

# Cooperation for the Recognition and Conservation of Potential World Natural Heritage Sites in Asia-Pacific Region

## Jeju World Natural Heritage Center / Korea Institute of Ocean Science and Technology

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- The Asia-Pacific region has many valuable natural heritages such as volcanic topography and rare submarine topography centered on the Ring of Fire. Many of them are designated and conserved as the World Natural Heritages, with many other sites being designated as Biosphere Reserves for the sustainable coexistence of humans and nature. Hong Kong and Jeju Island are taking good care of their World Geoparks. Jeju Island is the only place whose three natural heritages were recognized by UNESCO. However, there is little attention on submarine volcanoes, black smokers, and undersea mountains, thus requiring more efforts to discover and preserve such natural heritages. Jeju Island is also a rich repository of mineral resources.
- It is hard to examine and research the ocean floor not only because it is under the sea, but also because of issues involving the territorial waters of neighboring countries. The Hantan River is an important geological resource that flows more than 100 kilometers along the territories of both South and North Korea. There are 1,031

world natural heritages, 802 cultural heritages, 197 natural heritages and 32 mixed sites. The standards for the world natural heritages include supernatural phenomenon, esthetic importance, geological features and the history of the Earth, ecological process, biological diversity, and the appearance of endangered species. Jeju has well-organized conservation programs, including an educational one. Among Jeju Island's World Natural Heritages, caves are especially precious natural heritages that carry universal value, as the lava tubes preserve stalactites and stalagmites that were created after lime components from the shell sands permeated into the caves.

- South Korea is also trying to list the mud flat on the southwest coast as a World Natural Heritage. The caves of Jeju Island are much older than those in Hawaii and have lots of geological value. There are other candidates for World Natural Heritages in South Korea, including the mud flat on the southwestern coast, which is a geological and biological heritage as an intertidal zone, similar to the Wadden Sea in Europe.



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- There are about 300 submarine topographical features, including lagoons and coral reefs, in the Asia-Pacific region. They are susceptible to climate change and extremely changeable, but not many places have been listed as world heritages. Because of this, it is very hard to preserve them. There is a serious shortage of scientific data, and a lot of expenses, effort, and time are required for their designation as world heritages. There are a number of coral topographies, including lagoons and barrier reefs in the area, referred to as the "Coral Triangle." It is extremely difficult to effectively preserve the natural heritages located across multiple countries due to the lack of understanding about natural heritages in underdeveloped nations and strong resistance from residents, who suffer difficulties from regulations placed on the natural heritages. These factors are obstacles to the efforts to recognize, designate, and preserve

the natural heritages in the Asia-Pacific region.

- So far, natural heritages have been concentrated only on overland features. Last year, a submarine volcano was discovered on Jeju Island's ocean floor, and there is a possibility that more valuable submarine topographies exist in the area. It is time to focus efforts on recognizing marine natural heritages, too.

## Policy Implications

- It is difficult to designate preservation areas in certain waters because of serious territorial disputes.
- Efforts are necessary to overcome the differences between scientific boundaries and actual boundaries.
- The designation of new heritages brings economic prosperity and stability to the region.
- It is urgent to launch new research into the submarine topography around Jeju Island. There should also be elaborate research into the geological environment of the continental shelf off of Jeju Island, in particular.
- Natural heritages will be unique geological and biological inheritances in the future. Central and local governments should engage in active research on them. It is suggested from a long-term view that a full-scale expedition into the

marine topography be pursued through the cooperation among the countries around the area.

- Designation of a certain site as a serial heritage corresponds to UNESCO's philosophy. South Korea's heritage may lack outstanding universal value, but it can be recognized as serial transnational property. Measures to carefully preserve the heritages are needed for the designation of other sites to be connected to the heritage as serial heritages.
- Geological diversity should be linked to biodiversity and preserved by locals. The sites of serial transnational properties will be improved if the preservation programs appropriate for each site are implemented.
- It is imperative to strengthen education regarding the preservation of the heritage sites. A balance should be maintained in implementing preservation measures in developed and developing countries, as underdeveloped countries suffer difficulties due to tight budgets. All countries should make all kinds of efforts.