

The Philosophy of Equality in Age Groups: *Gapjang* of Jeju Island

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(In lieu of an abstract) This article aims to understand the cultural meaning of the *gapjang* age groups of Jeju Island. A *gapjang* relationship is a relationship between people of the same age, but it carries a significance beyond the merely biological fact of common age. *Gapjang* is understood also as a social relationship based on the shared factors of having been born in the same village and sharing experiences while growing up. The *gapjang* relationship in Jeju is an intimate friendship based on regionalism; that is, being born and growing up in the same village. The philosophy of equality is a distinctive feature of *gapjang* relationships and *gapjang-gye*, *gapjang*-based rotating savings and credit associations. *Gapjang* do not recognize differences in economic and social standing among themselves. Any breach of the principle of equality among *gapjang* can spur conflict. This kind of interpersonal relationship can be found broadly in Jeju culture. In short, the philosophy of equality apparent in *gapjang* relationships is a general principle of Jeju culture.

1. Introduction

Though age groups are an important means to understanding social structures, they have not been given much attention in Jeju studies thus far.¹ I believe this dearth of attention to age groups is due to a lack of

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¹ (Editor's note) Jeju is the largest island in South Korea, located to the south from the mainland. Incorporated by the Korean peninsula's Goryeo Dynasty in 12th century, the

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insider perspectives in Jeju studies. The existing literature that attempts to understand the social structure of Korean society has primarily focused on kinship groups or voluntary associations, and as a result of such perspectives being used in the study of Jeju Island, there is a relative wealth of research on kinship and *gye* (rotating savings and credit association); yet the important Jeju cultural element of age groups has been overlooked.

The subject of age groups was one that structural functionalist anthropologists focused on in their studies of Africa. Though they focused on kinship groups as the basis of social structure, they also recognized age groups, along with kinship groups, as a crucial cultural factor that made up the social structure (Eisenstadt 1956). These researchers saw that a society was made up of a number of age-sets, and society was maintained through each individual age-set managing a role necessary to their society as a whole. Since age-sets are established on the basis of initiation rites, those who go through these rites of passage together form a single age-set; depending on how often initiation rites are held, people of different biological ages might belong to the same age-set. That is, while age-sets are roughly determined by the biological factor of age, in the process of forming them, initiation rites as well as cultural rules regarding the cycle of initiation rites, among other things, are also influential.

The structural functionalist anthropologists focused on hierarchy between age-sets. That is, seeing that the younger age-sets generally took charge of the roles related to production activities and war, and the older age-sets were in charge of the functions of politics and religion, they recognized the functions as being differentiated and the social system being maintained in such a manner. This understanding seems to stem from the structural functionalists' emphasis on structural consistency. Because they held a belief that order should be erased from society and systematization should take place, they stressed the distribution of roles and the hierarchy between the age-sets and, based on this, explained the social structure as harmonious and balanced.

An emphasis on structure causes us to overlook meaning. Age groups do not only have a function of structuring society but also afford meaning to members of society. What kind of meaning do members of society give and take with one another through age groups? In addition, uncovering

island maintained a culture distinct from the mainland and often housed political exiles.

how age groups are utilized in a political context is a very important factor for understanding age groups.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the cultural significance of a type of age group found in Jeju Island: *gapjang*. Meaning “born in the same year,” *gapjang* refers to people who are of the same age. But this term has a very particular meaning for the people of Jeju. That is, in Jeju, not all those who are the same age are *gapjang*. One important thing to understand about *gapjang* is that if a man and woman are the same age, they do not call each other *gapjang*. In addition, even if a person who has recently relocated into your village is the same age as you, or a person you meet for the first time is the same age as you, in neither case would you refer to them as your *gapjang*. The designation of *gapjang* is not made solely on the biological factor of age; sociocultural factors are considered as well. In general, the people of Jeju feel a special sense of closeness for their *gapjang* and recognize their relationship as a close friendship in which they must help one another. In addition, when met with confrontation in the everyday life of a village or in a political context, they believe that one must always stand on the side of their *gapjang*.

Beyond the meaning of being the same age, *gapjang* carries the meaning of an especially close friendship. We can define friendship as an interpersonal relationship based on voluntary emotion or fondness (Carrier 1999: 21). Anthropologists and sociologists have traditionally recognized friendship as an acquired and learned relationship, distinct from the innate and *a priori* kinship bond (Bell and Coleman 1999: 6). In addition, these two forms of relationship are different: while hierarchical relationships based on age or generation are present in kinship, friendships are grounded in lateral relationships. However, in the case of a village made up of a single descent group, it may be difficult to differentiate between kinship and friendship relations. In these types of villages, close friendships and kinship relationships can overlap, and it may be difficult to distinguish whether the roles taken on by two people are a factor of their kinship or their friendship. That is to say, social relationships can be redefined by social categories.

We can understand *gapjang* in this context as well. As I mentioned above, the *gapjang* relationship is a friendship, but it is not just an acquired relationship. A *gapjang* relationship is a close connection based on being born in the same year. A *gapjang* relationship is precisely a friendship strongly mediated by the *a priori* condition of having been born in the same year. Therefore, the *gapjang* relationship is not something purely

voluntary in the way that friendships (such as those made through various voluntary associations, like *gye* between friends) are, and thus they also cannot be dissolved as easily. A *gapjang* relationship is a relationship simultaneously mediated by *a priori* and acquired elements.

Despite *gapjang* relationships being one of the core social relationships present in Jeju, and thus a vital cultural factor essential for understanding Jeju culture, there has been almost no scholarly interest in the concept. The origins of scholarly interest in *gapjang* relationships can be traced back to Harajiri (2011). Harajiri identified the *gapjang* relationship of Jeju Island as the very closest friendly relationship a person could belong to; one's *gapjang* are those who help out with funerals and other events, so Harajiri saw *gapjang* relationships as a core concept by which to understand communities in Jeju-do. He had a broad understanding of the concept of the *gapjang* relationship, identifying it as including those who graduated school at the same time. However, his interest in *gapjang* only went so far as to stress the importance of the concept and was thus limited; he never presented a detailed analysis of the social relations it was a part of or its place within systems of meaning.

It is not uncommon for a scholar researching a culture other than their own to overlook a crucial cultural element of the society that they are studying. Richard Lee was famously unable to detect that the San people (Bushmen) had a custom of making jokes about and poking fun at those with power until he bought an ox for their Christmas feast (Han Gyeonggu et al. 2006: 65–79). In his study of Jeju's kinship organization, Choe Jaeseok was similarly unable to grasp the central concept of Jeju kinship relations (*gwendang*²) despite his long observation period (Choe Jaeseok 1979; Jeon Gyeongsu 1983). I myself have spent 30 years (1988–2013) repeating long periods of participant observation and short visits for the purpose of research in a single village in Jeju Island, but I had no great scholarly interest in *gapjang* relationships. I was aware that the term *gapjang*

² This is a kinship term used in Jeju Island to signify all familial relations, including consanguine and affinal relations. While those connected by blood are referred to in Jeju as *bangsang*, *gwendang* is a concept that does not distinguish between relationships based on blood and those based on marriage. *Gwendang* can generally be divided into *seongpen gwendang* (paternal kin), *woepen gwendang* (maternal kin), and *cheo wendang* (wife's kin) (Kim Hyesuk 1999: 401). As he researched familial organization in Jeju, Choe comprehensively analyzed family, marriage, kinship groups, and more, but Jeon Gyeongsu pointed out that the term *gwendang* did not appear once in this research and criticized him for his lack of an insider's perspective.

was used in everyday life and participated in meetings of those in *gapjang* relationships, but I only understood it in its use as an everyday concept, not as a subject for academic examination. Harajiri's text on *gapjang* relationships was an invaluable catalyst for kindling my scholarly interest in the subject.

The data used in this study draws on the past 30 years of my field work. During this period, not only did I collect general ethnographic data on this village, but I also participated in the inauguration ceremonies of village foremen, various other events in the village, regional elections, and individuals' celebratory or condolatory events (weddings and funerals, for example). My reinterpretation of the data I collected during these years of observation, from the perspective of *gapjang* relationships, forms the basis for this article. In particular, a *gapjang-gye* of those born in 1955 was an important subject of observation. Because one of my key informants, whom I heavily relied on during my fieldwork, was born in 1955, I was able to most frequently participate in the activities of his *gapjang-gye* of men born in 1955.

This article primarily aims to analyze what kind of significance the Jeju *gapjang* relationship holds for residents of Jeju Island as well as what kinds of actions are expected from one's *gapjang*. Additionally, I intend to analyze the principle by which *gapjang* relationships operate. On the basis of such analyses, I hope to shed some light on the primary principles that make up the foundation of social relationships in Jeju society.

2. Cultural Significance of *gapjang*

A synonym of *donggap*, *gapjang* refers to the year of birth within the sexagenary cycle (*gap*) being the same.³ As the sexagenary cycle is based on the lunar calendar, *gapjang* are also generally decided by the standard of the lunar calendar. Though *gapjang* means people of the same age, it does not simply refer to a common biological age. Because *gapjang* are born in the same year, they experience a very similar process of maturation. *Gapjang* begin school in the same year and, save for special exceptions, they will all

³ (Translator's note) The term *gapjang* can refer to the relationship between two people born in the same year and be used to designate people who are in a *gapjang* relationship. For example, when two or more people are in a *gapjang* relationship, they will refer to one another as their *gapjang*.

advance to higher levels of education in the same year as well. They attend their military service within the same era, and they generally marry and start families of their own within similar timeframes as well. Therefore, *gapjang* traverse life courses that are very similar to one another; as such, they have the characteristics of a cohort.

On the one hand, *gapjang* relationships have a deep connection with the village community overall. That is, those born in the same year, in the same village, and who have grown up together are *gapjang* in the truest sense. This signifies that a sense of regionalism is imbedded in the concept of *gapjang*. Of course, one can refer to someone from another village who is the same age as oneself as *gapjang*, but this is only in the simplest sense of being born in the same year and does not signify the especially close friendship imbued with regionalism. On the other hand, *gapjang* from the same village have an especially close friendship that surpasses simply sharing a biological age. This close relationship is maintained regardless of where those who are a part of it currently reside. *Gapjang* who grew up together in the same village, through the end of high school, but afterwards move to another region are still recognized as being a part of the *gapjang* relationship. For such people, there is an obligation to take part in their fellow *gapjang*'s celebratory and condolatory life events (i.e. weddings and funerals), and if a *gapjang-gye* is organized, they are recognized as being qualified to join as a member. Generally speaking, however, the relationship of *gapjang* is not regarded as encompassing those who move into a village after becoming an adult. Though their biological age may be the same, they are not afforded the same status of *gapjang* in terms of its definition as a social role. In this sense, the sociality of having developed an especially close friendship by growing up together in the same village is a more decisive factor in establishing the *gapjang* relationship than being born in the same year.

In this context, the concept of *gapjang* is meaningful only to men, and its significance to women is rather slight.⁴ For the majority of men of the

⁴ The term *gapjang* is, at times, used among divers. In order to dive into the ocean and harvest seafood, they must be friends (*beot*) (An Mijeong 2010: 137), and a strong social bond exists between divers. This is due both to the fact that they must work together and that they share an identity as divers. The fact that divers, who share a strong social bond, use the designation *gapjang* with one another, despite not being from the same village, further demonstrates that the term does not refer to biological relationship but a close friendship.

same age, the village that they live in currently is the one they grew up together in, from the time they were children. Many women, however, move into a new village following marriage and thus lack the element of having grown up together. Therefore, even when women are the same age, they cannot form a *gapjang* relationship. Rather, women tend to form close friendships with the wives of those men who are *gapjang* with their husbands. Where men have *gapjang* relationships, their wives strike up close friendships as well. In this sense, *gapjang* has a culturally masculine nature to it.

Beyond simple relationships, *gapjang* relationships can develop into organizations as well. Generally, once the number of *gapjang* exceeds a certain number or there are many *gapjang* living in different regions, a *gapjang-gye* will be organized. If there are numerous *gapjang*, there will occasionally be people who miss meetings, and in some cases the sense of mutual obligation to their fellow *gapjang* will be neglected as well. If this occurs, grievances on each side can begin to pile up, and the close relationships can become damaged. In order to prevent these problems before they occur, once the number of *gapjang* grows, a *gapjang-gye* will be organized, thus institutionalizing the relationship of mutual obligation between *gapjang*.⁵ A *gapjang-gye* will also be organized if the number of *gapjang* living outside of the village increases as they grow older. In these types of cases, they hold regular meetings to have the chance to see each other. Since news of life events is better communicated in person, encouragement for participation in events such as funerals and weddings is also given at meetings.

Just as age groups function as a part of the formal social organization in Africa, *gapjang-gye* play a fixed role within the official sphere of villages in Jeju Island as well. The most representative example of this is that *gapjang-gye* are crucially considered in the process of electing foremen for the village. When a foreman is elected in the village, a candidate's personal qualifications are the chief subject of consideration, but the capabilities of

⁵ Shin Haengcheol (2004: 170) conducted a study of the social organizations present within 8 villages. This study revealed that *gapjang* organizations were present in 7 of these villages, showing that *gapjang* organizations or *gapjang-gye* are a ubiquitous form of social organization in Jeju society. However, since there can be numerous *gapjang-gye* made up of different age groups within a village, one could argue that they are more important than other forms of social rotating savings and credit associations.

their *gapjang* are also subject to consideration.⁶ This is because there is an understanding that the village foreman does not conduct village duties solely through his own qualifications and skills, instead, he must work with assistance from his *gapjang*. That is to say, if a person is elected to the position of village foreman, this person's *gapjang* believe that they must help the foreman to the best of their ability. People of the village expect this cooperation from the foreman's *gapjang*. Moreover, if a fellow *gapjang* is elected as the foreman of the village, the rest of the *gapjang* hold a celebratory party for him and pledge to actively assist the foreman. On the occasions of inauguration/farewell ceremonies for a village foreman, the foreman's *gapjang* will prepare food, greet guests from the village and beyond, and open the village's *dogap*⁷ (box) to complete the documents related to transfer of power. Because the president of the neighborhood association and the committee members for village development, among other positions, are appointed by the newly inaugurated village foreman, there are no formal organizations to assist the foreman at the time of inauguration. In this situation, the foreman's *gapjang* lend a hand.

In this sense, *gapjang-gye* are informal organizations and private groups, but at the same time they are involved in official village matters. When there is important business in the village, such as an expensive public construction project, the *gapjang-gye* plays a fixed role. For these types of situations, residents of the village will contribute voluntarily and members of the *gapjang-gye* will contribute the *gapjang-gye* funds to the project; or, in other cases, each member of the *gye* will contribute the same amount and donate it in the name of the *gapjang-gye*. If they do this, they end up giving the impression that the resolve of their *gapjang-gye* is strong and gain the reputation that is it a *gapjang-gye* suitable for the position of village foreman.

There are numerous *gapjang-gye* in any given village, but it is difficult to find any fixed social relationships between these different groups. In

⁶ In addition to individual qualifications and the capabilities of one's *gapjang*, the skills of one's *bangsang* or *kwendang* are also considered during elections for village foremen. Thus, what *bangsang* you belong to as well as who you have *kwendang* relations with are important factors when selecting a foreman. For more on the process of electing village foremen in Jeju, see Kim Changmin (2002).

⁷ A *dogap* is a box made from wood, in which the village's official documents, tracing all the way back to the Joseon Dynasty, are stored. There are many villages in Jeju that still maintain this type of box.

short, each *gapjang-gye* exists independently, and there is no hierarchy or particular relational bonds between different *gapjang-gyes*. There is nothing comparable to the age groups of Africa, in which distinctions can be found between the social roles of elder and younger age groups, and the system of age groups does not function as the core of social organization. That is, *gapjang-gye* are not hierarchical but rather have an equal and lateral relationship with one another.

Generally speaking, the age differences that exist between individual members of a village in Jeju Island have great social significance. Age differences form the junior-senior (*seon-hubae*) relationships in school and form the older brother-younger brother (*byeong-dongsaeng*) relationships within the village as well. Additionally, even if they are of different ages, if there are *gapjang* relationships between your family members, you will recognize your young sibling's *gapjang* as a younger sibling and your uncle's *gapjang* like your own uncle. In this context, *gapjang* relationships can carry over into familial relationships, forming wider social relationships.

It is true that age differences have an important function as social parameters within a village, but at the same time, the phrase “young and old enjoying together” (*nosodongnak*) is also used often. Particularly in instances where there is entertainment or gambling, this phrase is used. This is because if age differences take on significance during entertainment or gambling, the situation of such entertainment or gambling itself cannot be established in the first place. When a game of *neokdongbaegi*⁸ is set up or people gather to drink alcohol, under the principle of “young and old enjoying together,” the people of the village will come together and participate in the event without regard for differences in age.

The principle of “young and old enjoying together” recognizes differences in age but rejects the hierarchy that is associated with it. This principle applies to *gapjang-gye* in that they do not recognize a hierarchy between *gapjang-gye* belonging to groups of different ages. Each individual *gapjang-gye* exists independently, not within a social hierarchy among the other *gapjang-gye*.

⁸ *Neokdongbaegi* is a term for the game of *yunnori*, on which money is bet. For more on *neokdongbaegi*, see Kim Changmin (1993).

3. Obligations between *gapjang*

As a relationship between people born in the same year, in the same village, the *gapjang* relationship has social significance as an especially close friendship. There are a variety of cultural apparatuses by which this especially close friendship is validated and reinforced. Foremost of these is the fact that *gapjang* call one another “*gapjang*.” Whereas those who are merely amiable with one another would call each other by their first names when they were young, and after getting married and starting a family use teknonymy in the form of “[child’s name]’s dad,” *gapjang* instead use the appellation *gapjang* with one another. This appellation not only confirms to other people in the village that those who use the term have a *gapjang* relationship with one another but also denotes that there is a mutual expectation of the role of *gapjang* between those who use it. When one asks for help with something difficult by saying, “*gapjang*, I need your help with this,” the listening party will understand that this is a request that is difficult to refuse. In instances where someone announces that they are running for any type of elected position, if they ask, “*gapjang*, please help me out,” the *gapjang* who has been called on to help understands that they must help. The appellation of *gapjang* is a means for reinforcing the relationship between two people, and at the same time, it is a method by which they can confirm the relationship of obligations that they have to each other.

Because *gapjang* connections are recognized as a special relationship within a village (Harajiri 2011: 398), there is a sense of obligation between *gapjang* to actively assist with important occasions, taking care of them like they were one’s own events. The most representative occasions at which *gapjang* are expected to assist are weddings and funerals. When one *gapjang* is to be married, his other *gapjang* will discuss how to help out with the wedding. From among the groom’s *gapjang*, one will be chosen to fill the role of vice groom (*busillang*). With the vice groom at the center of planning and assisting, the other *gapjang* will greet guests, set up a game of *neokdongbaegi* on the day of the wedding rehearsal dinner (*gamunjanchi*)⁹ and

⁹ *Gamunjanchi* refers to an event held on the night prior to the wedding ceremony. Close friends and wedding guests will visit the bride and groom’s home, where the wedding host (*honju*, generally the father of the groom or bride) will serve food. For more on the status *gamunjanchi* holds in marital rites in Jeju as well as its process, see Kim Hyesuk (1999: 188–213).

create and maintain an atmosphere befitting of a feast. They also go with the groom to the bride's home and accept the groom's meal (*sillangsang*) on the day of the wedding and take scenic drives with friends of the bride following the wedding.

Vice grooms and vice brides are selected for weddings in Jeju. Though this custom is not a longstanding tradition but something that first appeared following modernization, it continues to be practiced up to recent times. In the stead of the soon-to-be-wed bride and groom, the vice groom and vice bride are people who will greet guests at the wedding ceremony or take charge of administering the budget. *Gapjang* of the groom will take charge of necessary work for the wedding at the request and advice of the vice groom.

In Jeju Island, a wedding rehearsal dinner is held a day before the wedding ceremony. Only a limited few, usually family and *gapjang*, will participate in the wedding ceremony itself, and the majority of guests (*bagaek*) will participate in the rehearsal dinner, helping out and celebrating. When one holds a rehearsal dinner, one must have a form of entertainment that can be enjoyed by guests, and the typical form this takes is *neokdongbaegi*. But because the competition can become heated, and a lot of money can be put on the line, one should be somewhat cautious when becoming a participant. This is because if a player makes a mistake, everyone who had placed their bets on him will lose money. When people are passive or hesitant to play for such reasons, the *gapjang* of the groom will offer to become players and ease the mood. In addition, they will ensure that a game can be played by placing bets on participants who may be lacking in skills.

On the morning of the wedding ceremony, the groom, along with the elder relatives as guests of honor (*sanggaek*) and the *gapjang* as *usi*,¹⁰ visits the home of the bride. There, a splendid spread of food, called the *sillangsang* (groom's meal), is served for all guests.¹¹ Along with the groom,

¹⁰ *Usi* are those who accompany the groom or bride when they visit their in-law's home on the day of the wedding. Though depending on the region, the guests of honor can also be referred to as *usi*. In Dalbat Village, representatives of relatives are called guests of honor, and friends are called *usi*. Guests of honor are selected as those who are well versed in etiquette among relatives, and *usi* is generally assumed by *gapjang*.

¹¹ This refers to a spread of food that is presented to the groom at the bride's home on the morning of the wedding ceremony. For this spread, the groom's friends will accompany him and partake in the meal. Because the groom's meal is considered an

the guests of honor and *usi* will partake in the *sillangsang* as breakfast. Once breakfast is finished, the groom takes the bride to the site of the wedding. The bride's friends present small gifts to the *gapjang* of the groom, and they exchange greetings. Once the wedding ceremony has finished, the bride and groom, along with the groom's *gapjang* and the bride's friends, take a drive to a nearby scenic spot and entertain themselves for a few hours. In this way, the *gapjang* of the groom take on a vital role throughout the entirety of the wedding process.

Gapjang also play an important role in funerals. Generally, the main role is assumed by the *bangsang*¹² (paternal family) or *gwendang* of the family in mourning, but because there are many things that need to be taken care of within the house of mourning, chief mourner *gapjang* actively assists with the affairs of the bereaved family. In the house of mourning, there is a distribution of roles between the residents of the village, the paternal family, and the *gapjang*. Foremost, the role of officiant, who presides over the entirety of the funeral rites, goes to the paternal family or the *gwendang*. Carrying the body to the burial site and making the grave are considered to be tasks for village residents. The role of the *gapjang* is to greet guests who visit the house of mourning and prevent the atmosphere from growing too melancholy. *Gapjang* assist during the funeral in many other important ways: they unfurl a straw mat on the lawn of the house of mourning and start a game of *neokdongbaegi*; they greet and bring food and drinks to the villagers who are spending time in the yard; and they even help prepare food when necessary. They stay at the house of mourning throughout the entirety of the funeral period, helping out with anything that is needed. If the chief mourners need something during the funeral period, they can always find a *gapjang* and ask for help, and the *gapjang* who is asked to help does his best to be of assistance.

In instances where the deceased does not have many paternal relatives, a villager or *gapjang* could take on the role of the officiant as well. In these instances, they are called the neighborhood officiant or *gapjang* officiant. Everyone in the village believes that they should help the bereaved family,

opportunity to display the culinary prowess of the bride and her family, it is typical that relatives or those from the village who are known for cooking well will gather and cook for this event.

¹² A contraction of *ilgabangsang* (close and distant relatives), this term is used in Jeju to mean one's paternal family.

but this sense of obligation is particularly strong for *gapjang*.

As part of their close relationship, *gapjang* also share material interests. When many people gather, such as at a wedding or a funeral, small-scale gambling occurs, such as with games of *neokdongbaegi* or go-stop (*hwatu*). In these circumstances, *gapjang* will always take the same side as one another and believe that if they are going to lose money, they shall lose it together—and if they are going to win money, they shall win it together. In the case of *neokdongbaegi*, they will start small, with bets of around 10,000 won each; but as the games go on, both the number of people placing bets and the size of the bets placed tend to increase, making it a big pot to win or lose. Because the fate of those betting is decided by the outcomes of the players, betting on a player means having a shared economic stake with the player. In this process, not only do economic stakes play a part but social relationships are also actively considered. That is, those who bet do not place their money solely with regards to their predictions about who will win and who will lose; instead, they place bets according to established cultural rules. Generally speaking, there is a tacit rule that you bet on the side of those with whom you have deeper ties, such as *gwendang* or kinship. In the game of *neokdongbaegi*, *gapjang* are an important party to betting. That is, if a *gapjang* plays *neokdongbaegi*, those who share a *gapjang* relationship with him must place their money on him, and betting money on the rival player is criticized as being a misdeed. Therefore, when playing *neokdongbaegi*, the phrase, “If my *gapjang* loses, I lose,” is often said. Similarly, when gambling in the form of go-stop takes place at a wedding, funeral, or other event, when the pot is small, one can play with whomever; but sometimes, when the pot grows larger, the groom or the chief mourner *gapjang* will play on their own. This is because when money is gained or lost among *gapjang*, the emotional burden is diminished because it is possible to return money when large sums are lost.

Meanwhile, the relationship between *gapjang* is perceived as equal. *Gapjang* relationships are social relationships bonded through the conditions of being the same age and having been raised in the same village. The most important characteristic of this social relationship is that the connection between members is lateral. Because a *gapjang* relationship is a close relationship, differences in class, such as those defined by economics or education, are not recognized. That is, all *gapjang* perceive that they are in a lateral and equal relationship with one another.

Traditionally in Jeju villages, when there is an expense that needs to be

shouldered by the village members, such as for village development, the expenses are shouldered in a graduated manner based on economic disparity (Kim Changmin 2003: 208). In other words, for public improvement projects, such as constructing electric infrastructure, storage facilities, or village halls, residents shoulder these shared expenses based on their individual ability to do so, and this graduated contribution is understood as a cultural principle. However, because *gapjang* who belong to a *gapjang-gye* recognize their relationship as equal, all public expenses and obligations are shared equally.

Evidence of the lateral nature of *gapjang* relationships can be found in their activities as well. While *gapjang* certainly pay *gye* membership dues equally, they also arrange their *gapjang* meetings on a rotational basis. In addition, the president of a *gapjang-gye* is not chosen because of his individual skills or capacity; instead, each member assumes the role of president on a rotational basis. The principle of equality applies to both the relationship between *gapjang* and the management of the *gapjang-gye*.

In addition, when residents of a village must raise funds to cover the costs of village business, *gapjang* will, when possible, try to contribute the same amount as one another. In particular, when they contribute in the name of their *gapjang-gye*, all members of the *gye* will contribute an equal amount, pooling their contributions for donation. If there is a *gapjang* who holds a particular position in the village, such as village foreman or chairperson of the development committee, and thus must make an especially large contribution, rather than a pooled contribution in the name of the *gapjang-gye*, each individual member of the *gye* will make an individual contribution. In this instance, typically the *gapjang* who holds the position will make a slightly larger contribution, whereas the rest of the *gapjang* will make contributions equal to one another. That is, when a person works in an individual *capacity* for the village, there can be disparities between individual contributions, but when work is done in the name of *gapjang*, there is a belief that there should be no difference between individuals' contributions.

However, this philosophy of equality can become the source of disputes and conflicts between *gapjang* as well. That is to say, the majority of conflicts between *gapjang* arise when the philosophy of equality falls apart. For example, conflicts or disputes occur when individuals believe they are equal but are not recognized as being so. There are differences between *gapjang*, but there is a cultural rule dictating that they must speak and act

as though these differences do not exist. All *gapjang* perceive that they are part of an equitable relationship in terms of social status and economics. That is to say, a principle of equality is in play between *gapjang*.¹³

Jeju's *gapjang* is similar to the *doshi* or *hobei* of Iki Island in northern Kyushu and the *dushi* of Okinawa (Harajiri 2011: 403). The *doshi* or *hobei* of Iki Island refers to people of the same age, but that definition has been expanded to mean a close friend, in a manner similar to the *gapjang* of Jeju. In Okinawa, *dushi* means "very close friends" of a similar age-set. That is, the condition of *dushi* having to be the same age has tempered, while the meaning of a close relationship has grown stronger. It is also not a relationship that is limited to regional communities. *Gapjang*, *doshi*, *hobei*, and *dushi* are all social relationships based on age and are characterized by their lateral and equal relationships.

The emphasis on equality and reciprocal obligations between *gapjang* demonstrates that *gapjang* are in relationships of close friendship. And among the many forms of close relationships, *gapjang* have especially close bonds. Therefore, it is a relationship where one can make any request and, in turn, must entertain any request made. In short, there is a fixed sense of reciprocal obligation between them.

4. Creating a Debt of Requests

The philosophy of equality that exists between *gapjang* is apparent in the reciprocal nature of the sense of obligation between them. Help is reciprocally given and accepted between *gapjang*. This is because of an expectation that my *gapjang* will always be available to help me if I help them. However, this reciprocal sense of obligation is not something that occurs naturally. Rather, this philosophy of equality and reciprocal sense of obligation is created by the cultural principle of creating a "debt of requests."

Creating a debt of requests means that one does not automatically help another when they need help but only after a request for help is made. Simply put, by making your counterpart request many things of you, you

¹³ Studies of the maritime culture of the South Pacific Islands have shown that equality is an important element of their culture (Vayda and Rappaport 1970: 9). Jeon Gyeongsu (2010: 179) asserted that Jeju folklore is steeped in a sense of equality, so communities in Jeju are grounded in ideologies of equality.

are building a debt of requests on his part. When looked at from the principle of reciprocity, building a debt of requests on the part of my *gapjang* by helping them means that I can then make a request of them when necessary; and just as I responded to the request of my *gapjang*, they will surely respond to mine. Thus, in order to ensure that my counterpart cannot refuse my request, I must make sure that my counterpart makes a request of me when they need help.

Creating a debt of requests is not a unilateral concept but a mutual one. Said differently, one has to build up a debt of requests owed to your counterpart, but your counterpart must also accumulate a debt of requests owed to you. The greater the scale of the debt of requests in your relationship, the more intimate the relationship grows and the more it solidifies into one where one cannot refuse to help the other when they are facing some form of difficulty. Making many requests of your counterpart conversely means that when the counterpart makes a request of you, you will not refuse it. Therefore, making a request of someone is not something to feel apologetic for or embarrassed about; instead, it is an act illustrating the intimacy of your shared relationship.

This principle is not something that is operational only between *gapjang*; it is something that appears broadly throughout the daily lives of Jeju people. Jeju is considered a *gwendang* society, meaning that its residents resolve all their issues through the practice of making requests of acquaintances. The following examples illustrate how this cultural principle operates. When making a reservation at a restaurant, instead of directly placing the reservation yourself, you ask someone who is close to the restaurant owner to do it on your behalf. When you must have official forms issued by an administrative body, rather than making an appointment with a civil servant, you ask someone from your village—whether they are your senior or junior, a *gwendang*, or a *gapjang*—who works at the administrative office to take care of it for you. Even when you have to go to a hospital, you book an appointment through an acquaintance who knows someone at the hospital. Despite these requests all being issues you can solve on your own, it is regarded as advantageous to resolve them by asking someone else to help you. This practice has been understood in oversimplified terms as irrationality or premodernity.

However, this practice should not be understood in such reductive terms as irrationality and premodernity but as a strategy of reinforcing relationships by becoming indebted with a debt of requests. The debt of

requests is not something only shouldered by others but something that a person indebts himself with as well. By indebting yourself to those you are close to, including your *gapjang*, it is no different than making a promise to unconditionally accept any requests they may make of you in the future.

The debt of requests is observable in the norm of absolutely having to first make a request for help when you need the help of another. The people of Jeju make unnecessary requests of others and are themselves requested to do things as well. When a request is made of you from another party, you readily accept this request; in fact, in instances where you feel that someone should rightly ask you for help but does not, you will actually feel hurt. When a *gapjang* is elected as foreman of the village, their *gapjang* will help the foreman and help prepare the inauguration/farewell ceremonies, but in these instances as well, the foreman is expected to call each individual *gapjang* and ask for help. If a *gapjang* is not directly asked for help by the foreman, they will believe that they were ignored by the foreman and feel hurt.

The most typical situation in which one must make a request to their *gapjang* or close friends is an election campaign. After the establishment of the autonomous governing system, elections became very frequent and important social events in Jeju. Beyond National Assembly member elections and gubernatorial elections, more local elections, such as for union representative for the National Agriculture Cooperative Federation, make up an important social arena. During elections, canvassers and campaigners are sent to each village, and these campaigners do their campaign work by asking for the support of those they know.

Something to pay particular attention to in Jeju's elections is that all voters are expecting that either a candidate or a canvasser will, in one manner or another, directly ask them for their support. Even if someone supports a candidate in theory, unless the candidate asks explicitly for their support, they will be disappointed and develop negative feelings towards the candidate. In some cases, if a person is not contacted by the candidate that they support, they will openly tell others that they are abstaining from the election, thus making the candidate anxious. Because of this, candidates and canvassers working on candidates' behalfs must seek out, greet, and ask for support even from those they are certain will support them.

The same goes for helping with elections. If a person from the village, a *gwendang*, or a *gapjang* is a candidate for any elected position, the rest of their relations all think that they must actively help the candidate.

However, those who help are, in actuality, limited to those specifically asked by the candidate to help. When a candidate makes a request of someone and that person accepts the request, the candidate perceives themselves as being indebted with a debt of requests. This debt of requests becomes a tool that ensures that when this person makes a request of the candidate at some point in the future, the candidate will not be able to refuse help. Thus, for candidates, elections are a process of growing one's debt of requests to others and, conversely, once a candidate is elected to their position and thus gains authority, they have a sense of obligation to not refuse the requests of others.

This debt of requests can ultimately also be called the reciprocity of requests. The people of Jeju-do believe that the help of others is unavoidable when it comes to their social lives. That is, in order to resolve your problems, you must receive help from others, and in this instance, you must inevitably make a request for help from them. In order to make this request, you must acquiesce to a request they make of you, meaning that they must owe a debt of requests to you. Put simply, you must make it so that when you make requests of others, they are unable to refuse them, and you do this by creating as many chances for others to make requests of you as possible. This relationship can be considered as operating on the basis of a reciprocity of requests. The expectation on the part of voters to be asked for their vote by a candidate illustrates this accumulation of the debt of requests, and this is regarded as an important form of social capital.

5. Conclusion

The culture of Jeju has long been discussed in terms of its distinctiveness or universality in comparison to Korean culture. The perspective that espouses Jeju's distinctiveness has discussed how so-called "Korean things," which are decided on the standards of the mainland, are different from the culture in Jeju. Yet those who argue for universality tend to see Jeju culture as the "primitive form" of Korean culture (Noriko 2013: 77). This is not unrelated to how the ideology of central government, under which Jeju Island was politically subjugated by the mainland authorities, has been regarded on the island. Because Jeju culture has been understood as different from Korean culture—either distinctive in comparison to Korean culture or its primitive form—it would not be an exaggeration to state that

it has always been viewed from the perspective of mainland Korea. This ultimately signifies that research on Jeju up to this point has been completed from an internal colonial perspective. As a result, Jeju culture has been analyzed and understood by the standards of culture on the peninsula. How any given significant cultural element belonging to the mainland is materialized in Jeju, as well as how these two are either different or similar, has been an important subject for research. Owing to this, if important cultural elements of Jeju are not regarded as similarly important on the mainland, they are not likely to even be considered as a subject for academic scrutiny or research. The concept of *gwendang*, which only recently became a subject of scholarly interest, is evidence of this tendency, and the concept of *gapjang* discussed in this article is as well.

The internal colonialist viewpoint has engendered a recognition of Jeju culture as either mainland culture or as an imitation of mainland culture. In mainland culture, ownership of land, hierarchical social relations, and the use of exclusionary rights, among other things, are important. In contrast, for the people of Jeju, labor, lateral interpersonal relations, and the use of equal rights are considered more important. As a result of viewing Jeju culture as an imitation of mainland culture, there has been a tendency to focus on the inheritance of land rather than methods of labor mobilization, hierarchical social relations rather than horizontal relations, and the practice of exclusionary use of rights. I anticipate that when Jeju culture is looked at from the perspective of an insider, new implications of Jeju culture will be come to light.

This article was an attempt to investigate Jeju culture from a perspective internal to Jeju, with a focus on analyzing *gapjang* relationships. The *gapjang* culture of Jeju does not refer to a relationship merely based on the biological factor of being the same age. Rather, as people who were born in the same village in the same year and have experienced a similar journey of maturation, there is a special interpersonal relationship inherent in the space between the *gapjang* of Jeju. That is, although they are close friendships (acquired relationships), *gapjang* are also relationships mediated by the innate element of having been born in the same village, in the same year. Between *gapjang* there is a sense of obligation to reciprocally cooperate with and help one another. There is a uniqueness to the relationship between *gapjang* that cannot be replaced by *gwendang* relationships or other social relationships.

The relationship between *gapjang* can also become organized through a

gapjang-gye. A *gapjang-gye* functions as a tool to institutionalize the mutual obligations and cooperative relationships that exist between *gapjang*, and it is grounded in community bonds and the principle of equality. Though *gapjang-gye* are systematized close relationships between individuals, occasionally they will also participate in official duties of the village. *Gapjang-gye* form out of private relationships, but by having an effect on the official and public realm, they can be understood as an aspect of social structure.

The horizontal interpersonal relationships that appear between *gapjang* are grounded in the creation of a debt of requests. The recognition of having to help one's fellow *gapjang* is based on a principle of actions that dictates one must make requests of others and acquiesce to requests made by others. This does not describe someone with low social or economic capital making unilateral requests of others; instead, through the reciprocity of requests between one another, the relationship between *gapjang* becomes a horizontal one. And this creation of a debt of requests functions as a general cultural principle common throughout Jeju society.

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