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Cover illustration Photo no.5 from Hedda Morrison's 'Jehol album 1', Hedda Morrison Collection, Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University (© President and Fellows of Harvard College, Bequest of Hedda Hammer Morrison)

VENGEFUL GODS AND SHREWD MEN: RESPONSES TO THE LOSS OF SOVEREIGNTY ON CHEJU ISLAND

史 Michael J. Pettid

Introduction

Scholars in Korean studies have frequently addressed questions concerning the colonial era and the impact colonialism had on Korean society. These studies nearly all concern the period of the Japanese occupation (1910–45) and are frequently quite vociferous about the suffering and adversities inflicted upon the Korean people during this traumatic time. This period is said to have marked the end of a long era of stability and sovereignty. With regard to the history of Korean kingdoms such as Chosŏn (1392–1910) and Koryŏ (918–1392), the peaceful nature of these kingdoms is emphasized in most writings. On the other hand, the disastrous conditions that resulted from frequent foreign invasions are often highlighted for having brought great misfortune to the people and the nation.¹

Yet, such studies neglect the history of Cheju Island 濟州島, which lies approximately 140 km from the Korean peninsula at its closest point. Historical documents inform us that this island was once the independent T'amna 耽羅 kingdom, with a culture distinct from those on the Korean peninsula. T'amna was, however, incorporated first into the Koryŏ and then into the Chosŏn kingdoms. The Chosŏn government, in particular, was intent on transforming the island into an easily manageable region of its domain, as a result of which it was during this five-hundred-year period that the indigenous culture and lifestyles on Cheju underwent their greatest transformation.

An earlier working version of this paper was presented at the 11th International Conference on Korean Studies held at the Academy of Korean Studies, 27–29 June 2000. The present form of the paper benefited from comments by the discussants and audience at the conference. In addition, I would like to thank the anonymous referees who reviewed this paper for *East Asian History* for their incisive and helpful comments.

¹ A relatively typical assessment of Korea's history is given by Ku Sang: "Through its five thousand-year history, Korea has never willfully invaded another country nor tried to subjugate other peoples" (Ku Sang, "Ideas of peace native to Korea," *Korea Journal* 29 [May 1989]:13). Ku goes on to point out that Korea has suffered eleven foreign invasions over a period of about 750 years.

The History of Cheju Island and the Ruling Powers on the Peninsula

² Recorded in *Sanguo zhi* 30:18 b7–10 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1959, reprint ed. 1973).

³ The *Hou Hanshu* [History of the Latter Han dynasty], compiled in the fifth century, gives a similar account of the people of Chuho, adding that they wore animal skins on their upper bodies and nothing on their lower bodies (*Hou Hanshu*, vol.105: 10: b5–7, *Dongyi liezhuan* 東夷列傳, no.75 [Taipei: Taiwan Zhonghua Shuju, 1981]).

⁴ *Koryōsa* 57: 53 b7–54 b2. The *Koryōsa* was compiled in 1451; the other early source for this myth is the *Yōngjuji* 瀛州誌, thought to have been compiled in 1450. Both of these sources have similar contents and are thought to be taken from the same source. For more, see Michael Pettid, “Reshaping history: the creation of the Myth of the Three Surnames, the foundation myth of the T’amna kingdom,” *Review of Korean Studies* 3 (July 2000): 157–77.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Samguk sagi*, “Paekche pon’gi” 百濟本記, vol.26, entry on King Munju 文周王, year two.

⁷ The relationship between T’amna and Koryō has been noted as both independent and dependent as the local lords of T’amna were clearly subordinate to Koryō but permitted autonomy in the governing of the island. See Kim Iru, *Koryōshidae T’amna-sa yōn’gu* [A study of T’amna history during the Koryō period] (Seoul: Shinsōwōn, 2000), pp.29–37.

⁸ There are numerous such records during the first two centuries of Koryō in the *Koryōsa*. For example, in the ninth month of 1019 envoys from Sung China, T’amna, and Malgal, among other countries, were treated to a special performance on Chungyang 重陽 (holiday of the ninth day) (*Koryōsa* 4:31 a5–6). A similar account of a feast given by the Koryō king for embassies from Sung and T’amna on Hanshik 寒食 (*Koryōsa* 7:30 b5–9), and the gifts given to the Koryō king on the occasion of the Yōndūng-hoe 燃燈會 by parties from Sung, Malgal, Japan, and T’amna (*Koryōsa* 9:11 a6–8), among other entries, seem to confer the special status of T’amna *vis-à-vis* the other domains of Koryō.

The first records concerning the T’amna kingdom are found in ancient Chinese histories, including the “Dongyi zhuan” 東夷傳 of the *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 (Section on the Eastern Barbarians, History of the Three Kingdoms—third century AD).² At that time the country was known as Chuho 州胡 and the record states that the inhabitants of the island differed in both their appearance and their language from those on the Korean peninsula.³ Moreover, an examination of the oldest recorded myth concerning T’amna demonstrates that the early islanders were quite possibly of a different origin or origins from the peoples on the peninsula. The *Koryōsa* 高麗史 (History of Koryō) records one of the two earliest extant versions of the *Samsōng shinbwa* 三姓神話 (Myth of the Three Surnames),⁴ a foundation myth of the T’amna kingdom. As I have argued elsewhere, the motifs in *Samsōng shinbwa* bear resemblances to those present in other island cultures of East Asia and Austronesia, and as such exhibit roots for the early inhabitants of Cheju Island that differ from the people on the Korean peninsula proper.⁵ Even up to the present day, the shamanistic narratives and myths of Cheju Island are distinct from those on the Korean peninsula, suggesting different origins for the early inhabitants of the island.

The complete independence of T’amna does not seem to have lasted too long, however, as in 476 it submitted to the Paekche kingdom, according to records in the *Samguk sagi* 三國史記 (History of the Three Kingdoms).⁶ Despite the tributary relationship of T’amna to first the Paekche and later the Shilla and Koryō kingdoms, there was not a great deal of cultural interchange between the peninsula and the island kingdom that lay some 141 km from present-day Mokp’o, 286 km from Pusan, and 255 km from the Japanese island of Tsushima (see Map 1 below).

Records in the *Koryōsa* indicate that, while T’amna paid tribute to Koryō, it was allowed autonomy in governing itself. Hence, the hereditary rulers continued to direct the affairs of state.⁷ That T’amna was treated as an autonomous state can be deduced from records of visits from foreign embassies on various special occasions to the Koryō court that included representatives of T’amna.⁸ This has been cited as evidence that T’amna enjoyed the status of an independent state such as that enjoyed by Japan, Malgal, and other areas.⁹ Still, there were moves on the part of Koryō to incorporate T’amna into the kingdom proper: in 1105 it was placed under the direct rule of the central government and governed by officials dispatched from the capital.¹⁰ The Koryō government also made heavy demands on the T’amna people in an effort to exploit both the products of the island and the labor of its people.¹¹ Despite this, however, due to major internal and external crises Koryō failed to make a concerted effort to settle and exploit the island.¹²

latter myth demonstrates the resentment of the people towards Kim T'ongjŏng whose ill-fated attempts to cling to power brought great misfortune to the Cheju people. Interestingly, rather than the difficulties resulting from the Mongol subjugation of the island, it is the unreasonable taxes that Kim extracted from the people that are specifically cited in this narrative.

2. Guardian Deities

While not as prominent as the above narratives of vengeful gods in their level of contempt directed towards the ruling powers from the peninsula, these songs of tutelary deities provide an insight into the desire of the Cheju people to be protected from external threats, both Korean and other. Aside from simply intercourse with the peninsula, Cheju has also been visited by frequent foreign incursions from Japan and China. Japanese pirates, especially, were a common threat to the island.⁵⁴ We can accordingly understand the creation of myths concerning guardian deities as reflecting the people's hopes for a safe homeland.

A common motif is that of a god or goddess who leads a massive army to Cheju from heaven or another sacred place and then defends the island. One such example is *Ch'ilmŏrit-dang* (Song of Ch'ilmŏrit Shrine).⁵⁵ In this narrative the deity, whose father was the sky and mother the earth, became a great general. Her homeland was threatened by enemies from the north and south, and after receiving sacred armor and weapons from the heavens she led a million troops into battle and crushed the enemy. Then she married the Dragon King and settled on Cheju Island with her army. Her garrison is in Cheju City where she protects the people against invasion and also grants

⁵⁴ Kim Pongok cites some thirty recorded raids from 1316 to 1556 (*Cheju Tongsa*, pp.102–6).

⁵⁵ This narrative is performed to honor the goddess of a shrine located in Kŏnrip Ward of Cheju City. It is recorded in Hyŏn Yongjun, *Chejudo musok charyo sajŏn*, pp.597–8.



Figure 4

View of the same village shrine from the shrine wall

⁵⁶ Recorded in *ibid.*, p.606.

⁵⁷ Recorded in Hyön Yongjun and Hyön Sunghwan, *Chejudo muga* [The *muga* of Cheju Island] (Seoul: Minjok Munhwa Yön'guso, 1996), pp.370–81. This shrine is located in T'osan Village, P'yosön Township, South Cheju County.

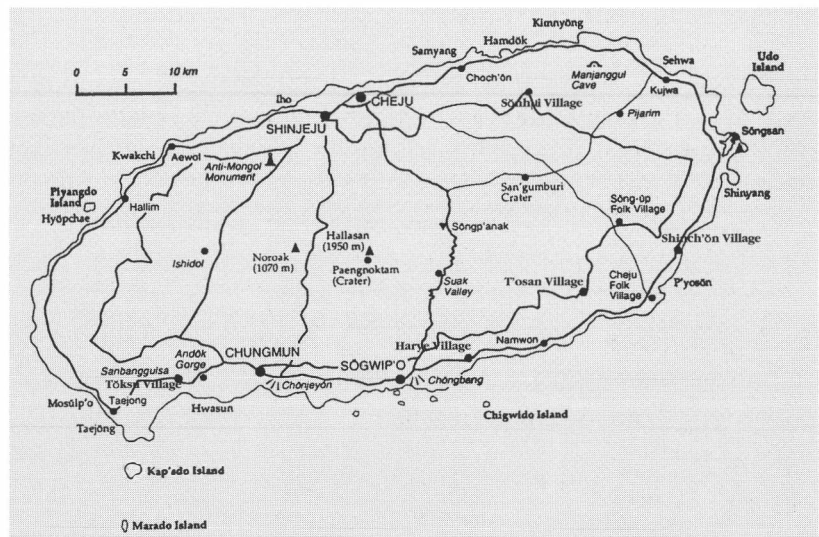
prosperity to those who worship at her shrine. An interesting quality of this goddess is her ability to control the three major elements of land, sky and, by virtue of her bond with the Dragon King, sea.

In a similar vein, *Shinch'on ponhyang-dang* (Origin Myth of Shinch'on Shrine)⁵⁶ tells of K'unmumō who leads ten thousand troops to Shinch'on Village where he now guarantees the livelihood and protects the people of this village. While this short narrative lacks the dramatic qualities of the above song, we can still see the creation of a deity of abundance possessing martial prowess. Hence, it is the ability of this deity both to protect the people from physical harm and to provide for their material needs that have led to his veneration.

Another story of a guardian deity is *T'osan yödüre-dang ponpuri* (Origin Myth of T'osan Shrine),⁵⁷ Although this lengthy song contains many different episodes, the central theme revolves around the goddess of T'osan Shrine and the difficult processes she undergoes before eventually settling at this shrine. Noteworthy for this analysis is that in one of her previous incarnations the goddess is captured, raped, and killed by a band of marauding pirates. She is then reborn into the body of a young girl and is eventually transformed into a tutelary deity for T'osan Village. Among the powers possessed by this deity is the ability to ward off pirates, a common problem for the seaside villages of Cheju.

These three narratives illustrate the fragile nature of life on Cheju Island. The insecurity of the island people in the face of outside threats is vividly portrayed in the creation of powerful guardian deities who had the might and military power to protect the island from external threats. We can understand such narratives as mirroring the desire of the island people to be protected from the external forces that had disrupted, subjugated and transformed their way of life.

Map 2
Chejudo



**Figure 5**

*Carving of a deity
'couple', Cheju City*

3. *Shrewd Men*

It is not only the gods who protect the people of the island against the hardships inflicted by an uncaring and oppressive government, but also humans who appear in times of trouble. These secular beings act to protect or care for their fellow islanders and, as such, serve as exemplars of human behaviour. Unlike the deities who rely solely on supernatural power, the humans in these tales use both cunning and, in some cases, divine power.

Kodaejang ponp'uri (Origin Myth of Headman Ko)⁵⁸ tells the story of a secular being rising up against an unjust government official. Moreover, this narrative constitutes a direct criticism of the Chosŏn ruling élite and their poor understanding of the Cheju way of life. The basic narrative line of this myth tells of a newly-appointed magistrate to Cheju, the aforementioned Yi Hyŏngsang, who according to this song razes some 500 temples and shrines upon his appointment. In his ambition to become even more powerful, Yi seeks out a powerful *shinbang* (shaman) surnamed Ko, and asks if he can summon the spirits on his behalf. Ko states that he can but will need a week to prepare himself spiritually. Ko returns to his shrine and recruits the help of his fellow shamans to demonstrate the power of their religion. They gather in seven days and conjure forth legions of *chapkwŭi* 雜鬼 (minor demons) who rise in a great, swirling cloud and cause the earth to shake. The magistrate is terrified at this awesome display of power and vows never to burn a shrine again.

⁵⁸ Recorded in Hyŏn Yongjun, pp.811–15. This shrine is located in Samdo Ward of Cheju City.

⁵⁹ Akiba Takashi, *Chōsen minzokushi* [Collection of Korean folklore], trans. Shim U-sōng (1954; reprint ed., Seoul: Tongmusōn, 1993).

⁶⁰ The narrative also demonstrates the hypocrisy of the ruling class's condemnation of shamanistic practices. The interaction and syncretism between various belief systems was certainly present throughout the Chosŏn period and among all classes. For a comprehensive discussion, see Yu Tongshik, *Han'guk mugyo ūi yōksa wa kujo*, pp.163–70.

⁶¹ Recorded in Hyōn and Hyōn, *Chejudo muga*, pp.382–97. This song is performed in a shrine located in Sōnhŭl Village, Choch'ōn Township, North Cheju County.

⁶² Cheju was not an independent province in the Chosŏn period, but a part of Chōlla Province.

Kodaejang ponp'uri is an overt condemnation of the persecution of shamanistic practices and celebrants by the Chosŏn government. As this persecution presumably reached a climax during the time of Yi Hyōngsang, in this narrative he becomes the object of the displeasure of the shamanistic gods. In particular, by destroying the shamanistic shrines Yi attacked the very core of the people's religious beliefs, the shrines being where the deities are thought to reside. Notable in the narrative is Yi's pledge never to destroy a shrine again, reflecting the wishes of the composer group for an end to the religious persecution that they suffered.

The heroic role of the *shinbang* in this narrative provides an interesting contrast to the above narratives where a deity performs this function. We can understand the role of the heroic shaman as reflecting the hopes of the shamanistic community to reverse the discriminatory practices from which they suffered. Moreover, since the spirits of ancestors are thought to be powerful guardian deities for the living,⁵⁹ we can perhaps understand this narrative as an attempt to summon the power of past shamans to overcome hardships.⁶⁰

We may also read *Kodaejang ponp'uri* as an indictment of those who failed to act against government persecution. The shaman Ko has been fashioned into a hero who is able to summon the might of the shamanistic pantheon to rectify the unjust actions of the magistrate. He provides a concrete example for others to follow. Moreover, by reciting a narrative of heroic action, the shamans of Cheju might have been seeking to bring about a similar result through the power of example or suggestion.

While the narrative of the shaman Ko tells of a religious leader confronting the ruling powers, other songs recount the heroic actions of individuals firmly grounded in the mundane world. Yet, the deeds of these men are no less heroic: they act in times of hardship to save their fellow islanders. These narratives establish a basis for caring for one's community and neighbors in distress, and perhaps seek to emphasize qualities that were common in traditional Cheju society.

Chosang-shin ponp'uri (Origin Myth of the Ancestor Deity)⁶¹ tells the tale of a rich Cheju Islander who saves the island people during a drought by using both his wealth and cunning. A hapless government official implores ship-owner An to help the hungry people during a great famine, and the protagonist sails far and wide to secure the food that will allow them to survive. It is interesting that An is finally able to buy the much-needed grain in Naju, Chōlla Province, which until 1896 was the administrative seat from which Cheju was governed.⁶² I see this aspect of the narrative as an indirect criticism of the administration of Cheju by the officials stationed in Naju: although the people of Cheju were starving, the provincial government was not prepared to help.

This narrative, however, also mentions supernatural intervention. A great serpent protects the grain An had painstakingly obtained during a storm at sea and later serves as a guardian deity for the people of Choch'ōn Township. This serpent reveals itself to be an ancestor spirit that promises to protect the people if it is properly honored with shamanistic rites. In this narrative, then, the righteous behavior of a human secures divine assistance.

A further example of a secular hero is found in *Yang imoksa ponp'uri* (Origin Myth of Magistrate Yang),⁶³ in which a magistrate named Yang saves the people of Cheju from the heavy tribute demanded by the central government.⁶⁴ Due to his antagonism, Yang is arrested and eventually beheaded by a secret envoy sent from Seoul. Before dying, however, Yang makes a plea to the envoy on behalf of the people of Cheju for relief from the onerous tax burden, to which the king ultimately accedes upon hearing the petition. Yang, having given his life for the people of Cheju, becomes transformed into a guardian deity who brings abundance to the island.

While the above three tales tell of individuals from the secular world, we can see that their actions allowed the Cheju people to overcome certain hardships. The actions of these men serve as a reproach to those who do not take care of the interests of their fellow man: they condemn those who fail to come forth in times of woe. Moreover, since the supernatural realm ultimately rewards men, the principle of reciprocity can be clearly seen in these narratives.

Conclusion

The evident resentment of the composers of these narratives towards the ruling powers from the peninsula is striking. The songs record tales of the destruction of pre-colonial Cheju society and the people's way of life, and the attempts by these composer groups to cope with these injustices. Yet, the issue of colonial domination on Cheju is one that is rarely broached in traditional Korean scholarship. Instead, the discussions commonly concentrate on the unity of the Korean people (*tanil minjok* 單一民族) and how this has permitted the preservation of a unified Korean culture in the face of all sorts of hardships. I feel that any such claim of racial unity is merely the result of a myopic inspection of historical documents, one that seeks to find only those aspects of Cheju culture, religion and society that match with those on the Korean peninsula.⁶⁵ While this type of nationalistic scholarship has been rampant in some circles of Korean studies,⁶⁶ we should not allow it to cloud our analysis of the narratives of Cheju Island.

Despite claims of unity, a close examination of both written documents and oral narratives reveals something else. The history of Cheju is not that of a willing part of Chosŏn's domain; rather, it is a history of a conquered and subjugated people being forced to change their way of life. Indeed, the shamanic narratives of Cheju represent the pleas of a colonized people for liberation from oppression. These songs enabled the islanders to create narratives of their own history and further established the distinctness of their culture.

Why is it that we should understand the ire of the Cheju people to be directed chiefly at Chosŏn rather than Koryŏ, the Mongols or even Paekche? Quite simply it revolves around the desire of an external power to transform

⁶³ Recorded in Hyŏn and Hyŏn, *Chejudo muga*, pp.432–41.

⁶⁴ It is notable that the name of this magistrate is one of the 'native' surnames of Tamna. Some of the Cheju Yang migrated to the peninsula during the Koryŏ and Chosŏn periods and established branch families. Accordingly, the favorable depiction of Yang might be due to his family's link with the island.

⁶⁵ Perhaps indicative of the disregard of the possibility of a distinct culture on Cheju Island is the following comment concerning the shamanism on the island. Chang Chu-kun writes of Cheju that it is "generally regarded as the home of the purest form of Korean shamanism ..." (Chang Chu-kun, "An introduction to Korean shamanism," trans. Young-sik Yoo, in *Shamanism: the spiritworld of Korea*, ed. Richard W. I. Gusso and Chai-shin Yu [Berkeley, Calif.: Asian Humanities Press, 1988], p.30).

⁶⁶ For example, Hyung Il Pai has conducted an exhaustive investigation into the historical basis for the culture of the ancient Korean kingdoms based on archeological evidence and determined that some widely accepted concepts such as Tan'gun Kojosŏn 檀君古朝鮮 only became indispensable parts of the national discourse in the latter part of the twentieth century and were perpetuated in order to create the façade of an unbroken legacy of historical racial consciousness (see Hyung Il Pai, *Constructing "Korean" origins: a critical review of archaeology, historiography, and racial myth in Korean state-formation theories* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asian Center, 2000], pp.249–50).

⁶⁷ There was, of course, the ongoing problem with Japanese pirates along the coasts of Koryŏ, but this was not on the scale of the Khitan and Mongol invasions from the north.

⁶⁸ The history of Cheju Island records numerous uprisings dating from the Koryŏ period right into the twentieth century. Before the twentieth century common reasons given for the unrest of the people include excessive labor requirements and heavy tax burdens. See Kim Yŏngdong, *Chejudo Cheju saram*, pp.83–4. The so-called April 3rd Uprising of 1948 resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of Cheju people as the U.S. and anti-communist troops cracked down on the activities of communists on the island. The facts of this horrific chapter in South Korean history are still highly controversial. See <<http://www.kimsoft.com/1997/cheju.htm>> for further information.

⁶⁹ Kim Seong-Nae (“Dances of *toch'aebi* and songs of exorcism in Cheju shamanism,” pp.57–8) argues that the traditional sense of separatism has been rekindled in recent years among Cheju Islanders due to the influx of visitors and the development of the tourism industry which has greatly changed their way of life.

⁷⁰ Edward W. Said writes: “For the native, the history of his or her colonial servitude is inaugurated by the loss to an outsider of the local place, whose concrete geographical identity must thereafter be searched for and somehow restored” (“Yeats and decolonization,” p.77). This is initially only possible in the imagination due to the continued physical presence of the colonizer.

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the island and the duration of contact. As explained above, Koryŏ did not actually incorporate T’amna into its domain until nearly two centuries after the founding of the dynasty; internal and external problems prevented the central government from focusing on a rather unimportant part of their territory. After all, the major problems in Koryŏ were caused by invading forces from the north.⁶⁷ Moreover, Koryŏ allowed its counties and prefectures a great deal of administrative autonomy. As pointed out before, the Koryŏ period was one with a very eclectic religious and cultural life, in Cheju as elsewhere; hence, the government had little interest in changing the customs of the people. The Mongols, as already discussed, were not interested in ruling the minds and hearts of the T’amna people. They only wanted to subdue the military men who made their last stand on Cheju and then exploit the labor and resources of the island. Moreover, their domination of Cheju, while bloody, was quite short-lived. Chosŏn, however, had both the means and the desire to transform Cheju and her people. Historically, the definitive period in Cheju was the 500 years of Chosŏn rule and the fundamental changes this brought to the traditional way of life on the island.

The above shamanistic narratives of Cheju Island are important in that they allow us to understand the harsh reality of the people being first conquered and then colonized by a kingdom from the Korean peninsula. Like the colonial experience of any people, this was a violent enterprise that left the subjugated islanders with feelings of deep bitterness towards their new masters. We can see expressions of revolt and displeasure at the colonial oppression in certain shamanistic narratives of Cheju Island.⁶⁸ These songs provided an important outlet for the tensions that the people experienced in their daily contact with their colonizers, and a significant aspect of these narratives is the attempt to regain historical autonomy.⁶⁹ Undoubtedly the Cheju Islanders sensed the destruction of their culture and way of life as the Chosŏn government extended its reach into the island: they had become marginalized in their own territory. In light of this cultural devastation, the composer groups of various shamanistic narratives created heroes and heroines who could overcome social limitations and injustice, and furthermore, provided role models for others to follow. By reciting the heroic lives of various shrine deities, the shamanistic religious celebrants sought to enlist the power of the supernatural in order to regain cultural autonomy and eradicate elements of the past.

The composer groups of these narratives have produced a valuable reservoir of the people’s hopes and dreams. They represent the indigenous voice of the inhabitants of Cheju and allow us a glimpse into the lives of a people suffering under colonial domination. In addition, the narratives are the first step towards recovering what has been lost to the colonizer, although this recovery is only possible through the imagination.⁷⁰

latter myth demonstrates the resentment of the people towards Kim T'ongjŏng whose ill-fated attempts to cling to power brought great misfortune to the Cheju people. Interestingly, rather than the difficulties resulting from the Mongol subjugation of the island, it is the unreasonable taxes that Kim extracted from the people that are specifically cited in this narrative.

2. Guardian Deities

While not as prominent as the above narratives of vengeful gods in their level of contempt directed towards the ruling powers from the peninsula, these songs of tutelary deities provide an insight into the desire of the Cheju people to be protected from external threats, both Korean and other. Aside from simply intercourse with the peninsula, Cheju has also been visited by frequent foreign incursions from Japan and China. Japanese pirates, especially, were a common threat to the island.⁵⁴ We can accordingly understand the creation of myths concerning guardian deities as reflecting the people's hopes for a safe homeland.

A common motif is that of a god or goddess who leads a massive army to Cheju from heaven or another sacred place and then defends the island. One such example is *Ch'ilmŏrit-dang* (Song of Ch'ilmŏrit Shrine).⁵⁵ In this narrative the deity, whose father was the sky and mother the earth, became a great general. Her homeland was threatened by enemies from the north and south, and after receiving sacred armor and weapons from the heavens she led a million troops into battle and crushed the enemy. Then she married the Dragon King and settled on Cheju Island with her army. Her garrison is in Cheju City where she protects the people against invasion and also grants

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Figure 4

View of the same village shrine from the shrine wall

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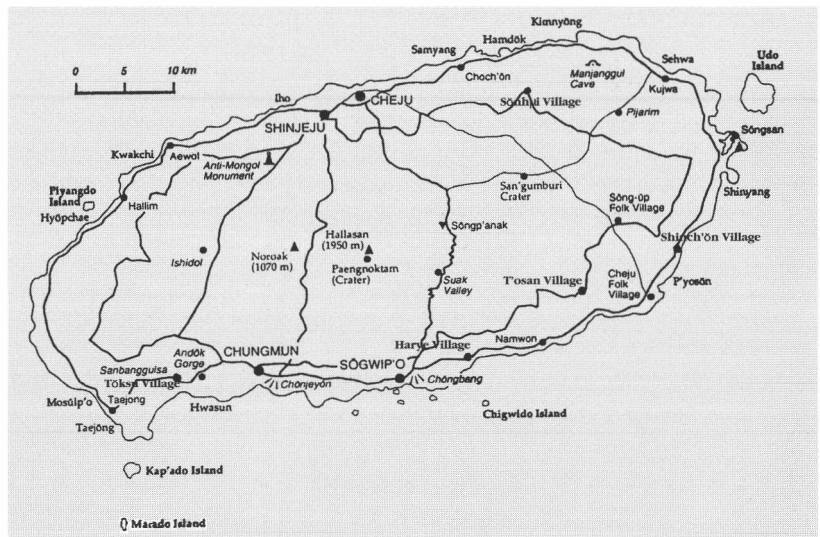
In a similar vein, *Shinch'on ponhyang-dang* (Origin Myth of Shinch'on Shrine)⁵⁶ tells of K'unmulmō who leads ten thousand troops to Shinch'on Village where he now guarantees the livelihood and protects the people of this village. While this short narrative lacks the dramatic qualities of the above song, we can still see the creation of a deity of abundance possessing martial prowess. Hence, it is the ability of this deity both to protect the people from physical harm and to provide for their material needs that have led to his veneration.

Another story of a guardian deity is *T'osan yōdūre-dang ponpuri* (Origin Myth of T'osan Shrine).⁵⁷ Although this lengthy song contains many different episodes, the central theme revolves around the goddess of T'osan Shrine and the difficult processes she undergoes before eventually settling at this shrine. Noteworthy for this analysis is that in one of her previous incarnations the goddess is captured, raped, and killed by a band of marauding pirates. She is then reborn into the body of a young girl and is eventually transformed into a tutelary deity for T'osan Village. Among the powers possessed by this deity is the ability to ward off pirates, a common problem for the seaside villages of Cheju.

These three narratives illustrate the fragile nature of life on Cheju Island. The insecurity of the island people in the face of outside threats is vividly portrayed in the creation of powerful guardian deities who had the might and military power to protect the island from external threats. We can understand such narratives as mirroring the desire of the island people to be protected from the external forces that had disrupted, subjugated and transformed their way of life.

Map 2

Chejudo



**Figure 5**

Carving of a deity 'couple', Cheju City

3. *Shrewd Men*

It is not only the gods who protect the people of the island against the hardships inflicted by an uncaring and oppressive government, but also humans who appear in times of trouble. These secular beings act to protect or care for their fellow islanders and, as such, serve as exemplars of human behaviour. Unlike the deities who rely solely on supernatural power, the humans in these tales use both cunning and, in some cases, divine power.

Kodaejang ponp'uri (Origin Myth of Headman Ko)⁵⁸ tells the story of a secular being rising up against an unjust government official. Moreover, this narrative constitutes a direct criticism of the Chosŏn ruling élite and their poor understanding of the Cheju way of life. The basic narrative line of this myth tells of a newly-appointed magistrate to Cheju, the aforementioned Yi Hyöngsang, who according to this song razes some 500 temples and shrines upon his appointment. In his ambition to become even more powerful, Yi seeks out a powerful *shinbang* (shaman) surnamed Ko, and asks if he can summon the spirits on his behalf. Ko states that he can but will need a week to prepare himself spiritually. Ko returns to his shrine and recruits the help of his fellow shamans to demonstrate the power of their religion. They gather in seven days and conjure forth legions of *chapkwi* 雜鬼 (minor demons) who rise in a great, swirling cloud and cause the earth to shake. The magistrate is terrified at this awesome display of power and vows never to burn a shrine again.

⁵⁸ Recorded in Hyŏn Yongjun, pp.811–15. This shrine is located in Samdo Ward of Cheju City.

⁵⁹ Akiba Takashi, *Cbōsen minzokushi* [Collection of Korean folklore], trans. Shim U-sōng (1954; reprinted., Seoul: Tongmusōn, 1993).

⁶⁰ The narrative also demonstrates the hypocrisy of the ruling class's condemnation of shamanistic practices. The interaction and syncretism between various belief systems was certainly present throughout the Chosōn period and among all classes. For a comprehensive discussion, see Yu Tongshik, *Han'gukmugyo ūi yōksa wa kujo*, pp. 163–70.

⁶¹ Recorded in Hyōn and Hyōn, *Chejudo muga*, pp. 382–97. This song is performed in a shrine located in Sōnhūl Village, Choch'ōn Township, North Cheju County.

⁶² Cheju was not an independent province in the Chosōn period, but a part of Chōlla Province.

Kodaejang ponp'uri is an overt condemnation of the persecution of shamanistic practices and celebrants by the Chosōn government. As this persecution presumably reached a climax during the time of Yi Hyōngsang, in this narrative he becomes the object of the displeasure of the shamanistic gods. In particular, by destroying the shamanistic shrines Yi attacked the very core of the people's religious beliefs, the shrines being where the deities are thought to reside. Notable in the narrative is Yi's pledge never to destroy a shrine again, reflecting the wishes of the composer group for an end to the religious persecution that they suffered.

The heroic role of the *shinbang* in this narrative provides an interesting contrast to the above narratives where a deity performs this function. We can understand the role of the heroic shaman as reflecting the hopes of the shamanistic community to reverse the discriminatory practices from which they suffered. Moreover, since the spirits of ancestors are thought to be powerful guardian deities for the living,⁵⁹ we can perhaps understand this narrative as an attempt to summon the power of past shamans to overcome hardships.⁶⁰

We may also read *Kodaejang ponp'uri* as an indictment of those who failed to act against government persecution. The shaman Ko has been fashioned into a hero who is able to summon the might of the shamanistic pantheon to rectify the unjust actions of the magistrate. He provides a concrete example for others to follow. Moreover, by reciting a narrative of heroic action, the shamans of Cheju might have been seeking to bring about a similar result through the power of example or suggestion.

While the narrative of the shaman Ko tells of a religious leader confronting the ruling powers, other songs recount the heroic actions of individuals firmly grounded in the mundane world. Yet, the deeds of these men are no less heroic: they act in times of hardship to save their fellow islanders. These narratives establish a basis for caring for one's community and neighbors in distress, and perhaps seek to emphasize qualities that were common in traditional Cheju society.

Chosang-shin ponp'uri (Origin Myth of the Ancestor Deity)⁶¹ tells the tale of a rich Cheju Islander who saves the island people during a drought by using both his wealth and cunning. A hapless government official implores ship-owner An to help the hungry people during a great famine, and the protagonist sails far and wide to secure the food that will allow them to survive. It is interesting that An is finally able to buy the much-needed grain in Najū, Chōlla Province, which until 1896 was the administrative seat from which Cheju was governed.⁶² I see this aspect of the narrative as an indirect criticism of the administration of Cheju by the officials stationed in Najū: although the people of Cheju were starving, the provincial government was not prepared to help.

This narrative, however, also mentions supernatural intervention. A great serpent protects the grain An had painstakingly obtained during a storm at sea and later serves as a guardian deity for the people of Choch'ōn Township. This serpent reveals itself to be an ancestor spirit that promises to protect the people if it is properly honored with shamanistic rites. In this narrative, then, the righteous behavior of a human secures divine assistance.

A further example of a secular hero is found in *Yang imoksa ponp'uri* (Origin Myth of Magistrate Yang),⁶³ in which a magistrate named Yang saves the people of Cheju from the heavy tribute demanded by the central government.⁶⁴ Due to his antagonism, Yang is arrested and eventually beheaded by a secret envoy sent from Seoul. Before dying, however, Yang makes a plea to the envoy on behalf of the people of Cheju for relief from the onerous tax burden, to which the king ultimately accedes upon hearing the petition. Yang, having given his life for the people of Cheju, becomes transformed into a guardian deity who brings abundance to the island.

While the above three tales tell of individuals from the secular world, we can see that their actions allowed the Cheju people to overcome certain hardships. The actions of these men serve as a reproach to those who do not take care of the interests of their fellow man: they condemn those who fail to come forth in times of woe. Moreover, since the supernatural realm ultimately rewards men, the principle of reciprocity can be clearly seen in these narratives.

Conclusion

The evident resentment of the composers of these narratives towards the ruling powers from the peninsula is striking. The songs record tales of the destruction of pre-colonial Cheju society and the people's way of life, and the attempts by these composer groups to cope with these injustices. Yet, the issue of colonial domination on Cheju is one that is rarely broached in traditional Korean scholarship. Instead, the discussions commonly concentrate on the unity of the Korean people (*tanil minjok* 單一民族) and how this has permitted the preservation of a unified Korean culture in the face of all sorts of hardships. I feel that any such claim of racial unity is merely the result of a myopic inspection of historical documents, one that seeks to find only those aspects of Cheju culture, religion and society that match with those on the Korean peninsula.⁶⁵ While this type of nationalistic scholarship has been rampant in some circles of Korean studies,⁶⁶ we should not allow it to cloud our analysis of the narratives of Cheju Island.

Despite claims of unity, a close examination of both written documents and oral narratives reveals something else. The history of Cheju is not that of a willing part of Chosŏn's domain; rather, it is a history of a conquered and subjugated people being forced to change their way of life. Indeed, the shamanic narratives of Cheju represent the pleas of a colonized people for liberation from oppression. These songs enabled the islanders to create narratives of their own history and further established the distinctness of their culture.

Why is it that we should understand the ire of the Cheju people to be directed chiefly at Chosŏn rather than Koryŏ, the Mongols or even Paekche? Quite simply it revolves around the desire of an external power to transform

⁶³ Recorded in Hyŏn and Hyŏn, *Chejudo muga*, pp.432–41.

⁶⁴ It is notable that the name of this magistrate is one of the 'native' surnames of Tamna. Some of the Cheju Yang migrated to the peninsula during the Koryŏ and Chosŏn periods and established branch families. Accordingly, the favorable depiction of Yang might be due to his family's link with the island.

⁶⁵ Perhaps indicative of the disregard of the possibility of a distinct culture on Cheju Island is the following comment concerning the shamanism on the island. Chang Chu-kun writes of Cheju that it is "generally regarded as the home of the purest form of Korean shamanism ..." (Chang Chu-kun, "An introduction to Korean shamanism," trans. Young-sik Yoo, in *Shamanism: the spirit world of Korea*, ed. Richard W. I. Gusso and Chai-shin Yu [Berkeley, Calif.: Asian Humanities Press, 1988], p.30).

⁶⁶ For example, Hyung Il Pai has conducted an exhaustive investigation into the historical basis for the culture of the ancient Korean kingdoms based on archeological evidence and determined that some widely accepted concepts such as Tan'gun Kojosŏn 檀君古朝鮮 only became indispensable parts of the national discourse in the latter part of the twentieth century and were perpetuated in order to create the façade of an unbroken legacy of historical racial consciousness (see Hyung Il Pai, *Constructing "Korean" origins: a critical review of archaeology, historiography, and racial myth in Korean state-formation theories* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asian Center, 2000], pp.249–50).

⁶⁷ There was, of course, the ongoing problem with Japanese pirates along the coasts of Koryŏ, but this was not on the scale of the Khitan and Mongol invasions from the north.

⁶⁸ The history of Cheju Island records numerous uprisings dating from the Koryŏ period right into the twentieth century. Before the twentieth century common reasons given for the unrest of the people include excessive labor requirements and heavy tax burdens. See Kim Yŏngdong, *Chejudo Cheju saram*, pp.83–4. The so-called April 3rd Uprising of 1948 resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of Cheju people as the U.S. and anti-communist troops cracked down on the activities of communists on the island. The facts of this horrific chapter in South Korean history are still highly controversial. See <<http://www.kimsoft.com/1997/cheju.htm>> for further information.

⁶⁹ Kim Seong-Nae (“Dances of *toch'aebi* and songs of exorcism in Cheju shamanism,” pp.57–8) argues that the traditional sense of separatism has been rekindled in recent years among Cheju Islanders due to the influx of visitors and the development of the tourism industry which has greatly changed their way of life.

⁷⁰ Edward W. Said writes: “For the native, the history of his or her colonial servitude is inaugurated by the loss to an outsider of the local place, whose concrete geographical identity must thereafter be searched for and somehow restored” (“Yeats and decolonization,” p.77). This is initially only possible in the imagination due to the continued physical presence of the colonizer.

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the island and the duration of contact. As explained above, Koryŏ did not actually incorporate T’amna into its domain until nearly two centuries after the founding of the dynasty; internal and external problems prevented the central government from focusing on a rather unimportant part of their territory. After all, the major problems in Koryŏ were caused by invading forces from the north.⁶⁷ Moreover, Koryŏ allowed its counties and prefectures a great deal of administrative autonomy. As pointed out before, the Koryŏ period was one with a very eclectic religious and cultural life, in Cheju as elsewhere; hence, the government had little interest in changing the customs of the people. The Mongols, as already discussed, were not interested in ruling the minds and hearts of the T’amna people. They only wanted to subdue the military men who made their last stand on Cheju and then exploit the labor and resources of the island. Moreover, their domination of Cheju, while bloody, was quite short-lived. Chosŏn, however, had both the means and the desire to transform Cheju and her people. Historically, the definitive period in Cheju was the 500 years of Chosŏn rule and the fundamental changes this brought to the traditional way of life on the island.

The above shamanistic narratives of Cheju Island are important in that they allow us to understand the harsh reality of the people being first conquered and then colonized by a kingdom from the Korean peninsula. Like the colonial experience of any people, this was a violent enterprise that left the subjugated islanders with feelings of deep bitterness towards their new masters. We can see expressions of revolt and displeasure at the colonial oppression in certain shamanistic narratives of Cheju Island.⁶⁸ These songs provided an important outlet for the tensions that the people experienced in their daily contact with their colonizers, and a significant aspect of these narratives is the attempt to regain historical autonomy.⁶⁹ Undoubtedly the Cheju Islanders sensed the destruction of their culture and way of life as the Chosŏn government extended its reach into the island: they had become marginalized in their own territory. In light of this cultural devastation, the composer groups of various shamanistic narratives created heroes and heroines who could overcome social limitations and injustice, and furthermore, provided role models for others to follow. By reciting the heroic lives of various shrine deities, the shamanistic religious celebrants sought to enlist the power of the supernatural in order to regain cultural autonomy and eradicate elements of the past.

The composer groups of these narratives have produced a valuable reservoir of the people’s hopes and dreams. They represent the indigenous voice of the inhabitants of Cheju and allow us a glimpse into the lives of a people suffering under colonial domination. In addition, the narratives are the first step towards recovering what has been lost to the colonizer, although this recovery is only possible through the imagination.⁷⁰