

# **Traditional-Religious Significance and Contemporary Value of *Sanshin-je* Mountain-spirit Ceremonies in the Naepo Region**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Traditions of certain anciently-selected mountains being widely held to be sacred are still remarkably strong in the Republic of Korea (hereinafter, the common nickname "South Korea"), following upon thousands of years of continuous cultural development which prominently features that factor. It is notable that the most prominent of these holy peaks are regarded as such by not only one traditional Korean religious grouping or practice, but by multiple such entities – this is quite unusual within the entire world's existing sacred mountain-traditions. To this day, South Korea's dynamic culture includes many styles and instances of mountain-worship ceremonies, in which the spirit of one peak or a cluster of them, known as a ***Sanshin***, is venerated with offerings of water, alcoholic drinks and natural foods, burning of incense and candles, chanting, prayers, bowing, prostrations and dancing. These ritual activities range from very private affairs conducted by even a single person alone in remote areas up to publicly celebrated expensive ceremonies with full costumes and orchestras, conducted by dozens of officiants and witnessed by hundreds of community members – and every conceivable configuration in-between – and are generally known as ***Sanshin-je*** [Mountain-spirit ceremonies]. They are practiced, often as a initial and key part of other religious events (including funerals, beginning of constructing buildings, and even by secular hiking-clubs) by Korean Buddhists, Daoists, Neo-Confucianists, Shamanists, practitioners of minor national religions such as the Jeungsahn-do, Cheondo-gyo and Taejong-gyo, and also by many Koreans with no formal religious membership but yet maintaining a general sense of traditional spirituality. *Sanshin-je* and their varied associated practices and beliefs are so widespread, frequent and deeply ingrained in almost all of South Korea's religious practices that it would be fair to call them a central focus, kind of an axis, of its traditional culture.

The "Naepo Region" is the northwestern area of South Chungcheong Province (Chungcheong-namdo) stretching to the West Coast, and can be geographically identify as dominated by the *Geumbuk-gimaek* mountain-range. The highest, most-prominent, best-known and most-sacred mountain of this area is Gaya-san, which records and archaeology show to once have been a highly active religious center, which can be associated with Great-Master Wonhyo, one of Korea's most famous and important Buddhist heroes. This expository paper provides background rationale for and discussion of the traditional-religious significance and contemporary value of *Sanshin-je* ceremonies being held in this Naepo Region today, particularly at Gaya-san and with reference to the legendary association with Wonhyo.

Mountain-worship was once very common, but has almost disappeared on this earth, as aboriginal and agrarian cultures are continually destroyed by the vectors of modern civilization and unique, local traditional religions are replaced by “universal” modern ones. In South Korea, however, various traditions of mountain-worship are still going strong. Some of them are ancient and some are of more recent origin, but all are flourishing out on the edges of modern life<sup>1</sup>.

An OECD-member nation with a developed industrial economy (rapidly going post-industrial) has a “Mountain-God” at the center of its complex web of religious forms – connecting most of them to national roots – and flourishing, varied practices of this ancient belief-system. Not only is mountain-worship still ‘alive’ in Korea, but it is evolving new roles for itself in Korea's twenty-first century cultural and political realities. This is a fascinating situation, the breadth and depth of which must be explored from a full variety of perspectives.

Seventy-five-percent of the Korean Peninsula is nearly-uninhabitable mountainous terrain, and this is the foremost factor in the physical context of the development of Korean culture. Lofty, massive, beautiful and inspiring; obstructing, conducting, dangerous, useful, deadly and providing; rich sources, venerable depositories and sheltering retreats – their mountains have always inspired gratitude, respect, admiration, awe and worship from the Koreans. Long ago, they created the animistic concept of *Sanshin* [Mountain-spirit, Mountain God or Spirit of the Mountains] to simultaneously symbolize both what is universally true of all mountains and what is the unique character of each individual set of peaks, ridges, slopes, valleys, forests and streams.

*Sanshin* are named by the mountain they represent. For example, the spirit of *Sorak-san* [the Snowy-crag Mountains] would simply be called the *Seorak-san-shin* by those who respect it. Some *Sanshin* are regarded as male and others as female, according to different traditions and systems of thought, but are always conceived of and depicted in iconic artworks as patriarchal or matriarchal human-like deities of royal rank and enlightened-master status, living with excellent health and in harmony with nature. These artworks always also include a tiger (the spirit's alter-ego or assistant) and a pine tree, and these are situated in a craggy background like the most beautiful of Korea's alpine areas. They share many similarities with traditional Chinese and Korean images of *Shinseon* [spiritual immortals], to which they are conceptually related. Other symbols of health, longevity, authority and enlightenment are often included in these icons, derived from and referring to most of Korea's religious traditions. *Sanshin* paintings and statues are therefore to be regarded as multi-religious icons that summarize the complex interlinked web of Korea's spiritual beliefs and practices.

Mountain-worship is as ancient as anything else that we know about early Korean civilization. The oldest *biseok* [stele, or stone pillar carved with a proclamation or historical record] which has been found in Korea is dedicated to a *San-shin*.<sup>2</sup> The Chinese *Record of the Later Han* [a history and geographical survey from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century] describes the ‘Eastern Barbarians’ [Koreans] as having the custom of paying respect to mountains and streams, and performing rites in honor of the tiger.<sup>3</sup> Many of the old legends which have long informed the Korean sense of national identity feature personified Mountain-spirits in essential (and beneficial) roles, as we shall see.

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<sup>1</sup> General reference for the discussion here: Mason 1999, and [www.san-shin.org](http://www.san-shin.org)

<sup>2</sup> noted in Grayson 1989, pg. 262. Unfortunately, we do not know the pre-Chinese-characters [original Korean] name used for *San-shin*.

<sup>3</sup> Kim Hoe-u 1996. Refer to my section II.3.A. below, for the significance of tiger-worship.

Korean mountains are often quite steep, with forested slopes sweeping down from sharp, high ridges, forbidding cliffs decorated by gnarled pines and waterfalls, soaring rocky peaks of gray granite. Their residents have always believed these most prominent landforms to be spiritually alive, whether inhabited by a “god” or, more abstractly, infused with a unique telluric *ki* [energy, or “material force”, an old Chinese concept]. They have sensed that each has its own individual character (according to its size, shape, orientation, outstanding features, flora and fauna). Living in one mountain’s shadow is subtly different from living in another’s. This sense of a mountain’s particular character forms a ‘spirit’ which can be personified and respected – and which will in exchange offer protection and benefits.

I have developed my own idea of the deeper meaning of *San-shin*, as a symbol representing a “mental system” (a “mind” in its larger-than-one-body conception) as defined in the seminal work of Gregory Bateson.<sup>4</sup> This mental system encompasses the total interactions between the ecosystem of the mountain and its human residents. It is personified as a human-figure ‘god,’ and its synergism<sup>5</sup> is what is being venerated when that god is ritually served. The small section of Earth’s biosphere residing on a mountain and the equally small section of Earth’s humanity residing on it are brought into harmonious, co-evolutionary relationship – or just acknowledged as already being so. The “Gaia” theory of James Lovelock,<sup>6</sup> that the Earth and its biosphere (including humankind) may be regarded as a living and evolving being, is also very relevant to this enhanced understanding of what traditional Koreans may really have (unconsciously) meant when they worshipped their *San-shin*.

Professor Keum Jang-tae says that Koreans have traditionally believed that “every mountain has a spirit, and those who live on or climb the mountain receive that spirit and experience a deepening of their humanity.”<sup>7</sup> ‘Receiving the spirit’ of their mountains refreshes Koreans’ minds and opens their hearts, the encounter with Nature on the grand scale freeing them to return to their original humanistic ‘nature’. This *San-shin* has far greater meaning than just this effect on individuals, however: throughout the long course of Korean history it has been the main tutelary spirit of each village and town, and the guardian of the Korean nation as a whole. Despite their relentless modernization in the past century, Koreans still pay respect to, or at least acknowledge, their *San-shin* in a wide variety of contexts.

The animistic vision of mountains having a human-like spirit has long since gone as far as imagining the shapes of *ak* [peaks/crags] and *bawi* [prominent boulders or rock-outcroppings] as zoomorphic and anthropomorphic figures; they are commonly named as such, and are depicted as such in drawings and paintings from the past 600 years.<sup>8</sup>

The *San-shin* have been known as harmful when abused or ignored, but quite benign when properly treated; and their *ki* has strong beneficial powers when properly absorbed and utilized. Human beings can attain better *bok* [good fortune]<sup>9</sup> and improve their experience of life when properly attuned to their natural environment – and in a mountainous nation that means holistically encountering the Spirit of the Mountain. Thus since as far back as their records go,

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<sup>4</sup> Bateson 1979. This book is the summation of his lifetime of psychological, anthropological, epistemological and ecological theorizing and experimenting, which many observers rank as among the most important-in-the-long-run scientific work in this century.

<sup>5</sup> “synergism” means the simultaneous action of separate agencies which, together, have greater total effect than the sum of their individual effects – by their combined influence on the larger and longer cycles of biological life within ecosystems – sometimes far beyond what could have been predicted from knowledge of the original separate agencies.

<sup>6</sup> there is no appropriate space here to explain that theory in detail; refer to his well-known 1988 book *The Ages of Gaia* from Bantam Books.

<sup>7</sup> Kûm 1996, pg. 40.

<sup>8</sup> Zo Zayong 1975 (may be out of print).

<sup>9</sup> *bok* is also translatable as “blessing”. In traditional Korean thought it includes longevity, good health, a virtuous character, prosperity, fame or at least a favorable reputation, fecundity, and a peaceful death.

Koreans have built the tombs of their ancestors, studied for exams or self-development, refreshed themselves, meditated, retreated, hidden, and held *kut* [healing ceremonies] far out on their mountains, where the *San-shin* are found.

Representing the highest point of the earth, the *San-shin* enjoys the highest rank among earth or nature spirits<sup>10</sup> in traditional Korean religions. It is served first and treated with high regard at all ceremonies. Edward R. Canda explained this primary status in this way:

“The mountain spirit personifies earth at its highest point of development (both literally and metaphorically), at which earth meets heaven and receives its most direct blessings and communications.”<sup>11</sup>

*San-shin* is first among all Korean deities, perhaps only because Korea itself is mostly mountainous. Korea's mythical founder is thought to have become a *San-shin* upon retirement, all of Korea's religious traditions acknowledge the importance of *San-shin* (even if only in opposition to it), and its people have always worshipped the *San-shin* before all others. Scottish Pastor John Ross (1842-1915) noted in his 1879 *History of Korea* (the first general history of Korea in a western language): “There are more believers in the god of the mountains than in Buddhism”.<sup>12</sup> I have come to believe that *San-shin* could easily be called the central figure in traditional Korean culture. Despite this, there has been very little in-depth study done on it (in any language).

The foremost living champion and reviver of traditional Korean culture, Dr. Zo zayong [Jo Ja-yong], founder of the Emille Museum<sup>13</sup> and the *Sam-shin* [Three Spirits] Association, wrote in the preface to one of his collections of folk-art:

“Since the first days of eastern mythology Korea has been known as the mountain country, not just because the land is mountainous, but because the people throughout history have believed in the mountain spirit... Even today we know of many holy mountains all over Korea, and we also know that many people still pray to the mountain spirit. In studying Korean culture it seems a matter of utmost importance to acquire correct knowledge of mountain worship which has played such a significant role throughout our cultural strata.”<sup>14</sup>

The first serious and in-depth treatment of *Sanshin*'s role in Korean culture was presented in J.C. Covell's first book, and the subsequent works by her and her son Alan.<sup>15</sup> The subject of Korean mountain-worship has turned out to be a vast and complex field, but with little known about it (in an academic sense) outside of a few specialists, who had published almost nothing in English; my own research on it has therefore continued for more than 20 years and is still progressing.

How many actual *San-shin* paintings, statues and carvings are there in (south) Korea, both in religious use and stored away or on display in public or private collections? Nobody could even

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<sup>10</sup> as opposed to heavenly and underworld spirits, and human ghosts.

<sup>11</sup> Canda 1980, pg. 13.

<sup>12</sup> according to the article “Rare Books on Korea” in the *Korea Times* 98.6.8, page 18.

<sup>13</sup> Founded in Seoul several decades ago, moved to just outside the entranceway to Bôb-ju Temple in Sogni-san National Park in the 1980's, but now unfortunately closed due to the poor health of Dr. Zo, I have heard.

<sup>14</sup> Zo Zayong 1975, page 7.

<sup>15</sup> Covell 1981. The four books by Dr. Jon Carter Covell and her son Dr. Alan Carter Covell are classic popularizations of Korean art and religion. They were some of the first works in English to explain traditional Korean thought and customs to the general public. In some places they suffer from superficiality, and Alan's book on Shamanism is riddled with small mistakes. As a result, I've had to be careful in using them as references, always double-checking the information. But I still believe they are valuable and worthwhile introductions for casual readers and beginners in Korean Studies. I like to think that with this book I am carrying their work forward, improving on it a bit.

begin to claim to know, but perhaps 100,000 would not be an unreasonable estimate. However, the vast majority are simple cartoonish icons used by practicing Shamans that are quite similar to each other with little variation in iconographic elements or artistic styles. Seeing a dozen of those means that you've seen them all. My photo-collection mostly includes the more important ones – the large, “formal” and generally more complex icon-paintings that are each unique, offering a great variation in iconographic elements or artistic styles – are found in the temples of most Korean Buddhist sects<sup>16</sup> and in museum collections (both national and private). These are called in Korean “*San-shin taeng-hwa*” [mountain-spirit sacred-paintings]; ranging from 300-year-old, post-medieval, folk-art treasures to newly-painted, modernist, retro-folk works. Many are elaborate paintings of high artistic value.

The best of them are found in museums and in almost every Buddhist temple in the nation which could be called large and ‘important,’ and also a good sample of small, remote and obscure mountains, temples and hermitages<sup>17</sup> along with some of the larger Shamanic shrines masquerading as temples. They are found in all areas of South Korea, in a reasonably even distribution. The number of *San-shin taeng-hwa* held in museum and private collections is very hard to estimate, but could surpass another thousand.<sup>18</sup>

Korean and native traditions, including its ‘Shamanism’ are quite difficult to research and write about due to the lack of written records from before 1900 or so, and the prejudicial character of what did get recorded by Neo-Confucian officials and Christian missionaries. In addition, there are no definite boundaries between the religious traditions I will discuss: Shamanism fades into and blends together with Korean Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism and nationalism.<sup>19</sup> The resulting ever-evolving, shades-of-gray conglomeration which we call “Korean Traditional Culture” has no unbroken laws, uncrossed borders or unvarying parameters; any definitive rules have many exceptions, and any definitive answers to the type of questions we can pursue can be only partially valid – limited truths within a wide range of other ‘truths.’

Most knowledgeable people (both Korean and foreign) that I have spoken with during this long research-project regard *San-shin* as a purely Shamanic deity, and categorize its study under the label of Korean Shamanism [*Musok*]. I do not agree with this. Korean Shamanism (in its present form as a loose-but-distinct “proto-religion”, at least) is only one of the spiritual traditions which have co-evolved with *San-shin*, which has itself remained partially independent of them all. This book will demonstrate *San-shin*’s autonomous (but highly interactive) character, forming the very core of traditional Korean culture.

Several advanced humanistic religions were imported to Korea from China (and later, Western nations) including Buddhism, Confucianism (in its basic, Han and Neo- forms), Daoism (including geomancy and its ideas of Earth-energy), and Christianity. All of them have interacted with Korea’s native beliefs and customs in interesting ways. Buddhism was the

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<sup>16</sup> Temples of the minor Chôn-tae and Won-bul-gyo sects, at least, do not house *San-shin* paintings or altars, but most other sects – representing, I would say, 95% of Korean temples – do at almost all of theirs.

<sup>17</sup> called *am-ja*, these are small residential sub-temples attached to a main monastery on the same mountain, generally higher up on the slopes. They always have their own Buddhist and folk-spirit shrines, usually including a *San-shin*. Their name generally includes the suffix *-am*; in rare cases *-won* or *-gung*. Temple names have the suffix *-sa*.

<sup>18</sup> It is especially difficult to estimate the number of, or gain the opportunity to photograph, privately-held *San-shin taeng-hwa* due to the severe and increasing problem of antique-art theft in Korea. Many have been stolen from temples and sold to private collectors, who then naturally keep them stashed secretly away. This problem also makes legitimate collectors and even some temples with valuable old paintings reluctant to permit photography/publication, fearing that the thieves will be alerted and attracted.

<sup>19</sup> Zo Zayong 1982, pages 18-34 contains an excellent discussion of this complex reality. He wisely proclaims: “At times these religious motifs (Confucian, Buddhist, Daoist, Shamanist) are so complexly interwoven that it becomes impossible to determine to which specific religion each belongs. The end result of this is a general impression that in Korea there is Daoist Buddhism, Buddhist Shamanism, and Daoistic Shamanism, and that the thought behind religious ritual painting is actually the shamanistic folk content of each religion rather than its academic aspect.”

earliest to be imported, developed the grandest tradition on Korean soil, and has maintained the strongest mutually-transformative interaction with San-shin.

There once were ancient and extensive traditions of mountain-worship found world-wide;<sup>20</sup> Korea's San-shin tradition is unusual only in that it grew so extensive and enduringly central to its greater culture, and that it has persisted so strongly up to the present day. San-shin certainly does not deserve the lack of global recognition it now suffers.<sup>21</sup>

For the more than two thousand years of Korean history, the residents of this mountainous peninsula have believed that the peaks and slopes are spiritually alive, inhabited by a *San-shin* [Mountain-spirit, or spirit of the mountains], male or female, one or more integral with each mountain, both manifesting it and being manifested by it. This has long been the main tutelary spirit of most villages and towns, and the guardian of the Korean nation as a whole. Since ancient times Korean kings have funded great ceremonies at grand *Sanshin-dan* altars as symbols of their legitimacy, while the common folk prayed for good weather, bountiful crops, healthy children and protection from ill-fortune at their small village *Sanshin-gak* shrines.

Mountain-worship was once found worldwide, with ancient roots and extensive traditions; scholars have reported it in many if not most pre-industrial cultures. Most mountain-worship traditions sharply declined during the twentieth century, however, and are steadily becoming harder to find, as the vectors of modern industrial civilization continuously destroy aboriginal and agrarian cultures and unique, local traditional religions are replaced by modern universalistic ones. But various traditions of mountain-worship are still very much alive in South Korea, not only surviving but positively flourishing out on the edges of what is in most other ways a very modern life. It is even evolving new roles for itself in twenty-first century cultural and political realities. This may be unique to Korea, among technologically-sophisticated industrialized nations.

*San-shin* is first among all Korean deities, perhaps only because Korea itself is mostly mountainous. Korea's mythical or legendary founder Dan-gun Wanggeom is thought to have become a San-shin upon retirement, all of Korea's imported religious traditions acknowledge the importance of San-shin (even if only in opposition to it), and its people have always worshipped the San-shin before all other deities. I have found it to be an axial figure in traditional Korean culture, due to the way in which it connects the various religious traditions to each other, forming the "native center" of the "web" of Korean religions.

Despite their relentless modernization in the past century, Koreans still pay respect to, or at least acknowledge, their San-shin in a wide variety of contexts. Its manifestations are readily found scattered amidst the urbanization and modernization, hoary roots of stable wisdom that can be glimpsed underneath the chaotic neon-lit surfaces. Ceremonies with ancient roots are still being held up on high ridges and deep in remote gorges nationwide, from Halla-san down on Jeju Island up to the north of Seorak-san. And sometimes at shrines overlooking skyscraper-filled downtowns.

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<sup>20</sup> refer to Bernbaum 1990, for an excellent global overview.

<sup>21</sup> Two examples, one foreign and one domestic: there is no chapter on Korea in Bernbaum's book *Sacred Mountains of the World*, although China and Japan each have their own, and Korea's mountain-worship traditions are historically at least equal to and currently much stronger than theirs; KOREANA magazine (published by the semi-official Korea Foundation) put out an issue devoted to "Mountains In Korean Life and Culture" [V.8 #4], and *San-shin* was never mentioned in it. Ignoring Korea is still lamentably common in studies of Asian religion and philosophy – many authors write as if there are only two countries in Northeast Asia worth more than a glance.

Most Korean Buddhist temples have an altar set up with a painting or statue of the San-shin (frequently both), and most of them house that in a separate shrine building with walls covered with Daoist-themed paintings, called "Sanshin-gak". The thousands of paintings are unique, no two ever quite the same, as their artists have been inspired to individualize them according to the characteristics of the mountain they are intended to represent. Many of the temple's San-shin paintings are now valuable antiques over a hundred years old, and represent the best of Korea's folk-painting traditions. Some of those have been stolen by art thieves, selling for thousands of dollars on the black and gray markets; while quite a few others are now safely kept in museums.

But San-shin icons are not only historical treasures. Visitors to temples will find many newly created and enshrined paintings and statues of the Mountain-spirit, tending to be ever larger and more elaborate, and more prominently displayed. These works are far more elaborate than the antiques, incorporating a higher number of symbolic elements that extend the range of religious associations, such as Buddhist symbols of enlightened authority, or the folk-Confucian *ship-jang-saeng* [10 symbols of longevity]. Many are intricate and complex paintings of high artistic value, offering a great variation in iconographic elements or artistic styles.

These newly-painted, modernist, retro-folk artworks are quite expensive, and their proliferation indicates that San-shin worship is growing in strength and importance within contemporary Korean culture. San-shin icons are drawing in increasing amounts of donation-money from lay believers, and in turn greatly increased amounts of money are being spent in constructing new ones. They are also being given noticeably higher stature within temple compounds and in the proliferating independent Shamanic shrines.

San-shin shrines were once typically a small building in the far back of the temple compound, built up on the mountain-slope surrounded by forest, and in a traditionally designed temple they can sometimes be a little difficult to find. These days more and more temples are reconstructing or newly-constructing "*Sam-shin-gak*" [Three Spirits Shrine] or "*Samseong-gak*" [Three Sages Shrine, conferring a higher status] buildings within the main Buddhist-worship area. These enshrine two other major folk-spirits besides the San-shin, usually the *Chil-seong* [Seven Stars of the Big Dipper] and the *Deok-seong* [Lonely Saint], or perhaps the *Yong-wang* [Dragon-King of the Waters] often now with the San-shin in the center of the triple-altar display.

Across South Korea, public San-shin ceremonies with the explicit themes of national identity, protection, and re-unification have been held with steadily-increasing frequency and prominence over the past decade. This sort of open government approval of and support for San-shin worship is truly revolutionary in modern Korea, where officialdom is typically dominated by Protestant Christians opposed to public expression of indigenous culture.

San-shin paintings have also been found to be highly attractive to foreign visitors, who can easily understand their general import of humanistic pantheism. They have thus begun to serve as one of the cultural bridges that the Korean government is now building out towards the rest of the world. San-shin has found yet another role as a unique symbol of Korea, and promotional factor for its Tourism.

This is happening together with an increasing public "coming out" of Korean Shamanism and official/legal tolerance of and even respect for it. These manifest changes suggest that a new 'religion' may be evolving in South Korea, based on ancient traditions but far more explicit and organized than ever before. It is highly nationalistic in character, based on ancient deities central to Korea's national identity, borrowing from the altar-forms that developed in Buddhist

temples but now beginning to express its own independent identity. It has so far developed on relatively remote slopes of the holiest mountains, but might begin to move into the cities. How popular it will become or what forms that assumes cannot really be predicted.

Urbanized Korea may seem relentlessly hyper-modern, but its ancient traditions of Mountain-worship and respect for the Mountain-spirits are far from dying out. Anyone who travels around the country and hikes up on the trails will find plenty of both old and newly evolving signs of it.

The "Naepo Region" is the northwestern area of South Chungcheong Province (Chungcheongnamdo) stretching to the West Coast, and can be geographically and even culturally identified as dominated by the *Geumbuk-gimaek* mountain-range (by traditional geographical concepts associated with *Pungsu-jiriseol* Daoist philosophical practices), which is the end of the larger *Geumbuk-jeongmaek* mountain-range (both by traditional geographical concepts). The highest, most-prominent, best-known and most-sacred mountain of this area is named Gaya-san, which is a reference to Bhodgaya, the site in India of Sakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment, and thus a highly auspicious and meaningful Buddhist name.

Local records, ancient legends and recent archaeological finds indicate that Gaya-san was once a highly active religious center, with dozens of Buddhist temples and also Confucian, Shamanist and Daoist shrines. Due to its geographical location nearby the part of Korea's west coast that reaches closest to China's Shandong province, we have good reason to speculate that it was once a major transit-center for Buddhist monks traveling by ships between Korea and China. It therefore qualifies as one of the highly-sacred mountains of South Korea, although its current public reputation does not reach up to the level of the former fame it once enjoyed.

Traditional legends associate this auspicious mountain with Great-Master Wonhyo, one of Korea's most famous and important Buddhist heroes, by claiming that he attained his enlightenment while on his way traveling to China to further study Buddhism, a trip than aborted (refer to the very famous "drinking water from a skull in a tomb" story from the *Samguk-yusa*) at the cave which is now above the temple named after him, Wonhyo-am. This may be the reason that this mountain attained the name "Gaya-san" which has the significance noted above; it may have been intended to draw a parallel between the self-enlightenment of Sakyamuni Buddha and the very significant self-enlightenment of Master Wonhyo on Korean soil. The idea that this mountain was once a nexus for Buddhist travelers between the two early nations lends credence to the notion that it served as the site of Wonhyo's sudden awakening. This adds a strong extra factor of religious-historical significance to this mountain and the Naepo region as a whole.

In summary of all the above discussion we can therefore say that there is a very high level of traditional-religious significance to be seen in the holding of *Sanshin-je* ceremonies at Gaya-san and even elsewhere within the Naepo Region. They exemplify and carry forward many central factors of what is most important in Korea's cultural history. These days, with Korea's Sanshin traditions in general retaining such remarkable strength, the contemporary value of these sacred ceremonies, performed by a variety of religious and spiritual groups, cannot be overestimated. They continue the aspects of this region's cultural identity, and also offer fresh opportunities for attraction of tourism from international and domestic sectors, and the building of Naepo's brand value and distinctive identity.

For more information on and photos on this subject, refer to Prof. Mason's book "Spirit of the Mountains" (Hollym, 1999), or go to <http://www.san-shin.org> on the Internet.

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