

# The Snake Faith of Cheju People \*

revised and adapted by

*Patricia Hunt*

original by *Chin Song-gi*

Cheju is a warm island off the southernmost tip of the Korean peninsula. It is a natural nesting place for snakes, and ancient documents and folktales indicate that there has always been an abundance of snakes on the island. In fact, if we were to add one thing to *Samda*—a term used to describe the three abundances on the island: wind, women, rocks—it could be snakes.

Unlike other wild animals which live far away from people, snakes not only live in fields, mountains, and rivers, but near people's dwellings as

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well. The presence of snakes in Cheju people's daily lives, combined with the usefulness of snakes to the island's eco-system,<sup>1)</sup> probably combined to form the Cheju people's *soksin*, or folk belief about snakes.

Snakes on Cheju have a religious significance, and the faith in snake spirits affects the life-style of many islanders even in today's industrialized, modern society. In fact, if we were to view Cheju people's way of thinking from ancient times to today, an underlying, unifying influence would be the *soksin* related to snakes. Thus, an exploration of the snake faith on Cheju is an essential prerequisite to understanding the traditional consciousness of Cheju people.

This paper will discuss religious practices in homes and in shrines of the two kinds of snake worship found on Cheju: *yodure - dang* shrine worship and *ch'ulsong* worship. In addition, historic documents which highlight our ancestors' conceptions of snakes will be examined. Finally, the origin myths of snake spirits found on Cheju will be recorded.

## I. Snake Worship on Cheju

There are two kinds of snake worship on Cheju: *yodure - dang* (eight-day shrine) worship and *ch'ulsong* (seven star) worship. From information provided in origin myths, we can speculate that *yodure - dang* snake worship came to Cheju 500 years ago during the Yi Dynasty, possibly as Naju (a city in Chollanam-do) worshippers were pushed out

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1. Personal interview with Professor Lee Ki-wook 25 October 1989. Lee's research indicates that the snakes on Cheju were essential to control the island's rat population. Rats were highly destructive to agriculture.

of the mainland due to the influence of neo-Confucianism.<sup>2)</sup> Information in the origin myths of *ch'ulsŏng* snake worshippers, on the other hand, indicates that *ch'ulsŏng* snake worship was probably introduced to Cheju 1,000 years ago, during the Kōryo Dynasy.<sup>3)</sup> Characteristics of the two types of worship are discussed below.

#### 1. YŎDURE-DANG WORSHIP IN THE T'OSAN-RI AREA

The *yŏdure-dang* snake worship, which is localized on the southeastern coast of Cheju around the village of Tosan-ri, is the most severe of the two types of snake worship. It is a hereditary and obligatory faith, passed on from mother to daughter. Followers believe that harm and misfortune will come to them if they don't practice the snake faith and pass it on to their daughters.

Sometimes marriage is difficult for these women because they have no choice but to continue practicing the snake faith in their households, even if they marry someone from another area and move to another part of the island. In fact, it is an unwritten law that if a man marries a woman from the Tosan region, he has to take not only her as his wife, but the grandmother-snake spirit as well. If a woman finds a husband from the same village, or if her spouse and his family also accept the shrine god, there are no problems. However, if a family who is not a believer of the snake god makes a woman from Tosan-ri their daughter-in-law, they have to convert to the belief of the snake god.<sup>4)</sup>

Because of this belief, people living in other parts of Cheju tend to shun inter-marriage with women in the Tosan area; thus, this village

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2. Ibid

3. Ibid

4. In traditional Korean families, the daughter-in-law moves in with the husband's family.

has had difficulty developing. The people who live in Tosan-ri are said to be part of the *sagwi* (snake spirit) clan; other islanders view them as being different, as their social structure and cultural beliefs are unique.

Shrines for the snake spirit are usually in caves; the spirit of the snake god, which is generally female, can exist in various external forms such as a tree, a rock, or a piece of holy cloth. According to Chang, "about 20 (*yodure-dang* or eight-day shrines) still exist on the southeastern parts of the island. Individual shrines hold prayer rituals on the 8th, 18th, and 28th of each month".<sup>5)</sup>

In addition to shrine worship, the women of Tosan-ri also worship snakes in their homes. Usually, they make a special place, shaped like a cave, with a tile roof in their backyard.

## 2. CH'ILSŎNG WORSHIP

Among the many beliefs currently practiced in Cheju, there is not another faith with an origin as old as that of the *ch'ilsŏng* snake faith, nor is there another belief system which so deeply permeates the minds, daily lives and activities of the older generation of Cheju people, regardless of their geographic area or religion.

Thus, *ch'ilsŏng* snake worship, in contrast to *yodure-dang* worship of the Tosan-ri area, is not geographically localized, nor is it matrilinear. There are no punitive repercussions for not worshipping the *ch'ilsŏng* snake god; instead, there are rewards of longevity, good luck, happiness, and wealth. For many people, worship of this snake god is a private belief system which extends beyond religious parameters.

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5. C. K. Chang, "An Introduction to Korean Shamanism", in *Shamanism: The Spirit World of Korea*, ed. Chai-shin Yu, and R. Guisso, (Berkeley, California: Asian Humanities Press, 1988, p. 37.

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In general, Cheju people always treat snakes with politeness ; children are instructed not to point to snakes and are told that their fingers will rot off if they do. Instead of killing a snake, a person might offer the snake rice - spreading it carefully with his or her hand - while uttering the following chant which urges the snake to go to a place where it can't be seen.

Oh, you are the grandmother who manages the water.  
As it looks like rain, you have come out and are laying down.  
Won't you hide under a stepstone, or children will be surprised.

Many common people, as these examples illustrate, view snakes as sacred. Even though not officially practicing the *ch'ulsŏng* snake faith, acts of showing respect for the snake spirit are deeply embedded in the daily activities of island people.

Buddist and Christian followers, in addition to Shamanistic believers, show respect for this spirit. There are village shrines for the various snake gods, but even islanders who don't outwardly appear to believe in the snake faith and who are not affiliated with a snake shrine, set tables or altars for the snake spirit during the special holidays when Confucian-based memorial services for ancestors take place. A *kobangsang* (storehouse table) is set in the storehouse for *Anch'ulsŏng* (the inside seven star snake spirit) and a *tui-halmangsang* (outside altar for grandmothers) is set for *Baich'ulsŏng* (the outside seven star snake spirit).

Although altars are set up for special occasions, many homes have everyday shrines as well. A shrine commonly found in backyards is a bundle of straw; underneath the straw worshippers put seven colors of holy cloth, rice (to bring wealth), and a string (to symbolize long life).

In addition to the backyard shrines, earthenware rice containers are sometimes put in the inner storehouse for *Anch'ulsong*

As the *Anch'ulsong* origin myth described later in this paper illustrates, the *Anch'ulsong* snake god originally was the only daughter of a Chinese noble family. She was transformed into a mother-snake, or *Batch'ulsong*, and, at the time she was found washed up on a Cheju Beach, she had given birth to seven daughters. An interesting phenomena is that the mother snake and the seven daughters are each charged with protecting different domains, according to their rank. The specialties of these snakes differ, however, on the northern part of the island and on the southern part. In the northern part of Cheju, domains are divided according to the structure of a government official's house.

(Government has historically been localized in the northern part of the island, and even today, Cheju's capital is on the north central coast). In the southern part of the island, the domains of the mother snake and her seven daughters are divided according to the structure of a countryside farm house, with the exception of the lowest ranking daughter, who is assigned the territory of the government office. A comparison follows :

Domains of snakes in Pukcheju-gun (North Cheju-county)

The mother snake	—head official's room
1st daughter	—head soldier's room
2nd daughter	—main shrine of village
3rd daughter	—backyard
4th daughter	—god's tree <sup>6)</sup>
5th daughter	—storehouse
6th daughter	—eaves of house

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6. Many villages have a shrine for a designated sacred tree which is believed to have spiritual powers.

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7th daughter —stone wall

Domains of snakes in Namcheju-gun (south Cheju-county)

The mother snake —inside people's homes

1st daughter —window open to the east

2nd daughter —window open to the west

3rd daughter —window open to the north

4th daughter —window open to the south

5th daughter —orchard

6th daughter —pasture

7th daughter —government office

Although traces of *ch'ulsŏng* snake worship can be observed in mainland Korea and Japan, and, according to Chang, "records of the same sort of practice appear in the *Susin gi* of the fourth century in China,"<sup>7)</sup> it is only on Cheju that the domains of the mother snake and her seven daughters are divided according to rank.

## II. Historical Documentation of Snake Worship on Cheju

The strong relationship of snakes to the daily lives of Cheju people is reflected in several historical books and documents. The following excerpts from Cheju-p'ungt'ŏ-rok (1520), Namsa-rok (1601), Tamla-ji (1653), and T'amlakinyŏn (1918) indicate that, historically, there has been an abundance of snakes on Cheju and that islanders have attributed special spiritual powers to these snakes.

7. Chang, p. 44

Kim Cheong, pen name Chung-am, recorded the following observation about snakes in his book Cheju-p 'ungt' 0-rok.

According to their customs, Cheju people are very much afraid of snakes and have set the snake up as their god. They chant incantations to it, serve it wine, and never kill or expel it. As I have heard, there are many snakes on this island, especially when it looks like rain. The snake lives on the ground. I think it thrives because these people respect it too much.

Kim Sang - Heon noted in Namsa-rok that "the customs of respecting the snake god are not as strong as before."

The Tamla - ji, written during the Yi Dynasty by Lee Hyeong-sang states

Many snakes and centipedes live in this region. Especially when islanders see a grey snake, they never kill it because they think it is the God of Chagwi.

Kim Seok-ik records the following story about a vicious snake in his book, T'amnakinyon.

A vicious snake lived in a shrine - Kwangjong - dang - by the road of Sanbang mountain in the town of Taejŏng. Whenever passing this place, people needed to get off their horses to show respect for the snake. Otherwise, their horses would begin limping due to the snake's power. One day when Lee Hyeong-sang (a government official) and his party passed this area, his attendant asked him to get off his horse but he refused. Later, his horse started to limp, as had been predicted. In response, Lee went to the shrine himself, hoping the snake would appear. He enlisted the powers of a shaman to perform an exorcism. A ceremony was held in



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which the horse was killed. The snake emerged from the shrine and bit off the flag of the official with its venomous teeth. Lee then killed the snake with his sword and burned the shrine. The wicked snake has not been seen since that time.

In addition to the story about the snake of Kwangjong - dang, there is another story about the snake of Kimnyǒng cave. This incident, transcribed below, is relayed in a shaman's song which is recorded in the T'amlakinyǒn. The event is said to have occurred in 1515, the 10th year of King Chungjong's reign.

In March of the 10th year of King Chungjong's period, (1506-1544) *Pankwan* Suh Rin (an officer) killed a vicious snake in Kimnyǒng cave. Before this time, a huge snake lived there and caused much grief and misfortune among the people. In order to appease the snake, and avoid disasters such as violent winds or heavy rains, these islanders held a rite with wine and food at the beginning of every year and every spring and fall. Once during each year, a fifteen year old virgin was sacrificed.

Suh Rin was young but brave. He set the table for the snake as usual. Then, at the instant it came out and moved to eat the young woman, Suh Rin stabbed it with a spear. His soldiers violently followed suit. After killing the snake, they took it out and burned it.

### III. Origin Myths of Cheju Snake Spirits

*Ponp'uri*, or shaman epics, explain the origin and history of the gods.<sup>8)</sup> These are recited at shrines on ritual dates, during the *kut* (the shaman

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8. Chang, p. 38

directed ceremonies), and in homes at the time of family ceremonies.<sup>9)</sup> The *ponp'uri*, or origin myths, of snake spirits found on Cheju fall into two categories: those spirits originating in Cheju and the spirits originating in foreign places. The *ponp'uri* of the various snake gods worshipped on Cheju follow.

## 1. SPIRITS ORIGINATING IN CHEJU

### 1). THE STORY OF *KOINOI KITTO* (TAEJA)

This myth describes the origin of *Koinoi kitto*, a snake spirit worshipped at Kimnyŏng Cave, which is located on the northeastern part of the island.

A nobleman named Suh Ch'ŏn - kuk had eighteen sons. *Koinoi kitto* was the sixteenth son. One day *Koinoi kitto* (nicknamed Taeja) took his lunch box and went to Hibikikkol - wat, a field, to plow. That field was wide enough to plant nine *ŏm* of millet (about 1,584 lbs). As Taeja was busy plowing, a monk approached him and asked for something to eat, explaining that he was hungry after journeying from Samsin - san, the three sacred mountains.<sup>10)</sup> Taeja offered his lunch to the monk and the monk ate some of it and left.

At lunchtime, Taeja was afraid of to eat the rest of his lunch,<sup>11)</sup> so he decided to have beef for lunch. He butchered his ox, roasted it, and ate all of it. After eating, he had no ox for use in plowing the field so he pushed the plow with his belly until finishing. Then he returned

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9. Ibid

10. Korea has three sacred mountains; one of them, Mt. Halla, is located in the center of Cheju Island.

11. During Confucian rule, Buddhist monks had low status. Taeja didn't want to eat after someone of lower status.

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home.

When Taeja told his mother about the events of his day, she became outraged, yelling that the incidents predicted a disaster among countries. His father, too, was angry. His parents made a large iron box, put him in it, locked the box with 38 locks and took it to sea.

The box drifted with the flow of the waves until it became caught on a branch of coral in the Yong-wang's(Dragon King's) empire at the bottom of the sea. Inside the box, Taeja played the flute in the daytime and kept a light on at night. The King, intrigued by the box, encouraged his oldest and second oldest daughters to open it, but they couldn't. Finally, he allowed his youngest daughter to try, and she opened it with ease. Inside, much to everyone's surprise, there was a handsome scholar.

"Where do you live?" the King asked him.

"In Cheju-do." Taeja replied.

"Why did you come here?" the King queried.

"There is a large rebellion in the Emperor's country in Kangnam(China). I am on my way there to help suppress it," Taeja explained.

The king, believing Taeja was a general, wanted to make him his son-in law. First, the King brought forth his eldest daughter and then the second eldest, but Taeja showed no sign of interest. Finally, the King called forth his youngest daughter;Taeja definitely appeared to be interested in her and a big smile came across his face.

The youngest daughter quickly prepared a meal and presented it to Taeja but Taeja didn't look at the table. "Why don't you eat this meal?" the third princess asked, perplexed.

"Even though I grew up in a small country," Taeja replied, we always

had the best of food - rice, meat, and wine. How can I eat this?" The princess told her father about Taeja's comment. The King ordered that Taeju be given anything he wanted. He also ordered that a feast be prepared for Taeja.

After one hundred days had passed, the King's storehouse was nearly depleted. He knew that he could not continue to feed Taeja and maintain his kingdom as well. Hence, he called for his youngest daughter and said, "All these problems come from you. Please take your husband and go away somewhere."

Taeja and the princess went to the Emperor's country in Kangnam (China), and, indeed, there was a rebellion there which Taeja helped suppress. He beheaded an evil general with nine heads. After he had cut off all nine heads, the rebellion ended; the emperor, pleased with Taeja's courage, wanted to do something to repay Taeja for his brave deeds. Taeja responded that all he wanted was a small part of Cheju. The Emperor happily granted Taeja's request and provided large ships for Taeja and his wife's voyage to Cheju.

Upon arriving on Cheju, the first thing Taeja wanted to do was see his mother; he went directly to his hometown. When she saw him, however, she ran away, surprised and fearful of her own son. Taeja then went to see his father, but his father, too, was frightened and ran away.

"My parents have no love for me", Taeja thought, "so how can I love my parents?"

Thus, Taeja climbed to the top of Mt. Halla and there he lived with the princess, daughter of the Dragon King. Later he took a second wife, the only daughter of a general who was one of the 500 sons of *Solmundae - halmang*.<sup>12)</sup>

12. Solmundae-halmang is the legendary giant grandmother of Cheju.

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One day as Taeja was idly playing paduk and Chinese chess, the shrine god of a large shrine in Kimnyŏng approached him. Because she had no children, she had requested permission to adopt Taeja from So Ch'ŏn-kuk, Taeja's father. She told Taeja she wanted him as a son.

Taeja agreed and started to descend from Mt. Halla with the shrine god. He passed through Tarik'ot, Toldari, and Kimnyŏng. He sat down to rest at Ipsan-bong but nobody offered him as much as a mouthful of water to drink. Angered by the fact that he had been treated so poorly, Taeja exercised his mysterious powers to move the seasons ahead. Suddenly the weather was like that of September and October; severe rainstorms flooded the area and the people had a year of bad harvest.

The weather change happened so suddenly that the people of that village had no idea as to why the rains had come. They held a meeting for seven days at the home of a village official. After hours of heated discussions as to why the unexpected weather had occurred, they finally concluded that a horrible spirit was exercising supernatral power; they conceded that they would have to treat it well in order to keep the peace of that village.

Therefore, the people in that village called a shaman to perform an exorcism. They told Taeja that they would honor him if he would settle down in a suitable place. First Taeja went down to the seashore to try to locate the place where he would take his seat, but he couldn't settle there because the many goblins made him dizzy. Continuing his search,

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Supposedly she sat on Mt. Halla and rested her right foot on Mt. Sanbang (a mountain on the southwest coast) as she did her laundry. Her 500 sons are said to have been transformed into rocks, and 499 of them are represented in unique rock formations off the south-west slope of Mt. Halla. The youngest son is said to be Chakwido Island.

he walked under a large tree and came into a cave and settled down at Sori-ŏng. This is how he settled.

To this day, the people of the Kimnyŏng village still honor Taeja with sacrificial services. Taeja ordered the people to always offer a pig as a sacrifice instead of a cow, as cows are more expensive. But the pig, Taeja said, must be a three year old pig weighing 100 *gun* (about 132 lbs.) or more. For that reason, this sacrificial service is also called a *Tot'je* (pig service).

## 2) THE SNAKE SPIRIT OF KWANGJONG-DANG

The snake god of *Kwangjŏng-dang* shrine, located on the southwestern coast of the island, is commonly known to have originated in Cheju. Although no origin myth is available, there are several records of this snake. Kim Seok-Ik's account, found in the T'amlakinyŏn is discussed in the previous section of this paper.

## 2. SPIRITS ORIGINATING IN FOREIGN PLACES

### 1) THE SNAKE SPIRIT FROM HEAVEN

This story describes the origin of the snake spirit from heaven worshipped in Naedo-dong, a part of Cheju City. She is called *Turebille - Yonghaebuin - Halma - nim* (Dragon - Sea - Madame - grandmother, worshipped at *Turebille* shrine).

After Lee Hyéong-sang, a government official, had killed the snake of *koinoiki - dang* in Kimnyŏng, he returned home and slept that night. That night in his dream, an old man with long white hair appeared to him and said, "If you don't return to your hometown tomorrow, you will die." So the next day, accompanied by Kim Tong-chi and Park Tong-chi, two experienced sailors, Lee Hyéong-sang returned to

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Yongch'ŏn, his hometown on the mainland.

As Mr. Park and Mr. Kim were returning to Cheju, however, the bottom of their ship suddenly sprang a leak and water started flooding into the boat. Stranded in the floundering ship, the two men prayed to heaven for a long life, crying: "We haven't done anything wrong. Now our ship is loaded with grain to share with the people who are starving on Cheju. Please spare us."<sup>13)</sup> Just at that moment, a huge serpent descended from the flagstaff, and, like a cork, succeeded in plugging the leak. Within seconds, the sinking ship floated to the surface, and finally, the three men arrived at the port of their hometown safely.

Upon their arrival, the wife of Kim Tong-chi, held out her skirt to the snake saying, "Please jump into my skirt if you are the spirit of an ancestor of mine." She spread out her skirt and the snake jumped into it. She carried the snake to her home, and, from that time, the snake was worshipped at Kim Tong-chi's house. Later the snake was enshrined along the seashore at a place called Turebille, near Cheju City. From that point, the snake was established as a shrine god.

### 2) THE SNAKE SPIRIT FROM THE MAINLAND : TOSAN-DANG SHIN

The following origin myth is the *ponp'uri* of the Yŏdure - dang worshippers of the Tosan - ri area. This snake spirit is worshipped at Tosan - dang shrine of Tosan - ri, Pyoson - myŏn, located on the southeastern coast of Cheju.

Once upon a time there was a very big snake at Kumsŏng mountain in Yongsan, Naju. Everyone who became head governor of the area died upon accepting the post because the snake was exercising mysterious evil power. Thus, after several deaths, no one wanted that

13. At one time, Cheju people had to borrow grain from the central government.

position. The central government, worried about not being able to fill the post, announced that they would open the position to anyone who would accept it. A scholar named Kōlchuri, a courageous (but pretty ignorant) man who was a native of that village, volunteered to take the post.

After becoming governor, Kōlchuri, started to make an inspection of Kumsong mountain. At this point, his servant asked him to dismount from his horse to show respect for the snake spirit. Kōlchuri thought the advice ridiculous and he wanted to just keep riding. He couldn't, however, because his horse began to limp. He got off his horse and then performed an exorcism, waiting for the snake god to appear. After awhile, the snake god appeared in front of him and the governor asked it questions and made a short speech. He then cut the snake god into three pieces and threw them into the fire.

The snake god then changed into a gold paduk stone and a jade paduk stone.<sup>14)</sup> These transformed pieces of the god flew to Seoul and landed in Chong-ro (a street in Seoul).

Mr. Kang, Mr. Han, and Mr. Oh, three men originally from Tosan-ri in Cheju, were walking down the street in Seoul one day on their way to present the King special products of Cheju. They found the gold and jade paduk stones in the street, and, thinking maybe they were a sign of good luck, the men picked up the stones.

The King was very pleased with the products of Cheju that the three men presented to him. After seeing the King, Mr. Kang, Mr. Han, and Mr. Oh, happy that the King had been pleased, felt like drinking some *makōli* (rice wine). They hoped they could give the gold and jade paduk stones to the tavern owner in exchange for alcohol.

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14. Paduk is a board game, like checkers, played in Korea.



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The woman selling the alcohol looked at the jade and gold paduk stones for awhile. She agreed that they were fine stones, but said that they would be useless to her. Thus, she refused to sell alcohol in exchange for them. The three men left the tavern, disgruntled because they couldn't exchange the paduk stones for alcohol. Angrily, they threw the stones down and went to the pier.

There, at Kodaldo Pier, the three men had to wait for 100 days because they couldn't start out to sea due to a lack of wind. Perplexed, they consulted a fortune teller named Sŏsan-daesa. "If you all don't take the ghost with you to your hometown, you won't be able to reach your homeland," Sŏsan-daesa advised.

The three men held a service offering a sacrifice to the gods. As soon as they did this, the ship was able to sail with a fair wind behind it. When the ship approached Cheju, the three men fumbled with their *chang-po* (large wrapping cloths used to carry goods); to their surprise, the gold and jade paduk stones, which they had previously thrown away, fell to the ground. "This must be a ghost," they concluded. "If we take these to our hometown, we will surely be exiled." Panicked, the three men thought about throwing the stones into the sea, but, instantly, strong winds made the sea rough. Realizing their mistake, the men changed their minds and apologized to the spirits for their offense. Soon the seas calmed and they were able to pull the boat into port.

Upon reaching port, the men, exhausted by this time, took a nap. In their sleep, a beautiful female angel appeared and said, "Even though you brought me from the mainland, we must meet the day after tomorrow at noon." After speaking, she walked away.

The men were stunned by her words. Thinking the angel had come off their boat as the transformed paduk stones, they ordered their servant to follow her. The servant followed her and observed her actions.

She went to Onpyong - ponhyang and left her visiting card. There, under the guidance of an old man with the family name Moon, she settled down on a hill named Metggugi - maru in Tosan - ri. After that, this snake god was given hospitable treatment by the people of that village.

In summary, the snake spirit of Tosan - dang is believed to be a ghost which came from Kumsong mountain in Naju. The snake spirit, transformed into gold and jade paduk stones, was picked up by three men and inadvertently carried to Cheju.

### 3) THE STORY OF THE SNAKE GOD FROM CHINA (*CH'ILSŎNG HANCHIP*)

The following myth describes the origin of the snake god of Ch'ulsong (seven star) worshippers which, as previously discussed, are not localized in one geographic area.

There was a couple in Kangnam - chonja - kuk (China) named Chang Söl - yong and Song Cöl - yong. Both of them were blind. Troubled by the fact that they had no children, they went to the temple and offered food to Buddha. In their old age, they were blessed with a daughter.

When their daughter was seven, Chang Söl - yong and Song Söl - yong had to leave for heaven on official business. They called the maid - servant and requested that she care for their daughter by giving her water and rice until she reached the age of fifteen. "If you do this", the couple promised, "we will burn your slave record and reward you well when we finish our term of office." The maid servant accepted the proposal and the couple continued with their plans to leave for heaven.

The daughter knew about her parents' plan to leave and wanted to go with them. She hid outside the main gate as they were departing and

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unbeknownst to them, she climbed on top of the palanquine and tightly held on to the corner of the box as it flew through the air. After awhile, however, her hands grew weak and she fell to the earth, landing in a pine forest. As she was sobbing, crying for her parents, a monk found her. He soothed her and promised to find her parents. From this time, the monk went about carrying her in his sack. In the daytime, he fed her with his oblations (the gifts people give to monks) and, at night, he slept with her.

Three years later, her parents returned home after finishing their term of office in heaven. Eagerly, they called for the maid-servant to bring their daughter to them. Surprised, the maid-servant explained, "But she followed you when you left..." Upon the realization of what had happened, the three of them burst into tears.

One day, while going from house to house, the monk happened to go to the daughter's parents' house. The couple told the monk of their loss and asked him how they could find their daughter. "You can meet her", he said, "the day after tomorrow at noon." The couple became suspicious of the monk's behavior. They grabbed his sack and looked inside. Inside the sack was their daughter. The monk quickly ran away.

Although the couple was initially astonished and delighted to find their daughter, they immediately realized she was pregnant. Interpreting her pregnancy as an omen for the downfall of their nobility, the couple decided to kill their daughter. When they attempted to do so, however, the maid-servant blocked their way and offered to die instead of the daughter. When they tried to kill the maid-servant, the daughter crossed their path. Again they attempted to kill the daughter only to have their efforts intercepted by the maid-servant. The parents realized that in order to kill one of them, they would have to kill both of them.

The couple discussed the problem and finally decided to banish their

daughter from their home. They put her into a box and let the box float away to sea. The box floated for three years on the surface of the sea and for another three years it drifted, submerged underwater.

Eventually, the box washed up on the sandy beach of Hamdok - ri Cheju. Seven women divers<sup>15</sup> were walking along the beach on their way to dive just as the box washed up. All seven of them insisted on the right to the box, and soon their fighting and arguing began to cause a civil disturbance. One of the village elders, Grandfather Sŏng noticed the disruption on his way to go fishing; he quieted the women and then listened to their story.

After hearing the story, he said, "Divide whatever is inside the box, be it gold or silver, equally among yourselves. After you take what's inside, if you give the box to me, I'll use it for a tobacco box."

The seven divers agreed to this solution and eagerly they went to open the box. Much to their astonishment, they found, not treasures, but one large snake and seven small snakes. The snakes started crawling out the sides of the box and the divers, horrified and repulsed by the contents, spit on the ground in disgust. Then they went to the sea to dive.

Possibly because of their actions, the woman were stung by poisonous fish while trying to work. They came out of the sea, screaming with pain and became sick. Their condition worsened as days went by, and, finally, the families of those three women consulted a fortune teller.

The fortune teller said, "There is the sin for eyes to see what they should not, there is the sin when a mouth makes an absurd remark, and there is the sin when hands pick - up."

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15. Cheju is famous for its women divers, who are trained at an early age to hold their breath for long periods of time. The women dive for seaweed, abalone, and other ocean plants and animals.

## The Snake Faith of Cheju People

Obviously, it had been a sin for the divers to pick up the wooden box. A shaman was called to perform an exorcism. At the closing of the ceremony, the shaman ordered the women divers to take the snakes with them to their houses. So they divided the snakes among themselves and took them to their respective houses to care for them. Soon all of the women recovered from their illnesses.

Many neighbors heard about the snakes and went to the beach to look for them, but there were none. Unable to find a snake, some of villagers gathered the sand which the snakes had crawled on.

The shaman society of this village honored these snake spirits, calling them *pu gun ch'il sŏng* (wealth/ king/ seven stars). These snake spirits are considered to be gods of good fortune who bring longevity, wealth, and happiness to their worshippers. As described previously in this paper, the mother snake and seven daughters are each charged with protecting different domains.

### 4) THE STORY OF THE SNAKE GOD FROM THE SOUTHERN AREA

This story is told at Kosan - ri, Hankyeong - myeon, a village located in the southwestern part of the island. There, the people honor a snake spirit which they say floated ashore in a bamboo box. Because the box was bamboo, it is believed that its spirit came from a tropical area, such as Nam - yang (an area to the south), where bamboo grows in thick patches.

One day, it is said, a cow herder named Pŏpsŏng went to the sea-shore for a picnic. He discovered a large bamboo box and opened it, expecting to find valuables - like gold or silver - inside. Much to his astonishment, however, he was greeted by a large red serpent when he opened the box. Dumbfounded, he apologized to the snake for opening

the box and then took the snake to a peaceful place. There he served the snake and worshipped it as a shrine god. This snake spirit, personified as a grandfather, later became the guardian deity of the village.

#### CONCLUSION

As this paper illustrates, snakes have played a vital role in Cheju folklore. Upon encountering a snake, Cheju people are faced with two deep-rooted feelings which alternate with each other : one is fear and the other is respect. To understand the snake worship of Cheju is to appreciate one aspect of Cheju's traditional culture. This study is only an initial attempt at describing Cheju Island's snake faith, which is complex and not easily categorized. I hope further research and studies will be actively developed in the future.

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〈國文抄錄〉

## 제주인의 뱀신앙

페트리시아 헌트

본고는 고대부터 현대에 이르기까지 제주인의 생활에 커다란 영향을 끼쳐 온 뱀과 관련된 속신을 고찰하고 있다. 내용은 세부분으로 나뉘어져 설명되고 있다.

첫째부분은 가정과 부락에서 나타나는 두가지 상이한 뱀송배 양상- 여드렛당과 칠성송배신당-에서의 종교적 의례를 논하고 있다.

두번째 부분에서는 제주인의 삶의 과정에 나타나는 뱀과의 관계를 제주풍토록 (1520), 남사록 (1601), 탐라지 (1653) 그리고 탐라기년 (1918)과 같은 역사 자료를 통해 설명하고 있다.

마지막 부분은 원고의 대부분을 차지하는 내용으로 아래에 목록으로 작성된 제주 뱀신앙의 기원에 대한 분류가 기록되고 있다.

- I. 제주 토속신앙
  - 1. 괴뇌기도 신화
  - 2. 광정당의 뱀신앙
- II. 외지로부터 건너온 신앙
  - 1. 하늘에서 내려온 뱀신앙
  - 2. 육지에서 건너온 뱀신앙 : 토산당신
  - 3. 중국에서 온 뱀신화 : 칠성한집
  - 4. 남양에서 온 뱀신화

이상과 같이 본고는 제주인의 생활에서 뱀이 중요한 역할을 행해왔음을 설명하고 있다. 그러므로 제주의 뱀 신앙을 이해하는 것은 제주의 전통문화의 일면을 이해하는 것이 된다.

진성기의 연구는 복잡하고 체계화되지 않은 제주도의 뱀신앙의 실상을 체계적으로 기술한 최초의 시도라 할 수 있다.