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**Jirisan : Sacred Aspects and Assets**

**DAVID A. MASON**

**Introduction**

Korea’s folk-shamanist shrines and Buddhist temples, and the practices and artworks they house, are very interesting to foreign tourists, especially Westerners, but they are as yet vastly under-utilized as draws for Korea’s inbound cultural tourism. South Korea has an ancient tradition of considering some of its mountains to be especially sacred or holy, inhabited by powerful San-shin [Mountain-spirits], which are depicted in strikingly original and colorful icons in characteristic shrines. It also has many Buddhist monasteries whose presence, architecture and practices add to the sacred character of the mountains that host them. If the character and meaning of these places is properly explained, they can be very attractive to foreign tourists. The culture of these “holy mountain” shrines and temples is ancient but yet still quite contemporary, still evolving and growing in a fascinating way.

Jiri-san or the Exquisite-Wisdom Mountains is the Republic of Korea’s oldest and largest National Park. It is a great treasure-house, holding a vast cultural wealth which is so far virtually un-utilized as an inbound international tourism attraction. There can be no doubt that it is one of the most sacred mountains in all of Korea. However, the fact of its being regarded as sacred since ancient times, and its contemporary religious assets, such as temples and shrines, are not very well-known, particularly outside of Korea itself; information about them in English has been scarce.

China and Japan both have well-known “sacred mountains” (such as Tai-shan and Fuji-san) that are featured in their international tourism- promotions. Korea has quite a few “sacred mountains” yet under-utilizes their reputations and aspects for this purpose. I believe that increasingly doing so would be of widespread benefit to both Korea’s national reputation and its tourism industry. Therefore, in this paper I want to [page 90] discuss the aspects and factors of Jiri-san which make it one of Korea’s most sacred mountains, and provide details on its physical religious assets, especially its many Buddhist temples and mountain-spirit-oriented folk- shamanism shrines. They have been found by this author to be of unique variety and vivid, colorful interest.

Even within South Korea itself, and in the international publications concerning it, the topic of sacred mountains has received little attention in either popular or scholarly publications. I have extensively searched for books or papers in the English language written by academic scholars (both Korean and non-Korean) on this subject, but have not found any at all. There are a few written in Korean or Japanese, but I could not find any that offered useful detailed listings. Nothing can even be found on the Internet, beyond the few statements that I reference in this paper. In South Korea’s tourism-promotion literature, both national and local, including both printed materials and Internet webpages, there are only passing references to the sacred character and religious assets of the Jiri-san National Park and the areas close around it.

In both the cases of China and Japan, the idea that certain mountains are highly sacred, and designations of sets of nine or three most-sacred mountains, are extensively used for international tourism promotion in order to attract inbound tourists, particularly from Western nations. Sacred mountains of this kind are a unique type of attraction, offering combinations of beautiful natural scenery, adventurous and health-promoting hiking and profound cultural interest (at the temples and shrines on the slopes and peaks). Adding the cultural atmosphere and assets of such a place to its natural assets raises it far above any ordinary, beautiful mountain in its potential interest to sophisticated travelers, who may already have some interest in the Asian religions represented. A general survey of tourist-oriented brochures and websites available in English from these nations shows widespread use of these mountains and their sacred character as factors in drawing tourists, whether in the spirit of viewing exotica or of sincere pilgrimage.

The English tourist brochures and websites of South Korea, however, make very little mention of the sacred character of Korea’s many sacred mountains as reasons or enticements for foreign tourists to visit. In promoting visits to the great mountains, or to the nation in general, the[page 91] concept of sacred mountains with fascinating religious sites on them is generally absent. There is no mention at all of a systematic set of “Korea’s Most Sacred Mountains,” which might spark or heighten the curiosity or interest of international travelers. This is a good promotional opportunity that is simply being missed in Korean tourism.

**Criteria and terminology for the sacredness of Korean mountains.**

The factors that I have discovered in the course of my research that lead to Korean mountains being considered sacred can be divided into two categories: factors that are more physical and others that are more cultural. These are interrelated and cumulative; to be considered “highly sacred” a mountain must be seen to have at least several of them, having only one will not be considered sufficient. Every mountain in question has its own unique and characteristic set of and balance of these factors, which combine to establish and maintain it’s reputation.

1. Physical Factors:

a) unusually-high peak(s) or great size / outstanding prominence

b) significant geographical position

c) unusual, strange or outstanding topographical features

d) serving as the origin of a major river

e) being a member of the Baekdu-daegan Range or one of its major branches

f) serving or having served as the geographical “guardian” mountain of a city or region, perhaps with a military fortress on it

2. Cultural Factors:

a) the mountain’s name has a profound / auspicious religious meaning

b) people have had, and/or are said to have had spiritual experiences or visions, or attained enlightenment and wisdom, on that mountain

c) social heroes having been born, trained or educated there, gaining special powers

d) old folk or religious myths or legends being sited there, including myths of that mountain’s “spirit” appearing, manifesting or causing some phenomena

e) the mountain has served as the spiritual “guardian” mountain of a city, being thought to have powers to generate or ensure abundant fecundity, or[page 92] simply to protect against disaster

f) presence of one or more important Buddhist temples

g) presence of one or more major Shamanic shrines

h) presence of significant historical / archaeological remains

i) previous governments established shrines there for worship of its spirit

j) previous governments including it in a numeric-based system of sacred mountains

Contemporary Koreans themselves rarely refer to any such criteria when mentioning that a certain mountain is sacred; that it meets one or more of these criteria is usually only implied, and usually assumed to be generally known by everyone, not requiring detailed explanation. “Myeongsan” is the most common term used to designate a sacred mountains ― the Hanja character myeong employed here was apparently originally the one meaning “bright” with Shamanic-Daoist religious overtones, but is now its synonym meaning “famous”. Other Korean terms used in this way, although less commonly, are Yeongsan [spirit(ual) mountain], Shinseong-hansan [spirit-holy big-mountain] and Shinryeongsan [mountain with a (strong) spirit].

**Basic features of Jiri-san.**

Jiri-san is really a group of mountains long known under one name. It was designated as Korea’s first National Park at the end of December 1967 by President Park Chung-hee. It has three main peaks -Cheonhwang-bong (1915m), Banya-bong (1751m) and Nogo-dan (1507m) -and more than a dozen major subsidiary peaks over 1000 meters high along their main ridge, each with their own distinct religious character, often with specific associated myths.

There are six southern spurs respectively dominated by Chail- bong (1008m) / Wonsa-bong (579m), Hyeongjae-bong (912m), Wangshiri- bong (1243m), Hwangjang-bong (942m), Samshin-bong (1355m) / Shiri-bong (1200m) / Hyeonjae-bong (1115m) / Ju-san (832m) and Gugok-bong (961m); a northeastern spur comprising Ssukbat-Jae (1323m) / Wangdeung-jae (936m) / Wang-san (923m) / Eungseok-bong (1099); two northern spurs respectively led by Samjeong-bong(1225m) / Baekun-san (903m) / Sambong-san (1187m) / Beobhwa-san (990m), and[page 93] Nam-gori-bong (1305m) Manbok-dae (1433m) / Buk-gori-bong (1305m) / Barae-bong (1165m) / Deokdu-bong (1150m); and two western spurs respectively comprising Yeongjae-bong (878m) / Gyeondu-bong (775m) / Cheonma-san (656m) / Gitdae-bong (691m) and Ganmi-bong (728m) / Jichobong (601m). Most of these peaks listed here are within the National Park boundaries. They extend outside those boundaries into various districts of Gurye City of South Jeolla Province; Hadong County, Samcheong County and Hamyang County of South Gyeongsang Province; and Nam won City of North Jeolla Province.

Alpine springs of very high-quality water flow down into two dozen dramatic valleys and famous scenic gorges. Three great ancient Buddhist temples (all among the Republic of Korea’s 20 most important monasteries), more than two dozen other “traditional” (founded before the 20th Century) temples and hermitages, and several dozen more modern ones are found around the slopes, along with several significant Shamanic and/or Daoist shrines and well-known historical and/or folk-culture sites.

**Sacred aspects of Jiri-san.**

Jiri-san certainly meets all the physical criteria for a sacred Korean mountain. It is relatively gigantic, and dominates all the surrounding countryside. It divides into separate provinces the entire southern quarter of the Korean Peninsula, serving as both the military and spiritual “guardian” mountain of all the south-coast region between Jinju City and Gwangju City; there are several sites of former military fortresses on its slopes. Its topographical features are dramatic, and of a wide variety (as outlined in the previous section). It serves as the origin of the Seomjin-gang River, which flows to the south coast, and the Imcheon- gang River to the north. It holds a primary position in what we might call the “sacred geography of Korea” (according to Pungsu-jiriseol theories established long ago by National Master-Monk Doseon-guksa and others, still widely referenced and utilized today), serving as the southern end of the Baekdu-daegan earth-energy and water-source range.

The name of this set of mountains itself expresses its highly- sacred character; “Jiri” can be translated as “Exquisite Wisdom”, a Buddhist-based term meaning spiritual wisdom that is above垂the-ordinary, refined, precious and rare. The term “exquisite wisdom” is used in the[page 94] great Diamond and Lotus Sutras as the type of wisdom possessed and employed by Munsu-bosal [Manjusri (Skt), Wenshu (Ch) or Monju (Jp), the Bodhisattva of Wisdom] to enlighten each Buddha before he manifests into our world, and to potentially enlighten all beings in the universe. This massive mountain has long been associated with this key Buddhist deity, and several of the temples found here reflect that emphasis.

As a result, there is an old Korean saying that residing, studying and conducting spiritual practices for a while on the slopes of this mountain will transform foolish people and make them wise. There are a wide variety of historical records and legends claiming that many Koreans have in fact done so, including some of Korea’s greatest Buddhist masters: Uisang-daesa, Jin-gam-guksa, Doseon-guksa, Jinul Bojo-guksa and Seongcheol, and cultural saints such as Choi Chi-won.

Half of Korea’s eight high-altitude Buddhist temples are found in these mountains, and higher altitude has long been associated with sacredness in Korean culture, due to the strong function of mountains on mountain spirits in its spiritual traditions.

In most instances that can be found in contemporary writings, when Koreans list the three or five most sacred mountains of their nation, Jiri-san is always included as one of them. It has been the most sacred set of peaks in the southern quarter of the Korean peninsula since at least the 6th-Century Shilla Kingdom. The Shilla kings regarded Jiri as one of the outer “O-ak” or five great outer mountains protecting the kingdom, and built a shrine for its San-shin [mountain-spirit] at Cheonhwang-bong [Heavenly-King Peak, the highest, on the eastern end], holding rituals up there for the well-being of the nation and its citizens despite severe weather. There were both Buddhist-style and Daoist-flavored royally sponsored ceremonies honoring its spirit(s) and beseeching protection and fortune during the Goryeo Dynasty, at first at a shrine on Nogodan [Crone-Altar Peak, the third highest, on the western end], and later down on its lower slopes.

One of the most enduring and vivid demonstrations of Jiri-san’s sacred character is the continued holding of the Namak-je [Southern Peak Ceremony], successor to the official rituals described above. In the 1700s the Joseon Dynasty officially established a system of three holy peaks which would be semi-annually worshiped in the Neo-Confucian style, [page 95] under lavish royal patronage; Jiri-san was the southern one (Gyeryong-san was the central, and Myohyang-san was the northern). A large shrine was built at the western foot of the Nogo-dan slopes, in Dang-dong [Shrine Village] of what is now Jwasa-ri of Sandong-myeon District, at the western foot of Galmoi-bong Peak (now called Nam-gori-bong). It was moved to its current site just east of the entrance road to Hwaeom-sa Temple in 1737 by the Namwon Magistrate, and titled Nam-ak-dan [South Peak Altar], or the Ha-ak-dan [Lower Peak Altar]. It was torn down by Japanese invaders in 1908, as they launched their early-20th-century colonial occupation of Korea its remains were further destroyed during the Korean War.

However, the tradition of holding rituals to respect Jiri-san was slowly revived by local monks and people during the late 1950s. The relatively small shrine building, now called Namak-sa [South-Peak Shrine] was rebuilt in 1964 by an association of Gurye County residents, who then began the modem local revival of the ancient royal Namak-je [Southern Peak Ceremony], in the Neo-Confucian style. It is held just once a year, on the traditional date “Gok-u” (one of the 24 seasonal divisions by the old Oriental Solar Calendar, usually falling in April of the modern Solar Calendar and during the Third Moon of the traditional Lunar Calendar), in conjunction with the local Gurye Festival called the Yaksu-je [Celebration of Medicinal Water, referring to both the clean, healthy waters flowing down from the mountain and consumption of sap of the Acer Truncatum trees that grow abundantly in this area]. Every year the costumes and performances have gotten more elaborate, and ever more people attend. I have attended and photographed it twice; it is now about two hours long, solemn, profound and even beautiful. The Mayor of Gurye County and other prominent locals officiated, and the Abbots of major nearby Buddhist temples attended, all with evident sincerity, demonstrating the importance they believe this ceremony has for their community. Holding the ceremony has come to mean a lot for the pride of the residents in their own ancient cultural forms and values. The official website of Gurye County states:

The most representative of the folk cultural festivals held in each district adjoining Mt. Jiri is the Jirisan Namakje. This festival has a[page 96] long history and is of such a scale that it is known by Koreans nationwide. Every Goku-jeol, participants offer a sacrificial rite to the mountain-gods of Mt. Jiri to wish for national peace and safety. This festival dates from the Silla Dynasty. At Mt. Jiri, one of Korea’s five famous mountains, Goku-je was held to pray for a good harvest and peace for the people. At this time, the Hwarang (elite youth corps of the Shilla Dynasty), as well as local townspeople participated in the vibrant festival and several competitions such archery and traditional wrestling were held. Until 1999, this festival was only called Yaksu- je, but it was renamed Namakje in 2000.

It is also quite significant that the government of Samcheong County has established a new shrine for public ritual-respect of Jiri-san, with a large statue of the female San-shin of Jiri’s Cheonhwang-bong, at a popular eastern trailhead of the mountain. This action also followed along with ancient precedents; the effort and money spent demonstrate how the old traditions of Jiri-san as one of Korea’s most sacred mountains continues to the present-day.

In addition to all of its important Buddhist and Shamanic shrines, Jiri-san also gains in reputation as a sacred mountain due to several other factors. It hosts the Hwagye-dong Valley, which was Korea’s original site of growing green tea (strongly linked to meditational Buddhism) ana is still producing the nation’s highest-quality teas. Further, it contains Cheonghak-dong, a famous alpine valley that is home to two unusual nationalistic religious cults (one Neo-Confucian millennialist, the other Daoist). Recently, it has become the site of attempted re-introduction to the wild of one of Korea’s most famous animals, the nearly-extinct bandal-geom bear.

**Sacred assets of Jiri-san.**

From my visits and study of maps, I have determined that the entire Jiri- san region can be usefully divided into twelve sectors for cultural- geography and tourism-geography purposes. These sectors, with their major Buddhist temples, Shamanic or Daoist shrines, scenic-gorges and other significant sacred features are listed here, as a summation of Jiri- san’s sacred assets:

[page 97] (\*\* indicates one of the 3 great ancient Buddhist temples at Jiri-san, and \* indicates one of the 26 other important traditional temples, hermitages or shrines there)

1. Far-Southwest Sector (west of Nogo-dan, northern Gurye County):

a) \* Cheon-eun-sa [“Hidden Spring” Temple, implying that it is a source of esoteric but life-enriching spiritual wisdom], founded in 828. Its present configuration and some of the buildings are from a reconstruction in the late 1700s. Its main current fame is as a charming place, with easy access for tourists driving up the paved road to Nogo-dan. It holds a 1776 Sakyamuni Buddha altar-painting (Treasure #924). Following the ancient tradition, before paintings and statues began to be used in the late 1700s, Cheoneun-sa’s only San-shin icon was an uncut stone set in a rock-shrine behind the Main Hall, against the temple’s back wall. Carved Hanja characters read “Monument of Mountain King”. There are two more examples of these primitive crude-stone San-shin icons nearby here and a few more nationwide; they are now rare.

b) \* Sudo-am, a newly-rebuilt Hermitage featuring Korea’s largest Sanshin-gak [Mountain-spirit shrine] and Sanshin-do [Mountain-Spirit painting]

c) \* Sangseon-am, the remote “Upper Meditation” Sanctuary-Hermitage

d) Nogo-dan, the “Crone-Altar Peak” of 1507 meters anciently sacred as spiritual residence of the mythical divine mother of Founder-King Pak Hyeokgeose of the Shilla Kingdom, revered as a national guardian-deity, and reputed training-site for Shilla’s Hwarang warrior-youths. It enjoys easy vehicle access, hence its popularity today.

e) several other small hermitages with interesting artworks.

2. Central-Southwest Sector (south of Nogo-dan, northern Gurye County):

a) \*\* Hwaeom-sa, the Temple named after the Hwaeom [Flower-Garland, Skt: Avatamsaka, Ch: Huayen] Sutra one of the most important scriptures of doctrinal Buddhism, was founded in 544 by a missionary-monk named Yeon-gi-josa, who may have come from India. It remains the greatest of all Buddhist temples at Jiri, and one of Korea’s largest, most-important, most-venerated and most-visited. Great Master Uisang, who brought the Hwaeom-Sect teachings back to Korea after extensive study in of them in [page 98] China, reconstructed and greatly expanded it with royal support from Queen Seondeok in the mid-600s. On this site he authored one of the key documents of Korean Buddhism, the Hwaeom-ilseung-beopgye-do. Hwaeom-sa was refurbished in the late 800s, with magnificent, unique and treasured granite artworks in the courtyard, by Master of Geomancy and Meditation Doseon-guksa. They include the East and West Pagodas in the Lower Courtyard (Treasures #132 and #133), a gigantic Stone Lantern (National Treasure #12, the largest of its kind carved before 1960 or so), the Four-Lion-Piliars Saria-budo funerary-monument (Treasure #300) and the famous Four-Lion-Pillars Three-story Pagoda (National Treasure #35) which features a standing monk-statue inside the pillars and a unique Lantern-on-pillars with another monk kneeling in respect towards it (probably representing a disciple of Yeon-gi); on both these latter the four lions have monkeyish faces displaying four cardinal human emotions - anger, laughter, sorrow and serenity. Since then its buildings have been burnt and rebuilt several times, with its stone monuments remaining in excellent condition and great halls hosting thousands of monks and lay- worshippers, including the Gakhwang-jeon Main Hall (National Treasure #67) dedicated to the Biro-bul [Buddha of Infinite Cosmic Light].

b) The Hermitages of Hwa-eom-sa -\*Jijang-am, \*Geumjeong-am and Yeongi-am.

c) Munsu-sa, a large newly-built monastery dedicated to the Bodhisattva of Wisdom

d) \* Osan Saseong-am, the Four-Sages Hermitage, now a popular temple to visit in the near-SW foothills of Jiri-san just east of Gurye Town, with fantastic views, a cliff-carved Buddha and legends of the four enlightened master-monks who lived and practiced there; it was founded in 544 CE by Yeon-gi-josa; Wonho, Doseon and Jin-gam practiced there.

e) \* Taean-sa [Grand Peace Temple] at Bongdu-san (a.k.a. Dongri-san), in the far-SW foothills of Jiri-san just west of Gurye Town, founded in 742 CE, high-point of the Unified Shilla Dynasty, by Master Nosa. Great Master Hyecheol reconstructed it much larger (said to have 132 rooms) at the beginning of the Goryeo Dynasty, and it became one of the leading monasteries of Jiri-san. This is now a major Meditation Retreat temple of the Jogye Order, and is therefore generally not open to the public, and contains no San-shin or other folk-shamanism shrines. Its treasure-assets [page 99] include the Gwangja-seonsa Pagoda (NT #274) and the Hyecheol-guksa budo-sari-tap stone monument (NT #273).

3. Eastern-Southwest Sector (south of Samdo-bong, northern Gurye County):

a) \* Yeon-gok-sa, another major temple, possibly founded by Yeongi around the same time as Hwaeom-sa, reconstructed after several tragic destructions; containing a budo funerary-stupa that might be for Doseon-guksa, one of Korea’s most important monks.

b) Pia-gol Gyegok Scenic-Gorge, very famous for viewing the autumn leaves

c) Minor Temples: Bullak-sa, Hansan-sa & Cheonwang-sa

4. Central-South Sector (west of Samshin-bong, northern Gurye County):

a) \*\* Ssanggye-sa, the Twin-Streams Monastery, was founded in 722 by monks Sambeop and Daebi, disciples of the great Hwaeom Master Uisang-daesa. It is said that they were guided to the location by a Jin- sanshin in the form of a tiger, after being instructed by him in dreams to look for a site where arrowroot flowers blossomed through the snow. They had traveled China for study, and returned with the skull of and a portrait of Hui-neng, the Sixth Patriarch of Scon [Zen] Buddhism, which they respectively buried and enshrined here. In the early 800s it was expanded by Meditation-Master Jin-gam, who was responsible for planting Korea’s first green tea field outside of its gates. It was burned to the ground by Japanese invaders in 1592 during the Imjin War, and then rebuilt and renovated several times from the 1600s until now. It serves as one of the Jogye Order’s “District Headquarters” temples, remaining a major site of pilgrimage and tourism. It contains a famous monument written by Daoist culture-saint Choi Chi-won.

b) the center of Korea’s Green Tea tradition, near Ssanggye-sa

c) \* Guksa-am, the National-Master Hermitage, founded by Jin-gam in the early 800s

d) \* Bulil-am Hermitage, founded by Jin-gam in the early 800s, and Bulil- pokpo (one of mainland south Korea’s highest waterfalls)

e) \* Chilbul-sa, the Seven-Buddhas Temple of Beob-wang-gol [Dharma-King Valley], at an altitude of about 800m, is one of Korea’s primary meditation-retreat temples. This small but important monastery [page 100] was founded around 560, when the Shilla Kingdom gained control of this region, conquering the Gaya Federation and overthrowing its last ruler Suro-wang. It is said that the seven sons of King Suro realized that further resistance was futile, and so retreated to this sacred site and built a hermitage. They all intensively meditated here without distraction and reached full enlightenment ― people said that the Seven Princes had become Seven Living Buddhas ― thus the name Chilbul-sa was adopted, and its fame grew. Aja-bang may be Korea’s most-renowned Seon [Meditation] Hall, built in the shape of an equal-armed cross with what may be the thickest ondol heated-clay/stone floor; for every summer and winter gyeolchae [traditional Korean intensive meditation sessions, of at least two months], there is a long waiting-list of monks applying for the honor and privilege of sitting in this building.

f) Daeseong-gyegok, the Great Sage Scenic-Gorge dedicated to Choi Chi- won.

5. Far-South Sector (south of Samshin-bong, northern Hadong County):

a) Akyang-myeon District and Hadong Town host a dozen small Buddhist temples

b) Cheonghak-dong, the “Azure-Crane Village,” is a nationally famous alpine valley home to two unusual nationalistic religious cults. One is revised-Neo-Confucian millenialist and operates the Jinju-am Shrine, the other is Daoist (very rare in Korea), claiming to have been there for 300 years, building the \* Samseong-gung [Three Sages Palace] dedicated to Korea’s mythical founding-kings Hwan-in, Hwan-eung and Dan-gun.

c) Middle and Lower Cheonghak-dong Valley, with several other small temples and shrines.

6. Inner-Southeast Sector (southwestern Sancheong County):

a) Cheonhwang-bong, the Heavenly-King-Peak, Jiri’s summit at 1915 meters, very popular with hikers. The entire area around it features many temples and shrines devoted to the national “Holy-Grandmother San-shin” (a female Mountain-spirit, once common but now a rare phenomenon in Korea), depicted in many statues and paintings. She is identified with the mythical origins and general prosperity of Korea, and also thought of as the spirit of Queen Wisuk, mother of Founding-King Taejo of the Goryeo Dynasty, “whose prayer was believed to make the unification of the Three Kingdoms possible”.

[page 101] b) \* Beobgye-sa Temple, one of Korea’s highest-altitude temples at 1300 meters, said to have been founded in 544 by Yeon-gi-josa

c) \* Cheonhwang-sa, a small temple where the ancient stone statue of the “Holy-Grandmother San-shin” is now enshrined.

d) Sanshin-Halmae-dang shamanic Shrine

e) Seokcheon-sa Shamanic Shrine

f) Gilsang-am Buddhist Hermitage

g) several other Buddhist and Shamanic Temples & Shrines of the Naedae-cheon Valley

7. Eastern Sector (western Sancheong County):

a) \* Naewon-sa, a medium-sized temple founded by Muju-guksa in 888, with two ancient National Treasures, a pagoda and a Birobul [Vairocana, Buddha of Cosmic Light] statue.

b) \* Daewon-sa, a larger temple founded in 548 by Yeon-gi-josa a very popular trailhead for climbing Cheonhwang-bong, and famous for its nine-story (only 8 remain) granite pagoda that is said to glow with a bluish light when the nation is in danger (T #1112).

c) several other smaller Buddhist temples, featuring rare female San-shin icons

8. Far-Northeast Sector (northwestern Sancheong County):

a) Wang-san, the King’s Mountain, featuring the pyramidal stone tomb of Gaya King Guhyeong-wang and the \* Muryang-sa Temple on its north slope and the large Wangbok-sa [King Fortune Temple] on its east slope.

b) Ungseok-bong, the Bear-Stone Peak, featuring Jigok-sa and Shimjeong-sa Temples

9. Inner-Northeast Sector (southern Hamyang County):

a) \* Byeoksong-sa, a charming small temple founded in the Shilla Kingdom era

b) West Hermitage next to Byeoksong-sa, with monumental new Buddhist cliff-carvings

c) Chiseong-gyegok, the Seven-Immortals Scenic-Gorge

d) Beobhwa-san, the Dharma-Blossom Mountain, with three significant temples including the \* North Beobhwa-sa and the large new South Beobhwa-sa

e) \* North Munsu-sa, Jeokjo-am and other small temples

f) Gyeonbul-sa, the major new “Viewing Buddha Temple”

[page 102] g) Baekmu-dong & Hanshin Scenic-Gorges

h) Seseok-pyeongjeon alpine flower-field & the Seseok-cheon mineral- spring

10. Upper-North Sector (east & north of Samjeong-bong):

a) \*\* Silsang-sa, one of the “Gu-san-cheol” [original Korean Zen temples], founded in 828 by National-Master-monk Hongcheok-guksa, expanded by royal order in the early 900s according the advice of geomantic master Doseon-guksa. Contains a famous iron Yaksa-yorae Medicinal Buddha.

b) \* Yaksu-am, Geumdae-am, Anguk-am, Seojin-am and \* Baekjang-am Hermitages

c) \* Yeongwon-sa Temple, famous for its remote serenity, founded in 650 CE during the reign of the Shilla Kingdom’s Queen Jindeok

d) \* Godam-sa, founded in the early Goryeo Dynasty, with a large cliff- carved stone-relief Buddha

e) legendarily remote smaller temples including Sambul-sa,\* Muju-am and Dosol-am Hermitages, and \* Sangmuju-am Hermitage, known as the site of the final enlightenment of National Master Jinul Bojo-guksa (founder of the dominant Jogye Order).

11. Inner Northwest Sector (far-northeastern Namwon City):

a) Baemsa-gol Scenic-Valley, site of mystical legends and famous for unspoiled beauty

b) Samdo-bong Peak, 1500m, where borders of the three southern provinces meet

c) Banya-bong, the Prajna-Wisdom Peak, South Korea’s third-highest at 1751 meters

d) Myohyang-am Hermitage, Korea’s highest and most remote

e) the remote and unspoiled Unbong-myeon District, with Manbok-dae, Gori-bong, Segeol-bong, Barae-bong and Deokdu-bong Peaks, and several small temples

12. Outer Northwest Sector (eastern & southern Nam won City):

a) several small but significant temples of Namwon. Korea’s City of Romance (due to being the site of the very popular Joseon-dynasty story Chunhyang), including \* Unseon-sa, \* Yeonhwa-sa and \* Juji-am.

b) several small shamanic shrines on the Northwestern Slopes

c) Surak Waterfall and its scenic-gorge

d) the Jiri-san Hot Springs Resort (a major tourism asset but of no [page 103] religious significance)

**Conclusion**

Jiri-san meets all the criteria for being considered a sacred mountain, and has an extraordinary wealth of sacred assets that could individually and collectively be promoted to attract higher levels of inbound foreign tourism. The combination of its scenic beauty and excellent hiking trails along with its good level of tourism infrastructure (accommodation, restaurants, transportation access, sales of local products etc.) already make it a well-known and popular domestic tourist destination for Koreans, and a small number of international residents and tourists. With greater knowledge of and promotion of its sacred aspects and assets, I believe that it could attract many more international tourists to Korea.

National and local tourism authorities, as well as private tour- companies, ought to make greatly-increased efforts towards:

1. Further assessment and systemized categorization of Jiri-san’s sacred aspects and assets, as have been listed in a preliminary way here.

2. International promotion of the results, particularly to Western nations, Japan and China, in order to let potential visitors know about the unique things Jiri-san has to offer them, particularly from the “spiritual and pilgrimage tourism” point of view.

3. International promotion of the more general idea that Korea has a number of sacred mountains, comparable in tourism value to those of China and Japan, and that Jiri-san is a leader among them (comparable to China’s Tai-shan and Japan’s Fuji-san); and

4. Implementing measures to ensure that Jiri-san’s sacred aspects and assets are made more accessible to international visitors, in particular the upgraded use of English and other non-Korean languages to clearly indicate and describe them on-site, enhancing the visitors experience with historical and spiritual depth of understanding.

I would like to propose, that since Jiri-san hosts a dozen major ancient sacred places, mostly located at its base, very nearly in a circle (oval, elongated on the east-west axis) going about 80% around the entire National Park area, a long-term project should be undertaken to create a pilgrimage trail between them all, linking them in a single well-sign- [page 104] posted hiking trail. Places to rest and stay overnight at the temples, and places to eat characteristic local cuisine, should be established with proper foreign-language support at appropriate intervals along the way. This circular Jiri-san pilgrimage trail, although not having ancient roots, could itself become a significant attractor of spiritually-minded international tourists (as well as those merely interested in long healthy walks through beautiful natural scenery). More research should be conducted on this idea by tourism geographers and concerned local officials.

**References**

Most of the data and ideas about Jiri-san presented in this paper were obtained through my own repeated travels to and hikes on that mountain, and analysis of the photos obtained during them. For extensive details and photographs of all the sacred places and aspects of Jiri-san discussed in this paper, please see the several dozen web-pages on my own website devoted to Korea’s sacred mountains, starting at: http://www.san-shin.net/Jirisan-01 .html

Other web-sites devoted to this topic on the global or local scales, which I found useful in developing the perspectives and arguments of this paper are:

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