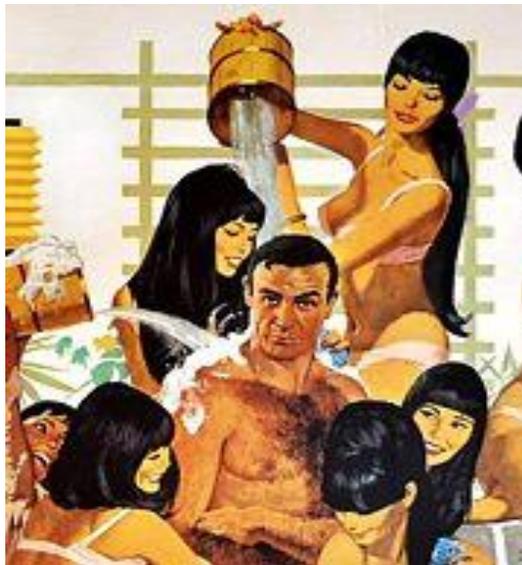


Figure 27-1: Me, fantasizing myself as James Bond and living in disguise among Jeju women divers.

Alas! I arrived on Jeju Island to discover its diving women to be more Amazon than Siren in temperament (see Chapter 6: “Close Encounters of the Haenyeo kind, Udo Island, Part 2”).

The American diplomat, W. Franklin Sands, describes in his *Undiplomatic Memories* (1930) what he perceives to be the rough and misandrous disposition of Jeju womenfolk: Sands called their island “a real Amazon community” and elaborated that the women owned all the property, that children kept their mother’s family names, that few males over 13 years of age were permitted to live on the island, and that the Governor of Jeju could never bring his wife to the island so as to prevent any mainlander’s son possibly born there from laying “claim to the throne of the island kingdom.” What a storyteller!

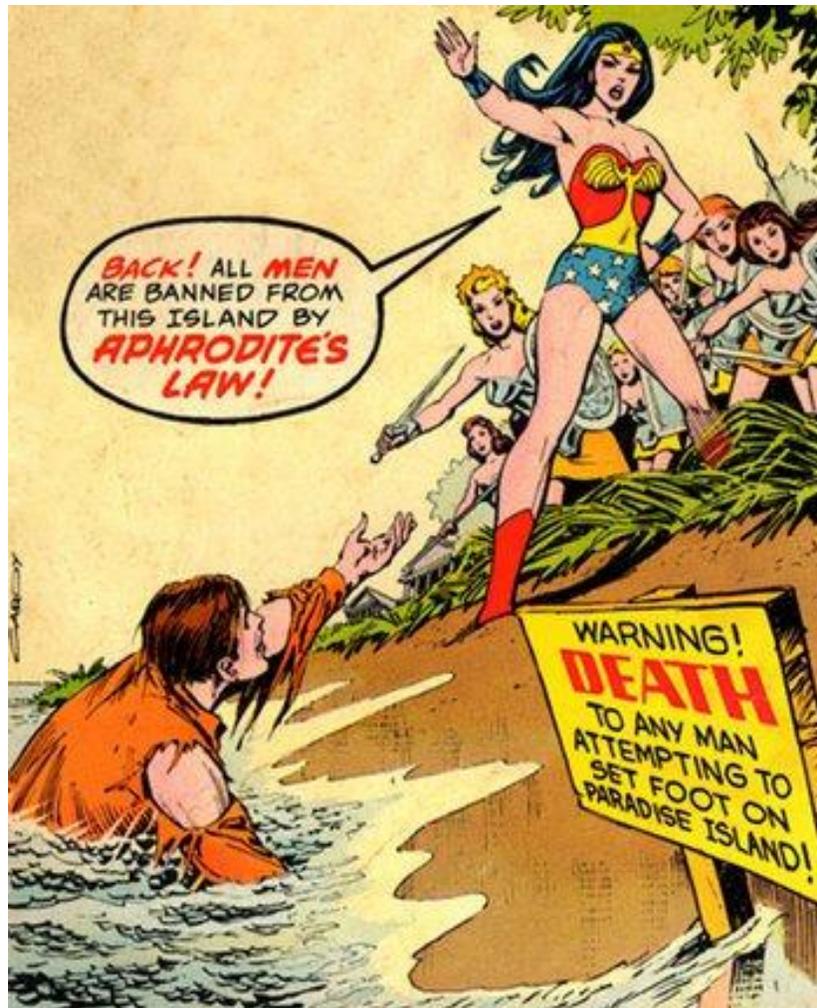


Figure 27-2: Are Jeju Island women divers more akin to “Amazons” than to “Sirens”?

In Greek myth Amazons were women warriors that took glee in dispatching annoying men with their swords and spears. The Amazons of yore were raised fit to fight. In contrast, and as described in the previous chapter, Sirens in Greek myth welcomed sailors near shore with their song – and shipwrecked them there to be ground against the sea cliffs and devoured by octopi and anemones:



Figure 27-3: *The Siren* (1888), a painting by Edward Armitage.

Note the timeless “Hi there, sailor!” come-on, the trusty lyre by her side – and the beastly tentacle arising from the reef in anticipation of the incoming feast! For unsuspecting, careless sailors, following the Siren song was a peaceful path of enchantment leading to a wet death. You decide: Were and are the diving women of Jeju akin to Sirens, Amazons, a bit of both, or neither?

I am proof that high levels of curiosity, idealism and testosterone could take a young man far in the world in 1972, thanks to Peace Corps. I suppose the same goes today as Peace Corps is still going strong throughout the world, has unprecedented applicants, and is much more selective than ever.

Peace Corps Korea shut down abruptly in 1981. There are two prevailing theories about why that happened. One theory – the “official” version – boiled down to an axiomatic “mission accomplished” with the corollary that the dedicated Volunteers had wrapped up their assigned tasks all too well and were no longer needed. The *unofficial* story amounted to there being too many rogue Volunteers taking it upon themselves to “do and say more than asked, required and permitted” at the time of the 1980 Gwangju Rebellion. Peace Corps Korea, already unpopular with the military and State Department was shut down because its Volunteers were unmanageable under the political circumstances prevailing at that time. So goes that rumor.

My personal perspective in retrospect is that the chief Volunteer mission of teaching English-language to Korean students in middle school through college was incomplete by a long shot in 1981. The unexpected and rapid winding-down and departure of Peace Corps from the Republic of Korea really stunned me when it occurred.

I’m guessing that the diving women of Jeju Island hardly noticed when Peace Corps pulled out of Korea and Jeju Island. They were still pretty much an independent cultural force on the island all through the Peace Corps Korea era, and focused themselves and their efforts on maintaining their traditional matrilineal, parochial, seaside village social, economic and political monopolies throughout that 15-year stretch of PCK history. When I exited Peace Corps and left the island, the diving women were still splitting their time between their underwater world, their “sisterhood on the shore,” their families, marketing their catch, and tending to their Shamanist/Animist shrines.

Magistrate Yi Hyong-sang’s “search and destroy” mission of 1702, so impressive in the pages of the elaborate historical record of the event that I have been sharing with *Jeju World Wide* readers for the

past four weeks seemed to have left no trace whatsoever in the public memory of Jeju women divers. Magistrate Yi's Great Accomplishment was apparently short-lived and quickly undone after his ambitious Tour of Duty on the island. Time passing has downgraded his self-aggrandizing extravagant sojourn on the island to a historical blip.

I don't want to leave this topic without making brief mention of glimpses of some marvelous manly martial arts in action depicted in a few of Artisan Kim Nam-kil's illustrated maps of the Magistrate's tour. Here, for example, we see spectacular feats of archery and bravery on display as experienced by Magistrate Yi on the Seogwipo side of the island, and here at Cheonjeyeon Waterfall:

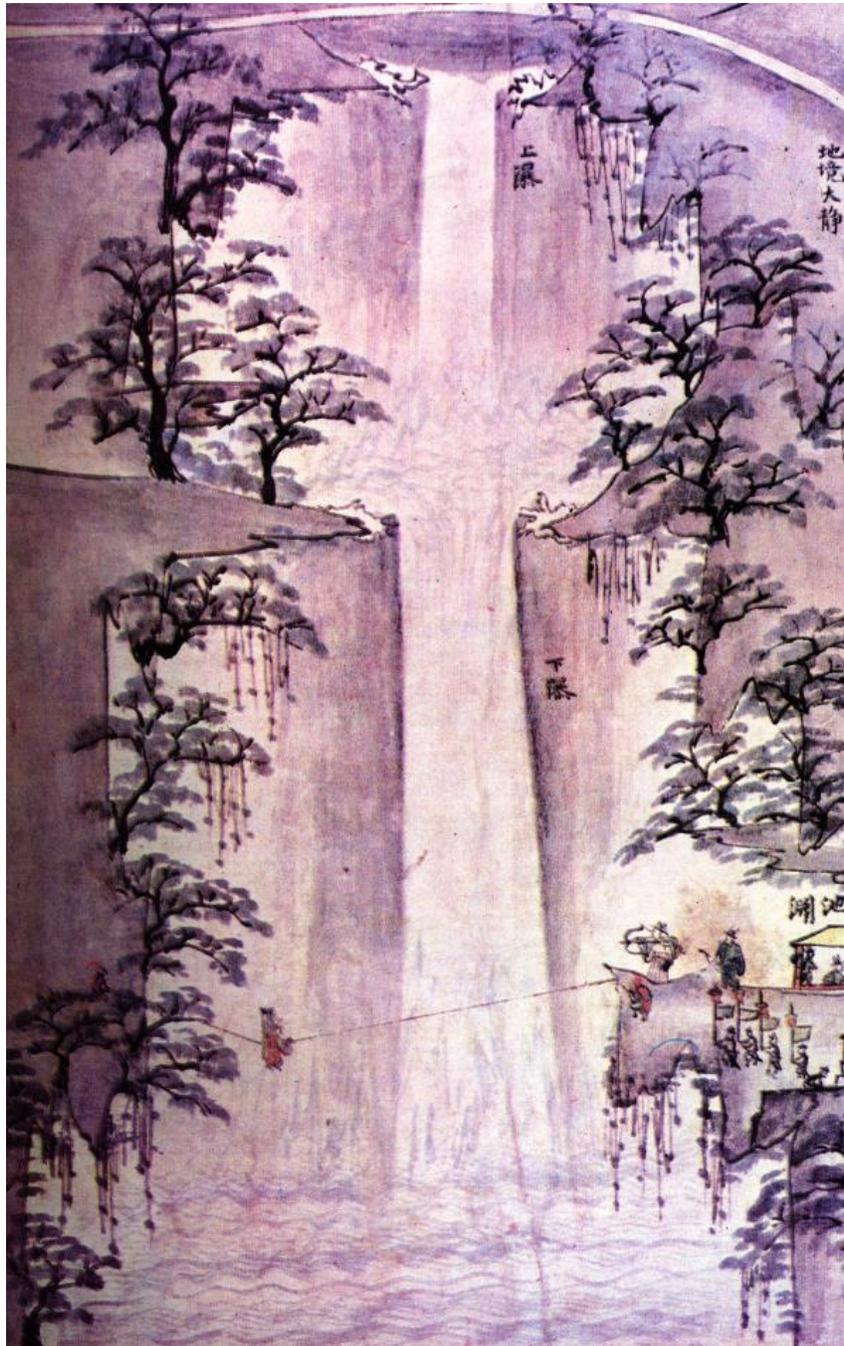


Figure 27-4: Hwarang-like martial arts on display at Cheonjeyeon Waterfall in 1702.

When I first saw this painting I could not help but think of the skills described for the celebrated Hwarang elite soldiery of the Silla Dynasty (later 6th and 7th centuries). Their talents are said to have included horsemanship, swordsmanship, archery, javelin and stone throwing, polo, tightrope walking and ladder-climbing. Zooming in at the figure of the archer, note just below him and wearing red appears to be a performer in action astride a horse at the very edge of the precipice.

What I cannot figure out at this time is whether these martial arts performers are crack troops belonging to a permanently-stationed island constabulary showing off to impress and entertain the visiting Magistrate Yi, or are they elite members of Magistrate Yi's personal military escort showing off to impress the islanders at that locality?

## Chapter 28

### The Tiger Division meets ‘Travelling Sam, Peace Corps Man’ (Part 1)

Last week’s column ended by introducing the presence of some spectacular “Hwarang-like” martial arts and derring-do on display at Cheonjeyeon Waterfall back in 1702. These were dramatically captured in illustrated map images drawn by Kim Nam-kil, an artisan in the entourage of Magistrate Yi Hyong-sang. Yi, an uncompromising Neo-Confucian ideologue, was at the time undertaking a belligerent circumnavigation of Jeju Island in order to search out and put to the torch all Buddhist temples and Shamanist/Animist shrines.

Korean Hwarang lore reaches back to an elite corps of “chivalrous knights” emergent at the time of Silla. Though the uncontested translation of “Hwa Rang” in English is “Flower Boys,” and notwithstanding their characteristic “precious mannerisms” (the annals of the Chinese describe them as “beautiful”), their cloistered regimental upbringing instilled the highest order of martial virtue, camaraderie, loyalty and esprit de corps through specialized rites of passage and covert mysteries. They were formed into the perceived aristocratic image of an Ideal Manhood for their time and day and the oldest Korean historical documents claim them as the driving force behind the 7th Century unification of the Three Kingdoms (Silla, Goguryeo, Baekje). Jeju Island at that time and until the 13th Century appears as Tamna in the histories and as a distinct Kingdom with trading and tributary relations with Unified Silla. Its own aristocracy cannot have been oblivious to the Silla Hwarang elite cadet corps and perhaps wondered about or even tried to emulate the secrets leading to Hwarang-enhanced military prowess.

My guess is that no few of the loyal readers of *Jeju World Wide* resident to the island are studying local crafts including martial arts in their spare time; taekwondo, for example. I myself considered joining a martial arts *dojang* in 1973, when Peace Corps assigned me to the island. One reason I opted out of the martial arts possibility in favor of body conditioning (See Chapter 7-10: “Mr. Bu’s Jeju Island *dojang*”) was that the martial arts landscape, much as it is portrayed in martial arts movies, seemed rife with bickering and competition between martial arts schools fighting each other for validity, authenticity, claim-to-fame, and – sad to say – market share.

Then, as now, it seems intriguing and remarkable how many and the extent to which some self-validating *dojang* histories reference and elaborate their origins, uniqueness and superiority as forged in Hwarang traditions and lore. “Hwarang awareness” in the Republic of Korea (ROK), as I understand it, was far from mainstream thinking in the public consciousness prior to World War 2. Thereafter and down to the present “following the Hwarang path to victory” has been deliberately nurtured by succeeding military governments. Beautiful “Flower Boys” and their martial arts skills seem everywhere displayed on screen these days in Korean historical dramas.

Our Peace Corps contingent (K-25) was the 25th to train in Korea and we trained for three months (November-February) in mountainous Chuncheon, east of Seoul. I traveled to Seoul several times during those three months by train. Leaving Seoul, the last train stop was the Hwarangdae Station (now closed). Step off the train there and you face the front gate of the Korean Military Academy. I never did, but if I had and were it permitted at the time, I would have walked through those gates to soon find myself at the Hwarang Parade Ground, where graduation ceremonies, festivals, celebration of national holidays and the remembrances for the dead take place. The profound and pervasive significance of Hwarang lore and symbolism to the ROK Army, in particular, cannot be overstated. Here is their flag:



Figure 28-1: Flag of the Army of the Republic of Korea. The design is an embodiment of profound traditional Hwarang and hibiscus flower lore and symbolism.

The ROK first deployed a few “support” troops under this flag to Vietnam in 1964, and then thousands of combat troops – mainly the famed Korean Capital “Tiger” Division – in 1965. Also arriving, the 11th Infantry Division (Mobile) also called “the Hwarang Division.” By the way, those initial few ROK “support” troops in Vietnam were “M.A.S.H.”-type hospital units – and taekwondo instructors!

I am wondering what the North Vietnamese thought on that first occasion they faced the Tiger division and saw their flag: “Flowers and a bow?” “This should be easy!” Any uninformed attempt to interpret the insignia might be forgiven for having not discovered any militant or intimidating symbolism anywhere within it. If I had seen this insignia on a panel truck in the city before I learned about the Hwarang and proud ROK military traditions I might have guessed in my ignorance that it was

delivering flowers or diapers.

However, the specific flower on the ROK Army flag is the hibiscus (*mugunghwa*). Deceptively fragile, it proves to be triumphantly immortal. Hibiscus valorizes the immortal bond of love, including brotherly love. In war it is the symbol of invincibility. No wonder it is the flower of Korea and its Hwarang tradition. Other enigmatic and untranslatable Korean concepts including *han*, *chong*, *kibun*, and *kosaeng* can all be discovered to have hibiscus/Hwarang associations.

What the North Vietnamese discovered to their grief about the Tiger Division throughout that war was that Tiger Division troops were a Viet Cong soldier's or sympathizer's worst nightmare. It is 20th Century military legend that the Turks with their curved swords were the fiercest fighting force on the ground during the Korean War, and by far the most feared by the Communist North Koreans and Chinese. The members of the ROK Tiger Division earned that same valorous distinction for the Vietnam War, and did a lot of the damage with their bare hands and feet. All this is to say that when the Tiger Division was deployed to Vietnam, they took all their Hwarang fighting skills with them – but forgot to bring along their “precious Hwarang mannerisms.” The Viet Cong thought they were literally fighting demons at the time. Meanwhile the ROK grunts of the Tiger Division took pride in their hand-to-hand combat kills. Every one demonstrated his mastery of their shared martial art – taekwondo.

While diverse taekwondo schools worldwide claim Hwarang history and lore as part of their provenance and exceptionality, at least one tradition has a verifiable connection to Jeju Island. Before earning his rank, ROK Army General Choi Hong-hi (1918-2002), was tasked with forming the 29th Infantry (so-called “Fist”) Division based on Jeju in 1953. The crack 29th Division was trained to carry the fight to the enemy with or without weapons. The “Fist” Division produced ample highly trained taekwondo instructors for the rest of the Korean Army. Those ROK taekwondo instructors sent to train troops in Vietnam in 1964 were a legacy of General Choi's dedicated organizational efforts on behalf of advancing martial arts training for military troops and civilians. Honoring the memory of the 29th Infantry Division, the Choi style of taekwondo training taught around the world today has 29 moves at the red belt testing level. He named this 29-step movement “Hwarang.”

## Chapter 29

### The Tiger Division meets ‘Travelling Sam, Peace Corps Man’ (Part 2)



Figure 29-1. “Travelling Sam, Peace Corps Man.” He’s a lover, not a fighter.

Above the sweet sizzle and smoke of ribs, eel and chicken gizzards everybody in the joint sensed there was trouble brewing at our table. In fact, you could have cut the tension with a knife. The noisy crowd abruptly had fallen silent. All across the room the usual crowd of patrons – fishermen, fishmongers,

sidewalk vendors, cab drivers, prostitutes – all sat there frozen in a combination of morbid curiosity and anticipation. The Americans were in trouble. All hell was about to break loose.

After three hours of hard drinking at our expense “Hungry Tiger” had suddenly jumped to his feet. He stood there unsteadily and stared coldly into my eyes. *Gaja!* (“Let’s go!”) he ordered. His chair toppled to the cement floor behind him. A couple at the table there leaped to their feet and backed away. The manager and the help had retreated into the kitchen area, where I knew they could peer out in my direction from a safe distance through strategically-placed holes in the walls.

I was the new Peace Corps Volunteer on the island. I figured that this town, Old Jeju City, was now my town. This rib joint was my chosen sweet spot and safe zone; a place where I could toast my occasional guests over a greasy griddle of roast black pig parts and squid or, most often, just casually kick back to imbibe and tend my grill in silence while surveying the usual crowd at a distance, thinking deep thoughts. Hemingway might have disapproved of this joint, for it was *not* a clean, well-lighted place.

Bill from the mainland was my guest on this particular afternoon. We were surrounded by jovial folk who, though poor as church mice were really enjoying their tight bonds of friendships while cementing them in *soju*. In contrast, here we were, Bill and I, seated across a small table and well within range of a swift kick or a hand chop from a sullen, resentful, red-faced, well-oiled ROK Tiger Division killing machine on his way back to Seoul from the Vietnam War. I’ll just call him “Hungry Tiger” or HT here, for I didn’t catch his name; yet I clearly recall after all these years that he was hungry for a fight.

HT was particularly angry at me. “*Wae geurae?*” (“What’s your problem?”) I kept asking him. He spoke no English and my Korean was lousy, so my silly question repeated over and over only made him angrier as the afternoon deteriorated. Bill had become mainly an observer at this point. We were both Peace Corps Volunteers. Informal protocol was that if you were being hosted in somebody else’s town, and an awkward situation developed, you stood down and waited it out while the local Volunteer resolved the problem.

If HT had his druthers, the big fight would most likely take place outside in some dark alley, where he could do me some bodily harm, unseen, and perhaps get away with it. While I was a big palooka in those days, I was also Peace Corps Volunteer and a teacher of middle school girls.



Figure 29-2: A teacher of middle-school girls, 1973

I believed that if Peace Corps was to stand for anything during the Vietnam War era, it was patriotic service in the name of Pacifism. When taunted by strangers, those of us who were like-minded used to respond with a knowing wink that we were “lovers, not fighters” and thus ignore the taunts and carry on by refocusing our energies even harder on our volunteering. I never catered much to “explaining” Peace Corps service to outsiders in peacetime or in wartime. For me, Peace Corps was then and remains today an enigma that wears both horns and a halo. In 1973, it was what it was.

And so it was a Saturday afternoon and Bill and I had found our groove and were minding our own business when in barges Hungry Tiger, already three sheets to the wind. Soldiers on leave tend to prowl in packs so HT’s standing alone there in the doorway was from the outset, unusual. He paused there, eyes narrowing to a squint, to size up the place. Spying out no friends, he fixed his attention on Bill and I seated at my favorite table. He began to track in our direction, dragging along an empty chair. On arrival he parked it between Bill and me and invited himself to sit down. We were not off to a good start. That was three hours previous to this moment of truth. It was now approaching sundown. “*Gaja!*” he repeated, loudly. What to do? What to do?

I do not know where this story actually begins except to guess that it originates in some vast maelstrom of cross-cultural history and emotions too complex to fathom, and then becomes set into motion along no specific trajectory till it results in some random event like this one. Hungry Tiger and I had very little in common when we first met. We were two strangers speaking different languages colliding in a portside greasy spoon on a remote island in the northern reaches of the East China Sea. One of us was a mellow fellow and the other one was on a bender and had serious issues.



Figures 29-3 and 29-4: Iconic images representing U.S. Peace Corps and ROK Tiger Division, circa 1970.

Three hours later the two strangers had determined beyond a doubt that they shared absolutely no common ground on God’s Great Earth. That was my position as I stood up to follow HT to some final resolution outside the seedy restaurant and into the underbelly of Jeju City’s Dickensian waterfront district at dusk. I don’t know how Bill felt at that moment. He had the greater experience with Korean soldiers between us. Bill had joined Peace Corps straight out of his military service in Korea. However, that particular evening, if Bill had an opinion or a better idea he kept it to himself. And so out of curiosity if nothing else he also pushed his chair back and rose to his feet to follow us outside.

It is time to describe Hungry Tiger in more detail and in context, perhaps thereby revealing why he was packing a lot of bad attitude into the rib joint that day and so hell-bent on unloading some of his pent-up hostility upon me. Picture this:



Figure 29-5: In Vietnam circa 1970 the Tiger Division was always fit and ready to roll. Photo: ROKFV.com

Here is an official U.S. military evaluation of its Korean Tiger Division allies in the field during the Vietnam War: “Their discipline is superb, their leadership skilled and eager, their equipment beautifully maintained, and their firebases immaculate. They plan most meticulously for field operations, gather intelligence quite intensively, and emphasize local security; hence, their casualties are very, very few and the enemy’s are many, with the ROK’s having the highest ratios of weapons captured.” Reading these plaudits while contemplating this anonymous photo reveals a lot about HT, I think. The evaluation, confirmed by the photo, reveals that Tiger Division troopers like HT proudly took the fight to the enemy and beat the enemy at its own game.

These documents give credit where credit is due and deserved. The only way to capture lots of weapons from the Viet Cong was to “catch them with their pants down.” The kill ratio for the Korean Tiger Division in the Vietnam War was something like 25 to 1.

## Chapter 30

### The Tiger Division meets ‘Travelling Sam, Peace Corps Man’ (Part 3)

Last chapter I introduced a circa 1970 Vietnam War battlefield photograph of a Tiger Division soldier standing proudly in front of some ready-to-roll APCs (armored personnel carriers a.k.a. “battle taxis”). He reminds me vividly of “Hungry Tiger (HT),” the troubled Tiger Division soldier I met on the prowl in Old Jeju City in the Spring of 1973. I recognize, for example, the same sort of menacing panache in the photographed soldier that the annoying and belligerent HT confronted me with on that tense afternoon he chose to swagger into my favorite waterfront rib joint. My previous chapter ended with HT commanding me to follow him outside to some vague destination he had in mind, where we could settle our differences.

So we hoofed it across the bone-strewn floor towards an entrance door that opened onto the western bank of the lower Sanjicheon riverbed – in those days perceived by everyone but the locals to be an open sewer amidst urban squalor. At that spot, a mere stone’s throw from the Old East Gate of medieval Jeju Castle, local history was so rich, palpable and concentrated on certain days that if you breathed too deeply it could torch your lungs.

My friend Bill was right behind me. The three of us had run up quite a bill, which I was obliged to pay because one of my companions was my guest and the other turned out to be a deadbeat and an ingrate. Fortunately I kept a running tab in my rib joint which I always paid promptly on Tuesdays. However, on this occasion it was a Saturday. So I was surprised to see the owner standing behind her cash register with a look of concern and pleading eyes when I passed by her station without pausing on my way out. “Aw, she’s concerned for my safety. How sweet!” was my initial thought. It occurred to me later that she was probably concerned that I owed her a tidy sum and would not be coming back. Not Tuesday. Not ever.

Their 25:1 kill ratio and uncompromising exploits against the Viet Cong and perceived sympathizers in Vietnam had earned Tiger Division troopers notoriety around the world and fame among their peers. Both HT and the soldier in the photograph were proud of their Division’s front line accomplishments over eight years as judged by military standards of all elite fighting forces there. They were legend by

1973. They expected attention and respect. Most of them had never met a Peace Corps Volunteer or seen an unofficial Korean PCV insignia:



Figure 30-1: Unofficial insignia of Peace Corps Korea circa 1973

Emphatically “lovey-dovey” the symbolism in this insignia gushed with gentle, pacifist sentiments. In contrast, the Tiger Division official insignia worn in Vietnam was an entirely different animal: The jungle tiger stalks its prey then attacks and devours it. This beast is ferocious, uncompromising and remorseless:



Figure 30-2: Insignia of the ROK Tiger Division during the Vietnam War.

Actually Peace Corps and the Tiger Division made a pretty good pair when successfully (as it turned out) deployed against world communism. But I didn't see it that way back in 1973. Who could?

Returning to the battlefield photograph: I notice that it centers on the fearsome Tiger Division insignia stenciled upon an APC (armored personnel carrier). It is a calculated focus of this soldier's pose: "Here we come! The Korean Army Tiger Division! Surrender, run or die!"

I have a personal theory about the rapid decline of global Communism, leading to its near-total collapse in 1989. Nobody in the communist world wanted to fight this guy. For the purposes of this discussion, let's just call him "Tiger 2."

Odds are that Tiger 2 was born around the time of the Korean War and spent his childhood days sharing the burden of hardscrabble farm labor with his parents and siblings. He had many brothers and sisters. He was neither eldest nor youngest. Perhaps his parents were war refugees and had settled down after the Armistice in 1953 as sharecroppers, and thus they farmed someone else's land: If so, they were *really* poor and may have been barely surviving. They probably lived in some remote village far from Seoul. In his mid-teens Tiger 2 may have heeded the impassioned call of President-General Park Chung Hee to rural youths with patriotism, courage and stamina to take up the arts of soldiery in order to escape rural poverty. Park, himself, had done so.

A rumor circulating at that time (around 1965) was that escape from rural poverty leading to success via an Army career route began with joining the Tiger Division's patriotic fight against Communist invaders of South Vietnam. There was a bonus for volunteers and a promise of rapid advancement up the military ranks for survivors who fought with fervor and distinction. There were incentives to kill and not be killed. As noted, combat soldiers of the Tiger Division watched each other's backs to the tune of a 25:1 kill ratio. And so Tiger 2 ended up being photographed late in the War, proudly standing next to his Division's well-maintained APCs, in his bathing suit and sporting a huge pistol on his hip:



Figure 30-3: Tiger 2, full of panache, proudly sports his sidearm

"Nice butt" you might be thinking – especially if you are a gun nut! This is the conclusion reached by my firearms-savvy colleague Brian. He closely examined this magnified portion of the battlefront photo and reported back to me: "It looks like a 45 ACP 1911 model by the grip angle and the end of the frame that can be seen protruding. It also looks like it has some kind of custom grips maybe ivory or some such stuff." Brian thus confirms your thought. He elaborated enthusiastically that the "C" in "ACP" stands for "Colt," as in 'Colt 45, the gun that won the West!'"

He confirmed it was a U.S.-government-issued sidearm, its 45-calibre bullet being the best blunt force weapon to be had for infantry combat at close quarters. "Anything smaller and you have to shoot twice!" Apparently the U.S. supplied state-of-the-art arms, ammunition, vehicles and service pay to the Tiger Division throughout the Vietnam War. However, The Tiger Division did not want or need, and

thus tended to decline or refuse, tactical assistance from the U.S. and their other allies in Vietnam. Indeed, Tiger Division troopers proved battle after battle that they were the experts in tactical jungle warfare.

Brian was not finished: "I heard a story of S Korean troops in Vietnam from a gringo I knew who was there. Apparently a South Korean outfit/unit and the American troops were waiting for helicopters to transport them ten or so miles to fight some Viet Cong troops about which they had received fresh intelligence. The Korean troops decided it was quicker to run the distance, and they did. Apparently they were paid by the head (dead ones) and they had fought the battle before the Americans ever got there."

While in Vietnam HT was paid \$40 a month. History records that the first units of the ROK Tiger Division began to land at Qui Nonh in the coastal jungle and bush of South Vietnam in 1966, in relief of the U.S. 101st Airborne's famed "Screaming Eagles." Once entrenched there they became one of the longest serving allied formations. Their last elements departed for South Korea in March 1973. Tiger 2 in the photograph may have actually *been* the HT in my rib joint for all I know.

What I do know is that the ROK government routed hundreds of Tiger Division soldiers through Jeju Island on their way home from the Vietnam War during the month of April, 1973. They had earned their rest and relaxation. No doubt they needed to "wind-down" from their combat experiences; to "decompress" upon rapidly emerging from that abyss of continuous combat in Vietnam. While they probably deplaned on the outskirts of Moselpo, an army base southwest of Seogwipo, most of them gravitated to roaming the streets of Jeju City – *my* town -- day-in and day-out for the entire month of April.

They were angry at America. The answer to my question "*Wae geurae?*" is no mystery to me now, in retrospect. Tiger Division combat vets fresh out of the jungles of Vietnam arrived on Jeju Island very bitter over their involuntary "retreat" from the Vietnamese battlefield. "Stand your ground and die there if you must. Retreat is no option" was the Tiger Division trademark. Left to their own devices, the soldiers of the ROK Tiger Division would have probably elected fight it out with the Viet Cong to a last stand. Vietnam would be their Alamo.

But didn't turn out that way: The sudden pullout of allied forces orchestrated by America had trampled on the pride of Tiger Division troopers sent home shy of their final victory over the Communists. Their angry reaction perhaps had a lot to do with the Korean concept of *gibun*, which I am not qualified to interpret much less explain. Suffice it to say, these combat vets were returning back home to face their families, friends and the public-at-large as losers instead of winners. That hurt. Their winding down on Jeju Island amounted to a lot of chairs being tossed about and tables upended in the cheapest of wine houses and tea rooms. In this way Tiger Division stalwarts initially tried to sort out their betrayal by the Americans as well as their personal issues. It could have been worse. I like to think that most of them demonstrated discipline and restraint during their days of decompression on the island.

"*Gaja!*" HT impatiently motioned with his thumb to continue following him downstream and toward the Old Jeju City waterfront. I paused. Bill paused. I said "*Wae geurae?*" HT turned abruptly on his heels to face us and teetered there on his toes with his hands on his hips, his torso leaning in our direction. His head cocked and his face was sweating and beet red.

It was dusk. We were blocking pedestrian traffic. Some of those busy folks paused and stopped. Some curious patrons had followed us out of the rib joint. They also stood around at a safe distance. In a phrase: "A crowd was gathering." I heard a little voice in my head. It was my faithful Moondoggy.



Figure 30-4: Moondoggy (see Mr. Bu's *dojang*, Part 2)

He advised: "You can take this guy. He's short, he's tired and he's drunk."

## Chapter 31

### The Tiger Division meets ‘Travelling Sam, Peace Corps Man’ (Part 4)

“You can take this guy!” The echo of Moondoggy’s lunatic advice bounced around inside my brain for several seconds as I stared into “Hungry Tiger” (HT)’s angry, bloodshot eyes across a distance of about two feet.

“And then what?” interrupted the more self-assured voice of My Own Better Judgment. This was a voice that I trusted a lot more than I trusted “Moondoggy wisdom” – especially when my health and safety seemed at stake. Indeed, there was little or no upside to any fistfight between me and HT. Losing would be painful, at minimum. And win or lose, repercussions would ensue. Police reports, no doubt. A free trip to Seoul for me, perhaps one-way. For street fighting I could be sent back to the United States.

On the other hand, by simply abandoning my pride on the spot I would be left with a slew of more rational options. I could, for example, poop in my pants and beg HT to spare me a beating right there in front of my favorite rib joint. Absurd and unlikely? Yes – and yet a possible option.

So I am not saying that I was facing a life or death situation at that time; only that I had to act decisively. Without taking my eyes off of HT, who at close quarters and unhinged might strike swiftly without warning, I took note of that part of the crowd within the range of my peripheral vision. Sad to say, there were some familiar faces there. Many were regulars from the rib joint. In addition, I spied what I thought to be one of my students in her school uniform, most likely on an errand, who was skirting the edge of the crowd very slowly and all bug-eyed. She had probably never before seen any of her teachers in this rough part of town.

All public school teachers circa 1973 invariably wore slacks and ties and dressed professionally inside and outside of the schoolhouses. They were highly respected at that time by a public who expected them to strictly avoid the more disreputable part of town. All uniformed students from all schools paused and bowed low (girls) or paused and removed their hats (boys) whenever a teacher approached. Schoolhouse Royalty included me. Any teachers encountered out of place threatened deeply-entrenched prevailing proprieties. Once suspected of deviancy from the norm he or she could be disciplined – perhaps fired – for perceived indiscretions.

Peace Corps Volunteers who taught in public schools were also advised during training to follow these

strict rules. In practice, however, many Volunteers quickly discovered at their assigned service sites that they were pretty much Teflon where strict rules and regulations were concerned. For example, most of the locals expected Volunteers, as outsiders and “guests,” to discover their personal comfort zones and to recreate themselves – but within reason – during their terms of service. In short, we Volunteers on Jeju Island enjoyed a double-standard.

The only person to ever admonish me for habitually hanging around the waterfront after dark was the KCIA agent assigned to me, who would occasionally pop out of dark doorways in the early hours of the morning to remind me that I was out-of-place. He would sometimes hail me a cab and even pay the fare while attempting to keep me out of trouble and harm’s way. So, as I stood there facing HT on that Saturday in front of my rib joint I wondered just where *he* might be in my time of need?

My best guess is that he was probably in the encircling crowd waiting to see what *I* was going to do. So, it was in those few final pregnant seconds before the birth of my decision that I also noticed that just to the right of HT, in the front row of the encircling crowd, and directly facing me, was a young apprentice from Mr. Bu’s *dojang*, which was located in the warehouse just across the riverbed from my rib joint. He was carrying his small supply of packaged chewing gum that he would hope to sell that evening in cheap restaurants up and down the riverbank. I sensed that he and the majority of the crowd wanted me to follow HT northward down the Sanjicheon Ditch to its mouth and thus into that most primitive zone of labyrinthine streets and alleys interfacing Jeju portside.



Figure 31-1: The Sanjicheon Ditch (stream) in the vicinity of my favorite riverfront rib house, circa 1960. Photo courtesy Jeju Special Self-Governing Province

Civilization, in contrast, was located in the exact opposite direction, upriver, and along its right bank to where the bustle suddenly meets the hustle of the East Gate Rotary traffic hub. Hundreds of islanders entering and leaving the vast public market on the south side of the rotary would be milling about there, overcrowding the bus benches. Some fools would be braving the treacherous curbsides in order to hail one of the furtive taxis that darted in and out amidst the confusion of inbound and outbound diesel-belching buses constantly circling about at that location. Policemen and policewomen were constantly present at the rotary, for there was a police box there.

So that is where I headed. With a “Let’s go Bill!” I turned my back on HT and split the crowd while sauntering southward toward the rotary. We ignored HT, who quickly caught up with us and ran circles around us trying to intimidate us into reversing our course. As angry and frustrated as he was, he did not touch us. When we reached the rotary we found space on a bench in front of a loading bus and I sat down with Bill. HT stood right in front of me grunting “*Gaja!*” “*Gaja!*” (“Let’s go!”) while I responded “*Wae geurae?*” “*Wae geurae?*” (“What’s your problem?”) – and this went on for a good five minutes. I suggested to Bill that he might as well leave and explore the vibrant marketplace and find some fun while I would remain in the rotary with HT. We could hook up later, I suggested. “Good Luck!” he said, and wandered off. Another half-hour passed with me sitting there at the busy rotary with HT pacing in front of me and speaking unkindly at me, and to me, and about me to strangers, and generally making a pest of himself. Finally he got bored and walked off. I never saw him again, though I expected that I might.

Nothing bad ever came of my refusing to fight HT that I can tell or will admit to. I sometimes but not often review my options on that day in retrospect and imagine up all sorts of possible scenarios for decisions I did not make. Today the Korean government has taken to calling Jeju “Peace Island.” I suppose that perhaps because I was a Peace Corps Volunteer and conscious of it that I naturally and understandably opted for peace instead of war with HT of the Tiger Division on that tense afternoon back in 1973. I therefore acted wisely in the Spirit of Things to Come.

## Chapter 32

### A preliminary roll call of Cheju Island Peace Corps Volunteers, 1966-1981

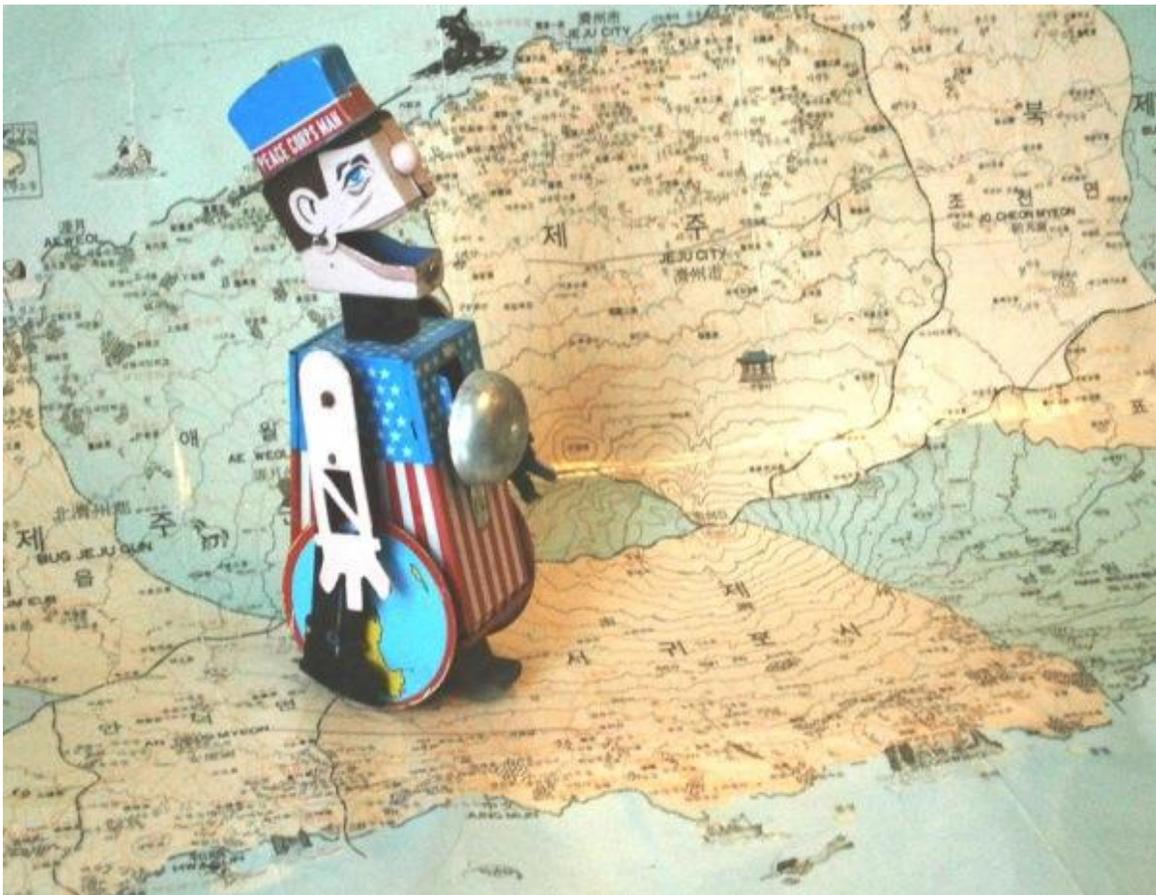


Figure 32-1: Peace Corps on Cheju: *Venimus, vidimus, servivimus*, 1966-1981

The United States rolled out its Peace Corps Program in 1961, and its Volunteers first began arriving to the Republic of Korea and to “Cheju” (Jeju) Island in 1966. To Peace Corps Volunteers who served in Korea the Island will always be remembered as “Cheju.” That is because we all spelled it that way (in contrast to “Jeju”) during the years we served. I spell it both ways in this book. Nineteen-eight-one was the year Peace Corps shut down shop in Korea and its final Volunteer officially deactivated.

There were all told 51 PCV groups trained to serve in Korea and they were numbered consecutively. For example, the K-1 Volunteer group arrived in Korea in 1966 and the K-51 group departed Korea in 1981. The approximately 2,000 Volunteers who actually served in Korea over the lifespan of the program trained primarily in English education and health specialties (for example, as TB and leprosy technicians). Many Volunteers liked Korea so much that they found work and stayed on in-country directly following after officially terminating their Peace Corps service. Several “went native” and a few went crazy. There are endless anecdotes.

Here’s one: A fairly new Volunteer who suddenly tired of Korea marched into headquarters in Seoul unexpectedly one day and demanded to be sent home immediately. Peace Corps honchos there recommended a week of counseling in hopes of salvaging the Volunteer for continued service. Adamant and unwilling to negotiate, the Volunteer walked outside of the headquarters building, which was located on a crowded street in central Seoul with heavy pedestrian traffic and many bus stops, in broad daylight, and took off all his clothes. Early the next day he was on a one-way flight to Los Angeles. Such things happened.

Some Volunteers extended their Peace Corps service either in Korea or elsewhere (with Samoa and Tonga as favorite destinations). Not a few Volunteers who headed home after Peace Corps suffered serious bouts of nostalgia and had readjustment issues in the States. Some of these returned to Korea immediately; some later. A few Volunteers are now Korean citizens.

I was a K-25 and my Volunteer group officially arrived to Korea in November of 1972 and officially departed for home 27 months later, in March of 1975. Two Volunteers from our group were sent down to Cheju Island in February 1973 to serve. I was one of them and Steve Beatty was the other:



Figure 32-2: K-25s Nemeth and Beatty, above Sogwip’o (Seogwipo) Town, 1973

Enough background for the time being: It's time to present the tentative results of the initial Cheju Island Peace Corps Volunteer roll call. You would think that such a name list and inventory is already compiled and on file somewhere in hard-copy versions or in digital files. The Peace Corps Office surely must have kept track of all their Volunteers around the world and the times and places they served. Likewise, Korean government agencies including the nosy KCIA must have compiled its own thorough investigations of PCK Volunteers, highlighting who was good and who was bad, and so on. Certainly someone, somewhere, in some official government capacity has only to walk into a room and pull open a file drawer to — “Voila!” — discover then thumb through a tidy row of folders to access the “PC Volunteer Service Folder for Cheju Island, ROK” file. But no: that folder and its contents do not seem to exist anywhere on Planet Earth any more — if it ever did.

So, I have casually endeavored over the past few years to contact past KPCVs and especially those who served on Cheju Island in an attempt to compile a complete-as-possible Volunteer name list in chronological order. Jim Shon (K-12) and his personal contacts among Cheju ex-PCVs have been particularly helpful. Here is the list as it stands today, still tentative and perhaps, say, 70 percent complete. I invite readers of *JWW* from around the world to help us fill in the gaps and correct any errors. Just email me with your input at david.nemeth@utoledo.edu.



Figure 32-3: Rough-draft roll call of Chejudo Peace Corps Volunteers, 1966-1981 (a work in progress as of July, 2013):

Jackie Tanny (K-1)

Sherrie Moore (K-1)

Craig Cooley (K-1?) Sogwip'o Town

Jim Chamie (K-4?)

Lou Spaventa (K-7) Cheju City

Peter Adams (K-7) Hallim Town

Bob Sirko (K-9?) Cheju City

“some tall guy” (K-?) Sogwip'o Town

John Csenger (K-11 or K-13) Sogwip'o Town

Linda Pope (K-12)

Jim Shon (K-12) Cheju City  
Joe Reilly (K-12) Cheju City and Pyosun Village  
Bob Swartout (K-12) Cheju City  
Sue Ann Allen (K12) Cheju City  
Larry Morgan (K-12) Sogwip'o Town  
George Biolsi (K-13) Cheju City.  
Linda Terrio (K-17?) I think was in Songsanp'o  
Kathy Heitman, a.k.a. "Maggie"? (K-17)  
Ed Evans (K-?) Cheju City  
Barbara Siegel (K-?) Cheju University  
Jack Maisano (K-?) Sogwip'o Town  
Mark Tierney (K-18)  
James P. Callahan (K-19) Sogwip'o Town.  
Courtney Callahan (K-19) Sogwip'o Town  
Vicki Metcalf (K-21?) Cheju City  
Gary Ashkenazy (K-24) Sogwipo Town?  
Tom Runyan (K-24) Cheju City  
Steve Beatty (K-25) Cheju City  
David ("Jim") Nemeth (K-25) Cheju City  
James Lampru (K-27) Sogwip'o Town  
Cindy McMillen (K-27)  
Jon McLean (K-30) Cheju National University  
Edith Jensen Westerod (K-30) Cheju National University  
Martha Gustafson (K-32) Cheju National University  
Michael Clement (1976-1978) Kimnyung and Cheju City  
Kathy Clement (1976-1978) Cheju City  
Karen Hymbaugh (K-36) Sogwip'o Town.  
Douglas Hansen ?  
Charlie Kelly (K-41) ?  
Darrel Hess (K-46)  
Brenda Carey (K-49) Cheju City?

(... a work in progress ...)

# Chapter 33

## The Jacket

Setting aside 19th century Captain Sir Richard Francis Burton (whose example is peerless) few in the world would have more right to claim “Been there, done that!” when at Death’s door than the author-adventurer Jack London (d. 1916) — and he only survived to be forty years of age. Let the record show also that Jack London was castaway on Jeju Island – although vicariously – in the person of Jack Strang, a crew member of the *Sparwehr*; a Dutch merchantman that sailed uncharted seas between Java and Japan in the mid-17th century until it came to grief in a stormy night time shipwreck shortly after departing Japan.

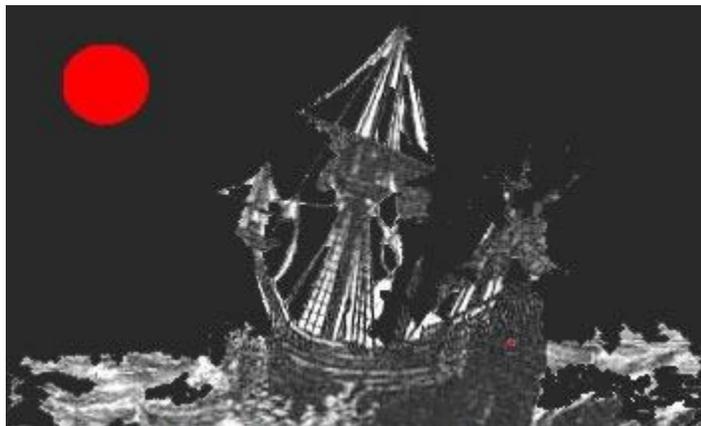


Figure 33-1: Adam Strang’s doomed *Sparwehr* departs Japan into stormy uncharted seas, circa 1650.

The doomed vessel, according to Strang, was half-owned by his shipmate Hendrik Hamel. Wait! Is this story beginning to sound very familiar? It should if you know anything about the history of Jeju Island’s intercourse with early Western travelers.

Jack London borrowed some detail from the real Hendrik Hamel’s classic account of his own 17th century *Sparwehr* shipwreck on Jeju Island when writing of his surrogate Adam Strang’s adventures



What a magical transformation! This is how I become the Illustrated Peace Corps Man of Jeju Island: It was late in my second year of Peace Corps service. I would soon be leaving my post and returning to the United States. My students, all middle school girls, sent a contingent into the teachers' room unexpectedly about two months prior to my departure date. They made this request: "Please let us borrow your blue jacket for a few weeks." I agreed and gave it to one of them the next day. The next time I saw it was the week of my departure (So much time had passed I had been beginning to wonder if I would ever see it again).

But there it was, along with a hundred or so smiling faces. What a perfect going-away gift! Each student involved in the conspiracy had embroidered an iconic image of the Jeju Island cultural landscape, or the name of a landmark place, or their own names. Also included were my favorite food and drink items – and even a portrait of me!



## Chapter 34

### The Illustrated Peace Corps Man (Part 1)



Figure 34-1: Teacher Nam and his little Orb-Weavers

I've described how my little orb-weavers at Central Girl's Middle School in Cheju City pulled a Ray Bradbury on me by carefully embroidering my hitherto unremarkable Sears denim jacket and thereby transforming me into "The Illustrated Peace Corps Man of Cheju Island." When I wear this jacket now, 40 years after the fact, I am not only a walking, talking blackboard of island lore and landmarks, but when anyone gazes on jacket detail the images invariably quiver into life as a storybook tale of my Peace Corps Volunteer experiences long ago on The Blessed Isle. I tend to yak it up. There is no escape.



Figure 34-2: Nam Dong-il is my Korean name

All Peace Corps Volunteers adopted Korean names. These were in fact bestowed on embryonic Volunteers by Peace Corps staff members during training camp as a rite of passage. These in-country names were part symbolic, part pragmatic and part whimsy.

The first letter of a Volunteer's surname set into motion the ritual naming ceremony. For example, Jim McGuire in our training group became "Mang" ("The Magnificent"). In my own case "Nemeth" became "Nam" ("South"; a fairly common Korean surname). My given name was "Dong-il" which, when spoken, has ambiguous meaning (it could, for example, mean "first-class poop"). Thank you Peace Corps staff! However, when written in Chinese characters "Dong-il" unambiguously signifies "East #1." No harm done there and, in fact, "Nam Dong-il" (South East #1) is an appropriate name for a geographer who is often on the road. My Peace Corps Korean name was thus eerily prophetic of how my life and career over the long term has shaped up.



Figure 34-3: Teacher Nam in his John Lennon glasses, highlighting acne

Why my students didn't perceive me as the handsome young man I saw in the mirror in 1974, and instead sewed me into perpetuity as a long-nosed, mouth-breathing, white-haired hayseed with acne, is a mystery I will have to take with me to my grave. The kids got the glasses right, however: John Lennon steel-rim eyeglasses with unbreakable, flexible frames were elective Government Issue for Peace Corps Volunteers in 1972, and an example of unexpected freebies that began to materialize once I made the Peace Corps recruitment shortlist. I make no claim to know how Peace Corps bureaucracy operated. Sometimes I wonder if anybody knew. What I do know is that after I had survived months and months of screening, I reached a stage where the bureaucracy decided they could begin to spend some real money on me as a prospective volunteer.

This all began with an invitation letter to join an advanced recruitment workshop in Denver for a week on the taxpayer's dime. I was invited to report to the Brown Palace Hotel (I think it was) to meet the Korea Volunteer recruiter team. Wow! I approached it as if it were a blind date. If all went well I gathered, Peace Corps Korea and I would become officially "engaged" at the end of my week in Denver. Then, after another few months, the honeymoon (three months of training camp) would commence. The actual marriage would take place after the honeymoon, meaning that if I performed

well enough in training camp I would ceremonially at that time become an official Peace Corps Volunteer, having been judged qualified to commence duties at my service site.

Fitting for eyeglass frames was part of the workshop activities. The optician was a jovial bloke, full of questions, and I thought we had a fine conversation. In retrospect I have concluded that the optician was a government-paid psychiatrist in disguise. Shrinks seemed to be everywhere at the workshop and the eyeglass man was a ploy for the recruiting team to contrive special circumstances in order “to see what condition my condition was in” (a lyric coined by Kenny Rogers, 1968). They must have figured they would need an entire week to discern if I and the other male volunteers were not simply clever-by-half draft dodgers faking our enthusiasm for Peace Corp Volunteer service. When those of us who were not de-selected during our screening in Denver finally arrived as a group in Korea for training camp, it became obvious early on that the psychiatric team at the workshop had given a pass to a few suspect trainees who clearly should have not made the cut.

For six nights Joni Mitchell (I swear) was perched on a tall stool singing “Both Sides Now” for us in that leathered-up-luxurious old Brown Palace hotel bar. We Volunteers-to-be meanwhile struck up new friendships over pitchers of beer-on-tap to wash down basketfuls of popcorn. Peace Corps recruiters had really pulled out all the plugs to win us over to a firm commitment it seemed.

On the second night at the workshop a mystery was solved. There appeared to be another contingent of Volunteer-recruits in the hotel beside the Korea group, and the explanation was forthcoming as to why there was in fact, two Volunteer-recruit groups meeting in the same hotel at the same time. It was no mere coincidence: Washington staff was going to give at least some of the recruits an opportunity to choose between either Peace Corps in Korea or Peace Corps in -- Nepal! Was this significant choice built into the battery of their psychiatric tests? I was unsure of how to respond to their questioning.

My whole life after Peace Corps service in Korea was shaped by my ultimate choice in Denver resulting in that two-year experience. Talk about a path not taken! That would be Nepal. I could have volunteered for Nepal and eventually have written up my experiences for an electronic newspaper called “Nepal World Wide” instead of *Jeju World Wide!* Whenever the profound decision I made that week in Denver crosses my mind, I slip temporarily into a tenuous and bifurcated mode of uncertain being, much like Schrodinger’s Cat.

By Wednesday, people were stopping me in the hotel halls, elevators and staircases and asking “Nepal or Korea?” Although I had gone to Denver thinking my future as a Volunteer in Korea was a done deal, by Wednesday my plans were wavering. There were some experienced returned Volunteers from both Nepal and Korea at the workshop. They formally and informally shared with all the recruits what they knew of the virtues and vices of each country as a Volunteer destination. We would have to decide by Thursday noon. By Thursday morning, the difference between the two Volunteer sites (at least for male recruits) was reduced ad absurdum to this: 1) Nepal: a paradise for dope-heads, but don’t expect to find any fair maidens to cozy up with; 2) Korea: a superabundance of Babes, but no weed indeed.

I discovered eventually that these simplistic truth claims turned out to be at most half-truths. Korea did indeed have a drop-dead beauty queen around nearly every corner — and it was a rare rural bus ride that didn’t have few old-timers (over 60 years of age), both men and women, puffing on the dragon weed (ranging from lowly hemp sack to high-grade homegrown). But I am no fan of the weed. To my everlasting joy I learned in Denver and then discovered for myself that Korean farmers had invented and developed to perfection a flavorful and inexpensive alcoholic beverage guaranteed to knock your socks off:



Figure 34-4: *Makgeolli* (fermented grain of the gods).

## Chapter 35

### The Illustrated Peace Corps Man (Part 2)



Figure 35-1: *Saemaul Undong* (New Village Movement)

My middle school students in 1974 acclaimed the arrival of *Saemaul Undong* (New Village Movement) by embroidering its name prominently upon my jacket. Who could have envisioned its ultimate impact at that time? I mentioned in my previous essay that Joni Mitchell (or somebody who looked and sounded just like her) sang “Both Sides Now” in Denver’s Brown Palace Hotel, in the saloon, night

after night, when I attended an elaborate Peace Corps advanced recruiting event there (officially called “PRIST,” meaning “pre-invitational staging”). Woowoo! Joni also sang her latest big hit “Big Yellow Taxi.” The famous lyrics from that song are “they paved paradise to put in a parking lot.” Her muse according to music industry legend is that on her first trip to Hawaii she looked out the hotel window early in the morning after her night time arrival and saw beautiful green mountains in the distance, but then she looked down to discover a parking lot extending nearly as far off as the eye could see. She said it “broke my heart... this blight on paradise.” So she sat down and wrote the song. Since Jeju Island is known worldwide as “The Hawaii of Korea” perhaps you can see where I am going with this analogy.

*Saemaul Undong* in 1974 was already a powerful cement-spewing juggernaut financed and spearheaded by the central government in Seoul. Everywhere it busied itself 24/7/365 relentlessly with burying and then rebuilding upon what once was the traditional cultural landscape of the Hermit Kingdom on the peninsula. Consider Figure 35-2 here:

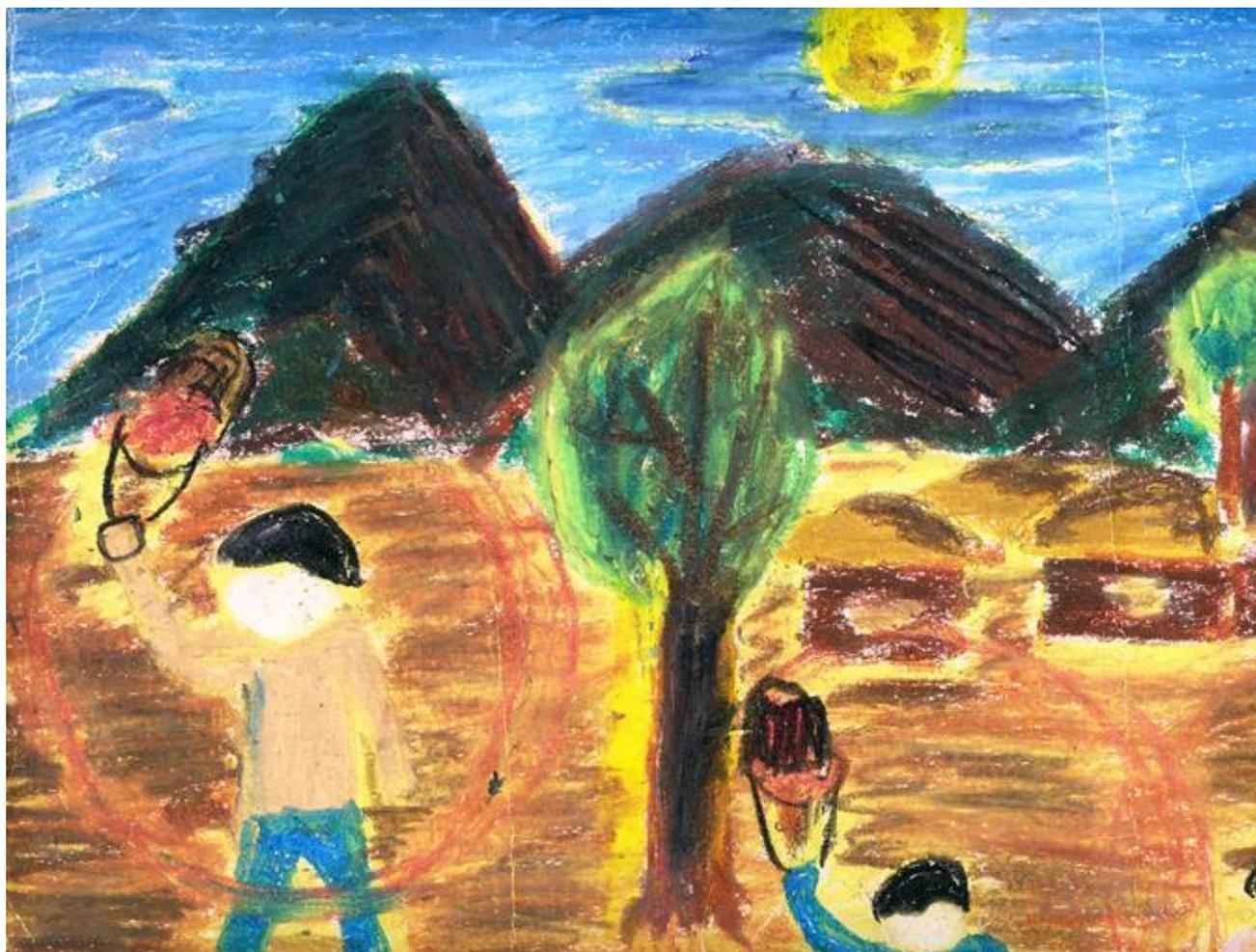


Figure 35-2: “Untitled” by a 4<sup>th</sup> grader in Chuncheon named Seong-su.

Seong-su was a 4th grader and one of my teacher-training students in Chuncheon City. This was in January of 1973. He drew this innocent contemporary rural landscape scene of his natal village at night,

and on the threshold of its *Saemaul Undong* facelift. Being a child, he might have imagined it would remain this way forever. I merely pause here in my essay to invite the reader to contemplate briefly on the soon-to-be-rendered obsolete straw roofs and swinging *yeontan* (cylindrical charcoal briquette) fire pails in this drawing. It was a time now near forgotten and just prior to the arrival of the great disruption that was *Saemaul Undong* into Seong-su's small, isolated, traditional community.

*Saemaul Undong* had barely begun to sweep away "The Old" on Jeju Island in order to make way for "The New" when I arrived there in February of 1973. However, the loaded die had already been cast by President Park Chung-hee. The high stakes game of rapid economic development was already underway. In retrospect, it is possible to claim that *Saemaul Undong* was a "mixed blessing" instead of an absolute success. Its complex outcomes are still unfolding. I have interviewed many Peace Corps Volunteers who served on Jeju Island during the 15-year lifespan of Peace Corps Korea ranging between 1966 and 1981. All seem astonished at the rapid pace of change that has taken place in such a short time. Some ex-Volunteers are stunned by the changes and resent them. Other ex-Volunteers applaud these changes. One example of *Saemaul Undong* induced change in the Jeju cultural landscape is the near disappearance of the *choga jib*.



Figure 35-3: The iconic Jeju Island *choga jib* ("grass-roofed house").

Figure 35-3 depicts an iconic Jeju *choga jib* (“grass-roofed house”). My students embroidered it prominently onto my blue denim jacket. We observe how the matted grass roof is expertly tied down with woven ropes to withstand the force of the Island’s notoriously constant and unforgiving winds.

*Choga jib* was ubiquitous in rural Jejudo (and even plentiful in Jeju City) when I first arrived. Now they are nearly all extinct save for a few museum examples spared for tourists to gawk at in official folk village settings. Gone also, having passed only recently, is the talented Island artist Byun Shi-ji (1926-2013) who portrayed the *choga jib* both in its prime as well as in its rapid and demoralizing decline. In one of his most memorable paintings “Boisterous Dance” (1997) Byun captures a *choga jib* and its owner, frozen entwined in their own death watch, anticipating the end: Time stands still for the old farmhouse under the ominous darkening sky of *Saemaul Undong*’s minions of creative destruction.

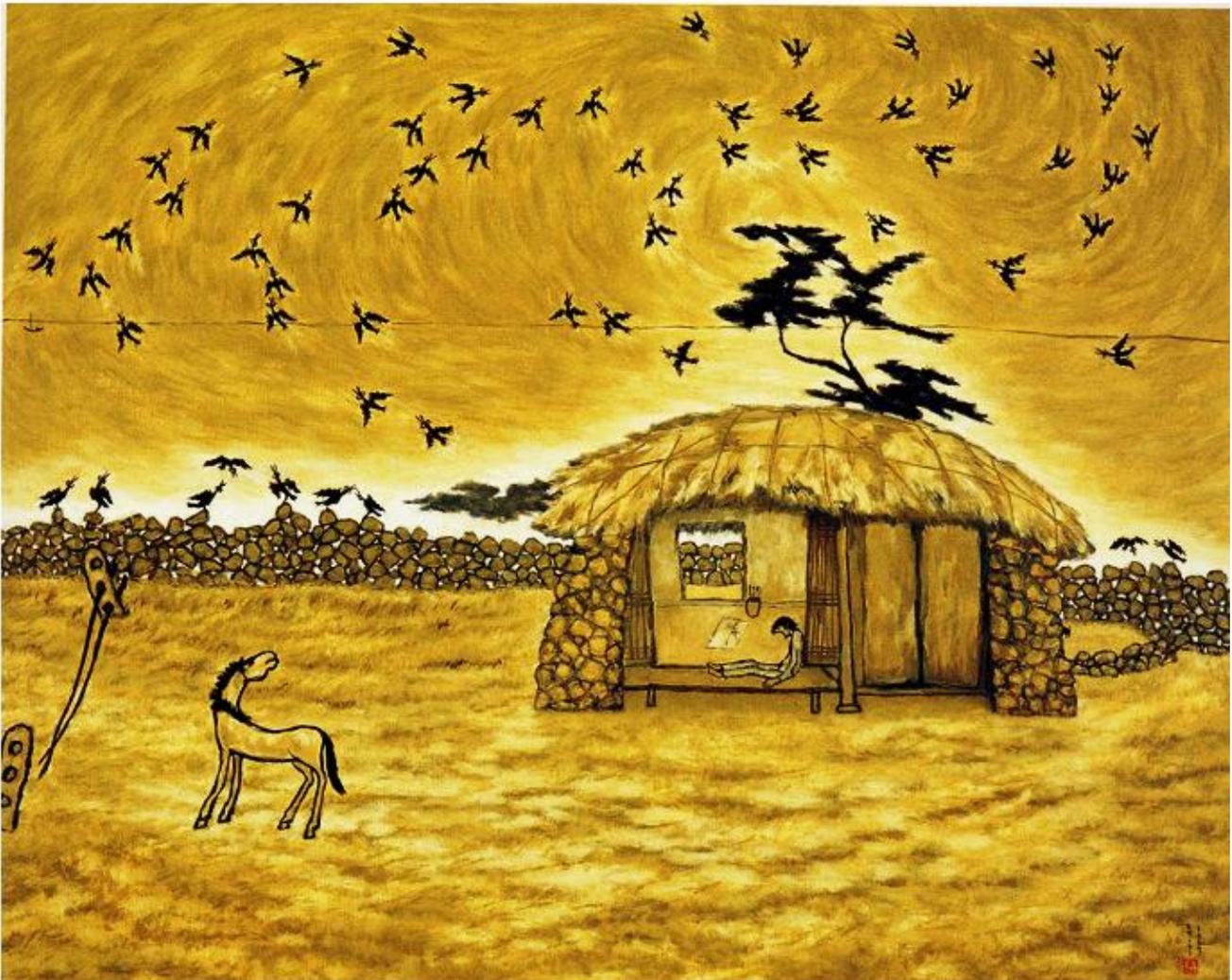


Figure 35-4: “Boisterous Dance” (1997) by Byun Shi-ji (1929-2013).

Americans like me who were raised in desert environs grew up knowing quite well what it meant when carrion birds began to circle, then perch, then hop forward in a closing circle towards their next meal. The “boisterous dance” of the carrion birds is often the last vision a doomed man or woman, lost and alone, experiences before expelling their last living breaths in harsh desert environs. Jeju Island is not

the American Old West but is technically a semi-desert vulnerable to drought. In Byun's painting we observe the demise of a once-proud, independent young farmer. One interpretation of the painting – my own – is that he has entered through no fault of his own an inescapable metaphorical desert of increasing debt, despondency, rapid sterility of undernourished and abused soils, impending starvation, bankruptcy, leading finally to abandonment of inherited lands. This entire downward spiral terminated with his unhappy migration to a manufacturing city on the mainland in order to barely survive there by working hard for low wages. To what extent was *Saemaul Undong* responsible for his woes?



Figure 35-5: Where have all the flowers gone? Thank you, *Saemaul Undong*!

Perhaps I have been a bit careless and cynical here by intimating in a seemingly simplistic manner that some sinister and conspiratorial role advertently played by *Saemaul Undong* in the successful achievement of “The Korean Miracle” also led to the downward spiral of Byun's traditional *choga jib* farmer. Confucius is supposed to have claimed that “Behind every success story is a great crime.” But don't blame me for recklessly spouting off in this chapter. Blame Confucius for my cynicism.

Certainly there are many sides to every story. *Saemaul Undong* spokespersons promoted the systematic eradication of grass-roofed houses both on the mainland and on Jeju Island as part of a public safety campaign. They claimed the *choga jib* was a fire trap back in 1973 and 1974 when I attended a few *Saemaul Undong* advisory team meetings with Jeju villagers. Few could marshal any credible counter-claim that a *choga jib* was fire proof. Look again at Seong-su's crayon drawing in Figure 35-1: a bunch of kids are swinging tethered red-hot brown-coal briquettes around in flaming arcs in the vicinity of grass-roofed houses! Horrors! A disaster in the making!

I am not being sarcastic. One of the most unforgettable and disturbing scenes imbedded in my memory from my Peace Corps days on Jeju Island occurred during a powerful typhoon event. I was foolishly riding the highway bus entirely around the island just for kicks. When the bus, which was traveling in a

clockwise direction out of Jeju City and tracking east, turned the corner at Seongsanpo and began to roll southwest along the coast toward Pyoseon-ri, it ran head-on into the full fury of this tremendous storm.

It was dark. Pitch dark. The rain was heavy and blowing horizontal. The bus shuddered and swerved as it became increasingly pummeled by savage gusts. The driver seemed terrified, yet was striving to stay on schedule. Need I say that the bus was uncrowded? Most the passengers who were destined for Seogwipo Town disembarked at a run in Seongsanpo. Although far short of their destination, they aimed instead for the closest roadside *yogwans* and *sulchibs* in order to wait out the peak of the storm in relative safety. The bus rolled on.

The force of the downpour strengthened as we slowly approached Pyoseon-ri. I was half-asleep. Our driver suddenly gasped aloud about something happening up ahead. I always sat behind the driver when touring the circumference of the island in this particular direction because the passenger window faced to the sea, and because I could also watch the road ahead through the driver's large front windows. What I saw that night spasmodically between curtains of deluge I will never forget.

The black howling night was illuminated by a huge fire up ahead. The bus slowed nearly to a halt. With that, a strong, acrid stench of hot wet smoke hit us like a wall and it was nearly overwhelming. Everyone on the bus began hacking and choking up. The driver picked up speed. Off to the left but adjacent to the highway were several village houses with their grass roofs aflame. Through the near-blinding storm I could glimpse only scant details of the fiery disaster so close at hand: Some villagers were running amok in their attempt to flee the vicinity of burning structures. We could hear them screaming and yelling. Others were forming into bucket brigades which seemed both absurd and futile as the flames and embers leaped higher and higher in defiance of the terrific rains and winds.

The bus sped up dramatically just as a fusillade of windborne rain and fire began to furiously pelt against its exposed nose and left side panels and windows. My nose was inches away from tiny brands of ignited wood and straw that momentarily stuck sizzling to the window glass then melted quickly away. On the pavement below I thought I could see small fireballs rolling around randomly. "*Jwi!*" the driver shouted as he ran them down and picked up more speed. The fireballs were rats all aflame and taking random paths to nowhere.

"*Mumchura!*" (Stop!) I insisted. I wanted to run back to the chaotic scene and somehow lend a hand. But the driver by then had pushed his pedal to the metal.

## Chapter 36

### The Illustrated Peace Corps Man (Part 3)



Figure 36-1: Embroidered *milgam* (tangerines) of Jeju Island.

I fondly remember my Peace Corps service experience on Jeju Island as my “Tangerine Years.” This is because I had immediate access to bejillions of them and they were free as could be. My middle school girl students were fully aware of my insatiable appetite for their island’s tangerines and were proud to

embroider their image upon the right-front pocket of my blue jean jacket, in glorious orange, straight over my heart. They invented a ritual shortly after I was assigned a desk in the teachers' room at their school. I had arrived at the height of tangerine season. They began at the outset to place four perfect Jeju tangerines in a perfect pyramid on top of my desk every morning before I arrived to work. The perfect start to what everyone hoped would be a perfect day for Teacher Nam.

My scientific knowledge of tangerines was zilch in 1973 when I first laid eyes on my first tangerine plantation in Seogwipo. Before then I just mindlessly ate as many as I could whenever the opportunity arrived. That day I first descended from the high flanks of Mt. Halla by minibus into the coastal enclave of Seogwipo Town via Route 11 that woke me up to the profound significance of the tangerine as a constant blessing in the tumultuous history of human civilization – which I won't go into here.

As our bus began to pass from temperate high forest and pine into sub-tropical tangerine country I thought I had died and gone to heaven. Why? Perhaps my joy was because when I was a toddler during World War 2 and living in Ohio I would find a "Christmas Orange" (what Midwesterners in the U.S., called a tangerine at that time) or two in my stocking once a year. I was hooked and my addiction to their sweetness as a child turned me into a connoisseur and aficionado as an adult. Anyway, it was about the time my downhill bus swung through the picturesque village of Beophocheon that I had the epiphany just described:



Figure 36-2: Portion of a map depicting the location of Beophocheon Village astride old Jeju Route 11 on the approach to Seogwipo Town, circa 1973.

The map above depicts where I first lost my heart to colorful Jeju tangerine landscapes in February of 1973. The arrow points to the name of the village and the little black squares represent the settlement. Note Route 11 threading the village. The heart symbol on the map is located at a rustic *makgeolli* shack about 10 paces from the bus stop. The *makgeolli* served there came out of what appeared to be quart-size plastic containers with long necks and was served into stainless steel bowls. During the heat of summer, the plastic containers were each tethered to cords and submerged in the shallow waters of a cold stream that flowed adjacent to the wine house, where the highway traffic passed over a concrete bridge. That stream is visible on the map as a thin blue line emerging from Beophocheon.

Take my word for it: streams in this area flowed overland and disappeared underground right and left; so just imagine that happening as you analyze the map. Upstream from Beophocheon several thousand meters is a famous place named Donnaeko Resort (written in large orange Korean alphabet at the top center of the map). It was even a popular “resort” back in 1973, before the tourist boom. More than any other place on Jeju Island, Donnaeko was then and remains now famous for its spectacular therapeutic waterfalls and plunge pools.

I visited Donnaeko to test its icy waters several times in the summers of 1973 and 1974. There was always a crowd. The idea was to stand in the large plunge pool under the falls and pray no log or boulder drops on your head while the massage of the downpour heals your aches and pains. When it is raining, the falls can get heavy enough to do bodily harm. I visited once during a rainstorm and the falls thundered away into the plunge pool while a large crowd sat around and observed the event. Nobody ached enough to risk getting healed that day.

Upstream from Donnaeko where the elevation rises rapidly it is said that the stream emerges out of the steep mountain side fully formed, as if from the head of Zeus. I have never ventured there. Between Donnaeko and that sacred source are several Buddhist Temples and Animist shrines. What did this all add up to? A mighty fine bowl of *makgeolli* at that Beophocheon bus stop wine house: icy cold, delicious, inexpensive, inebriating — and perhaps of therapeutic value.

On late afternoons I used to emerge from the wine house into the shadows of surrounding towering *oreums* (volcanic cones) and stare up at the still-sunlit peak of Mt. Halla. From that perspective and under those conditions the mountaintop profile appears to be a beautiful maiden lying on her back. Just sayin’.

Those of my readers with a historical bent might be wondering if Magistrate Yi Hyong-sang in his tour of Jeju Island in 1702 was interested in visiting tangerine plantations in and around Seogwipo. Fortunately the artisan Kim Nam-kil in his entourage created illustrated maps of several occasions during the island tour when the magistrate inspected the orchards. Here Kim depicts a visit to a large tangerine plantation located somewhere just west of Cheonjeyeon Waterfall:



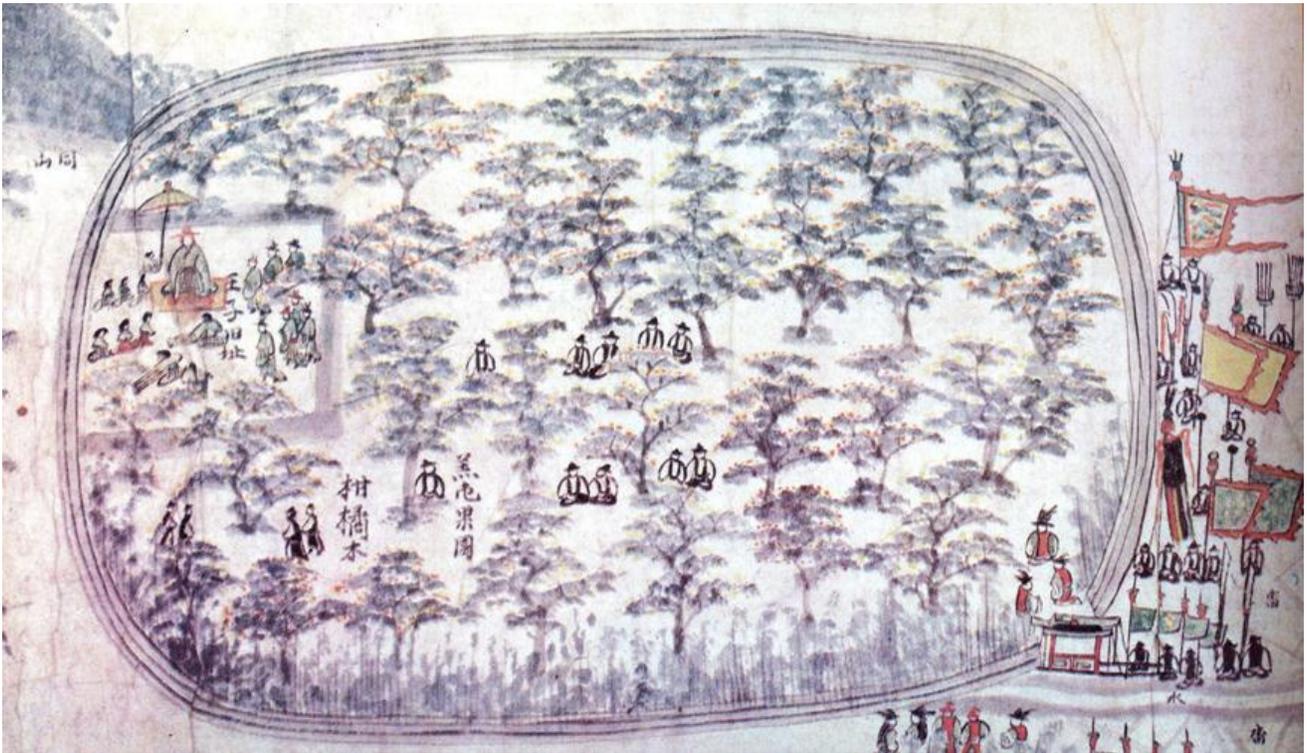


Figure 36-3: Magistrate Yi visits a tangerine plantation near Cheonjeyeon Waterfall, 1702.

Readers are encouraged to zoom-in on the ceremonies and imagine they are on the spot and peeking over the protective walls that surround this remarkable tribute orchard:



Figure 36-4: Close-up of Magistrate Yi inspecting tribute tangerines somewhere west of Seogwipo, circa 1702.

## Chapter 37

### The Illustrated Peace Corps Man (Part 4)



Figure 37-1: “You there! Reader! Caughtcha!”

Didn't you know that peeking over the walls at Magistrate Yi Hyong-san's private picnic (featuring *gisaeng*) inside the King's tangerine tribute orchards on Jeju Island is a serious breach of security? Heaven forbid you should actually *climb* the wall to *steal* then *eat* one of those precious, succulent beauties. Be forewarned!

Two principle punishments to discourage both peeping Ko's and tangerine thieves “back in the day” when white deer smoked pipes on Jeju Island were 1) bastinado (flailing the feet) and 2) amputation (sawing through the flesh to the bone and beyond with thin, jagged wire). Hendrik Hamel himself witnessed bastinado applied to captured iron thieves in the immediate aftermath of his shipwreck in 1653. Hamel remarked in his recollection written some years later how each of these thieves had 30 or so strokes of the cudgel applied to the soles of his (or her?) feet — and how some of their toes dropped off during the administration of the torture! Ouch! The second form of punishment, the sawing, is too horrible to further discuss and contemplate here.

Judging from ample evidence in Yi Hyong-san's Jeju Island inspection maps (drawn by Kim Nam-kil), there were many heavily-guarded tangerine tribute orchards on the island. One of the most remarkable examples is found within the walls of Jeju Castle. Here we see Magistrate Yi picnicking away in a

spacious fenced-in tribute orchard there — this time without his broad-brim horsehair hat (zoom in to verify). The trees hang heavy with fruit. The magistrate is again depicted within his familiar comfort zone surrounded by a cornucopia of tangerines, *gisaeng* galore, somber court officials and menacing bodyguards.



Figure 37-2: Magistrate Yi in a tribute orchard within the walls of Jeju Castle.

Hello? Say, what's this odd structure in the foreground of the orchard? The building with the onion dome. An onion dome? Is this pavilion-like building abutting the orchard wall in Jeju Castle the Russian embassy?

Doubtful.

But seriously, what is onion-dome-like architecture doing on Jeju Island in 1702? Artisan Kim Nam-kil thus bequeaths us with a bit of a mystery here. He is probably smiling from his grave about this mystery after more than 300 years. Let's take a closer look:



Figure 37-3: An onion-dome copula architecture in East Asia in 1702? How odd.

Help me out here readers. I'm still at a loss to explain this rooftop adornment. What does the sign read above the door? Or is that a gate? Perhaps this structure is the official entrance to the orchard? That still doesn't explain the origins of the onion dome. And why is it painted black? This can have nothing to do with Buddhist iconography (for example, a lotus) because Magistrate Yi was tasked specifically with destroying all traces of Buddhism on the island during his tenure.

Meanwhile, there is another map in the Inspection Atlas drawn by Kim Nam-kil worth considering. Part of this other map depicts the onion-domed structure from a different perspective:

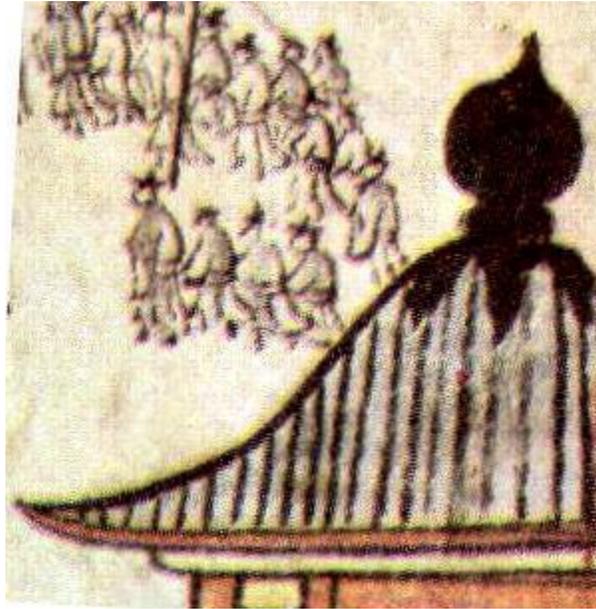


Figure 37-4: The onion-dome within Jeju Castle walls sprouts leaves!

Most certainly, the “onion-dome” within Jeju Castle walls in 1702 resembles this “onion-dome” from 13<sup>th</sup> century Tver (Russia):



Figure 37-5: Architectural sketch from Tver (Russia), 1294.

Now I’m really confused! Perhaps we can blame the Mongols for importing the design to the island?

The history of the onion-dome rooftop copula in Russia traces its origins to the tumultuous Mongol Empire era, and perhaps earlier. Above, for example, is an architectural sketch from the oblast of Tver (on the Volga River northwest of Moscow) dated 1294. Tver is about 5,000 miles distant from Jeju Island!

The Mongol occupation of Jeju Island began in 1273 and ended in 1375. The Mongol civilian administration brought horses, camels, mules and sheep to the island. Tangerines were already there (I’m guessing). Did the Mongols bring the onion-shaped dome design from one end of their empire to the other in the 14th century? If so, how could this architecture survive for an additional 350 years, to the time of Magistrate Yi’s inspection tour? And what became of the onion dome depicted by Kim in the Inspection Atlas after 1702? C’mon readers; help me out.

# Chapter 38

## The Illustrated Peace Corps Man (Part 5)



Figure 38-1: Embroidered *dolharubang* (stone grandfather) statue.

The *dolharubang* (stone grandfather) embroidered onto the backside of my denim jacket looms large on its image-rich canvas. As well it should. As an iconic emblem of Jeju Island, the *dolharubang* ranks second only to *haenyeo* (diving women) in world renown. The year before I first arrived on Jeju Island as a Peace Corps Volunteer (1973) a comprehensive archaeological survey to estimate the size and distribution of the “authentic” Jeju *dolharubang* population (estimated to total 48) located 45 of these on the island, two more in Seoul which left but one unaccounted for (go look in some Japanese garden).

During 1973 and 1974 I made a point of paying a visit to as many of the 45 on the island that I could find. *Saemaul Undong*'s reshaping of the traditional landscape on Jeju was entering into full swing during my Peace Corps years there, and many of the monoliths (which ranged from 1.5 to 2.5 meters tall) were being relocated helter-skelter from their historic positions to new sites. It was a chess game with no rules. For example, some that originally stood on matching pedestals were separated from them during their ad hoc redistributions.

When I revisited the island in 1980, many of the historic monoliths had by then been moved twice over. Apparently no one supervised or mapped these movements. To the extent the monoliths were created as sacred stones mirroring celestial prototypes, *Saemaul Undong* had created chaos under heaven.

To make matters worse, island stonemasons were carving brand new *dolharubang* hand over fist. Every new entrepreneur catering to the burgeoning tourist trade on the island seemed adamant to have one stationed in front of his or her establishment. *Dolharubang* knock-offs and grotesque imitations were fast becoming the cigar store Indians of Jeju retail expansion. Adding insult to injury, ambitious and unethical entrepreneurs (many of them mainlanders) confused tourists by claiming that their graven fakes were the authentic originals! Today it would be hardly hyperbole to venture a guess that half of every vertical stone artifact over two meters tall on the Blessed Isle is an imitation *dolharubang* sculpted for the tourist trade. Or indeed, if you marshaled them into a single line and chained them front to back you might build a bridge all the way from Moseulpo to Mara Island!

I've noted elsewhere but it is worth repeating here that it would not be idle speculation to hypothesize from cosmological inference and telling aspects of the artifacts themselves that half of the original 48 stone grandfathers are grandmothers:



Figure 38-2: Two of the original stone “grandfathers” from old Jeju Castle (here reassigned to positions guarding the main entryway to Jeju National College [now University], circa 1974). I leave it to *Jeju World Wide* readers to judge which of the two is the “stone grandmother”?

Forty-eight authentic *dolharubang* monoliths were identified in the 1971 government survey report. The survey culminated with their official nationwide recognition as high-order “local cultural assets” on the threshold of Jeju Island mass tourism planning. Some Jeju Studies scholars speculate that their function may have been to serve as sacro-symbolic castle gate guards in medieval times. As such the 48 were stationed outside the walls of the three major Yi Dynasty administrative fortresses on the island. Twenty-four *dolharubang* guarding three gates at Jeju Castle; 12 guarding three gates at Daejeong Castle; 12 guarding three gates at Jeongui Castle. These fortresses were located ritually and/or pragmatically equidistant from the axis mundi (sacred center) of the island, Baengnokdam, atop Mt. Halla. So, when I open up the atlas of Yi Hyong-san’s Inspection Maps with its 40 colorful leaves drawn in detail in 1702 by Kim Nam-kil, I expect to discover some evidence of the authentic *dolharubangs* depicted there. And here is what I find:

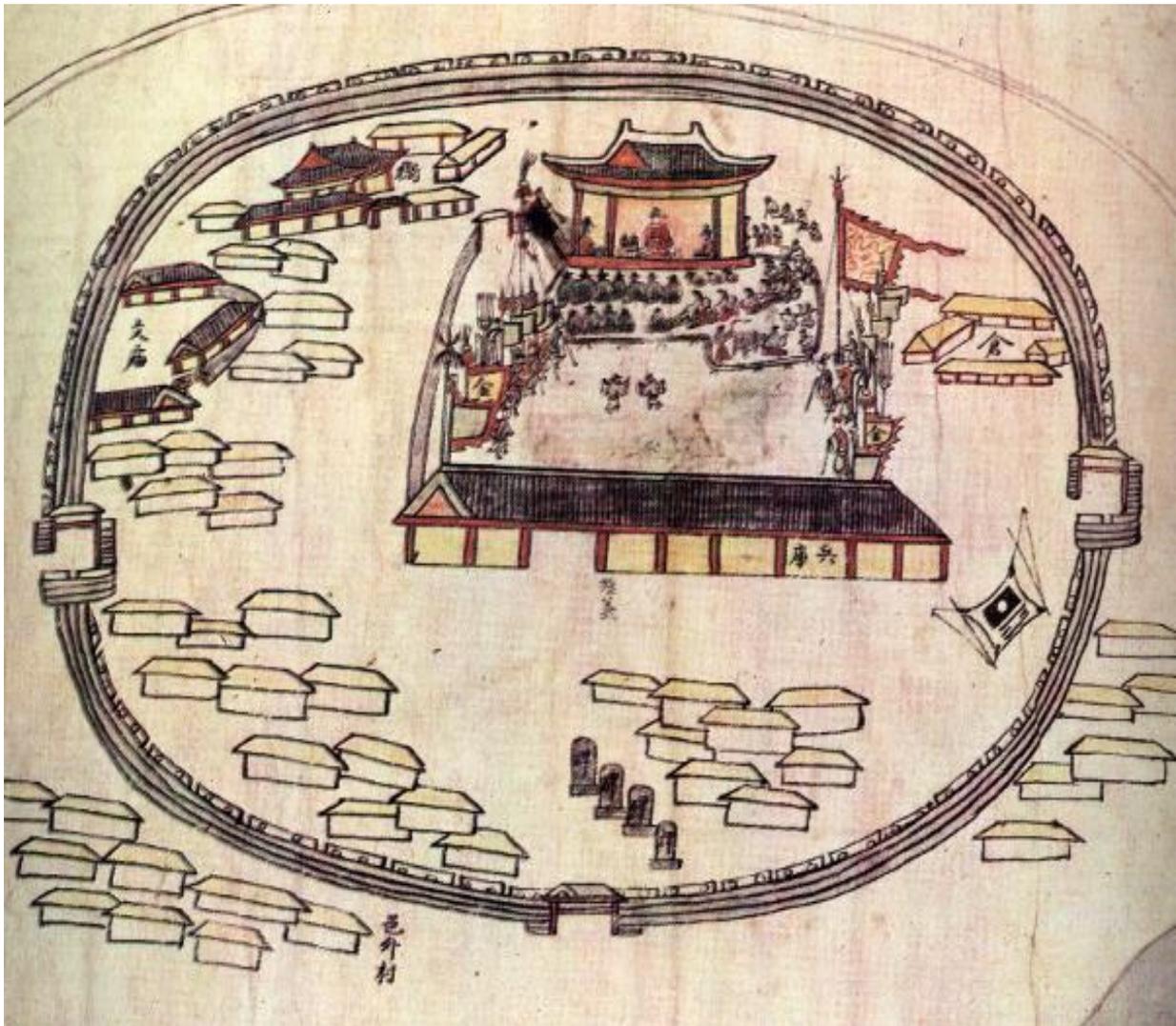


Figure 38-3: Four *dolharubang* statues located just inside the south gate of Jeongui Castle, 1702.

The only map in the 1702 atlas to depict *dolharubang* statues is the map that represents Magistrate Yi's inspection of Jeongui Castle. We can observe four of the statues inside the south gate of the fortress. There is another map of the inspection of Jeongui Castle in the atlas. I have excerpted a portion of that second map which has some remarkable detail that centers on these four monoliths:



Figure 38-4: Magistrate Yi is arriving to Jeongui through the south gate in 1702. The four *dolharubang* statues appear to be serving as backrests for some of the members of the reception committee.

In sum, if there were 48 *dolharubang* monoliths on the island in 1702 why do we only observe four of them represented by artisan Kim in Yi's Inspection Atlas of the entire island? Also we observe that the four statues at Jeongui Castle are located inside, and not outside, the gate. Also, we might expect to encounter them depicted on Kim's maps at Jeju Castle, if anywhere – yet we do not observe any there.

Finally, Hendrik Hamel was marched into Cheju Castle as a prisoner in 1653, and spent several months there before being transported to the mainland. You would think he would mention them in his recollections of his captivity if they existed at that time. There is much food for thought here about the Jeju Island *dolharubang* phenomenon and I hope the readers of this chapter will contact me to share their opinions and critique my own fevered interpretations and conclusions.

## Chapter 39

### The Illustrated Peace Corps Man (Part 6)

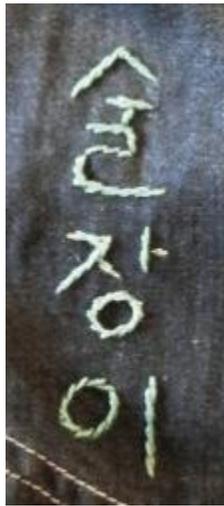


Figure 39-1: *Suljangi* (heavy drinker).

Although my middle-school students embroidered “*suljangi*” on my denim jacket near my name, I didn’t drink a wide range of *sul* (alcohol) all that much during my Peace Corps days on Jeju Island. Soju gave me headaches, and Johnny Walker Black (which the average Korean male would kill for back then) could turn me into such a mindless monster that I had to swear it off.

And beer, domestic or imported, made me sleepy. I remember that there was a tea room/beer hall located not all that far from the Peace Corps Korea headquarters building in Seoul. This may have been one of the pioneer “themed” Korean beer halls in Korea. The theme was “cowboy.” Why? It seemed that nearly all Korean men of drinking age by 1973 were big fans of that Hollywood blockbuster “The Magnificent Seven” (released 1960). This film made its rounds to packed crowds in Korean theaters located from Chuncheon to Moseulpo – then returned to these same theaters again, and again, and again, for decades. Two macho male actors in that film were especially idolized by Korean men. One of them was Charles Bronson (see Chapters 19 and 20 featuring Charles). The other was Yul Brynner.

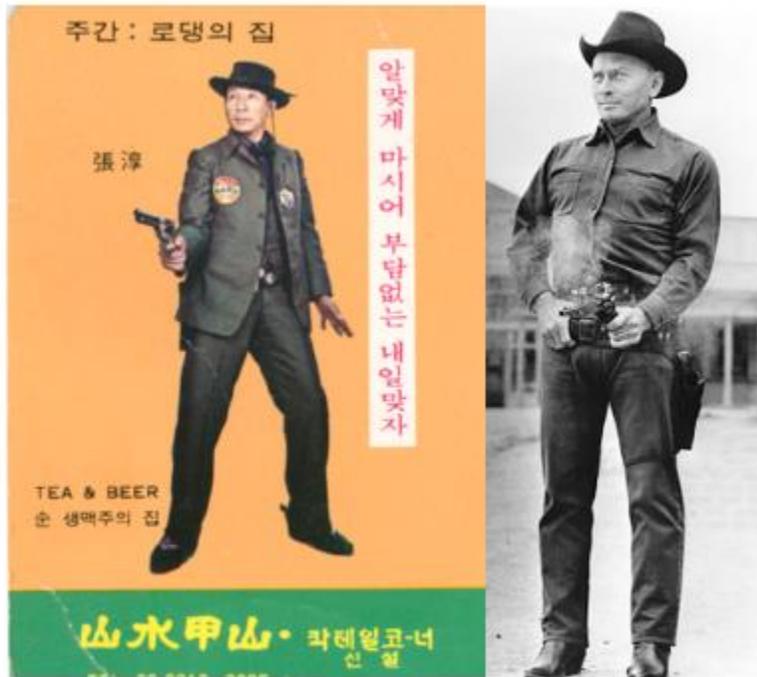


Figure 39-2: Business card for what may have been one of the first themed beer halls in Seoul (1973). Here ‘The Magnificent Seven’ star Yul Brynner strikes his influential ‘gunslinger’ pose.

There were no themed beer halls on Jeju Island during my Peace Corps years there in 1973-1974. Instead, *makgeolli* was both my favorite alcoholic beverage and my muse.



Figure 39-3: *Makgeolli* (traditional Korean farmers’ alcoholic beverage).

So, while I cannot claim to have been the *suljangi* that my denim jacket now advertises, I did enjoy my *makgeolli*. I had the habit of writing poetry while in my cups. Or should I say “bowls”? I preferred my *makgeolli* served fresh and poured cold into large stainless steel bowls – even in the dead of winter. “Shaken, not stirred!” I liked to shout out to the owner of my favorite pork ribs and eel joint when I walked in out of the late afternoon sun to make my way to my favorite table. It was a ritual. “Assud-ri [assuredly] mista bond!” she would shout back on her way to the *makgeolli* bin. I was a Peace Corps English-language teacher just doing my job.

Along with my big cold bowls of *makgeolli*, I would often have five or six items to broil at my table over the red-hot glow of *yeontan* (charcoal) cylinder. There I would sit and think and write, long into the night. Some of my favorite munchies were *nakji* (small octopus), *k'omjangeo* (eel), *muneo* (large octopus) and *badaoi* (sea cucumber):



Figure 39-4: *Nakji* (small octopus), *k'omjangeo* (eel), *muneo* (large octopus) and *badaoi* (sea cucumber).

Mornings following my poetry binges, I would gather up the verse that was legible and arrange it into a special folder that had four divisions, one each for: “one-bowl-down poems;” “two-bowl-down poems;” “three-bowl-down poems;” and “four-bowl-down poems.” Here follows my criteria for these categories along with an example from each category:



A one-bowl-down poem inspired by the *makgeolli* muse is nine-times-out-of-10 good enough to publish. Unfailingly, the buzz from the bowl is that powerful and inspiring. My rule is to trust the *makgeolli* muse entirely. You must show this category of poem to no one. They may try to talk you out of publishing it. They may break your luck:

#### Hallasan Incantation

Deviled Waters.  
 Currents clashing.  
 Waves upon  
 Its black pot dashing.  
 White Deer from  
 Its cauldron peeping.  
 Sinking.  
 Sleeping.  
 Immortality.



Two-bowls-down poems qualify as “crafty” and “clever” verse, but serious poets might judge them to be “inferior,” “romantic twaddle,” “crass,” and so on. Serious poets are Fredos. They *will* break your heart. On the other hand S. Freud, on reading one of your two-bowl-poems, might just toss his hat into the air and shout “Aha!” Whatever: this category of verse tends to teem with double entendres and experimental tropes:



Figure 39-5: A *bibari* is an innocent young seaside village woman.

**Kimnyong *Bibari***

To enjoy the slimy tangle where her  
 Flooded harvests teem and sway,  
 I would venture down to where the  
     Kimnyong *bibari*  
 goes to hunt and play



A three-bowls-down poem is the rusty key that opens up doors to dim lit rooms inside your brain that you normally want to keep closed. If there are any skeletons in your closet they will avail the opportunity, wander out, roam about, and rattle their bones. This category of poems can grow dark but its spawn is rarely outright depressing. This verse will gush with wistful thinking, sink into black humor, and strive too hard to convey tragi-comic insight. Most three-bowl-down poems end up being clever-by-half:

**tick/tock**

Around dinnertime,  
 a duck and bunny basket pendulum  
 swings home from the five-day market.  
 Elastic ebony,  
 the duck's neck droops around the ground.  
 She searches out a place to put her feet  
 to waddle on her way.  
 The bunny, blacker still,  
 not bunny-wise denies

one hop might clear that basket's side.  
Instead it tries to hide –  
inside the basket!  
I see his future fly  
and watch him die.



A four-bowls-down poem is a poem you think you wrote during your Peace Corps tour in Korea but fail to recognize anymore. You run across it in your attic 40 years after the creative moment. You read it over, rest then read it again. “It’s not me babe” you lie to yourself. You shake your head. Finally you mutter aloud to yourself: “Whoever wrote this poem should have been medicated or incarcerated.” Later in the day you take it out back, light up the BBQ, and incinerate it.

### **Near the Sanjicheon Stream Footbridge**

I’ve heard the scrape of club feet draggin’  
across old sidewalks sewer-saggin’.  
I’ve seen tired sun-stroked ponies falter  
whilst jerked about ‘twixt cart and halter.  
I ate a fish served up so raw  
Its gills gasped yet behind its maw.  
Then slipped upon some putrid jelly  
not long emerged from some dog’s belly.

When you’ve written a poem this bad it is *way* past time to call it a day. You stumble back to your *ondol bang* (a room with a traditional Korean heating system in the floor), reach for the Bacchus-D™ and hit the hay.

## Chapter 40

### You Can Return but You Can't Go Back (Part 1)



Figure 40-1: *Kimchi* (spicy, fermented Korean cabbage; the chief iconic and beloved Korean foodway).

I was reaching for the Bacchus-D™ when last I wrote. If there ever was a miracle drug to cure hangovers then credit the Koreans way back when for inventing the Bacchus-D™ brand of hangover remedies. The stuff they sell today as an energy drink containing ethanol under the global Bacchus brand is weak p\*\*s and laughable compared to the Bacchus-D™ jet fuel restorative that any Peace Corps Volunteer could purchase back in 1973 for just 700 won (a buck) by walking into any pharmacy (*yakguk*) or drug store (*yakbang*). Believe me, if you drank *makgeolli* and wrote poems till 4 a.m., in the morning and had to teach 50 middle schoolers wafting kimchi breath in your direction four hours later, then Bacchus-D™ was “the little bottle that could” sober you up.

But even at a buck a bottle it was almost a too-expensive necessity for a Volunteer subsiding on a paltry Peace Corps wage. So, when I hit Jeju Island in February of 1973 and began to search out all the best *makgeolli* huts, I also began my search for a “Fountain of Bacchus-D™,” and dreamed of finding a hidden fount from which the magic elixir flowed endlessly -- and at a rock bottom price. It took me a year, but to show you the sort of genius I was back in the day, I found a little pharmacy *where I could get Bacchus-D™ for FREE!* The tale of how I accomplished that epic feat begins a short time before I even thought about joining Peace Corps and venturing off to Korea, and thence to Jeju Island. That story begins in 1971, in El Monte, California, near Los Angeles.



Figure 40-2: The Tom Nicholas family and me (in the mustache), 1971.

Fresh out of college I was spending a lot of time working with a Gypsy (Romani) tinplater named *O Toma le Georgesko* (“Tom”) Nicholas. I met Tom in 1967 when I was looking to do a MA thesis topic on territorial behavior among Gypsy-Americans residing in Los Angeles. I discovered that most of the Gypsies in L.A. were secretive and self-employed in informal and underground (that is, illegal) economies. It was tough going to find a Gypsy who would even *talk* with much less confide in me.

Then I met Tom and his family and we fast became intimate friends. He had a mobile enterprise specializing in the hot-tinning of bakery bowls. It was dangerous work requiring skillful manhandling of a propane torch and muriatic acid. He also repaired kitchen equipment (pots and pans and such). He took me on as his apprentice/partner. We travelled widely throughout the American West and I learned

the tricks of his trade. I willingly, totally, “drank the Gypsy Kool-Aid” and immersed myself in their lore and lifestyle. All my good Lutheran upbringing went out the window. Nearly every night was a party and there was no time to sleep. Gypsies burn the Candle of Life at both ends. I could hardly keep up with them. The average Gypsy in the United States in 1970 lived to be 48 years old. In other words, the Gypsy lifestyle was a middle-age death sentence.

I wasn't living at home, but when my Dad first heard that I was working and living with Gypsies, and then saw me adopting their values and habits — and observed how quickly I was aging — he mightily disapproved. To try and smooth things over I once invited Tom's family over to my Dad's house for a birthday party, but it didn't go well. Both my Dad and Tom were stressed from the outset. I knew Tom was uncomfortable being around non-Gypsies (he gave only me a pass; but that's a long story for another time). I'll just say that Tom grew up believing outsiders are unclean (impure). He and his wife Lodi lasted about an hour in Dad's house among strangers before they became visibly ill and so rounded up their kids and drove off without eating dinner. They did take some birthday cake along at my Mom's insistence, but probably trashed it on their way back to their Gypsy community in El Monte. After they left, my Dad spent the next two hours counting the spoons and candlesticks.

Don't get me wrong. I loved my Dad. He was just old-fashioned and prejudiced when it came to Gypsies. He assumed they were all thieves. Dad also hated motorcycles. Most importantly, his custom was to do everything “the Army way.” That applied to raising his kids and making sure they made smart choices in life. So I should *not* have been surprised that when I finally made the tough decision to give up the Gypsy lifestyle to join the Peace Corps, Dad did *not* respond with a big “Hooray!” No: his reaction to my joining the Peace Corps was that it was even a *worse* decision than spending my life among Gypsies. Dad almost begged me: “Why can't you just go back to college, study math this time, become an engineer, then settle down and raise a family?” Too late: I had made up my mind; I was off to Korea.



Figure 40-3: My Dad and the “spite Harley,” 1973.

Dad got his revenge a year or so later. I was by then a Peace Corps Volunteer living an adventurous life on Jeju Island. Out of the blue I received a letter from Dad. This was very surprising since my Mom usually wrote letters to me from home and her letters indirectly included any “regards” from Dad. This letter he had sent himself. “Somebody must have died!” was my first thought. But no: inside the letter was a photograph and a brief message: “Guess what, Volunteer? I won a Harley Davidson in a contest. It’s black and loud and has a lot of chrome. See the photo. The Harley shop that runs the contest says I can take it home — or take a cash substitute. What should I do? Love, Your Father.” Dad was a big tease from the get-go. He knew I had always wanted a Harley Davidson and how he so despised them. Alas! I knew he had already taken the cash. I called it “Dad’s spite Harley.” Years later Dad and I would laugh about it, but at the time I could have killed him.

Instead, I spent a long night drinking *makgeolli* downtown, at a joint near the Sanjicheon Stream footbridge. One morning a month or so later I stumbled into an unfamiliar pharmacy and there discovered my “Fountain of Bacchus-D™” – and a lot more!



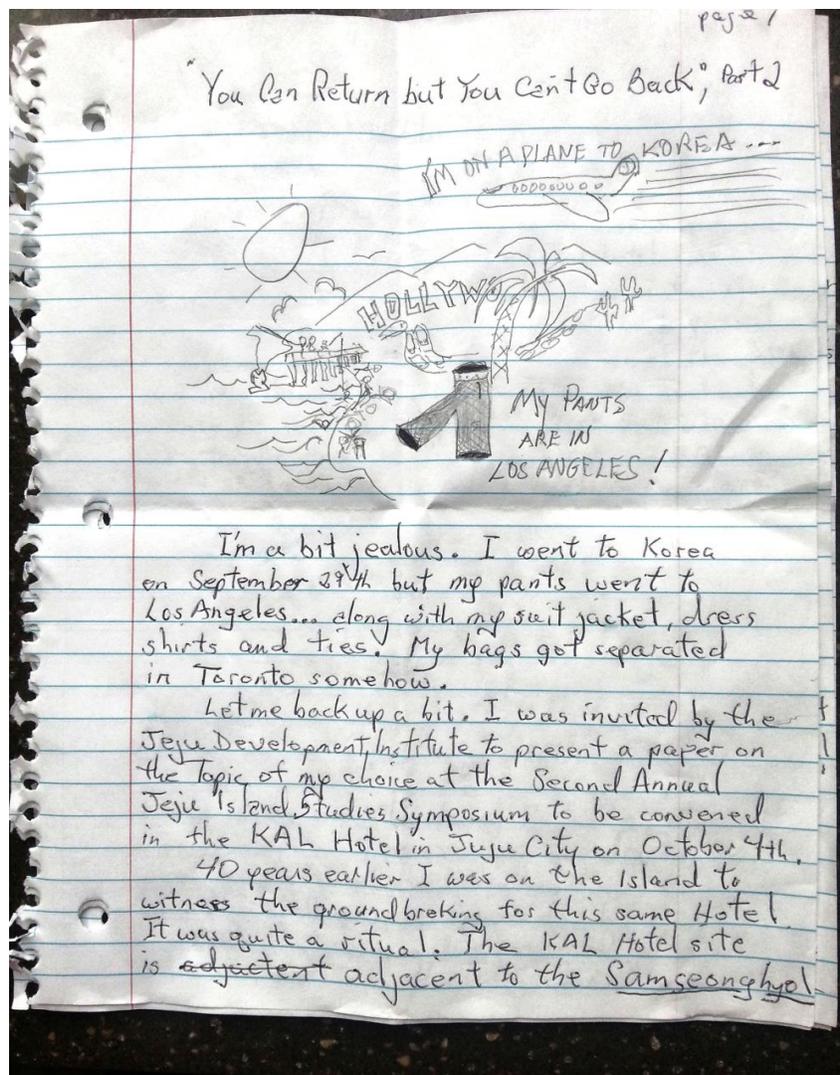
Figure 40-4. The future Mrs. David Nemeth in her pharmacy smock, 1974.

I couldn't wait to write home and tell Dad.

# Chapter 41

## You Can Return but You Can't Go Back (Part 2)

In early October of 2013 I traveled to Jeju Island with my wife for a conference. In lieu of a weekly article to Todd Thacker, the JWW editor, I submitted by email the following four page handwritten report.



(3 founder's site) and has in my opinion the best pingsu location in all of Jeju City.



Anyway, I saw this magnificent hotel rise floor by floor in the the starry sky. My hosts greeted

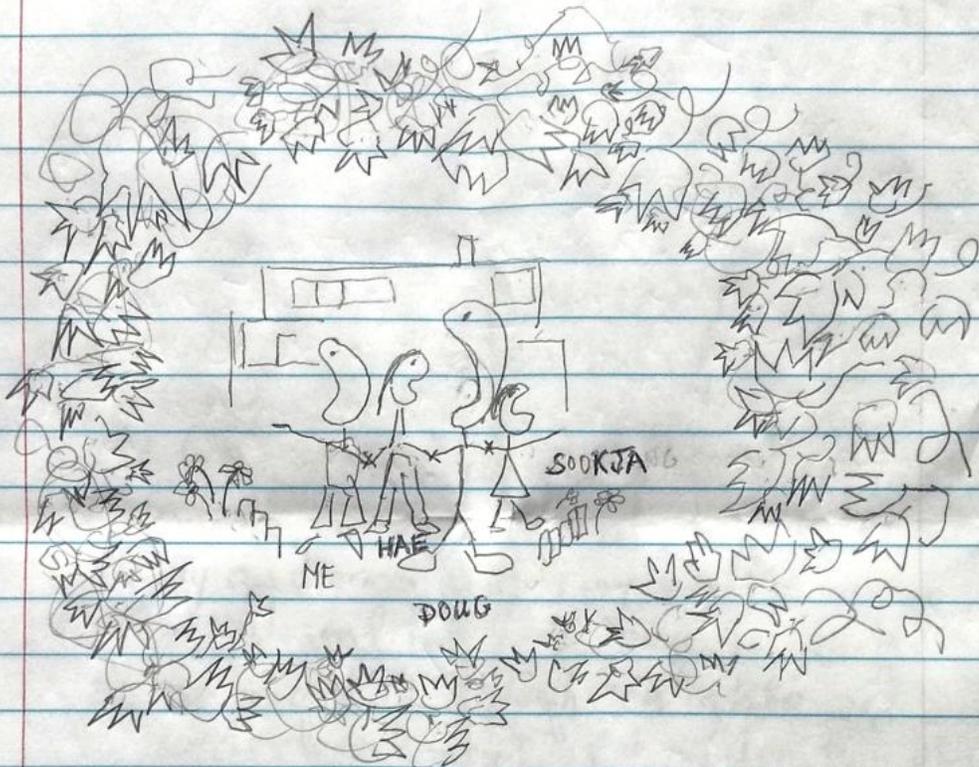
me and my wife at the airport: Dr. Choa of the JDI, and Dr. Han of the JNU faculty. We hooked up with Dr. Ko of the Tamna Culture Institute and had a terrific dinner on the 19<sup>th</sup> floor of the KAR - Hotel. What a view! We had a swell room waiting



for us on the 11<sup>th</sup> floor facing Hallasan. The next morning at dawn I threw open the drapes to greet my Old friend the Mountain top and saw clouds! Hallasan is famous for being shy.

Later that morning I experienced my first "action moment" in the elevator when a

Chinese tourist tried to lite up a cigarette  
in the elevator and my wife Hae took his  
head off!



A few days later Hae and I were the guests  
of Doug Hansen and his wife Sookja at their quiet  
home east of Jeju City. Whata lovely residence!

Dougs home is under siege by the  
notorious Kudzu plant! it covers up  
everything in its path and grows like  
wildfire. If you park your car at the side  
of the road and come back 5 days later  
you won't be able to find it! The Kudzu  
will have buried it under a ton of Kudzu

leaves / I don't remember any Kudzu on Jeju Island back in 1973-1974 when I first came to the Island.

The Kudzu is a good metaphor for mass tourism on the Island, which was only in its infancy during my Peace Corp days on the island. My Symposium presentation and another presentation I gave to students at JNU on Oct. 2 dealt with the issue of mass tourism on Jeju Island. There are four Wisdoms I've accumulated during my lifetime that apply to the mass tourism dilemma on Jeju Island that I shared with my audiences during my brief homecoming to "The Blessed Isle" I care for so much:

- 1) the concept of "enough" "enlightened underdevelopment" (= moderation strictly applied to economic growth);
- 2) "Space prohibits so much and permits so little";
- 3) "Behind every success story is a Great Crime";
- 4) "Don't kill the goose that lays the Golden Egg";

I'll leave it for my readers to apply these Wisdoms to the issue of runaway mass tourism on Jeju Island.

next week: "You Can't Return but You Can't Go Back," part 3

## Chapter 42

### You Can Return but You Can't Go Back (Part 3)

I was reunited with my suitcase containing my pants and suit jacket on the eve of the big Jeju Studies Symposium event, and just in time to be able to face my academic and scholarly audience looking presentable. I had packed a bolo tie thinking I would be the only presenter wearing one.



Figure 42-1: At the Jeju Studies Symposium, fortified by Bacchus-D™ and enjoying the brief camaraderie of an extraordinary character, the charismatic SNU anthropologist and raconteur Dr. Chun Kyung-soo. Photo courtesy Dr. Yuji Ankei.

Instead I discover that bolo ties are the current fashion among male Korean academics. I recall that during my Peace Corps days nearly all university professors and independent scholars I encountered were Francophiles wearing wine-red berets. Forty years later I didn't see even one beret in the lecture hall. The presentations that day were all on significant topics and delivered with passion. The audience

responded with spot-on, intelligent comments and questions. Throughout the day perhaps 10,000 business cards were exchanged. All considered, the symposium was a terrific success.

And so was the private banquet hosted by two nights later by Fred “China Smith” Dustin (see Chapters 16, 17 and 18). I composed and sang a little ditty to the tune of a classic Korean drinking song for the affair, to honor Fred’s entrepreneurial spirit as played out on the island over many decades and for which his diligence, enterprise and ultimate success are legend:

Frederick Dustin *hanguk e*

*Gunin-uro wasseumnida.*

*Daume Hallasan gachi gaso.*

*Yeolsimi ilhaessumnida!*

*BUJA!*

Frederick Dustin came  
to Korea as a soldier.  
Then he ventured down to Halla Mountain  
and strived mightily  
to become the wealthy and respected man he is today!

So, to answer the question posed in the titles of my preceding three chapters: Yes. You can return as well as go back. In my own case the journey is to Jeju Island: The Islanders still remain cheerful in the face of adversity and generous to a fault. There are still pockets of inspirational isolation amidst visual grandeur. Cold *makgeolli* still flows thick, sweet and powerful from the same sort of long-necked plastic bottles as it did in cheap rib joints 40 years ago. And some untidy rib joints yet remain, resilient to change and resistant to domestication. Plus, I rejoice that the sun has not yet set on Bacchus-D™ in Jeju City.

Yes. I discovered that one *can* go back and at least partially re-live his or her Peace Corps Volunteer days of yore on The Blessed Isle — even in the midst of runaway mass tourism. But why would one want to? Life is too short, and who with an adventurous bent really *wants* to live even the Best of Times twice over in the same place?

Between you, me and Google maps, I recently ran across what appears to be the fraternal twin of Jeju Island. It holds the promise of twice as much peace and quiet as there once was on Jeju Island — before the arrival of the 747-400s.

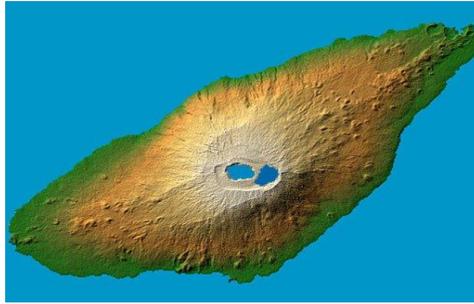


Figure 42-2: Fraternal Twin of Hallasan? Contest! Be first to discover the name and GPS coordinates of this mystery island and \$50 is yours!

Perhaps it is just wishful thinking, but I am hopeful that the two calderas on this island portend of twice the *makgeolli*, and *twice* the diving women and *twice* the privy pigs, and so on. The natives of this island still wear loincloths I hear — and mass tourism is not even a speck on its far horizon. So I must go there. I just added it to my bucket list (near the top).

Fifty dollars goes to the first *JWW* reader who sends me the correct name and GPS coordinates for this mystery island. If no one comes up with the correct answer before Dec. 24 (2013), the publishing date of my 52nd and final essay, I will spill the beans at that time...

Getting back to Fred: The morning following his wonderful banquet was the morning of the last day for Haesook and I on Jeju Island. We could have done many things, but I was most curious to visit and lurk around Fred's famous Maze and Cattery. Something unusual seems to be going on there that I was anxious to explore firsthand.

Just before my trip to the island I carefully examined some satellite photos of Fred's Maze and was surprised to discover a secret compound on or near the premises:



Figure 42-3: A secret compound in the shape of a cat near Fred's Maze. What could it be?

Obviously of deliberate human construction, this secret compound carved out of the pine forests near the maze has the unmistakable shape of -- a cat. On first observing the details of this satellite image I was immediately reminded of the ancient Nazca lines in the high Peruvian desert, some of which seem to represent animals, including what also appears to be a cat:



Figure 42-4: Archeological drawing of some ancient Peruvian Nazca lines. Note the cat-like image.

Although it may seem incredible, in the following image the Nazca lines appear to be extensions of a *maze* into the shape of a *monkey*!



Figure 42-5: Archeological drawing of some ancient Peruvian Nazca lines. Note the maze/monkey image.

One popular hypothesis explaining the origins of the ancient Nazca lines in Peru has yet to be refuted: that they were constructed by intergalactic travelers. So I ask you: Was the compound in the shape of a cat adjacent (and perhaps attached to) Fred's Maze also constructed by aliens?

I think not. Applying Occam's razor, there is a much more rational explanation based on what we know about Fred Dustin, cats and the global economy.

## Chapter 43

### Fred's Maze and His Secret Compound in the Shape of a Cat

Knowing what we already know about Fred “China Smith,” cats and the global economy, the explanation for the secret compound near his Maze is not all that hard to deduce. You just have to rely on hard science and state-of-the-art technology to get all your ducks of evidence in a row, then do the math, and “Voilà!” the truth becomes crystal clear and the conundrum within the enigma of the mystery becomes solved to nearly everyone’s satisfaction.

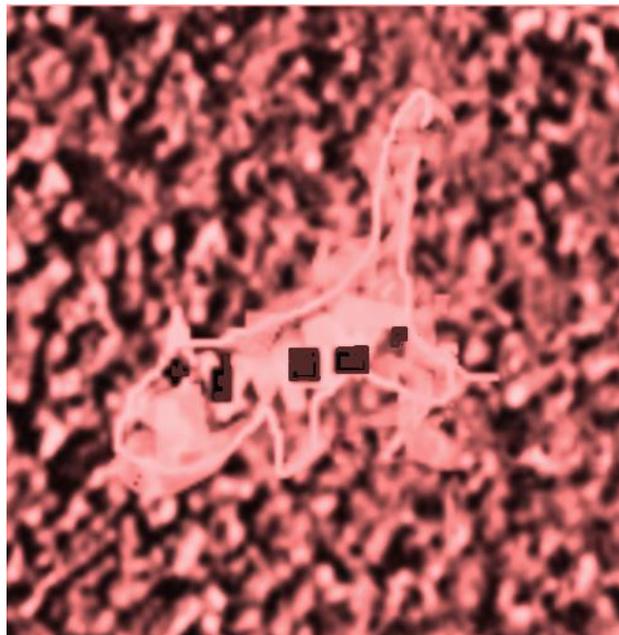


Figure 43-1: Infrared satellite (IR) image of the secret compound in the shape of a cat, and five structures (dark objects) within its walls.

To the evidence: First and foremost, there is the astonishingly revelation provided by sophisticated satellite imagery, and thanks to a bit of luck. Were it not for a rare clear day coinciding with a lucky pass of an imaging satellite overhead the exact location and peculiar shape of the secret compound would probably be unknown to this day — and probably remain unknown for months, possibly years, into the future. Figure 43-1 is an infrared (IR) image of the mystery site and its cat-like walled compound that was fortuitously captured during a short window of time when the site was apparently under construction, and not yet camouflaged from aerial detection as it is today.

Readers will note that there is no discernible evidence of any access/egress routes in the vicinity of the compound. I have concluded with confidence that any access to and from the compound at the moment of image capture was being achieved via foliage-occluded trails *or a subterranean tunnel*. Materials to build the five distinct structures (the dark geometric shapes within the compound walls) must have been manually transported into the compound construction site, no doubt at night. This effort must have been accomplished by a highly organized team of insiders sworn to secrecy. If so, their furtive comings and goings possibly manifest the activities of some sort of cult. But this is not necessarily so. We must strive to be critical thinkers.

A second piece of evidence not easily dismissed can be observed visually on the ground just a few hundred yards from the secret compound and inside the nearby Maze. This evidence I confirmed just 10 days ago with my own eyes (during early October of 2013). There is a sturdy locked gate located about two hundred paces into Fred’s Maze along one of its myriad paths. The gate appears to lead to nowhere and so its purpose, if any, is not readily explainable. “Why the large padlock?” I wonder. I have surmised that the locked gate, when opened, leads to the secret compound by some serpentine and probably underground pathway!

I am suggesting that the genius who designed and constructed both the public Maze and the private compound, for whatever reason, through the efficacy of this illogical gate has connected the two: The heavy padlock on the gate within the Maze, when unlocked by its clever key-master (probably during the dead of night) permits access to and from the mystery compound for purposes unknown. How many hundreds of unsuspecting tourists each year have paid to enter into Fred’s Maze and obliviously sauntered on by this innocent-looking gate without even a sideways glance, or a nary a pause to contemplate the possibilities of its purpose? Hundreds of thousands! Again, this perplexing conundrum all seems to be work of a genius, albeit an eccentric genius. I can only deduce that the key-master that opens the heavy lock of the-gate-that-leads-to-the-secret-compound-in-the-shape-of-a-cat is none other than the enigmatic impresario and Maze owner/operator Fredrick Dustin.

Professor Dustin is already the renowned mastermind of the most profitable Maze attraction on Jeju Island if not in all of Asia. So what’s up with the secret compound in the shape of a cat attached to his Maze? We have only to examine in more detail three of the major structures within the closely guarded compound walls to reach the most plausible conclusion based on what we know of Fred, cats and the global economy:



Figure 43-2: A close-up of the IR image focusing on the relative location and configuration of the three principal structures centrally located inside the compound.

The close proximity of buildings A and B indicate an intimate functional relationship between them. I suggest that one expects to encounter this sort of arrangement and relationship in the notorious cat farming regions of Asia. Observed from the air, the buildings comprise the unmistakable footprint of the sort of Mom-and-Pop cat farming enterprise that is now fairly ubiquitous in the rural, monsoonal mid-latitudes. The familiar layout and plan view of a cat farm consists of two adjacent low-slung warehouses situated in the middle of nowhere.



Figure 43-3: A typical Asian Mom-and-Pop cat farm layout as found in the middle of nowhere, featuring two essential and adjacent, low-slung, escape-proof cat and rat warehouses.

Building C, however, is something new on the entrepreneurial Asian landscape in economically distressed rural regions. I will go out on a limb and suggest that Building C as it manifests near Fred's Maze serves the independent function of a modern biological research station as if so is oddly juxtaposed to structures A and B. As such, it represents something new and unprecedented in traditional Asian cat farming design and layout.

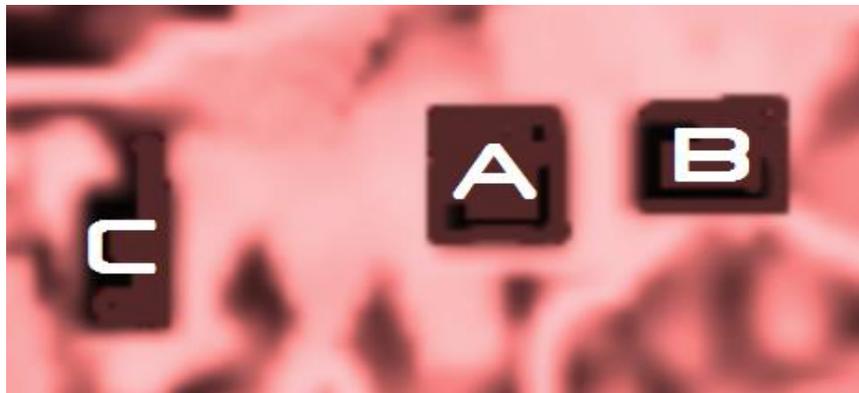


Figure 43-4: Familiar, traditional paired cat-farm structures (A and B) juxtaposed to a sophisticated, highly capitalized, biological research station (C) within Fred's secret compound.

My working hypothesis is the outcome of a simple and direct image analysis: Buildings A and B in the image are climate-controlled warehouses housing small animals, and this is the earmark of a highly capitalized industrial/commercial cat farm. For example, their roofs analyzed under high magnification seem to support extensive air conditioning/humidifying devices and ducts). Moreover, Building C appears equipped with sophisticated and expensive rooftop dust filters and exhausts; this would indicate that the interior of Building C houses a dust-free electronics or biological research station. Clearly, Fred's highly successful recreational Maze functions to finance his experimental cat farm within the hidden compound.

Adding up what's evident (the IR image and the gate to nowhere) and subtracting what's implausible (extraterrestrials, cultists and such) clears the analytical deck for a rational working hypothesis that tentatively explains the conundrum within the enigma that is Fred's secret cat farm. It is a state-of-the-art experimental outpost that only an eccentric entrepreneurial genius with a penchant for profit-making and a proven track record for innovative scientific breakthroughs could devise.

Granted, reports of the economic imperatives for, and the efficiencies of, profitable cat farming in Asia have been circulating for decades. Yet Fred's operation as far as I can tell seems to achieve the unprecedented scientific breakthrough that will solve for all time both ethical and cost-of-labor issues that have historically combined to discourage the sort of large scale industrial/commercial cat farming that specializes in fur production.

No one knows when and where cat farming for fur in Asia originated, but authoritative economic histories validate the fact that public demand for quality domestic cat furs, especially those with calico or white-on-black patterns, as an alternative to expensive and now outlawed wild animal furs, has been increasing for centuries. It is well known that the inexpensive formula for potentially lucrative small-business cat farming in Asian regions within distressed rural economies has only two essential investment requirements: 1) a landholding expansive enough to accommodate the two small escape-proof warehouses, and 2) labor-for-hire as cat-skinners.

Without elaborating into excessive and/or morbid detail, this is how the cat-farming-for-fur business operates ideally once the construction of the modest warehouses is complete: Assuming the prospective cat-farmer is ambitious yet desperately poor; he (or she) commits to the project come hell or high water and perforce acquires two cats, one male and one female. Most likely these two can be trapped in the nearest town, after dark, by deploying a cat whistle and a burlap sack.



Figure 43-5: A charming Nazca-themed cat whistle and an ordinary burlap sack.

Ideally, the fur color patterns of this pair of “founder” felines adhere to the global customer-demand specs described above. Once bagged, the cat couple is released into one warehouse. The rat couple goes into the other. Beginners often confuse the distinct nature of the two structures and so often write “cats” or “rats” as appropriate on the buildings. The prospective cat-farmer now waits. Time flies as both cats and rats multiply at geometric rates.

What do these exploding cat and rat populations eat to survive? Each other.

This is where the beginning cat-farmer makes his or her second investment. A cat-skinner is required; just one will suffice at the very beginning of the new operation, and then more as the size of the operation (in terms of cat and rat populations) increases. The skinner’s secondary task is to gather up rats from the rat warehouse and toss them into the cat warehouse. The ethical issue in cat farming for fur is in the job title of the hired hand, and so now becomes apparent: Rats, thanks to the skinner, dine on what is left of the cats after their valuable fur is removed. Such a savage business! Should cat-farming-for fur therefore be-banned? Should poor rural folk in Asia be denied the right to survive and perhaps prosper as cat farmers? Perhaps; unless or until some genius comes up with a more humane and civilized way to produce cat-fur pelts for profit.

This may be a moot point. As it stands, most Mom-and-Pop cat farms fail to turn a profit. Mainly, labor costs are too high. The modest cat-farm enterprise may seem promising at first, but soon proves problematic. The usual division of labor has the skinner going about his or her business while the cat farmer attends to the tanning, curing and marketing of the hides. Initially high global demand for the product initially attracts fur brokers from all compass directions at regular intervals to purchase the pelts. But initial profits are soon eaten up by labor costs.

Whereas the operation began with only one cat-skinner, after a year there will of necessity be five or ten cat-skinners on the typical payroll. Soon after they are hired these hard-working, poorly-paid employees will invariably begin to organize themselves into a bargaining group to demand wage increases. This, then, is the unfortunate economic history of cat-farming for fur throughout Asia and reveals that the major obstacle to profitability in the industry since its inception.

I have briefly attempted to explain why cat-farming-for-fur-in-Asia has seductive appeal to nearly bankrupted subsistence farmers throughout Asia, but proves to be quickly unsustainable. Happily I am here to share with you the good news that Fredrick Dustin is striving to solve both the ethical and labor economic issues of cat-forming-for-fur within his secret compound, inside Building C. Rumor has it that he has now achieved a scientific breakthrough there.

By now the reader realizes why Fred’s secret compound is of necessity isolated and secret within its walls — at least for the time being. Caterwaul is known to be deafening on commercial cat farms large and small. Both owners and workers wear earplugs. The caterwaul in Fred’s compound is somewhat mitigated by soundproofed warehouse walls, and also by the high walled enclosure and dense pine forests surrounding the compound. Indeed, the inhabitants of Building A (cats) cannot be heard from either the grounds of the Maze attraction or by drivers of vehicles along the adjoining highway. Moreover, the region surrounding the Maze is mostly government-owned and managed, and thus nearly devoid of private and public residences that might be within earshot of the aforementioned around-the-clock caterwaul.

In addition, the heavily guarded secret compound walls have served over the years since their construction to help ensure that the nearly completed “hush-hush” scientific experiments being undertaken by Fred’s team inside of Building C were not vulnerable to industrial espionage. If the word ever got out early-on about what was going on inside Building C, then Fred’s aspirations to leap to the forefront of scientific industrial/commercial cat-farming-for-fur in Asia might never have gained the

momentum it has already achieved in at the present time.

It can now be told that all of the scientists working in Building C as well as all of the construction team that built the secret compound are trustworthy students and alumni of Jeju National University. Fred has nurtured close working relations with talented and skilled members of its student body over the past four decades. Fred's hand-picked young scientists for these past many years have been conducting their experiments only during the night, arriving unnoticed to the Maze premises and departing from it stealthily, both on a regular schedule.

This brings me now to finally reveal the scientific goings-on in Building C, and to formally announce Fred Dustin's marvelous scientific and humanitarian discovery and the fruit of his labors. Fred's Building C discovery team has miraculously bio-engineered the capability to eliminate any future labor costs in large-scale commercial cat farming, not only in Asia but worldwide: They have invented a procedure to successfully cross-breed cats and snakes. Now cats can shed their own skins as snakes do. There is no longer any need for Mom-and-Pop cat-farmers to go broke in order to pay cat skimmers. Thank Fred the next time you see him. His is a first-rate mind. It is no secret who will be winning the next Nobel Prize in Economics — or perhaps even the Peace Prize. Or both!



Figure 43-6: A close-up of the IR image focusing on Building C (Fred's bioengineering lab) and a nearby, mostly subterranean, structure (D) that serves as a snake pit.

In sum, Fred's breakthrough applied science is singlehandedly civilizing the once-notorious cat-farming-for fur industry and thereby eliminated any future need for cat skimmers. Now and for all time a humane cat-farming-for-fur industry can succeed to grow with pride and prosper, devoid of stigma and controversy.

PS: In case you are wondering what the cats will eat while the fur market waits for them to shed their skins, we can leave that for second-rate minds to figure out.

## Chapter 44

### Cat Man Do!

*“Chop me some broken wood*

*We’ll start a fire*

*White warm light the dawn*

*And help me see*

*Old Satan’s tree.”*

*– Katmandu, Cat Stevens (Yusuf Islam), 1970*

Cat Stevens once saved my life. At the age of 29 I was still living out my teenage fantasies while in the eyes of my Dad’s semi-retired poker-playing buddies I was the hippy no-account son of a good friend whose tank of happy-go-lucky was long overdue-to-be running on empty. Fair enough: in those days I had indeed deluded myself into thinking I was an immortal and was destined through no effort of my own to strike it rich.

I had the unusual bad habit at that time of partying with Romany Gypsies till near daybreak and then, on impulse streaking dead drunk on automatic pilot across the breadth of Los Angeles from El Monte to Panorama City to attend to other vices. My buddy in PC resided in a rustic guest house ensconced within a quiet grove of tall eucalyptus trees capped in crows’ nests. The door was always unlocked and the kitchen cabinet was always stocked with Southern Comfort. My life was thus divided at that time between two fantasylands.

I wore hemp neckties designed, woven and sold by some hippies in Calabasas and I drove a 1956 simulated gold-plated Triumph TR3. I imagined I was the cat’s meow.



Figure 44-1: Hemp tie and golden chariot, but going nowhere in 1971.

I loved that faked-out automobile, as did my Gypsy friends. For one, it was the color of Luck – and those Gypsies worshiped Luck. My TR3 was “powered” under the hood with a crude twin-carbureted four-cylinder tractor engine concealed within a small streamlined carriage by clever British craftsmen. It was pretty much all-show and no-go; barely capable of reaching a peak highway speed of a 90 m.p.h. My Triumph commenced to shudder at 70 and shake at 80. To compensate for its lack of speed it featured Jaguar-like fenders and low-slung doors. With its removable hard-top off to expose its convertible mode, my ride looked fast even when standing still.

In daylight, the Gypsy kids would have me park the Triumph on the grass in front of their rented house facing Peck Road. They would put one of their Dad’s many “For Sale” signs on the windshield and then just sit in it for hours on end, waving at their kin driving by, or practicing their selling techniques with any *gaje* (non-Gypsies) who might stop at the curb and try to negotiate a bargain price. The kids had strict orders never to sell my Triumph at any price.

It was easy to forgive myself for acting like a Greek God when whizzing along a moon-lit California freeway at 60 m.p.h. on a summer night with my hemp tie flapping in the wind and with my elbows hanging over the low-cut doors, parlous close to the scabrous tarmac rushing underneath. From the Triumph’s tiny cockpit all alight with dials and funky switches, and with the radio blasting away, I

carried on as though I was a pampered princeling piloting his screaming 16-cylinder Ferrari full throttle along the German autobahn. Of course I was no such thing, but even so women young and old invariably waved out their windows to me and honked their horns. Meanwhile, their jealous hard-working husbands and boy-friends occasionally gave me the one-finger salute. Those were heady days.

My radio dial was welded to KFWB ~ Channel 98. Their disc jockeys in the summer of '71 were promoting around the clock a lot of Cat Stevens: *Katmandu*, *Peace Train* – all the latest from the Cat Man.

It happened that one early afternoon in the summer of 1971 I woke up in Panorama City to the familiar sound of cackling crows, and yet astonished that I could not even remember the previous night's long ride from El Monte. Then and there I experienced what I now call in retrospect my "*Peace Train* epiphany." Thanks to Cat Stevens singing *Katmandu* on KFWB I'm convinced I finally came to see that I had been mindlessly hanging my hammock on "Old Satan's tree" and had been taking Life for granted for too long. I was living on borrowed time.

And so I decided to forgo my fantasies, to stop faking my life in my fake car, and to get real about planning for the future. I took a hint from the Cat Man and hopped aboard the Peace (Corps) Train. I sold the Triumph and paid some debts. I bid farewell to my friends in El Monte and Panorama City and headed overseas to Jeju Island, Korea. Once there I began to make a conscious effort to gradually work on changing my ways. And that is how I ran free of Satan's Tree. So thank you Cat Stevens for saving my life!

Walking the straight and narrow in Korea was not all that easy at first. I had to watch my p's and q's. For example, no sooner had I officially agreed to serve with Peace Corps in Korea than the Korean government drafted and implemented some strict new rules of conduct that I was sworn to abide by:

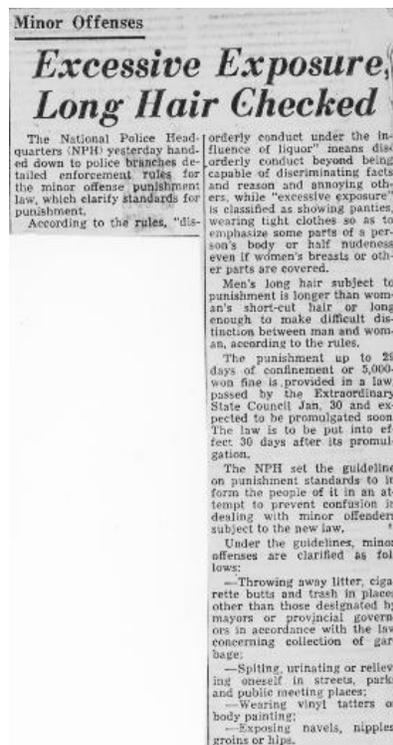


Figure 44-2: The outlawing of 'old' Korea, circa 1972.

I've been told by veteran Peace Corps volunteers that the advent of these new rules marked the tipping point between an "old" and a "new" Korea. Mainlander Korean males, anyway, were being reinvented and regimented for the factory floor as well as for white-collar careers. Korea was suddenly all about "getting down to business" by following the Western industrial model. Fortunately I was headed for the subsistence agricultural backwater of Jeju Island – still another "world" within Korea – where the "old" rules for the patriarchy (anything goes) still had broad local support and so would persist to resist modernization for at least another decade.

However, anyone who has been to Korea recently can testify that many those draconian "new rules" for behavior modification enacted in 1972 have been dramatically reversed since the advent of the Internet and the birth of K-Pop. Gone are those draconian rules imposed by South Korean militarist dictators during the Cold War that once regulated long hair, nudity and strict regulation of distinction in appearance between young men and young women.

Not that I was any threat to the new public order in Korea on my arrival there. My bladder was disciplined and I had planned ahead cleverly: There was no trace left of the Hairy Rogue of El Monte that was me in the summer of 1971. Instead, when I stepped off the plane at the Seoul Gimpo airport in the fall of 1972 to begin my in-country Peace Corps Trainee phase, I looked like a choirboy:



Figure 44-3: My training-camp choirboy look in Chuncheon, December 1972.

But anarchy still burned within me. That hemp tie, for example, was a nostalgic link to the past that stayed with me throughout boot camp. Three months after arriving in Chuncheon I was an official card-carrying Peace Corps Volunteer and on my way to Jeju Island.



Figure 44-4: My Official Peace Corps Volunteer identity card, issued in two languages. On the Korean side I am identified as Nam Dong-il.

My two years in Korea were full of surprises. For example, I thought I had seen the last of Gypsies when I left the U.S., but it turns out that traditional Korea had its own version of ethnic peripatetic peoples – mobile entertainers and such – called *gwangdae*. I ran across a troupe of their present day remnants in a small town during the summer of 1973, and snapped this photo:



Figure 44-5: Traditional Korean ‘Gypsies’ (ethnic peripatetic peoples) in 1973.

They traveled about in three vehicles, including a unique large panel truck, perhaps of Japanese origin. Among them were a ringmaster/announcer, a fire eater, a tightrope walker, a clown, several musicians, and three lovely dancing girls. One paraded around salaciously with swords. This band of *gwangdae* numbered about 10, and each one played multiple roles. These entertainments, some of them rather skilled and spectacular, drew a large crowd. During frequent intermissions the female members of the troupe successfully hawked to the crowd all sorts of phony elixirs in dark bottles. I watched them perform for the local rubes close-at-hand for about three hours – but not without an initial fight.

It didn't take long for the Gypsies to discover me standing tall at the sidelines ogling their act. They immediately became perturbed and tried to incite the crowd to evict me. You have to be thick-skinned to intrude among Gypsies against their wishes, no matter where you find them in the world. I was and so defiantly stuck around. At one point they deployed their maidens to taunt and embarrass me into drinking down some of their bottled hooch in public. For several long moments I became part of the act. This generated plenty of laughs at my expense. The crowd, however, was delighted. I proved that I could beat these *gwangdae* at their own game. Gypsies respect that. It was like old times.

That was 40 years ago. I've since had a satisfying career and raised a family. Given the opportunity to live my life again, would I choose to live it over the same way? But of course! I've traveled the straight and narrow for half a lifetime and have lately decided that I have finally paid my dues to civilized society. Now, I want that Triumph back!

## Chapter 45

### The Stink Eye

My impertinent curiosity into other peoples' business has often put me on the receiving end of "the stink eye." In the previous chapter I describe my encounter with a traveling band of *gwangdae* (a Gypsy-like people) entertainers/basket-makers/butchers in Korea during my first year as a Peace Corps Volunteer there. They are among the traditional outcaste groups and their customs and informal/underground economies little-known by Korean scholars and it could be said with confidence "unknown" by non-Korean scholars. They may even be extinct today (though I doubt it). Anyway, I ran across them performing and hawking amulets, magic potions and such to a big crowd of rural folk in a small town.

Like ethnic Gypsies I have studied in other locals around the world these Korean *gwangdae* were mobile and secretive, and prone to be rude and hostile toward inquisitive observers they perceived to be a threat to their economic stability and security. So when I snapped the following photo of a *gwangdae* maiden working the inside perimeter of the crowd and in the act of pouring a syrupy, black elixir laced with hooch for a paying customer, I snapped this photo:



Figure 45-1: A *gwangdae* maiden captured in my viewfinder while pouring some sort of alcohol-laced elixir for a member of the crowd.

My impudent act resulted immediately in a booming reprimand from the ringmaster who bellowed his earsplitting displeasure at me over two elevated portable loudspeakers. Unfazed, I seized that moment to snap another photo — just in the nick of time, as a well-aimed barb from a *gwangdae* stink eye launched from across the arena struck me full force:



Figure 45-2: A venomous *gwangdae* stink eye caught me full force from across the arena the moment I snapped this photo.

I had inured myself to the Gypsy stink eye while in the United States, but the *gwangdae* variant nearly sent me reeling. Although I never had the opportunity to photograph an incoming Gypsy stink eye, the French artist Ferdinand Roybet (1840-1920) successfully captured its sensational alienating experience in this engraving titled *En Retard Pour la Fête*:



Figure 45-3: Beware the long, sideways glance. The Gypsy stink eye as depicted by F. Roybet in his book engraving *En Retard Pour la Fête* (Arriving late for the Fair), circa 1865.

My readers may have mistakenly concluded that my previous remarks here about the Gypsy stink eye and the *gwangdae* stink eye are disparaging of these ethnic peripatetic peoples. Quite the opposite: It is because I sincerely respect the power and the agency of the practiced and applied hostile stink eye when deployed against outsiders by historically persecuted minorities like the *gwangdae* and the Gypsies that I bring it up both as an ethnographic fact and a cautionary warning in this present chapter.

When some peoples “stare daggers at others” (a.k.a. “the stink eye,” or, “the skunk eye”), their long, hard looks I believe have the occult agency to inflict harm. The phrase “If looks could kill”) is therefore not a trivial expression. So much has been written in the cross-cultural ethnographic and psycho-social literatures about “the evil eye” and “the gaze” that I won’t digress any further on the topic and leave my readers to explore these fascinating occult avenues on their own — except to point out that Gypsies, *gwangdae*, and other historically outcaste and persecuted minority peoples are *not defenseless* as often portrayed by those who would seek to “protect” them as “victim” of majority society persecutions. These minority ethnic groups I have studied and mentioned have myriad defensive strategies and stratagems little understood and underestimated by uninformed and cynical outsiders. Some of these defensive and offensive weapons are mystical (like traditional curses and the powerful stink eye) and some are material; for example, the exquisitely terrible edged-weapons devised and mastered by the feared Gypsy *navajeros* of the Iberian Peninsula.



Figure 45-4: Woodblock print by M. J. Gallagher in Irving Brown’s *Romany Road* (1932).

Speaking of the skilled use of edged weapons by outcaste and/or despised minority peoples, Jeju Island diving women (*haenyeo*) were also an armed historically-disparaged cultural (indeed ethnic) minority group under Korean Neo-Confucian patriarchal rule. They too possessed traditional mystical and material defensive and offensive weapons, strategies and stratagems for survival. These skills were not underestimated by more observant and cautious outsiders.



Figure 45-5: Tools having the potential as edged weapons in the hands of Jeju Island *haenyeo*. A vintage photo of unknown provenance.

I personally experienced the *haenyeo* stink eye on several occasions during my first year of Peace Corps service on Jeju Island (1973) and on one occasion experienced their edged weapons raised against me (see Chapter 6 titled “Close Encounters of the Haenyeo Kind”). This was roughly coincidental with my touch-and-go experience with the *gwangdae* stink eye. In all these instances I was in the *right* place at the *right* time facing the *right* direction — and doing the *wrong* thing. My relentless impertinent curiosity in all cases made me an easy target for the stink eye. I guess I will never learn.

To any *JWW* reader who strongly agrees or disagrees with strong sentiments having intergroup conflict implications like “birds of a feather flock together” and to each his own,” here is an anecdote worth thinking about and discussing from Jeju Island circa 1974. It involves a *gwangdae* youth and a *haenyeo* maiden.

When I heard this story I happened to be searching for individuals of *gwangdae* descent on the Island. My good friend Kim Ji-hong claimed to have discovered one and arranged an interview near Shin San Village on the island. When we showed up for the interview the alleged *gwangdae* suddenly changed his mind. Discouraged, we headed back to Jeju City but stopped by the residence of Mr. Oh Moon-pok, an elderly gentleman with some knowledge about *p’ungsu* (geomancy) practices on Jeju Island. I mentioned the failed interview and he responded with this anecdote:

*“As you know, the basket maker and the shell-diver are the lowest of the low: he with his twisting and twining among the rushes, and she with her poking and prying among the fishes. They are made for each other*

*... and surely no one else would have them!*

*So it was that a boy basket maker [gwangdae] and a diving girl [haenyeo] met. They vowed to begin their matrimony in a new village, posing as decent folk. This was a grand idea, but impossible, as their true nature eventually betrayed them.*

*It happened in the busy marketplace, when the two began to quarrel. One thing leading to another, and with a great crowd of their new neighbors looking on, the newlyweds came near to blows:*

*“Bitch!” he threatened, “I’ll thrash you with my willow branches!”*

*“But not before I carve you with my diving tool!” she cried.”*

# Chapter 46

## Diving for Coin

The current Wikipedia article titled “Haenyeo” begins with “Until the 19th century, diving [on Jeju Island] was mostly done by men.” That’s news to me but perhaps true. I suggest that some readers with expertise on this topic either quickly provide the Wiki with a credible citation in support of this iconoclastic truth claim, or, request that it be removed from the Wiki article at once as unconfirmed patriarchal hogwash.

This is not to say that islander menfolk in other parts of the world in times past did not free dive in dangerous deep waters for economic gain. Male Persian and Polynesian pearl divers come immediately to my mind as examples. Quite a few Hollywood movies featuring male pearl divers in the South Pacific have been produced over past decades, though none recently. In these classic movies the pearl divers often dove down too close to giant clams camouflaged below and in a few I have seen they were suddenly clamped upon and devoured whole. Short of that horror the unfortunate divers simply drowned when the clams got ahold of one or both of their feet. It was hard to watch without spilling my popcorn.

I myself was a male diver twice over. In the first instance I was a springboard diver during my high school years. My friend Mike was also a springboard diver. Mike resembled Elvis Presley and this was about the time that “Hound Dog” (1956) was released. When sudden fame launched The King’s long reign, Mike inadvertently, happily, found himself chained to a comet and became a stupendous chick magnet even though he could not sing a lick. All he had to do was stand around and comb his hair. Women appeared out of nowhere. It was spooky. We two palled around together throughout Southern California for several years. And so I rode the coat tails of a little comet chained to a big comet.

This brings me to the second instance: On weekends during the summers of 1957 and 1958 we would take the big S.S. Catalina passenger ferry from San Pedro to Santa Catalina Island to earn money diving for coin. Here is a postcard photo of that famous ship:



Figure 46-1: The *S. S. Catalina* bound for Santa Catalina Island located 26 miles off the coast of Los Angeles.

Did I mention that Mike was a chick magnet?



Figure 46-2: Mike the chick magnet and me headed for Catalina Island to dive for coin.

About 90 percent of the passengers on the S.S. Catalina were old timers who were headed to the island in order to get away from carefree teenagers just like Mike and me, and from bored high school girls looking for excitement. Imagine their delight to be on a ship in the presence of an Elvis Presley look-alike and headed for a weekend island paradise! And what stories these girls would have liked to tell back home! Too bad Mike and I were going to the island for work and not play.

As for the old folk sitting around us, they could only wish they were young and restless again, and could look like Elvis, and we could feel the heat of their jealousies and feeble stink-eyes boring into the backs of our heads:



Figure 46-3: The jealous-old-fart-stink-eye.

Diving for coin might qualify as “work and no play” to some people averse to ocean swimming. However, any work involved came naturally for competitive “water men” and was a barrel of fun for springboard divers like Mike and me. We simply had no time for girls on our working weekends. Instead, we could earn several hundred bucks on a good weekend diving for coin and put it to good use. I was in the Saracens high school car club at the time and had an automobile to support. Gas was thirty-five cents a gallon!



Figure 46-4: Saracens forever! My club car membership plaque from high school.

Mike claimed at the time to need date money (although for all I could tell his girlfriends — and especially the cougars — were happy to pick up all the bills just to be seen in his company). I don't know what his did with all this share of money we earned diving for coin. He didn't even own a car. His girlfriends drove him everywhere.

Diving for coin where the big cruise ships dock around the world is just what it sounds like. I think the custom was invented or popularized in Honolulu, Hawaii. It is well remembered in Honolulu circa 1946 how the town folk would occasionally take a break to wander down to the pier beneath the Aloha Tower to watch the big cruise ships come in. Islanders would greet the tourists as they disembarked, and listen to the brass band playing there. Meanwhile young swimmers gathered there, mostly boys and men, to tread water beneath the high rails of the ship's deck and gangplanks to catch coins tossed into the water by the passengers.

It was pretty much the same experience for Mike and I in Avalon Bay alongside the dock when the Catalina or her sister ship arrived and departed several times daily during an average weekend. We would swim out to the deep water near the bow of the ship and it would rain coin.

It was far better earnings for divers on Catalina than in Honolulu because gambling was legal offshore in California and a lot of the coins tossed overboard were silver dollars. There was a famous casino near the boat dock and the slots took silver dollars at that time. The passengers had tons of them. We would catch the coins except for the pennies and sometimes the nickels while treading water. Since it was pouring coins we missed a lot and tried to catch these escapees as they spun beneath the surface on their way to the seabed forty feet below. Down there some rich kids with aqualungs waited and made a real haul. Forty feet was a bit deep for free divers like Mike and me, so we let the quarters and even the Franklin half-dollars pass by and focused our attention instead on the silver dollars as they shimmered in the sun and spun in and out of our clutches and downwards under the force of gravity. In sum, we were technically swimming for coin but spent a lot of our strength diving after those many we failed to catch at the surface.

In truth it was exhausting work, though exhilarating from successful moment to successful moment during the daytime action. The more successful we were the harder it was to keep afloat and maneuver about due to the weight of our catch. We had a special belts and pouches to carry our coins, but had to retreat to shore and hotel room often to unburden ourselves. Also, in the water the fight for space between divers was constant and occasionally brutal. It was hard to stay afloat, catch coin and protect territory all at the same time. Bloody noses were common and thank god sharks were not about in the bay.

Mike saved my life once when a mean-spirited passenger sailed a silver dollar hard right into my head. I passed out and Elvis swam me to shore to recover. I still have a bump of scar tissue up there as a reminder of that close call and our warm friendship. I fondly remember how we ended our day with our last long swim to shore near sunset. A warm breeze would inevitably be blowing in from the mainland. We would grab a pizza and retreat dog-tired beneath the stars to our rented room. We would split up the day's haul fifty-fifty. We would click on the radio and click off the light. One night I remember that the Five Satins were singing "In the Still of the Night" and the weather was especially balmy and the last thing I heard before dropping off to sleep was the joyous crowd downhill at the casino whooping it up.

In sum: Diving for coin In Avalon Bay, Catalina Island, was good exercise and great fun back in the day. I hear the S.S. Catalina eventually wore out and ended up half sunk off the coast of Ensenada, Mexico, where it became the residence of a big colony of seals. The very latest word I got is that its remnants were finally cut up with blowtorches for scrap and sent to China for recycling. So it goes.

And Mike? He went on to become a springboard diving champ at Brigham Young University in the 60's. By that time we had lost contact with each other. Word is he (unsurprisingly) married into money, became a Mormon, but then passed away about a decade or so ago. Now I'm an old-timer and there are more casinos around than ever — but those big, heavy silver dollars have disappeared into coin collections or have been melted down into ingots.

Recently big cruise ships began to tie up and disgorge tourists at Jeju City. They will soon be doing the same at the new Navy/commercial port on the south side of the island and just west of Sogwip'o. I'd be surprised if diving for coin hasn't already caught on there among the island youth and expatriate community. It's a global tradition.

## Chapter 47

### ‘Jeju Ireland’



Figure 47-1: Irresistible? Through the Ages the singing swan resides in a pool of tranquility. Behold the design perfection of the venerable Jew's harp.

Indulge me. Keeping in mind that censorship of the mail in Korea was rife along with a bit of corruption in 1973/1974, what do you imagine were the odds that a letter — much less a package — from the United States would reach the hands of a Peace Corps Volunteer on Jeju Island intact? The correct answer is “zero.” Ask any Volunteer serving on the island in those days: The odds were better that a Tyrannosaurus Rex chasing a leprechaun on a snowy day in August would collide with a public bus carrying the Pope.

In my experience not only did every letter I received at my work address over a two year period arrive at my desk with the envelope *unsealed* and the stamps *torn off*, but a package my Mom sent me for Christmas containing a Jew's harp got “lost” for about three months after arriving on the island.

I am not pointing fingers here, but if you 1) worked as a customs clerk for low pay back in the day and 2) opened up a small, secured box addressed to an American that was packed with unshelled peanuts and assorted small, soft condiments inserted to protect a shiny, new, Jew's harp, and 3) if you had never seen or held in the palm of your hand a magical-looking Jew's harp in your entire lifetime, then 4) you might just go temporarily insane and be tempted to make that Jew's harp your own by hook or by crook. That is my theory about what happened to my wayward Jew's harp around Christmas-time in 1973.

The Jew's harp may be the earliest musical instrument devised by humankind. Its design has cosmic perfection. It is a magico-religious instrument in some quarters of the world even today, and this was most probably so at the onset of human civilization.

The ancient ancestors of Chinese, Russian and Japanese peoples manufactured and played the Jew's harp. Did Koreans do likewise in past times? I don't know — but I recently heard the tune “Arirang” played on a Siberian Yakut's Jew's harp by a Vietnamese musician. It was spellbinding. Anyway, I doubt that my own Jew's harp in 1973 was the first one ever to reach Jeju Island — but it may have been.

It is rumored that there are over 1,000 names for the Jew's harp worldwide at present, with “Jew's harp” being the most popular phrase in the English-language to describe the venerable instrument. There are heated debates about how this tiny instrument, alternatively called “jaw harp” and “juice harp” in English, got its name.

But I've digressed too far here from the story at hand, which is my tale of woe and worry over the Jew's harp sent to me by my Mom around Christmas in 1973 that mysteriously went missing. Once I knew that it had been mailed from the U.S. and was overdue I mindlessly filed a formal complaint with the Jeju City Post Office. That was a mistake I will forever regret.

I reported that I had received an opened package full of loose peanuts in the shell, small soft candies, and gum — but no Jew's harp. Then I had to describe the missing item. This part was not easy, for I had not seen the actual harp that was sent. I tried to draw a picture that represented a Jew's harp, but failed miserably. I attempted to describe a generic Jew's harp in English to the postal clerks, but no one in the post office was adept at English. The office manager took the opportunity at that juncture to ask me if I could come to the post office a few evenings every week to teach his staff English. Meanwhile, everybody was terribly confused. I grew frustrated then angry and finally left and spent the rest of the day grousing in a *makgeolli* hut.

A week went by as I searched libraries on the island for a photo of a Jew's harp. Alas, there was no Internet at that time. *Finally* I remembered that there was a big dictionary in my Volunteer book locker. Therein I found a small but expert drawing of a Jew's harp. I took the dictionary back to the post office. They insisted on keeping it. My cynical thought at the time was “I bet they lose this dictionary too!” Obviously, I was getting paranoid and making much ado about nothing. Would that I could, I would turn back the clock and never file my missing mail complaint with the post office in the first place.

About three months went by. One morning I came to work and found the missing Jew's harp on my desk. There was no note attached. There was no explanation. None of my co-workers would look me in the eye that day. But eventually, everything at work returned to normal. I thought long and hard for many weeks thereafter about the entire situation. Whereas the American-in-me wanted to shout aloud “Yes! Yes! Victory at last!” on that morning when the Jew's harp finally appeared, I did not succumb to gloating. Already by that time I had grasped that there was absolutely no victory to be earned through filing an official complaint in Korea in order to successfully solve The Mystery of My Missing Jew's Harp.

The stakes — a silly Jew’s harp — were too small. My complaint was culturally-insensitive and served only to trigger embarrassment for my school and the post office. Given those anxious times in Korea, with the KCIA about and all, my official complaint may have even resulted in some physical and emotional suffering to persons unknown during the investigation process. In the aftermath I tried to play that Jew’s harp but the sound was never sweet, and the harp always left a bitter taste in my mouth. I even chipped a tooth. The device had become a monkey’s paw. I finally gave it to a shoeshine boy down on Chilsong-ro (“Seven Stars Road” in Jeju City).

Speaking of leprechauns, I would not be surprised if the little buggers inhabit Jeju Island, though as yet undetected. The conditions are perfect: Jeju Island as is well known is a smaller version of Ireland, where leprechaun sightings are frequent.



Figure 47-2: Dry (mortar-less) stone wall construction is ubiquitous in Western Ireland (left) and on Jeju Island (right).

Irish priests and nuns assigned to Jeju Island during the many decades following the Korean War have often remarked in print on the similarities between rural Ireland and Jeju Island. In both the West of Ireland and on Jeju Island farmers over the centuries have pried boulders from the surface and fashioned boundary fences and windbreaks from them. Archaeologists claim that dry stone wall constructions on the Emerald Isle date from almost 6,000 years ago. Both of these beautiful places have traditionally featured, both seaside and inland, bucolic and peaceful panoramas of cultural landscapes with long, low stone walls enclosing productive pastures and tilled fields, all centering on scattered stone-walled households, isolated hamlets and villages. Personally, I never encountered a leprechaun on the island during my Peace Corps service. But who knows, perhaps more recently some prescient Irish priest in anticipation of loneliness has arrived to Jeju Island facing his long assignment with a leprechaun concealed up his pant leg?

Returning to the topic of the postal service on Jeju Island at the time of my Peace Corps adventures: Had anyone back in the U.S. addressed a letter to me and written “Jeju Ireland” instead of “Jeju Island,” I am certain that nobody — not even those notorious sharp-eyed censors in the employ of the Korean government — would have noticed or objected.

# Chapter 48

## Camaraderie

About this time every year, on the cusp of Fall turning into Winter, and after Daylight Savings has kicked in, I often wake up in the dark singing a little ditty that my Dad memorized in the Army and then never quit singing for the rest of his life. The song is titled “\$21 a Day – Once a month.”

The lyrics begin:

*“They wake you up at 5 o’clock in the morning*

*For 21 dollars a day, once a month ...”*

But when my Dad sang it, it went this way, and *loud*:

*“OH, they wake ... you up... at FIVE O’CLOCK in the MOOOOOOOOOOOOR-NING,*

*For TWENTY-ONE DOLLARZ ZADAY ONCE A MOOOOOOOOOOOON-TH ...”*

And that was about it. He only knew the first two stanzas. I asked him a long time ago: “Where did you learn that song, Dad? He said “I learned it in the Army...” and then paused, and then continued ... “from a WOODpecker!” I didn’t know what that meant. It was an Army insider’s joke, I guess. But, I gathered that he must have sung this song a *lot*, and probably in the company of his war buddies, his comrades. So when I ran across the following photo recently of my Dad crooning with his pals somewhere in the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific during World War 2, guess what lyrics boomed inside my head?

That’s right! *“TWENTY-ONE DOLLARZ ZADAY ONCE A MOOOOOOOOOOOON-TH ...”*



Figure 48-1: Wartime camaraderie: My Dad (hat in hand) clowning around with other low-paid Army pals on some war-torn Pacific Island. Thanks to John Dorough for this photo.

If I live to be a hundred, there are some words I will never succeed to spell correctly, no matter how hard I try. One is “camaraderie.” This photo sums it up its meaning to me: a mutual trust and friendship earned through some sort of fraternal bonding; a shared rite of passage, or a trial by fire — like in war. Some say men have it and women don’t. However, I am certain that I have observed camaraderie among the Jeju Island *haenyeo* (diving women). Camaraderie must be profound and complex. Perhaps undefinable (and damn hard at least for me to spell!).

The Peace Corps Volunteers serving on Jeju Island during my experience there had an odd sort of camaraderie. But let me say first that adjusting for inflation the average down-country PCV serving in Korea during 1973-1974 may have made *less* than \$21 dollars a day once a month. Of course I wasn’t getting paid to duck incoming sniper fire. And don’t forget that the priests and nuns over in Hallim Town on Jeju worked for free! And they had to wrestle with the Devil day in and day out.

Anyway, getting back to the topic of camaraderie among Peace Corps Volunteers on Jeju Island, it was a rare occasion that brought island Volunteers together when I served on the island. And even when they came together they each seemed to be “elsewhere”; that is, lost in their own contemplations:



Figure 48-2: A rare convergence of the low-paid Jeju Island Peace Corps Volunteer flock in 1974. Strange birds, each more likely than not is lost in his own thoughts.

The Jeju Island Volunteer experience back in the day gave each of us a lot — sometimes too much — to contemplate. For example, in the above photo, that is me in the center, gazing out the window. I believe we are in a bakery shop that was once located at the foot of the steep hill that climbs from Old Jeju City up to and past the site of the KAL Hotel. If so, from where I am sitting I could view the street and sidewalks clearly through the plate glass windows.

One weekend morning in December or January I was bundled up and sitting in that bakery looking out that same window and saw a dirty, old Jeju pony hauling an overloaded cart filled with black *yeontan* (charcoal) cylinders in the middle of the street and headed up the steep incline. The pony was advancing at a painfully slow rate. The frigid winds were beginning to blow sleet outside. Buses and taxis headed uphill were increasingly honking their horns and attempting to pass the poor animal. Their big wheels were spinning to gain traction as they attempted to accelerate. Passing the pony at close quarters they spattered the beast with ice shards and slush. Downhill-bound wheeled traffic had all but ceased to roll due to the treacherous ice on the road surface. These vehicles just slid into the curb at odd angles to wait out the storm. It was a dangerous situation. I hesitated to get involved in the plight of the pony, and events were moving fast.

Those few pedestrians on the sidewalks had nearly all paused to observe the predicament of the *yeontan* deliveryman, who was now growing frantic in his attempt to keep the pony moving. He was yelling and running about, alternatively pushing the cart and then rushing to the fore where he would roughly yank about on the old pony's chest halter. I could see the pony had commenced to shiver then shudder violently as it continued to strain forward without much success.

Then it simply ceased trying and gave up the ghost. I had waited too long to lend a hand. First its front hooves began to skid and slide about on the rapidly freezing pavement. Then suddenly it fell to its

knees. The deliveryman quickly grabbed a wheel chock that dangled from the cart's side and positioned it flush against the downhill side of the cart wheel. No sooner had he done so than the pony keeled over on its side, head last, and then lay motionless there. The sweat on its hide began to freeze white under a thickening blanket of wind-borne sleet.

At that point, the pedestrians who had paused to watch resumed trekking up and down the sidewalks. A policeman on foot casually walked into the slippery street to begin directing traffic around the stalled cart. The deliveryman meanwhile was beside himself with frustration and perhaps grief. He wailed, mouth agape, while attempting to lift up the dead pony's head. I was stunned by the scene and sick at heart. Could I have helped avert the tragedy? My stomach churned and I left my table to go into the restroom. When I returned to pay my bill I could not but look again out the window and onto the street. Sleet pushed by the wind was sailing nearly horizontal outside. Amazingly, the policeman, the overladen cart, the deliveryman and the fallen pony were gone. Had I been in the john that long? It was as if the sad event I witnessed had never even occurred.

I have heard that island peoples, due to their unique geographic environments, have more in common with each other around the world than they do with peoples bred and raised in continental or peninsular habitats. Perhaps this observation was truer in past times than it is in present times. Personally, as a continental person, living on Jeju Island was in many ways a steep learning curve. You can disagree with me about the uniqueness of small islands and their peoples, and cite specifics, but consider first the extent to which the following two metaphorical saws reveal — each from the kernel of wisdom within its own nutshell — the essence of small islands and their inhabitants:

“A small cup soon overflows.”

“A small pot boils quickly.”

To what extent do these pithy sayings about small islands and their inhabitants apply to the example of Jeju Island and its indigenous peoples? I'd say they apply to a great extent, and I think myriad pertinent examples may come to mind if *Jeju World Wide* readers pause to contemplate these sayings long enough.

Those *JWW* readers who are teaching English to islanders of all ages might treat these adages as hypotheses to motivate some critical thinking and writing exercises among their students. Or, perhaps the students can discuss the meaning of these two adages and then afterwards bring photographs, graphs, art works illustrations, and so on as illustrations that validate the hypothetical truth claims, and this might lead to further discussion. For example: I use them as captions for the two illustrations below:



Figure 48-3: “A small cup soon overflows.” Photo: Yonhap.

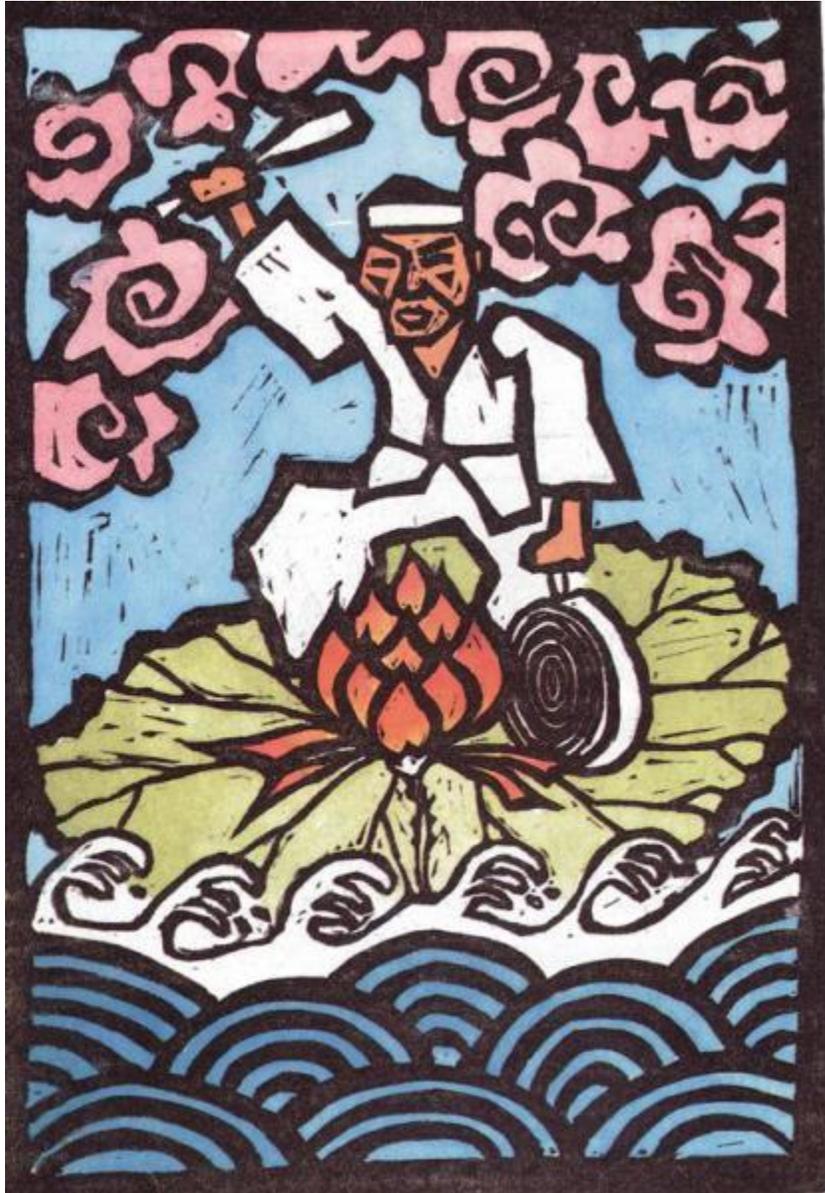


Figure 48-4: “A small pot boils quickly.” *Minjung misul* artwork titled “Shinmyung” (rousing the spirit) by Nam Gung-hyung.

# Chapter 49

## Artificial Islands

You can file this one away under either “island fever” or perhaps “nautical whimsy”...

While most folks have heard of Ernest “Papa” Hemingway, few have heard of his brother, Leicester “Duke” Hemingway. What does this have to do with Jeju Island? More than you now know. So please read on.

I discovered that the only English-language newspaper available on Jeju Island when I arrived there for Peace Corps Volunteer service in 1973 was an unusual little *Korea Times* insert titled “Guide to Current English.” Once weekly a provocative news item printed in English would be broken down into four or five paragraphs, translated into Korean, and skimmed of uncommon words and idioms like “pipe dream” and “pooh-pooh” for the purposes of further discussion.

Invariable I would run into highly motivated islanders, most often college students, seeking to practice these same idioms with a rare native English speaker in the immediate aftermath of their publication. They would seek me out, for example, in my favorite bakery or simply stop me on the sidewalk with questions like “Hello. Do you think it will rain today?” If I replied in a professional manner using the best-practice-format for English teachers in those days “Hello. Yes, I think it will rain today,” the opportunity would ideally arise for my inquisitors to respond “That is a pipe dream” or “Pooh-pooh, Thank you.” Lesson accomplished.

Anyway, I saved a few of these “Guide to Current English” inserts because a little voice in my head at the time suggested that I might possibly be able to use them at some future date if I lived long enough. That time is now. I have kept this one example dated Tuesday, July 17, 1973 for 40 years and now have the opportunity to share it with you. It is a gem titled “Dream Island Plan” and it reports of a pipe-smoking Japanese tycoon named Noboru Gotoh whose dream it was to build an artificial island called “Shangri-La” ideal for human habitat and located in the remote South Pacific “far from the ills of modern civilization.”

The design plan revealed that Shangri-La comprised four islands with a total area of 180 km<sup>2</sup>: “Natural Living Island,” “Nature Development Island,” “Rehabilitation Island,” and “Mother Island.” Wealthy people suffering from “ailments arising from modern materialistic civilization and managed society”

could escape from authoritarian rule and the psychological stresses of urban, industrial living. Shangri-La would have no electricity. Life would be comfortable, but not luxurious. Residents on “Rehabilitation Island” would number 100 in addition to highly trained doctors, psychologists and nurse-caretakers.

This Shangri-La Island complex, ultimately pooh-poohed and politely judged to be a pipe dream after proposed, was never built. Gotoh died of respiratory failure in the heart of Tokyo in 1989. He was 72. Gotoh’s dream island may have ultimately fizzled, but my first encountering the story while living on Jeju Island in 1973 sparked my life-long fascination in the big idea of artificial islands in history, which is a terrific and complex story, and one which the online Wikipedia article now introduces conveniently and quite adequately (see “Artificial Islands”). This chapter is not redundant of that article. The focus of my particular fascination with artificial islands is its sub-genre of islands as “elitist” escapes from the real world for those who can afford to dream up, design, build and own them; for tycoons like Noboru Gotoh.

Another tycoon, Lazarus Long, an American from Tulsa, was until recently building “New Utopia” near the Cayman Islands. It was to be a principality and Mr. Long envisioned himself as its Prince. His artificial island, a new nation where nothing previously existed, was inspired by the writings of Ayn Rand.

Several other tycoons and consortiums of wealthy libertarians have hatched schemes from their dreams to build sovereign countries at many scales and sizes around the world. They built on floating platforms tethered to sea beds or propped up atop sunken pillars or afloat and free to ride the oceanic currents. A flock of artificial island schemes were hatched in the final decade of the last millennium. Was this due to apocalypse anxiety? Among these projects were the short-lived Oceania (the Atlantis Project) circa 1994, Marshal Savage’s “Millennial Project” (circa 1992) and The New Island Creation Consortium (Freedomium of Merica), circa 1993. Also included is the City of San Diego’s ambitious “Floatport” international airport idea (circa 1992). None have succeeded.

Leicester Hemingway’s dream of an artificial island paradise came a few decades earlier, in 1961, just after he successfully published his biography *My Brother, Ernest Hemingway*. It earned him significant financial rewards. While perhaps not yet a tycoon, “Duke” Hemingway energetically invested his new wealth in a dream: a sovereign micro-nation called “New Atlantis,” which he built on a raft in the Caribbean. He claimed that its purpose was to serve as a marine research headquarters. A hurricane supposedly swept it away a few years after it was built. There is also a rumor that “Duke” built two islands in succession: The first was crude and anchored to the seabed by chains attached to a Ford engine block. Apparently it was not permanently occupied and scavenging fishermen in search of lumber dismantled New Atlantis in the absence of any caretaker. The second attempt, circa 1964, was christened with a new name and was more successful. A colony of eight “citizens” occupied the rebuilt island. Whence came the hurricane.

More successful throughout recorded history were landfill-sorts of artificial island building beginning with ancient low-tech expansions of agricultural plots into shallow water bodies adjacent to existing shores. Perhaps the best known example are those vast *chinampas* (artificial floating gardens) in central Mexico built by the lakeside-dwelling Xochimilcas, ancient inventive farmers who successfully responded to a need to feed their rapidly growing population by expanding into the lake, creating these offshore artificial islands.

Case studies of man-made islands as “escapes” and “safe zones” from the outside world and its problems are therefore especially interesting. Escaping from head-hunters is the reason some Solomon Islanders (who were not cannibals) built their own impressive artificial islands prior to World War 2, as

documented and photographed by missionaries. This postage stamp from 1939 commemorates that achievement:



Figure 49-1: A 1939 postage stamp featuring artificial islands built by indigenous peoples in the Solomon Islands, supposedly to escape from cannibals..

Here is a missionary photograph of one such artificial island, which very much resembles the representation in the stamp:

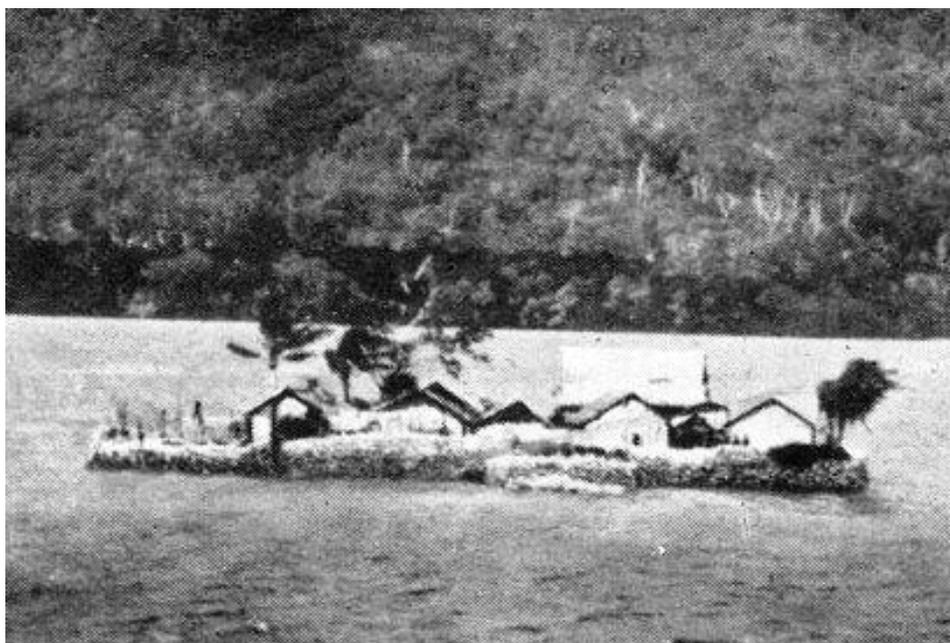


Figure 49-2: The stamp documents and does not exaggerate, as is demonstrated by this vintage missionary photograph.

This remarkable photograph reminds me of the feasibility and risk of living on giant seaworthy rafts of a sort that perhaps reached Jeju Island in ancient times. Big exploratory and colonizing rafts were reportedly pushed offshore and into the East Sea from the west coast of China by the “First Emperor.” He was in search of the “Isles of the Blest” where both the immortals and the plants of immortality supposedly resided. We read of adventurous pioneers like Hsu Fu who was dispatched by the emperor in the 3rd century B.C. with ample supplies of young women, tradesmen, artisans, animals and the seeds of the five grains — a floating agricultural village! Legend on Jeju Island has it that it was his rafts that made their successful landfall on “Yongju” (the earliest recorded name for Jeju Island) at a place called Seogwipo (“Port of Return to the West”).

“Farmsteading” on artificial islands is passé these days and artificial island settlement projects are now typically called “seasteading.” Most of these are post-industrial and high-tech habitats. Google, for example, is currently constructing a high-tech “barge” (a floating artificial island) in San Francisco Bay. The project is very hush-hush. Nobody is pooh-poohing this project because Google is wealthy enough to accomplish just about any sort of construction project on land or sea that its tycoons and venture capitalists dare to dream up. It could very well be a residential raft.

In fact, sailing condominiums are happening as I type. Norwegian tycoons launched a giant ship called “The World” about a decade ago. It features apartments rather than staterooms that only the very wealthy can afford. These apartments cost from two to seven million dollars apiece. There are 110 of them that range in size from two to six rooms. Unlike a gated community on land, where neighbors hardly ever meet, residents of The World get to know each other “intimately” — for better and for worse. A sister ship is in the works

There is hardly any unclaimed land around the worth settling anymore, islands included. Angelina Jolie just last week (in November, 2013) was rumored to have purchased a heart-shaped island featuring a residence designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. The sale price was advertised at \$20 million. Natural heart-shaped islands are not unique in the world, but they do seem rare as hen’s teeth.



Figure 49-3: A rare, natural heart-shaped island located near New York City.

For example, there is a nice one near Fiji that attracts a lot of tourists — but it is not for sale. Since natural heart-shaped islands are scarce commodities in high demand by competing tycoons who cannot wait for the next one to come on the market, they can alternatively choose to spend whatever it takes to carve one out of raw material, or to simply build one from scratch. The technology to do either exists at present. Consider Yas Island, completely man-made, located in Abu Dhabi. This new artificial island is the site of the world's fastest rollercoaster (at 240 k.p.h.!). Yas Island is not heart-shaped — but it could easily have been. Different tycoons have had different dreams in the annals of artificial island building.

The poor can also live on artificial islands. Lest we forget, real islands in times past were often the officially enforced abodes of poor fishermen, pirates, exiles, criminals, and those afflicted with contagious diseases like leprosy. Jeju Island itself was a notorious natural island of exile throughout the Yi Dynasty era. But, a history of building artificial islands for these same purposes is not well documented. So, I was surprised to read that a recent mayor of New York City was “floating” the idea of waterborne shelters for homeless people. At the time of this brainstorm minimum security inmates were already being housed on a surplus ferry moored to a pier extending from the adjacent Riker's Island corrections complex. Moreover, to the mayor's dismay there were several families of waterborne squatters living off-shore of Manhattan Island in several small flotillas of boats and rafts that were chained together.

I suppose the best definition of “artificial islands” in contrast to “natural islands” is that the former are islands that would not be islands if it were not for the creative intervention of human wealth, technology, and the will power to dream dreams and then strive to make them come true. The first Disneyland in Anaheim, California had a “Tom Sawyer's Island” with caves and such just as Mark Twain described them in his famous book. Why? Walt Disney was a tycoon and a dreamer. Examples of artificial islands in history are endless.

At a much larger scale and according to the above definition the entirety of North America became an artificial island when humans built the Panama Canal. If you believe that, then Africa similarly became an artificial island when humans and their machines built the Suez Canal and boldly severed Africa from Asia. While these examples seem preposterous, a serious detailed study of artificial islands as solutions to some of the world's everyday problems is long overdue.

## Chapter 50

### Shon, Pitts, Dustin, DeNoon and the ‘Hawaii of Korea’

How often and long have Korean tourism marketers been calling Jeju Island “The Hawaii of Korea”? Consistently I think, but only since the mid-1980s. The formal “sister state” relationship between Jeju Island and Hawaii was negotiated in 1986. A major mover and shaker in the formal bonding between the two islands was James Shon, Representative Hawaii State Legislator, 1984-1996.

I knew him as “Jim” when we both served on Jeju Island as Peace Corps Volunteers. He had been on the island since 1969. When I arrived in February of 1973 Jim was just finishing up his fourth year of service. He left Jeju that May and moved on to the University of Hawaii, to earn a PhD in political science and long-term care. He eventually entered into politics and is presently director of the Hawaii Education Policy Center.

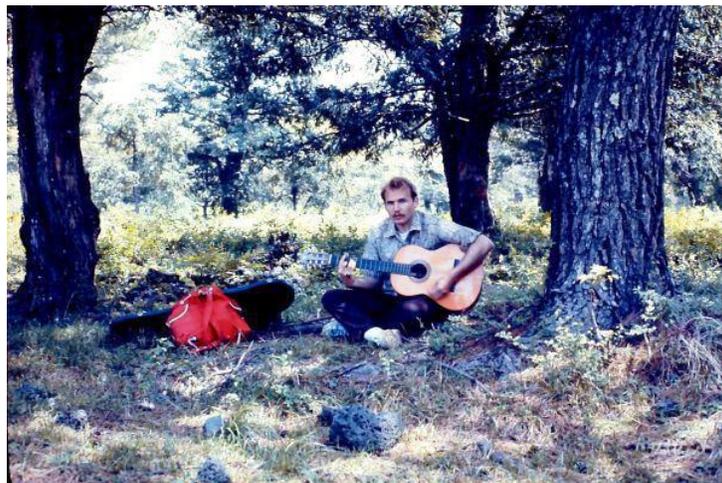


Figure 50-1: Peace Corps Volunteer and future State Legislator of Hawaii James Shon (K-12) in the Jeju Nutmeg Forest, circa 1972. Photo by Tom Runyon (K-24).

While helping to roll out the 1986 sister-state relationship Jim helped promote the first interdisciplinary Jeju Island studies symposiums that explored learning from Hawaii as a model for achieving economic success on Jeju Island through tourism development. The First Social Development Institute International Seminar occurred on Jeju Island on June 30 to July 1, 1986. Participants were instructed to focus on the similarities and differences between Jeju Island and Hawaii, with regard to tourism and its growth potential.

Two of the invited participants at this Seminar were Professor Forrest R. “Woody” Pitts (1924-2014) of the University of Hawaii and Professor Frederick H. Dustin of Jeju National University. “Woody” is an academic geographer of high repute. Fred as all *JWW* readers are aware is retired from university teaching and owns and operates the world famous Kimnyoung Maze Park on Jeju Island, and resides nearby.

Woody, a Koreanist throughout his career, was the long-time editor of *Korean Studies*, a top-ranked journal published by the University of Hawaii. We began corresponding when I began to research and publish some of my critical researches on the negative impacts of the walking tractor (hand tractor) on traditional Jeju Island agricultural landscape and life. Woody at that time (circa 1980) was well-known in Korea as the “Father of the walking tractor” for his active role in promoting its introduction and spread throughout South Korea. I first met Woody in California, shortly after his retirement from the University of Hawaii. We continue to correspond.

I met Fred Dustin a decade earlier on Jeju Island (see Chapters 15-17 on the topic of “The China Smith of Jeju Island”). It is worth noting today, in 2013, what these two experts had to say about the “Hawaii Model” and Jeju Island tourism development potential back in 1986. Fortuitously, their presentations were preserved and published in 1987 by Jeju National University, along with several other papers from the Seminar, in Volume 3 of the *Social Development Review*.

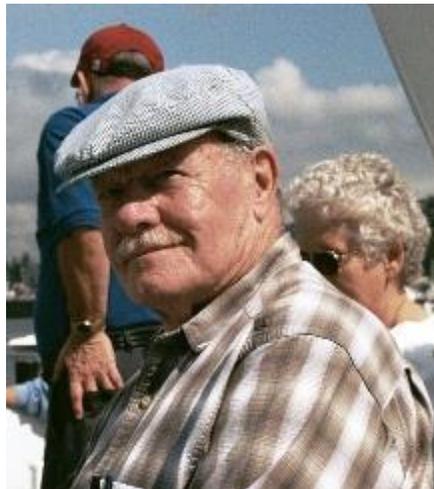


Figure 50-2: Forrest W. Pitts, University of Hawaii, enjoying his active retirement near the UC Berkeley campus in California.

Professor Pitts’ published presentation article in *Social Development Review* (pages 477-495) is titled “Hawaii and Cheju as Natural and Living Museums for Tourists.” He begins by reminding his readers that the tourism boom in Hawaii began with the first commercial jet airplane flight to Honolulu in 1958, then points out that the first organized tour bringing Western tourists from Seoul to Jeju occurred that same year.

His comparisons of the two islands begin with shared physical features and factors; how for example both islands are volcanic and composed of basalt rock “into which rain and snowmelt run and tend to disappear.” He details the shared volcanic features that appeal to tourists in Hawaii are those same that would appeal to tourists on Jeju Island: towering majesty of the high volcano, crater lake, cinder cones, and so on. Pitts concludes “Certainly [Jeju] could attract scientific tourists in comparative volcanic phenomena, given target marketing.”

He moves on to note the similarities of rare black sand beaches in both places, then discusses the accessibility of lava tubes as mass tourist destinations in Hawaii and potentially Jeju. He also sends a cautionary warning about their fragile ecosystems. He discusses the potential for sports fishery tourism along the Jeju coast and suggests annual fishing contests be considered for Jeju tourists. He wonders if the Jeju coastline can support a marketable board surfing experience for the tourist trade.

Woody suggests that the history of early Western explorers and travelers, as in Hawaii, may be colorful enough to justify the marketing and construction of monuments, museums and perhaps even some special commemorative holidays to educate and entertain potential tourists. He cites commemoration of Hendrick Hamel’s shipwreck as an exploitable example.

The rich cultural traditions of the Jeju Islanders have great potential to inform successful marketing strategies aimed at increasing tourism. Dr. Pitts suggests the construction of culture centers and folk villages based on successful precedents in Hawaii. Adding assorted cultural heritage events to the calendar that involve music, dance and crafts are another of his recommendations based on proved successful examples of Hawaiian marketing initiatives. Woody also envisions exploiting the appeal of Jeju ponies as part of an imaginative Mongol-era heritage tourism promotion.

He sees mass tourist appeal of farmers and periodic markets, but warns that this is a bad idea if rest room facilities are not adequate. Related to this is the lessons Hawaiians have learned about developing a mass tourism industry without due attention to the fresh water availability to support or sustain the industry. Local potable water shortages triggering water rationing within and beyond tourist destinations in Hawaii should be anticipated also in a Jeju Island strategic tourism development plan.

Dr. Pitts acknowledges the beauty and appeal of the flowering plants throughout both Hawaii and Jeju Island, and the need for providing tourists access to such beautiful destinations at appropriate times throughout the year. He writes “It is true that some tourists are content to buy colored picture postcards at a hotel, but the more adventuresome tourist lady would prefer to snap a photograph at the actual spot, or to be photographed there with a flowery background.” If Woody could enjoy accessing the entire island via Jeju’s Olle trails, he would be happily astonished at his powers of prophecy.

He also suggests what activities might be marketed on Jeju to appeal to a rugged male demographic in addition to sports fishing. Hunting pheasant, wrestling matches and steak cookouts (perhaps he is thinking here of Hawaii’s big outdoor barbecues with hula girls, fire dancers and such).

He wraps up his suggestions with a provocative list of appropriate items invested with Jeju Island identity that tourists might prefer. Fur coats, anyone? He also rails against billboards and shares a story about how long it took and what a fight it was for Hawaiians to finally rid their islands of unsightly signage. He pleads with Jeju Islanders to preserve their authentic indigenous language, for it also has tourism potential. Finally he recommends that Jeju Province and the State of Hawaii seek out a carefully planned sister island relationship. Of course this was already in the works and in fact achieved in the same year of his presentation.

Surprisingly, Dr. Pitts had nothing to say in his article about the potential of tourism promotion involving the traditional diving women of Jeju Island. Perhaps it was too obvious to mention. Also, there is no diving woman tradition in the “Hawaii Model.” Could it be that Hawaii tourism development marketers have something to learn from a “Jeju Model”?

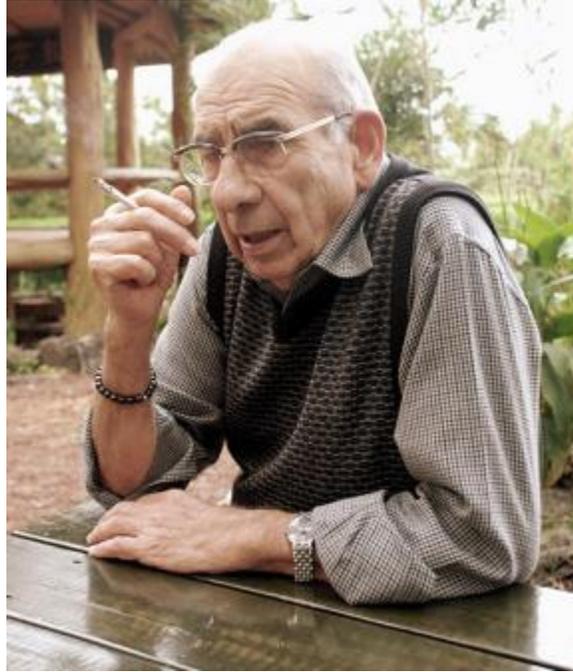


Figure 50-3: Frederic H. Dustin, Jeju National University.

Professor Dustin’s 1986 published presentation article in *Social Development Review* (pages 526-539) is titled “Avenues to Cooperation for Regional Development between Cheju and Hawaii.” It is a gutsy manifesto for its time and a challenge to government bureaucracy to deliver on its promises, by boldly exploring new paths in Jeju tourism development appropriate to new priorities and opportunities.

Fred begins with a timely reference to the Cheju Comprehensive Development Plan released in 1985 (the year previous) which asserts that 1) the development of successful national tourism will be the basis to attract international tourists and 2) regional development will be promoted through the development of tourism. Fred’s response to these priorities is to insist that islanders should support future tourism development on Jeju Island from that point forward with a new spirit of self-empowering aggressive entrepreneurship motivated by their desire “for self-sufficiency, self-management and self-pride.” Otherwise government monopoly will readily substitute its own power for public apathy, filling any void in public initiative.

The article has little to say about Hawaiian cooperation per se except to assume that Hawaii: 1) has the potential to lend Jeju expertise in tourism development; 2) is willing to share it; and 3) will come up with the necessary and sufficient venture capital to stimulate success. Fred sets a priority for implementation of the development plan through increased intellectual exchanges between scholars and scientists in participating higher education institutions. He emphasizes the importance of English-language instruction those working in the tourist industry on Jeju Island. He would like to have locals rather than outsiders qualifying to fill the skilled positions in the tourism workforce as they open. He reiterates the importance of “big investments” to accomplish the goals of the ambitious Jeju Island

tourism development plan.

His general arguments digress into specific types of “participation attractions” for tourists that will employ local human resources: yachting/cruising; fishing; the Jeju pony and pony trekking; the dude ranch. There is some obvious overlap here between Fred’s suggestions and the specific tourism potentials suggested for Jeju Island by Woody Pitts. It was around 1986 that Fred and the Scotsman Murray DeNoon (a government agricultural extension advisor in the employ of Great Britain) hit upon the idea of a recreational maze as a tourist attraction.



Figure 50-4: The A-maze-ing Murray DeNoon, O.B.E., in 1986.

The final paragraphs in Professor Dustin’s presentation article appear in the sub-section “Tourism as an Instrument in Political Reform.” Here Fred describes a global trend toward democratization. He argues again the virtues of self-reliance and entrepreneurship underlying local economic development fostered by elected bodies sworn to achieving the public good and resisting corruption. He notes that local public and governmental civic duty demands a democratic and efficient plan to achieve and maintain local economic and environmental sustainability, and in that context cites contested tourism development issues in Mt. Halla National Park in support of his arguments.

He concludes by noting that the Jeju tourism industry began in a quagmire of unrealizable goals spawned by unrealistic policies, but that conditions have changed with the implementation of the 1985 Cheju Tourism Development Plan. My visit to Jeju Island a few months ago demonstrates to me that Jim Shon, Woody Pitts, Fred Dustin and Murray DeNoon were all major yet mostly unsung contributors to the gradual inception and implementation of the Cheju Comprehensive Development Plan. I am proud to have known such intelligent men of vision and to have had this opportunity to sing their praises.

# Chapter 51

## Land's End

I've heard that the Japanese cannot resist a maze, nor the Germans, a precipice. *Zen koan* introspection may have something to do with explaining the former. Japanese are said to enter into the maze to enjoy the personal satisfaction of discovering their way out. The maze experience or exercise is to escape the pressures of daily life without going anywhere. This makes sense. The Japanese are an insular people and, following the logic of the determinist geographer Ellen Semple (1863-1932), accustomed to looking inward.

But what are we to make of those everyday German romantics over the past few centuries, often found poised in their thoughts and actions at a real or symbolic precipice and surveying the horizon; those who have characteristically sought out extreme situations in order to discover themselves and/or test their limits? One of these I discovered through my Korean Studies is Siegfried Genthe (1870-1904), author of *Korea* (1905), which includes a splendid chapter on his personal explorations on Jeju Island. He deliberately journeyed to Mt. Halla in order to climb up and stand on its precipice. He accomplished this goal in Oct. 16, 1901 and *may have been* the first European to “conquer” the mountain.



Figure 51-1: The German journalist-adventurer Siegfried Genthe (d. 1904). The first European to have climbed Mt. Halla?

His account in *Korea* remarked on his feeling of power at such heights. He took scientific measurement and walked around the rim of the crater there. He noted the splendid view. Facing to the southwest Genthe no doubt spied Gapado and Marado from his perch. He probably thought he had reached land's end in Korea. Facing southwest and into the East China Sea (Korea's West Sea), he may have drawn a long deep breath of what he imagined was "the purest" air, knowing that human habitation in that direction was no closer than hundreds of miles across a landless sea.

Jeju Island has been land's end for many purposes. A king of Joseon (1392-1897), for example, could not send a political prisoner any further into exile than the lonely flanks of Mt. Halla. The tales of early Western explorers and travelers have been told many times over and won't be repeated here.

I think that one of the most remarkable and inspiring tales of land's end in Korea on Jeju Island relates to its more recent waves of settlement. This tale describes how hard-working and innovative men and women born in the north of the Korean peninsula migrated down to Jeju Island and once there helped render the land more agriculturally productive. Tens of thousands of refugees from the north relocated to the south of the peninsula, and some to Jeju Island, rather than live in the north under communism. They overcame some hard times at first as most had to restart their productive lives from scratch.

My own parents-in-law, Kim Bong-sung and Yu Pil-yo, his mother, and their first child (now my wife) were refugees to the south, relocating there from Hwanghae province in the north. Mr. Kim sought to regain an economic footing for his family first in Seoul and then in Suwon. He quickly demonstrated his determination and entrepreneurial spirit by establishing several business enterprises. He was even the principal of a public school for a while. My mother-in-law was briefly a 5th grade teacher in Seoul. The family prospered and grew larger. My wife is the eldest of six children.

Fate and vision took my father-in-law, his wife and his mother onward to Jeju Island in 1965. They resettled there to pioneer several new economic ventures at land's end, in Seogwipo, along Korea's last agricultural frontier. Their chief aspiration was to carve a profitable tangerine plantation out of the mountainside wilderness. This was no small task. Success was achieved at a slow pace through the accumulation of small victories, struggle upon struggle, dawn to dusk, day after day. It was a monumental, back-breaking battle for these three tireless pioneers and whatever local labor they could hire. Meanwhile the children remained in Seoul to attend school.

My father-in-law was popular and respected. He co-mingled, collaborated and formed productive relationships in Seogwipo and its surrounds with many other enterprising refugee families from the north of Korea, as well as with indigenous island families. Cooperation among the refugees nurtured ultimate success for many, including my wife's father. Another success story is my wife's charismatic godfather, Mr. Choung Chang-jo, who became professor then dean at Jeju National University.

I first met my father in law in 1974, near the end of my second year of Peace Corps Volunteer service on Jeju Island. I was spending more and more time in and about Seogwipo in those final months. What I recall most clearly about him was his strong character, good humor, and stamina. He worked constantly to maintain and expand his tangerine orchards. His voice was strong, spirited and rhythmic. He was tall, and walked the streets and mountainside with assurance and dignity. Mostly, I observed him from a distance. Often he would be riding on his trademark red motorcycle, wearing his black leather jacket and either a black helmet or a blue baseball cap. He was especially well-known about town for his generosity. He became instantly famous south of Mt. Halla for buying a house near his orchards in Beophocheon Village as a gift for one of his elderly female employees. I can't say enough in praise of my father-in-law.



Figure 51-2: Mr. Kim Bong-sung, my father-in-law, Seogwipo tangerine plantation owner. Photo from 1974.

My parents-in-law's tale of courage, perseverance and success over a period of many decades, overcoming the most challenging travails along the way, is but one north-to-south refugee resettlement story of a hard-working family that wound up successful at land's end in Korea. All of these refugee stories need to be told as inspirations to young South Koreans today that must also face economic struggles during their own time.

I am sure it never seemed possible to Genthe in 1901, to my father-in-law in 1965, to me in 1974, or to Shon, Pitts, Dustin and DeNoon in 1986 (see Chapter 50), that anyone could face seaward at land's end in Korea and gaze over that seemingly infinite expanse of sea to the southwest and suddenly and unexpectedly feel the world rapidly closing in like a global noose constricting like a slip knot around one's neck. We all learned to perceive Korean peninsula as spanning the distance between Baekdu Mountain in the north and Halla Mountain in the south. That was the simple fact of it all.

Now there is Jeodo, Korea's new land's end. Once a mystical place, Jeodo has suddenly been thrust into the public consciousness as a harsh and dangerous reality – as a new land's end for Korea – but also for China and Japan as represented on this map:

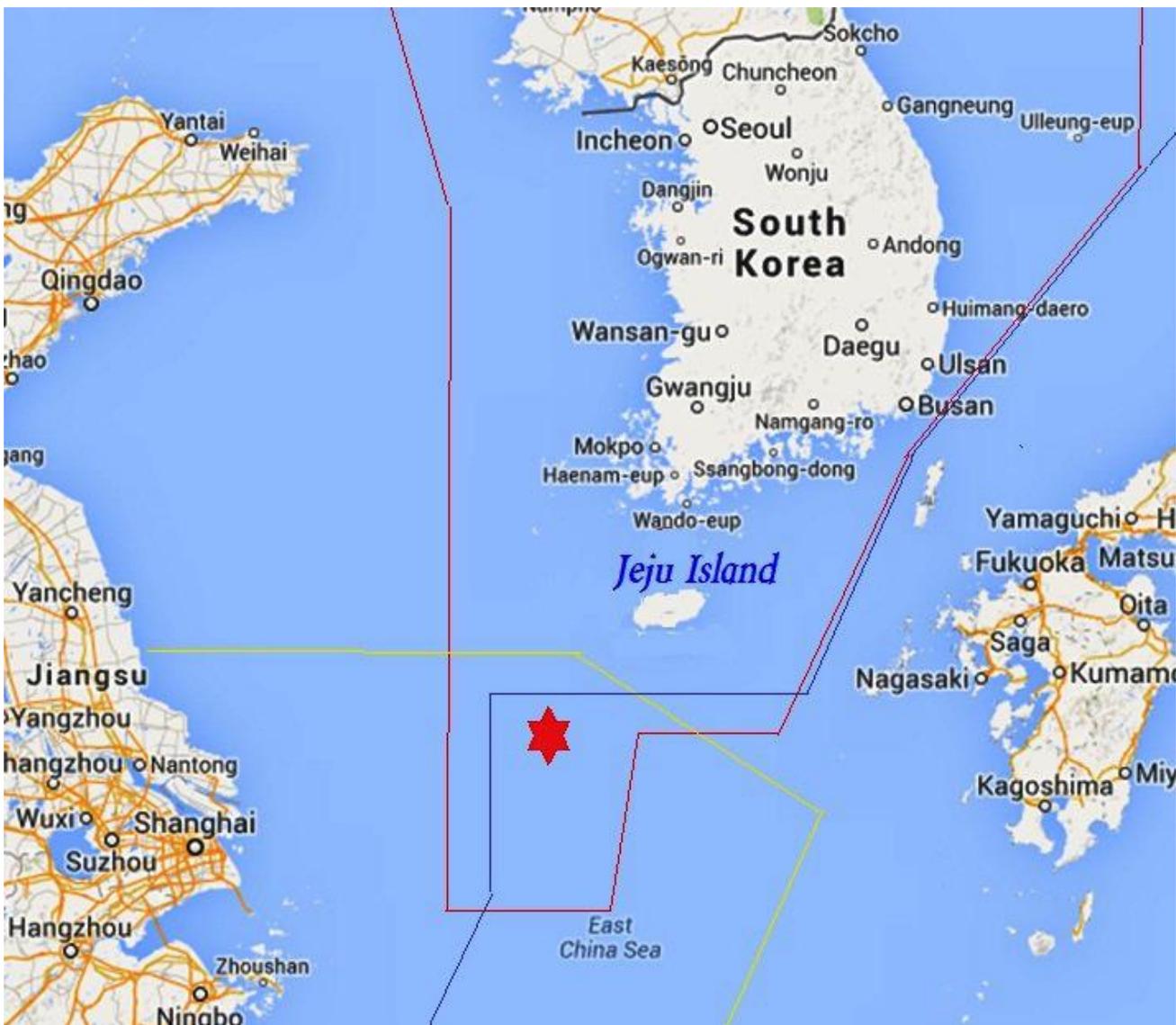


Figure 51-3: Ieodo's location is represented by the red star. Is Ieodo the newest "land's end" for South Korea?

Figure 51-3 depicts the location of Ieodo "island," heretofore little-known and now a suddenly hotly-disputed seamount in the northern reaches of the East China Sea. As I write, Korea is claiming territorial jurisdiction over Ieodo within its red ADIZ (Air Defense Information Zone) boundary line; China, within its yellow ADIZ boundary line; Japan, within its ADIZ blue boundary line. Note how these ADIZ lines all overlap to include Ieodo. Military posturing in the region is currently front page news in all the world's major newspapers. *JWW* readers can consult detailed accounts there. My thoughts at this moment are more esoteric: Does a "land's end" have to be land?

Many newspapers describe Ieodo as a "seamount." A seamount is a mountain rising from the ocean seafloor that does not reach to the water's surface. Existing below sea level, it is not by definition an *island*. During storms, however, the peak of Ieodo emerges "as 'land'" in the troughs between large waves. To the extent that the high seamount is a potential hazard to ships, it has been called a "maritime rock" (and known in the shipping lanes as Socotra Rock). At least one shipwreck has occurred there.

So, Jeodo seamount occasionally becomes an “emergent” land mass and thus becomes temporarily and by definition a natural island, or “land” as when the sailor in the crow’s nest shouts out “Land Ho!” Adding to the confusion, South Koreans have occupied year-round and for over a decade a sturdy, high-tech biological research facility atop the Jeodo seamount. This makes it an artificial island (See Chapter 49).

In sum, from the past perspectives of both folklore and maritime law Jeodo was an enigma. At present, unless the present ADIZ boundary claims at land’s end in the East China Sea between South Korea, China and Japan are quickly resolved through diplomatic channels, the world may be on the verge of knowing what the authors of military history will begin to have to say about Jeodo.

## Chapter 52

### ‘Skidoo,’ a final chapter

“Skidoo” as in “Let’s skidoo!” was a popular American slang term during Prohibition in America. In those days, if you and your gal frequented speakeasies it meant “Let’s get out of here while the gettin’s good”: that is; after a few more drinks but before the cops arrive.

As described in the Preface to this book: In early January, 2013, I got lucky when *Jeju World Wide* Managing Editor Todd Thacker published an essay I wrote about my arrival by airplane to Jeju Island as a Peace Corps Volunteer in February of 1973. He asked to see more short manuscripts in the same nostalgic vein and this encouragement propelled me into a productive writing mood for fifty-two consecutive weeks. Once I pried open that old crate of Peace Corps memories, so much direct and tangential material spewed forth there was no shutting the lid on it for an entire year.

“Fifty-two-weeks-and-out” seems about right for finally wrapping up my year-long Peace Corps memories column. I’ve been noticing as I dig down into its depths that lot of the stuff still in the old memory crate is highly radioactive and must never see the light of day, and will not – if I can just stop writing now. And so I shall end the series with this chapter. I can almost hear a collective sigh of relief from those many Peace Corps Volunteers, Jeju islanders, family members and friends who out of pure luck have escaped being featured in one or more of my rambling essays during their weekly run in *JWW* and now compiled as this book. All considered, and no holds barred, I suppose I could have written “ten thousand essays” (a lot) related to my Peace Corps Volunteer experiences in Korea. Yet sometimes loss of memory is a good thing.

I sat down last week and figured this out: If the first half of my life was photographed in Super-8, with different movie segments from my birth to the present day each directed by a different big-name director, then Peter Jackson (“Lord of the Rings”) is the director who took full charge of my Peace Corps Volunteer service experience on Jeju Island. My experience was very much that magical and adventurous under his direction. I met a good share of champions, fair maidens, spiders and trolls in that mystic place.

Who then, I asked myself, directed my early childhood and youth through high school years? That would be Alfred Hitchcock (“Notorious”), because my first few decades on Earth were very film noir. The star of that movie was not me but my mother, a femme fatale who at the time she married my Dad could strike up an oneiric pose at the drop of a hat:



Figure 52-1: My Mom (Mrs. David Nemeth Sr.), a film noir femme fatale if there ever was one.

Suffice it to say that after first laying eyes on my Mom in college my Dad never had a chance: He was the football hero; She, the homecoming queen. He was putty in her hands. This movie was pure Hitchcock. Since I was the first-born son and the darling of her eye, I pretty much lived this Life-of-Riley-as-directed-by-Hitchcock until I began to meander away from the nest.

My meandering away from home began my life-as-directed-by-John Ford (“The Searchers”) decade. In this episode I was part adventurous man of the West and part suburban drifter, meanwhile traveling in exotic company – but mainly going nowhere (as described in Chapter 40).

When I discovered the Peace Corps option as a potentially life-changing and viable opportunity in 1972, that’s when Peter Jackson stepped in to direct the next few years of my life as-a-movie. This was when my Dad according to the script roared “Peace Corps? No way!” and my Mom straightaway “vampORIZED” him with her dream dust till he changed his mind. To nobody’s surprise in the Nemeth clan, Mom at middle age still had the old magic!

Two mighty forces then combined to shape the trajectory of my life as I parted ways with Peace Corps Korea and returned to America in December of 1974. To say that marriage gave my life story a powerful boost and a trajectory would be an understatement. On leaving Peace Corps as a married man I had achieved the confidence, momentum and motivation to direct the rest of my own life story. And so I launched my career in higher education.

My wife and partner for this final episode had the right stuff. She inspired me to seek to earn a Ph.D. at UCLA. My dissertation topic focused on the shaping of the traditional Jeju Island agricultural landscape under Neo-Confucian influence. The upshot of my long road to a higher education is that, for

better and for worse, I came to intellectually fetishize the Jeju landscape as an example of “enlightened underdevelopment.” I idealized traditional Jeju Island its Korean Neo-Confucian context as a “sincere” landscape populated by a “virtuous” people in search of “propriety.” The theories and practices I deployed in support of my arguments have been varied and provocative over the years, resulting in mixed responses. I plan to passionately persevere with this project as long as time permits.

I grew into my role as successful and satisfied university professor mainly because Hae Sook, my wife, has been an adept and artistic companion during our 40 years together. She is romantic, a trusted friend, and as a Korean born and bred she has always believed in my life’s work. Hae Sook has been consistently supportive of my “enlightened underdevelopment” concept and project. She even moved to Tennessee for her Ph.D. program in order to advance our research collaboration, but postponed those plans and rejoined me in Toledo when I became seriously ill. I regret that on my account she could not continue on with her higher education.

We have returned to Jeju on many occasions during the past four decades, sometimes for long research and teaching sojourns at Jeju National University. This past October, we visited once again (see Chapter 41).



Figure 52-2: My wife and I at Professor Fred Dustin’s Kimnyong Maze Park in October, 2013. Photo by Todd Thacker.

At the time of our visit the Jeju provincial government tourism planners were enthusiastically projecting the arrival of 13 million tourists a year to Jeju by 2020. Frankly, any strategic tourism plan that invites such a crush of humanity to tread on what little remains of the original unique and fragile Jeju Island ecosystem seems an unsustainable and unconscionable plan

Before I skedaddle there are two loose ends I need to tie up in this final chapter. First, I promised to announce the winner of the “Mystery Island” contest (see Chapter 42). Mr. Rich Pretti was the big prize winner, having been first among *JWW* readers to correctly identify Aoba (Ambae; Leper’s Island) in Republic of Vanuatu as Jeju Island’s “mysterious” fraternal twin. I have since learned that the Vanuatu national anthem is named “Yumi, Yumi, Yumi” (no joke) and so, for reasons of self-preservation, I have decided to scratch a planned visit to Aoba from my bucket list.

I also promised to publish here my latest (yet still incomplete) updated list of the names of Peace Corps Korea Volunteers who served on Jeju Island between 1966 and 1981:

**Jeju Island Peace Corps Volunteers 1966-1981**



Jackie Tanny (K-1)	Courtney Callahan. (K-19)
Craig Cooley (K-1?)	Vicki Metcalf. (K-23)
Sherrie Moore (K-1)	Gary Ashkenazy (K-24)
Joel Koemptgen (K3)	Tom Runyan. (K-24)
Keith Kager (K3)	Steve Beatty (K-25)
Raymond Boyko (K-3)	David (“Jim”) Nemeth (K-25)
John Bowler K-3)	James Lampru (K-27)
Jim Chamie (K-4)	Cindy McMillen (K-27)
Lou Spaventa (K-7)	Darrel Hess (K-?)
Peter Adams (K-7)	Jon McLean (K-30)
Bob Sirko (K-9?)	Edith Jensen Westered (K-30)
John Csenger (K-10)	Martha Gustafson (K-32)
Linda Pope (K-12)	Michael Clement (1976-1978)
Jim Shen (K-12)	Kathy Clement (1976-1978)
Joe Reilly (K12)	Karen Hymbaugh (K-36)
Bob Swartout (K-12)	Charlie Kelly (K-41)
Sue Ann Allen (K12)	Brenda Carey (K-49)
Larry Morgan (K-12)	
George Biolsi (K-13)	
Barbara Siegel (K-16)	
Linda Therrio (K-17)	
Kathy Meitman (K-17)	
Ed Evans? (K-?)	
Jack Malsano (K?)	
Mark Tierney (K-18)	
James P. Callahan (K-19)	



Figure 52-3: Jeju Island Peace Corps Volunteers K-1 through K51 (1966-1981). The list remains incomplete.

Finally, there is one panel embroidered into my denim jacket by my Jeju Island middle school girl students in 1974 as a goodbye gift that appropriately sums up my Peace Corps Volunteer experience there during 1973 and 1974:



Figure 52-4: "How was the Korea?" ~ "It was very good."

**Time to skidoo!**

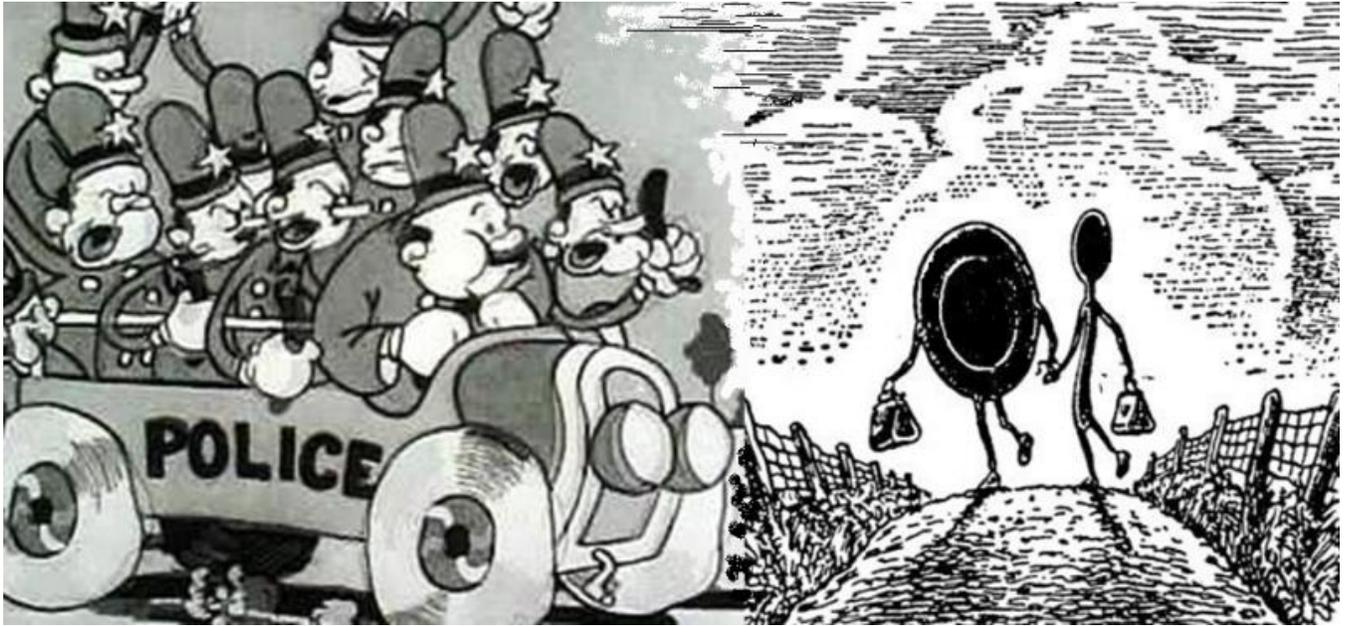


Figure 52-5: Time to skidoo!



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