

# Ancestral Worship, Charms, Games Characterize Lunar New Year's Day

By Hong Sun-hee  
Staff Reporter

Agarian countries included in China's sphere of cultural influence have observed the lunar New Year holiday from ancient times, and Korea is no exception.

Since Koreans planned their farming schedules strictly abiding by the waxing and the waning of the moon, they celebrated the lunar New Year's Day as the real start of the year and as one of their most festive holidays.

For over a millenium, good luck charms, ancestral worship and games have characterized Korean new year celebrations.

The oldest written history on the Lunar New Year's Day dates back to the seventh century. According to a Chinese history book, the king and his subjects gathered on the New Year's morning to exchange greetings and to hold a mass for the gods of the sun and

the moon.

Koreans observed New Year's Day as an occasion to perform ancestral worship ceremonies at the house of the eldest brother and to pay homage to senior members of the family.

Also it was an occasion for neighbors, wearing new or clean clothes, to trade remarks wishing the best for the year and to offer a sacrifice for the village's guardian spirits, in prayer, for a bumper crop and the community's prosperity throughout the new year. The village ritual was accompanied by music and dance.

The respected seniors of the village, after the sacrifice, decided community-level events for the coming year under the self-rule system of the community.

In Korea, traditionally, the festive mood of "sol" used to warm up in the last ten days of "sottal" (the 12th month) and lasted until the next year's first full moon day.

During the last remaining days of

December, the villagers visited the seniors and recollected the happy and sad events of the community in an attempt to speed out the old year.

Canons were fired in the palaces to expel the evil spirits while the rich people distributed to their poor neighbors a pack of rice and a bundle of dried pollack to help them perform ancestral worship rituals at daybreak on the New Year's Day.

Parents used to bring their won farm products or handmade works to a five-day village market to trade them for new clothes and shoes for their children.

The New Year's Day was one of the very few occasions for Koreans to receive new clothes along with "Chusok," the Korean version of Thanksgiving which falls on Aug. 15 by the lunar calendar.

From pre-dawn morning of the year's last day, housewives cooked buns stuffed with vegetables and meat, pancakes of ground green peas, grilled fish and meat coated with egg and flour, and also prepared rice cakes and brewed rice wine.

Mothers and daughters kept on working in the kitchen or in the hallway till early dawn of the New Year's Day with their hands, clothes and even eyebrows covered with flour and rice powder.

As soon as the bells started ringing at midnight, the vendors of bamboo strainer called "jori" came. The bamboo strainer was used in removing stones from the rice in water before steaming. It was then capped with "pok" (blessings) and is spelled "pokjori" and was supposed to invite blessings and good luck.

The good-luck bamboo strainer vendors appeared on the streets chanting "pokjori" as they made their way through the mazelike backalleys and paths in residential districts in cities and towns across the country.

People buy "pokjori," sometimes several, and hung them on the walls in their houses before dawn of New



Young girls wearing the colorful Korean dress known as "hanbok" enjoy "nolltwigi," a popular pastime for women. Korean women living under the constant of Confucian cus-

toms used to amuse themselves on this Korean seesaw during the winter and on a swing around "Tano," the fifth of May by the lunar calendar.

Year's Day, to ensure good luck.

The early morning ancestral ritual on the New Year Day's consists of offering wine and delicacies. The food normally is comprised of rice cakes, meat, fish, vegetables and fruit.

The use of fish is usually limited to dried and steamed pollack and coldfish and the color of the fruit should not exceed three, namely the color of apples, pears and persimmon.

Properly, fruit having pips, or seeds, can only be used but the ritual rule has been relaxed to such an extent that now seedless oranges are also served.

As for the location of the fruit dishes

on the table, fruit of red or persimmon hue go to the eastern side while pears and other fruit of lighter color are placed on the western side.

One could misplace the fruit, fish and other foods on the table, but there is one item which is most important and without which it would be no New Year's ancestral food-offering. It is "ttokkuk," or rice cake soup made primarily with thin slices of white rice.

After eating one bowl of "ttokkuk," which means one year older, the separated relatives gathered at the house of the family's eldest enjoyed themselves over the game of "yut," in which

four wooden sticks are used in a form of gambling. Originally used as a means of making shamanistic predictions and fortune-telling, the game is played with four pieces of wood each in the shape of a cloven half of a round wooden rod.

Women play on the Korean seesaw called "nolltwigi" while children engage in the shuttlecock game of "cheki" using their feet in stead of their hands. Also popular is top spinning, and "sokjon," a war game with stone missiles, "tuho" similar to darts but they were thrown at the mouth of a jar filled with arrows.



Silk shops in Seoul's Tongdaemun (East Gate) Market are frequently visited by women, who want to prepare traditional "hanbok" costume for their families, before the New Year's Day.



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