The Myth of Tan`gun : A Dramatic Structural Analysis of a Korean Foundation Myth

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I. Introduction

Foundation myths, the subject of this paper, are a particular class of myths of origin which describe the origin of a state or nation, or the origin of a ruling family and its progenitor. Such myths presume the existence of the physical world and an existing social system prior to the advent of the nation which the myth describes. Such myths often, but not always or invariably, also relate the origin of the culture peculiar to the nation which is the focus of the myth. In myths which combine a description of national origin with a description of cultural origin, the key figure of foundation myths, the national progenitor, is usually described as the culture bearer, the figure who brought to the people their distinctive civilisation. The Myth of Tan'gun, which we will examine, is a foundation myth of both national origin and the origin of a national culture.

In this paper, I will analyse the Myth of Tan'gun using an analytical method which I call dramatic structural analysis. This method is based upon the idea that the narrative structure of myths, legends and folktales is similar to the structure of a drama or play. That is, any single item of traditional oral narrative is composed of "scenes" containing dramatis personae and background features which convey the overt meaning of the story. These "scenes" in turn are combined in a particular sequential order which gives the tale its peculiar narrative flow. The narrative has one or more "themes" or "sub-themes" which are the principal topic of the tale and give it its meaning. From the composition of the structure of the narrative, one can then determine what the function or purpose of the story was and is. The Myth of Tan'gun will be discussed using this analytical method.

The Myth of Tan'gun is the seminal myth of Korean cultural history. Its narrative relates the origin of the earliest Korean state—the Kingdom of Ancient Chosŏn, the origin of the ruling family of the state, and the origin of the national culture. The source for this myth is drawn from an ancient book called the *Tan'gun kogi* (The Ancient Record of Tan'gun) which is no longer extant. The oldest surviving texts of

this myth are four, two each from the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. The best known of these early texts is the record contained in the *Samguk yusa* (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms) written by the Buddhist monk Iryŏn (1206-1289). Contemporaneous with this book is a work by the Confucian scholar Yi Sŭng-hyu (1224-1300), *Chewang un'gi* (Rhymed Record of Emperors and Kings). These works in turn each became the source for two later works, Kwŏn Nam's (1416-1465) *Ŭngjeshi chu* (Commentary on Poems Written at Royal Command) and the text in the geographical section of the *Sejong shillok* (The Veritable Records of the Reign of King Sejong) dating from the mid-fifteenth century.

As it is my view that the *Samguk yusa* version of the myth best represents the earliest structural form of the Myth of Tan'gun, this text will be analysed in detail and then compared with the structure of the other three texts. The tale will be translated in its entirety, a structural outline of the tale will be derived which will then be compared with the structural outline for the remaining three versions. In the translation, words in parentheses are insertions by Iryŏn into the text which he is quoting, while words in brackets are my insertions to create a smoother translation. As it is my contention that the Myth of Tan'gun constitutes a distinctive type of Northeast Asian foundation myth, in the concluding section, the Tan'gun mythic type will be compared with the structure of the Myth of Jimmu, the founder of the Japanese imperial line.

II. The Myth of Tan'gun, the *Samguk yusa* Text

1. Translation

It is written in the *Weishu*.[1]

> Two thousand years ago, there was a man called Tan'gun Wanggŏm. He established a city at Asadal and founded a nation called Chosŏn (In another book it is called Muyŏpsan mountain or Paegak mountain and is located in Paekchu. It is also said to be to the east of Kaesŏng. This is the present Paegakkung palace). This was in the time of the Emperor Yao.[2]

It is written in the |*Tan'gun*| *kogi*.[3]

> In another times, Hwanin (this means Chesŏk) had a *sŏja*[4] |called| Hwanung. He desired to descend from Heaven and to possess the world of men. His father, realizing his son's intentions, descended to the three great mountains and saw that mankind would benefit |from his son's actions|. He gave his son the three *ch'ŏnbuin*[5] and commanded him to go and rule |over mankind|.
>
> Taking with him three thousand |spirits|, Hwanung descended upon the summit of T'aebaeksan mountain[6] beneath the tree by the Sacred Altar (T'aebaeksan mountain is now Myohyangsan mountain). That area was called the Sacred City.[7] He was known as Hwanung *ch'ŏnwang*.[8] Together with the Earl of Wind, and the Master of Rain, and the Master of Cloud, |Hwanung| supervised agriculture, the preservation of life, the curing of disease, punishments, the difference between right and wrong, in all some three hundred and sixty kinds of work for mankind.
>
> At that time, there was a bear and a tiger which lived together in a cave. They constantly petitioned Shinung |Hwanung|.[9] They wanted to be transformed into men.

Then the god gave them a piece of Sacred Mugwort and twenty pieces of garlic[10] saying, "If you eat this and do not see daylight for one hundred days, you will receive a human form." The bear and the tiger took [the plants] and ate. They fasted for three times seven days. The bear received a woman's body. The tiger was not able to fast and did not receive a human body.

As there was no one with whom the woman Ungnyŏ[11] could marry, she went daily to the base of the tree by the altar to pray for a child. Hwanung changed [his form] and married her. She became pregnant and had a son. He was called Tan'gun Wang'gŏm. In the fiftieth year of the Emperor Yao, in the reign year *kyŏngin*[12] (The year of Yao's ascension was *mujin*. The fiftieth year would be *chŏngsa*, not *kyŏngin*. These discrepancies cause distrust [of the text]), Tan'gun established a city at P'yŏngyang (This is now Sŏgyŏng) and called the nation Chosŏn. He later moved his city to Asadal on Paegaksan which was also known as Kungholsan and also as Kŭmmidal. He governed [the nation] for 1,500 years. King Hu of Zhou, in the reign year *jimao*,[13] enfeoffed Kija with [the state of] Chosŏn. Tan'gun then transferred to Changdanggyŏng. Later, he returned to Asadal, hid himself, and became the Mountain God. [At this time,] he was 1,908 years of age.

(*Samguk yusa*, Part 1, 1, "Ko Chosŏn, Wanggŏm Chosŏn.")

2. *Analysis of the Text*

A. Thematic Structure:

The Myth of Tan'gun is *the* great Korean foundation myth, having narrative motifs and expressing a number of different functions. The structure of the myth is composed of six different scenes or elements which comprise the overall plot of the myth, and which undoubtedly are the result of considerable redaction over the centuries from the time in which it was first transmitted. In addition, Iryŏn, has prefaced the text of the core myth with a brief commentary culled from another documentary source. This contains an abstract of the information in the *Weishu* and clearly places the location of Tan'gun's activities in the P'yŏngyang area.

The scenes or narrative sections of the myth and the content of each scene as depicted in the *Tan'gun kogi* version in the *Samguk yusa* are:

1) Heaven: The actors are two divine figures, the father Hwanin, the Ruler of Heaven and his son, Hwanung. The son desires to descend to earth to bring political order and culture to the inhabitants below. The father selects the place where his son will descend to earth. Before the son descends to earth, the father gives his son the symbols of his authority to bring political order and culture to mankind.
2) Descent to Earth: The son of the Ruler of Heaven descends to earth on the summit of a sacred mountain by a sacred tree near an altar located there. He brings with him three principal associates and a host of assistants, who are specialists in all aspects of culture. The son of the Ruler of Heaven gives himself a title (*ch'ŏnwang*) which means heavenly king, and the land surrounding his residence—the site of his descent from Heaven—is called the sacred city, or the city of God.
3) Trial of the Tiger and Bear: A bear and a tiger plead with the son of the Ruler

of Heaven to transform them into men. A trial is proposed in which only the bear is successful.

4) Union of Heaven and Earth: The bear who has been transformed into a woman (called Ungnyŏ or Bear Woman) pleads with the son of the Ruler of Heaven to give her a husband. He in turn marries her. The Bear Woman gives birth to a child, Tan'gun, Prince of the Altar.
5) Creation of the State of Chosŏn: The offspring of the son of the Ruler of Heaven and the Bear Woman creates a state. He gives the country a name and establishes a seat of government. There are some later changes in the place of the seat of government.
6) Creation of the State of Kija Chosŏn: The kingship is removed from Tan'gun and given to Kija. Tan'gun becomes the Mountain God.

The six scenes of the myth may themselves be grouped into three units: 1) a scene in which there are only divine actors, the action taking place entirely in the heavenly sphere with an historical time setting (Scene One); 2) scenes in which the actors are divine or semi-divine heroes, with the action taking place in a vaguely historical setting on earth (Scenes Two, Three, Four); and 3) scenes in which the actors are human with an attempt to provide a totally historic, earthly setting (Scenes Five, Six).

B. Themes and Narrative Motifs:

Scenes One and Two

Narrative Motifs: The principal theme of the Myth of Tan'gun is ethnogenesis, the creation of the nation of Chosŏn. Scenes One and Two form a seamless unity describing the origin of civilised culture, and the origin of the political order. Hwanung, the son of the Ruler of Heaven is the great culture hero of Korean myth. The actors in these scenes are divine, a god and his son, and the son's retainers. The son is referred to as a *sŏja*, or son of a secondary wife of the Ruler of Heaven. This implies that not only does the Ruler of Heaven have a complex family life with a principal wife and subsidiary wives, but that there might also be a son in the principal line of descent who would have the right to succeed to the rulership from his father. This aspect of the plot adds a very human element to the story, the plight of the second son of the nobility.

The father's name and role are defined by Iryŏn with a Buddhist term, Chesŏk, referring to the Indian deity, Indra. One of the great gods of the Vedic pantheon, Indra was the ruler of the sky, god of the storms, and the protector of the Aryan people. Precisely what the Three Heavenly Treasures (called *ch'ŏnbuin* in Korean) which Hwanin bestows upon his son are, is not known, but they are part of the sacred regalia which Hwanung takes with him when he descends to earth. They are the symbols of his authority, indicating his right to bring culture and political order to humanity.

Hwanin's descent to earth takes place at two cosmic axes, symbolic points which link earth with Heaven. It is unusual in foundation myths to have more than one cosmic axis. In the Tan'gun myth, the centre of divine activity occurs at the summit of a sacred mountain and by a sacred tree. The area around these two sacred axes becomes, the residence for the god as he begins his rulership. He symbolises his divine culture-bearing activing by creating the "City of God." These three motifs

(sacred mountain, sacred tree, sacred city) have parallels with Chinese mythology. In the ancient Chinese work the *Shanhaijing* (The Classic of Mountains and Seas), compiled between the third century B.C. and the first century A.D., the Kunlun Mountain Range to the west of China, which is the focus of much mythological reference, is seen to be an *axis mundi*, a point at which the divine and the mundane may communicate. At the summit of the central mountain, there is a tree, called the Tree Grain, a second *axis mundi*. This tree is said to act as a giant sky ladder by which heavenly beings and humans may communicate. The area around this summit is called God's City. This is clearly a place where the two realms, the sacred and the profane come together.[14] Here we have three parallel motifs—mountain summit, tree, and city of god—which are associated with the movement between the spiritual and earthly realms in Chinese and Korean myths. It is impossible to say whether these elements were borrowed by the Korean mythopoets from Chinese examples, or whether they both stem from a common primeval source.

There is another motif element which is introduced at this point, the Sacred Altar. I believe that this is a scribal error. The Chinese characters for altar and sandalwood tree are different only by their radical or left-hand character element which classifies the graph. The phrase in the *Samguk yusa* text "tree by the Sacred Altar" would make more sense in terms of the mythic narrative if it read "Sacred Sandalwood." In all three of the other older texts which we will examine, including the text most similar to the *Samguk yusa* version, the phrase reads "Sacred Sandalwood." It would also seem logical to identify a tree which has played an important role in the descent of the culture hero with a specific name, rather than to simply identify it by spatial location. The mountain axis is identified by a name. The tree axis ought to be as well. This point is again confirmed by the presence of a named tree on the summit of the Kunlun Mountains, where Heaven and earth meet. Although I have translated the phrase precisely according to the text, I believe the phrase as we have it to be a scribal error and not in the original text.

The phrase "Earl of Wind" and "Master of Rain" appear at least as early as the myths about King Wu, founder of the Zhou dynasty. In this myth, as the Shang dynasty is about to be replaced by the Zhou, these august figures and important spirits appear before King Wu and ask him what his wishes are.[15] The Myth of Tan'gun has this same sense of the subordination of major spirits of nature to the divine or divinely-selected ruler.

Another interesting aspect of this myth is that the pre-existence of the world is implied, as is the existence of mankind. The Myth of Tan'gun is not a myth of the origin of the universe, but a myth of the origin of a specific political order, the creation of social order out of social chaos, the creation of culture. As a symbol of the act of creation, the divine King and the land which he rules are given sacred names. Naming is, thus, an important part of the action of bringing order out of chaos. The title which Hwanung bestows on himself is also paralleled in Chinese practice. The title *ch'ŏnwang* (Chinese *t'ienwang*) is similar in meaning to *ch'ŏnja* (Chinese *t'ientzu*), Son of Heaven. It is a term implying that the ruler has received the *ch'ŏnmyŏng* (Chinese *t'ienming*) or Mandate of Heaven, the right to rule. In the case of the Myth of Tan'gun, this is obviously one meaning, but more is implied. The intention of the mythic narrative is to indicate that the mysterious figure who descends onto Paektusan

mountain is divine, literally the Son of the Ruler of Heaven.

Themes: The theme of these two scenes taken collectively is the bringing of civilisation to the world of men. Mankind exists, but social and political life are of a low order. The decision to bring civilisation is taken in Heaven, and interestingly enough not by Hwanin, the Ruler of Heaven, but by his son, the son of a secondary wife. The father, checks out the possibilities of sending his son down, approves the son's plan of descent, and sends him off with the symbols of his authority, necessary skills, chief assistants and a host of followers. Read in this way, the myth begins to sound like the movement of a great chieftain leaving his parental home, going to another land, and establishing his rule there. Thus, in this mythic narrative section, the establishment of rulership by a foreign warrior is identified with the action of the creation of a new people and new civilisation. The Myth of Tan'gun is, therefore, the myth of the people who have come from afar to rule over the people.

Scenes Three and Four

Narrative Motifs: These two scenes taken together form a continuous sequence of action involving four principle actors, the son of the Ruler of Heaven, the bear, the tiger, and the offspring of Hwanung and Ungnyŏ, Tan'gun. The animals in this myth are depicted in a very primeval fashion. Similar to animal figures appearing in the legends and myths of Siberian tribal peoples, the bear and tiger have speech and seem to participate in a social life akin to the social life of human beings. They have wishes and desires, and put forward pleas and petitions. This type of mythic description comes from a period of cultural history when the divide between humanity and the animal world was not felt to be great.

The animals are described as having a human-like society, but also desiring to become human. That is, they wish to possess the power of transmutation, to change into another form of being. The implication here is that the animals seeing the great power of the son of the Ruler of Heaven, and the advantages of the civilisation which he has brought to humanity after his arrival wish to be metamorphosed. The son of the Ruler of Heaven has this power of transformation in two forms, a magical portion to change other beings, and the ability to transform himself, presumably through simple volition. The son of the Ruler of Heaven presents the animals with a test, which has a spatial element (remaining in the darkness of the cave), a temporal element (the length of time of the trial), and a magical element (the ingestion of two kinds of sacred food). The magical aspect of this rite is emphasised by the phrase "three times seven day." The numbers are apparently sacred numbers. Their juxtaposition may have been meant to indicate the greater sacral nature of the period of the transformation from an animal to a human.

The first three actors in these two scenes have been interpreted to be clan totems, symbols of their representative clans, that is a solar clan, a tiger clan, and a bear clan. It is correct to see these figures as the symbols of their clan, but not in a strict totemic sense. Rather than being totemic images, the three actors in this myth are the original ancestors of their lineage. Thus the son of the Ruler of Heaven, the tiger and the bear are ancestral totems, symbols of the origin of their clan and also their very first progenitors. It is clearly the case with the contemporary Tungusic tribes of Siberia and

Manchuria that various clans identify as their first ancestors a tiger, a bear or some other animal.

It is interesting to note that when the tiger and the bear put forward their petition to Hwanung to become people, the term for prayer is used. However, when the Bear Woman (Ungnyŏ) desires to become a person, the text uses the term *chuwŏn* for her supplications. Although this two-character phrase can be a Buddhist term referring to prayers offered by a monk for the good fortune of a benefactor, as the character *chu* also occurs in combination with other characters, such as *chusul*, which have to do with magical powers, the text seems to imply that Ungnyŏ was divining, performing a shamanistic ritual, to obtain her object, to become pregnant. The idea of the Bear Woman shamanising is reinforced when we remember that this ritual was being performed at the base of the sacred tree, on the summit of the sacred mountain, in the area designated as the City of God, that is the place where Heaven and earth meet and where communication between the spirit world and the mundane world is possible. This interpretation also opens up the possibility that at this stage of cultural history there were female clan shamans as well as male ones amongst these tribes. Contemporary Palaeo-Siberian tribes usually have female shamans.

Ungnyŏ obtains her aim. Hwanung temporarily transforms himself into a man and marries her. They have an offspring who is called Tan'gun, the effective founder of the dynasty and its first king. A curious aspect of the myth at this point is that Hwanung simply disappears from the narrative. We have no indication of whether he went somewhere else, died, was assumed into Heaven, or simply returned to Heaven of his own volition. It would seem that his sole purpose was to impregnate the Bear Woman to create a human ancestor for the ruling dynasty of the political entity which he had established.

If we are to use the Chinese characters in the *Samguk yusa* text, the name Tan'gun means the "Prince of the Altar." This would imply that the first sovereign had a priestly function, that is he would have offered up ritual worship at a designated spot, presumably to his grandfather, the Ruler of Heaven. As I have said before, I think that the Chinese character written in the *Samguk yusa* text is a scribal error. If the Chinese character is the character *tan* for Sandalwood tree, then Tan'gun's name means Prince of the Sandalwood Tree. As the sacred tree is the point at which communication between the spirit world and the world of men is made, Tan'gun's name would imply that he was a shaman, in fact the chief of shamans. This interpretation makes greater sense in terms of the background of the text, and in terms of what we know of cultural history. Early political leaders often combined a religious role with a political one, and the religious role was more often as a shaman than as a priest. Also this interpretation of the prince's name would make the *Samguk yusa* text agree with the other three older textual variants of this myth.

Themes: In these two scenes, which form a unitary sub-structure of the myth, the central theme of the unit is to explain the origin of the ruling house of the state of Ancient Chosŏn. There are three sub-themes here—the trial between the tiger and the bear, the marriage of the son of the Ruler of Heaven to the Bear Woman, and the birth of the first ancestor of the dynasty. That is, the myth explains why the sky god figure and the bear came together to create the progenitor of the dynastic line. The sky god tests the two animals of earth to see which can sustain itself through the trial. The vic-

torious animal then acquires shamanistic powers and uses them to obtain one further goal—pregnancy and the birth of a child.

Read in this way, the myth again seems to be about humans. Perhaps in ancient times in the area of Ancient Chosŏn, there were three principal clans at a time when a tribal confederation was changing into a more structured political entity, moving towards the development of a state. In this context, where the leadership of the political entity is becoming hereditary in one clan and ceases rotating amongst the leadership of various clans, then a myth such as the Myth of Tan'gun explains why rulership became hereditary, and why it became fixed in a particular line.

One extra element which one could discern in this myth is that a certain clan's claims about its origins would imply that it came from far off, whereas the other two competing clans are indigenous. The myth not only explains why a certain family became hereditary rulers, it also explains both why another clan did *not* succeed to the rulership, and why it did not have any connection with the origin of the ruling family. That is, the myth explains why one clan, the tiger clan, was eliminated entirely from political power. Another important element in this scene is that it explains how a third clan became linked with the divine origins of the ruling family. The myth is then not simply stating that one state of affairs changed into another, it offers a description of how this actually happened and what happened to the various actors.

This mythic story is parallel to known historical events. We know that in the Old Shilla period (1st century B.C. to 7th century), when the Shilla area was dominated by a tribal confederacy, the headship of the confederation rotated between members of three clans, the Pak, Sŏk and Kim. The Sŏk clan seems to have been eliminated rather early from the political scene and eventually the headship of the political entity, now becoming a state, became hereditary in the Kim clan. The ruler of the Shilla entity had to be a member of the Holy Bone class. This status was achieved only when the ruler's father was a member of the Kim clan, and the ruler's mother from the Pak clan. This condition indicates a state of stability or harmony was established between these two leading clans at the time of the emergence of a state-level political body. These historical facts parallel closely the story portrayed in the narrative of the Myth of Tan'gun, where one clan is eliminated and two clans come together to form the basis of the ruling family.

One further comment could be made about the symbolic structure of this unit of the myth—the union of Heaven and earth. By linking the birth of the progenitor of the royal family with the descent of a sky god, the mythopoets were symbolising the union of two major aspects of the universe, the union of Heaven and earth. This kind of symbolism, creating a harmony out of opposites, is a primordial form of the Yin-Yang concept which was later elaborated in the great philosophical traditions of East Asia. Thus, symbolically, the establishment of the state of Chosŏn is not just about the origin of a political entity or the emergence of a dominant family group. It portrays the major forces of the cosmos as being brought together in a harmonious unit in the person of the ruler.

Scene Five

Narrative Motifs and Themes: In Scene Five we find a repetition of the narrative

motifs in Scene Two. The grandson of the Ruler of Heaven emulates his father. He gives himself a title as ruler, establishes a city, a place of royal residence, and establishes a state and gives it a name. Tan'gun is the progenitor of the dynasty, the establisher of the historic state, and the successor of a divine culture hero. These elements all give artistic balance to the narrative and bring it to a conclusion. As a means of indicating the change from mythic time to historic time, the teller or perhaps a later redactor has added precise time definitions, drawing the narrative into Chinese mythic history. This has the effect of both bringing the narrative of the Tan'gun story into putative time, and also linking it with the most ancient period of Chinese history, the period of the Sage Kings. Yao is the first of the Sage Kings, and represents, mythically, the beginning of human (Chinese) time. Thus the assertion is made through these motifs that Korean time is equal in length to that of China's, the central country of East Asian civilisation. Thus the core myth closes with the bringing together of Korean and Chinese chronologies and the assertion of the equivalence of Chinese and Korean cultures.

Scene Six

The first five scenes of the Myth of Tan'gun must have constituted the core or original elements of the state-foundation myth to which further elements have been added by a redactor at a later period. The intent of the Myth of Tan'gun as originally constituted would have been the three-fold explanation of the origin of culture, the origin of the royal family, and the origin of the state. Scene Six has been added on to this core narrative structure and is not integrally related to it. This segment gives precise and actual dates to describe the establishment of the state of Kija Chosŏn. The purpose of this narrative segment is two-fold, to describe the decline and fall of the Tan'gun dynasty and the rise of a new dynasty in its place. It also offers an explanation for the origin of the cult of the Mountain God. The sixth scene is set in a precise historic and temporal setting. Names of kings and exact dates are given to provide a verisimilitude of his-tory. This short addition to the core myth changes the whole purpose of the myth from an explanation of the origin of the royal family to an explanation of dynastic change.

This short redaction of the principal Korean foundation myth is similar to the development of the concept of the *t'ienming*, the Mandate of Heaven, at the beginning of the Zhou dynasty of China which explained the fall of the Shang Dynasty which claimed the supreme deity, Shangdi, as their primal ancestor. The "Kija" dynasty must have felt the same need to provide religious legitimacy to the change of political leadership by linking themselves organically with the foundation myth of the state. This creative reuse of an ancient myth is an indication of how potent such myths are and how rulers will have recourse to them whenever there is a political crisis. The "Kija" dynasty's reuse of this myth is the first of many examples.

The sixth narrative section also explains the origin of the Mountain God cult. The narrative of the final scene mentions in passing that when Tan'gun was replaced by Kija, Tan'gun became the Mountain God. It is a distinctive feature of current Korean religious practice that *sanshin* is not the god of a particular mountain, but the God of the Mountains, the ruler of the mountains collectively. This type of spirit who is in

charge of a broad aspect of nature is similar to the master spirits of Siberia who possess a certain aspect of nature and are not confined to a particular locality. This brief passage would appear to be an attempt to explain why the Mountain God was worshiped and to explain who he really was. This thematic element would have told the listener that after Tan'gun had lost the rulership of the state to Kija, he became a ruler of that aspect of nature, the mountains, through which communication with the world of spirits could occur. Consequently, it would still be possible through Tan'gun for the people of his nation to have a known avenue of contact with the heavenly is realm.

Although the dating of the original form of the Myth of Tan'gun is difficult, it is clear that the core myth must be very ancient. This is based on three lines of thought. First, the dramatis personae and the mythic background of the core myth are very primordial in ethos, parallel to the narrative figures and background of myths dating from the middle of the Zhou dynasty in China (traditional dates B.C. 1111 to B.C. 249). Second, the ethos of the myth is more primeval in character than the other major Korean foundation myth tradition, the more legendary Myth of Ko Chumong. As the earliest record for the latter mythic tradition is found in the Chinese work the *Lunheng* (Examination of Criticism) dated to the first century A.D., the Myth of Tan'gun must antedate the Ko Chumong story. Third, the state referred to in the mythic text must predate one of its successor states, the kingdom of Wiman Chosŏn (B.C. 194-B.C. 108). Taken together, these lines of enquiry would suggest that the original form of the Myth of Tan'gun must date at least to third century B.C., and in my view, probably considerably earlier.

III. Other Textual Traditions of the Myth

As mentioned earlier, there are three other early textual sources for the Myth of Tan'gun. For reasons of space, a translation of these texts has been omitted, and only a structural outline of the narrative of each version of the tale is given. A comparison of these alternative narratives with the text of the tale in the *Samguk yusa* will indicate that the four narratives contain a common structure which constitutes the essential structure of the Tan'gun mythic type. This narrative structure is very different from the Ko Chumong type, an outline of which is provided for comparative purposes.

1. The Myth of Tan'gun—Chewang un'gi *version*

There are five scenes in this version:

1) Heaven: The son of the Ruler of Heaven decides to descend to earth to bring civilisation to humanity. The Ruler of Heaven gives his son the symbols of authority and selects a retinue for his son's descent.
2) Descent to Earth: The son of the Ruler of Heaven takes a multitude of followers with him and descends to earth on top of a mountain by a tree. He gives himself a name and a title.
3) Transformation of an Animal: The son of the Ruler of Heaven gives a potion to the granddaughter of an earth spirit which transforms her into a woman.

4) Union of Heaven and Earth: The son of the Ruler of Heaven marries the metamorphosed animal-woman who gives birth to a child, Tan'gun.
5) Creation of the State: Tan'gun becomes king and governs a great race of people. When he has completed his work, he did not die but became the Mountain God.

2. The Myth of Tan'gun—Ŭngjeshi chu *version*

There are six scenes of the myth presented in this version:

1) Heaven: The son of the Ruler of Heaven desires to descend to earth and is given the regalia of his kingship by his father.
2) Descent to Earth: The son of the Ruler of Heaven descends to earth with a multitude of his followers beneath a sacred tree on a sacred mountain. He brings with him important officials and the knowledge of culture.
3) Trial of a Tiger and a Bear: A tiger and a bear who desire to become human are given a test in which the bear is successful.
4) Union of Heaven and Earth: The bear is transformed into a human, shamanizes, marries the son of the Ruler of Heaven, and gives birth to a son who is Tan'gun.
5) Creation of the State: Tan'gun creates a state. Korean time is linked to Chinese chronology.
6) Transfer of Dynastic Power / Second State: Tan'gun marries, has a son, sends him to an important summit meeting, and transforms himself into the Mountain God.

3. The Myth of Tan'gun—Sejong shillok *version*

There are six scenes in the Myth of Tan'gun as presented in this version:

1) Heaven: The son of the Ruler of Heaven desires to descend to earth, and is given the sacred regalia as symbols of his authority.
2) Descent to Earth: The son of the Ruler of Heaven descends to earth by a sacred tree on a sacred mountain. He takes with him unnamed retainers. His work is not specified. He gives himself a shamanistic-style name and a title. His residence is not named.
3) Transformation of an Animal: The son of the Ruler of Heaven makes a female animal drink a potion and she becomes a human.
4) Union of Heaven and Earth: The son of the Ruler of Heaven marries the animal-woman who bears a son, Tan'gun.
5) Creation of the State: Tan'gun creates a new nation and state. A list of the peoples which he ruled is appended.
6) Marriage of Tan'gun / Second State: Tan'gun marries; a successor is born; a new state is created; Tan'gun becomes the Mountain God.

4. The Myth of Ko Chumong—Samguk yusa *version*

My research into the structure of the foundation myths of Northeast Asia has indicat-

ed that the Ko Chumong type is the most common structural type amongst all ethnic groups. A brief outline of this type of foundation myth is provided below.

1) Discovery of the Maiden Taken in Adultery—A female earth spirit has been raped by a spirit from the sky. The desolate maiden is discovered by a local ruler.
2) Birth of the Hero—The maiden gives birth to an egg. The egg undergoes various trials. Afterwards, the hero breaks out of the egg. Oviparous birth is seen as an inauspicious omen.
3) Flight of the Hero—Jealousy amongst his half-siblings because of his strange birth and great martial skills leads the hero to flee. The hero takes with him a selected retinue. He is chased and faces a trial in crossing a river.
4) Establishment of the Nation—Having successfully forded the river, the hero establishes a state. He gives the nation a name, names himself, and builds a royal residence.

5. Comparison of the Four Textual Versions

Comparison of the four early manuscripts recording the Myth of Tan'gun shows that there are two versions of the myth which stem from the thirteenth century. Later authors appropriated either the version as presented in the *Samguk yusa* or the version as presented in the *Chewang un'gi*. All four versions, however, are agreed that the core myth is composed of five scenes, 1) A Decision Made in Heaven, 2) The Descent to Earth of the Son of the Ruler of Heaven, 3) The Transformation of an Animal into a Human Being, 4) The Union of Heaven and Earth Spirits, 5) The Creation of the State/Nation. We may say that this is the basic structure of the Tan'gun-type of foundation myth. All four manuscripts agree 1) that there is a Ruler of Heaven, and that the Ruler has a secondary son who desires to descend into the world from Heaven, 2) that the father gives the sacred regalia of office to the son before his descent, 3) that the son takes with him a large retinue of spiritual assistants, 4) that the descent of the son of the Ruler of Heaven takes place on the summit of a sacred mountain at the base of a sacred tree, 5) that there was some event by which an animal was transformed into a female human being, whether by a contest or by divine instruction, 6) that there is a marriage between the god from the sky and the transformed earth spirit, the offspring of which union is the founder of the first Korean state and the progenitor of the royal family, 7) that the name of this progenitor is associated with the tree at the base of which his father descended to earth, and 8) that, for whatever reason, when Tan'gun stopping being king, he became the Mountain God, thus initiating the cult of that spirit.

The main differences between the four texts have resulted in two sub-traditions of this mythic tradition. The principal difference is that the *Samguk yusa* and the *Ŭngjeshi ju* versions have the scene "The Trial of the Tiger and the Bear" in which the two animals are full participants in the process of metamorphosis from animal to human being, whereas the *Chewang un'gi* and the *Sejong shillok* versions have the scene "The Transformation of an Animal" in which the animal is only vaguely referred to and plays a more passive role in the events which unfold around her. Like-

wise, the *Samguk yusa* and the *Ŭngjeshi ju* do not have the list of peoples ruled by Tan'gun which the *Chewang un'gi* and the *Sejong shillok* include.

These sets of differences form the basis of the two sub-traditions which had emerged by at least the thirteenth century. Precisely what was the content of the original text which the thirteenth century or earlier writers drew upon is difficult to say. Structurally, the myth as a foundation myth of the state must have consisted of the five scenes which we have described above. It is my opinion that the third scene as depicted in the *Samguk yusa* tradition, The Trial of the Tiger and the Bear, is the original scene. The character of the scene, its narrative motifs and its actors, and its action is very close in ethos to tales, foundation type or not, told by contemporary tribal peoples in Manchuria and the Amur River Basin. This statement is supported by the use of the term Ungnyŏ (Bear Woman) in the *Samguk yusa* to describe the transformed animal who marries the son of the Ruler of Heaven. "Bear Woman" is a type of phrasing which recurs frequently in the tales told by the Tungusic tribal peoples of Northeast Asia. The vague scene, The Transformation of an Animal, reads as if it had been deliberately edited to eliminate many of the "primitive-sounding" elements in the original text. This difference is not surprising when one considers that the *Samguk yusa* was written by the Buddhist monk Iryŏn who specifically included in his work folkloristic material as a counterbalance to the *Samguk sagi* written by the eminent scholar-bureaucrat Kim Pu-shik. The *Chewang un'gi*, written by a Confucian scholar, lacks these more primordial motifs, which as indicated above is not surprising since the tendency of writers in this tradition would have been to lessen or eliminate "primitive" elements in the myth.

By the fifteenth century, a sixth scene had been added to the core text. As I have shown, the *Samguk yusa* also has a sixth scene, which I believe represents a redaction from the period of a dynasty which claimed Kija as its progenitor. Each of the fifteenth century texts we have examined has a new sixth scene. The *Ŭngjeshi ju* following the *Samguk yusa* text contains the reference to Kija. However, both that text and the *Sejong shillok* text add the marriage of Tan'gun to a named figure, give the name of Tan'gun's successor, refer to the first assembly of the gods by China's culture hero Yü, generally link the core Myth of Tan'gun with other foundational myths of Korea, creating a continuous and coherent description of the early rulers of the nation. This connection then makes a smooth development of royal authority up to contemporary times, the fifteenth century. It is interesting to note that these later texts were written during the reign of King Sejo (r. 1455-1468) at which time there was a major political crisis due to the association of the king in the murder of his nephew King Tanjong (r. 1452-1455) for whom he had been acting as regent.

The Myth of Ko Chumong as recorded in the *Samguk yusa* has a very different narrative structure from the Tan'gun type in spite of the fact that there are certain parallel motifs such as divine descent. The Ko Chumong type of myth is typical of virtually all Northeast Asian foundation myths and is of the expulsion-and-flight type of myth. Although this mythic type has certain parallels with Mediterranean heroic myths—which are also expulsion—and flight-types of myth, the latter myths almost invariably depict the hero as returning to the place from which he had fled.[16] In the case of the Ko Chumong type of myth the hero flees to fulfill his destiny by establishing his own nation. Hsu Cho-yun and Katheryn M. Linduff in their study of the myths

of the Zhou dynasty of China showed that these Chinese foundation myths derived from narratives about exodus or migration. The hero of the myth goes to a new region, establishes himself there, and is followed by the people of the nation.[17] The Ko Chumong type of myth is similar to these Chinese mythic types and with them constitutes a general East Asian type of foundation myth.

The Tan'gun myth type is different from these East Asian mythic types both in the dramatic arrangement of its scenes and in its ethos. In the Ko Chumong type, the hero is an outsider who must flee for his life and thus fulfill his destiny. In the Tan'gun type, there are two heroes, the father who leaves to seek his destiny, and his progeny who founds the state. In the Tan'gun type of myth, the principal characters make decisions, rather than having decisions made for and thrust upon them. What the Tan'gun myth does share in common with the Ko Chumong type and the other East Asian myths of migration is the theme of the wandering of the hero to a place of destiny. Here we have encapsulated the story of the wandering of the secondary son of a great tribal chieftain who must leave his home to find a place where he can become a leader in his own right. Like the Chinese myths and the Ko Chumong type of myth, the Tan'gun myth is the story of a journey outward from the place of the hero's birth to a land of destiny. Mediterranean myths tend to depict the hero returning to the land of his birth.

IV. The Myth of Jimmu, Progenitor of Yamato

Of the two oldest surviving Japanese historical works which contain the origin myth of the Japanese imperial family, the *Kojiki* (Records of Ancient Matters) and the *Nihon shoki* (Chronicles of Japan), the *Kojiki* is the older. It is a compilation of various myths, legends and historical notes woven together into a single document to form an official record of Japan from its mythological roots until the time of its composition. It was completed in 712, and contains some of the earliest versions of the Japanese imperial foundation myth, the Myth of Jimmu. This myth explains the origin of the Yamato state, the Japanese imperial family, and offers an explanation of how the various families were related to the imperial family. An outline of the structure of the Myth of Jimmu is given below.[18]

1. Thematic Structure

I) Heaven:

a. Decision of the Sun Goddess: The Sun Goddess has a discussion with her spouse and decides to send a son down to earth to establish his rule there.
b. Change of Descender: At the suggestion of the Sun Goddess's son, his second son is designated to take his place and descend to earth.
c. God Offers Self as Attendant: Unexpectedly, a spirit offers to accompany the grandson of the Son Goddess on his descent.
d. Gift of the Sacred Regalia / Selection of the Grandson's retinue: Before her grandson descends to earth, the Sun Goddess gives him three sacred regalia representing his authority to rule, and selects the retinue of gods who will

accompany him.

2) Descent to Earth: The grandson of the Sun Goddess descends to earth on top of a mountain.
3) Union of Heaven and Earth: The grandson of the Sun Goddess sets off from his base on a long journey eventually encountering the daughter of an earth spirit whom he marries.
4) Birth of a Successor: The grandson's wife gives birth to a child who becomes the ancestor of Jimmu, founding sovereign of the Yamato state.

2. Themes and Narrative Motifs

The narrative of the Japanese imperial foundation myth is a very complex structure indicating several layers of redaction, particularly with regard to demonstrating the linkage between various clans and the imperial family. The narrative describes the primal ancestors of various clans, and discusses the origin of various local cultic activities and the relationship of members of the imperial descent retinue with these cults.

The narrative structure of the Jimmu foundation myth is strikingly similar to the structure of the Myth of Tan'gun. Of all the foundation myths of Northeast Asian states and peoples, it is the closest in its narrative structure and in the use of narrative motifs. The sequence of the scenes is precisely the same as in the Myth of Tan'gun. In the first scene, the Sun Goddess has made a decision to send one of her sons to earth to govern it. In a narrative element which occurs before the core mythic narrative, the reader becomes aware that there is social disorder on earth below and that other deities have been sent down to pacify the land before the divine ruler descends. The son of the Sun Goddess suggests a change in the goddess's plan and proposes that the second of his two just-born sons should be sent down. This plan is agreed upon and there follows a long description of the composition of the retinue which will accompany the divine grandson. The Sun Goddess chooses five chief lieutenants for her grandchild and gives him the three sacred regalia. These items are identified as pieces of curved jade, a mirror, and a sword. In the middle of this general narrative, there is an insertion in which an earthly deity makes itself known so that it too can accompany the divine grandson.

Throughout the narrative of the first scene, there is a thorough description of which deities are to form part of the imperial retinue and become the ancestors of which clan or the source of which particular shrine cult. Here we see all of the principal sub-themes of the first scene of the Tan'gun myth—the approval by the great spirit of the journey of the divine child, the preparation by the great sky spirit for the journey of the divine child, the selection of the chief lieutenants to accompany him, and the gift of the sacred regalia which signify the divine child's authority. The Myth of Jimmu is even parallel to the Myth of Tan'gun at one key point: the divine grandchild who is selected to descend is not the first-born child of the son of the Sun Goddess, but the second-born son. While this child is not a *sŏja*, the child would have faced the same problems as did Hwanung. There was no place for him in the celestial sphere. The Myth of Jimmu is different from the Myth of Tan'gun in one respect. The Myth of Tan'gun potrays the son of the Ruler of Heaven as desiring to descend to earth whereas

in the Myth of Jimmu the hero is merely sent out on a mission by the Sun Goddess.

In the second scene, there is a graphic description of the descent of the divine grandchild with his retinue. The divine entourage arrives on the top of a mountain. The divine ruler approves of the area and sets about creating a royal residence. This again follows very closely the narrative flow of the second scene of the Myth of Tan'gun. An important element in this story is its very thorough description of what each member of the imperial retinue did. In the redaction which went into the compilation of the *Kojiki*, it was clearly necessary to establish the precise relationship of various ancient clans to the imperial clan, reflecting the social hierarchy and positions of status in eighth century Japan.

The third scene in the Myth of Jimmu is the same as in the Myth of Tan'gun where the marriage of the divine ruler to a local earth spirit represents the union of Heaven and earth. This motif, however, is expressed in a very different way in the *Kojiki* myth. In the Tan'gun narrative, there is a petition by the local animals and a trial to see which of them can succeed. The power and authority of the divine ruler is clearly indicated as he makes all the key decisions. In the Myth of Jimmu, however, the divine ruler after his descent begins a long journey in the course of which wanderings he encounters an earth spirit. He proposes marriage to her which is followed by a long, delicate discourse about propriety and parental authority. The divine ruler then negotiates with the earth spirit's father. This sequence is in stark contrast with the Myth of Tan'gun where the position of the son of the Ruler of Heaven would appear to have been absolute. In the Myth of Tan'gun, the union of Heaven and earth is the will of the ruler. The narrative in the *Kojiki* illustrates a weaker figure who must negotiate with the local spirits to gain his desire.

In the fourth scene, the birth of the divine grandchild's sons represents the offspring of the union of Heaven and earth. However, this union does not immediately produce a progenitor of the state, nor the immediate foundation of the imperial line. In the *Kojiki* myth, it is three generations after the descent of the divine grandchild before the imperial line is established. In between times, the Myth of Jimmu describes a long series of divine wanderings before the nation and kingship are actually created. It is important to note that in the Myth of Jimmu the line of imperial descent is traced not through the eldest child, but through the youngest child in each generation. In the final generation, Jimmu, the descendant of the Sun Goddess who according to the myth establishes the state, is the youngest sibling of four brothers.

Thus, the Myth of Jimmu and the Myth of Tan'gun are remarkably similar in structure and use of narrative motifs. In particular, two diagnostic motifs of the Myth of Tan'gun are shared in common—the motif of the three sacred regalia, and the divine ruler as being a second, secondary or younger son. These two myths are the only two examples of the mythic type which I call the Tan'gun type and are different in structure and narrative content from other foundation myths in Northeast Asia. This fact would suggest that there must have been a very close relationship between the ruling house of Chosŏn which traced its descent to a figure called Tan'gun, and to the ruling family of the state which claimed Jimmu as its progenitor.

NOTES

1. A record of the Northern Wei dynasty (386-534), one of the "barbarian" dynasties of China during the period of disunity from the third to the sixth centuries. It contains substantial information on the peoples surrounding the empire. The received text of this record, however, makes no mention of the Myth of Tan'gun. This section may have been lost, or the book referred to as the *Weishu* may be another work of a similar name which is not extant.
2. The Emperor Yao was the fourth of the Five Emperors of Chinese primordial time. He is alleged to have reigned from B.C. 2356 to 2255.
3. The *Tan'gun kogi*, a record of Tan'gun and his dynasty, is no longer extant. Nothing is known about it other than that writers in the Koryŏ period quoted from it.
4. *Sŏja* normally means the son of a secondary wife or concubine. It can also mean the second son of a principal wife.
5. "Heavenly Seals" or "Heavenly Treasures." Although we do not now know precisely what these objects were, they symbolized the authority of the ruler.
6. Regarded as being modern Paektusan mountain on the border between Manchuria and northeastern Korea. A dead volcano it stands 2,774 metres high and has a crater lake at its summit called Ch'ŏnji (Heavenly Lake).
7. *Shinshi*, the "City of God."
8. This term has the same meaning as *ch'ŏngun* (Prince of Heaven), the title used for the chief shamans during the Shilla period.
9. Another name for Hwanung, meaning "Holy Ung," and emphasizing the hero's divine nature.
10. These plants are medicinal herbs used in traditional Korean herbal medicine. The narrative implies that these plants are sacred and possess the power of metamorphosis.
11. Bear-woman. This phrase is similar to terms found in contemporary myths told in eastern Siberia to refer to transformed animals or humans.
12. Presumably the year B.C. 2308.
13. Wu was the first king of the Zhou dynasty of China and is said to have ruled from B.C. 1125 to 1115. This would place the date of Kija's alleged enfeoffment in B.C. 1125.
14. Birrell, pp. 183-184. In the *Shanhaijhing*, chapter *Hai-nei hsi-ching*, section 13, the area at the summit of Kunlun Mountain is called *Ti-chih hsia-tu*, "City Below of the Supreme Ruler." The tree at the summit of the mountain is called *muhe*, "Tree of Grain" or "Tree of Rice." Section 21 in the same chapter mentions the presence of six shamans living at the summit.
15. Birrell, pp. 262-263.
16. See the writings of Johann Georg von Hahn, Alfred Nutt, Otto Rank, F.R.S. Raglan, and Joseph Campbell. Victor Cook in "Lord Raglan's Hero—A Cross Cultural Critique" has pointed out the differences between East Asian and Mediterranean heroic myths.
17. Hsu and Linduff, p. 163.
18. There are two English translations of the Myth of Jimmu as recorded in the *Kojiki*, one by Basil Hall Chamberlain, and the other by Donald L. Philipi. A translation of the *Nihon shoki* version of the myth was done by William G. Aston.

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GLOSSARY

Changdanggyŏng	藏唐京	*kyŏngin*	庚寅
Chesŏk	帝釋	*mujin*	戊辰
Chewang un'gi	帝王韻紀	*Nihon shoki* (J.)	日本史記
chŏngsa	丁巳	*sanshin*	山神
ch'ŏnbuin	天符印	Shangdi (Ch.)	上帝
ch'ŏnja	天子	*Shanhaijing* (Ch.)	山海經
ch'ŏnmyŏng	天命	*sŏja*	庶子
ch'ŏnwang	天王	*Tan'gun kogi*	檀君古記
chusul	呪術	*t'ienming* (Ch.) ▶	*ch'ŏnmyŏng*
Hu (Ch.)	虎	*t'ientzu* (Ch.) ▶	*ch'ŏnja*
Hwanin	桓因	*t'ienwang* (Ch.) ▶	*ch'ŏnwang*
Hwanung	桓雄	Ungnyŏ	熊女
jimao (Ch.)	己卯	*Ŭngjeshi ju*	應制詩註
Jimmun (J.)	神武	*Weishu* (Ch.)	魏書
Kojiki (J.)	古事記	Yamato (J.)	大和
Kŭmmidal	今彌達	Yao (Ch.)	堯
Kungholsan	弓忽山		
Kunlun (Ch.)	崑崙	(Ch.: Chinese, J.: Japanese)	