

Korean Culture  
The power of myth and legend

**Goal:** To expose students to the writings of Samguk Yusa and discuss how ‘we’ can learn about Korean culture through these stories. Additionally, we will hypothesize diffusion of culture to Japan by comparing the stories in these writings with early Japanese literature.

**Strategy:** Lecture, Primary Source translation, Guided handout

**Time:** One class period

**Key Concept/Synopsis:** We will explore the power of myth and legend and its impact on history and society in general. To accomplish this task we will use two of the oldest stories known from Korea, and address the question of how story, myth, and legend influence culture and understanding of culture.

**Learning Outcome:** SWBAT understand and see cultural diffusion between Korean and Japanese cultures through the use of story.

**Resources Needed:**

- Examples of Samguk Yusa legends - Tan’ gun & Chumong
- Examples from Nihon Shoki and Kojiki – Amaterasu & Jimmu
- Handout of Questions related to stories
- Maps of Korea and Japan

**ODE Standards:**

Grade	Strand	Topic	Content Statement
6	History	Early Civilizations	Early civilizations (India, Egypt, China and Mesopotamia) with unique governments, economic systems, social structures, religions technologies and agricultural practices and products flourished as a result of favorable geographic characteristics. The cultural practices and products of these early civilizations can be used to help understand the Eastern Hemisphere today.
6	Geography	Human Systems	Variations among physical environments within the Eastern Hemisphere influence human activities. Human activities also alter the physical environment.
7	History	Historical Thinking & Skills	Historians and archaeologists describe historical events and issues from the perspectives of people living at the time in order to avoid evaluating the past in terms of today’s norms and values.
7	Geography	Human Systems	Trade routes connecting Africa, Europe, and Asia fostered the spread of technology and major world religions.

7	Geography	Human Systems	Improvements in transportation, communication and technology have facilitated cultural diffusion among peoples around the world.
7	Government	Civic Participation and Skills	The ability to understand individual and group perspectives is essential to analyzing historic and contemporary issues.

### **Bibliography:**

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### **BACKGROUND:**

Samguk Sagi and Samguk Yusa are the two oldest known writings from Korea. Samguk Sagi chronicles the three kingdoms (Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla) and was finished around 1145 CE. This politically charged account of history written by Kim Busick was commissioned by the Silla King Injong to promote his claim as legitimate ruler of the unified Korea. The stated purpose of the book was to provide Koreans with their 'history' – cultural and artistic traditions and promote Confucian values. Though no mention of Japan exists in the story we do know that similarities exist between the two cultures and the stories told – especially the Japanese goddess Amaterasu and the Korea Yonorang & Syeonyo. NOTE: Professor Edward Shultz at University of Hawaii is in process of translating this book into English (see bibliography).

Samguk Yusa on the other hand is a collection of stories, myths, legends, and folktales. This book compiled by a Buddhist monk named Iryeon was completed in 1285 CE. Many historians consider this the more valuable resource because it is based more on the people's beliefs and social customs without the bias of politics. The story of Tan 'gun comes from this book. Chumong is Tan 'gun's grandchild and is also found within this book.

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The purpose of this lesson is to display the cultural similarities and sharing between Japan and Korea. Historians can trace interaction between the two races of people and hypothesize that Koreans moved into Japan in early part of Common Era. We also know that many stories and traditions – not to mention religious practices, art, etc. are similar between the two cultures. For example the ancient royalty (symbols) of kings for the two cultures is the same – jewel, sword, and mirror. Both cultures claim to have their first king (ruler) to be the grandchild of a god/goddess. Additionally, both cultures share animal imagery and shamanism in their myths. Water and Sky animals are positive creatures, while land based animals are negative creatures.

In my research, all accounts point out that Japanese stories are more complete and better written, while Korean stories may have gaps in detail. You will note this as you read the myth Amaterasu and the story of Jimmu.

### **Students**

**TELL:** We just learned that Japanese society was influenced by Chinese, Indian and Korean societies for art, architecture and religion. Let's take a closer look at how the Koreans in particular viewed their early stories by looking at two Legends found within the Samguk Yusa. {In this particular lesson, students will review and critique two Korean stories "Legend of Tan 'gun" and "Story of Chumong"}. We will then read and discuss two early Japanese stories as a method of comparing and contrasting. {Here students will review Amaterasu and Jimmu}

**SHOW:** The two legends can be made into copies, projected to the screen in the room, or uploaded to Moodle so that students will have the chance to read along. Teacher must pass out the guided questions generated for this lesson in all cases unless uploaded on Moodle.

**GUIDE:** Depending on how one sets up the reading – one could read along with students or go from group to group as students read the legend and answer a series of guided questions that go with the story and then extend out into stories they may know. It is important to circulate throughout the room because students will be reading unfamiliar stories and may need clarification of terminology and meaning.

**TRANSITION:** The transition is helping the students see the possible connections between Korea and Japan from these stories, and explain how this is just one example of how culture is diffused to another land. Have students generate examples from their own culture as method of connections to their life and thereby enhancing understanding of literature diffusion concept.

### **DIFFERENTIATION:**

- Extend for advanced students by pulling up other Korean and Japanese stories/myths to compare with in class or as assignment.

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- Special Education students will receive print out copies of the legends to work with in class and during the supplemental period with the special education teacher. Provide copy of stories to special education teacher prior to lesson and be available to receive questions.

**ASSESSMENT**: The greater assessment is having students understand the cultural diffusion from Korea to Japan which shows up on the medieval test and OAA testing. For this particular lesson, though, the assessment is related to the handout provided with this lesson and the formative assessment done in the classroom.

**NOTE: On Student handout - questions in **bold** and answers underlined – erase answers for student version.**

## The Legend of Tan 'gun

The Wei Shu tells us that two thousand years ago, at the time of Emperor Yao Tan gunun Wanggôm chose Asadal as his capital and founded the state of Choson. The Old Record notes that in olden times Hwanin's son, Hwanung, 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 to be the most suitable place for his son to settle and help human beings. He then 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 the sunlight for one hundred days, you will assume human form." Both animals began to eat the spices and avoid 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. Hwanung metamorphosed himself, lay with her, and begot a son called Tan gun Wanggôm.

In the fiftieth year of the reign of Emperor Yao, Tan gun made the walled city of Pyongyang the capital and called his country Chosôn. He then moved his capital to Asadal on Mount Paegak, also named Mount Kunghol, whence he ruled for fifteen hundred years. When, in the year kimyo (1122 B.C.E.), King Wu of Chou enfeoffed Chi Tzu to Chosôn, Tan gun moved to Changdangyông, but later he returned and hid in Asadal as a mountain god at the age of 1,908.



## Chumong

Founder of the Koguryeo kingdom in 37 BCE, he was the son of Haemosu and Yuhwa (eldest daughter of the water deity Habaek). Haemosu (a sun deity) impregnated Yuhwa (who was at that time in the household of King Keumwa of Puyo), and she bore an egg from her left armpit. The king saw this as unnatural and tried to destroy the egg. First he placed it in a corral, but all the horses carefully avoided stepping on the egg. Then he brought it to the mountains, but all the animals protected it. Even on cloudy days, a ray of sunshine always shone on the egg. Finally, the king gave up and brought the egg back to Yuhwa.

When the egg hatched a young boy, Chumong, emerged. After only one month he began to speak. He complained to his mother that he couldn't sleep because of the flies that were biting his eyes. He asked that she make him a bow and arrow, and she did so. Chumong took the bow, and with every arrow he shot he hit a fly.

Chumong's skill improved as he became a young man. He often went hunting with the king's seven sons, and although they might catch one deer all together, Chumong would catch many. The eldest prince warned his father, "Chumong is a boy of supernatural powers--it would be best to take care of him quickly before he grows to be a man." So the king ordered Chumong to work as a stable boy, to see how he would react to being ordered to do such lowly work.

Dissatisfied with such a lowly station, Chumong said to his mother: "I am the son of a god--this is no way for me to live. I will go to the south and found a nation of my own." His mother answered, "I, too, have worried about this day and night. Since you will be traveling such a long way, let me choose a good horse for you." His mother went to the corral and snapped a large whip, frightening all the horses. One of the horses leaped over a fence the height of two men. Chumong saw this and knew immediately that this was an exceptional horse. Secretly he stuck a needle in the horse's tongue so that he wouldn't be able to eat or drink.

When the king saw that all the horses had become big and strong he was very happy, and he gave the thin, starving horse to Chumong. Chumong took the needle from the horse's tongue and fed him very well. When the horse was healthy he fled south until he came to a great river. The king's troops were fast on his heels, so he pointed his whip at heaven and shouted, "I am the son of Haemosu, the son-in-law of Habaek, and I have thus far escaped disaster. Now may the gods of heaven and earth have mercy on me and send a bridge." Then he struck the water with an

arrow, and all the fish and turtles in the river came up to the surface and formed a bridge. Chumong quickly rode across, even as the king's troops were approaching. When he had reached the other side, the fish and turtles dove back into the water, and all the king's men that were on the bridge drowned.

When he had parted with his mother she had given him many different seeds of grain, but somewhere along his journey he had lost the barley seed. As he was resting beneath a great tree, a pigeon came flying into view. He thought to himself, "Since I have lost the barley seed, my heavenly mother has sent me another." He shot an arrow and killed the pigeon, and when he opened up its throat he found a barley seed there. Then he put the pigeon into the water and it came to life and flew away again. He decided to found his nation at that place, and he gathered vassals around him and declared himself king.

One day, when he was out hunting, he met Songyang, the original king of the land. When Songyang asked him who he was, Chumong answered, "I am a descendant of the god of heaven, and I am now king of this land." Songyang replied, "I have been king of this land for some time now, so don't you think it would be right for you to submit to me?" Chumong said to him, "You are no descendant of the gods, so if you do not submit to me heaven will surely strike you down."

Songyang decided to try another tactic. "The mark of a great king is surely his skill in archery," he said. "Let us have a contest." He commanded one of his servants to draw a deer and place it at a hundred paces. Songyang took aim and fired, but he missed his target. Then Chumong commanded his servant to place a jade ring at a hundred paces, and he broke it with one arrow.

Songyang was defeated, and Chumong commanded rain to fall from heaven. It rained for seven days, and Songyang's capital was swept away in a flood. With the help of heaven, Chumong erected his own palace in another seven days, and thus he founded the kingdom of Koguryeo.

## **Geneology of Tan 'gun to Chumong**

- ❖ Hwanin – Lord of Heaven who sends his son to earth to help people.
  - Hwanung – Son of Hwanin - King of Heaven who descends to Mount T'aebaek – teaches people about, medicine, justice, agriculture, and law
    - Tan 'gun – Son of Hwanung and Ungyno (bear that becomes a woman) – believed to be the founder of Choson – which is the ancient name for Korea
      - Haemosu – Sun god (descendant of Tan 'gun)
        - ◆ Chumong – Son of Haemosu and Yuhwa (daughter of water god Habaek) He hatches from an egg that is laid from Yuhwa's left armpit

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## Amaterasu

The Japanese Shinto sun goddess, ruler of the Plain of Heaven, whose name means 'shining heaven' or 'she who shines in the heavens'. She is the central figure in the Shinto pantheon and the Japanese Imperial family claims descent from her. She is the eldest daughter of Izanagi. She was so bright and radiant that her parents sent her up the Celestial Ladder to heaven, where she has ruled ever since.

When her brother, the storm-god Susanowa, ravaged the earth she retreated to a cave because he was so noisy. She closed the cave with a large boulder. Her disappearance deprived the world of light and life. Demons ruled the earth. The other gods used everything in their power to lure her out, but to no avail. Finally it was Uzume who succeeded. The laughter of the gods when they watched her comical and obscene dances aroused Amaterasu's curiosity. When she emerged from her cave a streak of light escaped (a streak nowadays people call dawn). The goddess then saw her own brilliant reflection in a mirror which Uzume had hung in a nearby tree. When she drew closer for a better look, the gods grabbed her and pulled her out of the cave. She returned to the sky, and brought light back into the world.

Later, she created rice fields, called *inada*, where she cultivated rice. She also invented the art of weaving with the loom and taught the people how to cultivate wheat and silkworms.



## The Eastern Expedition of Emperor Jimmu

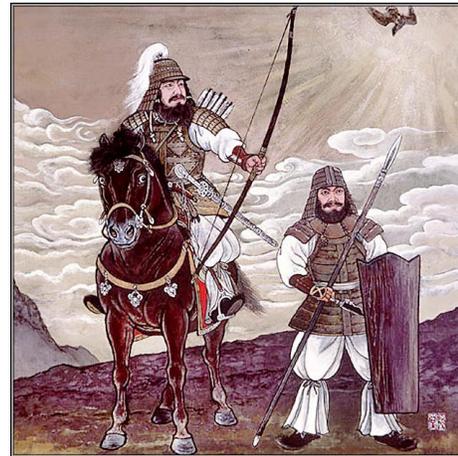
Emperor Jimmu was forty-five years of age when he addressed the assemblage of his brothers and children: "Long ago, this central land of the Reed Plains was bequeathed to our imperial ancestors by the heavenly deities, Takamimusubi-no-Kami and Amaterasu Omikami.... However, the remote regions still do not enjoy the benefit of our imperial rule, with each town having its own master and each village its own chief. Each of them sets up his own boundaries and contends for supremacy against other masters and chiefs.

"I have heard from an old deity knowledgeable in the affairs of the land and sea that in the east there is a beautiful land encircled by blue mountains.... This must be the land from which our great task of spreading our benevolent rule can begin, for it is indeed the center of the universe'.... Let us go there, and make it our capital."

In the winter of that year, on the day of *kanototori*, the Emperor personally led imperial princes and a naval force to embark on his eastern expedition....When Nagasunehiko heard of the expedition, he said: "The children of the heavenly deities are coming to rob me of my country.? He immediately mobilized his troops and intercepted Jimmu's troops at the hill of Kusaka and engaged in a battle.... The imperial forces were unable to advance. Concerned with the reversal, the Emperor formulated a new divine plan and said to himself: "I am the descendant of the Sun Goddess, and it is against the way of heaven to face the sun in attacking my enemy. Therefore our forces must retreat to make a show of weakness. After making sacrifice to the deities of heaven and earth, we shall march with the sun on our backs. We shall trample down our enemies with the might of the sun. In this way, without staining our swords with blood, our enemies can be conquered.?..So, he ordered the troops to retreat to the port of Kusaka and regroup there....

[After withdrawing to Kusaka, the imperial forces sailed southward, landed at a port in the present-day Kii peninsula, and again advanced north toward Yamato.]

The precipitous mountains provided such effective barriers that the imperial forces were not able to advance into the interior, and there was no path they could tread. Then one night



Amaterasu Omikami appeared to the Emperor in a dream: "I will send you the Yatagarasu, let it guide you through the land." The following day, indeed the Yatagarasu appeared flying down from the great expanse of the sky. The Emperor said: "The coming of this bird signifies the fulfillment of my auspicious dream. How wonderful it is! Our imperial ancestor, Amaterasu Omikami, desires to help us in the founding of our empire...."

At long last, the imperial forces caught up with Nagasunehiko and fought with him repeatedly, but could not gain victory. Then suddenly, the sky became darkened and hail fell. There appeared a mysterious hawk of a golden color which flew toward the Emperor and perched on the end of his bow. The brilliant luster of this hawk was almost like that of lightning. Bedazzled and confused the soldiers of Nagasunehiko were unable to fight with all their might....

[Subsequently Nagasunehiko was killed by his overlord, and the Emperor continued to make his successful conquest.]

On New Year's Day, in the year of *kanototori*, the Emperor formally proclaimed his ascension to the position of the ruler of the universe by virtue of being a descendant of Amaterasu Omikami. This took place in the palace of Kashihabara, and the year was counted as the first year of his reign....

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## **Geneology of Amaterasu to Jimmu**

- ❖ Izanagi - Sky god of Shinto religion creates world with Izanami who goes on to rule underworld
  - Amaterasu – Daughter of Izanagi - Sun goddess – ruler of heaven – created when dad washed his left eye (moon god Tsuki-yomi created when dad washed right eye; wind and storm god – Susanowa - created when he washed his nose)
    - Ame no Oshihomimi no Mikoto – son of Amaterasu
      - Ninigi no Mikoto – son of Ame - marries Princess Konohana Sakuya
        - ◆ Hikohohodemi no Mikoto – son of Ninigi - marries Princess Toyotama who is daughter of Owatasumi the sea god and brother of Amaterasu
          - Hikonagisa Takeugaya Fukiaezu no Mikoto – son of Hikohohodemi - marries Princess Tamayori – Toyotama’s sister
            - Jimmu – son of Hikoagisa – becomes first ruler of Japan – according to legend in the year 660 BCE

**Directions:** After reading the stories from Samguk Yusa, Nihon Shoki and Kojiki, you will have enough background to complete the following questions. Refer back to the stories if you need in order to get the accurate answers.

## Chumong

What three things happen to ensure that Chumong is born of the egg?

1. The horses will not step on the egg in the corral
2. Animals protect it on the mountain
3. No matter how cloudy it gets – a ray of light appears on the egg to warm it

Tell Me Five amazing things that Chumong did in the story:

1. Could speak in first month of life
2. Was able to kill flies with bow and arrow
3. Deer hunting story
4. How he tricked king into giving him the best horse
5. Makes a bridge out of fish and turtles

What land can the reader hypothesize Chumong is fleeing from when he chooses to go south? China

How was Chumong able to command the sun and water?

His dad is the sun god and his father in law is the water god.

Describe Songyang's mistake in challenging Chumong.

He challenges Chumong to an archery contest which is Chumong best weapon.

## Amaterasu

According to story of Amaterasu, how does dawn become a reality?

Amaterasu shuts herself in a cave to escape the noise of her brother Susanowa (storm god) creates, and then must be lured out of her cave. When she emerges a small ray of light escapes and becomes dawn.

Make a connection between the Shinto 'kami' goddess and the Japanese slogan – "Land of the Rising Sun".

Student should be able to connect sun goddess with image on Japanese flag and the rising sun being that of Amaterasu rising.

## Jimmu

At age 45 Jimmu decides to seek out a land to the east surrounded by mountains and sea. What does this suggest about the origin of Jimmu's ancestry?  
That is family is from the Asian mainland (Korea, China or a smaller island of Japan)

Jimmu is unsuccessful in his bid to conquer the Yamato in his first battle? Why and how does he propose to fix this issue?  
He fights against the rising sun, and he decides to retreat and then reenter Japan from the east shore and fight with sun behind his back.

What two animals show up to guide him on his quest and what affect do they have on the situation Jimmu is in?  
Raven to guide (shows Amaterasu's support)  
Gold Hawk which descends to Jimmu and confuses Yamato's warriors.

## Connections

In the Story of Chumong, seven days is significant. Where else in myth, legend, or religion does this number of days show up?  
This is how long it takes Chumong to create his palace on earth. The seven days matches stories of the Qur'an and Bible (and by extension Torah) for length of world creation.

Take a look at the genealogy charts provided on Chumong and Jimmu. What similarities and differences can you spot with their ancestry?  
Students should see that both rulers descend from the gods based on the stories. They additionally have a connection to water and sky gods. {This is important because in both cultures positive creatures come from water and sky while evil comes from the land. }

Now think back to the Greek gods and goddesses, can you think of any similarities with the deities from this culture?  
Answers will vary

In your opinion, which culture [Japan or Korea] influenced the other with regard to religion and legends, and why do you believe this to be true?  
The goal is for students to see that diffusion came from Korea to Japan with large Chinese influence, but I do expect students to make the mistake of thinking Japan influences because of its stature in the world today. This provides a teaching moment based on answers in the room.