

Present Status and Types of Maeulsoop (Village Groves) in the Republic of Korea

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Introduction

Industrialization and urbanization in modern society have caused various environmental problems and accelerated changes of climate and the natural ecosystem. It is the ecological knowledge and resources management practices handed down from the traditional society that have gained attention as a means of solution for the environmental problems as well as management and distribution issues of resources. Korean traditional villages took ‘*baesanimsu* (背山臨水, mountain at the back, stream at the front)’ as the basic principle for location and land use, and this condition had much benefited villagers as being located within a well-secured watershed to obtain water, be protected against the wind and get resources. The traditional villages have been adapted to local natural condition and been in a harmonious relationship with the surrounding natural ecosystems in order for the spatial arrangement to be remained for a long period of time.

Definition of Maeulsoop

Maeulsoop (Korean Village Groves) is a forest which was created in the process of Korean people fighting against a monsoon and harmonizing the affluent village with the environment. Also, It is a forest that could be part of the village landscape, or co-owned, protected and managed by villagers. Amongst these village forests, some are classified and called as ‘traditional village groves’ if they have historical and cultural characteristics that stands out and they have been passed down.

Function of Maeulsoop

A village grove is often a place where villagers come to find emergency medicines and where they grow and harvest mushrooms and edible greens for their daily usage. Fallen leaves of the forest, in addition, are used as manure. It also covers the front and sides, so that the village can be protected by a typhoon in summer or cold dry wind in winter. A village grove makes microclimate of the village more temperate. And it can lead surface water to flow more naturally by preventing water from being flooded or providing it when needed for farming since the grove is closely located by ponds or streams. A village grove is a common meeting point where the villagers gather and a shelter for the people during hot summer. Further, it is a sacred sites as a holy place the villagers protect and perform ancestral rites periodically.

Biodiversity of Maeulsoop

Big trees such as pine tree and zelkova are the ones that grow near the groves. Also, many species of birds like mandarin duck, scops owl, owl, woodpecker, great tit, and starling that normally live deep inside a mountain and build a nest in hollows of tree trunks and branches inhabit the area, so that they can be seen near the village. A village grove plays an important role not only as a stepping-stone for birds that fly long distances, bridging the gap between big mountains, but also as an inter-acting habitat for various species of insects such as firefly that travel between streams, farmland and forests.

Types of Maeulsoop

Village groves could be classified into 4 types; *sugu* (水口, a mouth of watershed) where the village is located or *sugumagi* (a complement that protects the outlet) where the left and right side of a mountain ridge is afforested, hills, *meoi* (isolated mountain), *biboyeopseung* (裨補厭勝, a grove made with intent to suppress a bad spirit around the village). The oldest village grove of Korea is Daegwan-lim(大館林), is thought to be created with levees by Gowoon Choi Chiwon (孤雲 崔致遠) in order to prevent floods during his term of office as a governor of Cheonryeong-gun during the reign of the Queen Jinseong (887-897). This 205,842 m² big grove built about 1,100 years ago has tree species such as sawtooth oak, cork oak, Asian hornbeam, abundant-flower meliosma, tallow tree, zelkova and hackberry, etc. The grove is protected as natural monument No. 154.

Present status of maeulsoop

National Institute of Forest Science investigated organized information for the village groves in 1,400 regions as of March, 2017 and found that small groves were in the majority with groves smaller than 1 ha accounted for 78.7% of the total. Major plant species of the village groves on the list were pine trees and zelkovas. The groves were managed by the village and local government. And 'sugumagi' was the most common type of village grove.

Keywords: Baesanimso, Sugumagi, Biboyeopseung, Meoi, Zelkovas