



EDIÇÃO Nº 07 NOVEMBRO DE 2014
ARTIGO RECEBIDO ATÉ 30/09/2014
ARTIGO APROVADO ATÉ 30/10/2014

ZODIAC ANIMALS IN KOREAN PROVERBS

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SUMMARY: There are a lot of animals we can meet in Korean folklore, but in this paper are described the animals that are most commonly mentioned in the Far Eastern zodiac, better known in English as the Chinese Zodiac. Here are described the role of the zodiac animal images in Korean folklore: proverbs, sayings etc. Each animal has its allegorical form and expresses various traits of man. Dealing with twelve animals of the Korean zodiac such as rat (juj), ox (so), tiger (beom, horangi), rabbit (tokki), dragon (yong), snake (baem), horse (mal), sheep (yang), monkey (wonsungi), rooster (sutak), dog (gae), pig (dwaeji), this article represents a contribution to research in Korean paremiology in the specific field of animal idioms. Besides referring to proverbs and sayings about these animals, surely I also try to give some examples of their role and importance in the history of the Korean nation and in other genres of Korean folklore. For this article, are used both North and South Korean sources, mainly dictionaries and books of proverbs, in order to disprove the point of view that there are profound big language differences between the two Koreas.

1. Korean zodiac

The Chinese zodiac signs are used by cultures other than Chinese, too. They are used in some other Asian countries that have been under the cultural influence of China and also in countries that have not been under influence of China. However, some of the animals in the zodiac may differ by country. Japan's zodiac animals come from China. Like Chinese people, the Japanese love and believe in the power of these animals. Vietnam's zodiac animals are much the same as China's. The only difference is that the rabbit is replaced by the cat. Cambodia has the ox as the first and the dragon as the last animal. Myanmar has eight zodiac animals, including the tiger, lion, double-tusk elephant, non-tusk elephant, mouse, cavy and bird. India's twelve zodiac animals are the mouse, ox, lion, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog and pig.



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Western countries also have symbols like China's zodiac animals. The twelve animals in ancient Greece were the goat, lion, donkey, crab, snake, dog, mouse, crocodile, monkey, hawk, etc. Thus, zodiac animals are actually a worldwide phenomenon, and China's zodiac animals are an important part of this.

The Korean zodiac is mostly identical to the Chinese one. The lunar calendar was the basis of Korean life in the past and also now, holidays/celebratory events are based on the moon's cycles. The years were represented by animals that followed each other in an established order repeated every 12 years. In Korea, when someone asks about your sign, they are not only getting a sense of your personality as people in the West do with signs of the zodiac, they are also working out your age. The twelve animals in Korean zodiac are collectively known as the *Sibijisin* (십이지신), which literally means „Twelve (sibi) gods of the earth (jisin)“.¹ They are also used to measure the hours of the day as well as to represent direction. For example, the hours between 5 a.m. and 7 a.m. has been called „Myosi“ (Time of the Rabbit), and the hours between 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. „Misi“ (Time of the Sheep). The entire day has been divided into twelve different „times“ each represented by one of the twelve animals. The twelve animal signs are: Rat (aka Mouse), Ox (aka Cow, Bull, Buffalo), Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Sheep (Ram or Goat also), Monkey, Rooster (aka Chicken), Dog and Pig. Every animal is considered to have specific characteristics, which are shared by people born in their year. The year itself may be defined by its animal.

The order of the animals is said to be a result of a contest between the animals. When the gods were asked to decide which of them would be first, they decided to have all the animals swim across a river.² Each animal's place would be determined by the order in which they reached the opposite bank. According to some myths, unknown to the ox, the rat jumped on his back and hitched a ride, while others say that the ox generously agree to give the rat a ride. As they approached the shore, the rat jumped off the oxen's head and earned himself first place, with the ox following in second.

¹In this paper, for transcription of Korean proverbs, as well as personal, geographical and historical names, is used the method promoted in South Korea in 2000 for all countries of the world.

²In another story, it is said that when Buddha wanted to leave our world he invited all animals to farewell party.



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Zodiac has been used in astrology, astronomy, geomancy as well as horoscopes, which has been important especially for matching and finding future spouses. Zodiac is a common theme of art, treated as a whole or, especially in sculpture, by its individual animal symbols.

2. A glimpse of Korea through the proverbs

In the past, Chinese civilization was transmitted to Japan through the „Land of the Morning Calm“, thus, Korea, where a unique form of wise sayings evolved among the common people. This kind of folk wisdom or proverbs are known in Korean language as SOKDAM. They can be best understood as the wisdom of common sense, because they grew out of everyday experiences. While the gentry group of YANGBAN³ of the early days enjoyed various literary works following Chinese civilizations the majority of the Korean people, who were mostly illiterate, produced the SOKDAM which represent the real sentiment and ethos of their national character. Even though SOKDAM are often differentiated from SSANGMAL or vulgar sayings, a strict distinction between them is almost impossible. It is commonly held that the SOKDAM had their roots in the SSANGMAL. SSANGMAL have been refined and have become the proverbs of our times.

Like most proverbs, the SOKDAM that convey the national character are older than any written literature and have had a long history of oral tradition. Therefore, it is of little use to speculate on the origin and authorship of these sayings. They have become the common property of the Korean people. Until recent times, no real attempt has been made to write them down. However, as the old traditions begin to wane with the coming of a new technical civilization, a strong movement has developed to preserve the SOKDAM in written form.

Korean proverbs can provide us with an appealing glimpse of the Korean people, culture, cares, heritage and humor. However, at the same time, as seen in the examples given below, Korean proverbs have some similarities with Western proverbs and universal cultural properties may be identified through the proverbs of Korean people.

³The *yangban* were part of the traditional ruling class or nobles of dynastic Korea during the Joseon Dynasty.



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Procrastination: 시작이 반 *sijagi ban*.

To begin is to be half done or the beginning is half the completion. Half the battle is in getting started.

This proverb is popular because it alludes to the universal human malady of procrastination.

(Western counterpart) Don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today.

Envy: 사촌이 땅을 사나 배를 외 앓아? *sachoni ttangeul sana baereul oe ara?*

Cousin buys a farm field and why do you get a stomach ache?

This refers to the universal weakness of envy.

(Western counterpart) The grass is always greener on the other side.

Rumors: 때지 않는 굴뚝에 연기 날까? *ttaeji anneun gulttuge yeogi nalkka?*

Does smoke rise from a chimney where no fire burns?

It is used to suggest that a rumor must have some basis in fact.

(Western) Where there is smoke, there is fire.

Experience: 백 번 듣는 것은 한 번 보는 것이 아닙니다 *baek beon deunneun geoseun han beon boneun geosi animnida*.

Hearing 100 times is not like seeing once.

We should be slow to draw conclusions about situations with which we are not personally familiar.

(Western) Seeing is believing.

The accumulated wisdom, value systems and attitudes toward life are mirrored in these folk sayings. One can gain much insight about people's culture by studying their proverbs, even though he can at best only interpret them in terms of his own national background.

As a part of the oral folk tradition, proverbs are actually small literary creations, or small works of art, which can be analyzed from a literary point of view, by taking into account the creation



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of images, themes, etc. They have basis for various forms, such as metaphor, parallelism, contrast, hyperbole, repetition of certain parts and rhythm. These procedures may be naturally combined. Folksiness is reflected in the number of vulgarisms, the high proportion of dialectism and archaic expressions associated with the rural life (tools, types of cuisine, handicrafts etc.).

--낮 말은 새가 듣고 밤 말은 쥐가 듣는다 *nat mareun saega deutko bam mareun juiga deunneunda.*

Birds listen to your day-talk and rats to your night-talk. (parallelizm+repeation, kor.

대구법+반복법). comparing: The walls have ears.

--가는 말이 고와야 오는 말이 곱다 *ganeun mari gowaya oneun mari gopta.*

If you speak nicely you'll recieve nice answer too. (parallelizm+repeation). comparing: One who sows wind will reap hurricane.

The Chinese influence over the Korean mind is seen in many of the proverbs, such as the one mentioned above. Confucianism has effectively permeated the country politically and socially and Chinese modes of thought, Chinese literature and culture have made Korea what it is. But it is not China of the ruling Ching dynasty, but that of the Tang and Ming, which has been Korea's model. The Chinese of a thousand years ago is the groundwork of the present sinico-korean style of literature, the Chinese institutions of the Ming dynasty those on which the Institutes of the reigning dynasty of *Joseon* (1394–1910) are framed.

Perhaps a translation of proverbs (as that of poetry) is somewhat like looking at the wrong side of an oriental rug to find its pristine beauty. Yet the design remains, although something is inevitably lost: the metaphor, music, nuances, and wordplay woven into the fabric of the original idiom. Withal, it is an especially revealing experience to contemplate these popular sayings, in view of the sharp interest focused today upon the Korean people, their attitudes and values.



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3. Zodiac's animals and Korean folklore

1. rat, mouse (jui)—The rat or mouse is the first sign of the Far Eastern zodiac and in Korean proverbs it is known as an impudent, hypocrite, coward and a thief.⁴ e.g.

쥐가 도둑질하듯 한다 *juiga docheokjirhadeut handa* Steal like rat

쥐가 소금 나르듯 한다 *juiga sogum nareudeut handa* Steals like a rat carries a salt

나라에는 도둑이 있고 집안에는 쥐가 있다 *naraeneun dodugi ittgo jibaneneun juiga itta* Thieves in the government are the same as mice in the house

소 같이 벌어서 쥐 같이 먹는다 *so kati peoreoseo jui kati meoneunda* Works like an ox but eats like a rat (i.e. thriftiness)

쥐 새끼 같이 얽치없는 놈이다 *juiga saekki kati yeomchieomneun nomida* Impudent as a mouse

고양이 앞에 쥐 걸음이다 *koyangi ape jui keoreumida* As a mouse stepping in front of a cat (i.e. in embarrassment)

고양이 죽은 데 쥐 눈물 흘리듯 한다 *koyangi jugeun dae jui nunmul heullideut handa*

Like a mouse crying after a dead cat (i.e. falseness, hypocrisy)

⁴In Buddhism the rat stays a little bit away from the other animals. It first came to the Buddha's party, where it used the bull for crossing a turbulent river. In Asian cultures rat or mouse is a symbol of wealth. What else? What would the rat do in the house of a poor man? Chinese myths tell us that the rat has brought rice to the people and taught them how to grow it. Until now it is personalized with abundance and prosperity, and the one who is born in the year of rat has a charming personality. It is said that on the third day of the New Year, the rats (mice) wed their daughters and then in order not to interfere with their wedding matters, people try to go to bed early.

Koreans also hallowed and worshipped a mouse as a symbol of wealth. It was considered as a very clever, smart but cunning and thrifty creature with incredible abilities. It was believed that it was enough for the mouse to prick the human fingernail in order to become a human being.



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However, the mouse also personalizes positive traits like perseverance, obstinacy and vehemence.
e.g.

쥐도 한 모 파면 구멍을 뚫는다 *juido han mo pamyeon kumeongeul ttuneunda* Even a mouse can make a hole if it ploughs the same corner

쥐도 한몫 보면 낙이 있다 *juido hanmok bomyeon nagi itta* Even a mouse can achieve something by concentrating on it

2. ox (so, hwangso)—The second sign of zodiac is an ox (aka cow, bull, buffalo) which belongs to the group of domestic animals. In the images of Koreans it is originally a totemic animal and most often it is represented by an ox (so, hwangso) and sometimes by a bull or buffalo. This animal was important as a support for the peasant since in Korea it is often confused with the horse. e.g.

소는 농가에서 땅 다음 가는 재산이다 *soneun nonggaeseo ttang daeum kaneun jesanida* Ox is the second major source of wealth after the soil in the peasant family

소는 농가의 조상이다 *soneun nongawi josangida* The ox is the wealth of the family

In the ancient times when a family wanted his son to enter the university, they had to sell the family's ox. Therefore an ox was as important as entering and studying at the university, the ox (i.e. the whole property of peasant) had to be sold. That why from ancient times was used the following term: 옛날엔 소팔아 대학갔다 *yennaren sopara daehakkatta* Going to the university after selling of the ox.

The ox always had enormous importance in the lives and households of many Koreans as a drawing force and therefore it is the most popular figure in the Korean proverbs. The man takes a pleasure in its power and powerful physique. The ox is endowed with positive qualities, traits such as strength, diligence, gratitude and loyalty. e.g.

소 힘은 소 히미여 새 힘을 새 힘이다 *so himeun so himiyeo sae himeul sae himida* The ox has its own strength, and the sparrow its own

소가치 힘이 세다 *so kachi himi seda* He has strength like an ox



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소 같은 우둔한 짐승도 부리는 임자를 안다 *so kateun udunhan jimseungdo purineun imjareul anda*
Even a dumb ox can recognize his master.

소는 믿어도 사람은 못 믿는다 *soneun mideodo saramen mot mineunda* The ox can be relied on,
but not on the people

민중들은 소나 말 같다 *minjungdeureun sona mal katta* The people are either like oxen or horses.
(This proverb shows the relationship between common people and the government).

The character of the ox is displayed sometimes in a negative sense. e.g.

황소 고집 부리듯 *hwangso kojip purideut* Cussed like an ox

우둔하기는 소와 같다 *udunhagineun sowa katta* Rough like a bull

소는 골이 커도 우둔하다 *soneun gori keodo udunhada* The ox has a big head but it is dumb

3. tiger (ho, beom, horangi)—The third sign of zodiac is tiger. Tiger is a „national“ animal of the Korean people and the hero of many proverbs, sayings, tales and legends. It acts as a malicious and treacherous creature. It is a terrible monster, which only the brave dwarf could capture, but at the same time it is the animal with a good heart that fetched the beautiful bride to her virtuous man. Or it is the stupid tiger, who believed to be a hare and plunged his tail into the cold winter river to hunt a fish. Or it is the thankless tiger, which rendered evil for good to the man who pulled him out from the trap, but was again fallen into the same trap by a smart frog.

Fairy-tale *smoking tiger* is personalized in relation with the ancient times: *범이 담배 먹던 시대* *beomi dambae meoktteon sidae*, at that time when the tiger was still smoking tobacco....Like this begin most of Korean fairy tales and legends, talking about the old times when the tiger still existed and had greater symbolic significance. Still at the beginning of the 20th century, pictures of tigers could be seen on the exterior side of the Korean houses or administrative buildings, which according to popular superstitions might bring happiness, success and protect from evil spirits, miseries and inconveniences. Tiger is considered a master of the mountains, it is a dangerous animal even a taboo.



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Killing a tiger is an attribute of the invincible hero. The soldiers used the pictures of the tigers on their military flags. Since tiger represented strength and power, it was made subject to various superstitions. e.g.

범은 산중의 왕이다 *beomeun sanjungwi wangida* The tiger is king of the forest

범에게 날개를 붙여 준다 *beomege nalgaereul buteo junda* Giving wings to the tiger (i.e. provide somebody with unlimited power and domination)

범을 탄기 세다 *beomeul tangi seda* To be brave as if saddling a tiger

Sometimes the tiger is personalized with traits of thanklessness, ingratitude, greed, avarice and falsehood or is used to induce fear on the weaker animals. e.g.

범을 길러 산에 놓니 주인을 문다 *beomeul gillyeo sane noni juineul munda* The tiger bit his own master who brought it up and launched it into the forest (comparing: feed a snake in your own bosom)

남의 새끼 범 새끼다 *namwi saekki beom saekkida* A stepchild is like a tiger cub (i.e. ungrateful)

굶주린 호랑이 날고기 먹듯 한다 *gumjurin horangi nalkogi meokteut handa* Like a hungry tiger tearing into sulphur meat (i.e. hunger, miserliness)

새벽 호랑이 중이나 개를 가리지않는다 *saebyeok horangi jungina gaereul garijanneunda* At dawn tiger doesn't care what it has caught—dog or a monk (i.e. hunger, miserliness)

호랑이가 개 놀리듯 한다 *horangiga gae nolliteut handa* Like a tiger playing with the dog (i.e. hypocrisy, falsehood)

백두산 호랑이다 *baekdusan horangida* Like a Baekdusan⁵ tiger (i.e. frightening)

The tiger is also personalized with the trait of having the courage to do great things and some proverbs that are used in everyday situations. e.g.

⁵Baekdusan is an active volcanic mountain on the border between North Korea and China and means „white-headed mountain“. It is a national mountain of all Korean people and is also on North Korean national emblem.



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굴에 가야 호랑이 새끼를 잡는다 *gure gaya horangi saekkireul jamneunda* Who wants to catch a tiger cub should be the first to climb into its lair (i.e. each deed requires certain amount of preparation and courage to be realized)

호랑이 물려 간줄 알면 누가 산에 갈까? *horangi mullyeo ganjul almyeon nuga sane galkka?* Who would go into the forest knowing that he would come across a tiger? (i.e. you shouldn't take unnecessarily high risks)

4. rabbit (tokki)—The rabbit or hare is the fourth sign of the zodiac, and in sense it is the opposite of tiger and other predators. It embodies humility, meekness, kindness, timidity, cowardice as well as being harmless and helpless.⁶ e.g.

토끼 제 바람에 놀란다 *tokki je barame nollinda* The hare gets frightened of its own faint noise

Until now in the subconscious of people the rabbit has remained as a coward animal. e.g.

이리 앞에 선 토끼다 *iri ape seon tokkida* Like a hare in front of the wolf (i.e. being very confused)

토끼 도망가듯 한다 *tokki domanggadeut handa* Run like a hare

There is a common belief that the hare sleeps with open eyes

토끼 잠이다 *tokki jaminda* Sleeping like a hare (i.e. talking about someone who has a light sleep)

토끼는 잠자다가 잡힌다 *tokkineun jamjadaga japinda* The hare can be caught by the hunter when he sleeps (i.e. talking about being cautious)

⁶The rabbit or hare in Korean mythology is known from the allegorical story about the tortoise and the hare, which is regarded as the oldest Korean prose. In this story, the hare nearly loses its life because the sick Dragon King (the ancient aquatic deity, gods living in a water palace) needs to heal his liver. The turtle tries to bring the hare to the water palace. At the last moment, the hare makes an excuse that he has left his liver to dry on the rock. The story, however, is of Indian origin, judged by the fact that the turtle is a means of deception here.



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여우 죽은 데 토끼가 눈물 흘린다 *yeou jugeun de tokkiga nunmul heullinda* literally: The hare cries when the fox is dead. The tears of rabbit for the dead fox (i.e. hypocrisy)

한 몽치로 토끼 둘 잡으려다 *han mongchiro tokki dul jabeuryeonda* He wants to kill two rabbits with one stick

토끼 둘을 잡으려가다 하나도 못 잡는다 *tokki dureul jabeuryeogada hanado mot janneunda* You cannot chase two rabbits without losing them both. (i.e. anyone who likes to pursue two different tasks at the same time will fail in both of them)

5. dragon (yong)—Dragon, an ancient aquatic deity in Korea, is one of the four animals, namely, unicorn, phoenix, tortoise and dragon, which are associated with happy omen and symbolize royal power. The dragon usually embodies power, dominion and strength.⁷ e.g.

용과 범이 서로 싸운다 *yonggwa beomi seoro ssaunda* Like a dragon fighting with a tiger (i.e. to show the strength and weakness)

용이 물을 얻은 격이다 *yongi mureul eodeun gyeogida* Like a dragon that has found water (i.e. became dominating, imperious, commanding)

용이 물밖에 나면 개미 침노를 한다 *youngi mulpakke namyeon gaemi chinnoreul handa*

If a dragon comes out of the water, even an ant can crush it (dragon is the master of water), (i.e. each one is a master of its own territory)

⁷The importance of the dragon in the antiquity varied with respect to its conception by different religious currents. According to the East Asian image, it is a God of water, mastering and ruling events such as rain, wind, and floods. Originally, there were four types of dragons, which according to their color, symbolized the power of heaven, master of rain, ruler of soils and guardian of treasures. The dragon is a very important deity related to the heaven, it can serve as a mediator and donator. In principle, it resides in any place where there is more or less an accumulation of water. People are required to make oblations to it. For those oblations, it provides water and regulates floods. Dragons are frequent actors in myths and legends.



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용의 알을 얻은 것 같다 *youngwi areul eoteun geot gatta* Joyful as if he has found dragon's egg (i.e. something valuable)

용이 용을 낳어 범이 범을 낳는다 *youngi youngeul neoheo beomeul nanneunda* From the dragon is born a dragon, from the tiger is born a tiger (i.e. everything has its own rule, order)

용이 될 고기는 얼어서 부터 안다 *youngi toel gogineun eoryeoseo buteo anda* You can tell if a fish will become a dragon when it is a fingerling (i.e. the talented person can be distinguished right away)

미꾸라가 용 됐다 *mikkuraga yong dwaetta* A loach became a dragon (The proverb speaks to those who rise suddenly to power and wealth)

미꾸라짓국 먹고 용드림한다 *mikkurajitkuk meokko youndeurimhanda* He has done an ordinary, everyday action, but wants to show it as something great (literally: He ate a soup of loaches and got the dreams of a dragon)

용 가는 데 구름 간다 *young ganeun de gureum ganda* The clouds go where the dragon goes (i.e. to be tied inseparably, always acting together)

강물도 아껴 쓰면 용왕이 기뻐한다 *gangmuldo akkyeo sseumyeon youngwangi gippeohanda* Even the king of dragons rejoices when river water is flowing sparingly (i.e. pointing to austerity and being planned)

6. snake (baem, gureongi)—The snake is the sixth sign of the zodiac. In Korean proverbs there are two words that may be used to describe the snake: 구렁이 *gureongi* and 뱀 *baem*. The first word *gureongi* embodies a big, malicious and greedy predator.⁸ Some examples of related proverbs are:

욕심이 구렁이 같다 *yoksimi gureongi gatta* Miserly like a snake

⁸The snake may also function as a warning sign. It appears that after the death of the First Emperor of Silla Pak Hyokkose and his wife Aryong, the people wanted to bury them together, but the snake persistently separated them with its body. Therefore, their dead bodies were chopped up and divided into five graves. The white snake often appears in the folklore stories, turning into a girl or a boy and bringing happiness to the house.



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심술이 구렁이다 *simsuri gureongida* Malicious like a snake

구렁이 두꺼비 삼키듯 한다 *gureongi dukkobi samkideut handa* Like a snake gulping a frog (i.e. swallowing in a moment)

서리 맞은 구렁이다 *seori majeun gureongida* Like a snake in the rime (i.e. gloomy, lifeless man with low energy)

구렁이 돌담 너머 듯 한다 *gureongi doldam neomeo deut handa* As a snake climbing over a stone fence (i.e. doing something furtively, secretly)

구렁이 밭 이랑 넘어가듯 한다 *gureongi bat irang neomeogadeut handa* As a snake crawling across a patch

구렁이 숲속으로 사라지듯 *gureongi supsoeuro sarajideut* Disappear like a snake in the bush (i.e. disappearing quickly and quietly)

The second word **뱀***paem* embodies negative qualities such as meanness, fraud, mischief, villainy and maliciousness. e.g.

뱀 마음이 같다 *paem maeumi gatta* Having a soul like a snake (i.e. being malicious)

굴에 든 뱀 길이를 모른다 *gure deun baem girireul moreunda* You cannot know the length of a snake in the hole (i.e. it is difficult to estimate the true intentions of another person, or one's hidden talents)

마음은 뱀이요 말은 부처다 *maeumeun paemiyo mareun bucheoda* He has a soul like a snake, but speech as the Buddha

7. horse (mal)–The horse is the seventh sign of the zodiac. It is one of the totem animals and saints in Korea, whose function is to facilitate communication between heaven and earth. In the Korean proverbs, it is a symbol of speed, agility, dexterity and courage. e.g.

재빠르기는 말 같다 *jaeppareugineun mal gatta* Quick as a horse



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You can often come across the term 철 리마Chollima, i.e. a winged horse that can travel thousands of miles in one day⁹. e.g.

철리마 달리듯 한다 *chollima dallideut handa* Flies like a winged horse Chollima

철리마의 신력은 먼 길을 달려 봐야 안다 *chollimawi sillyeogeun meon gireul dallyeo bwaya anda*

You may know the power of the winged horse Chollima after riding it in a long journey

철리마도 단번에 철리를 뛰어가지 못 하다 *cheollimado danbeone cheollireul ddoeogaji mot hada*

Even though Chollima can't cross thousands of miles in a twinkling

8. sheep (yang)–The sheep is the eighth sign of the Far Eastern zodiac and in the subconscious of Koreans it is associated with humility, meekness, kindness and vulnerability. e.g.

양 같은 착한다 *yang gateun chakanda* Docile like a sheep

속은 양이고 같은 호랑이다 *sogeun yangiko gateun horangida* Looks like a tiger, but inside is like a sheep

이리 앞의 양 *iri apwi yang* Like a sheep against a wolf (i.e. helpless)

In Korean proverbs, there are a few examples directly associated with the sheep, while many of them describe its opposition against the wolf or some other predators. e.g.

양의 가죽 쓴 이리라 *yangwi gajd sseun irida* Like a wolf in sheep's pelt

⁹A Chollima (literally „thousand-*li* horse“) was a mythical a winged horse said to cover 1,000 ri (the *li* is a traditional Chinese unit of distance, about 400 km) in a day and represents, which originates from the Chinese classics and is commonly portrayed in East Asian cultures. Several statues of Chollima are found in the North Korean capital, Pyongyang. It is also the nickname of the North Korean national team. It gave its name to the Chollima Movement, which was a movement in North Korea promoting fast economic developments after the Korean War.



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9. monkey (wonsungi)—The ninth sign of the zodiac is a monkey, spending its effort for imitation and cunning. Similar to the sheep, it does not have such a widespread use in proverbs, as it has in the Japanese folklore. This may probably be explained by the rare occurrence of these two animals in the Korean peninsula. e.g.

원숭이 흉내를 내듯 한다 *wonsungi hyungnaereul naedeut handa* Imitate like a monkey

원숭이는 가르치지 않아도 나무에 잘 오른다 *wonsungineun gareuchiji anado namue jar oreunda*
You do not have to teach the monkey how to climb the tree

관 쓴 원숭이다 *gwan sseun wonsungida* Like a monkey wearing a hat of the official (i.e. corruption of clerks, officials)

원숭이도 나무에서 떨어진다 *wonsungido namueseon tteoreojinda* Even monkeys fall out of trees.

This is used to describe someone who fails in business or another undertaking and to rationalize one's own lapses. If a practiced climber like a monkey can fall out of a tree, then anyone can be excused for errors, even in his or her own area of expertise.

In Korean proverbs, drunkards are often compared to monkeys, due to their red faces. e.g.

원숭이 볼기짝 같다 *wonsungi bolgijjak gatta* Having a red face like a monkey's ass

원숭이 낫짝 같다 *wonsungi natjjak gatta* Having a physiognomy like a monkey

10. rooster (sutak)—The tenth sign of the zodiac is the rooster which belongs to the family of feathered birds. Domestic animals are mentioned frequently in Korean proverbs and the rooster has an important place in them with an ambiguous character. Firstly, the rooster announces the time and symbolizes new hopes and happiness.¹⁰ e.g.

¹⁰In Korean myths and legends, this bird announces sunrise and is also present in the proclamation of good news. Its connection with the sunrise makes it one of the solar deities. It may also act as a cheater connected to demons and evil powers. The rooster appears in myths as a messenger to announce the downfall of the founder of the royal house of Kim Alchi. Additionally, there is a motif of dragon–fowl found in the myth related to the the birth of Aryong who is the first wife of Silla's King Pak Hyokkose.



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수탁 울어서 날 안 세는 일 없고 암탉 울어서 날 세는 일 없다 *sutak ureoseo nal an seneun il eoppko amtak ureoseo nal seneun il eoppta* When the rooster sings morning comes, but if the chicken sings morning will not come

닭의 목을 내고 잔다 *dalkwi mogeul naego janda* He puts his head on the neck of a rooster and sleeps (i.e. not possible to notify the dawn)

닭의 목을 쥐고 논다 *dalkwi mogeul juigo nonda* He holds a rooster's neck and walks

Secondly, the rooster has a dull, stubborn, aggressive and imperious character. e.g.

수탉이 암탉을 쫓아다니듯 한다 *sutalkgi amtalgeul jjochadanideut handa* Runs after her like a rooster after the hen

닭 싸우듯 한다 *dak ssaudeut handa* They argue like roosters

닭이 아무리 잘 싸워도 개와는 상대가 되지 않는다 *dalgi amuri jal ssawodo gaewaneun sangdega doeji anneunda* The rooster is fighting well, but it can not defeat the dog

닭의 고집이다 *dalgwi gojibida* Being stubborn as a rooster

닭의 대가리 *dalgwi daegari* Having a mind like chicken (i.e. to be forgetful)

We can also find proverbs associated with the hen or chicken (암탉 *amtak*), which embodies a contentious, despotic, oppressive and evil wife. e.g.

암탉 울기 *amtak ulgi* The chicken sings like a rooster (i.e. at home rules a woman)

암탉 울면 집안이 망한다 *amtak ulmyeon jibani manganda* When the chicken sings like a rooster, than quarrels start at home

사납기는 새끼 다리 암탉이다 *sanapgineun saekki dari amtalgida* Anxious like a chicken sitting on eggs



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11. dog (gae)—The dog is the eleventh sign of the zodiac and is also one of the most fertile characters in Korean proverbs. ¹¹ Its character is ambiguous but significant, expressing both positive and negative characteristics. For example, in the following proverbs, the dog expresses negative characteristics such as ingratitude, bullyness, thievery, timidity. e.g.

내 밥 먹은 개가 발뒤축을 문다 *nae bap meogeun gaega balduichugeul munda* A dog that ate my porridge then bit me

개가 약과 먹듯 한다 *gaega yakkwa meokdeut handa* Behaves like a dog that eats healing paddy cakes (i.e. throw pearls before swine, ungratitude)

사나운 개 주둥이 아물 수 없다 *sanaun gae judungi amul su eopta* The evil dog doesn't have a living space on its nose

도둑개 살 안 찐다 *dodukgae sal an jjinda* The dog who steals will not fatten up

개도 기름 먹고는 짓지않는 법이다 *gaedo gireum meokkoneun jitjianneun beobida* Even a dog doesn't bark when it eats lard (i.e. pointing to corruption in government)

호랑이 앞에 개다 *horangi ape gaeda* As a dog in front of a tiger (i.e. to be in great embarrassment)

겁 많은 개가 큰 소리로 짖는다 *geop maneun gaega keun sorido jinneunda* The cowardly dog barks loudly

However, besides the negative qualities we can also see its positive properties, such as gratitude. e.g.

개도 다섯가 되면 주인을 안다 *gaedo datsaega doemyeon juineul anda* Even a dog recognizes its master after five days

개도 체 주인을 물지않는다 *gaedo je juineul muljianneunda* Even the dog doesn't bite its master

개도 키워 준 은혜는 안다 *gaedo kiwo jun eunhyeneun anda* Even the dog remembers the kindness of its master, who raised it

¹¹In the shamanic tradition, the dog is a guide who leads the dead to the other world.



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이웃집 개도 부르면 온다 *iutjip gaedo bureumyeon onda* Even the neighbor's dog comes running if you call it

개한테 한 말을 안 나도 부인한테 한 말은 난다 *gaehante han mareul an nado buinhante han mareun nanda* What you say to the dog stays undisclosed, but what you say to a woman definitely spreads

The word puppy (강아지 *gangaji* or 개새끼 *kaesaekki*) is also used frequently in proverbs. e.g.

개새끼도 주인을 보면 꼬리를 젓는다 *gaesaekkido juineul bomyeon kkorireul jeonneunda* Even a puppy plays with its tail when it sees its master (i.e. gratitude)

강아지도 골목에 들면 범을 문다 *gangajido golmoke deulmyen beomeul munda* Even a puppy backed into a corner jumps on the tiger (i.e. courage, love of freedom)

등을 쓰다듬어 준 강아지 발등 문다 *deungeul sseudadeumeo jun gangaji baldeung munda* He patted the puppy and it bit his leg (i.e. ingratitude)

하루 강아지 범 무서운 줄 모른다 *haru gangaji beom museoun jul moreunda* The mortal puppy doesn't know that it has to be afraid of the tiger (i.e. do not appear unnecessarily strong, if you don't have enough energy and resources)

강아지 똥이 똥이 아니다? *gangaji ttongi ttongi aninda?* Isn't a puppy's poo also shit? (i.e.

a) Although there may be minor or major differences, the essence is the same. b) Even a small evil remains evil)

12. pig (dwaeji)—The pig is the last of the twelve zodiac animals. In Korean proverbs it alludes to dirtiness, greed, bloodsucking, parasite, who wants to get everything without working¹². e.g.

¹²The pig in the older times had a function of the protecting of the people, home etc., but later it has become a frequently sacrificed animal. Apparently it has handled some magical power. The people of north-eastern Asia didn't rear, cultivate pigs, and that why the narrations about the pigs rather have appeared in the southern regions, which confirms the fact of the presence of a southern component in the ethnogenesis of the Korean nation.



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돼지 같은 욕심이다 *dwaeji gateun yoksimda* Stingy as a pig

놀고 먹는 돼지이다 *nalgo meonneun dwaejiida* (literally: just a joyful and eater pig) Parasite like a pig

돼지는 흐린 물을 좋아하는 *dwaejineun heurin mureul johahan* The pig likes muddy water (i.e. volatility, pigheaded)

돼지는 우리 더러운 줄 모른다 *dwaejineun uri deoreoun jul moreunda* The pig does not notice the dirt in his own home.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to give an overview of Korean proverbs associated with the twelve animals of the Far Eastern zodiac which represent domestic animals as well as predators. According to some Korean linguists, animals such as tiger, horse, bull, dog, chicken, mouse, pig, rabbit, snake and dragon are often referred in Korean proverbs while some others like monkey and sheep rarely occur. Of course, a detailed research is required to obtain accurate statistical data.

Additionally, the translation of Korean proverbs into European languages is a particularly difficult task. The difficulty of the translation lies in the fact that the Korean language has a different grammatical structure than the European languages, for example English. There are also differences in the history, thinking style and mentality of these nations. Actually, there is an abundance of ethnographic components which reflect the specifics of the Korean lifestyle.

An interesting problem that deserves a deeper attention is the influence of foreign cultural circles, spheres on the Korean folk creativity. We encounter with the effects of nearest neighbors, such as Mongolia, penetrating into Korea for invasion and occupation. Korean folk art consciously accepts the influence of Chinese and Manchu. Due to the continuous invasion by Japan, Japanese effects are observed in Korean literature and folklore. Interestingly, there are also traces of Indian



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cultural influences on the Korean folk culture. This confirms the theory that the former Central and South Korea were in the Indo-European zone.

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