

Traditional Korean Culture A1 – Family and Kinship

The Keywords: family, relatives, patrilineal characteristics, cognatic or bilateral, the scope of kinship, sub-clan (munjung), the ancestral home, clan (ssijok), sub-clans (pa), the dollimja, degree of descent (hangnyeol), the coming of age ceremony (gwallye), wedding ceremony, matchmaker, the gunghap (divining the fortunes of the man and woman to see if they will make a happy couple), the nappye ("gift offering"), the chest bearer, the chohaeng ("first journey"), the sinhaeng ("new journey"), the pyebaek, the jaehaeng ("second visit"),

funeral ceremony, imjong ("watching the end"), yeomseup ("shrouding"), the chief mourner, barinje (an ancestral rite held in front of the bier just before it leaves the house), jomun (guests[=jogaek] offer their condolences to the mourners),

charye, gije, myoje, the ceremony supervisor, the spirit marker (sinwi: a picture of the deceased or other item to indicate the location of the deceased's soul), the memorial address (chungmun), eumbok (The liquor and food is divided among the attendees.),

shamanism, mansin, mubyeong (falling ill due to spirit possession), a rite of invocation, dangol, shaman, simbang, the rite, the belief in household deities, josangdanji ("ancestral jar"), seongju (a household's guardian deity), dongje ("village rite"), sansindang, seonangdang, dangsan, jangseung (a guardian deity for the village), dolharubang

1. Characteristic of Korean Kinship

A family is traditionally comprised of a married couple and their children (if any), living together and forming a single economic unit. Kin are an extension of this basic family unit. Here, "kin" has the same meaning as "relatives."

Kinship is based on such principles as birth group, inheritance and succession. In Korea, children take the family name of their father, and the son inherits property and succeeds in the duties of performing ancestral rites, which are patrilineal characteristics. However, the four rites (coming of age, marriage, funeral, and ancestral rites) are also related to the family on the mother's side, so Korean kinship can be seen as cognatic, or bilateral.

2. The Scope of Kinship

Korean kinship terms are centered around the father's line. On the father's side, the vertical scope of kinship spans four generations in either direction. The horizontal scope of kinship extends to the eighth degree (8 chon, equivalent to "third cousin" in English) in the case of the family of the father's brother(s), and to the sixth degree (6 chon, equivalent to "second cousin" in English) in the case of the family of the father's sister(s). On the mother's side the vertical scope includes four generations up and two generations down, and the horizontal scope extends to the sixth degree (6 chon). For the wife's family, the vertical scope extends two generations in either direction and four degrees (4 chon, equivalent to "first cousin" in English) horizontally.

3. Sub-clans

One's clan (*munjung*) is comprised of one's kin and is expressed by the ancestral home and family name. The family name in Korea appears in the male bloodline, and everyone receives their father's family name when they are born. Servants and Buddhist monks might not have family names. The ancestral home is the birthplace of the clan ancestor in the male bloodline, or a place of residence where that clan has dwelt for a long time. This shows the patrilineal nature of Korean kinship, and if two people have the same ancestral home and family name means they are from the same clan.

The concept of clan and a consciousness of family names are still deeply rooted in Korean society. This is evidenced by the fact that ancestral homes are recorded on family registers, thus revealing the paternal bloodline, and that family members create genealogical tables. Until recently, there was a law prohibiting marriage between men and women of the same clan so that marriage between close relatives could be prevented.

Just as there are many family names they are also many ancestral homes, and in the case of the Kim and Lee family names there are about 500 different ancestral homes. Depending on the clan, some clans have as many as tens of thousands of members. Thus clans often have sub-clans (*pa*), but the number of sub-clans per clan varies.

The most important reason that a sub-clan comes into existence is that a famous high-ranking official or scholar belongs to a clan. A sub-clan then originates with this figure. In the case of the Jeonju Lee clan, successive princes founded about 200 sub-clans.

In this way sub-clans center around a famous ancestor, and the community formed around this founder is called a *munjung*.

The king can also bestow a family name. For example, the founder of the Andong Gwon clan was originally a Kim, but King Taejo, the first Goryeo monarch, gave him the family name Gwon. On the other hand, Choe Chung-heon refused the Wang family name offered by Goryeo King Gojong. This bestowing of a family name by a king is called *saseong*.

4. Names and degrees of descent

Parts of Korean names are often the same for members of the same generation of a family, and this similar character is called *dollimja*. Brothers may share a *dollimja*, and a father may share a *dollimja* with his brothers. Cousins, second cousins and third cousins may also share a *dollimja*, thus indicating their relationship. The part of the name that indicates how many generations a person is removed from an ancestor is called the *hangnyeolja*. Depending on the household, degree of descent may be more important than age.

Traditional Korean Culture A2– The Four Ceremonies

1. Coming of Age Ceremony

The coming of age ceremony (*gwallye*) is a ceremony where a child wears a traditional Korean hat (*gat*) for the first time, symbolizing his passage into adulthood. Placing the *gat* on the child's head marks him as an adult. Before the *gwallye*, the subject is considered a child, but after the *gwallye* he or she is allowed to participate in society as an adult.

The *gwallye* is usually performed at around the age of 20 for men and 15 for women, at an age when they are mentally and physically mature. It is said that the ceremony could be performed at around the age of 10 during the latter Joseon period. In the case of girls, the mother prepares her daughter's hair, first braiding it and then wrapping this braid in a circle, and finishes the ceremony by inserting an ornamental hairpin.

Today the *gwallye* has disappeared from folk traditions, and even in the past it was only performed in upper-class households; the common people combined the *gwallye* with the wedding ceremony. One reason given for the disappearance of this custom is a royal order¹⁾ given during the Gabo Reform²⁾.

2. Wedding ceremony

The matchmaker's role is very important in a traditional wedding. Once a match is made by the matchmaker the two families involved perform the *gunghap* (divining the fortunes of the man and woman to see if they will make a happy couple) or find out what kind of person the prospective bride or groom is. If the parents of the two young people agree to the marriage the groom's family sends the *saju* (one's fortune based on the date of birth) and *cheonghonso* (letter requesting marriage) to the bride's family. The *saju* is merely the groom's year, month, day and hour of birth written on white paper, and it is placed in a large envelope with "saju" written on one side and "geunbong" ("respectfully sealed") written on the other. Once the bride's family receives the *saju*, they decide on and inform the groom's family of the date for the wedding and the date for the sending of the dowry chest.

The sending of the dowry chest is called the *nappye* ("gift offering"). The chest is usually sent on the day before the marriage or on the day of the marriage, accompanied by the groom, and the chest is filled with a number of goods (the type of goods depends on the region). Long ago, the chest was sent with the marriage documents and enough fabric to make two dresses for the bride.

The groom's trip to the bride's house for the wedding ceremony is called the *chohaeng* ("first journey"). Once the groom's party reaches the bride's village people from the bride's household meet him and guide him to the *jeongbang*. The *jeongbang* is a place where the groom's party rests momentarily, and it is located somewhere along the way to the bride's house.

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While the groom prepares for the ceremony at the *jeongbang*, the bride's household lays down a straw mat, on top of which is placed a table and a folding screen, in preparation for receiving the dowry chest. The chest bearer(s) then puts the chest on top of the table. Then a blessed woman (one whom fortune has smiled upon) from the bride's household takes the chest into the inner room, sits atop it and yells, "Much blessing has come!" At this the bride's mother sticks her hand into the chest and looks at the color of the first fabric she touches. Then she offers liquor to the chest bearer(s).

Once the *nappye* is finished the wedding ceremony takes place. Once the groom steps on and over a rice sack laid in front of the gate, a person follows him bearing a wooden goose. The groom takes the goose and sits down at the table facing north. He places the goose on the table and bows twice to it. Then the bride's mother takes the goose and tosses it into the room where the bride awaits. It is said that if the goose lands upright the bride will bear a son, but if the goose falls over she will bear a daughter.

The groom then stands on the east side of the table and washes his hands, and then goes around the table to face the south. The bride emerges covering her face and stands at the table facing north. Once the bride and groom are facing each other the bride bows twice to the groom, and then the groom bows once in return. This is repeated, and then the bride and groom sit down. They drink two glasses of liquor from their own glasses, but for the third glass they offer each other their own glasses.

The bride and groom stay at the bride's house for a year or a month, and then embark on the *sinhaeng* ("new journey") to the groom's house. A representative from the bride's household follows them. Food prepared at the bride's house is brought out and the bride greets her new parents-in-law. This ceremony is called the *pyebaek*.

Long ago, the bride prepared food from the first harvest gathered at the groom's house and went to visit her parents. After returning from this *jaehaeng* ("second visit") the bride begins her life as the daughter-in-law of the household.

3. Funeral ceremony

When a parent's illness becomes critical and it appears that they are going to pass away, they are moved to an inner room or the main room. There the children keep watch as their parent breathes their last. This is called *imjong* ("watching the end"), and a child is considered very undutiful if unable to do this. Once moved to the room where the *imjong* will be held, the parent is positioned so that their head faces east, and they are dressed in new clothes.

When death is confirmed, the deceased's clothing is brought out to the yard and waved in the wind. After saying the deceased's name and address, the person waving the clothing shouts, "Turn around and at least take your clothes with you." Then the clothing is thrown from the rooftop, and it is later laid across the chest of the deceased. After this the body is temporarily placed on a wooden board called the *chilseongpan* ("seven star board"), covered with a single blanket and hidden behind a folding screen. Before the corpse is placed in the coffin it is washed and dressed, and then tied firmly. This is called *yeomseup* ("shrouding"). Once the body is placed in the coffin, the chief mourner puts on mourning clothes and performs an ancestral rite for the deceased. The mourner then greets those who have come to offer their condolences.

On the evening before the funeral bier leaves the house, the pallbearers perform a ceremony during which they carry an empty bier around the yard a few times.

On the day of the funeral the coffin is removed from the room and the *barinje* (an ancestral rite held in front of the bier just before it leaves the house) is held. Once the *barinje* is finished the pallbearers raise and lower the bier three times in farewell and then proceed to the burial site.

When the bier arrives at the burial site guests offer their condolences to the mourners and the coffin is lowered into the grave with the head facing north. The chief mourner covers the coffin with dirt until it is level with the ground, and one final ancestral ceremony is held before leaving.

4. Ancestral Ceremony

Confucian ancestral ceremonies are one of the most important things a family can do. Although it may have elements of ancestor worship, it is an ideology that dominated Joseon for five hundred years. This ancestral ceremony served to strengthen family bonds in a household.

Religious ceremonies performed in worship of ancestors include *charye*, *gije* and *myoje*. The *charye* is generally held on New Year's Day and *Chuseok* (the Korean harvest festival). Depending on the area, the *gije* may be held on the date of the ancestor's death or on the ancestor's birthday. This ceremony is held for the each parent of the four previous generations, so it is held eight times in one year. *Myoje* differs greatly depending on area and family, but it is generally held in October for ancestors removed by five generations or more.

Once the ceremonial table is prepared all of the people take their places. The ceremony supervisor stands out in front, kneels down, burns incense and then bows twice. All the others in attendance also bow twice and the supervisor sits down in front of the spirit marker (*sinwi*: a picture of the deceased or other item to indicate the location of the deceased's soul) and offers a glass of liquor. After offering this first glass the memorial address (*chungmun*) is read and the next person offers a glass of liquor. When the third glass is offered it is not filled completely, and the fourth time liquor is poured into the third glass. After offering a glass of liquor the person always bows twice. Once all have offered a glass of liquor a spoon is stuck in the bowl of rice so that the bottom of the bowl of the spoon faces east, and then chopsticks are placed on the table. Everyone then leaves the room for a moment, and when they return the soup is replaced by rice tea and the rice is mixed into this tea little by little. Shortly afterward the spoon is taken out of the bowl and the rice bowl is covered. Everyone bows twice and the *jibang* (paper ancestral tablet) and memorial address are burned. The liquor and food is then divided among the attendees, and this is called *eumbok*.

Korean Traditional Culture B2 – Folk Beliefs

1. Shamanism

There are those in Korean society today who mistakenly think shamanism is merely superstition. Not only does shamanism play a religious role in Korea, though, it is also a form of medicine and divination, and it has artistic and entertainment functions as well. It was this shamanism that allowed Koreans to escape from the formalism of Confucianism.

Shamanic differs from region to region. Gyeongsangbukdo Province and Chungcheongdo Province were influenced by Confucianism, so shamanism there is weak. There are two ways to become a shaman. The *mansin* of Gyeonggido Province fall ill due to spirit possession and seek out a great shaman. The seeker becomes the spiritual daughter of the shaman, and the shaman becomes the spiritual mother of the seeker, and a rite of invocation is performed. In this way the seeker becomes a shaman. This method is used in the central and northern areas of Korea. In the southern areas and eastern coastal areas shamanism is hereditary, and each area has a different lineage. Shamans also have a different name in each region: *dangol* in Jeollado Province, *mudang* in Gyeongsangdo Province and *simbang* on Jejudo Island.

There are a number of different gods in shamanism, and each god is unrelated to any of the others. A rite consists of twelve *geori*, or parts, and each of them is performed to a different god. When the rite is begun salt is sprinkled to cleanse the site. This is followed by the "Gamanggeori," which is performed for Dangun, the founding deity of Korea. The shaman then holds a fan and bell while performing "Malmyeonggeori" for the undying god. The "Sangsangeori" is performed for General Choe Yeong³⁾, a very important god to the shamans of Gaeseong and Gyeonggi.

At this time the shamans also climb stairs made of long blades. "Seongjumaji" is performed to greet the household guardian deity. "Byeolsingeori" is performed for the god of smallpox, and "Daegamnor" is performed for a variety of guardian deities. "Jeseokgeori" is performed for deities related to agriculture. "Hogwigeori" is performed for the god of measles, and "Gunonggeori" is performed for the clan's ancestor. "Changbugeori" prevents misfortune in the coming year through the spirit of arts and entertainment. At the end the "Dwitpuri" is performed. When performing these twelve *geori*, shamans continuously change their outfits. The rite described here is performed in Gyeonggido, and there are many differences to be seen in other regions.

2. Belief in household deities

The belief in household deities is directly related to shamanism. Confucian ancestral rites place excessive emphasis on form and doctrine and also exclude women, but the belief in household deities runs counter to these tendencies. The most important spirit in this belief is called *joryeong* (the spirit of one's ancestor). This spirit is preserved in the *josangdanji* ("ancestral jar"), which is kept on a shelf in the women's quarters. Each spring and fall it is filled alternately with barley and rice, covered with paper and not touched. This *josangdanji* ultimately represents an amalgam of the ancestor and a god of agriculture, and

3) Choe Yeong was a famous Goryeo general who repelled foreign invasions in the northern frontier territories and *waegu* (Japanese pirates) invasions in the south.

is kept at the house of the eldest son of the head family.

A household's guardian deity is called *seongju*, and this deity protects the head of the household and is worshipped in the *maru* (a large, wooden-floored room). In the Yeongnam (southeastern Korea) and Honam (southwestern Korea) areas the *seongju* jar is filled with barley or rice and placed in a corner of the *maru*, and in other areas a piece of folded paper is attached to the ceiling of the *maru* and coins are placed inside. In October, the harvest month, housewives play the part of household shamans, offer sacrifices to the spirits and give sacrificial rice cakes to their neighbors.

3. Village sacrificial rites

The sacrificial rite performed by all of the villagers for the welfare of that village and the unity of the villagers is called *dongje* ("village rite"). The *dongje* is performed in a designated area in the village; in Gyeonggido Province and Chungcheongdo Province it is called *sansindang*, in Gangwondo Province it is called *seonangdang*, and in Jeollado Province and Gyeongsangdo Province it is called *dangsan*. The target of the *dongje* is generally a rock or tree believed to be a spirit. A building is built next to this object and the rite is performed in this building. In some cases, villagers may forget the subject of their beliefs over time.

The *dongje* is held in either the first ten days of January, the first full moon of the lunar year, or during the harvest month, and it is always held at midnight.

A man in his forties or older is chosen to perform the rite, and he must not be in mourning, have a pregnant woman in his family, or recently have had a child born in his family. This man cleanses his body and mind, and puts a straw rope across the front door to prevent others from entering.

After the rite is performed the villagers all gather to eat the sacrificial food and discuss matters of common interest. Farmers' music, a mask dance or a shamanic rite may also be performed, and Hahoe Village is famous for its *byeolsingut* rite.

4. Jangseung

Jangseung stand at the entrances to villages to keep evil spirits away. The jangseung is a guardian deity for the village, but it also marks the village boundaries and serves as a milestone. Jangseung are made from either stone or wood. Of those made from stone, the *dolharubang* of Jeju Island are particularly famous. Jangseung made from wood rot, so these are replaced each year when the *dongje* is performed.

Traditional Korean Culture B1 – Seasonal Customs

1. Seollal (New Year's Day, January 1st⁴)

This is the first day of the new year. In the morning, people put on new clothes (*seolbim*) prepared especially for the occasion. After holding a memorial service for ancestors, *sebae* (a respectful bow to one's elders on New Year's Day) is performed. The elders who receive this bow of greeting speak a word to the greeter wishing them well, such as "I hope you meet a beautiful wife and get married this year." Some of the foods eaten on this day are *ddeokguk* (soup with sliced rice cakes), *sujeonggwa* (a pungent cinnamon-flavored punch) and *sikhye* (a sweet drink made from fermented rice). *Ddeokguk* is particularly important, as it is said that one must eat *ddeokguk* to age a year. Adults will often ask children how many bowls of *ddeokguk* they have eaten when asking their age.

Memorial services are held for ancestors, but these are only held for the most recent four generations of ancestors. Ancestors further back are honored in October with other families from the same clan. During the first ten days of January, people enjoy games like Yunnori (a Korean board game where sticks are tossed in the air to determine how far to move the pieces), seesawing and kite flying.

2. The first full moon of the year (January 15th)

It is a traditional custom to greet the first new moon of the year by climbing a hill bearing torches. The person who first sees the moon rise will have good fortune that year. When the moon rises, everyone passes over a nearby bridge twelve times. This is said to keep one's legs healthy during that year (the Korean word for "bridge," *dari*, is the same as the word for "leg"), and this custom is called *daribalpgi* ("bridge stepping").

On this morning people get up early and call to the first person they see. If that person answers, they reply "Buy my heat," and it is said that that person will not be too hot during that whole year.

On the evening of January 14th, people eat *yaksik* (flavored glutinous rice), five-grain rice and fourteen different types of greens. Then, early on the morning of the full moon, it is said that if one eats such nuts such as raw chestnuts, walnuts and ginkgo nuts one will not get abscesses and one's teeth will be strong.

On the day of the first full moon, people drink *gwibalgisul* ("ear quickening liquor") and engage in such pastimes as *jatbulkyeogi* (a divination practice in which pine nuts are set on fire) and *chajeonori* (a massive game where two teams build large chariots and fight each other).

3. March 3rd

This is the day when the sparrows, who went south on September 9th, return to the north. It is also when new grass shoots appear and streams begin to run swiftly again. New butterflies emerge, and it is said that if one sees a white butterfly one will wear mourning clothes that year, but if one sees a yellow or large spotted butterfly (*horangnabi*; "tiger butterfly") one will have good luck and be healthy that year.

Hwajeon are also eaten at this time. They are round rice cakes made from glutinous rice flour. Azalea flowers are pressed into the cakes and then they are lightly fried in sesame oil.

4) All dates, unless otherwise specified, refer to the lunar calendar.

4. Dano (May 5th)

On this day girls used to cut irises and put them in water, and then wash their hair with this water. They also cut the iris roots and made hair ornaments from them to put in their hair. It was said that one could avoid headaches in this way. People also drank a tea of brewed irises, as it was said to be good for one's health.

On Dano, girls played on swings and boys played *ssireum* (Korean wrestling). On this day a rice cake made with mugwort in the shape of a wagon wheel was made and eaten--this rice cake was called *surichi*. Thus, Dano was also called "Suri Day."

While Chuseok (see below) was an important holiday in the southern regions, Dano was more important in the northern regions. This is because of the difference in seasons and farming periods. In the north, Dano was seen as a celebration of the end of a long winter, and in Hwanghae-do Province they also performed the Bongsan Mask Dance at this time.

5. Yudu (June 15th)

On the full moon of the sixth month of the year, people wash their hair in eastward-flowing water to wash away the dirt. They also sit by rivers and streams outside the city, drink liquor and eat rice cakes called *sudan* dipped in honey water. Also, in the southern parts of Korea a rite dedicated to the god of farming is performed in the fields or rice paddies. This rite is performed to pray for a successful harvest, and in some areas rice cakes are strewn about the rice paddies. After Yudu, the hottest period of summer begins.

6. Chilseok (July 7th)

Farmers say that Chilseok is a day on which it rains. The reason for this is to be found in the legend of Gyeonu and Jingnyeo. Two lovers, they desired to meet each other, but they were separated by the Milky Way (called "Eunhasu" in Korean, and thought of as a river). They were able to meet for one day of the year. On this day, all of the crows and magpies on the earth flew up into the heavens and formed a bridge over the Milky Way. This bridge is called "Ojakgyo" ("Crow and Magpie Bridge"). The rain that falls on this day is the tears of joy shed by Gyeonu and Jingnyeo at their meeting, and the rain that falls on the next day is the tears of parting. If it does not rain on this day, everything is taken outside to dry in the sun.

7. Chuseok (August 15th)

The full moon of the eighth month of the year, along with New Year's Day, is one of the most important holidays in farming villages. At this time of year the weather has cooled off, the grains have ripened, and it is time to harvest--it is the most abundant time of the year. During the Silla period (1st century - 7th century A.D.), the women's hemp cloth weaving contest, which began on July 15th, ended on this day, and the losing team prepared liquor and food (in particular, a type of rice cake called *songpyeon*) for celebration. Koreans usually visit ancestral graves on Chuseok and Hansik (April 6th).

In the southwestern part of Korea young women dance and sing the "Ganggangsullae" by the moonlight. This is a song whose chorus is "ganggangsullae," and it is sung by young women holding hands and dancing in a circle around the main singer, who sings the verses. It is said to have originated during the Japanese Invasion of 1592, when women danced on the shores to make the Japanese invaders think there were many troops waiting for them, and also to keep watch on their movements.

8. Sangdal

Sangdal is a colloquial expression for the tenth month of the year. It is the month during which the new harvest of grains and fruits are offered in rites to gods and ancestors after the completion of the harvest. These rites include *gosa*, which is performed in the home, *sije*, which is performed at ancestors' graves and *dangsanje*, a joint rite performed by the whole village. *Sije* is generally performed around the 15th day of the tenth month. At this time the whole clan gathers and performs rites for ancestors five generations in the past and beyond.

During this month, people usually eat *mandu* (dumplings) and *gangjeong* (rice cookies with rice, sesame seeds or beans). The most important family event is the yearly making of *kimchi*.

9. Dongji

This holiday refers to December 22nd on the solar calendar. It is the shortest day of the year and the longest night. Red bean porridge with small dumplings is eaten, and this porridge is sometimes sprinkled on the front gate to exchange unfortunate events in the future for minor difficulties already experienced. New calendars are made and given out at this time.

10. Jeya

The night of the last day of the last month of the year is called "Jeya." People bow to their elders and the Jeya Bell is rung 33 times. No one sleeps on this night. This is called *suse*, and it is said that if one sleeps on this night their eyebrows will grow white. Sometimes people tease children who fall asleep by sprinkling flour on their eyebrows and then waking them up and showing them a mirror. When the rooster crows in the morning it signals the beginning of the new year.

1. What are the relatives and sub-clan (munjung) in Korea?
2. Explain the dollimja in Korean names.
3. Compare the custom in wedding between Korea and one's own country.
4. Explain the classes of jesa.
5. What is the function of jangseung?
6. Explain the different aspects of shamanism depending on regions.
7. Introduce three seasonal customs of Korea. (e.g. The food eaten on the New Year's day is ddeokguk: soup with sliced rice cakes.)
8. Compare Korean Seollal (New Year's Day, January 1st) and Chuseok (August 15th) with one's own national customs.