Introduction to Korea Box: Holidays and Traditions

The East Asian Studies Center presents Korea Box: Holidays and Traditions, a teaching tool for educators to introduce their students to traditional Korean festivities, folkways, and games. Items in this box reflect different aspects of Korean culture, which has been passed down from generation to generation for nearly 5000 years. Through these regalia, we hope that students will see, feel, and hence experience traditional Korea.

Items in this box pertain to celebrations of four major holidays:

I. The Korean New Year, Seolnal, (Suhl-lal) celebrated Jan. 1st

II. The full moon festival, or Daeboreum (Day-bo-rum)

III. Chuseok (Chu-suk), the Korean Thanksgiving Day.

IV. Dongji (Dong-je), the Winter Solstice

In this guide, detailed descriptions of the traditions, food, and activities associated with each holiday are provided. These descriptions correspond with the slides contained within the PowerPoint file available on the East Asian Studies Center homepage. We have also included two simple lessons for teachers who may be new to the profession or unfamiliar with Korea. We hope that the items included in the box will be a useful starting point in planning your own lessons as well.

We appreciate your comments and feedback on our Korea Box: Holidays and Traditions. In addition, when you return the box, we would like to hear how you used the items in your lessons/classroom and the outcome of your lessons. If you have lesson plans based on materials in the box and would like to share them with other teachers, please submit them when you return the box. With your permission, we would like to include the lesson plans in the box as a resource for other teachers.
**Item Checklist**

Please check the materials in the box when it arrives and before you return the box to the Center.

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**Holiday/Traditions**

I. Seolnal

a) Introduction

**Korean New Year**, commonly known as **Seol-nal**, is the first day of the lunar calendar. It is the most important of the traditional Korean holidays. It consists of a period of celebrations, starting on New Year's Day. Koreans also celebrate solar New Year's Day on January 1 each year, following the Gregorian calendar. The Korean New Year holiday lasts three days, and is considered a more important holiday than the solar New Year's Day.

b) Customs

**Sebae (seh-bay)** is a traditionally observed activity on Seolnal, and is filial-piety-oriented. Children wish their elders (grandparents, aunts and uncles, parents) a happy new year by performing one deep traditional bow (rites with more than one bow involved are usually for the deceased) and saying the words **saehae bok mani badeuseyo**, which translates to “Receive many New Year blessings,” or more loosely, "Have a blessed New Year." Parents typically reward this gesture by giving their children pocket money in “good luck bags.” Before and during the bowing ceremony, children wear hanboks as a respectful way to appreciate their ancestors and elders.

c) Play/Activities

**Yut-nori (yoon-nori)** is a traditional board game played in Korea, especially during Korean New Year.

Although the origins of this popular family game are unclear, some research suggests that yut was played as early as the Three Kingdoms (57 BCE - 668 CE).

There is a folk explanation for the game, describing a bet by some villagers to raise five different kinds of livestock: pigs, dogs, sheep, cows and horses. Each of the villagers would raise only one type.

The board and the game are also known to have been used in fortune-telling, particularly in mountain-areas and small farming-villages, but this is no longer practiced.
**Jegi-chagi** is a Korean traditional outdoor game. It requires the use of people's foot and a jegi. Jegi looks like a badminton shuttlecock, which is made of a small coin (quarter size), paper, or cloth. In Korea, children usually play alone or with friends in winter seasons, especially on Lunar New Year. A player kicks a jegi up in the air and keeps on kicking to prevent from falling to the ground. In a one-to-one game, a player with the most number of consecutive kicks wins. In a group game, the players stand in a circle, and take turns kicking the jegi. Players who fail to kick the jegi upon receiving it and let it drop to the ground lose. As a penalty, the loser tosses the jegi at the winner so that he can kick it as he wishes. When the loser catches the jegi back with his hands, the penalty ends and he can rejoin the game.

Although there is no written record about the origin of Jegi-chagi, historical legends states that the game was developed from young martial artists’ training which involved kicking a small leather pouch.

Known as **paeng-ee**, traditional spinning tops have been played by children and adults alike for many centuries as a traditional sport and past-time in Korea. Paeng-ee are wooden, acorn-shaped, and spun using a rope or a wooden stick. Usually they are kept spinning by being whipped with the rope. The player(s) keep knocking it around until someone wins the game or they just get tired. Many Korean children have paeng-ee-spinning competitions where two players try to knock each others' top out of a designated area such as a circle.
d) Clothes

Hanbok (South Korea) or Chosŏn-ot (North Korea) is the traditional Korean dress. It is often characterized by vibrant colors and simple lines without pockets. Although the term literally means "Korean clothing", hanbok today often refers specifically to hanbok of Joseon Dynasty and is worn as semi-formal or formal wear during traditional festivals and celebrations. The modern hanbok does not exactly follow the actual style as worn in Joseon dynasty since it went through some major changes during the 20th century for practical reasons.

Throughout history, Korea had a dual clothing tradition, in which rulers and aristocrats adopted different kinds of mixed foreign-influenced indigenous styles, while the commoners continued to use a distinct style of indigenous clothing that today is known as Hanbok.

The jobawi was traditionally worn by women as a winter cap when they went out, but it is now mostly worn by baby girls as a festive headpiece during their first birthday celebration.

The binyeo was a common accessory for women during the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910), and was worn by commoners as well as nobility. Styling one's hair with a binyeo for the first time was an important coming of age ceremony for females; it signaled a girl's transition to womanhood and thus her availability on the marriage market.

e) Food

Tteokguk (duk-gook) is a traditional Korean dish eaten during the celebration of the Korean New Year. The dish consists of a broth/soup (guk) with thinly sliced rice cakes (tteok). It is tradition to eat tteokguk on New Year's Day because it is believed to grant the consumer luck for the forthcoming year and gain an additional year of life. It is usually garnished with thin julienned cooked eggs, marinated meat, and gim (dried seaweed).
II. Daeboreum

![Daeboreum Festival](image)

a) Introduction

**Daeboreum (day-boh-rum; literally "Great Full Moon")** is a Korean holiday that celebrates the first full moon of the new year of the lunar Korean calendar. This holiday is accompanied by many traditions:

One familiar custom is to crack nuts with one's teeth. It is believed that this practice will help keep one's teeth healthy for the year.

In the countryside, people climb mountains, braving cold weather, to watch the moon “rise”. It is said that the first person to see the moon rise will have good luck all year or a wish will be granted.

b) Activities

Historically, people played *chwibulnori* the night before Daeboreum. They burned dry grass on ridges between rice fields while children whirled around cans full of holes through which charcoal fire blazed. These cans fertilized the fields and got rid of harmful worms that destroyed the new crops.
Kite-flying The historical record of kites in Korea dates back to the seventh-century Silla Dynasty, when General Gim Yu-Sin is said to have used a fireball-carrying kite to simulate a star. The general’s troops, whose confidence had been shaken by the bad omen of a falling star, saw what they thought was the star shooting back to heaven. They rallied and defeated the enemy. Yeon are classified according to their shape and design and about 100 kinds of yeon exist. Shape-wise, "Bangpae Yeon" - a rectangle shaped Yeon – is the most popular.

c) Food

Ogokbap (oh-gok-bap) For breakfast on Daeboreum, ogokbap a five "grain" rice consisting of rice, millet, Indian millet, beans, and red beans is served (gok includes grains and beans). This is eaten with various dried herbs.

Ogokbap (as well as other soups and stews) is often prepared and served in a Dookbaegi, or dark earthenware bowl.

Yaksik (yahk-sheek; literally "medicinal food") is a sweet Korean dish made by steaming glutinous rice, and mixing with chestnuts, jujubes, and pine nuts. It is seasoned with honey or brown sugar, sesame oil, soy sauce, and sometimes cinnamon. It is traditionally eaten on Daeboreum, a Korean holiday which falls on every January 15th in the lunar calendar, but also for weddings and hwangap festivities.

Legend says that King Soji of Silla headed on a journey on the 15th of January, 488, when a crow alerted him of danger. The King was saved from a potential revolt thanks to the crow’s warning and the day of January 15 was designated as a day of remembrance thereafter. Glutinous rice was put up as an offering during the commemorative rites, which became the origin of yaksik.

Bureom (boo-rum)-Refers to a collection of various kinds of nuts such as peanuts, walnuts, pine nuts, chestnuts, and gingko nuts. It is one of the most popular and traditional foods during Daeboreum. It is believed that cracking a nut in your mouth early in the morning of Daeboreum will help strengthen teeth, prevent allergies, prevent boils, and bring good luck for the coming year.
Namul (nah-mool) is a general term for a Korean seasoned vegetable dish. The name of the dish may vary slightly depending on what vegetables are used and how they are prepared, but they will nonetheless still be a type of namul.

Virtually any type of vegetable, herb, or green can be used, and the dish include roots, leaves, stems, seeds, sprouts, petals, and fruits. They can be prepared as a single type of namul, or they can be mixed. Namul are typically served as banchan (a side dish accompanying the main course). It is possible to have more than one type of namul served as a banchan at a single meal.

III. Chuseok

a) Introduction

Chuseok, originally known as Hangawi (hahn-gah-we), is a major harvest festival and a three-day holiday in Korea celebrated on the 15th day of the 8th month of the lunar calendar. Like many other harvest festivals, it is held around the Autumn Equinox. As a celebration of the good harvest, Koreans visit their ancestral hometowns and share a feast of Korean traditional food such as songpyeon and various rice wines.

In modern South Korea, on Chuseok there is a mass exodus of Koreans as they return to their hometowns to pay respects to the spirits of their ancestors. People perform ancestral worship rituals early in the morning. Then they visit the tombs of their immediate ancestors to trim plants and clean the area around the tomb, and offer food, drink, and crops to their ancestors. Harvest crops are attributed to the blessing of ancestors.
b) Activities

**Ssireum (she-rum)** or **Korean wrestling** is a folk wrestling style and traditional national sport of Korea. In the modern form each contestant wears a *satba*, or belt that wraps around the waist and the thigh. The competition employs a series of techniques, which inflict little harm or injury to the opponent: opponents lock on to each other's belt, and one achieves victory by bringing any part of the opponent's body above the knee to the ground.

**Ganggangsullae (gang-gang-soo-lay)** is an ancient Korean dance that was first used to bring about a bountiful harvest and has developed into a cultural symbol for Korea. It incorporates singing, dancing, and playing and is exclusively performed by women. The dance is mostly performed in the southwestern coastal province of Jeollanam-do. It is often associated with the Chuseok holiday.

The dance is thought to have originated around 5,000 years ago when the Koreans believed that the Sun, Moon, and Earth controlled the universe. Participants would dance under the brightest full moon of the year in order to bring about a good harvest.

In the 16th century, during the Japanese invasion of Korea, Admiral Yi Sun-sin ordered women to do this dance in military uniform to intimidate the Japanese. The women were said to have dressed in military uniform and danced on Mount Okmae. The Japanese scouts thus overestimated the strength of the Korean troops.
Nongak, or "farmer's dance", is a representative Korean folk performance bearing some features of ancient sacrificial rituals. Originating from farm work, the dance is generally performed in two forms: 1) a plotted show featuring dances and mimes; 2) joyous traditional dance with mass participation during the New Year and harvest celebrations.

![Image of Nongak dancers](image)

c) Food

**Songpyeon (song-pyun)** is a traditional Chuseok food made of glutinous rice. They have become a popular symbol of traditional Korean culture. Songpyeon are half-moon-shaped rice cakes that contain different kinds of sweet or semi-sweet fillings, such as sesame seeds and honey, sweet red bean paste, and chestnut paste steamed over a layer of pine needles, which gives them the fragrant smell of fresh pine trees. They are made into various shapes with the participation of family members and are often exchanged between neighbors.

![Image of Songpyeon](image)
IV. Dongji

a) Introduction

Dongji (dong-jee) is a celebration of the winter solstice, the day with the shortest daylight hours and most amount of darkness. In traditional Korean society people used to call Dongji "Little new years" and it was considered a festive day that followed new years. Old proverbs such as "You must pass Dongji to grow one year older" or "You must eat red bean porridge to grow one year older" are derived from this custom.

b) Food

Patjuk (paht-jook) In Korean cuisine, red bean porridge is commonly eaten during the winter season. On Dongji, Korean people eat Dongji patjuk, which contains saealsim (say-all-sheem) meaning bird egg, a ball made from glutinous rice flour, named such due to its resemblance to small bird's eggs, possibly quail eggs.

In old Korean tradition, patjuk is believed to have a mysterious power to drive evil spirits away. According to Korean traditional folk beliefs, the color "red" is a symbolic color of positive energy which can defeat negative energy. Cooking and eating patjuk is a ritual to prevent bad luck and disease that comes from evil spirits. Before eating the dish, Korean people used to scatter it all around their houses.
Activities:

A.) Learning to use chopsticks-Chopstick race

Koreans eat most of their meals with metal chopsticks (unlike the wooden kind used in China and Japan) and a spoon. Could you do the same? With the chopsticks included in the box, practice picking up small objects. In two teams, have a race to see which side can pick up and carry a group of objects (beans, marshmallows, etc) to the opposite end of the classroom the quickest.

B) Coloring Korea

The Korean peninsula is near and dear to the hearts of all Koreans; following the model, have students color the peninsula. Note the many provinces that make up Korea. Eight are located in the South, and nine are in the North. Also note the dotted line running across the peninsula. Explain that the two Korea’s were divided after the Korean War, and remain so to this day.

Koreans are proud of their flag, the Taegukki. Have students color the flag according to the color print-out. Explain the symbols on the flag: The red and blue parts of the circle represent Yang and Yin (Eum in Korea); they are a symbol of balance-masculine/feminine; day/night; heat/cold. The bars in the top corners represent:

- Heaven
- Earth
- Fire
- Water

Older students can learn to draw the peninsula and flag from sight.

C.) Korean Holidays movie clips: Seolnal and Chuseok

Enjoy these informative short films about two of the holidays covered in the Korea Box. Some of the information overlaps with the PowerPoint, but there is much that is new as well. The .wmv files are located on the CD.

Seolnal (9:44) [http://www.korea.net/Resources/Multimedia/Video/view?articleId=2759](http://www.korea.net/Resources/Multimedia/Video/view?articleId=2759)

Chuseok (9:04) [http://www.korea.net/Resources/Multimedia/Video/view?articleId=2766](http://www.korea.net/Resources/Multimedia/Video/view?articleId=2766)

Bibliography

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