

## Mountain: Maternal Symbolism of Conceiving Individuation

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### <Abstract>

In this article, the maternal symbolism of the mountain conceiving individuation was examined in the context of analytical psychology. Three significant symbolic meanings were identified: the mountain as maternity, the mountain as the one that brings about ego development, and which induces individuation. The lexical definition and general characteristics of the mountain, the significance of the mountain in various cultures and myths, including Korea, as well as the meanings that were drawn from the client's personal experiences were analyzed. As a result of analysis, it was concluded that the mountain was an important symbol that encouraged ego development and helped one to discover the mother complexes that were hidden in the deep abyss within the unconscious, so that it could lead to individuation.

*Keywords* : mountain, symbol, motherhood, ego development, individuation

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## I. Introduction

Due to its sheer height, the mountain usually symbolizes desires, dreams, and hopes. Also, because its appearance seems enduring, it is perceived as a sacred space where human beings' secular agonies are purified. Furthermore, it represents broad-mindedness or benevolence (Cooper, 2007).

The mountain is invested with various symbolic meanings because the layers that form it such as its height, verticality, mass, shape, and so on evoke different symbolisms. When the height is emphasized, it symbolizes psychological uplift. When verticality is emphasized, it is related to the axis of the world. If the mass is focused, then it represents greatness (Turner, 2005).

The mountain is an important symbolic place in the Bible. In the Old Testament, God freed the Hebrews from Egypt through their leader Moses and made a covenant with the people on Mount Sinai. The main idea of the Ten Commandments is the people's vertical love for God and his vertical love for humanity. Elijah, a later Hebrew prophet, also received God's message on Mount Sinai. The one who gave meaning to the mountain is Jesus Christ and he often prayed on mountains (Rim, 2006). In other words, the symbolism of the vertical ascent can be found as 'the meeting with God.'

The mountain's mass allows us to think about motherhood. There is a famous saying, 'If a mountain is deep, the valley runs deep as well.' As it says, the mountain's bosom is indefinitely deep and cozy. It is undeniable that people are comforted by the motherhood of the mountain without even realizing it. The mountain has the ability to make the human mind very comfortable when we look into the distance and are enfolded deep inside its bosom. As if it were a mother, the mountain accommodates and embraces humanity, and matures us in its bosom. Therefore, historically many figures have retired to the mountain and enjoyed time away from the world, and so many people have left the secular world and lived on the mountain (Koo, 1996).

The most profound symbolism of the mountain is that the concept of its mass is expressed as an actual being. It is combined with the concept of verticality, and then receives the characteristic of holiness. Like the cross of Christ or the cosmic tree, the mountain in this

case is located in the center of the world. The mystique the mountaintop holds originated from its role of connecting the three different dimensions together since it is sitting at the center where the axis of the world penetrates (Bradway, 2001).

This study deals with the counseling process of a 35-year-old female client who experienced severe depression and anxiety due to the sense of loss from her mother's death, along with the dreams that appeared during the grieving process afterwards. Kast (1982) defined grieving as the emotion that imposes order on the life of a person who has been shocked due to a loss and that allows the person to experience a new self and a new world. He explained that people who experienced loss expressed sorrow, anxiety, and the meaning of the rest of their lives in symbolic dreams. From the symbolic meanings of the mountains that appear in dreams or life experiences, the client's unconscious conflicts and messages about their future life are recognized.

Thus, the researcher will discuss the symbolism of the mountain by relating it to the client's experiences and dream stories from the viewpoint of analytical psychology. I tried to interpret the internal process that appears when one is separated from one's mother through the mountain's symbolism as the archetype of motherhood. Also, we will take some views of what kind of role the mountain's symbolism of motherhood takes in individuation through the journey to one's unconsciousness that leads to self-development of the client.

## II. Characteristics of Mountains

The dictionary definition of mountain is generally a highly elevated land with steep slopes and a relatively narrow top. A mountain is usually considered higher than hills, but these terms are not differentiated by geological meanings. A solitary mountain is very rare and in most cases it exists as part of a range or chain of mountains. Such ranges or chains are often connected to each other to form long ranges like the Rocky Mountains and the Andes Mountains. The major mountain ranges in the world belong to two gigantic ranges, the circum-Pacific and the Alps-Himalaya zones.

A mountain is formed by uplifts, folds, or faults of a land or explosions of volcanic

rocks. The origins of the major mountain chains are closely related to the huge, sturdy plates that form the lithosphere, which is the outermost layer of the Earth. In terms of geological age, most of the mountain ranges have relatively recently risen higher than their surroundings, and they will become lower lands by erosion over the course of time. The geological features of the mountain are affected by the types and structures of the rocks that compose the mountain as well, but the primary factor that decides the specific features of the mountain is the aforementioned process.

A fold by severe compression and a crustal uplift happen in a wide area due to the clashes of the plates of the lithosphere. For example, the plate moving towards the north including the Indian Subcontinent collided with the Eurasian Plate and formed the Himalayan Mountains. From further west, the African Plate moving towards the north blocked the Tethys Sea (the Mediterranean is what is left of the Tethys Sea) and uplifted the Alps, Pyrenees, and the Atlas. The ranges around the Pacific basin are mostly made by subduction, which is the process whereby one plate moves under another plate at the boundary of the plates.

As the edge of the plate under the Pacific Ocean is subducted, some of the rock materials go into the asthenosphere and gets melted. Later, these are erupted to the surface as lava or pyroclastic deposits. They form the lands where there are various volcanic cones with steep slopes like the Cascades in North America or those in Japan. In other margins located in the Pacific basin, the crust gets thicker due to the plates piled up and ranges are formed. In this kind of area, the volcanic landforms like the Andes in South America only take up a small portion of the overall features. In some areas, the ranges are formed by the reduction of the crust in the plates rather than formed at the edges of the plates where the ranges collide with each other, for example, the Rocky Mountains in North America and the Atlas Mountains in northwest Africa.

Mountains can be categorized into various types based on the methods of formation and the resultant structures. The main forms are domes, fault blocks, folds, and volcanoes. The dome-shaped mountains are formed by the Earth's surface that is not crushed but bent upwards, and are relatively flat with an easy gradient. The Mount Black Hills in South Dakota are a typical example of this. The mountains with the fault blocks are composed of pieces of

the crust caused by the uplifted blocks along the fracture zone. The uplifted fault blocks are divided into valleys or basins. The Sierra Nevada Range and the Teton Range in western North America are good examples of the fault block mountain.

Folded mountains are formed when the crust is under lateral pressure and uplifted. They appear in wide basins filled with sedimentary rocks. When under pressure, the sedimentary rocks that are close to the Earth's surface and are not transformed with the stratification bedding react differently compared to bed rocks located below such as granite or gneiss. Folded mountains with simple features can be formed in any place where the upper sedimentary rock slips to the side to become a fold on the bedrock. The Jura Mountains in Switzerland and the Appalachian Mountains in North America are typical of this category. (<http://100.daum.net/encyclopedia/view/b11s1118b>).

### III. Symbolization of Mountains

#### 1. Mountain that Symbolizes Motherhood

The mountain holds an image of the Earth and symbolizes life and abundance. The mountain is a place for the celebration of life where all living things breathe. The meaning of the maternal image of the mountain is well explained in the Korean poem "Mountain Drawing 1" by Park Mok-wol:

*One glittered in the sun. The other was covered in the shade. In this long hillside with a delicate smile and deep tears. Oh, you are the everlasting motherhood. I opened and closed my eyes in its warm balance of yin and yang. Just one layer of the fog was softly covering its mystery. So that the word of mother will not be lost or hardened. The angel was always humble. One part of the raiment shined brightly. Another part is dipped in the darkness, the angel always descended as well. In the deep, green sky, the sound of the silver well bucket moving up and down.*

The poet writes of the mountain as 'the everlasting motherhood.' The mountain is described as the motherhood that generates all things; in other words, it is expressed as the God of Creation. One section (*The angel was always humble. One part of the raiment shined brightly. Another part is dipped in the darkness, the angel always descended as well.*) shows that the mountain is in the position where it responds to the sky and is symbolized as female in the opposite position from male (Kim, 2009). The mountain is the motherhood, the source of existence, and the resting place where we can return.

More metaphorically, we can associate the mother's breast with the mountain. From "Mother's nipples are the highest mountaintops as long as I live in this world," the feelings towards the nipples are symbolized with the maternal image of the mountain:

*When I think of the breast of the mother's breast, it is the noble life force that is beautiful and inviolable. It is the spring of life that saved me and the oasis which opened up the unlimited possibilities. It extended my life with the mother's milk, it is the spring of life that planted all dreams of the world, and it is higher than any mountain. Mother's nipples are the highest mountaintops as long as I live in this world (Kim, 2009).*

The image of a child sucking the mother's breast can be thought as the single body of the mother-child relationship that Kалff stressed. The breast is the most basic connection between the mother and the baby and their relationship is formed along it. The single body of the mother-child relationship is the basic developmental stage existing prior to the child's development of self-awareness. It is based on the original characteristics of the pre-self mind, and during this early stage of the life the baby recognizes the mother as godmother and the motherly God in a human body.

Neumann (1959) understood that the mother is the omnipotent figure to the child before the child is individualized and ego identity is developed. He said that the godmother in its original form is very important for the child's development and that the godmother provides the safety and confidence that are needed for the healthy development of the personality while the child's ego is protected by the single body of the mother-child relationship.

The basic mother-child relationship determines the quality of all relationships. It includes not only personal intra-psychic experiences but also relationships with other people, objects, and events. Therefore, the child's relationship with oneself is determined by the quality of the mother-child relationship.

Neumann (1973) claimed that the child can have positive effects from original motherly characteristics such as trees or gardens even though the child does not have a sufficient mother-child relationship, and the positive basic relationship will allow the child to integrate crises that can happen not only in the personal development but also the personal, internal level. This means that the positive mother-child relationship can lead the child to develop the emotional skills and characteristics that are needed to efficiently use the unconscious materials happening during the course of life.

While we looked at the motherhood symbolizing life and abundance in the Korean poem, the opposite characteristic of the motherhood that symbolizes the death is shown in *The Legend of Mount Mangso*.

*There was a mountain called Mount Mangso, located near Ungak Fortress in Manchuria. Long time ago, a mother and a son lived lonely lives in this mountain valley. This child was the devoted son whom you could not see in any other part of the world, and he always thought about how to make his mother live a comfortable life. He not only had a good heart, he studied very hard as well. Therefore, he got permission from his mom to take an exam to become an officer. In order to write the exam, he had to go to Shandong. In order to get there, he had to take a ship. He found company for his travel, so he and his mother said good bye to each other, and he took off happily.*

*After a few months, it was the time for the son to come back but there was no news. The mother started feeling worried, so went up to the mountain everyday watching the sea thinking each ship would be the one that her son was on. She thought of the son all the time, forgetting to brush her hair and change the clothes. People said "Poor lady, she became crazy because of her son" and felt bad for her.*

*Her son died from the high winds and waves in Balbae, and she died from the shock. All the villagers made a tower for her on the mountain and prayed for her. Since then, everyone who*

*heard about the news started to call this Mount Mangso (Son, 2009).*

In the Legend of Mount Mangso, the mountain is symbolized as the place where people pray for the mother who died waiting for her son, and the death is described as the image of the grave. This is related to the mountain as death, and shows the negative side of the motherly characteristic of the mountain. Jung said all the negative sides are “secret, something secluded, darkness, hell, the world of death, something swallowing everything, something seducing, something poisoning, something causing anxiety, something you cannot get out of.” (Sibylle, 1988). The grave is the womb of the earth (Cooper, 2007), looks like a mountain, and works as a dish to hold dead bodies. It is connected to the integration of the two extreme opposites since the mountain is putting the negative side, the world of death, into the positive side of motherhood.

The mountain with the positive motherly form symbolized as the ‘breast’ and the negative motherly form symbolized as the grave is a very important symbol for the processes of self-development and individuation.

## 2. Mountain that Symbolizes Self-Development

In analytic psychology, ego is the center of consciousness. Ego not only controls and strengthens the consciousness as the center, it is also Ego’s role to assimilate or recognize meaning in the information from the unconsciousness to the consciousness. In other words, ego is the essential precondition for individuation (Rhi, 2002). Ego has the ability to control the instincts and aid adjustment to cultural standards. With this process, ego loses the balance and contacts with dark factors in the mind. The function of ego is to recognize and assimilate the outer and inner spaces and to interpret the world we experience into a consistent and easy-to-control environment. This ego is developed as we are born and grow (Turner, 2005).

Self-development is the process whereby the ability to connect the outer and inner spaces in harmony is developed. Edinger (1972) explained the development of ego-Self. The very initial stage is when Self is inside the mother and ego is inside Self. This status is when Self and ego have not been divided. Over the course of time, Self is slowly divided from the

mother. As it is divided, ego gradually develops and achieves independence consciously.

Let us see how the client's mountain climbing experience affected the appearance of perception and self development. The client started to climb mountains with her mother for the first time due to separation anxiety at the age of 7. The client started elementary school a year earlier than her friends, and suffered anxiety because she was very introverted and shy and worried about the new environment and the fact that she would be separated from her mother. The client's mother took her to the mountain to ease her anxiety. The client reported that during the process she experienced the mountain as another mighty mother who protected her mind from the fear and anxiety of separation from her mother.

A child's separation anxiety symptoms belong to the stage where Edinger (1972) said that self is inside of the mother and ego is inside of Self. Having separation anxiety can be viewed as the client's ego not consciously achieving independence. When the client climbed the mountain, she felt like the mountain was embracing and comforting her and could also feel the wonder and sacredness of the mountain. This can be seen as Numinosum in the field of analytic psychology. Jung defined Numinosum as 'a dynamic being or action that occurs in a place where the power of the conscious cannot be reached.' The action of Numinosum captures and controls the human subject, and the human is not the one who made it but rather the sacrifice to it and it is the condition of the human being that is not limited by their will. In other words, Numinosum is the characteristic of something visible or the effect of something invisible but nevertheless existing that causes a special change to the consciousness (Jung, 1985).

The client experienced the symbolism of the mountain as mighty motherhood while climbing the mountain and ego started developing through this experience so that independence could be consciously achieved. The client's experience worked as the inner resource that enabled her to endure the separation, while the emotions from the mountain climbing process contributed largely to the client's self development. Also, the client became psychologically stable and a more durable ego was developed.

### 3. Mountain that Symbolizes Individuation

The mountain has the symbolism that aims for the mind's inner enhancement and the absolute world of self-consciousness (Elide, 1959). Jung's individuation is to become 'Self,' demonstrating and incorporating the mind that we bring to the world when we are born. That the unconsciousness is the basic requirement and oneself is the wholeness and the original form supports the fact that the unconsciousness that can allow anyone to individualize exists from when a person is born. Everyone has the potential to individualize and it depends on ego whether one will individualize actively by waking up the potential or not (Rhi, 2002).

In other words, individuation is 'to make a person a special, individualized being.' If we each become an individualized being for oneself, then we can form a more mature, one-level-higher-dimensioned relationship. The way to make people healthy is to allow them to find their true characteristics that have otherwise been alienated by a lifetime of conforming to the demands of society-in other words, individuation. In that sense, it is a healing process and the course of making a healthy person (Rhi, 1978).

In Neumann's theory of mind development (1954), Self is the priority in the relationship with nature over the course of life, achieves individuation, exists prior to development, the origin of existence and development, the center that leads the development, and the ultimate goal of life.

The center and activities of centralization hold a very important meaning in sandplay since they are related to Self's original forms. Therefore, the symbol for the center is related to the axis of the universe. The center is described as the original center of the world and the place where the uplift to some other dimension is possible. During sandplay there are many cases in which people build a mountain in the center of their sand boxes. That mountain is pointing to a higher dimension, so it is considered sacred (Turner, 2005). Elide (1959) said that wherever the sacredness appears is the center. Similarly, a spatial location where a person pulls through the events of the reality also becomes the sacred place or center.

The holiness of the mountain can be found in many mythologies around the world. Mountaintops are often considered as a place for revelations and messages. In various legends, it has been said that sacred revelations were received on the highest mountaintop. Moses met

Yahweh on Mount Sinai (Nicholson, 1997). The Transfiguration of Jesus also happened on a mountain. For the ancient Hebrews, the place where God resided was not Mount Sinai; it was Mount Zion in Jerusalem where God lived among his chosen people (Turner, 2005).

In Korean myths, the first appearance of the mountain is in the myth of Dangun. In this legend, Taebaeksan Mountain is the universal mountain that is the center of the world and Sindansu is the universal tree.

*The king of kings who governed the heaven (Hwanin) had a second son, Hwanung. He always looked down the earth, wanting to rule the human world. Hwanin realized his son's thoughts and looked at the ground. Taebaeksan Mountain located in the middle of the beautiful mountains, rivers, and fields looked the most suitable place to govern widely the human beings and benefit them. Soon, he gave Hwanung the three marks showing that he had authorities to rule the earth and sent him along with few other Gods.*

Three marks, or seals, were the objects that government officials used to prove their authority; since Hwanung was the son of the heavenly king the reason why he was given three marks was because he had authority over the gods of the wind, rain, and clouds.

*Hwanung came down to Taebaek Mountain with three thousand people from the heaven. He decided to have the area as the base to rule the world and called it Shinsi. The person who opened Shinsi was Hwanung-in other words, Hwanung the heavenly king. He had Gods of wind, rain, and cloud and ruled over about 360 issues including farming, life, disease, punishment, good and evil and governed the human world (Lee, 1996).*

Hwanung's three marks symbolized his authority to rule the world. The number 3 is also the form of the Trinity and symbolizes the dynamic or lively aspect (Edinger, 1972). It is regarded as the energy needed for individuation.

In the client's dream, a similar symbolism of the mountain can be found. After her mother's death, the client went to Jeju Island to climb its highest mountain, Hallasan, and in doing so attained a peaceful mind. Prior to her trip to Jeju, the client shared a dream about the mountain:



Figure 1. The snowcapped Mt. Halla

*I was climbing Halla Mountain. The season at the time was certainly Summer, but the mountain was covered in snow and I could not see the top. Since I told everyone I would go up to the top by myself, I could not stop there; therefore, I kept walking while talking to myself that I could not give up. The surface was covered by the thick snow so I could not see what was there, so I fell into a hole. I kept shouting for help but no one was there. I struggled by myself and got out of the hole. I breathed deeply to calm myself so that I could keep going to the top. I really wished to go to the top. However, I felt so nervous and anxious because I could not see the end of it. But then there was another mountain right next to me. That mountain was the one in my neighborhood from my childhood; the one I always saw full of the green trees. I was not sure. Should I keep going up to Hallasan Mountain or go to the one I am used to?*

Take a look at a similar dream that a theologian had:

*In the mountain, he stared at a kind of Holy Grail. He was walking along the way that seemed reaching all the way up straight up to the mountain. Unfortunately, when he got closer to the mountain, the water that looked as if it were from the underworld was flowing with noises and this dark valley was dividing him and the mountain. The steep path ran in the direction of the dark valley and came back upwards on the other side. But the possibility seemed very low.*

The theologian who had this dream realized that he should go into the deep, dark place in order to get to the brighter upper side, which was an absolute requirement. In this darkness there were dangers and the clever ones could avoid them. But the treasures that

could be gained from a brave but unwise adventure were carelessly missed (Jung, 1984). When the unconsciousness is conscientized, the desire to attain the goal faster arises. But the unconscious will teach you that the goal can be an ordinary mountain. Individuation is similar.

In the dream of the client, the goal was not climbing the mountain. Due to the motherhood complex the client had, the dream's compensation effect revealed through the unconscious that the client avoided the recognition of hardships and tried to go further to acquire positive things. If one does not accept grief or sorrow as things that belong to them, one cannot grow up. Since her childhood the client's separation from her mother was her major source of anxiety and pain. Now let us look at the other aspect of the client's pain and sorrow, the motherhood complex.

The concept of complex is one of the essential concepts in Jungian psychology. A complex is something that disrupts the flow of our thoughts and causes us to become flustered, upset, or stifled (Rhi, 1978). Conscientizing the complex is an important task for maturing the personality. The client can face the complex in their dreams, but it is a very difficult process to conscientize and convert the complex into a developmental aspect. But facing it is an initiation process that is highly necessary.

In the motherhood complex, the 'motherhood' is not a mother in reality but the maternal instinct, productivity, tolerance, broad-mindedness, raising and protection instincts, prefigurative function, waiting, eternity, strong and destructive affection, possessive instinct, and domination instinct within human beings related to original motherhood. It has all of these positive and negative aspects at the same time. So, the creative activity is an expression of the positive motherhood complex. Generally the word complex is seen as negative and disease-related, and people have a negative impression of 'motherhood complex,' but it is not always negative (Rhi, 1978).

It is characteristic of a person with a positive motherhood complex to enjoy life as much as possible, but it is not limited to this. Such people usually feel a sense of intimacy from something unconscious and trust it. They are creative, mostly kind, and love sharing their possessions. They are also good at empathizing with other people (Kast, 2007). In this way, the client's mother provided the factors of positive motherhood, such as waiting, tolerance,

broad-mindedness, and the raising and protection instincts.

But the most serious problem for people with a positive motherhood complex is separation. They should accept the fact that death exists and separation offers a new start and development. The motherhood complex is usually overwhelmed by the mother as the 'mighty Goddess' who appears in various aspects so that the separation from parents does not happen at the point where it is not easily achieved or one cannot receive help (Kast, 2010). Another aspect is the problem with making decisions and showing aggressiveness in life; sometimes, it leads to depression combined with self-aggressiveness. While experiencing the parting from the mother, if not properly conducted the client develops a negative motherhood complex, which is based on depression. Anger means the parting so the person blames themselves and feels guilty. Then this guilt leads to an unstable unity of self complex, uncontrollable aggressiveness, and sudden depression (Kast, 2007). The depression is the pain that is targeted at the repair of self-consciousness. This is possible by conscientizing what had been lost in the unconsciousness; this is initiation-Jung's individuation (Rhi, 2001).

The client slowly processed the psychological separation by facing her motherhood complex and her depression symptoms were improved as well. Also, the client gradually changed from the point where she would not meet any people to positively interacting with other people.

The mountain symbolizes uplift, the heaven where deities live, magical and spiritual enhancement, and Self (Rhi, 2002). As many people think Mt. Everest is a heavenly place to reach, the mountain the client wanted to conquer was Hallasan, the highest mountain in Korea. In the dream, the mountain symbolized as Hallasan was the journey to Self, which is the heavenly place that humans cannot reach. This journey is the unconsciousness' message to say not to hurry but to take your time as you communicate with your inner self. It is the attraction to individuation that the mountain has.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

This study explains the symbolism of the mountain as the original motherhood, and

examines from the viewpoint of analytic psychology how the process of self-development independent from original motherhood appears when the symbolism of the mountain shown in the client's personal experience is separated from the real mother. Also, the way that the motherhood complex acted during the process of individuation was analyzed.

The mountain is connected to the sky above and the world below. Standing between the sky and the land, the mountain has varied symbolic meanings. The mountain was considered to possess inner nobility. In other words, the upward movement is expressed in the spiritual area (Bradway, 2001). It was impossible to receive comforts from the mountain in this spiritual area without realizing it, and in motherhood we meet the original form of the mother and go through the process of separation from the personal mother. A desire for individuation via self-development faces a complex, and the positive complex made psychological separation from the mother more difficult.

Jung thought that contact with the unconsciousness was essential for mental health and the process of individuation. It is the meeting with the unconsciousness that is essential for the fundamental part of life and is the meaning itself (Rhi, 1978). By analyzing the mountain, the deep abyss of the unconsciousness that is not resolved by the consciousness has been found and it is a very important symbol that leads to individuation.

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