



TEACHING  
*THE STORY OF HONG GILDONG*

홍길동전

NCTA Books of East Asia

Anne Gerbner

Thursday, October 27, 2022 - 18:00 to 20:30

# Top Three Reasons to Teach *The Story of Hong Gildong*

1) Aesthetics

1) Cultural significance

1) Entertainment

**And . . .**

# Reasons #4 to #100: It is cool.



i'm lovin' it 

Jimin 지민

Jimin

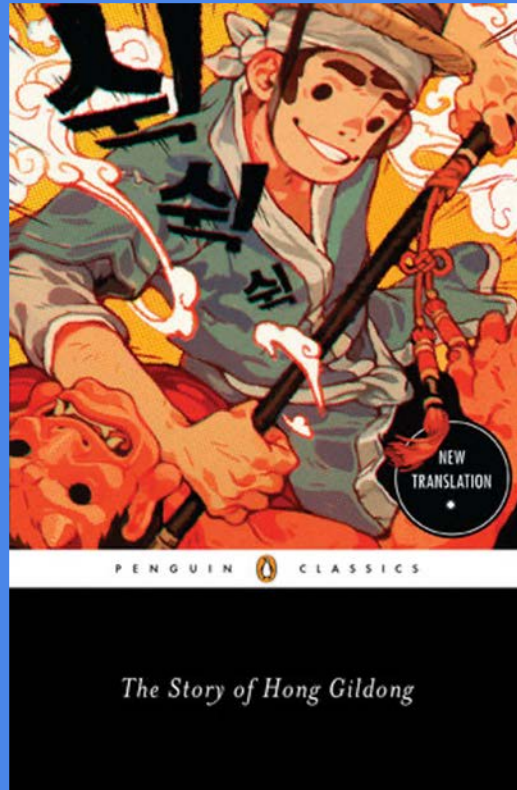


THE BTS MEAL



Now that we know we should teach it,  
here are six possible ways to teach it.

# #1 TEACH THE PENGUIN CLASSIC EDITION



# Provide a few introductory points

- 1) Is it real? There was a real-life outlaw: Hong Gildong in 1500
- 2) Why Penguin Classic edition? It is the longest & earliest (1893) manuscript. Written in Korean script (hangeul) . May not be the original text.
- 3) Author is unknown, probably a commoner, writing mass-market fiction as entertainment in late Joseon period
- 4) Best-known narrative in Korea, featuring themes that resonate with contemporary Koreans.
- 5) Careful: The internet has outdated information about author / date. The Penguin Classic introduction includes the most recent scholarship.

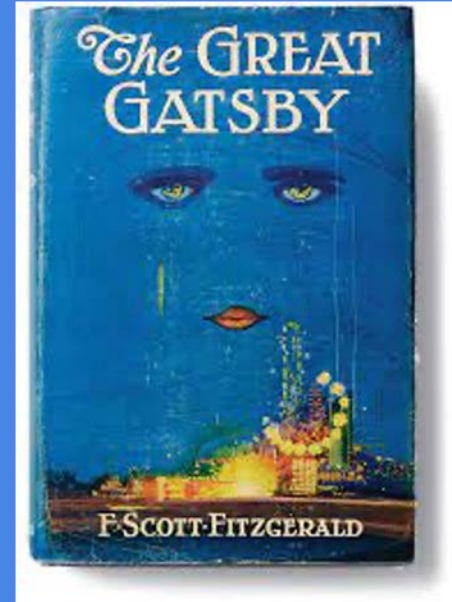
# Give some introductory context and vocabulary.



- 1) Joseon dynasty (1392-1897) and map of Korea
- 2) Neo-Confucian ideas of family life: one legitimate wife, no other wives have social standing. Illegitimate children were known as secondary children, faced discrimination.
- 3) Four status groups in Joseon dynasty determined by family lineage: Yangban (noble) Jungin, (secondary) Sangmin (common people) Cheonmin (lowborn)
- 4) Terms: concubine, secondary children, *Juyeok* (I Ching, Book of Changes)

**Start reading . . . Readers Theatre . . . Use footnotes.**

# #2 TEACH IT as a NOVEL OF NATIONAL IDENTITY with THE GREAT GATSBY



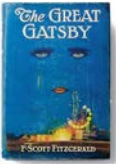


# Why?

- Iconic national literature
- Engage in questions of national identity
- Eponymous characters caught in class struggle

# How?

**Teach each novel in its specific context. Ask: How does each novel represents the dreams and aspirations, anxieties and fears of its nation?**



Jay Gatsby is prevented from achieving his dream – marrying his golden girl Daisy — because of his lowborn status, as “Mr. Nobody from Nowhere.”



Hong Gildong is prevented from achieving his dream – a glorious life supporting his father and country — because of his lowborn status. “I am barred from following my ambitions, and I cannot even address my father as Father and my older brother as Brother.”

## **Consider similarities:**

As boys, both Gatsby and Hong Gildong are driven to be successful.

Both yearn for greatness.

Both reinvent themselves.

Both prove themselves in war.

Both want to prove themselves in life.

Both men turn to crime to build their fortunes.

Jay Gatsby is a bootlegger /inside trader.      Hong Gildong is a bandit.

# Consider differences



Hong Gildong's greatest joy is when his Father allows him to call him "father."



Gatsby drops his father's name (Gatz) and takes a new one (Gatsby) when he leaves home in search of his destiny.

## Have students analyze how the different endings embody different worldviews



**Jay Gatsby** dies young, a victim of gun violence and mistaken identity. The wealthy elite are unaffected, their power undiminished. “The wealthy – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness.” Questions the American dream. Gatsby is the doomed optimistic dreamer.



**Hong Gildong** lives a long, prosperous life, surrounded by loyal family. At age 60, he retreats with his wife to study in the mountains. One day, while “luminous clouds of many colors” appear, he and his family disappear, transcendent. Reaffirms Confucian world views. Hong Gildong is the model of Confucian virtue.

# Have students compare imagery:



## Premodern novel set in feudal dynasty

Gyeongbokgung, Main Palace of Joseon dynasty, its location decided by Confucian theology/ geomancy. Built in 1395, rebuilt in 1553, 1887, 1990 ongoing restoration ).



## Modernist novel set in emerging capitalist society (Joseph Stella (1920)

Painting of iconic Brooklyn Bridge. Headlights! Fragmentation, rapid movement, transience.

### **#3 CONNECT JOSEON with MODERN KOREA**

**Pair the novel with an independent research project on contemporary Korea, using the novel as a jumping off point. Interdisciplinary study.**

**Here are some good resources that allow students to follow their interests in women's studies and other disciplines.**

- [The Economist](#), “South Korean Women are Fighting to be Heard” (statistics)
- [Lecture on Joseon Dynasty and Confucianism](#): Gender, Family, and Social Change in Contemporary South Korea
- [“Chronicle of a Third Wife” \(1940\) by Im Og-In](#), in *Gendered Landscapes: Short Fiction by Modern and Contemporary Korean Woman Novelists* (2017 Cornell East Asia Series)
- [A Brief History of Korean Animation](#) 20-minute analysis of the history of the Korean animation in context of Korean history
- [#MeToo Movement in Korea](#)
- [What Is the K in K-pop? South Korean Popular Music, the Culture Industry, and National Identity](#)



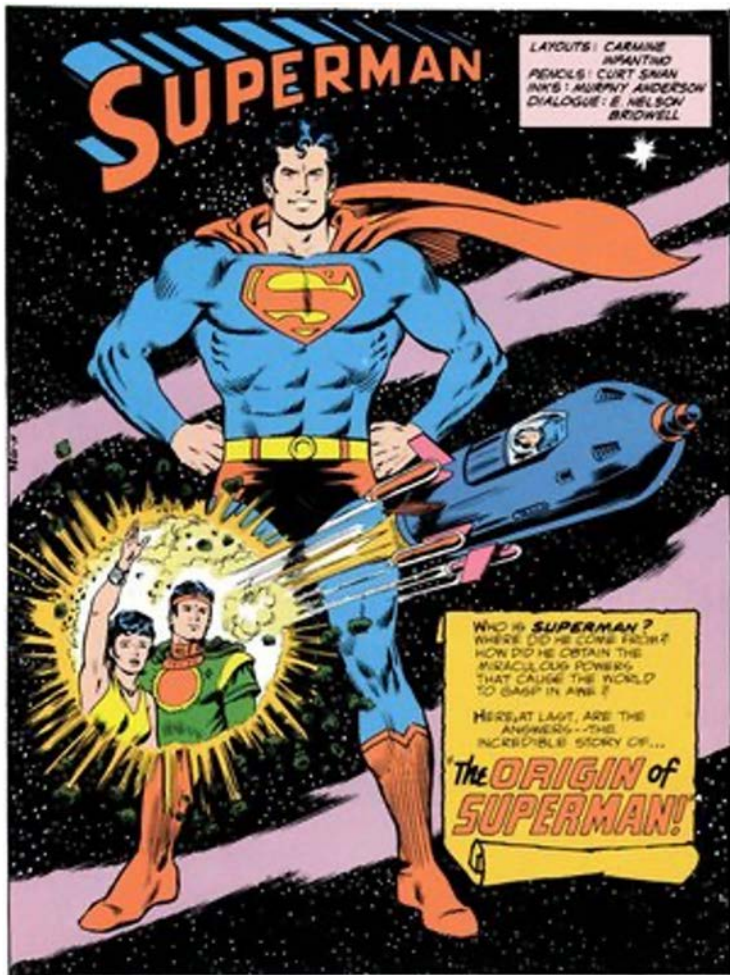
# **#4 COMPARE HONG GILDONG GRAPHIC NOVEL TO OTHER SUPERHEROES**

## **Key Questions:**

**Was Hong Gildong born great or did he achieve greatness?**

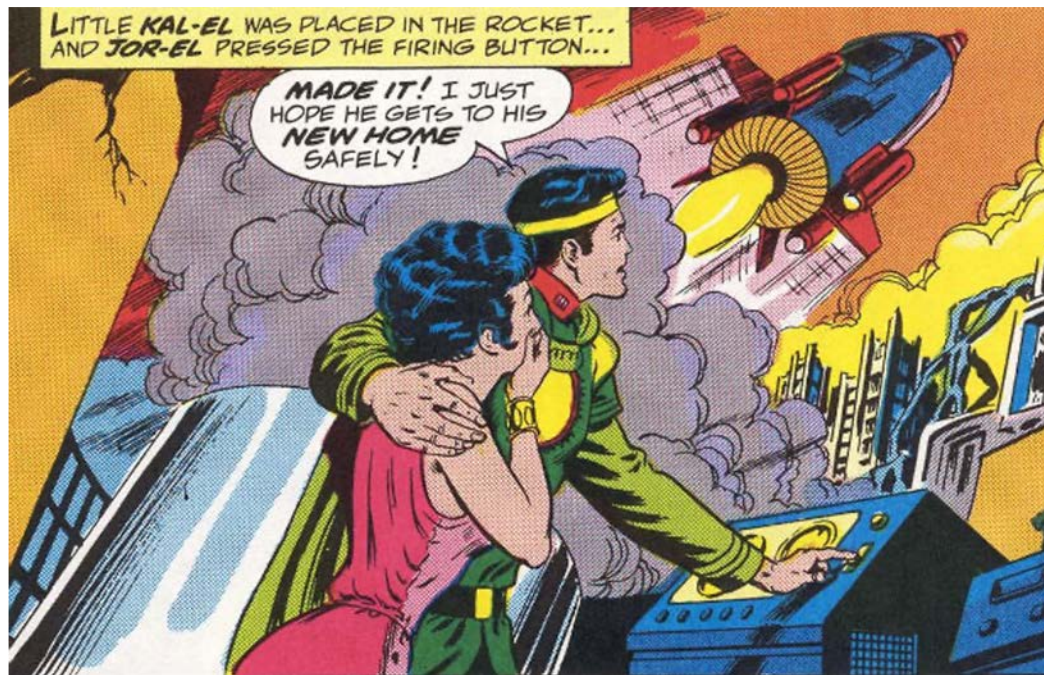
**Social Psychology research: Is a hero born or made through hard work?**

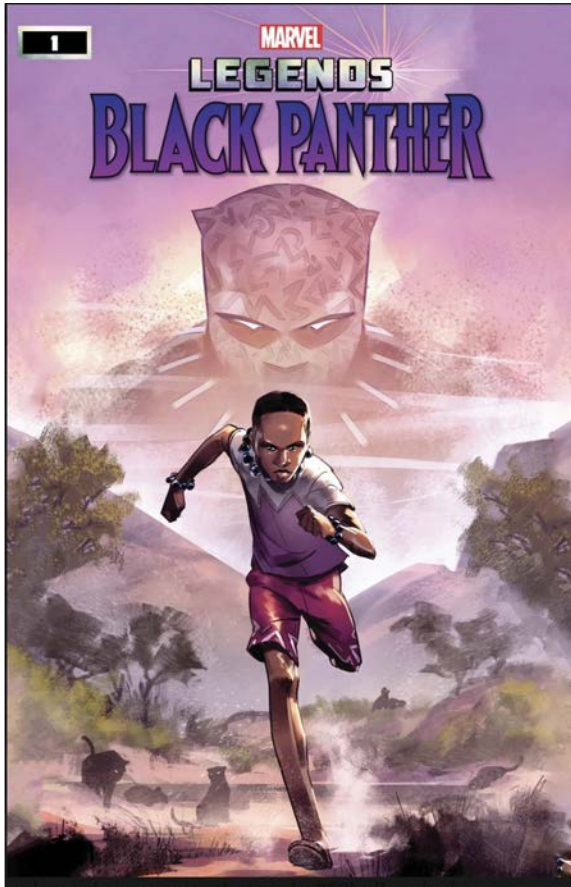
**Does each culture and generation reinvent the hero in its own image?**



# Superman's Origin Story

Compare father loyalty issues.





# Black Panther's Origin Story

Compare sibling rivalry stories . . .

Tochi Onyebuchi was hired in 2021 to write his origin story:

As a young boy, T'Challa needs to figure out his place in Wakanda as well as Wakanda's place in the world. His origin story also contends with sibling rivalry – because Young T'Challa is already destined to lead Wakanda, while his older brother must figure out his own destiny.

Marvel biography <https://www.marvel.com/characters/black-panther-t-challa/in-comics>

Black Panther, Encyclopedia Britannica origin story



# Ms Marvel's Origin Story (aka N.J. teenage Kamala Khan)

Compare cultural history as inspiration

Kamala's cultural history is a key element and turning point in the narrative: the Partition in 1947, when Britain divided India into two countries: India and Pakistan. In the MCU, Kamala Khan's powers come from her nani's bangle and appear to give her super strength/durability/agility, energy blasts, and to create crystal-like formations.

[‘Ms. Marvel’ Introduces a New Hero \(and a New Actress\) - The New York Times](#)  
[The Real History of the Partition in Ms. Marvel | Episode 10 | PBS](#)

## **Superhero Creative Writing Prompt:**

Create a hero (or a villain) who can solve one of today's problems. Write the back story explaining how that character became who they are now and their motivation.

NYTIMES: [Superhero creative writing ideas](#)

# #5 EXPLORE KOREAN LANDSCAPE



Main peaks of Taebaeksan as viewed from Munsubong, another of its peaks

## Historical places:

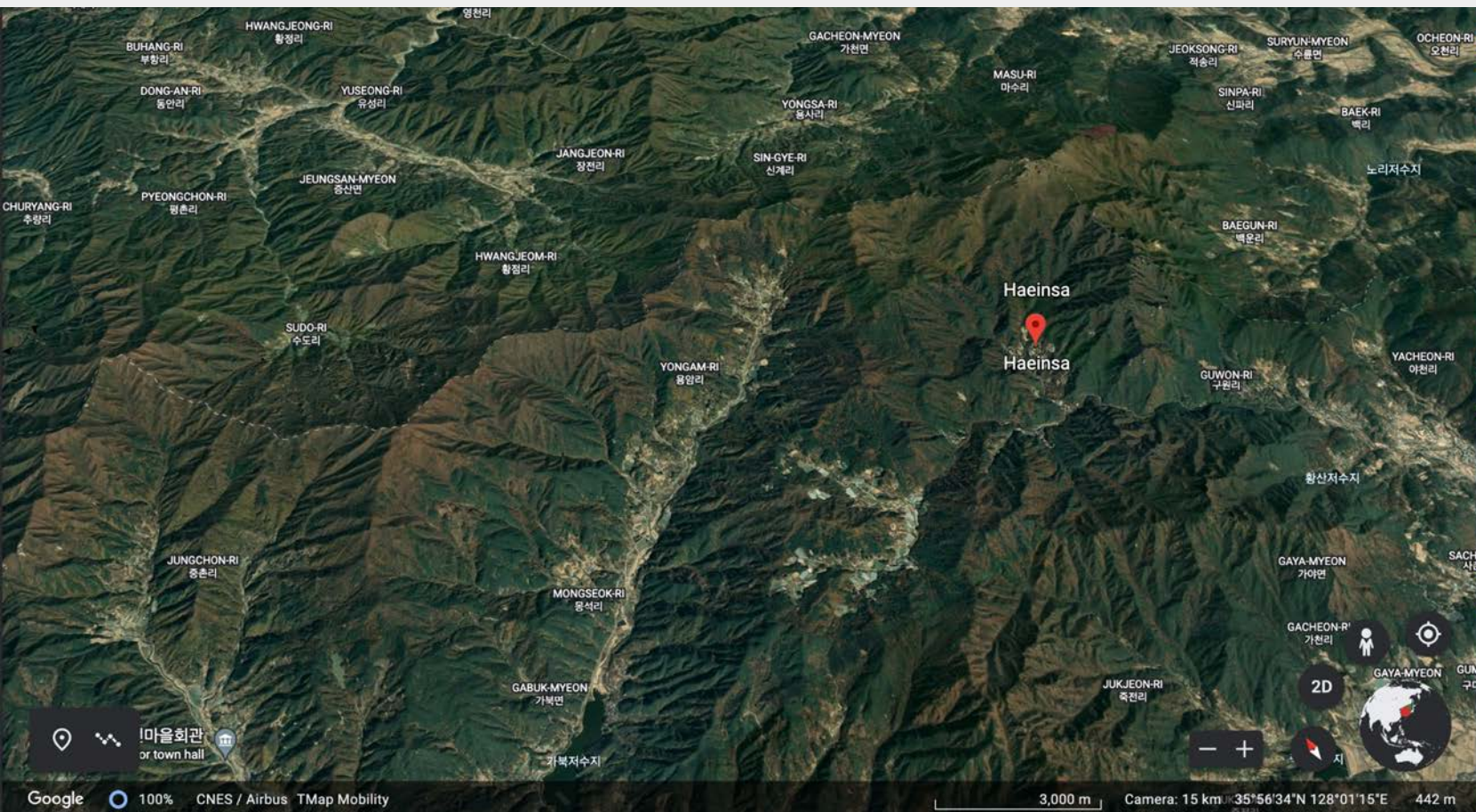
Use Joseon-era Korea with the eight provinces.

**Radiant places:** Geomancy is the art of finding sacred “radiant places” for the burial of the deceased. Hong Gildong: “I went into the mountains . . . studied geomancy.”

**Real places:** Use the footnotes to understand current day locations and map them on Google Earth:



**HONG GILDONG** tells the monks at Haeinsa Temple: “I have always heard that yours is a great and famous temple where the surrounding scenery is magnificent.”



[Google Earth: Haeinsa Temple in Chapcheon County](#)





## Fictional names for real places

The bandits's lair: The Taesobaek mountain range is a fictional name that combines the real Taebaek Mountain and the real Sobaek Mountains.

# Dream Landscapes, Imagined Landscapes

**Draw the imagined landscape of:**

**Minister Hong's Dream:**

“Verdant mountains lay in multiple folds, fresh waters flowed gently, and willow branches were arrayed like so many copies of green.” p. 1

**The assassin's confusion:**

“The room then transformed itself into an immense field filled with countless rocks, layers of green mountains that soared into the air with intimidating grandeur. . . Teukjae tried to orient himself... “how did I come to this mountainous place?” p. 17



After Rain on Mt. Inwang [Jeong Seon](#)

# True-view Landscape Painting



True to actual Korean landscapes. (*jingyeong sansubwa*) was a ground-breaking development in Korea.

[Jeong Seon](#) (1676–1759) is credited as the father of true-view landscape painting and, therefore, with the ‘Koreanization’ of Joseon painting.

“General View of Inner Kumgang, Leaf From the Album of Gyemojae Jeong Seon.”

# Resources for Korean Landscape Painting

Metropolitan Museum of Art:

Video: [Diamond mountains](#) (no sound)

Lecture: [Landscapes: Real and Imagined 2018](#)

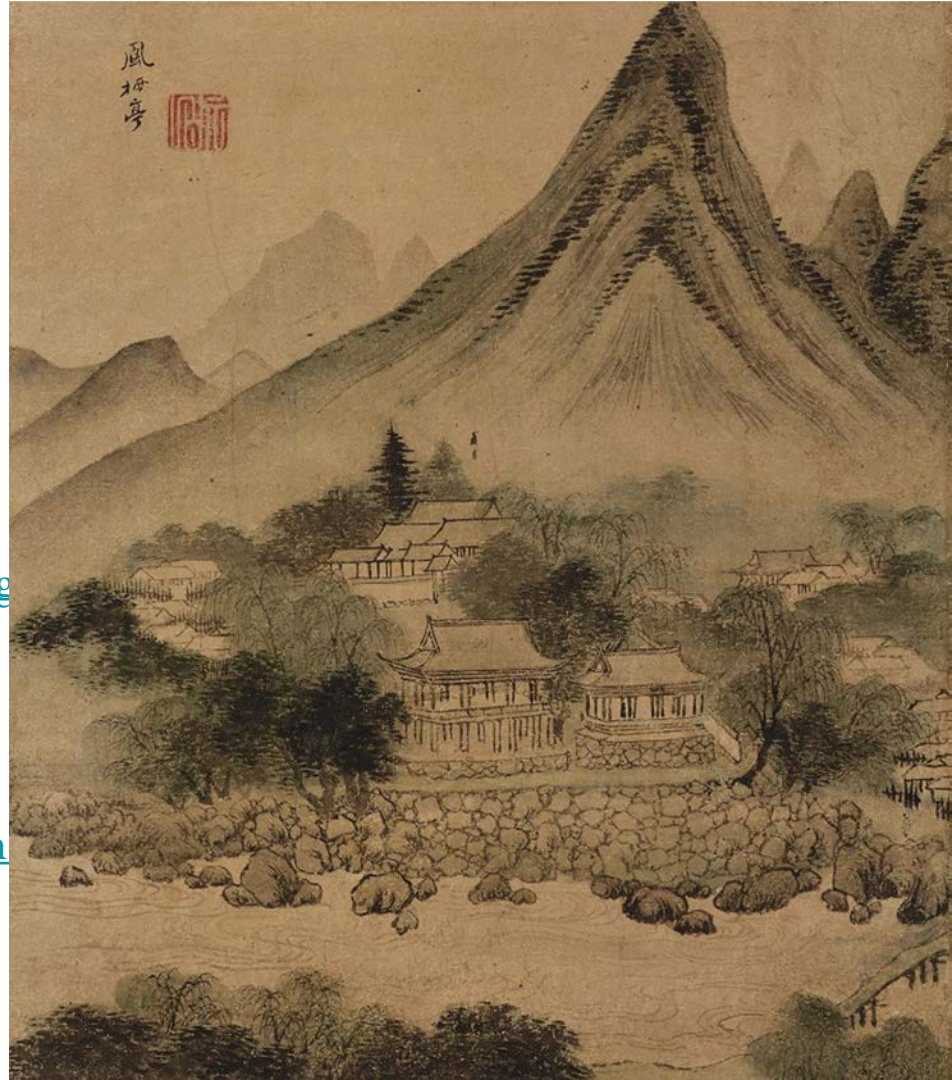
Article: [Mountain and Water: Korean Landscape Painting](#)

Article: [NYTIMES: Korean landscape art](#)

Article: [Korean Landscape and Literature](#)

Article: [Korean Landscape Painting - Continuity and Innovation](#)

Art idea: Using hanji paper from mulberry trees



# Contemporary Landscapes by Korean Artist Kimsooja



Kimsooja. "Cities On The Move - 2727 km Bottari Truck," 1997.  
Single channel video projection (Carrying "bottari" or bundles)

Kimsooja, *To Breathe: Mirror*, 2021  
Site-specific installation with stainless steel mirror



# #6 COMPARE and ANALYZE MODERN VERSIONS



**Rely on this resource for analysis  
and historical context:**

*INVINCIBLE AND  
RIGHTEOUS OUTLAW*

The Korean Hero Hong Gildong in  
Literature, History, and Culture  
by Minsoo Kang



INVINCIBLE AND  
RIGHTEOUS  
OUTLAW

THE KOREAN HERO HONG GILDONG  
IN LITERATURE, HISTORY, AND CULTURE

MINSOO KANG

Dr Kang points out that the one immutable point in all versions is that Hong Gildong is a second son who movingly laments his status.



## Children's Hero

Comic strip by Shin Dong Wu 1965-

“Hong Gildong,” a child’s [comic strip](#) in 1200 installments. A supporter of his country who wants to correct the harm done by greedy and corrupt. Does not dream of ruling his own kingdom.



# Champion of the poor against corrupt leaders & the rich



The graphic novel by  
Anne Sibley O'Brien  
(2006)

Additions/omissions  
highlight the Robin  
Hood theme.

Teaching materials are  
available from Ohio State!

# Heroic rebel fighting tyranny and foreign imperialism



North Korean martial arts film (1986). Rescues commoners from misery, punishes corrupt yangban, defends country from Japanese ninja kidnappers.



*Hong Gil-dong* 홍길동

DPRK Directors: Shin Sang-ok  
& Kim Kil-In

**Stylish and righteous outlaw who comes to believe that a ruler should be chosen by the people. A masculine ideal.**

Fusion Historical Drama  
*Sharp Blade Hong Gildong*  
2008 KBS TV show

The ahistorical elements and broad comedy are part of the show's *hallyu* (Korean Wave) strategy in attracting international audiences that have no inherent interest in the essential “Koreanness” of the narrative.



# A Tweet to support multi-national corporations



**Tweet** TJP @thejiminpost

Jimin's drawing for McDonald's is inspired by Korean folk tale character Hong Gildong. He is a cunning outlaw hero skilled in martial arts and steals from corrupt aristocrats.

Jul 30, 2021 — BTS Meal drives McDonald's 40% increase in Q2 sales.

Commodity culture" refers to what aspects of culture can be evaluated in terms of supposed "worth" or economic value.



“Like the multiple straw versions of Hong Gildong, multiple versions of the legendary righteous outlaw abound.”

–Dr. Minsoo Kang

And there are multiple ways to teach it . . .

**Comments or Questions?**