

The Tale of the Rabbit and the Moon

Overview

The Moon rabbit, Moon hare or Jade rabbit is a mythical figure in both East Asian and indigenous American folklore, based on interpretations that identify the dark markings on the near side of the Moon as a rabbit or hare. In East Asian mythology, the rabbit is seen as pounding with a mortar and pestle, but the contents of the mortar differ among Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese folklore.

Story

In the Buddhist Jataka tales,[4] Tale 316 relates that a monkey, an otter, a jackal, and a rabbit resolved to practice charity on the day of the full moon (Uposatha), believing a demonstration of great virtue would earn a great reward. When an old man begged for food from them, the monkey gathered fruits from the trees and the otter collected fish, while the jackal found a lizard and a pot of milk-curd. Knowing only how to gather grass, the rabbit instead offered its own body by throwing itself into a fire the man had prepared. However, the rabbit was not burnt and the old man revealed that he was Śakra. Touched by the rabbit's virtue, he drew the likeness of the rabbit on the Moon for all to see. It is said the lunar image is still draped in the smoke that rose when the rabbit cast itself into the fire.

A version of this story may be found in the Japanese anthology, Konjaku Monogatarishū, where the rabbit's companions are instead a fox and a monkey.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moon_rabbit

One night, the Man on the Moon came down to earth disguised as a beggar. He chanced upon a Fox, a Monkey, and a Rabbit (usagi) and asked for some food. The Fox brought him fish from a stream, and the Monkey brought fruit from the trees, but the Rabbit could only offer grass. So he told the beggar to build a fire, and when it was built, threw himself onto the flames to offer himself to the Man. Amazed by the Rabbit's generosity, the beggar transformed back into the Man on the Moon and pulled the Rabbit from the fire. To honor the Rabbit's kindness, the Man on the Moon carried the Rabbit back to the moon to live with him. Now, if you look at the full moon, you can see the outline of the Rabbit pounding mochi on the moon.

China and Korea share similar tales of the rabbit on the moon, which makes sense since Buddhism and the Mid-Autumn Festival both spread throughout Asia at roughly the same time (only a couple hundred years separate the two).

Source: <https://www.bokksu.com/blogs/news/japanese-folktale-rabbit-on-the-moon#ruffruff-table-of-contents-item-1>

