

ANCIENT CHOSEON: MYTH OR REALITY?

When studying the origins of Koreans in terms of significance for science, the ancient ethnogenetic “Legend about Tan Gun” is in the first place - the most important written monument of early Korean culture, which forms the foundation and knowledge basis for the reconstruction of history, ethnography, beliefs, language of the period of the first Korean state - Ancient Choseon. This was the era of formation, the transition from mythology to history, from a tribal society to an early state, when the culture of the people had just begun to take shape and acquire individual features. The Legend is a story about one very ancient dynasty - the Tan Gun dynasty and its heirs, descended from God and identified with the concept of the country and the state. The description of the facts presented in the Legend consists of a collection of scattered memories of past historical events, transmitted in the oral tradition and covering a period of almost 2000 years, therefore they are almost always figurative, ambiguous, giving too many opportunities for interpretation and deciphering. The myth was recorded by means of the Chinese language and Chinese graphics, which makes the text even more mysterious and puzzling. It must be said that the Legend is one of the most attractive areas for the study of antiquities associated with Korea; the riddles presented in it attracted and still attract the attention of not only serious scientists, but also a wide circle of literature and antiquity enthusiasts.

The Legend was first recorded by the Buddhist monk Iryeon in 1281. This was the time of the Korea’s submission to the Mongol dynasty (1259-1356), when foreigners intervened in state affairs and ruled Korea. The Legend describing the history of the origin of statehood of Korea and published at the most difficult moment for Korean culture, had both internal and external goals and was aimed at presenting the past of its state in the most favorable light, certifying the antiquity of the country, erecting a genealogy of the clan that ruled the first state to the “era of the gods” and thereby to approve the status of the current state (Koryeo) as an authoritative entity, to attest to the high cultural level of its court.

The Legend tells the history of the Choseon state, of which Huan In was the patron deity. The introductory plot reveals the motives behind which Huan In's son, Huan Ung, came down to earth, and describes the place where this event took place. At that time, in the territory appointed to Huan Ung by the god-father, there were simultaneously several groups of tribes, differing in the type of economic activity, ritual practice, sets of ancestral spirits and deities, in language, in the place where they came from, as well as by the amount of time lived in these places. All this (both people and customs) had to obey some new ideas and rules (new religion) brought with them by heavenly messengers. As in other related myths, the unshakable axiom of the Advent fragment is the description of the qualitative contribution that the aliens made to the life and culture of the Aborigines. Having intermarried with a representative of a local tribe, Huan Ung handed over the throne to their common son, Tan Gun. For a long time, the country did not see the change of the ruling dynasty until, according to the mandate of the Chinese court, power was transferred to a Chinese prince Chi Tzu. Although the appearance of Chi Tzu in the list of the rulers of Ancient Choseon at the mythological level looks like the result of the will of the Lord of the Celestial Empire (a means of certifying Chi Tzu's personal power), in fact, we can talk about the change of one Choseon governing elite to another. The Chi Tzu clan ruled in Choseon for 927 years. Then, after a long hiatus, power in the country was again returned to the Tan Gun clan. Starting in 2333 B.C., his reign lasted a total of 1908 years.

There are several approaches towards interpretation of the “Legend about Tan Gun”: structural and functional; literary; historical and cultural; ethnographic; sociological; theological etc. Although the Legend contains a fairly large number of personal names and other interesting names perceived as local words, forgotten for centuries after the death of the state, their detailed philological analysis has not yet been carried out. We will try to fill this gap.

THE TEXT OF THE LEGEND AND ITS ENGLISH TRANSLATION

昔有桓因【謂帝釋也】庶子桓雄 數意天下 貪求人世. 父知子意 下視三危太伯, 可以弘益人間. 乃授天符印三箇 遣往理之. 桓雄率徒三千 降於太伯山頂神壇樹下, 謂之神市 是謂桓雄天王也. 將風伯•雨師•雲師 而主穀•主命•主病•主刑•主善惡凡主人 三百六十餘事在世理化.

In olden times **Huan Ung**, a son of **Huan In**【so **Indra** was called】 and a *junior co-wife*, wished to descend from heaven and live in the world of human beings. Knowing his son's desire, the father [Huan In] surveyed the **Three-Peaked** Mountain and found the **Highest Senior-Peak** the most suitable place for his son to settle and help human beings. Therefore, he gave [Huan Ung] three heavenly seals and dispatched him to rule over the people. **Huan Ung** descended with three thousand followers under a **Tree** by the **Holy Altar** atop **Highest Senior-Peak**, and he called this place the **City-of-God**. He was the **Lord-of-Heaven, Huan Ung**. Leading the Master of Wind, the Master of Rain, and the Master of Clouds, he took charge of agriculture and fate of people, cured illnesses, defined punishment, taught to discern the good from the evil - he involved in people's affairs for all three hundred and sixty days. Living in peace, he ruled and enlightened.

時有一熊一虎 同穴而居, 常祈于神雄 願化爲人. 時神遺靈艾一炷蒜二十枚曰“爾輩食之 不見日光百日 便得人形”. 熊虎得而食之 忌三七日, 熊得女身 虎不能忌 而不得人身. 熊女者無與爲婚 故每於壇樹下 呪願有孕. 雄乃假化 而婚之 孕生子 號曰壇君王儉.

At that time a **Bear** and a **Tiger** living in the same cave prayed to **Holy** [Huan] **Ung** to transform them into human beings. The **Deity** gave them a bundle of sacred mugworts and twenty cloves of garlic and said, “If you eat these and shun the 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 **Altar Tree** for a child. [Huan] **Ung**

metamorphosed himself, lay with her, and begot a son called **Wang-geom Tan Gun**.

以唐高即位五十年庚寅，都平壤城 始稱朝鮮 又移都於白岳山阿斯達，又名弓【一作方】忽山 又今彌達御國一千五百年 周虎王即位己卯 封箕子於朝鮮，壇君乃移藏唐京 後還隱於阿斯達 爲山神壽一千九百八歲。

In the fiftieth year of the reign of Emperor Yao, [Tan Gun] made the city of **Phyeong-Yang** the capital and called his country **Cho-Seon**. He then moved his capital to Mount **Asa-Dar** (also named Mount **Kŭmmi-Dar**) on **White Peaked-Mountain**, whence he ruled for fifteen hundred years. When, in the year *kimyo* [1122 B.C.], King Wu of Chou enfeoffed **Chi Tzu** to **Cho-Seon**, **Tan Gun** moved to **Chang-Dang** City, but later he returned and hid in **Asa-Dar** as a mountain god at the age of one thousand nine hundred and eight.