

# A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON HUMAN VIEWS IN MYTHOLOGIES AND WEBTOONS

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Myths can provide a cross-section of human views in ancient societies. This study compared Zeus in Greek mythology and Hwanung in Korean mythology. This study also analyzed Lore Olympus and Baro-Jamneun-Sunaebo to derive their views of human beings. As a result, this study derived the following findings: First, it is confirmed that the Zeus and Hwanung who appear in the webtoons are similar to their prototypes. However, the Zeus and Hwanung in webtoons live and dress in the context of the modern era. Second, there was a difference between the two cultures in how humans are viewed in the two myths and webtoons. Lore Olympus shows that humans, as seen through Zeus, are imperfect beings with divine origins and nature and the relationship between humans and gods is vertical. In addition, human beings worship heroes who must endure hardships while constantly learning in a person-centered way. This study also reveals that in Baro-Jamneun-Sunaebo, based on Korean mythology, human beings examined through Hwanung prioritize community, value moral life, and grow through training and overcoming hardships because they are beings who can become gods themselves. This study presents the human view of the two cultures through the analysis of webtoon characters, which is expected to contribute academically and practically to understanding different cultures.*

## **KEYWORDS**

*Greek mythology, Korean mythology, webtoon, Lore Olympus, Baro-Jamneun-Sunaebo*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Myth is a typically traditional story of allegedly historical events that shows a part of a people's worldview or explains a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon [1]. Myth is a folklore genre that consists of narratives that play a fundamental role in a society—some myths are based on actual events, while others are completely fictitious [2]. The mythical stories were handed down from one generation to the next [3]. Mythical themes including birth, death, the afterlife, the origin of man and the world, good and evil, and the essence of man himself represent the concerns of mankind throughout history. Furthermore, many societies combine their myths, legends, and history, believing them to be accurate records of their distant past [4]. As a result, myths can be used as a kind of cultural resource [5]. In particular, Greek mythology is often referenced in Western culture, which has been present in Renaissance art, English poems, films, other literature, music, and even commercials [6]. Elements of Greek mythology include various gods, demigods, titans, monsters, nymphs, human beings, and famous locations [7]. Korean mythology does not have a global influence or include various characters like Greek mythology. However, Korean mythology has been used as a tool to teach the independence of Korean culture to students in Korean schools. It is reported that Koreans not only believe that they have a common language, history, and set of customs, but that they are descendants of a common ancestor—Dangun [8]. Meanwhile, webtoons (or webcomics), a new genre, is an animated cartoon or series of comic strips published online [9], named using a new compound word made up of “website”

and “cartoon,” meaning comics [10]. A webtoon is a digital cartoon format developed in South Korea for Korean audiences that do not read comic books often, but are heavy consumers of webtoons [11]. Korean webtoons have become popular among adolescents and young adults [12]. The webtoon genre has become a global phenomenon through hits such as Lore Olympus (2018-ongoing) by Rachel Smythe, a New Zealand artist [13]. Lore Olympus is a work provided by the Korean webtoon platform, and many users can see various pieces of digital art that tell several stories on websites or mobile apps [14]. In addition, Baro-Jamneun-Sunaebo (hereinafter referred to as BJS) is a webtoon published in 2014 by Lee Chae-young based on the Dangun myth, the founding myth of Korea. Although webtoons have become the object of research, it is still very rare to use a comparative approach to analyze webtoons based on mythology. This study aims to examine the view of humans through mythology using a comparative analysis of Lore Olympus based on Greek mythology and BJS based on Korean mythology. Since not all the characters and events in Greek or Korean mythology can be covered, this study focuses on the main characters, Zeus and Hwanung (father of Dangun) [15]. This study presents the following research questions. First, how is Zeus in Lore Olympus different from that in Greek mythology? Second, how is Hwanung in BJS different from that in Korean mythology? Third, how does the view of humans of the East and West differ from Zeus and Hwanung in mythology and webtoon?

## **2. ZEUS AND HWANUNG IN MYTHOLOGY**

### **2.1. Zeus as the Main Character in Greek Mythology**

Zeus is the God of the Sky and Thunder in Greek mythology, ruling as King of the Gods on Mount Olympus. Zeus was the God of thunder, lightning, rain, and winds, and his typical weapon was the thunderbolt. He was known as the father of both gods and humanity. Cronus, king of the Titans, swallowed his offspring as soon as they were born, according to a Cretan myth later adopted by the Greeks. Rhea, his wife, protected the child Zeus by substituting a stone wrapped in swaddling clothes for Cronus to swallow and hiding Zeus in a cave on Crete [16]. After Zeus grew to manhood, he led a revolt against the Titans and succeeded in dethroning Cronus, perhaps with the assistance of his brothers Poseidon and Hades, with whom Zeus then divided dominion over the world [17]. As ruler of heaven, Zeus led the gods to triumph over the Giants and successfully crushed multiple revolts by his fellow gods. Zeus was considered to oversee the events of men omnisciently from his high perch atop Mount Olympus, ruling everything, rewarding good behavior, and punishing evil. Zeus was well known for his amorousness, and he had many love affairs with both mortal and immortal women. To achieve his amorous designs, Zeus frequently assumed animal forms, such as a cuckoo when he ravished Hera, a swan when he ravished Leda, or a bull when he carried off Europa [18]. Though regarded by Greek religionists everywhere as omnipotent and the head of the pantheon, Zeus’s very universality tended to reduce his importance compared to that of powerful local divinities like Athena and Hera. Zeus is cheeky and unafraid of teasing his brothers and cracking jokes. In spite of his occasionally crass manner of expressing it, he gets along with them well and seems to want what is best for them. Also, Zeus can be very stubborn, especially when it comes to Hera, as evidenced by the way he handles her doubts about Apollo. Zeus is promiscuous, unscrupulous, and often dishonest when it comes to relationships. In addition, Zeus is incredibly egocentric, taking offense when others do not cater to him or disagree with him. When Zeus was older, he fed his father a poisonous plant that helped him free his brothers. At some point, Zeus became acquainted with Metis, as well as her creation Hera, who Zeus became infatuated with [19].

## **2.2. Hwanung in Korean Mythology**

According to Korean mythology (the Dangun creation myth), Hwanung yearned to live on the earth among the valleys and the mountains. Hwanin permitted Hwanung and 3,000 followers to depart and they descended from heaven to a sandalwood tree on Baekdu Mountain, then called Taebaek Mountain. There, Hwanung founded Sinsi (City of God) and gave himself the title Heaven King [20]. In a cave near the sandalwood tree lived a bear and a tiger who came to the tree every day to pray to Hwanung. One day, Hwanung gave the bear and the tiger twenty bulbs of garlic and some divine mugwort. Hwanung promised if they ate only his garlic and mugwort and stayed in the cave out of the sunlight for one hundred days, he would make them human. The tiger and the bear agreed and went back to the cave, but the tiger was too hungry and impatient to wait, leaving the cave before the 100 days had passed. But the bear remained, and on the 21st day was transformed into a beautiful woman, who gratefully honored Hwanung with offerings. With time, the woman grew lonely and prayed to Hwanung that she might have a child. So Hwanung made her his wife and gave her a son called Dangun, a name which has two meanings: "Altar Prince" and sandalwood. Dangun eventually founded Gojoseon [21]. Thus, Hwanung is an important figure in the mythological origins of Korea. Hwanung plays a central role in the story of Dangun Wanggeom, the legendary founder of Gojoseon, the first kingdom of Korea. Hwanung is the son of Hwanin, the "Lord of Heaven." Along with his ministers of clouds, rain, and wind, Hwanung instituted laws and moral codes and taught the humans various arts, medicine, and agriculture. Korean mythology shows an ancient paternal society leading to Hwanin-Hwanung-Dangun. A woman was also needed in mythology, and the bear applied to become a woman. The bear became a true human, and she gave birth to Hwanung's baby, and this child was Dangun, the progenitor of Korea [22].

## **3. ZEUS AND HWANUNG IN WEBTOONS**

### **3.1. Zeus in Lore Olympus**

Greek myths, particularly the story of Persephone's kidnapping by Hades, king of the underworld, are retold in Lore Olympus. After his partner, Minthe, dumped him, Hades decides to attend a party hosted by his brother, Zeus. Demeter, Persephone's mother, has given her permission to depart from the world of mortals to pursue a degree in Olympus. As Persephone is spotted at the party, Hades remarks to his brothers Zeus and Poseidon that she is as attractive as Aphrodite. Out of jealousy, Aphrodite calls her son, Eros, to make Persephone excessively drunk and they abandon her in the back seat of Hades' automobile for her to humiliate herself in front of him [23]. After their first meeting, Hades and Persephone both display an interest in one other, but Persephone still suffers with her emotions as a result of an earlier story point in the comic—she was raped by Apollo. In Lore Olympus, where kidnapping and rape are rampant to satisfy their lust, Zeus is said to be the king of the gods, but he is portrayed as selfish and individualistic with light words and actions. Therefore, Zeus is not trusted by other gods. Zeus is free-spirited, loves women very much, and sometimes ruins things because of his carelessness. Zeus is who is banned from entering the strip club, but uses money and power to join the party. Even his wife, Hera, is disrespectful toward him. However, Zeus employs Thetis as his secretary and has a love affair with her. Zeus recognizes that his actions are wrong but never tries to correct them. Zeus has an affair with Leto, a friend of Hera's, who gives birth to Artemis and Apollo, causing Hera and Leto to fall out [24].

### 3.2. Hwanung in BJS

The main character, Hwanung, is described as “Jang Ba-ro,” a high school student with extraordinary abilities. He also has a bear (Ko Soon-ae) and a tiger (Yang Bi-ta) studying at the school who want to become people. The female protagonist of the work, Ko Soon-ae, studies well, has a kind heart and excels in athletics. However, she is a bear. Therefore, as a bear, she must eat mugwort and garlic that she prepares daily to transform into a human for a certain amount of time [25]. Yang Bi-ta also normally has a human appearance but, in essence, is a tiger. Yang Bi-ta transfers to the school with Jang Ba-ro and Ko Soon-ae, and he is a handsome boy. After the two continue to eat mugwort and garlic and purify their bodies, they must be chosen by Hwanung who can empathize with plants and amplify the growth of crops. The Hwanung, Jang Ba-ro, knew that they were a bear and a tiger, and he helped the two be reborn as real humans by eating mugwort and garlic. In the end, Ko Soon-ae eats mugwort and garlic and becomes human, but Yang Bi-ta, a tiger, fails to transform into a "real person." BJS is a webtoon that presents a way of looking at life to modern people through a narrative of growth and makes it possible for readers to reflect on their lives. BJS asks readers what the essence of a human being is and whether they are qualified to be human if they are patient.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Comparison of the Characteristics of Zeus in Greek Mythology and Lore Olympus

Table 1 shows the comparison of the characteristics of Zeus in Greek mythology and Lore Olympus. Zeus' role in Greek mythology and Lore Olympus is similar. In addition, Zeus' personality is authoritative and selfish, and he lives a freewheeling life in mythology and webtoon. Overall, the characteristics of Zeus were not significantly different. However, Zeus is depicted more hypocritically in the webtoon than in mythology. Zeus has a sense of superiority over humans and other gods and recognizes them as imperfect beings. Moreover, Zeus' love and marriage life are the same in both. However, his clothes and residence reflect the modern social context in the webtoon.

Table 1. Comparison of the characteristics of Zeus in Greek mythology and Lore Olympus

Category	Greek Mythology	Lore Olympus
Role and status	-The God of the Sky and Thunder -The King of the Gods on Mount Olympus.	-The God of the Sky and Thunder -The King of the Gods -The horny CEO who sleeps with his secretary.
Personality	-Authoritative, belligerent, individualistic -A freewheeling lifestyle -Zeus considered humans imperfect -Zeus worships the hero	-Authoritative, belligerent, selfish, hypocritical -A freewheeling lifestyle -Zeus regarded other people and gods as inferior
Costume	-Ancient Greek clothing	-While on Olympus, Zeus wears stark white clothing, favoring business suits and dress shirts
Residence	-Zeus and Hera lived in a palace on Mount Olympus.	-Zeus and Hera live in a large mansion on Olympus
Marriage and love affair	-Zeus is known for his many sexual relationships outside of his marriage to his wife and sister Hera	-Zeus is a playboy and finally becomes a good husband.

#### 4.2. Comparison of the Characteristics of Hwanung in Korean Mythology and BJS

Table 2 shows the comparison of the characteristics of Hwanung in Korean mythology and BJS. According to the result, the role and status of Hwanung in Korean mythology and BJS are different. In Korean mythology, Hwanung was the omnipotent emperor as the son of God, Hwanin, but in the webtoon, he was portrayed as a high school student with extraordinary abilities. However, Hwanung's personality is altruistic and peaceful in mythology and webtoon. Furthermore, like the example of Zeus in Lore Olympus, Hwanung in BJS wears casual clothes, living in a modern city. Moreover, it is also similar that Hwanung marries or chooses a bear who has transformed into a human.

Table 2. Comparison of the characteristics of Hwanung in Korean mythology and Baro-Jamneun-Sunaebo

Category	Korean Mythology	Baro-Jamneun-Sunaebo
Role and status	- The son of Hwanin, the "Lord of Heaven"	- High school student with extraordinary abilities
Personality	- Altruistic, peaceful - Utilitarian	- Altruistic, peaceful - Passive
Costume	- Ancient Korean clothing	- Dressed in plain clothes
Residence	- Sinsi (City of God)	- A modern city, Korea
Marriage and love affair	- The bear transforms into a woman, and Hwanung marries her.	- Hwanung chooses the bear, Ko Sun-ae, who becomes a real human.

#### 4.3. Comparison of the View of Humans Through Zeus and Hwanung in Myths and Webtoons

Table 3 shows the comparison of the view of humans through Zeus and Hwanung in mythologies and webtoons. The Greeks created gods in the image of human beings. Therefore, their gods possessed many human characteristics, even though they were gods, they fought amongst themselves constantly. Also, they behaved irrationally and unfairly, often jealous of each other. Zeus was rarely faithful to his wife, Hera, although he was the king of the gods. Furthermore, individualism is emphasized in Greek mythology, which is a major cornerstone of all the virtues. Individualism is a social theory favoring freedom of action for individuals over collective or state control [26]. The individualistic human view in Greek mythology was also reflected in Lore Olympus, the object of analysis of this study, which portrays Zeus as a god representing the individualistic human view. While hero cults were one of the most distinctive features of ancient Greek mythology, they did not appear as distinctly in Lore Olympus. Also, a vertical structure between gods and humans is observed in Greek mythology and Lore Olympus. A god is a being who governs and educates human beings. It is a structure in which a human being cannot become a god without going through the process of becoming a hero. Meanwhile, Korea has been known as a monocultural society with a history of over 5,000 years based on Dangun mythology [27]. Korean mythology also influenced the identity of Koreans. However, Korean mythology is reminiscent of the mythology of the north Asian Continent, in that Korean mythology is based on hierophany [28]. In northern mythology, bears tend to be sacred. Therefore, it cannot be ruled out that only the bear becoming a human being in Korean mythology was influenced by northern mythology. In other words, there is a tendency to prioritize the interests of the community rather than individualism, and the characteristics of being patient and considerate of others are required over an individual's will. In Korean mythology and BJS, a horizontal structure is observed between gods and humans. A god is a being who helps humans, and humans are beings who can die and become gods even if they are not heroes [29].

Table 3. Comparison of views of humans through Zeus and Hwanung in myths and webtoons

Category	Mythology	Webtoon
Zeus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Humans are imperfect</li> <li>-Individualistic human view</li> <li>-A human view of worshiping a hero</li> <li>-The vertical structure between god and man</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Humans are inferior beings</li> <li>-Individualistic human view</li> <li>-The vertical structure between god and man</li> </ul>
Hwanung	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Human beings need help</li> <li>-Human beings must be patient</li> <li>-Communitarian worldview</li> <li>-The horizontal structure between god and man</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Human beings need help</li> <li>-Human beings must work hard and have patience</li> <li>-The horizontal structure between god and man</li> </ul>

#### 4.4. Discussion

This study examined the view of humans in mythology by comparatively analyzing Lore Olympus based on Greek mythology and BJS based on Korean mythology. Thus, this study focuses on the main characters, Zeus and Hwanung. According to the results of this study, it was confirmed that the fundamental characteristics of Zeus in Greek mythology and Lore Olympus did not change. In Greek mythology and Lore Olympus, the view of humans as imperfect beings is projected, even though humans have the same origin and nature as gods. In Greek mythology, the sky is described as infinite, transcendent, and incomparable to anything else. The succession of the heavenly generations and the authority of the father leading to Uranus, Cronus, and Zeus show that as they move from the age of gods to the age of humans. In other words, it explains the process of human birth [30]. There is harmony and cooperation in this process, but one of the characteristics of Greek mythology is that violence and ugliness coexist. With the help of the gods, the first humans were created, but in Greek mythology, humans suffered and were punished by the gods, constantly challenging and relying on them. In particular, the gods of Olympus, including Zeus, are objects of worship, and humans have the duty of worship, but humans can never become like gods. This means that in Greek mythology, human beings are recognized as imperfect beings who have the same origin and nature as gods and are not guaranteed to be eternal. Born as the son of Zeus, the story of the twelve labors of Heracles is a representative example of the worship of heroes in Greek mythology [31]. Greek mythology talks about the value that human beings receive when they overcome hardships and become heroes. On the other hand, the Korean myth states that humans can be the sky. In addition, Korean mythology emphasizes that human beings grow through overcoming hardships independently. The fact that a bear eats mugwort and endures for 100 days is also a Korean value system emphasizing that only by overcoming trials can one become a human being. This is different from the view of humans in Greek mythology, which values heroes [32]. It is a characteristic of Korean mythology that focuses more on the image of a woman who strives to give birth to a hero. In addition, Korean mythology is rich in stories about ancestors, birth, and after death, but information about what people did while they were alive is lacking. The Zeus story of Lore Olympus [14], based on Greek mythology, is not much different from the role and status of Zeus in Greek mythology. However, the role and status of Hwanung in Korean mythology differs since the development of the story about Hwanung in Korean mythology was poor. Thus, there is the dramatization of Hwanung in BJS. Also, a unique aspect of Korean mythology is that, above all, the world of the gods and the world of humans are not separate as they are in Greek mythology. In Korean mythology, the gods do not lead the lives of gods in the heavenly world but appear as helpers who help keep the peace in human life. In Greek mythology, the gods intervene in human life from the hill of Olympus and punish human beings who do not offer sacrifices [33]. These appearances in the two myths were portrayed similarly in the webtoons as well. In addition, the

gods' superiority downgrades the status of humans, and the gods who help humans are even punished for this. While the relationship between humans and gods in Korean mythology is complementary and supportive, the relationship between humans and gods in Greek and Roman mythology is vertical and disconnected. In other words, it can be seen that Korean mythology is based on the anthropocentric view of gods in that the hierarchical system of gods does not appear. On the other hand, in Greek mythology, murder or the use of violence to gain power is tolerated [34]. These aspects appear are similarly observed in the webtoon. Thus, this study shows the following results. First, Zeus in Lore Olympus was similar in role, status, and personality to Greek mythology. However, it was confirmed that Zeus' clothing and residence were adapted to suit the modern social context. Second, the role or status of Hwanung in BJS was slightly different from that of Korean mythology, which was presumed to be due to the lack of mythological content about Hwanung. However, Hwanung's personality and the fact that he possessed extraordinary abilities were not very different between mythology and BJS. Furthermore, similar to the case of Zeus, clothes and dwellings were adapted to fit the modern social context. Third, it was confirmed that the Eastern and Western views of humans were different from each other through Zeus and Hwanung in mythology and webtoon. In the view of humanity that appeared in Greek mythology and webtoons, individualism and heroism were emphasized in the vertical structure of god-human. On the other hand, the view of human beings shown in Korean myths and webtoons emphasizes community-centeredness and the human image of overcoming adversity with patience in the horizontal structure of god-human.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study compared and analyzed Greek mythology, a representative Western myth, and the Dangun myth of Korea in webtoons. In particular, this paper analyzed "Zeus" and "Hwanung" drawn in "Lore Olympus" based on Greek mythology and "Baro-Jamneun-Sunaebo" based on Korean mythology and drew the following results. First, it is confirmed that the Zeus and Hwanung appearing in mythical webtoons are similar to their prototypes. However, in the two webtoons, Zeus and Hwanung live a social life among human beings and dress in accordance with the context of the modern era. Second, it is also confirmed that the view of humans shown in the two webtoons are different. Humans, as seen through Zeus in Lore Olympus based on Greek mythology, are two-sided limited beings with divine origins and nature, and individual-centered, constantly learning and worshipping heroes who must overcome hardships. On the other hand, this study shows that human beings examined through Hwanung in Baro-Jamneun-Sunaebo based on Korean mythology could be seen as beings who prioritize community, value moral life, and become gods themselves as they grow through training and overcome hardships. However, this study is limited in that it only compared Zeus and Hwanung without comparing and analyzing the characters of all Greek and Korean myths. In addition, since the three-dimensional analysis of the characters in the webtoon needed to be improved, follow-up studies to supplement this will be required. Nevertheless, this study presents the view of humans of the two cultures through the analysis of webtoon characters, which is expected to contribute academically and practically to understanding different cultures.

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