

A Study of the relationship between the myth of two islands and traditional residence space: focusing on the myth of fire god and kitchen space in Jeju and Okinawa Island

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Abstract

PURPOSE The purpose of this paper is to find the meaning of the God of Fire related to the kitchen space of traditional private houses specialized in the island culture of Jeju and Okinawa.

CONTENTS Through mythology, the two islands interpreted the meaning of the god of fire differently from those of the land. And the meaning was projected into daily life to make it a channel through which nature and humans communicate. This myth reflects the actual beliefs and feelings of the local people living on the island. The most notable cultural feature of the two-year survey is the culture of anger on the two islands. However, they gained positive and hopeful energy through myths from their living environment, which is the foundation for self-realization.

RESULTS The correlation between the two islands' myths can be understood by overcoming existing social prejudice and indifference to island culture. In short, the people of the two islands transformed myths into storytelling patterns to gain psychological comfort and stability in terrible environmental situations. And they made up the space of the house and the kitchen into small cosmos. They created a new place of faith through the help of the kitchen and the god of fire. From this point on, he aimed at the universe in an endless cycle of birth and death.

KEY WORDS Jeju Island, Okinawa, resentment culture, kitchen god, fire god

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동아시아 두 섬의 신화와 전통주거 공간과의 상관성: 제주도와 오키나와의 화신(火神)의 신화와 부엌의 공간을 중심으로

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요 약

연구 목적 본 연구의 목적은 제주도와 오키나와의 신화에 투영된 두 섬의 전통민가에서 부엌의 공간과 화신(火神)의 의미를 연계해서 분석하는 것이다.

연구 내용 본 연구에서는 두 섬사람들은 그들의 신화의 내용에 근거해서 지었던 주거공간과 화신의 의미를 섬의 자연환경에 적합한 형태로 해석했다. 이러한 사유방식은 궁극적으로 이들에게 자연과 인간이 소통할 수 있는 결정적인 계기를 제공했다.

두 섬의 신화는 섬에서 생활하는 섬사람들의 실생활의 정서와 믿음을 반영하고 있다. 이같은 문화적 요소의 특징이 ‘원망의 문화(怨:resentment)’이다. 이들이 살고 있는 열악한 주변 환경으로부터 표출한 감정은 ‘한(恨)’과 ‘원망’으로 가득 차 있었다. 그럼에도 이들은 자신들의 신화와 주거공간으로부터 표출되는 긍정의 에너지를 통해서 한과 원망의 감정을 극복했다. 이것이 곧 ‘자기의 완성(self-perfection)’이다.

결론 두 섬의 신화와 주거공간의 상관관계에 대한 분석을 통해서 그동안 섬사람들과 관련된 오해와 편견에서 벗어날 수 있었다. 하지만 섬에 관한 이해와 관심은 섬에 거주하고 있는 섬사람들에만 국한된 관심사일 뿐이다. 이들은 섬 생활에서 직면한 위기상황을 극복하고, 그들만의 현실적인 위안과 평안을 찾았다. 이 과정에서 그들은 끊임없이 반복되는 생사의 굴레로부터 이 세상에 다시 태어나기 위해서는 반드시 하늘로 올라가야만 한다는 확고한 신념을 형성했다. 이에 대한 현실적인 믿음의 공간과 역할이 부엌의 조왕신과 불이다. 섬은 섬으로서 가치와 생명력을 갖고 있는 이 순간에도 여전히 침묵하고 있다.

주제어 제주도, 오키나와, 원망의 문화, 조왕신, 화신

I . Introduction

Myth reveals an identity of thought and culture that social members preserve throughout their community life. The community life has been handed down in various patterns, making a close relationship with myth to connect both its symbolic and practical meaning. Although both continent and island was and is an essential source to determine a cognitive framework and life style of its residents a history of human culture, the former has been the only focus point to understand and interpret almost all aspects of human culture as the cognitive border of continent and island becomes more evident and permanent over times. The pattern of the continent-oriented thought is bound to result in serious prejudice and misunderstanding of the island culture, even if it involves cultural implications and imaginative potentials, for instance, as a land of the most ecological and at the same time the most sterile environment.

Much attention was paid to the two islands described by this paper because they have been regarded to preserve a traditional type of life style distinct from the continent. Both the Jeju island with eighteen thousands of gods and Okinawa, one of a thousand bow-shaped Ryukyu Islands, show an unique culture of island by means of diverse myths. Like the mythic paradigm created in the continent, those of both islands in the East Asian seas¹⁾ consist of cosmos myths, celestial myths, creation myths, dynasty myths, but the type of the myths in both islands needs to be understood through a comprehensive analysis of their similarities and differences. Of course, there can be more debates on whether the myths were imported by a group of people from the continent or created by a voluntary participation and imagination of island people(Jeong, 2013: 5).

The existing researches on the myths in the two islands can be classified in two aspects. The first focuses on the transmission process of shamanism and myth which still remain even in the post-modern era, recognizing a relatively miserable reality facing the islands to understand their similarities in a positive way(Kim, 2002; 2008; Yoon, 2010; Han, 2012; Hur, 2013). The second type of research mainly deals with an architectural style of private houses and the sacred space specific in the southern islands of the East Asia(Gwak & Yoo, 2007; Yoon, 2010).

1) The reason I mentioned the East Asian waters here is because I paid attention to various understandings of the islands unfolding in a realistic situation where islands and continents are separated from each other in the East Asian waters. However, it is also worth noting the issues of Shiro Momoki (KAIKI AJIA KENKYU NYUMON, Min Sok Won published, 2012, pp.10-11), who understood the island and the continent in an integrated sense, unlike my point.)

This article emphasizes a relationship between myth and the kitchen space within a traditional residence, whereas the existing studies have handled either one of the two factors. Especially, it pays more intensive attention to a long-term process of interaction between a record of myth and kitchen space and a temporal pattern of its change, analyzing mythemes related to the fire god in the kitchen space as well as finding how mythic factors are reflected in the traditional kitchen space.

One of cultural phenomena found commonly in both islands is a culture of resentment which reflects both a realistic situation and an idealistic belief of people in Jeju and Okinawa island. Given that the islands are surrounded by a barren environment, it is natural that their myths involve a continual desire to transform the terrible geographical condition into a more comfortable and safer environment. As the culture of resentment in the islands is based on their selfish desire to overcome the environment and conflicts or tension among individuals, it is a methodologically important concept for explaining or comparing island cultures in terms of the island itself, but not in terms of the continent as the previous studies did. In addition to such comparative analysis and explanation, this article tries to show that people in the islands ultimately value human beings more highly than myths or sacred kitchen space.

II. A Culture of Resentment and <Munjeonbonpuri>

As resentment as an internal emotion of human beings often emerges with a selfish impulse, it is essential to transform the emotion of resentment and desperation into a positive hope in the daily life of island people. This transformation is shown very clearly in two representative examples, language and residential space. First, the words such as ‘ieodosana’²⁾ in Jeju, ‘nankurunaisa(なんくるないさ)’³⁾ and ‘araragama(あららがま)’⁴⁾ in Okinawa have been handed down orally for a long time to express and cope with an unexpected danger of island nature. Second, their traditional residential space, especially kitchen space based on the myth, shows

2) ‘Ieodosana’ is an oral folk song originally sung by female divers in Jeju when they go out to sea by boat. The song contains their wish for a permanent utopia without separation.

3) ‘Nankurunaisa’ means that things will work out somehow, but the bottom line is that everything will work out only when you can do the right thing or do it honestly and sincerely.

4) ‘Araragama’ means ‘it’s no big deal’, which is commonly referred to in Miyako Island area. It reflects the disposition of Miyako islanders to always think positively when they face with difficult adversity.

very distinctively their will to overcome the culture of resentment because it serves to island residents as a more practical and comfortable place than symbolic languages. It also functions as a starting point of the selfish transformation where the myths of Jeju and Okinawa become a more self-oriented narrative to transcend the culture of resentment. As a result, the myth is another expression of a practical, neither abstract nor idealistic, necessity of their life.

Indeed the myth to them is an exit to escape from their existential situation where they should survive the excessive border of life and death. Let me take an example of munjeonbonpuri⁵⁾ among bonpuri, which bestows divinity on women and creates a hierarchy of house gods on the basis of their feature. Mrs. Yeosan described in the myth of munjeonbonpuri faces death because of serious conflict with her husband, Namsunbi, but she does not attributes her difficult situation to others or environment, even when she accepts her husband's mistress to live together in her house and then is killed by the mistress. Interestingly, this myth elevates the mistress to a status of the restroom god after her death even if she is not qualified to be a family member. Mrs. Yeosan's self-recognition of all misfortunes focuses on the lack of her virtue, not on the denial or resentment of her miserable destiny. This kind of self-constraint is similar to the meaning of forgiveness(恕) explained in the Analects of Confucius(Seong, 2003: 230).

The possibility of communication based on the emotion of resentment, as munjeonbonpuri shows, is also revealed by the structure and placement of private house(民家) in Jeju island. As the meaning of house cannot be completed simply with one or two spaces, like living room, restroom, or bedroom, its residents tend to impose a meaning on each space of the house in equilibrium, not focusing on an individual or specific space. This structural equilibrium aims at sharing a comfortableness and benefit of the house with all neighbors. Each space in the house is in harmony with the overall meaning of the house structure and builds its own identity. In this space, the islanders were able to resolve emotional conflicts with the other party based on how to adapt to self-discipline. In other words, it means that the meaning of community life on

5) Munjeonbonpuri is a ritual to pray to the gate god, which is performed narrating the myth of the gate god at the shaman's rite on Jeju Island. In this myth, the basic composition between the space in the house and the household gods is made up of 'the front gate god', which protects the front of Sangbang(a floored room), 'Jowangshin(the kitchen god)', 'Cheukganshin(the restroom god), Obangtoshin that is the god of dwelling site and bearing, and Jeongjujishin that guards the entrance and the exit of a house. The rite is to pray to household gods for the peace of family by placing each of these household gods in the residential space. And it shows the origin of the gods who protect dwelling space.

the island can be realized. The myth of <Moonjeonbonpuri>eliminated the emotional imbalance arising from the culture of resentment for self-reflection and self-realization of the moral imperfection inherent in each individual's existence. As an example of this, Jeju people confirmed their confidence to overcome difficulties in the barren natural environment.

III. Myth of Existential and Phenomenological Relationship for Self-Realization

There are a few remarkable similarities between myths in Jeju and Okinawa, even though they were basically created by a different cultural and natural environment. These similar factors caused myths in both islands to be developed in a pattern of existential and phenomenological relationship, which functioned as a goal of self-realization for people in both islands. They are analyzed into the following four aspects.

First, the essential perception that distinguishes the island from the continent is due to the assumption that the island should be understood from the island's point of view. The formation of traditional culture in both islands was made on the basis of terrible natural environment and isolated geographical specifications. It is assumed that residents created myths specific in the islands to overcome their difficulties. Especially fire myths functioned as a centripetal point for the community to cope with geologically desolate conditions in the volcanic islands. They seem more significant in Jeju island where its people draw a feeling of comfort from fire myths against Halla mountain with a dormant volcano.

Second, myths in both islands isolated from a continental society had been localized differently, depending on its specific environment and a southern or northern line of culture. When the original culture and ideas of primitive ancient societies are considered in East Asia, it is necessary to distinguish before and after the introduction of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. Although there is a limitation in recognizing entirely its original meaning in modern times, it was invoked as a key element of shamanistic and mythic narratives and is still found in a space structure of traditional houses in both islands.

Third, both islands are a maternal society where female members play an important role in maintaining the society(Joa, 2000: 373-378). Being engaged in production activity, they were also given a religious authority to manage peace and order of their community throughout their

whole life. As god's daughters such as halmang in Jeju and noro in Okinawa, their position was distinguished from general people and produced many female-oriented myths.

Generally speaking, previous studies on features of myth structure in Jeju and Okinawa tended to classify creation myths of the two islands within the framework of a vertical or horizontal worldview(Yoon, 2010; Hur, 2013). However, it is neither desirable nor meaningful in theory for researchers to impose the existing criterion of classifying different mythic worldviews is imposed on both islands in the same way. Given that a more dynamic approach on their worldviews is necessarily required, this paper focuses on the orientation of self-realization, which means to reach a existential perfection of humanity by means of gods described in existential and phenomenological myths. Myths of both islands consist of a mixture of three types of mythemes: the creation god descended from the sky(天降神), came across the distant ocean(渡來神), and sprang out of the ground(湧出神)(Hur, 2013: 231-232). They are basically originated from the third type created in primitive agricultural society and changed into the first type by adding a justification of social ruling, even if there is a time gap between both islands. As a result, the first type of mythemes became the central axis of myths in both islands through a syncretism with the second and third type. This transformation involves and reflects the two contradictory ideas drawn from the situation of the age.

First, the phenomenological worldview is based on a second or third type of myth. It means that the gods appear in line with real life. The human position on mythology is very receptive and positive. This is because the pattern of myth is the motivation and result of accepting the meaning of myth in reality. Second, an existential worldview is based on myths where the sky god descends from the above. An ideal type of role in this existential relationship focuses on the assistantship for the creator as a main character of myths. This is because they consist of a narrative of a creation of the transcendental being and its role in overcoming a critical situation in reality rather than its external appearance. Whether it belongs to the second or third type, human beings in reality try to build a new foundation of their life beyond terrible life conditions. Especially the first type of myths intends to maximize a political mysticism that can justify a distinction between social classes and strengthen a power of the ruling class. The myth of existential relationship reflects a firm will of the other, whereas that of phenomenological relationship reflects a firm will of the self. Thus, it is necessary to abandon such perspective that focuses on passive aspects of myths. We would be in danger of dismissing an essential meaning of myths based on the demands and faith of the times if we simply inherit ancient myths without such conversion of thoughts.

It is difficult to find a consistent pattern between creation myths in Jeju and Okinawa, but the myths of both islands have in common with a central status of women as the origin of humanity. Goddesses are compared to everything in the world in a symbolic way. In other words, goddesses play an important role in mythology because they produce all life and sacrifice for their families. For example, the myth of samseunghalmangbonpuri(삼승할망본풀이) in Jeju is useful for analyzing a mythic structure reflected in for a better understanding of mythic elements left in our memories(Lee, 1996; Han, 1998; Cha, 2007; Cho, 2009; Lee, 2009; Kim, 2010; Jeong, 2010). It is also noteworthy to track down how such mythic elements are involved in women's life in terms of its remarkable features and patterns. A narrative of miyako island in Okinawa, which the sky god sends his daughter into the world to teach how to cultivate grain, is obviously reacted in an ancestor worship ritual of Karimata village, called 'wooyagan mazuri(祖神祭)', in the island(Jeong, 2013: 46-49). All village women participate in this ritual and supposedly take on the role of ancestor gods, and then come back to human beings(Kang et. al., 2016: 169-173). All participants sing together a long song with refined lyrics in the myth during the Karimata ritual, whereas only the clergy can sing in the myth of samseunghalmangbonpuri in Jeju.

IV. A Mythic Paradigm of Fire god and Kitchen god in Jeju

Fire-themed meaning of fire captures humans in unexpected fun and excitement, so fire is often used to stimulate endless imagination in primitive societies. Especially the connection of woman and fire pot created by the myths of fire led the meaning of traditional residence space and its structure to a more complicated and various dimension. According to Gaston Bachelard's explanation(2007, 15), fire is not an object of scientific study any more, but of psychological conceptualization because its implication in myth is too complex and diverse to be reduced to a simple chemical phenomenon. Unlike fire gods in Jeju, the mythology of the West focuses on introducing a role and scope of each god such as Hestia and Hephaestus in Greek myth or Brigit in old Irish myth.

Fire in Jeju, however, is assimilated into a natural environment and daily life of the island where Mt. Halla is located in the middle. It has a flexible shape of burning and flowing lava with its huge might and divinity. Jowangshin(竈王神), one of kitchen god, is a representative example of the fact that people in Jeju wanted to bring the divinity and meaning of fire to

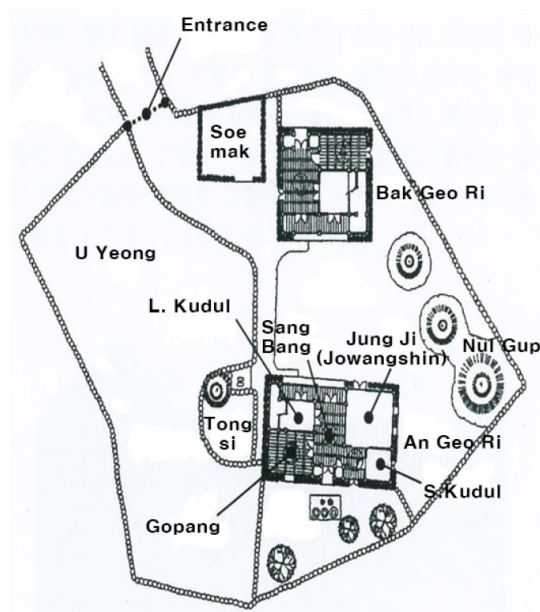
their private house for the same reason that they worship Mt. Halla with the shape of fire. Thus it symbolizes the purity of fire and is believed to have a divine power to purify the evil. There is no historical record of when Jowangshin began to be worshipped as kitchen god, even if it is known well that it is originated in Chinese Taoism. While it is called to shaman in the Antaek kut, which is a shamanistic ritual for wishing a safety and well-being of family members, it is regarded as one of the most important house gods in Jeju. Concerning the origin of Jowangshin in Korea, it goes back to the Chosun Dynasty when Lee Sookwang(1563-1629) described how Chinese people held a worshipping ritual for kitchen god, even if Lee Neungwha criticized his contradictory understanding of ritual culture in China then. Above all, the most remarkable difference between Jowangshin of Jeju and China is that the former is imagined as female, but the latter as male. The size of kitchen in traditional houses of Jeju and Okinawa is big enough to occupy about 30% to 40% of the entire house. This reflects a status of women to use the kitchen space exclusively and is based on a female-focused living condition.

It seems that there is a close relationship between Jowangshin in Jeju and Chinese Taoism in terms of geographical bearings. Taoism regards the East and West as important, as it is shown in the myth of Hsi Wang Mu(西王母) living in the jade pool in Kunlun Mountains. In particular, kitchens facing the West in Jeju and Okinawa are connected to the death of all things. The East represents a frightened head or rising life, and the Big Dipper is described as an outer gate to the sky. According to the myth of <Munjeonbonpuri> Jo Wangshin is described as the origin of distrust in Jeju, and in contrast to the continental distrust, it still plays an essential role in rituals held in private houses. <Munjeonbonpuri> says as follows.

As the stepmother's conspiracy is revealed, she hanged herself in the restroom where she had hid and later became a god of restroom. The shameless father ran away, but choke over jungnang, wooden bars, and later became a god of jungnang. Her sons obtained a flower of resurrection in a garden of the western heaven to revive her mother as a god of kitchen. Five brothers deified as gods who protect five bearings, the sixth son as god of the rear gate, and the youngest as god of the front gate.

Jowangshin as fire god in the myth of munjeonbonpuri has a symbolic meaning of going toward a bright world and going up to the heaven, and thereby the fire god can carry the wishes of island people into the heaven, as it did in the past. It is usually embodied as a bowl or pot filled with pure water in Jeju and Okinawa, and sometimes as three stones to be used

for brazier, called ‘samdeok(三德)’, three virtues (Cha et. al., 2010: 90). The kitchen space in the mythic time comprehends the importance of female, the power of fire, the cycle of birth and death, beginning and end, and the like. In addition, the reason why Tongsi, a special toilet optimized for raising pigs with human waste, is placed in a traditional house is because human waste means death and birth. This cycle of birth, death, and resurrection has been continuously embodied by the structure of Jeju private houses. This type brought about the change of Jeju's feminine Jo Wang-shin in the appearance of masculine distrust in Europe.



<Figure 1> Structure of Houses in jeju

V. A Fire Ember(火種子) and Tokura(トーグラ) in Okinawa

A representative myth of Okinawa about the ember of fire is the story of competition between Maitreya and Buddha, similar to a myth transmitted orally in the province of Hamgyeong in Korea(Fukuda et., 1989: 117-118; Jeong, 2013: 111-116; Shim et. al., 2013). The myth in Okinawa consists of five mythemes; competition for flowering, unfair victory, finding and hiding fire embers, origin of the good and the evil. That has a structure of synopsis based on competition similar to two myths of East Sea king's daughter and the Jade Emperor's

daughter involved in samseunghalmangbonpuri in Jeju, it belongs to a type of the myth of life and death transformed from the creation myth(Kim, 2002: 301). Interestingly, the myth in Yonaguni island(与那国島), Okinawa prefecture have the mytheme of competition between female-imagined Maitreya and male-imagined Buddha in common, which is still performed to dancing for Maitreya in local fertility rite(Fukuda et. 1989, 117-118). This myth says that Maitreya hid original fire embers after his defeat against Buddha and became the origin of fire, making it the feminine-oriented myth.

Meanwhile, house gods in Okinawa island are composed of earth god(ジ-ジオン), well god(カ-シン), and gate gods(ヒジャイニジリのカミ). Based on the placement of gods, most of private houses look toward the south(フェーンケー). Their most remarkable feature is that their architectural structure resembles a shape of recumbent person. Its right side, the east, symbolizes a head, while its left side, the west, does a foot. So, the central axis of all houses is split into the sacred right side and the profane left side where involves both restroom and kitchen(Akamine, 2016: 22). The first room in the east is a space for house god, the second room where only female can perform the ritual is a space for a ritual of ancestor worship equipped with a shrine. This feminine tradition is also the case in togura(トーグラ, kitchen) as a space for the worship ritual of hinukan(ヒヌカン), fire god, which people in Okinawa worshipped in the same way with the sun god. As the east means a beginning of life and the west means death, why kitchen is built in the west is due to their belief in the afterlife in the west. Hinukan is the god of fire, and it has the meaning of serving all living things because it brings back all deaths caused by cooking with food. That is to say, people in Okinawa believe in a cyclical transition of death and birth when they face dying in the kitchen.



<Figure 2> Hinukan

Three myths still remain to tell the origin of kitchen, called togura(トーグラ), which is built with three braziers supported by three stones for worshipping hinukan. Togura was used for cooking and sometimes as a storage to keep grains or farming tools. The number 'three' is interpreted traditionally as a pot with three legs(三鼎) in China, but in Okinawa it is believed to show a harmonious relationship between a small-scaled and a large-scaled universe. Another example is found in Ikema island located to the north of Miyako Island in Okinawa Prefecture whose folk belief describes "three stones under big pot in kitchen" as a fire god. The location and meaning of the stones are intended to pursue a peace of mind, focusing on a structural harmony of private house in terms of the small-scaled cosmos. The right-side stone is meant as a god of main gate, the left-side one as a god of earth, and the rear one as a god of house(Matsui, 1999: 102-103). When the lady of the house came to death, people in Ikema island would replace the rear stone in a sense that a new god of house are welcome. Although the myth of three stones, as mentioned above, was originated from the northern nation, they could add their own meaning to the myth through elaborating each stone to the eastern one as god of the other world, the central one as god of this world, and the western one as ancestors' god in the world of death(Matsui, 1999: 104).

Finally, the restroom is also believed to be as mythically implicative a space as kitchen in both Jeju and Okinawa. That a pigsty called 'huroo' in Okinawa, as 'tongsi' in Jeju, is next to the restroom to make it easier to feed the excrements to the pigs. That implies that eating and excreting are integrated into an everlasting cycle of life and death beyond a secular separation of cleanness and dirtiness(Jeong, 2013: 97). As a result, the space structure of traditional houses in both regions will be able to be understood much better when their mythic system of meaning is revealed more clearly.

VI. Conclusion

People in Jeju and Okinawa do not complain about a barrenness of their natural environment because the islands to them are a real stage of life where they should overcome endless difficulties and frustration. Through projecting myths into their house to survive the hard realities in front of them, the residence was set up to a space for communicating between the earth and the heaven. In this sense, the culture of resentment revealed by the space provided the strongest motive of balancing the reality and the ideal out of their conflicting situation. The

myths of Jeju and Okinawa can be understood as a result of wisdom by which they expressed their traditional customs and religious symbols in their own way. They functioned as a motive of completing the self by means of connecting the small-scaled cosmos with the essential great cosmos. The fire god among them implies a new stage of life like creation or abundance, centering on women's role. The myths of fire god say that the kitchen space is only for women. Through this kind of myths, it is revealed that fire as a core of kitchen symbolizes the central role of women not only in overcoming human weakness and limitation, but also in purifying the mundane world. Their trial to find a profound meaning in a relationship between fire and kitchen offers us a chance to look over the culture of the two islands on a new perspective. Ultimately, fire is the Empedocles complex that the instinct of life and death as well as love and respect is combined together.

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