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New Year’s by the Sea: The Ritual Landscape of a Cheju Island Village

by Timothy R. TANGHERLINI

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(This lecture has been slightly edited to fit the requirements of the reader of the printed page — Ed.)

Most discussions of lunar new year celebrations in Korean villages center around either the ceremony associated with the *simbang* (female shaman) and her followers, the *cheil kut* (제일굿), or the male dominated Confucian ritual, the *p’oje* (포제) While the two form distinct and separate ritual entities, to fully understand the ritual landscape of a village, both types of ceremonies should be considered together. Although both the cheil kut and the p’oje function independently of each other on the surface level, both play roles in the protection, cleansing and well-being of the village and the villagers in the new year. The village would not be able to move into the new year without successful completion of both rituals.

The lunar new year is a liminal period in the calendrical life cycle of a village and is approached with as much anticipation as caution. Throughout Korea, rituals are performed to secure the well-being of the entire village and provide divinations for the fate of villagers during the coming year. The new year arrives before the new planting season and during a time of lessened economic activity in village life *nonghangi* (농한기). The rituals offer a chance for villagers to reaffirm the identity of the village and their social positions. “Sunshine” village provides an interesting model for study as many of the women contribute directly to the village economic life, working as *chamsu* (잠수 diving women). The economic prosperity of both the men and women is integral to the prosperity of the village as a whole.

Domestic rituals are not included in this discussion because, although they comprise part of the entire village ritual landscape, they are oriented towards individual households and not the collectivity of the households which makes up the village. Like the village rituals, the domestic rituals also split along Confucian and *min’gan sinang* (민간신앙) lines. However, because [page 22] of the household orientation of both types of rituals, there is a far greater gender cross-over.

The kut held for the village at the new year is referred to as the cheil kut. In this particular village, the kut is performed by a *k’unsimbang* (큰심방), who is a village resident. There are only eight to ten *k’unsimbang* on the entire island. Rather than being a hereditary *simbang*, she is a possessed *simbang*, having experienced possession sickness at age thirty-three. She performed her first kut at age thirty-four. Originally, she came from nearby Cow Island, moving to the village at age thirty-six. The majority of the kut she performs are for individuals and the domestic gods, primarily taking place in the domestic space. However, at certain points in the calendrical life cycle of the village, she is called on to perform extra-domestic rituals for the welfare of the villagers as a close homogeneous group, as is the case with the cheil kut. Attendance at the kut is exclusively female.

The p’oje is one of two major Confucian village rituals which take place each year. Unlike village lineage rituals, in this ritual, as Dix says, “the village is united symbolically as a group of equivalent households” (1987:98). Participation is strictly limited to village males.

The cheil kut and the p’oje are held only once a year, acting as complements to each other. In the village ritual landscape, the kut may be seen as the ritual of *um* (음), dominated by women, and the p’oje the ritual of *yang* (양), dominated by men. Internally, both rituals rely on the oppositions of um and yang. Thus on both the macro and micro scales, the rituals try to unite the oppositions fundamental to both belief systems. In this manner, the village guarantees harmony in the coming yean The transition from old to new, agricultural decay to rebirth and lessened economic prosperity to gradual relative prosperity is expressed in both rituals.

Sunshine village is an hour’s drive by bus and then a twenty-minute walk from the city of Cheju on Cheju Island, off the southern coast of the Korean peninsula. The village is part of a larger township, but is distinctly separate from the other villages which make up the township. Several roads criss-cross the village but none of them are much wider than a single bus. All of the houses are single story dwellings, usually with three *ondol* (온돌) rooms, a central *maru* (마루 wooden floor) and occasionally an indoor kitchen. Most houses have an attached outdoor cooking area and a small courtyard Like all houses on Cheju island, they are completely surrounded by a chest-high stone wall. The language spoken in the village is a dialect of Korean, referred to as cheju-mal The latest population figures from the town administration show that 761 men and 704 women live in 276 households, twenty-five of which are [page 23] headed by single women. With the exception of eleven fishing households and eight store-owning households, the occupation of the village men is farming. This figure, however, includes the eighty or so households in which the woman works as a chamsu. Of the twenty-five women-headed households, only one, that of the simbang, is not headed by a chamsu. The majority of the non-diving women supplement the family income by working in the fields as day laborers- Even though many households have incomes from two sources, average yearly income is only 5.8 million won, a per capita income of 1.1 million won, less than half the national average.

Besides a bus running from the village to the township every hour, transportation is limited to eight privately owned cars and fifty privately owned motorcycles. The village is broken into three hamlets (east, center and west) although the physical distinction between one hamlet and the next is nearly impossible to make. Because the most frequently attended high school is in Cheju city, most high school students move to the city and live alone, in boarding houses or with relatives. Therefore, the population figure is exaggerated and the age distribution in the village is slightly skewed towards young children and older adults. Sunshine village is a homogeneous village with no class distinctions to speak of, even gender distribution, consistent standard of living and similar work patters. This homogeneity leads to a high degree of village cohesion. The village rituals not only express this homogeneity, but also reinforce it.

The first village wide ritual held for the new year is the cheil kut, so named because it is the first kut of the new yean The ritual is held in the village *kuttang* (굿당), located several hundred meters from the outskirts of the village by the sea shore. The building and the land are owned by the village simbang. The kuttang is a small, unheated building made of volcanic rock, with one door opening towards the sea in the east, the direction of yang. The kuttang is used for all but one of the village oriented kut, and is dedicated to the village god, Tongjigwan (통지관), the fifth son of a god couple. Certain prohibitions accompany participation in the kut, primarily a ban on the attendants from eating pig meat for three days prior to the ritual.

The kut is performed by the simbang who is assisted by three *somi* (소미), whose primary function is to play the musical instruments used to accompany the chants and dances. The somi are not’ apprentices *sinttal* (신딸), but rather simbang who practice on their own in other villages. The simbang represents all of the villagers to the village god and prays for their well-being in their stead. Village women attend the kut to help with the offerings and guarantee that the simbang represents them well to the deity. The kut [page 24] also provides a chance for the women of the village to gather and reaffirm their social and personal ties.

On the day of the kut, villagers leave for the kuttang long before the sun has made any indications of rising. At the kuttang, the audience, the simbang (called “Sonhi’s mother” since married Korean women with children are referred to by the child’s name) and the three somi lay out all of the offering foods on the *chedan* (제단 offering table). The offerings consist of tollaettok (돌래떡 round, unsalted rice cake), apples, mandarin oranges, oktom (억돔 dried fish), eggs, rice, both cooked and uncooked, and soju (소주 sweet potato alcohol). Many of the women present are dressed in hanbok (한복 traditional Korean dress) although, because of the cold, this is covered by heavy sweaters. Women who attend kut are referred to as *tan’gol* (단골). Sonhi’s mother is dressed in a bright pink hanbok, over which she wears a red-trimmed blue cape tied at chest level with a green belt. Over her shoulders, she wears a yellow belt, and in her hair, she wears a red band. Throughout the kut she wears the same clothes, only occasionally removing the blue outer cape.

The kut begins with no advanced warning while the women are still talking among themselves. Besides Sonhi’s mother and the three somi, thirty-seven women are present, most of whom are chamsu. The kut begins with Sonhi’s mother performing *ch’ogamjae* (초감제), bowing to the chaedan and the entrance of the kuttang. These are initial supplications to T’ongjigwan and *munjon* (문전). Sonhi’s mother asks all of the tan’gol to bow to the chaedan, as a *saebae* (세배) to the T’ongjigwan. Bowing in order of age reinforces the importance of seniority and its accordant position of respect in village society, establishing the social order at the very beginning of the kut. The saebae proceeds in sets of threes. Although the saebae originally consisted of only two bows, the influence of Buddhism has led to a change, all of the tan’gol bowing thrice. The only interruption is a rooster which gets loose in the room, but is quickly recaptured. As soon as the saebae are over, Sonhi’s mother starts a slow chant accompanied by occasional bell ringing, her voice rising and fall-ing hypnotically. The chant includes the date, time, and location of the kut. She also enumerates the tan’gol present, the number of tan’gol in each hamlet, and the elders of the village who are represented. As such, Sonhi’s mother catalogues the social organization of the village, primarily along geographic lines. The village catalogue lasts nearly thirty minutes.

The second section of kut is performed by one of the three somi. She is dressed in normal attire. In her left hand she holds a bowl of soju and in her right hand two swatches of paper. Accompanied by loud, frantic music, she [page 25] dips the paper in the soju and waves it over the tan’gol and out the door. This purifies the area of *pujong* (부정 impurity) before the village god is called to the kuttang. As in the section before, all of the tan’gol are catalogued and broken down by class—*hatan’gol* (하단골), *chungtan’gol* (중단골) and *sangtan’gol* (상단골),a second definition of the village organization. The classification of tan’gol follows the system used to classify the chamsu according to their abilities. Thus, this classification of tan’gol follows economic lines and stresses the importance of the chamsu in village economic life, as well as their close connection to min’gan sinang.

Whenever a ritual is held and goods put out at the kuttang, greedy, hungry spirits are always the first to arrive, blocking the arrival of the desired god. Before they will leave, they must be placated. These greedy spirits do not like to be photographed. Therefore, the somi feeds the hungry spirits who have come to the kuttang by throwing rice at the chaedan and out the door. Once these spirits are fed, they leave. The rest of the ritual segment focusses on purifying the kuttang. The somi does this by spraying soju through her teeth on everyone and everything present, to the accompaniment of deafening music

The next section is performed once again by Sonhi’s mother. In an accompanied chant, she asks T’ongjigwan if the “door” is being opened. Sonhi’s mother exits the kuttang and returns twice to the accompaniment of frantic music, jumping, whirling and dancing. At the end of the section, Sonhi’s mother uses the sink’al (신칼 god knives) and *chonmun* (전문 brass divination coins) to determine whether or not the door is open. The divination consists of throwing the sink’al and chonmun onto the floor and, by looking at the direction of the knives, cutting edges and the number of right side up coins, Sonhi’s mother receives a response from the god. All of the divinations during the kut rely on change of this nature, although Sonhi’s mother can produce the desired result almost at will. The repeated divinations heighten the tension of the kut and the enjoyment of the tan’gol. During this section, many of the tan’gol beseech the god for protection.

The next section begins with no real break between segments. This segment can be considered the climax of the kut because at this point the village deity T’ongjigwan arrives at the kuttang. Sonhi’s mother ties a red band on her right arm and a white band on her left. The tan’gol all rise to their feet and bow repeatedly, while one of the somi sprays soju around the kuttang. As the music becomes deafening, Sonhi’s mother runs in from the outsiae, wide-eyed and possessed by Tongjigwan. She throws the sink’al to see if the god has stuck to her; he has. When Sonhi’s mother is satisfied that the god is safely [page 26] inside the kuttang, she burns white rice paper, money in the spirit world, as a token of thanks and a supplication for a good blessing from the god.

The music slows and the atmosphere calms a bit. Sonhi’s mother prays for the good fortune of all the tan’gol. She throws grains of rice into the air, catches them and, if the number caught is even, she hands them to a tan’gol to eat. The uncooked rice grains which are eaten are an expression of expectation of increased fertility, bountiful harvest and rebirth of the village into the new yean A handful of rice grain is eaten by each tan’gol for every grouping that makes up the village. These groupings include the young men’s club, the Saemaul group, who need all the help they can get these days, people who drive cars and the like. Each one of these groupings is represented by a specific tan’gol. Groupings such as the police and soldiers who are not represented by any specific tan’gol at the kuttang have their rice eaten by a tan’gol who lives in vicinity of their installations. Representation before the village god thus takes place by proxy. The village is identified before the deity as a set of interdependent groupings. This breakdown does not fracture village identity, but rather reinforces it, as the entire village social structure is identified and presented as part of the greater whole.

After the blessings have been received, the god has to be persuaded to leave, something he seems reluctant to do. A collection basket is passed and all of the tan’gol contribute one to two thousand won. The money, the sink’al and chonmun are thrown to the floor to see if the offering has been accepted. It has not- The music increases in tempo and, at the urging of somi, more money is offered to the greedy god. This time he leaves.

In the final section of the kut, a live rooster is sacrificed to the *choso* (조소), who would otherwise claim the life of a villager as a sacrifice. The sacrifice of a live animal acts as a deterrent to the death of a villager. Death in the village involves a period of social disruption and a reshuffling of obligations. A death at this time in the village ritual life would be particularly bad as it could cause delay or cancellation of the p’oje, also necessary to guarantee the prosperity of the village in the coming yeaf. The kut ends as soon as the rooster has been sacrificed.

Most of the tan’gol remain at the kuttang after the kut is over. Some sit outside, eating the offering foods, which tastes remarkably bland. One informant explained that the spirits had eaten all of the taste out of the food. Others remain inside, receiving personal prophecies from the somi and Sonhi’s mother for the coming year. The focus of the ritual activity moves from the village as a collective whole to the small units within that whole, namely families or individuals. Nevertheless, village unity is stressed, as the [page 27] divinations take place in the public space of the kuttang as opposed to the private domestic space of the home.

The kut follows a pattern of separation, assertion of village identity and organization, supplication to the village god and reintegration. The separation is both ritual and physical. On the ritual level, the tan’gol are expected to avoid pujong, while on the physical level, the tan’gol all remove themselves to the kuttang. The village organization is given three times during the ritual — first along geographic lines, then along economic lines and finally along subgroup lines. The appeals to the village deity center on fears of possible calamity which would disrupt village unity and desires for collective village prosperity. Once the god has been fed and the village presented as a whole, the tan’gol begin to function as individuals again, through personal divinations. After the tan’gol have reestablished their individuality, they can return to the village and resume their daily life, safe in the knowledge that the village has been presented as a unified entity to the guardian deity.

Even before the kut has finished, preparations for the village p’oje begin. The p’oje of Sunshine village has a history even longer than the history of the village itself. The ritual finds its roots in one that was held in a nearby village starting in 1894. At that time, Sunshine village did not function as an independent social unit, nor was it officially recognized by the government as such. The present ritual took its form in 1933 when Sunshine village had grown large enough not only to the officially recognized as an individual village, but also had developed its own infrastructure to the degree necessary financially and socially to support its own ritual. Performance of the ritual requires substantial monetary support and a relatively large pool of male family heads along with an organizational structure to select the ritual officiants. Now, for the past fifty-one years, the men of Sunshine village have held the p’oje in the same ritual spot, offered the same ritual foods and chanted the same prayers for the prosperity of the village in both agriculture and fishing. The history of the p’oje is marked by continuity, and the ritual celebrants take great pains to maintain this continuity. Understandably, they are proud of the village ritual and their ability to preserve its form as much as its function.

The p’oje should not be confused with the domestic ancestor rituals which make up part of the private ritual landscape. Although the domestic rituals *kije* (기제), *kijesa* (기제사) and *ch’arye* (차례) play an important role in the male-dominated ancestor worship in the village and ch’arye are offered at nearly all the houses during the lunar New Year period these rituals are concerned with the agnatic kin of the individual households and are not [page 28] offered by the village as a collective whole. The p’oje, like village kut, is oriented towards the being of the entire village. This particular p’oje is offered to the male village Confucian god, *kuksinjiryong* (국신지령), and to *chonsin* (전신 god of heaven).

The choice of ritual officiants takes place at a meeting twenty-five to thirty days before the date of the p’oje. At this meeting, the date of the p’oje is also set. The method of selecting the day of the ritual is complex and left in the hands of a village elder. He relies on the book *Yonyokkam* (연역감), which relates the five elements of the universe, the five directions and twelve zodiacal signs in such a manner that a good day can be chosen for the village. The day must fall during the first lunar month. One informant said, “To explain the manner of choosing the day is to explain all of oriental philosophy,” and thus a clear explanation of the day selection was not possible. As a matter of contingency, two days are chosen as possible days for the ritual. This particular time, the best day was one of *chong* (정) and fell on lunar February 22, 1988). The second day was one of *hae* (해) eight days later. Because there were no difficulties with encroachment of impurity in the ritual area or among the ritual participants, the first choice day was able to be used, a propitious sign for the village.

At the meeting, the ritual officiants are chosen by consensus rather than election. Certain criteria apply to selection and not all village males are eligible to be selected. Selection is not made on basis of lineage nor is there any emphasis on the importance of the eldest son position. A single representative is not chosen from each lineage, but rather officiants are chosen to represent each lineage; thus several Kims could be chosen although the village has only one Kim lineage. However, all of the officiants must be married, imposing an implicit age restriction. Informants agreed that the average age of marriage in the village was twenty-seven. The candidates can not be from households with a death in the immediate family within the past three years. nor can there be an impending death in the immediate family. This latter rule seemed to have been violated as the mother of one of the officiants was close to death at the time of the ritual, heightening the tension surrounding the successful completion of the ritual. If the woman had died, the p’oje would have been postponed and, quite possibly, cancelled. Cancellation of the p’oje would leave the village open to attack by hostile gods and in bad favor with the village god. The mother of a ritual official being on her death bed was in direct violation of the traditional prohibitions. Thirteen officiants were chosen in all and ranged in age from thirty to sixty-four, with an average age of forty-eight. All of them considered their occupation to be farming. [page 29]

Each of the chegwan (officiant) has a specific title and a role to play during the ritual. The positions for the officiants are divided as follows: *ch’ohon’gwan* (초헌관 first offerer), *ahon’gwan* (아헌관 second offerer), *chonghon’gwan* (정헌관 last offerer), *chonsagwan* (전사관 preparer of ritual food), *chimnye* (집례 progress of rite), *taech’uk* (대축 large celebrant), *ch’anja* (찬자 respondent), *alja* (알자 usher), *ponghyang* (벙향 incense offerer), *pongno* (벙로 incense carrier), *pongjak* (벙작 food offerer), *chonjak* (전작 cup offerer) and *sajun* (사준 pourer). Among the chosen officiants, there is always at least one person, and usually five or six people, who has performed the ritual before. At this particular ritual, the most experienced participant had performed the rite ten times and was chosen as the *chimnye*. Besides his ritual functions, he is also charged with the task of instructing first time participants in their ritual duties. This position is usually given to the most experienced person among the chegwan although it is occasionally given to a person with no prior experience, which was the case in 1987. The second most experienced participant was chosen as the *taech’uk*, who was also in charge of the logistics of the ritual, including the finances. He had performed the rite six times. Several other officiants had participated once or twice before. Because of the large pool of men in the village and the constantly changing eligibilities among them, it is rare for an officiant to take part in the ritual several years running. Although this hinders the ability of the participants to maintain absolute continuity, variation is minimized through following the written rules used from one year to the next.

Three days before the p’oje is to take place, all of the officiants move to a ritually clean house, the *p’ojejip* (포제집 The house is chosen at the village meeting and the house owner must also fit the criteria used to select the officiants, especially the lack of death or impending death within the household. Since it must house the officiants and various guests (including a folk- lorist) during the three-day period, the house must fit a certain size criterion. Interestingly, the p’ojejip is never one of the officiant’s houses. The three-day period is set aside to guarantee the purity of the officiants and prevent them from coming in contact with impurity of pujong. Impurities include dead people or animals, blood, dog or horse meat, and any meat slaughtered by a *sangnom* (상놈 impure person). Menstruating women are included m the category of impure elements, and in general women are not allowed into the area of the p’ojejip. The only exceptions to this are the women who prepare the meals in the adjoining kitchen, all clean by these standards. None of them, however, is allowed into the house and serving food was relegated to the two youngest officiants, the chonjak and the sajun. To guarantee the purity of the [page 30] house, admonitory left-twisted ropes are strung across the road passing by the house and the driveway to the house. Attached to these ropes are small pieces of white paper inscribed with admonitions warning unclean people to stay away.

In the village, quite a few men qualified to attend the p’ojejip and so they did. The first day proceeded in a rather hectic manner. The officiants arrived in the morning and registered with the taech’uk who, along with the alja and the ch’ohon’gwan sat in an ondol room off to the right side of the house entrance. Each official brought money from the families he represented, generally either thirty or fifty thousand won, and a bottle of soju. Each of the officiants wore hanbok while in the p’ojejip. There was an implicit prohibition against non-officiants wearing the same. During the day, various village men came to the house and, after bowing to the three eldest officiants, offered an envelope of money and a bottle of soju, implicitly to guarantee their representation to the village god. While the official cost of the p’oje is between five hundred and five hundred and fifty thousand won, this amount only covers the purchase of the *chemul* (제물 ritual goods). Much greater expenses are incurred in supporting the officiants in the way of food, cigarettes and ritual clothing, not to mention the small sums given to the house owner and the women who prepare the food.

Most of the men who come to the p’ojejip do not leave immediately after paying their respects, but rather remain a while for conversation and “play.” Play consists primarily of gambling. The first day, the games of choice are *changgi* (장기 Chinese chess) and *yutnori* (윷놀이). The former is quite sedate and played only for small change if any betting is done at all. On the other hand, the yutnori is quite lively and forms the focal point of the house, the playing mat occupying the entire central marubang. Two players take turns tossing their wooden playing sticks and a neutral observer moves their counters around the playing board. Not only are the two players betting against each other, but the spectators as well place bets on the outcome. I managed to win twenty thousand won. The result is a very loud, boisterous and exciting game, made more exciting, or at least important, by the sizable bets riding on the outcome. The game continues through the night, with people occasionally wandering into a heated room to sleep. It ends about the time breakfast is served, and most non-officiants leave at this time.

The morning of the second day is dedicated to an explanation of the ritual positions and how the ritual will proceed. The explanation is given by the most experienced among the officiants. However, officiants who had participated previously interjected comments and discussions arose over [page 31] certain ambiguities in the ritual procedures. The explanation lasted only forty minutes and was not accorded a great deal of attention or significance. Soon thereafter, village men came to the house once again to talk and play. In the early afternoon, a card game, hwat’u (화투), began in a room off to the left of the house entrance. The betting stakes were quite high, averaging fifty thousand won a hand, with several million won making up the total pool. The monies represent a substantial portion of a farmer’s annual income. One informant mentioned that wives often hide the household funds before the p’oje to prevent large gambling losses. Because of the general fatigue and a lack of money, guests leave the house near eleven at night.

The third day at the house is markedly different from the previous two days. Whereas the first two days centered on greetings, conversations and games with ritual preparations taking a back seat, ritual preparations are the focus of this day and no visitors come from the village. Early in the morning, the finances of the p’oje are put in order and debts incurred to the local store are paid. Focus then turns to the preparation of the ritual tools and offerings. Two lanterns are made by vertically slitting bamboo poles, wrapping them with paper and placing candles in the center. Two bamboo poles are also cut which will be used to mark the gate at the ritual area. Amid great excitement and joviality, the chegwan catch and slaughter a female pig which has stayed within the confines of the p’ojejip yard and is therefore ritually clean. While the pig slaughter seems to violate the prohibition on seeing blood or dead animals, an informant explained that since the animal was ritually clean, as was the man who slaughtered it, the prohibition had not been violated. The pig is the main offering of the p’oje and is referred to as the *hwasaeng* (화생 sacrifice). Twenty squid are brought and one of the officiants spends the morning cleaning them. The *yukon* (유건 ritual hats) for the ritual are also made; an informant explained that these hats were originally made of horse hair but now are made from nylon, a typical example of the encroachment of modern life on the ritual landscape. The officiants try on the *ch’ongdoui* (청도의 ritual robe) and hem the ones that are too long, an interesting assumption of a female role by males, precipitated by the prohibition on women entering the house. The robes are ankle length and tie at the chest with both a belt and pendants. Gaiters of the same material cover the shins. When the officiants are fully dressed, they run through the list of ritual offerings which are then packed into baskets. Only the large pig offering is not brought into the house. These preparations mark the last activities carried out at the p’ojejip. The offerings are loaded onto a truck, the sacred ropes over the road and gate are taken down and the officiants leave the house. At this point, they [page 32] can not return to the house until after the ritual since it may have become contaminated after their departure. Women of the village abstain from going outside at this time of day for fear of meeting the p’oje officiants, and possibly ruining the three days spent in the p’ojejip.

The p’ojejip has a far more important function than simply a place to stay for purity reasons while waiting for the ritual to take place. It serves as a means for separating the officiants from normal village life, underscoring the importance of the ritual and marking the transitional phase in the village life. Village men come to assure their representation before the village deity and to express their solidarity with the officiants in the face of possible collective misfortune. Village male cohesion is reinforced by the game playing and gambling. Although the gambling could have deteriorated into arguments, it did not. Instead a feeling of comraderie prevailed, the arguments which did occur being jocular in nature, avoiding a threat to the harmony of the p’ojejip. The society of the p’ojejip acted as a microcosm of village organization, despite certain incongruities. A definite separation was made between the elder, high officiants and the younger, low officiants both by sleeping arrangements and activity. The elder officiants did not play games with as much frequency or enthusiasm as did the younger ones. Rather, they sat in a heated room discussing the intricacies of the ritual and its finances. The higher status village men came to this room to pay respects. These men often left without gambling. The younger, lower officiants dominated the rest of the house, particularly the maru where they took their meals and played yutnori. The traditional female roles of serving food and cleaning the house were carried out by the two youngest men. While the normal organization of deference to elders was maintained, the youngest officiants were forced into accepting female positions, underscoring the element of separation from normal community life and the social confusion of the new year period.

After leaving the p’ojejip, the officiants moved to the ritual area situated outside the village on a rise overlooking the sea to the south and the village to the north. The area is marked off by a chest-high semi-circular stone wall open to the south. Near the mouth of the semi-circle, the chegwan erect two long bamboo poles just inside two pine saplings, forming the gate of the ritual area. On either side of the offering table, they place the two lanterns made earlier in the day. Other bamboo poles, laid flat on the ground, mark off the officiant’s ritual positions. The ritual area is used only twice a year, once for the p’oje ritual and once in July for its complement, the *pyolje* (별제). The ritual area is considered to be clean. Near the ritual area is a small shelter and kitchen for the preparation of the offerings. A tent is erected over the walls of [page 33] the shelter where the officiants wait until the designated time of the ritual.

The chegwan hold a practice session to make sure all of the participants are familiar with their positions. After this, they return to the tent and prepare the ritual foods. The most important of these foods is the *okokpap* (오곡밥 five grain food). Its preparation is carried out with utmost care, and since it was prepared well, it was interpreted as a propitious sign for the village. Men’s preparation of food, normally a woman’s job, underscores the social confusion associated with this liminal period. Half an hour before the ritual begins, the offerings are arranged on the table according to strict guidelines, utmost attention placed on the order of foods on the table. No explanation could be found for the order of the food placement other than, “This is the way it has to be done.”

The ritual itself proceeds quickly and seems anticlimactic compared to the built-up tension. The officiants enter the ritual area according to position, wash in a small bowl and bow. The chimnye is charge of chanting the instructions. The *samhon’gwan* (삼헌관 three main offerers), offer in order at the chedan. After the initial offerings and saebae, the chbhon’gwan moves to the *umbogwi* (음복위) for drink, and drinks a cup of soju. This signifies that the village has received the good luck from the god. The taech’uk then chants a prayer to the god. Afterwards, along with the ch’onon’gwan, he removes the god tablet, burns it and buries it. This marks the end of the ritual The samnon’gwan leave the area without bowing, while the officiants bow before they leave. The ritual is over twenty minutes after it began.

The ritual offerings are removed from the table and brought to the tent. The pig is cut up, parts roasted and parts boiled, while the rest of the food is eaten with great relish. The feast ends shortly after dawn, when the ofnciants clean up the site and return to the village.

The p’oje is marked by separations and inversions of traditional duties. The time surrounding the ritual is given equal importance to the ritual itself. The p’ojejip allows the village men to reaffirm their ties and bolster village solidarity. The p’oje allows the village to move into the new year as a single cohesive unit. The men represent only one part of the economic make-up of the village, engaging primarily in farming. The excessive gambling may be an expression of increased economic expectations for the new year as normal economic rules are suspended during this liminal period, First, the officiants are separated from their normal socio-economic lives when they are moved to the p’ojejip. Village life for them stops and they are deprived of their normal activities. The second separation comes when they move to the ritual location. The offering is made outside the village, emphasizing the separation of daily [page 34] and sacred lives. The move away from the village in the evening and the subsequent return in the morning clarifies the transitional element in the ritual life of the village. Despite voiced desires to keep the ritual as true to form as possible, innovations such as a battery-powered microphone used during the ritual added a bizarre element of Western culture to the otherwise solemn ritual The reintegration into society of the officiants is much easier than their separation and passes essentially unnoticed. Once the god has been celebrated, the danger of the period has been removed, and the village can move self-confidently into the new year.

The village kut and the village p’oje are based in separate traditions and function independently of each other for distinct village groups divided, in this case, along gender lines. However, when the ritual landscape of the village is viewed as whole, neither ritual can be deemed more important than the other, nor could the village move into the new year successfully without the completion of both rituals. On a religious level, both function with the same goals in mind, namely prosperity of the village in the coming yean Both make appeals to their respective gods and ask them to give benevolent aid to the village. On the social level, both rituals provide the participants a chance to reaffirm the social structure and friendship ties, presenting the village as a unified front against the possible ill will of the god(s) or misfortune.

On first inspection, the cheil kut and the p’oje exhibit few if any similarities in their performance. The kut makes use of one central performer, the simbang, who serves the village tan’gol in this capacity throughout the year. She is assisted by three somi who mainly play musical instruments. The tar’gol who attend constitute a partially engaged audience, present at the kut primarily to insure proper representation of the village to the protecting deity. In contrast to this, the pbje comprises thirteen specially selected officiants who have no ritually significant positions in the village during the year. At the p’oje, there is no audience. Instead, the “audience” visits the officiants at the P’ojejip, offering money and soju to insure proper representation to the village god. While the cheil kut is thoroughly dependent on oral transmission with the simbang acting as both the repository and the conveyer of the tradition, the p’oje makes exclusive use of a written text. An interesting question is how much variation takes place from year to year in the rituals. While the p’oje has a fixed text, it has variant performers. The kut has a constant performer but lacks a constant text; rather, it has a constant framework.

Um and yang symbolism abounds in both rituals, reflecting the prominence of this essentially Taoist concept in both belief systems. The cheil kut, dominated by women, can be taken as the village um ritual, while the p’oje, [page 35] dominated by men, can be taken as the village yang ritual. Interestingly, the kut makes use primarily of yang symbolism. The kut is held as the sun is rising, and all of the supplications to the male god are offered in the east. Finally, the main sacrifice is male — a rooster. Conversely the pbje is replete with um symbolism. It is held at midnight during the first new moon of the new yean The main sacrifice is female — a sow. Finally, during preparation of the ritual, the male participants assume traditional female domestic roles such as cleaning, food preparation and sewing. The um segment of the community performs a ritual filled with yang to establish a harmony between these oppositions. The yang segment performs a similar ritual replete with um symbolism. In this manner, the two distinct social groups achieve harmony with the opposing group, the result being the establishment of village-wide harmony for the new year.

Though the kut and the p’oje could be effectively studied independently of one another, such a study would necessarily neglect the larger context of the village itself, focussing on one gender group or belief system, thereby ignoring the other equally important interdependent segment of village social structure. The lack of female ritual deference could be due in part to the major contribution the women play in the village economic life. While the two belief systems represented by the kut and the p’oje generally coexist separately in village life, at certain times such as the lunar new year the two function synchronically for similar purposes. When such instances occur, it is necessary to study both sides of the ritual coin.

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