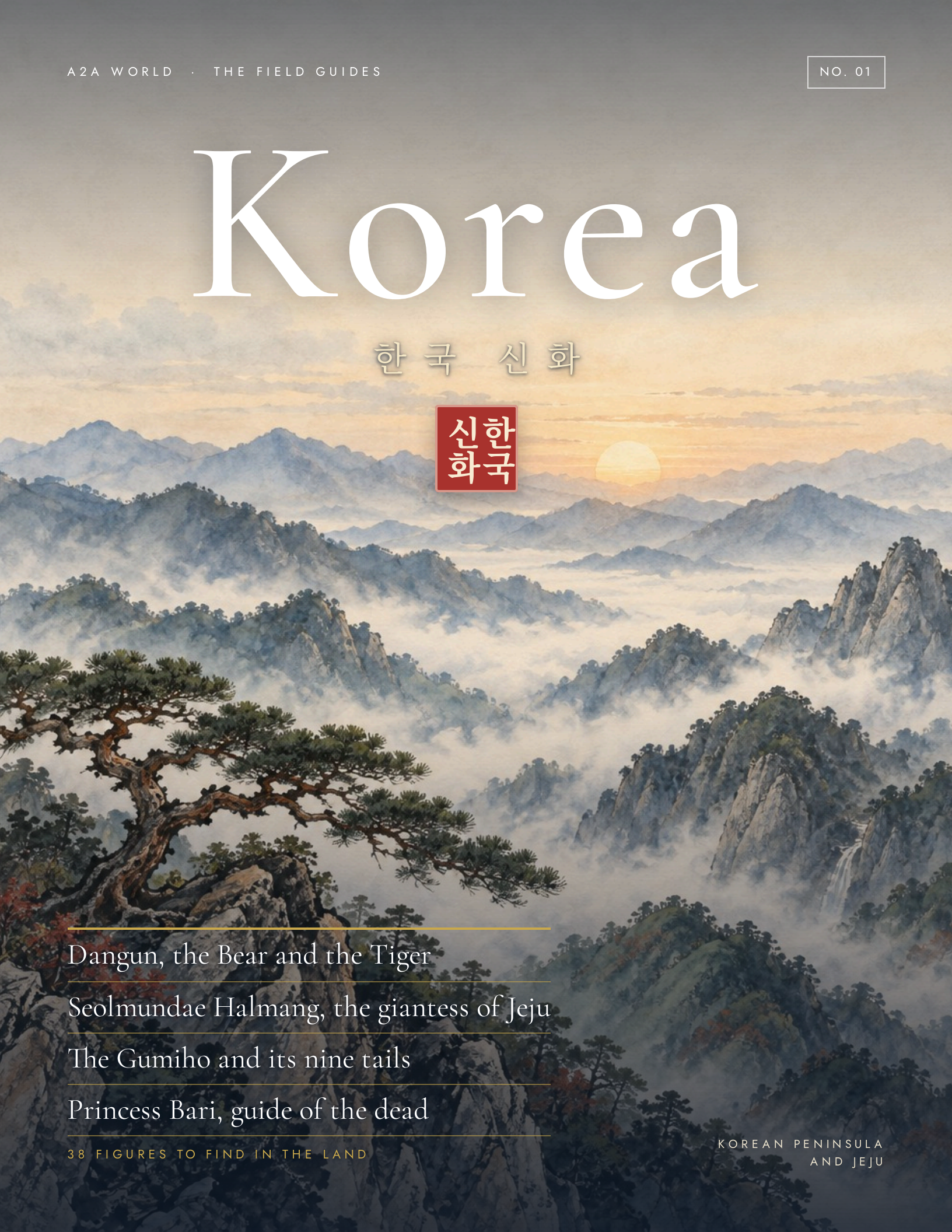
Korea

한 국 신 화

신한
화국



Dangun, the Bear and the Tiger

Seolmundae Halmang, the giantess of Jeju

The Gumiho and its nine tails

Princess Bari, guide of the dead

38 FIGURES TO FIND IN THE LAND

KOREAN PENINSULA
AND JEJU

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INTRODUCTION

Korean Mythology Field Guide

Names, attributes, and narratives from Korea's founding myths, shamanic gods, folk creatures, and its stranger tales — organised so each entry can be used as a search target in deliberate pareidolia practice.

Purpose: to demonstrate that a person from any culture can seek their own myths in the face of the Earth. This guide gives a learner from outside Korea a Korean starting point.

CONTEXT

How Korea Holds Its Myths

Korean belief is layered rather than singular. Indigenous shamanism (musok, led by the mudang) sits beneath centuries of Buddhism, Confucian ancestral rites, and Daoist cosmology, and the layers coexist comfortably. Jeju Island alone is traditionally said to have 18,000 gods.

Jeju Island alone is traditionally said to have 18,000 gods.

SOURCES

Samguk Yusa (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms), compiled by the monk Il-yeon in the 13th century, preserves the Dangun myth and most founding legends. Samguk Sagi (History of the Three Kingdoms, 1145), by Kim Bu-sik, is the older official history. The shamanic narratives — the bon-puri origin songs — survive orally and are still performed in rites. Most stories exist in several versions; the summaries here follow the commonly told form.



Haetae, the seated lion with one horn

A KOREAN PRECEDENT

Koreans have long read their own land as a figure. The mountain chain running the length of the peninsula, the Baekdudaegan, is traditionally called the nation's spine. In 1908 the writer Choe Nam-seon published a map drawing the whole peninsula as a leaping tiger — a deliberate response to a Japanese geographer who had likened it to a timid rabbit. The tiger map remains a popular national image today. This is national-scale pareidolia, chosen with intent.



Dangun Wanggeom — the sacred tree on the summit, the bear in the cave, the tiger walking away

THE FEATURE

Dangun Wanggeom

단군왕검

Legendary founder of Gojoseon (traditionally 2333 BCE). Son of Hwanung and the bear-woman.

Hwanin, Lord of Heaven, lets his son Hwanung descend to Mount Taebaek beneath a sacred sandalwood tree with 3,000 followers and the ministers of Wind, Rain and Cloud. A bear and a tiger beg to become human; told to stay in a cave 100 days eating only mugwort and 21 cloves of garlic. The tiger quits; the bear endures and becomes Ungnyeo, who bears Dangun.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
>
> *A bear in a cave or hollow; a lone tree on a summit; a tiger walking away.*

Ungnyeo 웅녀

The bear-woman. Patience, endurance, transformation.

After becoming human she prays beneath the sandalwood tree for a child; Hwanung briefly takes human form and marries her.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
>
> *A seated bear-figure; a woman kneeling beneath a tree.*

THE TWO BEST FIRST TARGETS

1. The Bear of the Dangun myth — the single best-known Korean story; every Korean recognises it. A bear seated in a cave, a tiger turning away. 2. Seolmundae Halmang — a goddess whose body literally is landscape. Strong alternates: the Gumiho (fan-shaped deltas suit nine tails), Haetae, and Jumong's turtle bridge.



I · FOUNDING MYTHS

I The Kingdom Founders

Korea’s dynasties trace their origins to heaven, eggs, and animals. These are the stories every Korean learns as a child.

Above: Jumong crosses the river on a bridge of fish and turtles

Jumong (Dongmyeong)
주몽

Founder of Goguryeo. Master archer; his name means 'skilled archer.' Born from an egg.

Yuhwa, daughter of the river god Habaek, is touched by sunlight and lays a great egg. King Geumwa discards it; animals shelter it rather than harm it. Fleeing his jealous half-brothers, Jumong reaches a river with no bridge — fish and turtles rise to form one, then sink once he has crossed.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *An archer with drawn bow; an egg shape; a line of turtles bridging water.*

Haemosu
해모수

Sun deity, father of Jumong in most tellings.

Descends from heaven in a chariot drawn by five dragons, wearing a crow-feather crown.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A chariot with a team of serpentine forms.*

Bak Hyeokgeose
박혁거세

Founder of Silla (57 BCE). Egg-born; shining body.

Village chiefs see a white horse kneeling by the Najeong well. It flies into the sky, leaving a large egg from which a radiant boy hatches.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A kneeling horse beside a round well or lake; an egg.*

Kim Alji
김알지

Ancestor of Silla's Kim royal line.

A white rooster crows beneath a tree in the forest of Gyerim, where a golden box hangs from a branch. Inside is a boy.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A rooster; a box hanging from a tree.*

Seok Talhae
석탈해

Fourth king of Silla. Seafarer, arrived from over the sea.

Born from an egg, set adrift in a chest; a ship followed by magpies brings it ashore.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A boat or chest on a coastline with birds above it.*

Kim Suro & Heo Hwang-ok
김수로 · 허황옥

Founder of Geumgwan Gaya and his queen from a distant land (Ayuta).

People on Mount Gujibong sing 'Turtle, turtle, show your head' (Gujiga). Six golden eggs descend in a red cloth; Suro hatches first. His queen arrives by ship with a red sail.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A turtle with head raised; six eggs in a cluster; a red-sailed ship.*

The Three Founders of Jeju (Samseonghyeol)
삼성혈

Go, Yang and Bu — ancestors of Jeju's people.

Three demigods rise from three holes in the ground. A wooden chest drifts ashore holding three princesses, calves, foals and grain seeds; each founder marries one, and they divide the island by archery.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *Three holes in a row; a chest on a beach; three archers.*



II · GODS & GODDESSES

II Shamanic and Folk Deities

The gods of musok — many of them female, many of them shapers of the land itself.

Above: Seolmundae Halmang, whose body forms the island of Jeju

Mago Halmi
마고할미

Primordial giant grandmother-goddess; shaper of the land.

In folk tellings she piles stones and earth to form mountains and islands, and her footprints and belongings become landmarks.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A giant female figure stretched across a range.*

Seolmundae Halmang
설문대할망

Jeju's giantess creator. So tall she used Hallasan as a pillow.

Carrying soil in her skirt, she built Hallasan; soil spilling through holes became Jeju's 360-plus volcanic cones (oreum). In one tragic version she falls into the pot of porridge she is cooking for her 500 sons; they eat it, discover her, and grieve until they turn to stone — the Obaek Janggun rocks.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A reclining giantess whose body forms an island; a cauldron; a line of standing stones.*



Princess Bari carries the healing water

Princess Bari (Baridegi)
바리데기

Abandoned seventh daughter who becomes guide of the dead and patron of shamans.

Her father, wanting a son, casts her away in a box. When he falls mortally ill, only she agrees to journey to the underworld for healing water. She labours for years, marries the guardian of the spring, bears seven sons, and returns in time to revive him.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A woman carrying a vessel; a river journey; a figure with seven small attendants.*

Jacheongbi
자청비

Jeju goddess of agriculture and love.

Disguises herself as a man to study beside the heavenly youth Mundoryeong; after trials in heaven she brings the five grains down to earth.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A woman scattering seed; a cross-dressed scholar.*

Yeongdeung Halmang
영등할망

Wind goddess who visits Jeju each second lunar month.

Arrives bringing seeds of shellfish and seaweed for divers; honoured with a farewell rite as she departs.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A woman in billowing garments over the sea.*

Samsin Halmeoni
삼신할머니

Goddess of childbirth and infants.

She grants children; the bluish Mongolian birthmark is said to be where she slapped the baby to hurry it into the world.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A grandmother cradling an infant.*

Sansin

산신

Mountain spirit; an old man with a white beard, always beside a tiger.

Shrines to Sansin stand at nearly every Buddhist temple; the tiger is his messenger.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *An old man seated with a tiger at his side.*

Yongwang

용왕

Dragon King of the sea; ruler of rain and fishermen's fortune.

Rules an undersea palace. Appears in the Rabbit and Turtle tale and in Cheoyong's story.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A dragon coiled in a bay or ocean trench.*

Gangnim Doryeong & Yeomra

강림도령 · 염라대왕

Gangnim: the human who became the reaper (Jeoseung Saja). Yeomra: King of the Underworld.

A magistrate's officer is sent to capture Yeomra himself; he succeeds, impresses the king, and is made the escort of souls.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A man in a wide black hat leading a figure.*

Chilseong

칠성

Deity of the Big Dipper; longevity and children.

Mothers pray to the seven stars for children's long life. In Jeju, Chilseong is a snake goddess who protects household grain.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *Seven points in a dipper pattern; a coiled serpent.*

Household Gods (Gasin)

가신

Seongju (house), Jowang (hearth), Teoju (site), Cheuksin (toilet).

Cheuksin is irritable, with very long hair she counts constantly; people cough before entering the outhouse at night so as not to startle her.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A woman combing very long hair.*



III · CREATURES & GUARDIANS

III Beasts, Spirits and Protectors

Figures with strong, distinctive silhouettes — often the easiest to find in terrain.

Above: The Gumiho, a fox with fanned, branching tails

Gumiho

구미호

Nine-tailed fox who can become a beautiful woman. Holds a fox bead (yeowu guseul).

A fox that lives a thousand years gains nine tails. In many tales it must consume human livers or hearts to become fully human; in others it fails at the final day of a 1,000-day trial.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A fox with fanned, branching tails — river deltas are ideal.*



A dokkaebi and its magic club

Dokkaebi

도깨비

Goblins born from discarded household objects. Mischievous rather than evil; love wrestling and buckwheat jelly.

Carry a magic club (bangmangi) that summons gold when struck. In 'The Lump-Removing Old Man,' a singer convinces dokkaebi his voice comes from a lump on his cheek; they buy it.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A horned figure with a club; a broom-shaped landform.*

Haetae (Haechi)

해태

Lion-like beast with a single horn. Judges right from wrong; guards against fire.

Will gore the guilty party in a dispute. Statues flank Gyeongbokgung Palace; it is Seoul's official symbol.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A seated lion with one horn.*

Imugi

이무기

Great serpent awaiting transformation into a dragon.

After a thousand years it may become a dragon if it obtains the yeouiju — a wish-granting pearl that falls from heaven.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A hornless serpent beside a round island or pearl-shaped lake.*

Yong (Dragon)

용

Benevolent water-dragon; four-clawed in Korean royal tradition; often holds the yeouiju.

Rises from rivers and seas; brings rain. King Munmu asked to become a sea dragon to guard Silla after death.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A dragon clutching a sphere.*

Bulgasari

불가사리

Iron-eating monster; cannot be killed.

Formed from grains of rice by a hermit, it grows by eating

needles, then every iron object in the land.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

A bulky beast with bristling spines.

Samjogo

삼족오

Three-legged crow living in the sun; emblem of Goguryeo.

Painted inside a sun disc in Goguryeo tomb murals, paired with a toad (or rabbit) in the moon.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

A bird with three legs inside a circle.



The Black Tortoise, guardian of the north

The Four Guardians (Sasin)

사신

Blue Dragon (east), White Tiger (west), Red Phoenix (south), Black Tortoise-Snake (north).

Painted on the four walls of Goguryeo tombs such as Gangseo Great Tomb.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

A tortoise entwined by a serpent; a phoenix with spread wings.

Tiger (Horangi)

호랑이

Korea's most beloved animal — fearsome yet often foolish in folktales.

A tiger panics when a crying child goes quiet at the word 'dried persimmon' (gotgam), concluding the persimmon must be more terrible than itself.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

A crouching or leaping tiger.



Jangseung guardian poles and a sotdae

Jangseung & Sotdae

장승 · 솟대

Carved village-guardian poles (a male and a female) and tall poles topped with wooden birds.

Placed at village entrances to repel disease and evil; the birds carry prayers skyward.

LOOK FOR IN THE LAND

Paired standing figures; birds perched on a tall post.



IV · THE UNUSUAL AND ODD

IV Stranger Narratives

Tales with unexpected turns — memorable, surprising, and excellent for holding an audience.

Above: The Sun and the Moon — the children rise, the tiger falls

Cheoyong
처용

Son of the Dragon King of the East Sea.

He comes home to find the plague spirit in bed with his wife. Instead of raging, he sings and dances. The spirit, ashamed, swears never to enter any house bearing Cheoyong's face — so his image was hung on gates as protection. The dance survives today (UNESCO-listed).

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A dancing figure with flowing sleeves.*

The Sun and the Moon (Haenim Dalnim)
해님 달님

Origin of the sun and moon.

A tiger eats a mother rice cake by rice cake, then devours her and disguises itself to trick her children. They climb a tree and pray; a strong rope descends and they rise to become the sun and moon. The tiger's rope is rotten; it falls onto a sorghum field — which is why sorghum stalks are stained red.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *Two small figures climbing a rope; a falling tiger.*

The Rabbit and the Turtle (Byeoljubu)
별주부전

Satire of greed and cleverness.

The Dragon King can only be cured by a rabbit's liver. A turtle lures a rabbit undersea. Realising the danger, the rabbit claims he left his liver drying on a rock on land and must fetch it — and escapes.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A rabbit riding a turtle's back.*



Gyeonu and Jiknyeo meet on the bridge of magpies and crows

Gyeonu & Jiknyeo
견우와 직녀

The Herdsman and the Weaver (the stars Altair and Vega).

Banished to opposite sides of the Milky Way, they meet once a year on the 7th day of the 7th month on a bridge formed by magpies and crows (Ojakgyo). Magpies are said to have bald heads afterward from being stepped on; rain that day is their tears.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *Two figures reaching across water; a bridge made of birds.*

Bihyeongnang
비형랑

Son of a dead king's ghost and a living woman.

Fathered by the spirit of King Jinji, he commands dokkaebi and has them build a bridge in a single night.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A figure directing a crowd building a bridge.*

Mangbuseok
망부석

The 'husband-awaiting stone.'

The wife of the Silla loyalist Bak Je-sang climbs a hill to watch the sea for his return and turns to stone with longing. Such stones are found across Korea.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A lone standing figure on a headland facing the sea.*

The Divine Bell of King Seongdeok (Emille Bell)
에밀레종

National Treasure; one of Korea's largest bronze bells.

Legend says the bell would not ring true until a child was cast into the molten bronze; its tone sounds like 'emille' — an old word for 'mother.'

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A bell shape.*

Arang
아랑

Ghost of Miryang.

A murdered magistrate's daughter appears to each new magistrate, who dies of fright — until one brave enough to listen brings her murderer to justice.

> LOOK FOR IN THE LAND
> *A pale woman with long, loose hair.*

A NOTE ON RESPECT

Romanisation follows the official Revised Romanization of Korean. Regional variants differ — particularly for Jeju's shamanic myths — so it is worth confirming the version of a story with a Korean source before telling it publicly.

The plates in this issue are interpretive illustrations, not historical artefacts.



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Earth Heritage and Perceptual Resilience

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