



# The Korean Magpie



The magpie is part of the crow family of birds. It is a noisy bird, like the crow. In Europe people think that a magpie can bring bad luck.

But in Asia a magpie brings good news. The Chinese call it the “Bird of Joy.” A chattering magpie signals happiness to come. Or welcome guests may arrive for a visit.

Koreans have made the magpie their national emblem. Several cities have also chosen the magpie as their official city bird. One of those cities is the capital of Korea, Seoul. Another city, Gyeongsan, has a saying about the magpie. The “clear song” of the magpie “reflects the bright and hopeful spirits” of its citizens.



Minhwa

*Korean National Heritage Online*

You can see magpies in Korean folk paintings. They are called minhwa. The magpie sits in a pine tree. It squawks at a

smiling tiger below. Why is this little bird shown with a fierce tiger? Both bring good news in Korean tradition. The gods send messages with the magpie. The magpie passes them along to the tiger, who is a messenger from the mountain spirits and a friend to mankind.

Koreans also have a kite in the shape of a magpie wing. This kite is called Gga-chi-nal-gae-yon. It is not a common kite in Korea. Most Korean kites have a rectangle shape and a hole in the middle. Koreans usually fly kites at the New Year. They write on their kites, “Bad luck away and good luck stay.” Then they cut the kite line and let the wind carry the kite away.

This kite design is an adaptation of the Korean magpie kite. It is like other bird kites in nearby Asian countries. The Chinese in Beijing fly a special swallow kite. It is often made of silk. Its spars are of thin bamboo. A very old kind of kite in Japan is a tobi kite. It is in the shape of a hawk.



Beijing Swallow *Drachen Foundation*



Tobi Kite *Skinner Collection*