

The Transforming Sacredness of Mt. Chirisan from an Utopian Shelter into a Modern National Park: Focused on the Escapist Lives of 'Mountain Men'

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지리산 읽기: 유토피아적 도피처에서 근대적 국립공원으로의 변형 - '산사람'의 도피주의적 삶을 중심으로 -

진중현

Abstract : I examine in this paper how the contemporary sacredness of Mt. Chirisan has been modified through the reworking of the embodied experiences of the mountain. I examine the theme of escapism through the cases of mountain men and Chonghakdong. The two mountain men, Huh Man-Soo and Ham Tae-Sik, tacitly suggested a modern aesthetic and environmentalist view of nature by articulating a typical form of appreciating nature in a transition period from pre-modern to modern society. Mountain men mediated their own personal dreams of revitalizing the Taoist utopian place with their social practices of modernizing and democratizing the appreciation of nature. Ultimately, the appearances and practices of mountain men symbolize the end of the pre-modern geographical imagination of the mountain as distinctive place outside society (real world). Therefore, the vision of modern civic-national landscape, national park, was made concrete at the very site where the people's dreams of utopia, the inherited sacredness of the mountain and people's religious beliefs in its protective power were terminated. Key Words : sacredness of Mt. Chirisan, mountain man, escapism, utopian place, civic-national landscape, national park

요약 : 본 논문은 당대 지리산에 각인된 민족적 신성함이 어떻게 개인적, 사회적 실천과 그것의 역사적 반복을 통해 형성되어 왔는가를 검토한다. 본 연구는 '도피주의'에 논의의 초점을 두고, 이를 위한 사례 연구로서 산사람의 삶과 부가적으로 청학동의 개발권 과정을 분석한다. 두 '산사람', 허만수와 함태식은 전근대에서 근대사회로 이행하는 과정에서 자연을 심미적 관점과 보호의 시각으로 바라보는 근대적 자연관을 암묵적으로 제시하였다. 그들은 도교적 유토피아를 찾으려는 내면적인 꿈과 근대적이고 민주적인 방식의 자연감상이라는 사회적 실천을 조화시키려고 시도하였다. 궁극적으로, 산사람의 출현과 그들의 실천은 지리산에 대한 전근대적인 지리적 상상-사회(세상)의 바깥에 존재하는 특별한 장소로서의 지리산-의 종말을 의미한다. 그리하여, 근대적 관광지이자 시민적 민족경관으로서의 지리산국립공원은, 사람들의 유토피아에 대한 꿈과, 산의 신성함과 그것이 민중의 삶을 보호할 것이라는 종교적인 믿음이 사라지는 지점에서 구체화되었다.

주요어 : 지리산의 신성성, 산사람, 도피주의, 유토피아적 장소, 시민적 민족경관, 국립공원

1. Introduction

Natural landscape is sometimes where national identity is imagined and constructed. Particularly, in Korea, several sacred mountains have played significant roles representing the symbolism of the nation. Mt. Chirisan, located in the southern part of the Korean Peninsula, became the first national park in South Korea in 1967. Since then, it had been one of the most popular traveling destinations for ordinary Koreans in modern era. The national park system in Korea was, however, introduced subordinate to a grand strategy for the effective development and control of national territory, epitomized by 'The Master Plan of National Land Development' forwarded by the developmentalist military government. It took a long time for the mountain area to become a 'nationally managed and controlled' park space partially free from the discourse of development under the principles and jurisdiction of environmental preservation. Around four million people visit the mountain annually to enjoy its sublime scenery.

Mt. Chirisan is not a newly discovered landscape of the modern period. Rather, it is a typical example of a landscape being transformed from a privileged landscape, -restricted to social elites in pre-modern period- into a civic-national landscape in modern society. Mt. Chirisan has become a representative place for civic recreation in the postwar South Korea. It has also been a battle ground for political and ideological contestation in defining the national identity around the Korean War. These are two different modern narratives of Mt. Chirisan. Each conveys the inherited imagination of the mountain: resistance and escape. Both are based on the recurrent historical references of the denial of the

existing order and the imagination of a utopian world. Throughout history, Mt. Chirisan has symbolized a resistance to the central political power, being also viewed as the realization of a utopian world and an aristocratic individual's escape from the real world in pursuit of a natural paradise.¹⁾

Because of the mountain's geographical location, the features of its physical geography, and its sacredness, which embody the enduring traditions of religions and folk beliefs, it has been a focal point of symbolic geography of Korea. However, in its modern manifestation, the utopian legend is no longer viable. Through the extermination of the partisans and the establishment of a national park system, the mountain ceased to be a shelter, whether spiritual or physical, outside of modern society. But the idea of escape did not entirely vanish. It was, instead, reactivated and incorporated into the discourse of nation and nature. I examine in this paper how the contemporary sacredness of Mt. Chirisan as a typically modernized national landscape has been modified through the reworking of the embodied experiences of the mountain. I mainly discuss the theme of escapism involved with the mountain to clarify the argument but do not intentionally avoid the discussion of resistance.²⁾ Specifically, I examine the symbolic role of two mountain men in the transition from the traditional utopian shelter into a civic-national space, the national park. The sublime experience of Mt. Chirisan is not just the invention of the modern spectators' vision, but also the representation of the accumulated geological strata of collective memory, myths and imagination throughout history. I deal with the particular historical phases and main figures and how the poetic imaginings attached to pre-

modern territory are subsumed into the discourse of the modern nation and landscape. Before moving to the discussion of mountain men, I examine some theoretical issues concerning national parks and mountain sensibilities in the West and the East in the following sections, which provide two critical frames of interpreting the sacredness of Mt. Chirisan.

2. National Park as Cultural Construction of Nature: Escape into/out of Nature

According to Tuan's *Escapism*(1998), 'escape' in human culture is understood through two contrasting directional movements; escape out of nature/escape into nature. In the evolution of modern industrial society, escape into nature has been one of the human desires to get away from the disorder of city life: temporarily or permanently, personally or collectively. American national parks are a typical example for the institutionalization of the human desire to escape into nature. It was 'invented' to meet the collective needs for an imaginary and mythical counterpart to abstract and democratic land allocation. Rational Western culture is accompanied by the mystical and sacred design of nature (Shama, 1995, 7), which is well demonstrated in the construction of national identity as a form of poetic imagination of homeland (*ibid.*, 15). Yosemite and Yellow-stone obtained their spirituality and became national symbol of America by erasing the memory of human presence and cultivation(*ibid.*, 9). Instead, American searched for the origin of sacredness from biblical and pastoral mythic memories.

American national parks are explained by "the

link between the idea of the park-enclosed preserve for beasts- and that of paradise"(Olwig, 1995, 383), which constructs the "garden idea" as a "vital symbol in Western culture of a moral society living in 'natural' social and environmental harmony"(*ibid.*, 384). Besides, the invented "wilderness" was fully subsumed in the modern transformation of the western garden. "The sublime wilderness ceased to be a place of satanic temptation and become instead a sacred temple, much as it continues to be for those who love it today"(Cronon, 1995, 76). In other words, American national parks can be considered a consequence of the change of the mountain (nature) sensation in the West--from the place of evil from which to be distanced to the destination of imperial/national adventure, both of which are internally connected. Thus, American national parks are not only a "religious redemption" but also a "national renewal" (*ibid.*).

Neumann (1998) emphasizes a 'nature-culture' nexus by examining African national parks and comparing them with American ones. He effectively integrates the diverse arguments regarding the cultural construction of nature focused on the historical origin and on-going cultural/political contestation of national parks. By providing two somewhat different examples of national parks, America and Africa, Neumann shows that "pictorialization of nature" is fundamental in the history of the national park ideal. Pictorialized nature implies that nature is defined, appropriated and consumed by distanced observer in the form of "framed" image of scenery. According to him, American and African national parks have similarities in that both were established within the European ideas of nature, which implants "romanticized image of wilderness." In addition, it is significant that

"Edenic myth" captured in colonial national parks is a geographical arrangement of historical (rather than spatial) imagination of Europe's own mythical origin, which denies the life and culture of native people for the construction of idealized nature. In this sense, national parks, especially in Africa, can be understood in terms of the projection of an imperial cultural ideal as well as the social reproduction of nature.

In addition, national identity is constructed through forging the imagined homogeneity of the whole territory and its residents in the form of symbolic integration of nature and culture. However, it is fundamentally fragile because it is constructed based on the concealment and mystification of history, which is well shown in Neumann's work. For example, he argues that national parks in North America played a significant role in masking the history of the violent conquest of humans by replacing it with conquest of nature. Therefore, national parks become the terrain of cultural and political contestation. In other words, he emphasizes that national identity, expressed in the practice and ideology of nature appreciation in national parks originated from the class and racial (imperial) identity.

Mels (2002) examines Swedish national parks and systematically categorizes features of national parks into three spatiality--empty, organic, and optical space--using Lefebvre's conceptual framework. In particular, in Sweden, the sanctification of national land through the colonization of nature was done in the form of a more explicit national project (*ibid.*). Sweden is the first European nation to create a national park, and the idea of 'organic' space was cultivated for the definition of Swedish self-identity (*ibid.*, 138).

National parks would be symbols of the

Swedish nation-places where people were supposed to transpose the metaphysical longing of a union with nature into the political doctrine of a union with the nation. As empty spaces, they represented the prehistory of *landskap* (landscape) or *hembygd*³⁾ appropriated by tourists as temporary visitors and incorporating the nomadic Saami as 'part of nature'. As organic spaces, parks were embedded in the common original birthplace of Swedish culture and the Swedish mind (*ibid.*, 139).

In this sense, visit to national park is far from escaping from the rules and norms of human community, normal society as Tuan(1998) implied. National parks in Western society, or even African national parks influenced by Western viewpoints of natural beauty, create and maintain their sacredness by concealing the memory of the past and native peoples.

However, national parks in Korea have a quite different history. Since the establishment of national park system, the development of park spaces for public uses such as road construction inside park areas was more emphasized rather than the conservation of the ecosystem and measures for sustainable uses (see Cho, 1999). These development-oriented national park policies have steadily been criticized by academics and environmentalists. However, I do not discuss about this conflicting issues of development and conservation in detail. The emphasis on such dualism may prevent us from approaching the cultural and social nature of the mountain by reinforcing the image of 'pure' nature.⁴⁾ Above all, national parks in Korea are not 'empty' space. Currently 110,000 people reside within national park areas in Korea, and 40percent of park spaces are privately owned (Lee, 2004, 63). Whereas Western national parks

promote the image of pure, national nature by erasing the traces of human residence substantially (Native Americans in US) or symbolically (Sammi people in Sweden), national parks in Korea inevitably became involved with diverse human inhabitation and agricultural and commercial activities within park spaces. Local people were not systematically removed out of park spaces but gradually incorporated into the institutions and practices of park systems. In addition, one of the key values of national parks in Korea comes in part from their cultural inheritances such as Buddhist temples and other religious relics located inside park spaces. Therefore, it was not possible to build a contemporary sacredness (spirituality) of the national parks as national symbolism based on their 'emptiness' from the very beginning.

If that is the case, how can the sacredness of Mt. Chirisan be interpreted? Where did the particular modern poetics of nature – the 'sublime' image of the mountain – originate? The spiritual power of Mt. Chirisan comes from presenting human history inscribed on it rather than hiding it (as in the case of the Sammi or the Native Americans). Yu Hong-Jun, an eminent art historian in Korea, sanctifies the mountain by identifying it with a set of social memory of it, introducing cultural heritage in Mt. Chirisan and its vicinity.

Mt. Chirisan is inscribed in our heart as the spiritual mountain of our nation, historical mountain on which honor and disgrace of the times have been accumulated, and the mountain of remorse as final shelter... (H. Yu, 1996, 12)

Mt. Chirisan is rediscovered as a mountain of

the nation by collapsing all heterogeneous memory into the circuit of national myth.⁵⁾ It integrates the fragmented memories such as poetic appreciation of upper class intellectual, people's resistance, and folk beliefs etc. All of these reconstruct modern sacredness of Mt. Chirisan. Using Mel's terms, it was neither conceived as 'empty' space nor 'organic' space. Imaginative power of the nation came from outside of conventional Western rooted national park practices and discourse. The park was developed of its own civic space with very vague national memory, and it was enabled by an 'escapist' rendering of the mountain; individual escape or collective deviance.

3. Different Mountain Sensibilities in the West, the East, and Korea

In the West, the changing views of the mountain are important in its cultural history with the rise of a new aesthetic experience of nature in the early modern period. There has been a great shift in the attitude toward high and deserted mountains, for example, the Alps since the 17th century. With the beginning of the Grand Tour, high mountains changed from symbols of evil or original sin, "mountain gloom," to objects of aesthetic consumption, "mountain glory" (Nicholson, 1997). The critical change depicts the confrontation of human and nature, consolidating the dualistic sense of separation from, and possession of, nature. Before long, high peaks were colonized and became a place where imperial subject and identity was articulated (Kearns, 1997), particularly in imperial Britain, where middle-class masculinity was performed through the discourse of exploration and

adventure in the late-nineteenth century (Hansen, 1995). Therefore, there had been interweaving transformations of the mountain sensation and experiences in the sphere of modern alpinism implying human triumph over natural forces, scientific experimentation and survey of nature, and modern aesthetic vision discovering the beauty of nature, all of which de-sacralized the mountain space in the West.

According to Eliade (1957), religion was isolated from the experience of nature by assuming the existence of a transcendental god in Western history. However, religion still existed within the logic of nature in the East, and the mountain had an essentially sacred nature in that it vertically connects the god and humanized world (*ibid.*). It was rendered as symbol of cosmos. Therefore, whereas Westerners lost the abilities for reflection of the self from the experiences of nature as well as its sacredness and mysticism, mountains in the East have played a critical role as religious and sacred space. In particular, mountain sacredness in the East has been strongly tied to the Taoist ideology. In ancient Chinese paintings, mountains were described as the abode of the immortals. Whereas mountains in the western tradition often symbolized human triumph over nature and the possession of it, mountains were depicted in the East as “spiritual” and “transcendent” places in comparison to the material and humanized world, where only the true students of Tao could live (Shama, 1995, 407). Shama shows the critical distance between Taoist mountain sensibility and the Dinocratic vision of Western tradition (*ibid.*; see Jin, 2005, 40). Unlike the Western sensibility, the verticality of the mountain in the East reinforces the spiritual connection between heaven and

humans, rather than stir the desire to climb and conquer.⁶⁾ For example, five sacred mountains in China symbolize the cosmic relationship between the celestial world and the terrestrial earth, ensuring immortality of the Empire through the rhetoric of the heavenly mandate.

The understanding and appreciation of the mountain in Korea is deeply connected to p'ungsu as well as Taoist imagination. Put simply, p'ungsu is a mixture of local environmental attitudes and Chinese fengshui. The directions of the wind and watercourses are predominantly determined by the shape of the mountains, so all of these are key elements in the idea of p'ungsu. A mountain is conventionally described as a 'dragon' in traditional fengshui literature. Mountains are considered to be a kind of living organism. When a landscape is called a dragon, it implies a unity of meaning between perceived, experienced, imagined and physical landscapes. The p'ungsu tradition of Korea places more emphasis on mountains than Chinese fengshui. The difference is due to the climate and topographical features of the Korean Peninsula. More than 70percent of the Peninsula is mountainous, but there are only a few high peaks above 2000meters. For Koreans, mountains have been a familiar background in everyday life, as well as spiritual places. Therefore, two specific cultural elements involving the mountains of Korea – Taoism and p'ungsu – depict the imaginary and everyday life experience of mountain space respectively. However, the two are not completely separated from each other. The imagination of Taoist immortals was usually overlapped into the interpretation of a utopian place for common people based on the p'ungsu idea of landscape. The abode of the immortal was not conceived to be located through the

vertical elevation of mountain height but in the deep ravines and valleys of mountains. Such interpenetration of Taoism and p'ungsu elements is also shown in the introduction of Mt. Chirisan in *Taengniji*, a book on choosing a site for a settlement, and the mountain is rendered a desirable place to live for both immortals and people.

Mt. Chirisan is referred to as the place where the Taoist god Taeul lives and where many supernatural beings gather. Its valley is deep and vast. The rich, deep-layered soil facilitates human habitation over the whole mountain... Farmers and Artisans are also well off without much toil. Since people on the mountain do not suffer from poor harvests, it is called a rich mountain. (C. Yi, 1998, 96)

As seen in *Taengniji*, from a Korean natural and cultural standpoint, Taoism was incorporated into the familiar image of the mountain as a human habitation to form the p'ungsu idea of the mountain.

4. Transforming Utopian Imagination of 'Escape': Mountain Men and Mt. Chirisan as a 'Civic-National' Space

Most mountains in Korea have been the places where multiple religious activities took place and its legacies were inscribed: Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism and folk beliefs, such as Shamanism. Therefore, the influence of no particular religion remained intact in its pure form. Rather, the religions were contested and

entangled by the power of geography over the sacred space (Ryu, 2004). This is well illustrated in the legendary story of the life of Choi Chi-won (AD 857-?). He was one of the most renowned scholars in the Unified Shilla dynasty (AD 654-935). He studied in Changan, the capital city of the Tang dynasty, and worked as a high-ranking official. Over time he came back to his native country, Shilla, to work as a government official, but he decided to retire on Mt. Chirisan in order to escape from corrupted aristocrats and the chaotic social environment (Y. Kim, 1998, 54). It is said that he lived in a Buddhist temple, and eventually disappeared into the mountain. He is, thus, believed to be immortal.

Over time Choi has been followed by many people, especially Confucian scholars, who want to renounce the world for various reasons. In this legendary narrative, three religious references work as its background: his Confucian academic learning, his retired life in a Buddhist temple, and his 'Taoist disappearance.' In spite of the hybridization of religious elements, the core of the story is the Taoist concept of escaping into the mountain to become immortal. Interestingly, Taoism has rarely existed as the primary state religion in Korea from the time it was introduced from China in the second century (Mason, 1999, 145). There are very few typical Taoist temples or well-known Taoist historical figure in Korea. Rather, Taoism has mainly been incorporated into Shamanism and folk narratives, which are usually referred to as 'Shamanistic Taoism'.

Taoist narrative becomes more evident in relation to the physical geography of Mt. Chirisan. Mt. Chirisan is made up of many continuous peaks and ravines rather than one remarkably high mountain peak. In the conventional East Asian usage, mountain (*san* or

shan) means not only one conspicuous peak but also the all-encompassing area of the mountainous region (Ryu, 2004). This usage is related to the p'ungsu or fengshui concept of a mountain. In terms of its size, Mt. Chirisan National Park is larger than any other mountainous national park. Thus, the mountain has been experienced and imagined through its depth and width as well as height. People do not just climb the mountain but also go into the mountain, both of which may be related to the concepts of the mountain in East Asia. Whereas climbing depicts the vertical elevation through the topographical surfaces, going into is a more spiritual and conceptual experience of entering different space from the real world outside. The Taoist concept of the mountains is related to a popular memory of deep mountains and dark valleys. The disappearance of Choi Chi-won into Mt. Chirisan has been reinforced by the physical geography of the mountain: its width and depth encourages the vision of a separate space, a natural paradise, the abode of the immortals hidden within the mountains.

The legend of the immortal escape into the mountains reoccurs 1500 years later. Huh Mansoo, whose nickname was 'Mt. Chirisan Immortal', disappeared into the mountain in June 1976 after devoting himself for thirty years to being a mountain guide (M. Kim 2001, 204). Huh was born in a city, Jinju, near Mt. Chirisan in 1916. When he was 10 years old, he went to Japan for high school. He joined a climbing club, Dongjonghoe, and he climbed many famous mountains in Japan with his colleagues. After the Liberation in 1945, he returned to Korea and managed a bookstore in his hometown. Four years later he entered a mountain near his hometown, Jagolsan, abandoning his wife and

children. He later moved to Mt. Chirisan, where he lived in a wretched hermitage (mud hut) in Sesokpyongjon, Mt. Chirisan. To ordinary people's eyes, he may have looked homeless or insane. He was once reported to police by hikers and arrested as a communist partisan.

In fact, he was not crazy at all. He truly loved the mountain and his life in it. He undertook many works to help mountaineers, making the first map of Mt. Chirisan for ordinary climbers, introducing all the complicated trekking paths of the mountain. He rescued many people who were wounded, exhausted, or lost in the mountains. He also opened up new hiking paths such as the ones in Chilson Valley and Hanshin Valley. He marked the paths to prevent people from getting lost, and restored those paths washed away by flood. He loved all the living things in the mountain. When he came upon people hunting, he would rescue and release the animals. He even buried dead animals. He collected beautiful flowers and recommended their cultivation to his acquaintances in the city.

Through the work that Huh accomplished during his thirty years on Mt. Chirisan, he became a pioneer of the reconstruction of the mountain as a civic, recreational place. He is usually referred to as Mt. Chirisan Immortal because, like Choi Chi-won, he disappeared suddenly. However, unlike Choi, he did not live a secluded, contemplative life within the Taoist ideal. He actively engaged himself in maintaining the natural beauty of the mountain for public recreation. Before Mt. Chirisan was designated the first national park and for a short time afterward, Huh acted as a 'park ranger' in the absence of an institutionalized park management system.

Other mountain men (san-saram or san-sanai)

also inhabited Mt. Chirisan in the 1970's. In 1972, shelters (*sanchang*) were built in popular mountains across the country, four of them in Mt. Chirisan: Nogodan, Sesok, Changtomok, Chibanmok.⁷⁾ Originally these were designed as unguarded, self-service shelters (Ham, 2002, 36), because the government did not have the funds to develop a management plan. However, garbage dumped by hikers soon devastated the shelters. Ham Tai-sik volunteered to manage the Nogodan shelter-Nogosanjong, and so, at 44 years old, he moved permanently to Mt. Chirisan in August 2nd 1972 leaving his families in the city (*ibid.*, 38) [figure 1]. Ham was born in Kurye, a small city near Mt. Chirisan in 1928 and graduated from Yunhee College. After graduation, he worked for ten years for Incheon Kikye, one of the largest companies in Korea at that time. Like Huh Man-soo, Ham was a well-educated intellectual from a rich family. Ham formed Chirisanakhoe, Mt. Chirisan's climbing club, in 1957 with his friends, and the goal of the club is "to encourage people to have an understanding of nature in Mt. Chirisan" (Ham, 27). Mt. Chirisanakhoe made maps for climbers and improved many hiking trails. They also worked to help Professor Kim Hon-Kyu, a proponent of national park system in early 1960s, establish Mt. Chirisan as a national park.

As discussed in the opening of this paper, the national park system was introduced within the discourse of 'national land development' (Kukto Kaebal), and park-related matters were under the jurisdiction of the park department of the Ministry of Construction until 1990. There were few systematic national management and conservation programs for national parks before the Korea National Parks Authority (NPA), a public corporation under the control of the

Ministry of the Environment, was launched in 1986 for the unified control of national parks. San-saram, such as Ham Tae-sik, played an important role in establishing the civic norm for mountain appreciation. In the 1960's and 70's, the mountain was, in a sense, a space of transgression, as well as recreation for ordinary people. Some people, especially youngsters, would go hiking into the mountain and drink, sing loudly and dance in the campsites until late at night. Other people would throw away garbage and cigarette-butts. One of Ham's main duties was to calm such disturbances and keep campers and shelter-users from leaving food waste and destroying nature. He would confiscate cassette players from noisy people at night, and return them the next morning (Ham, 84-92). His rule was strictly enforced, which earned him another nickname, 'Tiger of Nogodan' (*Ibid.*, 57). He established the following rules for the shelters (*ibid.*, 57-58): First, no musical instruments, dancing or singing; Second, no fire; Third, bedtime was 9:00 pm; Fourth, no card games; Fifth, separate rooms for men and women. Sixth; clean up your own space. To campers outside the shelters, singing and dancing were allowed only before the 9:00 pm curfew.

It was not easy for him as a volunteer⁸⁾ to control various kinds of hikers, who were sometimes drunk. He used every means to keep the mountain quiet and clean for public use. His stubbornness in keeping his rules came out of his inexhaustible love for the mountain and a desire for sharing his vision of its beauty with other people. Newly ingrained democratic and modern virtues were needed to transform the mountain from an aesthetic amusement site for privileged social elites in the pre-modern period

into a public tourist attraction.

In this sense, Ham's rules implied a way for people and nature to coexist by bringing the conventional social norms and virtues of the outside world to the mountain. For example, he would patrol the campsites near the shelter and strictly prohibit teenagers of different sexes from sleeping in the same tent. If he discovered teenagers in this compromising position, he would bring the girl back to the shelter to sleep for the night. He did not want to perpetuate the idea of the mountain as a different place, where different norms and virtues are communicated. He was not an escapist. Rather, he attempted to construct a typical public space where people respect and communicate with each other equally within the existing social norm, which he believed was the only way people could appreciate the enduring beauty of nature.

In other words, for him the sacredness of Mt. Chirisan was realized through the democratic and civic appropriation of nature, rather than, by containing nature as a special place. It is, thus, no wonder that he was politically liberal and hated the authoritarian military regime. This may look, in a sense, incompatible with his illiberal attitude in keeping the mountain a public space, which conformed to the civic norms by, for example, enforcing a conservative view of sexual morality. However, he was explicitly coherent in that he showed intolerance for anything that threatens democratic and civic virtues. In this sense, Ham was quite different from Huh Mansoo, the first mountain man on Mt. Chirisan, who was totally indifferent to the social or political turmoil of his time. Even though Ham lived in the mountains, he did not isolate himself from the world outside. He had a large circle of acquaintances. One of his close friends, Lee Don-

myung, human rights lawyer and dissident intellectual, recollected the first encounter with Ham.

In the summer when Yushin was proclaimed, I first met Mr. Ham at Nogodan. He was not just innocent and carefree to no end, but was also an advocate of democracy, unlike those who had sequestered themselves from the world. So, we easily made friends with each other... (Ham, 2002, in the back cover of his book)

Lee's representation of Ham challenges the popular image of *san-saram* perpetuated by the media as men living a sequestered, isolated life. Another, younger mountain man, Min Byungchun in the Chibanmok shelter said that, "there are a lot of people who misunderstand our life assuming that a shelter manager is like an immortal living easy in the mountains. But, this is job demands that you take on a lot of roles from garbage man to sheriff in a cowboy picture" (Pusankukje-shinmun (daily press) 1997, Nov. 28).

Thus, mountain men (*san-saram*) could be, in a sense, a fictitious character, the product of Taoist imagination created by the modern mass media. This image of mountain men is a representation of people's desire to escape into a natural paradise, where the illusion of liminal space is projected. This mythical image has been tempered by what mountain men are actually doing, as seen in the life of Ham.

The myth of mountain men and escape is now disappearing. Since shelters in Mt. Chirisan came under the systematic control of the central government in 1987, most of the large shelters were directly managed by the government organization, Korea National Parks Authority.

Ham Tae-sik in Nogosanjang was forced to retire, so he decided to move to a smaller shelter, Piagolsanjang. Some small shelters still remained under the management of the previous san-saram. So, currently shelters are operated under a dual system of officials and mountain men. Since 2000 open air camping in Mt. Chirisan has been prohibited, reinforcing a policy of environmental protection. Cooking is only allowed in designated shelters.

Mt. Chirisan National Park is not much of a 'park.' It is very different from national parks in the West, where the myth of nation has intentionally been inscribed in its design and construction. It also differs from many landscape parks constructed in Korean urban spaces since 1990, which show ostensible nationalist icons, such as the Korean (traditional) garden, the high-flying national flag, and the statue of King Sejong (the fourth King of Chosŏn dynasty) in Youido Park. Civic and democratic norms were not enforced in Mt. Chirisan National Park at the time of its designation. Mt. Chirisan was not presented as a symbol of nationhood encouraging patriotic emotion. Rather, it was a popular antidote for the nation's rapid industrialization and harsh political environment, reproducing the social illusion of escapism or deviance.

Going back to Tuan's 'Escapism', 'escape out of nature' becomes ultimately 'escape into nature'. For example, suburbia in America as an example of such escape into nature has brought inevitably about the construction of another culture system. Therefore suburban region is also an escape out of nature. In this sense, he refers to it as "middle landscape." containing both aspects of escapism in human life. Ham Tae-Sik in Mt. Chirisan too constructed his own space dominated by modern cultural norms, which is

contrasted with nature. The citizenship and the attitude of appreciating natural beauty he created in the mountain is another micro-cosmos-escape out of nature. And, Mt. Chirisan and Nogosanjang can be considered a middle landscape that mediates nature and culture.

5. The Reinvention of a Utopian Village, Chonghakdong

Whereas the mountain men in Mt. Chirisan are represented as an individual attempt to escape from the world, searching for a natural paradise, a legendary village, Chonghakdong, literally a village of blue cranes, shows more explicitly the way in which the inherited legendary narrative has been transformed into a modern, consumer reproduction of utopia. Chonghakdong is an imaginary utopian village, which is said to be located at the foot of Mt. Chirisan, according to the many travelogues of Confucian aristocrats in Chosŏn dynasty in the sixteenth and seventeenth century (see S. Choi *et al.*, 2000; Jung, 2005, 68-69). One of the main purposes for their travel to Mt. Chirisan was to search for the location of legendary Chonghakdong. Some people thought that the vicinity of Ssangyesa, the Buddhist temple where Choi Chi-won had lived, was Chonghakdong. But, nobody succeeded in finding proof of the real location of the utopian village. Chonghakdong was the mythical embodiment of the inherited Taoist imagination of sequestered life and the desire to escape into the mountain. The legend of Chonghakdong was, thus, continually reproduced by ruined or retired aristocrats looking for spiritual shelter--especially at times of political turmoil.

The first man to search for Chonghakdong

since Choi Chi-won disappeared into Mt. Chirisan, was Yi In-ro in the late Koryo dynasty (918-1392). He described Chonghakdong in his essay *Pahanjip* based on orally transmitted stories from the area.

There is Chonghakdong in the mountain, the road to the village is so narrow that a person can barely pass through. If you go along the road a couple of miles you can see a village with a wide prospect. The soil there is so fertile that it is good for farming. It is named Chonghakdong because only the blue crane lives there. It was where people renounced the world in the past. Still left are fallen walls and foundation stones. (quoted in S. Choe *et al.*, 2000, 340).

Yi confessed he could not find the village. Chonghakdong was ultimately discovered or invented in 1973 when the news media introduced an isolated village in Mt. Chirisan to the world. Residents were a minority religious community. They adhered to pre-modern clothes, hairstyles and customs, so they looked like the Koreans of 100 years ago. In fact, there is no substantial evidence that the discovered village is the legendary place. But, the village began to be called Chonghakdong, and since then became a popular tourist destination in Mt. Chirisan. The 'invention' of Chonghakdong in the modern period was more than a creation of another interesting tourist site. The legend was incorporated into modern discourse of tourism and consumerism.

In the past, aristocrats such as Choi Chi-won and Yi In-ro tried to escape from the turbulent ages into a peaceful other space. The image of a natural paradise was explicitly spatial and geographical. The discovery of the village

reflected an epistemological change of the view of escape. The village is represented in terms of the experience of time rather than space. The image of a utopian village in other space is transformed into a recollection of the forgotten past. In the context of a linear modern sensation of time, this shift destroyed the spatial image of utopia and escape inscribed in the mountain. The village landscape was objectified and reified through curious tourist eyes for their traditional customs and clothes viewed as a legacy of the past. Chonghakdong as imagined space was lost at the same time it was discovered as a historical relic. Thus, Chonghakdong moved from the realm of an elites' spiritual shelter to the object of a modern, temporary, and mass consumed desire for the escape from the world.

6. Conclusion

The meaning of symbolic landscape is not fixed but open to appropriation and reinterpretation. Above all, the dominant sublime image the mountain conveys is a consequence of compromise between the inherited conception of traditional human-land relations and a modern aesthetic view of nature. As I discussed earlier in the paper, in the designation of the mountain as a national park, the past and memory of the mountain territory was rendered differently from the Western convention. Whereas the modern sacredness of the Western national park was maintained through the erasure of the past, the sacredness and national symbolism of Mt. Chirisan is concretized by constantly reworking the memory of the pre-modern period. The escapist lives of Huh Man-Soo and Ham Tae-Sik are typical examples of the modification of the

traditional references of escapism into nature but with a very modern outlook.

The two mountain men embodied a modern aesthetic and environmentalist view of nature by articulating a typical form of appreciating nature in a transition period from the pre-modern to modern society. It can be said that they escaped into nature out of the rapidly industrializing modern society, and at the same time they may ironically be the pioneering figures of modernity in terms of the 'nature-culture' nexus. On the one hand, their lives reproduced the traditional escapism of Confucian aristocrats reworked since Choe Chi-won. The escapism was a product of the aristocrats' privileged social status, which made it possible to stake an exclusive claim on nature appreciation. On the other hand, mountain men mediated their own personal dream of revitalizing the Taoist utopian place with their social practices of modernizing and democratizing the appreciation of nature. Therefore, mountain men, being highly educated intellectuals, inculcated people with a very civic notion of nature appreciation: people should enjoy the beauty of nature (the mountain) equally – so that they themselves can become part of the renewed, but slowly disappearing, modern myth of the mountain.

In addition, the sacredness of the mountain has historically been politicized and contested since the ancient period. Koryo and Chosŏn Dynasty performed official ceremonies in the mountain to justify their kingship and the underclass people considered the mountain a symbolic image of resistance and emancipation. Mt. Chirisan is not only a symbolic place implying legendary imagination of people's resistance since ancient times but also one of the core battle grounds of Partisan struggles by communist during the



Figure 1. Ham Tae-sik (Hankukilbosa, 1980)

Korean War (1950- 53) and afterward.

The two different images of Mt. Chirisan as a modern reinvention of both traditional escapism and resistance, explain the complex nature of the modern sacredness of the mountain. In particular, the disappearing myths of escapism and resistance, at the same time, symbolize the termination of the pre-modern spatial imagination that shrouded the mountain with mystery and privilege, presenting it as an antidote to the real world. On the one hand, the maternal sacredness of Mt. Chirisan is being reasserted through the resonance of its poetic power for healing the nation's wounded and disrupted memory. On the other hand, the narratives of the mountain men provide an expanded view of modern national space and capture the moment when the mountain is incorporated into the civic reconstruction of inherited myths. Ultimately, the vision of modern national space was made concrete at the very site where the people's dreams of utopia, the inherited sacredness of the mountain and people's religious beliefs in its protective power were terminated.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

Notes

- 1) Refer to Jung(2005) about the features of geographical representation of utopian imagination in the Chosŏn dynasty. He also discusses in detail the Chonghakdong as an example of such a utopian place.
- 2) In fact, both aspects are not separated from each other. For common people in the Chosŏn dynasty, the continuous peasant uprisings, that occurred in the mountain area, are a political expression of the collective desire for utopia. Mt. Chirisan functioned as the final shelter for repressed people and was the base of the uprisings.
- 3) 'Hembygd' refers to one's native place. It implies abstraction (the complete nation) as well as the concreteness(the local village) of landskap (Mels, 2002, 138).
- 4) This paper is implicitly but firmly based on the thesis of social construction of nature. For a detailed discussion, of it, see Castree, N.(2001), Catree, N., and Braun B.(2001), Jin(2005, 32-34).
- 5) Mt. Chirisan is introduced as the "mountain of people", the "mountain of beliefs (religion)", the "mountain of agony", and the "mountain of life."
- 6) However, modern aesthetics and the practice of mountain climbing in the West are due to the ancient western tradition of mountain sensibility and the Dinocratic vision, as well as modern invention.
- 7) Sanjang is literally 'mountain villa.'. It is a shelter, providing lodging to climbers and selling some food and drink at inexpensive price. Mt. Chirisan is much larger than other national parks, so sanjang is much needed.
- 8) When he first began working in Nogosanjang, he was recommended by Chirisanakhoe. Nogosanjang was leased to Chirisanakhoe by local government without compensation.

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Received June 7, 2005

Accepted June 16, 2005