

KOREAN STUDIES SERIES No. 4

# Myths of Korea

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## Tangun\*

Tangun, the mythological progenitor of the Korean people and the founder of Old Chosŏn, the first state of Korea, is mentioned in a number of sources. The following version in the *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms* seems to be the closest to the original form of the myth.

The *Wei shu* tells us that two thousand years ago, at the time of Emperor Yao, Tangun Wanggŏm chose Asadal as his capital and founded the state of Chosŏn. The *Old Record* notes that in olden times Hwanin's son, Hwangung, wished to descend from heaven and live in the world of human beings. Knowing his son's desire, Hwanin surveyed the three highest mountains and found Mount T'aebaek the most suitable place for his son to settle and help human beings. Therefore he gave Hwanung three heavenly seals and dispatched him to rule over the people. Hwanung descended with three thousand followers to a spot under a tree by the Holy Altar atop Mount T'aebaek, and he called this place the City of God. He was the Heavenly King Hwanung. Leading the Earl of Wind, the Master of Rain, and the Master of Clouds, he took charge of some three hundred and sixty areas of responsibility, including agriculture, allotted lifespans, illness, punishment, and good and evil, and brought culture to his people.

At that time a bear and a tiger living in the same cave prayed to Holy Hwanung to transform them into human beings. The king gave them a bundle of sacred mugworts and twenty cloves of garlic and said, "If you eat these and shun sunlight for one hundred days, you will assume human form." Both animals ate the spices and avoided the sun. After twenty-one days the bear became a woman, but the tiger, unable to observe the taboo, remained a tiger. Unable to find a husband, the bear-woman prayed under the alter tree for a child. Hwanung metamorphosed himself, lay with her, and begot a son

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Section on Tangun myth of Old Chosŏn (from the *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms*)

called Tangun Wanggŏm.

In the fiftieth year of the reign of Emperor Yao, Tangun made the walled city of P'yŏngyang the capital and called his country Chosŏn. He then moved his capital to Asadal on Mount Paegak, also named Mount Kunghol, or Kŏmmidal, whence he ruled for fifteen hundred years. When, in the year *kimyo* (1122 B.C.), King Wu of Chou enfeoffed Chi Tzu (Kija) to Chosŏn, Tangun moved to Changdanggyŏng, but later he returned and hid in Asadal as a mountain god at the age of one thousand nine hundred and eight.

PL



Likeness of Tangun (owned by Hyŏnjŏng Society, Seoul)

## Chumong

Tongmyŏng (Eastern Brightness) appears to be a noun for a god common to the Puyŏ peoples. After Chumong established Koguryŏ, it grew to be a mighty power in Northeast Asia, and the people brought the Tongmyŏng myth transmitted among the Puyŏ peoples to embellish the legend of Chumong. It is preserved in such epitaphs as King Kwanggaet'o stele, erected in 414, and Chinese and Korean histories. The following is a prose version of the myth, originally in the *Old History of the Three Kingdoms*, quoted as a gloss to "The Lay of King Tongmyŏng," by Yi Kyubo (1168-1241), and preserved in the *Collected Works of Minister Yi of Korea (Tongguk Yi-sangguk chip)*.

In the third year of Shen-ch'üeh (59 B.C) of the Han dynasty, the Emperor of Heaven sent his son Haemosu to the old capital of Puyŏ (Chinese Fu-yü). When Haemosu descended from heaven, he rode a five-dragon chariot while his retinue of hundreds all rode white swans, floating on colored clouds that gave forth music.<sup>1</sup> He dallied for over ten days on Bear Heart Mountain before coming down; he wore a headdress made of crow feathers and carried a sword that shone like a dragon. He handled affairs of state in the morning and ascended back to heaven in the evening, so people called him the Heavenly King.

On the Green River,<sup>2</sup> north of the capital, the River Earl had three beautiful daughters. The eldest was called Willow Flower, the second Daylily Flower, and the youngest Reed Flower. One day the three girls set out from the Green River to play at Bear Heart Pond; their appearance was like gods, soft and lustrous, and their jade ornaments jangled wildly so that they seemed just like Han-kao.<sup>3</sup> Seeing them, King Haemosu told his courtiers: "If I marry one of them, I will surely have an heir." But when the girls saw the king, they immediately disappeared into the water.

The courtiers then said: "Why doesn't the king build a palace and wait for the girls to enter, after which he can close the door?"

Whereupon the Haemosu used his horsewhip to draw lines in the dirt—and suddenly a magnificent copper structure arose. In the middle of the room he set three places with goblets of wine. The three maidens came in, sat in the three places, and toasted each other with wine until they were quite inebriated. Having waited until the girls were drunk, the king then rushed out to close the doors. The girls were startled and tried to escape, but the eldest, Willow Flower, could not get away from the king.

An enraged River Earl sent a messenger demanding: “Who are you to detain my daughter?”

The king answered: “I am the son of the Emperor of Heaven and I seek the hand of your daughter in marriage.”

The River Earl sent his messenger again, saying: “If you, the son of the Emperor of Heaven, wish to seek my daughter’s hand in marriage, you should send an intermediary. Is it not improper for you to have detained my daughter?”

The king, who now intended to call upon the River Earl, was unable to enter the room because of embarrassment and decided to set Willow Flower free. But Willow Flower, who had come to love the king, would not leave. Instead she enjoined the king: “We can go to the land of the River Earl in the five-dragon chariot.”

The king called to heaven, whereupon the five-dragon chariot suddenly descended from out of the sky. As soon as the king and the girl rode the chariot, wind and clouds arose and they found themselves at the palace of the River Earl. The River Earl greeted them with propriety, prepared a place for them, and said: “The way of marriage is the same throughout under heaven. Why have you violated propriety and brought disgrace on my household? If you are truly the son of the Emperor of Heaven, you must have extraordinary powers.”

The king responded: “That can only be seen through a test.”

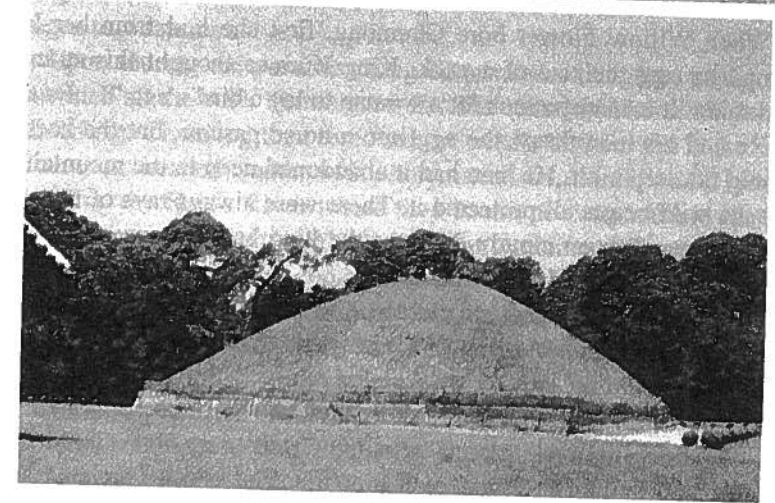
At that, the River Earl turned himself into a carp in the waters fronting his yard. The king turned himself into an otter and caught the carp. The River Earl then turned himself into a deer—whereupon the king turned himself into a wolf and chased the deer. Next the River Earl became a pheasant—but the king transformed himself into a

falcon and attacked the pheasant. At last the River Earl realized that the king was indeed the son of the Emperor of Heaven and had the marriage conducted with full ritual. But fearing that the king might not take his daughter with him when he left, the River Earl put on a banquet and urged wine upon the king, making him quite drunk. He

Section on the myth of King Tongmyōng  
(*Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms*)



Tomb of King Tongmyōng  
(Wangnūng-dong, P'yōngyang)



then put the king and his daughter in a leather bag, placed them on the five-dragon chariot, and sent it off to heaven. But before the chariot could clear the water, the king awoke, grabbed the girl's golden hairpin, pierced the leather bag, emerged and flew off to heaven alone.

Infuriated, the River Earl told his daughter: "You did not do as I said and have brought shame on my household."

He then had his courtiers stretch his daughter's lips to three feet and banished her to the Ubal River with only two slaves.

The fisherman Kangnyök-puch'u reported to King Kümwa: "Lately there has been something in the weirs taking fish, but I do not know what kind of creature it is."

King Kümwa ordered the fisherman to catch the creature, but the net ripped open. So the fisherman made an iron net with which he brought in a woman sitting on a rock. Her lips were so long that she could not speak;<sup>4</sup> only after they were trimmed three times was she able to talk. King Kümwa recognized that the woman was the consort of the son of the Emperor of Heaven and put her up in a detached palace. Impregnated by the sun shining on her, the woman gave birth to Chumong in the fourth month of the fourth year, *kyehae*, of Shench'üeh (58 B.C.). The newborn infant's crying was very loud and his form was heroic and wonderful.

When Willow Flower bore Chumong, first she laid from her left armpit an egg the size of a peck. King Kümwa thought this strange and said: "It is inauspicious for a woman to lay a bird's egg."

He had his men throw the egg into a horse pasture, but the horses would not step on it. He then had it abandoned deep in the mountains, but the wild beasts all protected it. There were always rays of the sun on the egg, even on cloudy days, so the king had the egg sent to its mother for her to tend.

Finally the egg opened and yielded a boy child who spoke before he was even one month old. He told his mother that flies were biting his eyes so he could not sleep and asked her to make him a bow and some arrows. His mother made him a bow and arrows of reeds, which he used to shoot flies resting on a spinning wheel; every arrow he loosed hit its mark. In the Puyö tongue, Chumong meant "skilled archer."<sup>5</sup>

As he grew older, he became more talented. King Kümwa had seven sons who always went hunting with Chumong. One day when the princes and their forty-odd attendants barely got one deer, Chumong shot many. Jealous, the princes grabbed Chumong, tied him to tree, and took his deer. Chumong uprooted the tree and returned home. The crown prince Taeso told King Kümhwa: "Chumong is courageous and has bold eyes. If we do not do something about him, there will surely be trouble later."

King Kümwa, seeking to test Chumong's intentions, had him tend horses. Nursing a sense of grievance, Chumong told his mother: "As the grandson of the Emperor of Heaven, I would rather die than feed horses for somebody else. I wish to go south and establish my own kingdom, but I do not dare do as I wish because my mother is here."

His mother replied: "This is what has troubled me day and night. I have heard that one needs a good horse for a long journey. I will choose one for you."

They went to where the horses were kept and drove them with a long whip. Terrified the horses raced about, but one chestnut bay leaped over the fence, which was twice the height of a man. Chumong recognized that this was a superior horse and secretly pierced its tongue with a needle so that it could not eat or drink. Soon the horse began to waste away.

Upon touring the pastures, King Kümwa was delighted at the way in which all the other horses grew fat. The emaciated horse he gave to Chumong. Chumong then removed the needle and fed the horse well. Chumong headed south with three men, Oi, Mari, and Hyöppu, reaching the Kaesa River where they found no ferry. Afraid that the soldiers pursuing them might arrive at any moment, Chumong raised his whip to the sky and deplorably cried out: "I am the grandson of the Emperor of Heaven the maternal grandson of the River Earl and have come here fleeing from danger. Gods of heaven and earth, take pity on me and quickly send a pontoon bridge."

He struck the river with his bow—whereupon fishes and turtles rose to form a bridge so that Chumong could cross the river. Soon the pursuing soldiers appeared. But after they reached the river, the fish

and turtle bridge disappeared and the soldiers already on the bridge all drowned.

Earlier, when it had been time to depart, Chumong was unable to leave his mother. But she said, "Don't worry about your mother," and gave him bundles containing the seeds of the five grains. But Chumong, stricken at the thought of separating from his mother, forgot to take the barley seeds. As Chumong was resting beneath a large tree, two doves flew up. Chumong said, "My divine mother must have sent the barley seeds," and shot the doves, knocking them both down with one arrow. He then opened their beaks, took out the barley seeds, and poured water on them. The doves then came back to life and flew away. Chumong sat himself on a reed mat and established the ranks of king and ministers.

Songyang, the king of Piryu, was out hunting when he saw Chumong. Impressed by Chumong's extraordinary appearance, he called him over and prepared a place for him, saying: "Piryu is an isolated place by the sea, so I have never seen a superior man. It is very fortunate that I have met you today."

King Chumong replied: "I am the grandson of the Emperor of Heaven and the king of the Western Country, so I dare to ask whom you succeeded as king."

Whereupon Songyang said: "I am the descendant of immortals and have been king for several generations. This area is too small to be divided between two kings. Since it has not been long since you set up your kingdom, is it not right that you should become my vassal?"

King Chumong responded: "I am the successor to the Emperor of Heaven while you, who are not the grandson of a god, insist on calling yourself king. If you do not submit to me, then surely heaven will kill you."

Songyang, who grew suspicious after hearing Chumong claim again and again to be the grandson of heaven, sought to test him, saying: "Let us shoot arrows together." He painted a deer, set it up inside a hundred paces, and drew his bow. Even though his arrow did not strike the deer's navel, it was all he could manage. King Chumong had a jade ring hung up over a hundred paces away and shot at the ring,

smashing it like a roof tile. Songyang was taken aback.

King Chumong said: "My kingdom is new and still does not have the pomp and circumstance of drum and bugle. Thus when your Piryu envoy came, I was not able to greet him and send him away in proper royal fashion. That is why you took me so lightly."

The distinguished minister Pubunno stepped forth to say: "I will get the drums of Piryu for you, Great King."

King Chumong asked: "How will you bring back something that another kingdom has hidden away?"

Pubunno responded: "This is what heaven has given. How can I not get it? Who knew that the king would rise to this level when he was in difficulty back in Puyō? The king has survived ten thousand dangers and is now known even west of the Liao River. This is due to the will of the Emperor of Heaven. There is nothing that the king cannot attain."

Pubunno and two others then went to the kingdom of Piryu and brought back the drums and bugles. The Piryu king sent a messenger to report the theft, but King Chumong, concerned that the messenger might see the drums and bugles, had them painted dark to look like something old. Songyang's messenger did not dare to dispute this and simply turned back. Because Songyang had sought to make King Chumong his vassal based on who set up his capital first, Chumong built a palace using rotten wood so that it looked to be a thousand years old. Songyang came, saw the palace, and did not dare to press the issue of whose capital was first.

King Chumong went hunting in the west, where he caught a white deer, hung it upside down at Crab Plain, made an incantation, and said: "I will not let you go unless heaven sends a great rain to wash away the royal capital of Piryu. If you want to escape this predicament, appeal to heaven."

The deer cried so piteously that the sound pierced the ears of heaven. Monsoon rains fell for seven days and Songyang's capital was washed away. King Chumong, riding a duck-horse, stretched out ropes made of reeds to which all the people clung. Then King Chumong took his whip and drew a line in the water from which the

flood subsided. In the sixth month, Songyang came and surrendered.

In the seventh month, a dark cloud covered Falcon Pass so that it could not be seen. But the voices of thousands of people and the sounds of cutting trees could be heard. King Chumong said: "Heaven is building a fortress for me." Then, for the first time in seven days, the mists cleared to reveal fortress walls and a palace terrace. King Chumong bowed to heaven and then took up residence there.

In the ninth month, King Chumong rose to heaven, never to return. At the time he was forty years of age. The Crown Prince held a funeral on South Mountain using the jade whip Chumong had left behind.

Even as a child, Yuri had great integrity. When he was young, he busied himself shooting birds. One day he shot and broke a water pitcher carried by a woman on her head. Angrily, the woman berated him: "This fatherless child has shot and broken my pitcher."

Greatly embarrassed, Yuri fashioned a plug out of clay and fixed the pitcher like new. He then went home and asked his mother who his father was. His mother, teasing because he was so young, replied that he had no particular father.

In tears Yuri said: "If I have no particular father, how can I face people from now on?" and he then tried to kill himself. Alarmed, his mother stopped him and said: "I was just teasing you. Your father is none other than the grandson of the Emperor of Heaven and the maternal grandson of the River Earl. He resented being the subject of Puyō, fled south, and set up a new kingdom. Will you not go and see it?"

Yuri answered: "My father is a king over people while I, his son, am the subject of someone else. Even though I have no talent, I cannot but be ashamed."

His mother said: "This is what your father said when he left: 'I have hidden something in a pine tree on seven hills and seven valleys. Only he who finds it will be my son.'"

Yuri looked for it through all the hills and valleys. But he could not find it, and returned home exhausted. He heard a sad sound coming from one of the posts in the house. The post was a pine tree on a stone.

The pine tree had seven corners. Figuring it out for himself, Yuri reasoned that seven hills and seven valleys were seven corners. He arose and went to the post where he found a hole at the top. There he was delighted to discover a piece of a broken sword. In the fourth month of the fourth year of Hung chia of the Former Han dynasty (17 B.C.), he escaped to Koguryō, where he presented the sword piece to the king. The king took out a piece of a broken sword and matched the two pieces together. They began to bleed and fused together into one sword.

The king then said to Yuri: "If you are truly my son, then what kind of godlike powers do you have?" In response to this sound, Yuri shot himself up into the sky and rode a spear to the sun, thus demonstrating his extraordinary godlike powers. The king was delighted and made Yuri his crown prince.

JD

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This scene is interpreted as symbolizing sunrise. The "Hae" of Haemosu's name means "sun" in Korea, and his appearance can be seen as the personification of the rising sun.

<sup>2</sup> The Green River is the present-day Yalu.

<sup>3</sup> Han-kao was a female fairy of ancient China. According to the *Han-shih wai-chüan* (Han Ying's Outer Chapters on the *Book of Songs*), when Cheng Chiao-fu of Chou passed Han-kao Terrace while on his way south to Ch'u, he met two women. The jewels they were wearing caught his eye and he talked them into giving him the jewels.

<sup>4</sup> Long lips, referring to lips like a chicken's beak, are a motif of chicken and dragon myths. The case of Lady Aryōng of Silla is one example.

<sup>5</sup> Chumong's archery skills suggest that the group which produced this myth was not agricultural but pastoral. This is borne out by the prominence of streams in the story, as well, since water was an absolute necessity for people who moved their animals across broad lands in search of pasture. In the myth of Pak Hyōkkōse, which reflects agricultural society, wells appear rather than streams.

## Pak Hyökköse

Installed as ruler by the chiefs of six villages, with the title *kösögan*, Pak Hyökköse was also the progenitor of the Pak clan of Kyöngju. Following is a version in the *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms*.

In olden times Chinhan had six villages. The first is Yangsan village in Arch'ön, south of present-day Tamöm Monastery. Its chief was Arp'yöng who first descended on P'yoam Peak. He is the progenitor of the Yi clan of Kümnyang district. The second is Kohö village on Mount Tol. Its chief was Soböltori who first descended on Mount Hyöng. He is the progenitor of the Chöng clan in Saryang district, now called Namsan district, which includes such villages in the south as Kuryangbol, Madüng, Odo, and Pukhoedök. The third is Taesu village on Mount Mu. Its chief was Kuryema, who first descended on Mount Yi. He is the progenitor of the Son clan in Chömnnyang (Moryang) district. Now called Changbok district, it includes such villages in the west as Pakkok. The fourth is Chinji village on Mount Ch'wi. Its chief was Chibaek'o, who first descended on Mount Hwa. He is the progenitor of the Ch'oe clan in Ponp'i district, now called T'ongsön, which includes such villages in the southwest as Sip'a. Ch'oe Ch'iwön is from Ponp'i district. The old site is in front of Mit'an Monastery, south of present-day Hwangnyong Monastery—it is clearer to say that this is the site of the ancestral house belonging to the Ch'oe clan. The fifth is Kari village on Mount Küm. Its chief was Chit'a, who first descended on Mount Myöngghwal. He is the progenitor of the Pae clan. Now called Kadök district, it includes such villages in the southeast as upper and lower Söjinaea. The sixth is Kaya village on Mount Myöngghwal. Its chief was Hojin, who first descended on Mount Kümgang. He was the progenitor of the Söl clan of Süppi district, which includes such villages in the east as Muri, Inggumi, and Kwölgok.

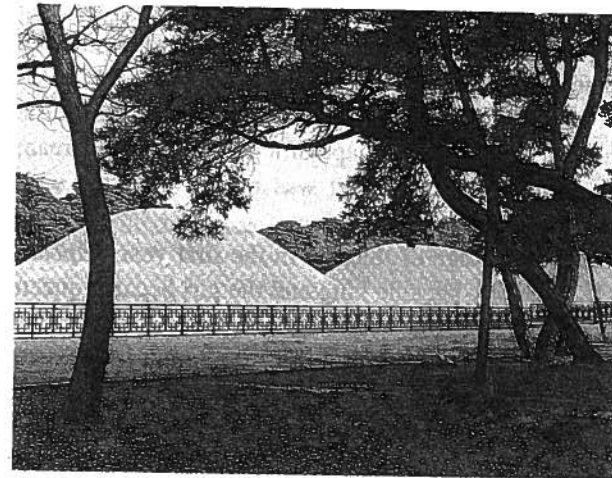
In view of this record, it appears that the progenitors of the six villages all came down from heaven. In the nineteenth year of King

Yuri (A.D. 32), the names of the six districts were changed and six clan names were granted. According to current custom, however, Chunghüng district is called Mother; Changhüng district as Father; Imch'ön district is Son; and Kadök district is Daughter, but the reason is unknown.

Myth of Pak Hyökköse, the founder of Silla section on Hyökköse (*Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms*)



Five tombs of Silla



On the first day of the third month of the first year, *imja*, of Tichieh of the Former Han (69 B.C.), the ancestors of the six villages, together with their children, gathered by the shore of the Al River. They said: "Because we have no ruler above to govern the people, the people are dissolute and do only what they wish. We should seek out a virtuous man to be our king, found a country, and lay out a capital."

When they climbed to a height and looked southward, they saw an eerie emanation like lightning by the Na Well under Mount Yang, while nearby a white horse seemed to kneel and bow. When they reached the spot, they found a red egg. The horse neighed and flew up to heaven when it saw men approaching. When the people cracked the egg open, they discovered within a beautiful infant boy with a radiant visage. Surprised and marveling, they bathed him in the East Spring, and then he emitted light. Birds and beasts danced for joy, heaven and earth shook, and the sun and the moon became bright. They named the child King Hyökköse, or Bright, and titled him *kösürhan*, or king.

The people congratulated one another and said, "Now that the Son of Heaven has come down to be among us, we must seek a virtuous queen to be his mate." That day a hen dragon appeared near the Aryöng Well in Saryang district and produced from under her left rib an infant girl. Her features were unusually lovely, but her lips were like the beak of a chick. Only when the girl was given a bath in the North River in Wölsöng did the beak fall off. The river was then called Palch'ön. The people erected a palace at the western foot of Mount South and reared the two wondrous infants together. Since the boy had been born from an egg in the shape of a gourd, *pak* in Korean, they gave him the surname Pak; the girl was named after the well where she was born.

When the two reached the age of thirteen in the first year, *kapcha*, of Wu-feng (57 B.C.), the boy became king and the girl became queen.

They named the country Söraböl, Söböl, Sara, or Saro. And because of the circumstances behind the queen's birth, the country was also called Kyerim, or Forest of the Cock, to commemorate the appearance of the hen dragon. According to another story, the country was so called because a cock crowed in the woods when Kim Alchi was

found during the reign of King T'arhae. Later, Silla became the official name of the country.

After a sixty-one-year reign, Hyökköse ascended to heaven, and after seventy days his remains fell to earth. His queen is said to have followed him. The people wished to bury them in the same tomb, but a large snake appeared and stopped them. So the remains of each were divided into five parts (the head, two hands, and two feet) and buried. Called Five Tombs or Snake Tomb, it is the present North Tomb at Tamöm Monastery. The heir apparent succeeded Hyökköse as King Namhae.

PL

## Kim Suro

The Kim Suro myth concerns the founder of Kaya and tells of his miraculous birth, growth, enthronement, and marriage with Hō Hwangok. The following excerpt is from the late eleventh century account, "Record of the State of Karak," contained in the *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms*.

Since the creation of heaven and earth there had been no name for the country of Karak or its ruler. The nine chiefs—Ado, Yōdo, P'ido, Odo, Yusu, Yuch'ōn, Sinch'ōn, Och'ōn, and Singwi—ruled over a hundred households with a population of seventy-five thousand who lived on the hills and plains and plowed fields and dug wells.

In the eighteenth year, *imin*, of Chien-wu, of Shih-tsu, Emperor Kuang-wu, of the Later Han dynasty (A.D. 42), on the day of the lustration festival, a strange voice called out from Mount Kuji in the north. The two or three hundred people who had gathered there heard the voice but could not see the speaker.

The voice asked: "Is anyone here?"

The chiefs replied: "Yes."

"Where is this place?"

"This is Kuji."

The voice continued: "Heaven commanded me to come here to found a new country and become your king, so I have descended. Dig the earth at the peak of the mountain, sing this song, and dance with joy to welcome your great king:

O turtle, o turtle!

Show your head.

If you do not,

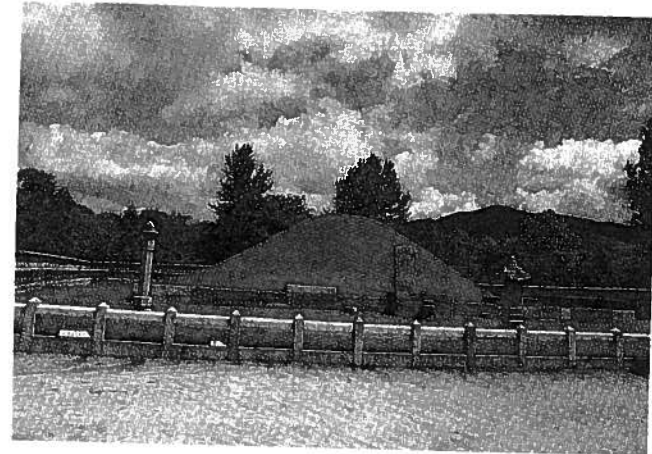
We'll roast you and eat you.

Overjoyed, the nine chiefs sang and danced. Shortly afterward they looked up and saw a purple rope descending from the sky and touching the earth; at the end of it hung a golden chest wrapped in red

## Myth of King Suro (*Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms*)



Tomb of King Suro (Kimhae, South Kyōngsang)



cloth. The chest contained six eggs round as the sun. Surprised and joyful, the people offered countless bows, wrapped them again in cloth and brought them to the house of Chief Ado, where they placed them on a table. Then they dispersed. When they returned at dawn, twelve days later, and opened the chest, the eggs had transformed into six infant boys with admirable appearances. The people had them sit

on the table, bowed to them, and offered them utmost respect. The boys grew day by day. After more than ten days, they were nine feet tall like King T'ang of Yin and had the dragon face of the founder of the Han, eight-colored eyebrows like those of Emperor Yao, and double pupils like those of Emperor Shun. On the fifteenth day of the month they ascended the throne. The taboo name of the boy who was the first to transform was Suro, or Sunŭng, and the name of his country was Great Karak, or Kaya. This was one of the six Kaya confederations. The other five boys became the rulers of the other five Kaya states. . . .

Suro had a temporary palace built that was roofed with uncut thatch in the interest of simplicity. The earthen steps of the palace were only three feet high.

Then, in springtime, in the first month of his second year, *kyemyo*, Suro declared: "I wish to establish a capital." He went to a newly reclaimed field (*sindapp'yōng*) south of the temporary palace and viewed mountain peaks in four directions. Looking back at his subjects he said: "This place is as small as a bean patch, but the hills and streams are beautiful and plentiful. It is fit to house the sixteen arhants or the seven sages. Proper reclamation will make this a fine place." Before returning to his residence he marked out sites for the outer walls, some fifteen hundred steps round, and for palaces, halls, offices, armories, and storehouses. Sturdy adults, workers, and artisans were conscripted, and construction went on from the twentieth day of the first month to the tenth day of the third month. The palaces and houses were built during the farmers' slack season, which lasted from the tenth month to the second month of the following year, *kapchin*. Suro chose an auspicious day and moved into his new palace, where he conducted the affairs of state diligently.

About this time the queen of King Hamdal in the country of Wanha conceived and gave birth to an egg. Out of the egg came a boy named T'arhae. He was three feet tall and his head was one foot round. T'arhae crossed the sea to Karak, entered the palace, and nonchalantly announced that he had come to take over the throne.

The king replied: "Heaven has commanded me to be king. I am to

pacify the country and quiet the people. How can I go against the mandate of heaven and yield my throne, my country, and my people?"

T'arhae proposed to settle the question with a contest in magic, and the king agreed. In the wink of an eye T'arhae became a hawk—whereupon the king became an eagle. T'arhae changed into a sparrow—whereupon the king changed into a falcon. Finally, both resumed their human forms.

T'arhae said: "I was a hawk before an eagle, a sparrow before a falcon. I escaped death because in your virtuous wisdom you do not wish to take life. I am not your equal."

Following the route taken by Chinese ships in a nearby ford outside of Ingyo, T'arhae departed. Fearing that T'arhae would foment rebellion, the king sent five hundred ships in pursuit. When T'arhae's ship fled toward Silla (Kyerim), the king's ships returned. . . .

On the twenty-seventh day of the seventh month of the twenty-fourth year, *musin*, of Chien-wu (5 August A.D. 48), the nine chiefs proposed to the king at the morning audience: "Since Your Majesty has descended to earth, you have not obtained a suitable mate. Please choose the most beautiful and virtuous of our daughters to enter the palace and become your wife."

The king replied: "My coming here was ordained by heaven, and heaven will choose my future queen as well. Please do not worry." He then ordered Chief Yuch'ōn to sail to Mangsan Island with a light boat and a fast steed and wait there. He bade Singwi to go to Sŭngjōm.

Unexpectedly there was a ship with red sails and a red flag sailing from the southwest to the north. When Chief Yuch'ōn and others brandished torches, the passengers were eager to come ashore. Singwi galloped off to relay the news to the king. Upon hearing the news, the gladdened king sent the nine chiefs who held the mast and helm of the finest quality to welcome the ship and escort the passengers to the palace.

"I have never met you before," the princess said. "How can I dare frivolously to follow you?"

When Chief Yuch'ōn and others returned to report what the princess had said, the king thought it proper. The king had a canopy

built on a hill sixty feet southwest of the palace to the edge of a mountain and waited there with his officials. The princess had her boat moored at Pyölp'o Ford and walked up to the hilltop to rest, then removed her silk trousers, and offered them as gift to the mountain spirit. . . . As the queen slowly approached the king's temporary quarters, the king went out to welcome her, and together they entered the canopy. The attending officials, in descending order of rank, greeted them from below the steps and then retired. . . .

Thereupon, when the king and the queen were alone in the bedchamber, the queen calmly said to the king: "I am a princess from the Indian country of Ayodhya. My family name is Hö, my given name Hwangok (Yellow Jade). I am sixteen years old. In the fifth month of this year, when I was still in my home country, my father and mother told me of a dream they had. In this dream the supreme deity of heaven appeared and said: 'The founding king of the state of Karak, Suro, has been sent by heaven. He is truly divine and holy. He has been busy governing the new country but has not yet chosen his wife, so you should send your daughter to be his queen.' Words spoken, he ascended to heaven. His words still ring in our ears: 'Take leave of your parents and go there.' So I started on my voyage searching for steamed dates and heavenly peaches. Thus it is that I, with a cicada-like head and silkworm-like eyebrows, stand before you now."

"Because of my divine nature", the king replied, "I knew that a princess would come from a distant land. I did not heed my officials' request that I marry a queen. Now that the wise and virtuous princess has come on her own, great is my fortune." The king passed two nights and one day with her. . . .

On the first day of the eighth month, the king and queen returned to the palace in a royal carriage, accompanied by courtiers in carriages and followed by a train of wagons loaded with exotic goods.

One day the king told his officials: "The nine chiefs are heads of officialdom, but their titles and names smack of uncouth rustics, not of nobility. If they became known abroad, we would incur ridicule." Accordingly he changed Ado to Agung, Yödo to Yöhae, P'ido to

P'ijang, and Obang to Osang. Retaining the first graph but changing the second he transformed Yusu and Yuch'ön to Yugong and Yudök, Sinch'ön to Sindo, and Och'ön to Onüng. He replaced Singwi with homophones with a different meaning. He also adopted the Silla official system and established the ranks of Kakkan, Ajilgan, and Küpkan. For lower officials he followed the precedents of the Chou and the system of the Han. This indeed was removing the old and adopting the new—a way of establishing government organization. Thereupon order prevailed in the country and family, and the king loved the subjects like his children. Though the king's teachings were not severe, they were majestic. Though his administration was not harsh, it was principled. . . . In that year (A.D. 48) his queen dreamed of a bear, conceived, and gave birth to a son, the heir apparent Kodüng.

On the first day of the third month of the sixth year, *kisa*, of Chung-p'ing of Emperor Ling of the Later Han dynasty (189), the queen died at the age of one hundred and fifty-seven. . . . The king spent many days mourning her death, and at last died ten years later, on the twenty-third day of the third month of the fourth year, *kimyo*, of Chien-an, of Emperor Hsien (199). He was one hundred and fifty-eight.

## Sök T'arhae

This account of T'arhae (57-80), the fourth king of Silla, tells of his birth, marriage, enthronement, and the process of his deification as the god of Mount East. This myth is also from the *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms*.

During the reign of King Namhae (4-24), a boat came to anchor off the shores of Karak. King Suro of that country, together with his people, beat drums and shouted to welcome it, but the boat sailed away and reached Ajin Cove in the village of Hasöji, east of the Forest of the Cock. Just then an old woman appeared on the shore of the inlet. Her name was Ajin Ŭlsön, and she was the mother of fisherman of King Hyökköse. Espying the boat from afar, she said, "There is no rock in the middle of the sea. Why does a flock of magpies circle there and cry?" She took a skiff and went to investigate. Magpies hovered over the boat, which bore a casket twenty feet long and thirteen feet wide. She pulled the boat and moored it at the foot of a grove of trees.



Myth of Sök T'arhae (*Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms*)

She did not know whether it would be auspicious or not and informed heaven of what happened. Then she opened the casket. She found a handsome boy, seven treasures, and male and female slaves.

After being provided for seven days, the boy said, "I am from the land of Yongsöng, where there were twenty-eight dragon kings, all born from human wombs. They ascended the throne one after another at the age of five or six, taught the people to regulate life. We have clans of eight ranks, but all ascended to the throne without elections. My father, King Hamdalp'a, married the daughter of the king of the land of Chöngnyö, but she long remained barren and prayed for a son. After seven years, she gave birth to a huge egg. The great king had a casket made, put me into it, together with seven treasures and slaves, and loaded it on a boat. He had it launched and prayed that it would land on a destined place, found a kingdom, and establish a family. A red dragon came to guard the boat until it arrived here."

Then the boy, his staff trailing after him, climbed Mount T'oham with two slaves, built a cairn where he stayed for seven days, and looked around for a suitable place within the city walls to settle. He saw a hill shaped like a three days' crescent moon, an ideal place for a long stay. When he went down and approached the place, it was Lord Ho's residence. The boy devised a ruse: he had whetstone and charcoal buried around the house. The next day, he went to the door and declared that it was the house of his ancestors. Lord Ho denied this, and, after a quarrel without reaching a decision, they brought the case before the authorities. When the officials asked the boy to prove his case, he replied, "We are a family of blacksmiths, but we were away at a nearby village. During our absence some other person occupied our house. I beg you to dig the ground and make a search." They found the whetstone and charcoal, so the house became his. Acknowledging the shrewdness of the boy, King Namhae gave him his eldest daughter in marriage, who was Lady Ani.

Upon the death of King Yuri in the sixth month, *chöngsa*, of the second year of Chung-yüan of Emperor Kuang-wu (A.D. 57), T'arhae ascended the throne. Because he had taken another's property under the pretext that it was his ancestors', his name became Sök ("old"); or

because magpies caused the casket to be opened, the bird radical was dropped from the graph “magpie,” leaving the one for Sōk. His name T’arhae (“remove and undo”) alludes to the fact that he came out of an egg from a casket.

After a rule of twenty-three years, he died in the fourth year, *kimyo*, of Chien-ch’u (A.D. 79), and was buried on the hill of Soch’ōn. Later a god said, “Bury my bones with care.” When dug out, his skeleton was three feet two inches in circumference, his body was nine feet seven inches tall, his teeth were closely set like one tooth, his bones were joined closely—indeed he was a peerless giant. His remains were broken, remade into a statue, and enshrined in the palace. Then a god spoke again, “Bury my bones on Mount East.” So he was enshrined there.

PL

## Kim Alchi

This account from the *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms* concerns the seventh generation ancestor of King Mich’u (262-284), the thirteenth king of Silla. Because his birth is related to the crowing of the white cock, his birthplace was called the Forest of the Cock, another name for Silla. This myth is also that of the Kim clan of Kyōngju.



Myth of Kim Alchi, painting of the golden casket illustrating his birth by Cho Sōk (owned by National Museum of Korea)

On the fourth day of the eighth month of the third year, *kyōngsin*, of Yung-p'ing of Emperor Ming of the Later Han, on his way to West Village in Wōlsōng at night, Lord Ho ("Gourd") saw a light emanating from the forest Sirim. Purple clouds stretched from the sky to the earth, a golden casket hung on top of the tree, light was emanating from the casket, and a white cock was crowing under the tree. The lord informed the king of this event. When the king went to the forest and opened the casket, he found inside an infant boy getting up from a lying position. This recalled the auspicious event associated with Pak Hyōkkōse. The boy was named Alchi, meaning a "small child" in our language. When the king returned with the boy in his arms, birds and beasts followed after him, dancing in joy. The king chose an auspicious day and appointed him the crown prince, but later he yielded the position to Pasa and did not accede to the throne. Because he emerged from the golden casket, his family name was Kim (gold).

Alchi gave birth to Yōrhan (Sehan, Sōnghān). Yōrhan gave birth to Ado, Ado to Suryu, Suryuo to Ukpu, Ukpu to Kudo, Kudo to Mich'u, and Mich'u ascended the throne. The Kim clan of Silla began from Alchi.

PL

## The Three Clans

The ancestor myth of the three clans of Cheju Island, the following is based on that of Yang Sōngji (1415-1482), in the "Monograph on Geography," in the *History of Koryō* (1451).

According to their old record, in the remote antiquity when there were no human beings, three divine persons emerged from the ground (the hole named Mohūng in the northern foot of Mount Chu is the place).<sup>1</sup> The eldest man was Yang Ūlla, the next, Ko Ūlla, and the third, Pu Ūlla.<sup>2</sup> The three wandered around the desolate plain and hunted, eating the meat and making clothes with the skin.

One day they espied a wooden box with a seal reaching the eastern shore. They went there and opened the box. Within it was a stone box, and an envoy clad in purple with a blue belt followed. They opened the box, which produced a colt, a calf, three maidens clad in blue, and seeds of five grains. Only then did the envoy say, "I am an envoy from Japan. After siring three daughters, our king said, 'Three sons of a divinity have descended to the peak in the middle of the western sea to form a country, but they don't have spouses,' so he dispatched me



Hollow of the Three Clans (Ido-dong, Cheju City)

Hollow where the progenitors of the Three Clans emerged

with his three daughters, so I am here. Please marry them and succeed in your great undertaking." He then went back riding on the clouds.

The three men married three maidens<sup>3</sup> in the order of their age, went to a place where the spring water is sweet and soil fertile, and chose a site with an arrow divination. Yang Ŭlla's settlement was called the first capital; Ko Ŭlla's, the second capital; and Pu Ŭlla's, the third capital. They planted the five grains for the first time, raised the ponies and calves, and flourished day by day.

PL

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> According to the *Historical Records of the Three Kingdoms (Samguk sagi)*, T'amna, now Cheju Island, began political contacts with the Korean peninsula in the beginning of the fifth century.

<sup>2</sup> The oldest among the three varies according to the source. Yang Sŏngji made Yang Ŭlla the first, while Ko Ŭlla became the first in the *Story of the Ko Family of Sŏngju*.

<sup>3</sup> The origin of the three maidens also varies.

## Shamanist Myths of the Peninsula

Song of Creation  
Prayer to the Steamer God  
Song for the Play of Sun and Moon  
Myth of the House God (Tongnae Version)  
Origin Myth of the House God (Hwang Uyang)  
Origin Myth of the Three Chesŏk Gods  
The Abandoned Princess  
Myth of Seven Stars  
Myth of Changja  
Rites for the Visitors