

## On the Jeju Dialect of Korean

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Jeju (濟州) province (道) is an isolated island south-west of the mainland of Korea. It is located about 450km from Seoul, 300km from Busan. (The distance from Jeju to Tsushima, Japan is 255km, to the east.) To the north Jeju faces Mokpo on the mainland, with the South Sea (南海) in between. The distance from Jeju to Mokpo is 154km.

Jeju province is the largest island in Korea, but it is the smallest province of the nine provinces in South Korea. In 1946, Jeju province was removed from South Jeolla province and designated as an independent province. Its total area is about 1,850km<sup>2</sup>. (Tsushima is 709km<sup>2</sup>.) The island is shaped like an oval, 73km wide and 31km long. Mt. Halla rises in the center of the island to 1,950m above sea level, in a conical shape. Jeju has 2 counties (郡), North County (北濟州郡) and South County (南濟州郡). Mt. Halla lies on the border between the two.

The Jeju dialect is the dialect of Korean used in Jeju province. It is called '*Jeju-do bang'eon* 'Jeju-province dialect' or *Jeju-eo* 'Jeju-language'. The members of the Jeju Culture Preservation Society and concerned inhabitants prefer the name *Jeju-eo* 'Jeju language', but most scholars prefer '*Jeju* dialect' or '*Jeju-do* dialect'.

The Jeju dialect differs greatly from the dialects of mainland. It preserves the archaic vowel /ɒ/ which has been lost in other Korean dialects. It also has many unique words, grammatical forms, and other distinctive features. But the pure variety of the Jeju dialect is spoken only by elderly people over 65. Thus younger people can't understand what their grandfather or grandmother are saying. Instead of Jeju dialect, they speak a variety of standard Korean. If this situation continues, the Jeju dialect may be lost in the near future.