

CULTURE COURSE

Korean Festivals and Traditional Life

Festivals, family rites and the claims made about Korean tradition, read from open sources

11 Chapters | Philip Osztromok | Generated with Claude

KOREAN FESTIVALS AND TRADITIONAL LIFE

Contents

Chapter 1	Why Festivals?	2
Chapter 2	The Calendar	8
Chapter 3	Seollal	15
Chapter 4	Chuseok	22
Chapter 5	The Seasonal Days	28
Chapter 6	Rites and Faiths	35
Chapter 7	Life-Cycle Ceremonies	43
Chapter 8	The Festival Boom	50
Chapter 9	Two Festivals Up Close	56
Chapter 10	Dress, Food and Home	62
Chapter 11	Tradition and Its Claims	68

Korean Festivals and Traditional Life

Course 1 · Chapter 1 · Why Korean Festivals? Scope & Sources

Korea has a yearly calendar of holidays, family rites and local festivals, and people often call them "ancient traditions". Some are old, some are recent, and some are old customs given a new form. This chapter sets out what the words mean, what the course covers and leaves out, how to tell what is documented from what is marketing, and how to follow up what you read.

> **How this chapter was checked**
>
> The facts here come from Wikipedia's articles on Public holidays in South Korea, the Korean calendar, Festivals in South Korea, Invented tradition and Culture of South Korea, as I read them. I read the opening sections only, and no books, government sources or festival websites. Two articles I tried to read were missing: the "Traditional festivals of Korea" article, which the festivals article points to, returned nothing, and the holiday article's own list of holidays did not come through as readable text. I therefore describe individual holidays later in the course, against sources I can read, and do not list them here.

Three Kinds of Day

The public holidays article begins by saying each holiday belongs to "one or more of three categories", each with "a different legal basis".

Category	What the article says
National day (국경일)	"Days that celebrate events considered joyous to Korea." The first, Independence Declaration Day (1 March), was stipulated in 1946. After the government was established in 1948, four major national celebration days (Independence Declaration Day, Constitution Day, Liberation Day, National Foundation Day) were provided for by a 1949 law. Hangul Day became the fifth in 2005.
National flag raising day (국기게양일)	All the national celebration days, plus Memorial Day (half staff) and Armed Forces Day, are provided for by Article 8 of the National Flag Law. On these days, raising the *taegukgi* at every house is promoted.

Category	What the article says
Public holiday (공휴일)	Days on which "the general working population gets a day off, and employers are legally required to pay their employees." The legal basis is the "Regulations on Holidays of Public Agencies", which "originally applied only to government and public offices, but most individual business offices also follow it."

> **A holiday is not the same as a tradition**
>
> The three categories are legal ones. A day can be a custom without being a public holiday, and a public holiday can be a modern commemoration with no old custom attached. The words "festival", "holiday" and "tradition" are used loosely in everyday talk. This course keeps them apart, and Chapter 2 looks at how the official list has changed.

Two Calendars at Once

The Korean calendar article says Koreans "now mostly use the Gregorian calendar", adopted in 1896 by Gojong, but that "traditional holidays and age-reckoning for older generations are still based on the traditional lunisolar calendar". The festivals article agrees: "Koreans mostly use the Gregorian calendar... However, traditional holidays are still based on the old calendar." The public holidays article has a section on the solar-calendar dates of Lunar New Year's Day, Buddha's Birthday and Chuseok, which implies those holidays move from year to year against the Gregorian calendar, though I could not read the table.

The Korean calendar article also describes a long history of calendars adopted from China and modified in Korea. Examples include the Xuanming calendar used in the early Goryeo period until 1281, the Shòushí calendar adopted that year, the first Korea-specific system (Ch'ilchŏngsan) created during King Sejong's reign, and the Qing-made Shixian calendar, officially adopted in 1653 but not implemented "in earnest" until 1725. Chapter 2 returns to this. The point for now is that two calendars run side by side, and a date in a source can belong to either one.

New Festivals

The festivals article opens with a claim worth keeping in mind through the whole course: "Many new festivals have originated in South Korea in response to the country's tourism initiatives." It adds that "contributing to this growth is a gradual change to a five-day work week and greater leisure." It points readers who want "older or historical observances" to a separate article on traditional festivals.

For example, the article's entry for the Seoul Lantern Festival says it "was held in 2009 for the first time", along the restored Cheonggyecheon stream, and gives visitor figures for its early years (the article's figures, which I do not verify). So a lantern festival can be recent even though lanterns in Buddhist festivals (Chapter 6) have a long history.

> **"Traditional" is a claim about age, not a label**
>
> A festival article gives a start year for some festivals and not for others. For a festival with no start year given, you cannot tell from the article whether it is old or new. Chapter 8 returns to the festival boom and Chapter 9 compares two festivals in detail.

The Idea of Invented Tradition

Because this course is about customs people call old, it helps to know a term from historical writing. The article on invented tradition defines such practices as "presented or perceived as traditional, arising from people starting in the distant past, but which are relatively recent and often consciously invented by historical actors". The concept was "highlighted in the 1983 book *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger."

- **Not an insult.** The article distinguishes "invention" from "starting or initiating a tradition that does not then claim to be old". A new festival that says it is new is not an invented tradition in this sense.
- **Three purposes.** Hobsbawm argues that invented traditions foster social cohesion, legitimise institutions and authority structures, and solidify value systems and beliefs.
- **Korean examples.** The article lists, among the cases the concept has been applied to, "some Korean martial arts such as Taekwondo". I report this as the article's list, not as a finding, and the planned Taekwondo and Korean Martial Arts course will look at it more closely.
- **A caution.** The article also says the sharp distinction between "tradition" and "modernity" is "often itself invented", and that "the concept of authenticity is also often questionable".

The term is therefore a tool for asking questions, not a way of ranking customs as genuine or fake.

What This Course Covers

- **The yearly calendar and the main holidays.** Chapters 2 to 5: the calendars, Seollal, Chuseok and the seasonal days.
- **Rites, faiths and life stages.** Chapters 6 and 7: ancestor rites, Buddhist and other ritual, and ceremonies such as weddings and funerals.
- **The modern festival scene.** Chapters 8 and 9: how local festivals grew, with a side-by-side look at two, Andong Mask Dance Festival and Boryeong Mud Festival.
- **Everyday heritage.** Chapter 10: dress, food and home. Chapter 11 is a capstone with a checklist.
- **South Korea.** The focus is South Korea. For custom shared across the peninsula before 1945 and 1948, I describe it as shared. North Korean practice gets at most a short, factual note from openly available sources.

What It Leaves Out

- **Food, literature, K-pop and drama.** These have their own courses. They come in only where a festival depends on them.
- **Ranking and judging.** Customs are described, not ranked, and no group is called more "authentic" than another. Religion is covered as practice and history, not as belief to be judged.
- **Dates for a particular year.** Dates that move with the lunar calendar are given as rules, not as this year's date, unless a source gives a specific year.
- **Travel advice.** The course does not recommend places to stay or events to book. Check the organisers for current dates and details.

Documented Custom, Legend and Marketing

Three kinds of source mix together when people write about festivals, and each has its own weakness.

1. **Documented custom.** A law, a calendar entry, a first-held year and a record of who ran an event can be checked in a named source.
2. **Legend.** An origin story ("it began when...") may be told for centuries without a document. Treat "it is said that" as a prompt to look for a source.
3. **Marketing.** Tourism materials describe festivals to attract visitors, and "ancient", "authentic" and "the largest" are selling words. The festivals article's own remark about tourism initiatives is a reason to read them with care.

Where to Read and Visit

Dates and details of festivals change, so I give no list of places. For reading, Wikipedia is a starting point (this course relies on it for facts and flags where it hedges), and each article has references to follow up. For a visit, look up the organisers' own website for current dates, and check them before you travel. You do not need to attend anything in advance; the chapters stand on their own.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Name the three categories of day in the public holidays article, giving what each means. Then explain why "public holiday" and "tradition" are not the same thing, using one fact from the article.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Explain how two calendars are used in Korea today, which holidays follow the older one, and when the Gregorian calendar was adopted. Then give the festivals article's claim about new festivals and the reasons it gives.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Define "invented tradition" in your own words and say what it does not mean. Then give the course's three kinds of source, one weakness of each, and the scope of the course in three sentences, including how it treats North Korea.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Three categories:** national day (국경일), flag raising day (국기게양일), public holiday (공휴일), each with its own legal basis
- **National celebration days:** four from the 1949 law (Independence Declaration Day, Constitution Day, Liberation Day, National Foundation Day); Hangul Day added in 2005
- **Calendars:** Gregorian adopted in 1896; traditional holidays still follow the lunisolar calendar
- **New festivals:** many arose from tourism initiatives and a shorter working week (festivals article)
- **Invented tradition:** presented as old but relatively recent; a tool for questions, not a verdict (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983)
- **Scope:** South Korea, plus shared pre-division custom; North Korea in at most a short factual note
- **Sources:** documented custom, legend, marketing
- **Check:** the full holiday list and the "Traditional festivals of Korea" article, which I could not read

Next chapter: The Calendar, which looks at the lunar and solar calendars side by side, public holidays versus customary days, and how the official holiday list has changed.

Korean Festivals and Traditional Life

Course 1 · Chapter 2 · The Calendar

Chapter 1 said that two calendars run side by side in Korea. This chapter looks at how, using the list of public holidays: which fall on a fixed date, which move, and which are customs without a day off. It also traces what the sources say about how the list has changed.

> **How this chapter was checked**
>
> The facts here come from Wikipedia's articles on the Korean calendar and on Public holidays in South Korea, as I read them. In Chapter 1 the holiday list did not come through as readable text. I have since read the article's underlying page source and can now use its table, including the table of solar dates. That article carries a notice, dated October 2017, that it needs more citations, so I treat its remarks as the article's claims. I read no statute, government page or almanac, and I give no date for any year that the article does not give.

Two Ways of Counting a Year

The Korean calendar article says various calendar systems were used in Korea, "many of them adopted from the Chinese calendar system, with modifications occasionally made to accommodate Korea's geographic location and seasonal patterns". Chapter 1 gave the main stages. The article adds some details that matter for festivals.

- **The lunisolar calendar.** The traditional calendar's features include a twelve-animal cycle (Earthly Branches) combined with ten Heavenly Stems into a sixty-year cycle, twenty-four solar terms (*jeolgi*, 절기) roughly fifteen days apart, and lunar months with leap months "added every two or three years". The leap months are why a lunar date drifts against the Gregorian one, and then jumps back.
- **Official status.** The article says that "although not being an official calendar", the traditional Korean calendar "is still maintained by the government" in South Korea, based on the Shixian calendar.
- **What it is still used for.** "The lunar calendar is used for the observation of traditional festivals, such as Seollal, Chuseok, and Buddha's Birthday. It is also used for *jesa* memorial

services for ancestors and the marking of birthdays by older Koreans." The article adds that many regional festivals also follow it.

- **Numbering the years.** The article says that from 1945 until 1961 South Korea used the Dangun calendar, counting years from the legendary founding of Gojoseon in 2333 BC (years 4278 to 4294), and that it has been only occasionally used since 1961.

> **A legend inside the calendar**
>
> The Dangun calendar counts from a date that comes from the *Samguk Yusa*, a medieval record. The public holidays article says that according to that text Dangun founded Gojoseon "on the 3rd day of 10th lunar month, 2333 BC". It adds that South Koreans now celebrate National Foundation Day on 3 October of the Gregorian calendar "for convenience sake". So a legendary date has been moved from the lunar calendar to a fixed Gregorian date, an example of how a holiday can look old while being set by modern choice. The article gives no source for the convenience reason.

The Public Holiday Table

The article's table gives each holiday's English and Korean name, date and three legal flags: whether it is a national celebration day, a flag-raising day, and a day off. Here it is, reorganised by how the date works.

Fixed Gregorian dates

Date	Holiday (Korean)	Flags (as the article gives them)
1 January	New Year's Day (신정, *Sinjeong*)	Day off only. The Korean name means "new calendar New Year's Day".
1 March	Independence Movement Day (3 · 1 절)	National celebration day, flag raising, day off. Commemorates the March 1st Movement of 1919.
1 May	Labor Day (노동절)	Day off. The article says it was called "Workers' Day" (근로자의 날) from 1963 to 2025, was renamed Labor Day in 2025, and "became a public holiday in 2026".

Date	Holiday (Korean)	Flags (as the article gives them)
5 May	Children's Day (어린이 날)	Day off. Started on 1 May 1922, moved to 5 May in 1946, and became a public holiday in 1975.
6 June	Memorial Day (현충일)	Day off; flag at half mast.
17 July	Constitution Day (제헌절)	National celebration day, flag raising, day off. Celebrates the 1948 constitution.
15 August	Liberation Day (광복절)	National celebration day, flag raising, day off. Celebrates liberation from Japan in 1945 and, on the same date in 1948, the founding of the government.
3 October	National Foundation Day (개천절)	National celebration day, flag raising, day off.
9 October	Hangul Day (한글날)	National celebration day, flag raising, day off. Commemorates the invention (1443) and proclamation (1446) of hangul.
25 December	Christmas (크리스마스 / 성탄절)	Day off only.

Dates that follow the lunar calendar

Holiday	Rule	Days off
Seollal (설날), Korean New Year, also *Gujeong* (구정)	1st day of the 1st lunar month. The article calls it "one of the most important of the traditional Korean holidays" and says it "is considered a more important holiday than the Gregorian New Year's Day".	3 days
Buddha's Birthday (부처님 오신 날)	8th day of the 4th lunar month. Formerly called *Seokgatansinil*; also *Sawol Chopail*.	1 day
Chuseok (추석), also *Han-gawi*	15th day of the 8th lunar month. "Korean traditional harvest and Mid-Autumn Festival", with Seollal "one of the most important Korean traditional holidays".	3 days

A date set by the election calendar

One more entry has a date that is neither fixed nor lunar: election days, for elections on the termination of terms of office. The article says the date is "not fixed, but always on a Wednesday", and limits the holiday to regular presidential, legislative and local elections, excluding early voting days, by-elections, referendums and unscheduled elections.

> **Two kinds of "important"**
>
> The article calls Seollal "more important" than the Gregorian New Year's Day and gives the first a three-day holiday and the second one day. That is a claim about cultural weight with a legal fact beside it. The claim comes from the article, which cites a tourism organisation page for it, and the legal fact is the article's table. Keep the two apart: the table shows how many days are given off, and not how people feel about the holiday.

How Far the Solar Dates Move

The article also gives a table of the Gregorian dates of Lunar New Year's Day, Buddha's Birthday and Chuseok for each year from 1994 to 2050. I read the table and picked the extremes. These are from the article's table, and I have not checked them against another source.

Holiday	Earliest in the table	Latest in the table
Lunar New Year's Day	22 January (2004, 2023, 2042)	19 February (1996, 2015, 2034)
Buddha's Birthday	30 April (2020, 2039)	28 May (2012, 2031, 2050)
Chuseok	8 September (2014, 2033)	6 October (2006, 2025)

So each lunar holiday wanders across about a month of the Gregorian calendar. Chuseok in 2025, for example, is listed as 6 October, and in 2014 as 8 September. Anyone planning around these days needs the current year's date, which this course does not give.

How the Official List Changed

The article does not give a full history of the list, but it records several changes with dates.

When	What the article says
1922 to 1975	Children's Day was declared on 1 May 1922 by a group of eight people including Bang Jeong-hwan, moved to 5 May in 1946, and became a public holiday in 1975.
1946	Independence Declaration Day (1 March) "was first stipulated".
1949	After the Republic's government was established in 1948, "The Law Concerning the National Celebration Days" provided four major days: Independence Declaration Day, Constitution Day, Liberation Day and National Foundation Day.
1963 to 2026	The 1 May holiday was "Workers' Day" from 1963 to 2025, was renamed "Labor Day" in 2025, and became a public holiday in 2026.
2005	Hangul Day became the fifth national celebration day.

What the article cannot tell us

The article does not say when each public holiday was first given as a day off, when a holiday was dropped, or how Seollal came to be restored as a major holiday after the years when the Gregorian New Year was favoured. The names themselves hint at such history, since *Sinjeong* (new calendar) and *Gujeong* (old calendar) both exist as names for the two new years, but the article does not explain it. I will not fill the gap from memory. A reader who needs the history of the list should look for the statute and its amendments.

Customs Without a Day Off

The table lists only days off. The Korean calendar article names other lunar observances: *jesa* memorial services for ancestors, the birthdays of older people, and regional festivals. Chapters 5 to 7 look at them. The pattern to remember is that the legal holiday list is a small part of the customary year, and that it is the part with a legal basis.

Reading a Date in a Source

1. **Which calendar?** A date for Seollal, Chuseok or Buddha's Birthday is lunar unless stated. A date for Liberation Day or Children's Day is Gregorian.

2. **Which year?** A lunar holiday has no fixed solar date, so a date means nothing without the year.
3. **Which legal status?** Check whether a day is a national celebration day, a flag-raising day or only a day off.
4. **Which source?** A tourism page, an encyclopedia and a statute can say different things about the same day.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Name the three holidays that follow the lunar calendar and give the lunar date and number of days off for each. Then explain what the article says about why the solar date of such a holiday changes from year to year, and pick one holiday to give the earliest and latest solar dates in the article's table.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Using National Foundation Day, explain how a holiday can have a legendary lunar origin but a fixed Gregorian date, and what the article says about why. Then name the four national celebration days of the 1949 law and the day added in 2005.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Describe two changes to the official list that the article dates, one for Children's Day or Labor Day, and one other. Then give two things the article does not tell us about the history of the list, and say how you would find out.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Lunar holidays:** Seollal (1st day of 1st lunar month, 3 days); Buddha's Birthday (8th day of 4th month); Chuseok (15th day of 8th month, 3 days)
- **Fixed days:** 1 Jan, 1 Mar, 1 May, 5 May, 6 Jun, 17 Jul, 15 Aug, 3 Oct, 9 Oct, 25 Dec; election days always on a Wednesday
- **National celebration days:** 1 Mar, 17 Jul, 15 Aug, 3 Oct (law of 1949); Hangul Day 9 Oct (2005)
- **Calendar features:** sixty-year cycle; 24 solar terms; leap months every two or three years
- **Lunar calendar used for:** Seollal, Chuseok, Buddha's Birthday, *jesa*, older people's birthdays, many regional festivals
- **Dangun calendar:** used 1945 to 1961, counting from 2333 BC
- **Changes dated by the article:** Children's Day (1922, 1946, 1975); Workers' Day to Labor Day (2025) and a public holiday (2026)
- **Check:** the full history of the list, and the article's "more citations needed" claims

Next chapter: Seollal, which looks at the Lunar New Year: ancestral rites, new-year bows, food, games, and how modern travel and family patterns have changed it.

Korean Festivals and Traditional Life

Course 1 · Chapter 3 · Seollal

Chapter 2 showed Seollal as a lunar holiday with three days off and a name, Gujeong, that stands against Sinjeong, the Gregorian New Year. This chapter looks at what the sources say about the holiday itself: where its name and records come from, how it was banned and restored, what people do, and how it is changing. It also fills a gap that Chapter 2 flagged, about how Seollal regained its place.

> **How this chapter was checked**
>
> The facts here come from Wikipedia's articles on Korean New Year (Seollal), Tteokguk, Yutnori and Jesa (ancestral rites), as I read them. For Yutnori I read only the opening sections. I read no books, government pages or travel statistics, and every figure is the article's claim. The "Sebae" page I tried was a disambiguation page, so the account of the bow comes from the Seollal article. The Seollal article uses some strongly worded phrases about the colonial period; I report its dates and acts and leave out its editorial wording.

The Name

The Seollal article says *seol* (설) in Middle Korean "means 'year of age' since it is also the date when Koreans grow a year older, though in South Korea this has changed as of 2023". It adds that the modern word for age, *sal*, comes from the same origin, and that *nal* (날) means "day". The article gives no more detail on the 2023 change, so I note only that it exists.

It also notes that "Seollal" can mean two things: *Eumnyeok Seollal* (lunar new year, also called *Gujeong*) or *Yangnyeok Seollal* (the Gregorian 1 January, also called *Sinjeong*), and that the lunisolar calendar has Chinese roots, as Chapter 1 described. The date, it says, "generally occurs in January or February on the second new moon after the winter solstice", with exceptions when a leap month falls earlier. That agrees with the January 22 to February 19 range in Chapter 2.

Early Records

Source or period	What the article says
Chinese records (*Records of the Three Kingdoms*, Book of Wei)	"The earliest attestations of the festivals and customs surrounding Seollal." It records worshipping events with singing and dancing in Buyeo in the 12th month of the calendar of that time.
Seventh-century Chinese works (*Book of Sui*, *Old Book of Tang*)	"The earliest records of Seollal celebrations", describing national rituals and festivals in Silla, including worship of sun and moon deities from the native folk religion that were later discontinued.
Samguk Yusa (13th century)	"The oldest surviving Korean records of Seollal." It mentions events in 488 AD under Bicheo of Silla, when the day was nicknamed *Daldo*.
Goryeosa	By the 13th century, the Korean new year "was one of the nine major national festivals of Goryeo".

Earliest record is not the earliest custom

The article's wording is careful: these are "earliest attestations" and "oldest surviving" records. They show what was written down and preserved. The Buyeo record falls in the 12th month, not the first, which suggests that the timing of a new year celebration could differ from today's. The article does not discuss this, so I flag it and draw no conclusion.

Ban and Restoration

This is the history Chapter 2 said the holiday article could not give. The Seollal article supplies it, with dates.

When	What the article says
1907	During the last part of the Korean Empire, celebrating Seollal was banned. The article says the last emperor, Sunjong, enacted the ban "under intense pressure by the Japanese".
From 1910	After annexation, "the Japanese reiterated the prohibition". The official new year was set to follow the Japanese one on 1 January of the Gregorian calendar, called *sinjeong* (new new year), and the old one became *gujeong* (old new year).

When	What the article says
1945 to 1950	After liberation and before the Korean War, a provisional government designated 1 to 3 January as a public new year holiday.
1980s	There was "widespread opinion" in South Korea that Seollal should be a national holiday again, for reasons the article gives as respecting cultural traditions and removing remnants of Japanese colonial rule and of the dictatorship period under Syngman Rhee and Park Chung Hee.
1985 to 1988	The government declared Seollal "a folk day".
1989	The Roh Tae-woo administration "accepted public opinion" and designated the original new year as both the official Korean New Year and a national holiday.

Two articles, one gap closed, one detail unchecked

Chapter 2 noted that the public holidays article does not explain how Seollal returned. The Seollal article does, with a clear sequence: ban, a replacement Gregorian holiday, a "folk day" stage from 1985 to 1988, and national holiday status in 1989. The article cites no source for the dates in what I read, so I treat them as the article's account. Its wording about the 1907 ban rests on one claim, that the emperor acted under pressure, which I report as the article's reading and not a finding of my own. A reader who needs the legal history should look for the decrees themselves.

What People Do

Travel and family

The article calls the festival "a typical family holiday". The three days, the day of, the day before and the day after, "is used by many to return to their hometowns to visit their parents and other relatives", where they perform an ancestral ritual called *charye*. It says that "in 2016, 36 million South Koreans reportedly would be traveling to visit their families" (the article's wording, with "reportedly" doing real work). Family members "often first visit the elders", and visiting parents-in-law is "considered respectful".

Ancestral rite

The article describes the morning rite: traditional foods are placed on a table as an offering to the ancestors, "a rite begins with deep bows from all family members", and people pray for the family's well-being. It says that on Seollal a family performs the rite "by serving tteokguk to their ancestors during a joint meal" (from the Tteokguk article). The article on *jesa* covers ancestral rites in general and says that jesa "are usually held on the anniversary of the ancestor's death", so *charye* on a holiday is a related but separate occasion. Chapter 6 returns to ancestral rites.

The New Year bow

The article describes *sebae* (세배) as "a ritual of filial piety". Dressed in traditional clothing, people bow deeply to elders and say "새해 복 많이 받으세요" ("Please receive a lot of good fortune for the New Year"). Elders "typically reward this gesture" with new year's money (*sebaetdon*), usually crisp paper money in silk bags, and with words of wisdom. "Historically, parents gave out rice cakes (ddeok) and fruit." The article says one of the best-known practices today is receiving money after a formal bow, "a tradition likely adopted from Confucian customs" (the article's hedge). It notes that many people now prefer modern clothing to *hanbok*.

Food

Dish	What the articles say
Tteokguk (떡국)	Sliced rice-cake soup, "the main dish eaten on New Year's Day in South Korea", usually in a beef broth with egg garnish. The long rope of rice cake is said to signify "an expansion of good fortune", the slices are "thought to resemble" old coins (*yeopjeon*), and the white colour represents "purity and cleanliness". Eating it "signifies adding another year to your life".
Jeon (전)	Savoury pancakes made with fillings such as beef, oysters, kimchi or green onion, "typically included in the Korean New Year's feast".
Japchae (잡채)	A noodle dish "often served on holidays like Seollal". The article says it originally had no noodles or meat and was invented by a servant of King Gwanghaegun, a claim I could not check.

"Origins" that are really first mentions

The Tteokguk article says "the origin of eating tteokguk on New Year's Day is unknown", and that the dish is mentioned in the 19th-century customs book *Dongguk Sesigi*, which also describes eating it "to get a year older". The historian Ch'oe Namsŏn, in 1946, speculated that the custom began in ancient times. The Seollal article says the dish's "origins can be traced back to the 19th century" because of that same book. That is a stronger claim than the Tteokguk article makes: a 19th-century mention shows the custom existed by then, and does not date its start. The two statements differ, and the cautious one is the better guide.

Games

The Seollal article lists *yutnori* (a board game played with specially designed sticks, "appropriate for all ages and genders"), kite flying and *jegichagi* (a kicking game) traditionally for men and boys, *neolttwigi* (seesaw jumping) and *gongginori* (a stone game) traditionally for women and girls, and top spinning for children. It adds that "a few adults play Go-Stop instead of traditional hwatu" (a card game).

The Yutnori article says the game's exact origin "remains uncertain" but that it roots in the Three Kingdoms period (57 BCE to 668 CE), that Goryeo-era documents show yut boards, and that the historian Chae Ho-shin suggested a descent from Gojoseon in 2333 BC. The article reports interpretations of its meaning (yin and yang, East Asian astronomy), and I treat them as interpretations. The 2333 BC date is a claim about legendary time, like the Dangun date in Chapter 2, and it needs a source before it is accepted.

Folk Belief

- **The zodiac.** The article says Koreans follow the twelve-animal zodiac, tells the story of Buddha inviting animals and naming the years in the order they arrived, and says "Koreans believe that specific zodiac animals bring specific resources and qualities". It gives the example that 2014, the year of the horse, "was considered a good year in the money and career aspect of life". These are beliefs reported, and I make no claim that they are true or widespread.
- **The "moon house".** The article describes burning a house of firewood and branches "symbolizes the warding off of bad/evil spirits for the new year", and adding wishes to it. It

places this within Seollal. I could not confirm which day it belongs to, and Chapter 5 checks the first full moon festival, so I flag it for that chapter.

Cost and Change

The article says that preparing for the holiday "is very costly": gifts, new clothes, food for visiting relatives, and travel. Because of demand, "food prices are inflated during the month of Seollal", and as a result "some people have chosen to forgo some traditions" and perform "a modest ancestral rite only with necessary foods". It says the government has taken measures such as increasing the supply of agricultural, fishery and livestock products, using rice reserves and pork imports, and supporting small and medium-sized companies' cash flow. These are claims in the article, with no figures or dates given beyond the 2016 travel number.

Reading Claims About Seollal

1. **"Earliest record" is not "origin".** Ask what the source actually shows.
2. **Read the verbs.** "Reportedly", "likely", "thought to" and "believed" mark claims.
3. **Check which new year.** *Seollal*, *Gujeong* and *Sinjeong* are different names with different histories.
4. **Separate custom from cost.** A tradition that is expensive to keep can be kept in a smaller form.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Explain what *seol* means and how it relates to age, and distinguish *Gujeong* from *Sinjeong*. Then give two early records of Seollal from the table and explain why "earliest attestation" is not the same as "earliest custom".

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Describe the ban and restoration of Seollal in five dated steps, from 1907 to 1989. Then explain how this fills the gap in Chapter 2, and why the dates should be checked against a legal source.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Describe the *sebae* bow, the three foods in the table, and two traditional games. Then explain how the Seollal and Tteokguk articles differ on the origin of tteokguk, and which wording is the more careful.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Name:** *seol* = "year of age"; *Gujeong* (old new year, lunar) and *Sinjeong* (new new year, 1 January)
- **Early records:** Book of Wei (Buyeo); *Book of Sui / Old Book of Tang* (Silla); *Samguk Yusa*; *Goryeosa* (one of nine major Goryeo festivals)
- **Ban and return:** banned 1907; colonial-era Gregorian new year; 1 to 3 January holiday 1945 to 1950; "folk day" 1985 to 1988; national holiday 1989
- **Rite and bow:** *charye* with deep bows; *sebae* to elders, with *sebaetdon*
- **Food:** *tteokguk*, *jeon*, *japchae*
- **Games:** *yutnori*, kites, *jegichagi*, *neolttwigi*, *gongginori*, tops
- **Reported:** 36 million travellers in 2016; rising prices; government supply measures
- **Check:** the legal dates, the 2023 age change, the "moon house" day, and the japchae and yutnori origin stories

Next chapter: Chuseok, the autumn harvest holiday: the rites, *songpyeon* and other foods, the travel rush, and what the sources say about its origins.

Korean Festivals and Traditional Life

Course 1 · Chapter 4 · Chuseok

Chuseok is the second of the two great lunar holidays in Chapter 2's table, falling on the 15th day of the 8th lunar month. This chapter looks at what the sources say about its names and origins, the rites at home and at the graves, its food, gifts and games, and the claims people make about its age. As with Seollal, several "origin" statements turn out to be beliefs, not records.

> **How this chapter was checked**
>
> The facts here come from Wikipedia's articles on Chuseok and Songpyeon, as I read them, with a cross-reference to Chapter 3's account of Seollal. For Chuseok I read most of the article, up to the section on Taekkyon, and not the later sections. I read no books, museum pages, travel statistics or price lists, and every figure is the article's claim. Where the article contradicts itself or another article, I say so.

Names and Date

The Chuseok article gives the holiday's names and its timing:

- **Chuseok** (추석), literally "autumn evening".
- **Hangawi** (한가위), from Old Korean, "the great middle [of autumn]".
- **Date.** "The 15th day of the 8th month of the lunisolar calendar, on the full moon." In South Korea, it "lasts for three days, including the days before and after the full moon". In North Korea, the article says it is "a single-day celebration on the full moon only". The three days agree with Chapter 2's table. I have no other source for the North Korean detail.

> **"Korean Thanksgiving" is a translation, not an equivalence**
>
> The article says Chuseok "is commonly translated as 'Korean Thanksgiving' in American English despite the holidays being vastly different in origin and celebration." A short English label helps an outsider find the holiday and also hides what is different about it. In this course I use "Chuseok" or "the autumn harvest holiday".

Where Did It Come From?

The article gives two accounts, and it frames both as belief.

Account	What the article says
Gabae (가배)	"According to popular belief, Chuseok originates from gabae." It began "during the reign of the third king of the kingdom of Silla", as "a month-long weaving contest between two teams". The team that had woven more cloth won and was treated to a feast by the losers. The article adds that it "is believed" weaving, archery and martial arts contests were part of the festivities.
Harvest-moon rites	"Many scholars also believe Chuseok may originate from ancient shamanistic celebrations of the harvest moon", with new harvests offered to local deities and ancestors, so that it "may have originated as a worship ritual".

Two stories, no document

Neither account is tied in the article to a named source. The first is "popular belief" and the second is what "many scholars believe" and "may" have happened, so both are hedged. They do not exclude each other: a contest and a harvest rite could belong to the same festival. The article adds that "in some areas, if there is no harvest, worship rituals are postponed, or in areas with no annual harvest, Chuseok is not celebrated." That sentence is a claim about practice, and the article gives no example. The Seollal chapter's warning applies: an origin story is a prompt to look for a source, not an answer.

At Home and at the Graves

The article names "two major traditions related to Chuseok":

- ***Charye* (차례).** Ancestor memorial services at home, "also known as Jesa" according to this article. Families gather, prepare food by "harvesting, preparation and presentation of special foods as offerings", and many "start the cooking process early in the morning". The article says the rite "embodies the traditional view of spiritual life beyond physical death", with the spirits of the afterlife also serving to protect their descendants. The offerings "vary across provinces", but "commonly feature freshly harvested rice, rice cakes (songpyeon) and fresh meat, fruit and vegetables".

- ***Seongmyo* (성묘).** A family visit to the ancestral graves, "usually accompanied by *beolcho* (벌초), tidying graves, removing weeds around them". People "trim plants, clean the area around the tomb, and offer food, drink, and crops to their ancestors".

The article also notes a custom of preparing "the family's ancestors their favorite meals as an offering". On the table, it says, "traditionally rice and soup are placed on the north and fruits and vegetables are placed on the south; meat dishes are served on the west and in the middle, and rice cake and some drinks ... are placed on the east. These details can vary across regions."

> **Charye and jesa: the article's equation**
>
> Chapter 3 noted that the Jesa article defines *jesa* as a memorial held "usually on the anniversary of the ancestor's death". The Chuseok article says *charye* is "also known as Jesa". Both words cover ancestral rites, but the Jesa article's anniversary rites and a holiday rite are different occasions, and the article's equation hides that. Chapter 6 looks at the terms properly.

Food

Food	What the articles say
Songpyeon (송편)	A rice cake with fillings such as sesame, beans, chestnut, jujube or honey, steamed over pine needles. *Song* means pine tree, and the needles give fragrance. Songpyeon "is traditionally eaten" at Chuseok and is often made at home. The Songpyeon article says "the earliest records of songpyeon date from the Goryeo period".
Hangwa (한과)	Sweet confections; the best known are *yakgwa* (honey cookie), *yugwa* (fried glutinous-rice cookie) and *dasik* (tea cake).
Rice liquor	Called *baekju* and nicknamed *sindoju* ("new rice liquor") because it is made of freshly harvested rice. The article also names *dongdongju* and fruits such as Asian pear and *hallabong*.
Others	*Japchae*, *bulgogi*, *jeon*, fish and fruits.

Why a half moon?

Both articles explain songpyeon's shape, and they give different stories:

- **The Chuseok article.** The rice skin resembles a full moon until it wraps the filling, and then a half moon. A legend says that during the reign of King Uija of Baekje, a phrase found on a turtle's back, "Baekje is full-moon and Silla is half-moon", predicted Baekje's fall and Silla's rise. Koreans have therefore believed a half-moon shape indicates "a bright future or victory". It adds that a single woman who makes a pretty songpyeon will find a good husband, and that a pregnant woman who does so will have a pretty daughter.
- **The Songpyeon article.** The "most common belief" is that "Korean ancestors thought that a round-shaped full moon could only wane while a half-moon would fill up", a sign of abundance. It then gives the King Uija anecdote as "one explanation".

The two articles therefore disagree on which story is the main one, and both are legends. Neither gives a document. The Songpyeon article's other claim, that offerings placed together of songpyeon, new fruit and taro stand for "the fruit of the heavens, the fruit of the earth, and the fruit of the underground", is a symbolic reading the article does not source.

Gifts and the Travel Rush

The article says "masses of people travel from large cities to their hometowns", and that "airline tickets to South Korea around the festival are usually sold out three months in advance and roads and hotels are overcrowded". It adds that many places, including banks, schools, post offices and shops, are closed. These are the article's statements, with no figures.

It also gives a history of gifts: from the 1960s, daily necessities such as sugar, soap and condiments; in the 1970s, cooking oil, toothpaste, instant coffee sets, cosmetics, televisions and rice cookers; in the 1980s, sets of fruit, meat and cosmetics; in the 1990s, gift vouchers; and in the 21st century, sets of desserts, canned meat, fruit, supplements and skincare. "Chuseok gift sets are big business in Korea and prices are typically inflated around the holiday." It lists a few extravagant examples with prices, which I do not repeat because the article gives no date and no source for them. The gift history is the article's own summary, and it is the sort of statement that a retail study could confirm or correct.

Games and Contests

The article lists a variety of games, which "vary by region". They include *sonori*, a performance in which villagers dress as a cow or turtle and go from house to house with a *nongak* band; *talchum* (mask dance); *yutnori* (see Chapter 3); archery; *ssireum* (Korean wrestling); and *juldarigi*

(tug of war). It also names *taekkyon*, a martial art practised in the Joseon period alongside ssireum at festivals.

- **Ssireum.** The article calls it "the most popular Korean sport played during Chuseok", says "scholars have found evidence for ssireum dating back to the Goguryeo dynasty", and then says it "is assumed to have 5,000 years of history". The second claim has no evidence given, and the article does not say who assumes it. I do not repeat it as a date.
- **The prize.** The article says the winner gets "a bull and 1 kg ... of rice", and the title of Cheonha, Baekdu or Halla Jangsa. It does not say where or when this applies.

Hanbok

The article says *hanbok* is worn on holidays and formal occasions "such as Chuseok, Lunar New Year, and weddings", and that its basic structure consists of the *jeogori* jacket, *baji* pants, *chima* skirt and *po* coat. It claims the design "remains unchanged to this day", which is an overstatement for a garment with varied colours and a long history. Chapter 10 returns to dress.

Reading Claims About Chuseok

1. **Which story?** "According to popular belief" and "many scholars believe" are different hedges for different claims.
2. **Which "oldest"?** A record of a food (Goryeo for songpyeon) is not a record of the holiday.
3. **Which translation?** "Korean Thanksgiving" is a label, not an equivalence.
4. **Which round number?** "5,000 years" and similar figures need a source.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Give the two names of Chuseok and what each means, its lunar date, and how many days it lasts in South Korea. Then explain why "Korean Thanksgiving" can mislead.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Describe the two accounts of Chuseok's origin in the article and say how the article hedges each. Then explain why they do not exclude each other, and what extra evidence would be needed to choose between them.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Describe *charye* and *seongmyo*. Then explain how the Chuseok and Songpyeon articles differ on why songpyeon is half-moon shaped, and name one claim in the Chuseok article (not the songpyeon shape) that has no source given.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Names:** Chuseok (추석, "autumn evening"); Hangawi (한가위, "the great middle of autumn")
- **Date:** 15th day of the 8th lunar month, full moon; three days in South Korea
- **Origins:** *gabae* weaving contest in Silla ("popular belief"); shamanistic harvest-moon rites ("many scholars believe")
- **Rites:** *charye* (home service); *seongmyo* (grave visit) with *beolcho* (tidying)
- **Food:** *songpyeon* (earliest records Goryeo), *hangwa*, new-rice liquor, *jeon*, *japchae*
- **Half-moon story:** Baekje/Silla legend (Chuseok article); "a half-moon would fill up" (Songpyeon article)
- **Games:** *sonori*, *talchum*, *yutnori*, archery, *ssireum*, *juldarigi*
- **Check:** the "5,000 years" claim for ssireum, the gift and price figures, and the North Korean one-day detail

Next chapter: The Seasonal Days, which covers the first full moon (Daeboreum), Dano, Hansik, the winter solstice and other days in the traditional year, with what is documented about each.

Korean Festivals and Traditional Life

Course 1 · Chapter 5 · The Seasonal Days

Between Seollal and Chuseok the traditional year had other marked days, most of them not public holidays. This chapter looks at five: the first full moon (Daeboreum), Hansik, Dano, Chilseok and the winter solstice. For each, it asks how the day is dated, what the sources document, and whether the sources trace it to China, to older Korean rites, or to both.

How this chapter was checked

The facts here come from Wikipedia's articles on Daeboreum, Dano, Chilseok and Patjuk, and from the Korean sections of its articles on the Cold Food Festival and the Dongzhi Festival, as I read them. I read the opening or Korean sections only. The article I tried for Hansik redirected to Korean cuisine, so Hansik comes only from the Cold Food Festival article. I could not find a usable article for Samjinnal's Korean customs, so it is left out. I read no books, folklore archives or government pages. Every custom is reported as the article reports it, and I do not say how widely any of them is still practised.

The Year in Five Days

Day	How it is dated	Root, as the sources describe it
Daeboreum (대보름), "Great Full Moon"	The first full moon of the lunar year (the 15th of the first lunar month).	Korean records cited from the *Samguk Yusa*; lantern customs recorded in Joseon annals.
Hansik (한식), "cold food"	The 105th day after the winter solstice, April 5 in the Gregorian calendar (April 4 in leap years), according to the Cold Food Festival article.	The Cold Food Festival, a Chinese festival with a legend about the noble Jie Zhitui.
Dano (단오), also *Surit-nal*	The 5th day of the 5th lunar month.	Described as an older spring rite that was combined with the Chinese Duanwu festival under the Joseon.

Day	How it is dated	Root, as the sources describe it
Chilseok (칠석), "seventh evening"	The 7th day of the 7th lunar month.	The Chinese folk tale of the Cowherd and the Weaver Girl, "adopted by Koreans".
Dongji (동지), winter solstice	A solar term, so tied to the sun and not the moon. Compare the 24 solar terms in Chapter 2.	Called "Small Seol" in Korea (Dongzhi article); also a Chinese festival.

Not every traditional day is lunar

Chapter 2 said the traditional calendar had 24 solar terms. Hansik and Dongji follow the sun, not the moon, and Hansik is counted in days from the solstice. A rule such as "the 5th day of the 5th month" and a rule such as "the 105th day after the solstice" can both be "traditional" and still behave differently from year to year.

Daeboreum

The Daeboreum article says it "celebrates the first full moon of the new year of the lunar Korean calendar" and is "accompanied by many traditions".

What it says about origins

The article points to the *Samguk Yusa* story of King Soji of Silla, in which a crow led the king to a plot, and says that afterwards the 15th of the first month was called *Ogiil* and sacrifice was offered to heaven. It adds that the origin "can be recognized" in customs of lantern lighting listed in the *Samguk Sagi* and the Silla annals, and that the lantern custom was recorded in the Joseon annals in the 13th year of Taejong's reign. The article's English is rough in places, and I report only the broad claims. They are stated as records ("recorded", "described"), which makes them stronger than the "popular belief" claims of Chapter 4, though I read none of the sources myself.

Customs the article lists

Custom	What the article says
Bureom (부럼 깨기)	Cracking nuts with the teeth, "believing that this will keep one's teeth healthy for the year". The article notes that the Dongguk Sesigi describes it and that it has spread to China and Japan.
Dalmaji (달맞이)	Climbing hills to see the first moonrise; "the first person to see the Moon rise will have good luck all year or a wish will be granted".
Jwibulnori (쥐불놀이)	The night before: burning dry grass on the ridges between rice fields while children whirl cans of charcoal. The article says this "fertilize[s] the fields and get[s] rid of harmful worms".
Daribalgi (다리밟기)	Walking across bridges all night; stepping on twelve bridges is "believed" to keep one healthy through twelve months.
Deowipalgi (더위팔기)	Calling out "Buy my heat" to be the first to greet someone, so as to escape summer heat.
Food	*Ogokbap* (five-grain rice), *yakbap* (a sweet glutinous-rice dish with jujube, chestnut and pine nuts), seasoned vegetable dishes (*boreum namul*) and *bokssam* (rice wrapped in leaves, "supposed to bring luck").

The "moon house" question from Chapter 3, still open

Chapter 3 noted that the Seollal article describes burning a "moon house" of firewood and branches, and I could not tell which day it belongs to. The Daeboreum article does not list it by that name. It does list burning dry grass (*jwibulnori*) and a straw fire to drive off mosquitos (*mogitbul*) on this day. I cannot say whether these are the same custom under different names, so the placement stays unconfirmed. A specialist source on fire customs would settle it.

Several of the listed customs are practical beliefs and some are plainly playful. The article lists, among others, a custom of not feeding dogs on this day, said to prevent them from being "infested with flies" in summer, and one of taking mud from the houses of the rich to spread on one's own walls "wishing they would be wealthy, too". I report these as the article's list, and I do not know how many places still keep them.

Hansik

The Cold Food Festival article describes Hansik as "the Korean equivalent" of that festival. It says it takes place on the 105th day after the winter solstice, "April 5 in the Gregorian calendar, except in leap years when it is on April 4". It is "a day to welcome the warm weather thawing the frozen lands". Rites to worship ancestors are observed early in the morning, and the family visits the ancestors' tombs to tidy up.

- **What has gone.** The article says "the custom of eating cold food on the day has, however, disappeared". So the day is named for a practice that no longer happens.
- **A modern overlap.** The article adds that the day "coincides with Arbor Day", so public cemeteries are crowded with visitors planting trees around the tombs. I did not read a source for this, and Arbor Day's status is not covered in Chapter 2's holiday table.
- **The legend.** The Chinese story that the festival explains concerns Jie Zhitui, a nobleman of Jin in the 7th century BC, a "model of self-sacrificing loyalty". The article gives the story as the "usual" origin. It is a legend about China, and it is not a Korean record.

Dano

The Dano article says the day falls on the 5th day of the 5th lunar month, is "an official holiday in North Korea and one of the major traditional holidays in South Korea" (but not, per Chapter 2, a day off there), and that South Korea "has retained several festivals related to the holiday". One of them, the Gangneung Dano Festival, is described as "designated by UNESCO as a 'Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity'". Chapter 8 returns to festivals of this kind.

Topic	What the article says
Customs	Women washed their hair in water boiled with sweet flag (*changpo*) to make it shiny; wore flowers of *gung-gung-i* in their hair because the aroma was thought to repel evil; men wore iris roots at the waist. Herbs damp with morning dew were once "believed to cure stomachaches and heal wounds".
Food	Herb rice cakes, including *surichwitteok* and *ssuktteok*. Cakes were marked with a wheel pattern, linked by the article to *suri* (wheel).
Games	Swinging (played by women), *ssireum* (wrestling, among men), *seokjeon* (a stone-battle game), *taekkyon* and mask dance, "extremely popular among peasants due to its penchant

Topic	What the article says
	for satirical lyrics flouting local aristocrats".
Names	*Dano* is Sino-Korean, derived from the Duanwu Festival. The older name *Surit-nal* is said to mean "high day or the day of god". The article warns that two hanja writings of Suritnal "are not etymological, merely homophonic".

On origin, the article says "modern history tends to characterize Dano to be a shamanistic ritual worshipping the sky deity in celebration of the end of the sowing season". It cites a comparative study of Korean and Chinese festivals for the claim that the Mahan confederacy celebrated after the May sowing, and that Jinhan held a rite to heaven. "It is said this custom was passed on to Silla." It adds that "the festival was syncretized with the sinitic Duanwu Festival during the Joseon period, adopting the new name Dano along with the exact date of celebration."

Old rite, borrowed name?

The article gives a two-part account: an older Korean spring rite, and a later merger with a Chinese festival that supplied the name and the date. Both parts are hedged ("tends to characterize", "it is said", "was syncretized"), and the article cites a single study for the early history. That fits the Dano table above, where the customs come from both strands. It is also a reminder that a festival can be both "native" and "borrowed" depending on which layer you look at.

Chilseok

The Chilseok article says it falls on the 7th day of the 7th lunar month and originates "from the Chinese Qixi Festival". It tells the Korean version of the tale of the weaver Jiknyeo and the herder Gyeonu, separated across the Milky Way and allowed to meet once a year. Crows and magpies form a bridge, and "it is believed" these birds have no feathers on their heads because the couple stepped on them. Rain on that night "is believed to be the couple's tears".

The customs it lists are bathing "for good health", eating wheat noodles and grilled wheat cakes because the day is "known as the last chance to enjoy wheat-based foods" before cold winds spoil the wheat's scent, and offering fried pumpkins to the Big Dipper. The article states plainly that the tale "was adopted by Koreans". It is a clear case where the sources name the borrowing.

Dongji, the Winter Solstice

The Dongzhi Festival article says that in Korea the winter solstice "is also called the 'Small Seol'", and that people make red bean porridge (*patjuk*, 팥죽) with round glutinous rice balls (*saealsim*). "In the past, red bean porridge soup was sprayed on walls or doors because it was said to ward off bad ghosts." It also says that "in the early days of the Goryeo and Joseon Period" people in financial difficulty "settled all their debts and enjoyed the day".

- **Why red?** The Patjuk article says people "used to believe that the red color of patjuk drives off baneful spirits".
- **The count of balls.** It adds that "the number of saealsim added is often the same number as the eater's age", which links to the age-reckoning of Seollal (Chapter 3).
- **The name.** "Small Seol" suggests the solstice was once a kind of lesser new year. The article gives that name and does not explain it, so I do not infer more.

Reading a Seasonal Day

1. **Date rule.** Lunar day, solar term, or counted from a solar term?
2. **Layers.** Does the source describe an older rite, a borrowed festival, or both, and does it hedge?
3. **Name against practice.** Hansik is named for cold food that is no longer eaten. A name can outlast the custom.
4. **Belief against record.** "Is believed" tells you what people said, and not that it works.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

For Daeboreum, Dano and Chilseok, give the lunar date. Then explain how Hansik's date is worked out and why that makes it different from the other three.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Describe three Daeboreum customs from the table and the belief attached to each. Then explain why the "moon house" from Chapter 3 is still unresolved after reading the Daeboreum article.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Using Dano, Chilseok and Hansik, give one example each of a day with an older Korean layer plus a Chinese one, a day the article says was adopted, and a day whose name outlasts its practice. Then name the winter solstice food and two beliefs attached to it.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Daeboreum (대보름):** first full moon of the lunar year; nut cracking, moon watching, bridge walking, five-grain rice
- **Hansik (한식):** 105th day after the winter solstice (about 5 April); tomb tidying; cold food custom gone
- **Dano (단오):** 5th day of 5th lunar month; sweet-flag hair washing, swinging, *ssireum*; older rite merged with Duanwu in Joseon
- **Chilseok (칠석):** 7th day of 7th lunar month; from the Chinese Qixi tale, "adopted by Koreans"
- **Dongji (동지):** winter solstice, "Small Seol"; *patjuk* with *saealsim*; red colour said to ward off spirits
- **Gangneung Dano Festival:** described as UNESCO-designated (see Chapter 8)
- **Check:** the "moon house", how many customs are still practised, Arbor Day overlap, Samjinnal (not covered)

Next chapter: Rites and Faiths, which covers ancestor rites (*jesa*), Confucian ritual, Buddhist festivals, shamanic *gut*, and how the sources describe their mixing.

Korean Festivals and Traditional Life

Course 1 · Chapter 6 · Rites and Faiths

Earlier chapters met ancestral rites at Seollal and Chuseok, a Buddhist holiday in the public holiday table, and mentions of shamanic origins. This chapter looks at those practices directly. It describes what the sources say about ancestral rites, Buddha's Birthday and shamanic gut rituals, and how the sources describe their mixing. It treats religion as practice and history, and judges none of it.

How this chapter was checked

The facts here come from Wikipedia's articles on Jesa, Buddha's Birthday (its South Korea section), Korean shamanism, Gut (ritual) and Religion in South Korea, as I read them. For Korean shamanism and Religion in South Korea I read the opening sections only, and not the full articles. An article I tried for the Lotus Lantern Festival returned nothing, so lanterns come only from the Buddha's Birthday article. I read no religious texts, surveys or interviews, and the survey figures below are the article's claims.

A note on tone

People hold these practices for reasons of belief, family and habit. The sources include hostile views of some of them, such as Confucian suppression of shamans and Christian disapproval. I report those as history, with owners, and they are not this course's views.

Ancestral Rites

The Jesa article calls *jesa* "a ceremony commonly practiced in Korea" that "functions as a memorial to the ancestors of the participants", usually held on the anniversary of an ancestor's death. It says "the majority of Catholics, Buddhists and nonbelievers practice ancestral rites, although Protestants do not". A later sentence in the same article says "many Korean Protestants no longer practice this rite", which is a softer claim, and the article does not reconcile the two.

The kinds of rite

Rite	What the article says
Gijesa (기제사)	A memorial service "held on the day of the ancestor's death every year", performed for up to five generations of ancestors in the eldest descendant's house. Held after midnight or in the evening before the anniversary.
Charye (차례)	Rites "performed on Chuseok or New Year's Day". The article lists them as "tea rites held 4 times a year on major holidays (Korean New Year, Chuseok)", though only two holidays are named.
Seongmyo (성묘)	Visits to the tombs, where people trim the grass, offer food, fruit and wine, and bow. The article mentions visits on 5 April and before Chuseok, which matches Hansik (Chapter 5).
Myosa (묘사) / *Sije* (시제)	Rites at the tomb site in the tenth lunar month for ancestors five or more generations removed.

Charye and jesa: now two articles agree on little

Chapter 4 noted that the Chuseok article says *charye* is "also known as Jesa". The Jesa article treats *jesa* as the general word and *charye* as one kind, along with *gijesa* and others. The article also says charye are held "4 times a year" while naming two holidays. I cannot tell whether a count of four includes other days, or whether the number is an error. The safe wording is that *jesa* is the general word for ancestral rites and *charye* is the holiday kind.

How a rite is done

The article describes the performance in some detail, and I summarise only the outline. The family at the eldest son's house prepares foods including wine, soup, beef, fish, vegetables of three colours, fruit and *songpyeon*, "particularly those that were favored by the deceased". A memorial tablet (*shinwi*), "which symbolizes the spiritual presence of the ancestor", is placed at the centre, or a written prayer is set up if the family has no tablet. The sequence includes calling the spirits down, three offerings of rice wine, a spoon placed in the rice, a pause when the participants leave the room so the ancestors can eat, a tea offering, the removal of the table and the burning of the written prayer. It ends with *eumbok*, in which participants share the offerings, which the article says "symbolizes the receiving of the blessings bestowed upon the family".

The article describes an arrangement of food on the table and gives details such as men's offerings on the west and women's on the east. Chapter 4 gave a different layout for the Chuseok charye (rice and soup on the north), and the Chuseok article added that "these details can vary across regions". I take the variation as part of the picture.

Change

The Jesa article says that ancestor worship "has significantly changed in recent years". It is now "common to hold ancestor rituals up to only two generations of ancestors", and in some cases only for dead parents; more rites are held in the evening, not after midnight; and "people can also perform ancestor rituals in a younger son's house". It adds that "in modern days, the daughter or younger son of the family may perform these rites". It concludes that in most Korean families the rites "still remain an important part of their culture and they are faithfully observed". That last claim comes without a survey, so I treat it as the article's judgment.

History

The article traces ancestral rites back to the Bronze Age, citing table-top dolmens "used for ancestral worship". It describes state rites to founders of dynasties, the shrines Jongmyo and Sajik, and says that "today's Confucian rituals were introduced from the end of Goryeo" and, in the early Joseon, a Chinese ritual manual "was accepted and spread gradually". It adds that the Catholic ban on ancestral rituals "was lifted in 1939, when Pope Pius XII formally recognized ancestral rites as a civil practice". These are the article's accounts, and I did not check them.

Buddha's Birthday

The Buddha's Birthday article says that in South Korea the day is "celebrated according to the Korean lunar calendar and is a national holiday" (as Chapter 2's table shows: the 8th day of the 4th lunar month). It lists its names: *Bucheo-nim o-shin nal* (부처님 오신 날), "the day when the Buddha came"; *Seok-ga T'an-shin-il*; and *Chopail* (초파일), "the first 8th day".

- **Lanterns.** "Lotus lanterns hang in temples throughout the month and lanterns are hung in homes and in the streets." Many temples hold a large lantern festival, *Yeondeunghoe* (연등회). Chapter 5's note on lantern lighting at Daeboreum, and Chapter 1's mention of the recent Seoul Lantern Festival, show lanterns in three different settings with three different ages.

- **Free meals.** On the day, "many temples provide free meals and tea to all visitors", often including *sanchae bibimbap*.
- **Who takes part.** The article says it "is a popular holiday and folk celebration in Korea, and is often celebrated by people of all religious faiths". That is a claim about participation, with no figures.

Shamanic Rites

The article on Korean shamanism (*Musok*, *Muism*) calls it "a religion from Korea" that scholars classify "as a folk religion and sometimes regard... as one facet of a broader Korean vernacular religion distinct from Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism". It stresses how little is fixed: "There is no central authority in control of Musok". The practice centres on gods and ancestral spirits, and "ritual specialists, the majority of them female, called *mudang* (무당)". They perform *gut* (굿), in which they offer food and drink and entertain the spirits "with storytelling, song, and dance". Gut may be held at home or in a shrine "often located on a mountain".

Gut type	What the Gut article says
Naerim-gut (내림굿)	An initiation rite, by which someone becomes a shaman by being possessed by spirits. It can be done only through another shaman.
Dodang-gut (도당굿)	A communal rite, common in central provinces, to wish for the well-being of a village. Held around the New Year or in spring or autumn, with prominent roles for female *mudang*.
Ssitgim-gut (씻김굿)	A rite to cleanse the spirit of a deceased person, from a belief that the body cannot enter the world of the dead because of the spirit's impurity. Observed mainly in the south-west.

History, as the article gives it

- "The origins of Musok are unclear but the earliest historical references to mudang date to the 12th century."
- During the Joseon, "Confucian elites suppressed the mudang with taxation and legal restrictions, deeming their rites to be improper."
- From the late 19th century, "modernisers – many of them Christian – characterised Musok as *misin* (superstition)".

- Under Japanese rule, nationalist folklorists "began promoting the idea that Musok represented Korea's ancient religion", an idea "later heavily promoted by mudang themselves". The word *musok* itself was coined by the folklorist Yi Nŭnghwa, and "developed during the Japanese colonial period, when it was employed with derogatory connotations".
- In the mid-20th century, persecution continued, including in South Korea through the New Community Movement. From the late 1970s, "more positive appraisal" came, with practitioners associated with the pro-democracy *minjung* movement and regarded as "a source of Korean cultural identity".
- Today the article says there are "over 200,000 mudang" in South Korea, and that "disapproval of mudang, often regarded as charlatans, remains widespread in South Korea, especially among Christians".

A category defined by what it is not

The article reports the anthropologist Chongho Kim saying that defining Korean shamanism is "really problematic" and that it is largely a "residual category" into which all Korean religious practices that were not Buddhist, Confucian or Christian were placed. Other scholars treat it as one part of "Korean folk religion". It is a reminder that a label such as "shamanism" is a scholars' tool, and that practitioners may describe their own practice differently. The word "shaman" itself is "debated among anthropologists".

The Mixing of Traditions

The shamanism article says "while Korean attitudes to religion have historically been fairly inclusive, allowing for syncretism between Musok and Buddhism, the mudang have nevertheless long been marginalised." The Jesa article gives a concrete example: altar food may be distributed to neighbours and friends in a Buddhist rite called *shishik*, "a form of merit-making" that, with sutra reading, is said to hasten the deceased's entry into Sukhavati (the Buddhist pure land). So a rite with a Confucian shape can have Buddhist elements, and Chapter 5 showed a festival (Dano) with an older Korean layer merged with a Chinese one.

How many people belong where?

The Religion in South Korea article opens with a survey claim: "A majority of South Koreans are irreligious." Citing a 2025 survey, it says 51% report no religion, 31% identify with Christianity

(20% Protestant, 11% Catholic), 16% with Buddhism and 1% with other religions. It adds that both Buddhism and Christianity "have been declining in adherents" since 2000, that shamanism "remain[s] popular and may account for a large share of the seemingly irreligious", and that "according to scholars, South Korean censuses do not count believers in indigenous Korean shamanism". In a 2012 survey "only 15% of the population identified as nonreligious in an atheistic sense".

> **Belonging is not the same as practising**
>
> A person can report "no religion", hold ancestral rites for their parents, visit a temple on Buddha's Birthday and consult a *mudang*, and each source above would count them differently. The article's own caution is that census categories can miss shamanism. So the survey percentages say how people answered a question about affiliation, and they do not describe what people do. This is why the course describes practices and attaches the sources to them.

Reading a Claim About Religion in Korea

1. **Affiliation or practice?** A survey answer about religion is not a record of rites performed.
2. **Whose label?** "Shamanism", "superstition" and "folk religion" are labels with histories, and some began as insults.
3. **Which rite?** *Jesa*, *charye* and *gijesa* are not interchangeable.
4. **Which layer?** A rite can be Confucian in form, Buddhist in an element and shamanic in its roots, and the sources may stress different ones.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Name and describe three kinds of ancestral rite from the table. Then explain why "*charye* is also known as *jesa*" and "charye is one kind of jesa" are different claims, and give one oddity in the Jesa article's description of charye.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Describe Buddha's Birthday in South Korea: its names, its lunar date, and two things the article says happen on the day. Then give one change to ancestral rites that the Jesa article reports, and say what claim the article makes without giving a survey.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Define *mudang* and *gut*, and describe two of the three kinds of *gut* in the table. Then explain why the article calls Korean shamanism a "residual" category, and why a survey percentage for "no religion" does not describe what people do.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Jesa (제사):** general word for ancestral rites; *gijesa* on death anniversaries; *charye* on Seollal and Chuseok; *seongmyo* tomb visits; *sije/myosa* for distant ancestors
- **Modern change:** rites for two generations or only parents; evening rather than midnight; daughters or younger sons may perform them
- **Buddha's Birthday:** 8th day of the 4th lunar month; *Bucheo-nim o-shin nal*, *Chopail*; lanterns, free temple meals
- **Musok:** folk religion with *mudang* and *gut*; no central authority; suppressed under Joseon and later, positively reappraised from the late 1970s
- **Survey claim (2025):** 51% no religion, 31% Christian, 16% Buddhist, 1% other; census may miss shamanism
- **Mixing:** *shishik* (Buddhist merit-making with altar food); syncretism between Musok and Buddhism
- **Check:** the "4 times a year" count, Protestants and jesa, the 200,000 *mudang* figure, the survey figures

Next chapter: Life-Cycle Ceremonies, which covers the first birthday, the 60th birthday, weddings and funerals: what is traditional, what is modern, and what the law and the sources say.

Korean Festivals and Traditional Life

Course 1 · Chapter 7 · Life-Cycle Ceremonies

The festivals so far belong to the calendar. This chapter covers ceremonies that belong to a person's life: the first birthday, the 60th birthday, the wedding and the funeral. For each it gives what the sources call traditional, what they say has changed, and where they disagree or say too little.

How this chapter was checked

The facts here come from Wikipedia's articles on Doljanchi, Hwangap, Korean marriage, Korean funeral and Jangnye, as I read them. For Korean marriage and Hwangap I read the relevant sections and not every line; for Korean marriage I did not read the Joseon section in full. I did **not** research South Korean law on marriage registration, cemeteries or cremation, so this chapter says nothing on those points beyond what the articles state. I read no ethnographies or family accounts, and everything below is the articles' claims.

A note on tone

These ceremonies mark births, ageing, marriage and death, and families treat them seriously. The chapter describes them as practice and history, and it does not rank the traditional against the modern.

The First Birthday: Doljanchi

The Doljanchi article describes *dol* (돌), the first birthday, as practised since the early Joseon period. It explains that *dol* is a native Korean measure word for a child's age, and says the importance of the day is tied to high infant mortality in the past. I take that as the article's explanation, which I did not check.

- **An offering.** The family makes a *samsinsang*, an offering to the god Samsin, of seaweed soup (*miyeok-guk*), rice and pure water, placed in the *anbang*.
- **Dress and guests.** The child wears *hanbok*. Guests bring gifts, including money, rice and thread. The *dolbanji*, a gold ring, is said to have come from Chinese immigrants in the early 20th century, which makes it a more recent custom than the day itself.

- **The table.** A round table (*dolsang*), with a folding screen (*byeongpung*) behind, holds foods such as *songpyeon*, *baekseolgi* and red bean rice cakes, each given a symbolic meaning in the article. *Tteok* is shared with neighbours.

Doljabi

The best-known part is the *doljabi*, in which the child picks an object from several set out, and the choice is read as a sign of the future.

Object	What the article says it predicts
Books or a brush	Intelligence, or success in the civil exams
Money	Wealth
Rice	Prosperity (the article lists it with the foods and goods)
A bow or sword	Martial talent
Sewing items	Household skills
Thread or noodles	Long life

Today, the article says, the day is often a secular party held at a reserved venue. The ceremony has moved from the home to the hired hall while keeping its main objects.

The 60th Birthday: Hwangap

The Hwangap article describes the 60th birthday (also *hoegap*, *jugap* and other names) as reached in international age, which is Korean age 61. The reasoning it gives is the sexagenary cycle from Chapter 2: when the cycle of sixty completes, a second lifetime begins. The date is chosen to avoid inauspicious days and is held *before* the actual birthday, not after.

- **A filial duty.** It is "a major affair" and an expression of filial piety, and the costs fall on the descendants.
- **Traditionally,** it was held at home, with respects at the ancestral shrine, food piled high, seaweed soup, a food table for the honoured person (*heonjusang*) and music. Before breakfast, the eldest son and his spouse approach the table, bow deeply and raise glasses; younger siblings follow in descending order of age, then extended family. The honoured

person's own parents, if alive, may join, "symbolically and/or jokingly" in children's bright clothes.
- **Guests.** Strangers and passers-by are often invited, and the article says it is "traditionally considered a sign of virtue and social status to have many guests". Speeches are given, and poetry could be read.
- **Later birthdays.** A smaller *jingap* follows the year after. The article lists others, rarer and of similar scale: the 70th (*gohui*), 77th (*huisu*) and 88th (*misu*), and a 60th wedding anniversary.

A milestone that lost weight

The article says that with longer life expectancy the hwangap has "a lesser significance than before". Some parents reportedly do not expect one and weigh later ceremonies, such as the *gohui*, higher, and the falling number of elderly people living with their children may also matter. It says larger ceremonies are "possibly more typical" in rural areas than urban. Where families do hold it, it may be a meal for close family or at a restaurant, or may be secularised or Christianised. The article cites a 1991 paper describing a family whose hwangap included a Catholic sermon and communion. "Possibly" and "reportedly" are the article's own hedges, and I could find no figures behind them.

Weddings

The Korean marriage article gives a history before the modern ceremony, and I report only the parts I read. It says that from Goguryeo through early Joseon, marriage was *matrilocal*: the groom went to live with the bride's family (*jangga*). In the Goryeo period it says aristocratic marriages were political and economic, ceremonies were held at the bride's home, there was no dowry or bride wealth, plural marriages occurred, divorce was easy and inheritance was equal. The Joseon period brought changes, including primary and secondary wives and imitation of the Ming code, but I did not read that part in full and so say no more. A wedding ritual that looks timeless is therefore set against a very different earlier marriage system.

The modern wedding, and pyebaek

- **Wedding halls.** In large cities, hotels and independent halls host weddings. Many couples begin with a "Westernized" ceremony in a tuxedo and white gown and then hold a smaller

traditional one. The article says hotel weddings were "prohibited by the government in 1980", partly permitted in 1994 and fully permitted in 1999.

- **Busy halls.** In busy halls, formality is relaxed for guests, a ceremony "may take no longer than 20 minutes", and the most common gift is cash, collected and logged by family representatives outside the hall.
- **Pyebaek** (폐백) is held after the official ceremony, among family members only. The bride formally greets her new parents-in-law with a deep bow. The article describes jujubes and chestnuts (a wish for children), wine cups, and parents throwing jujubes and chestnuts to be caught in the bride's skirt. It was traditionally held days after the wedding for the groom's family only, and is now often held after the reception, sometimes with the bride's family too, and commercial services exist for it. The article adds that the groom often gives his mother and then his bride a piggyback ride, to symbolise his obligations to both.
- **The feast.** The article describes a mixed feast of *bulgogi*, *galbi*, kimchi, rice, *gimbap*, *mandu*, soups and fruit, and *tteok* as a ritual food.

As context the article gives a 2020 Statistics Korea figure, an average age at first marriage of 33.2 for men and 30.8 for women, and says the average wedding cost per person passed 50 million won in 2013. I read these as the article's figures.

Funerals

The Korean funeral article says funeral practice mixes Confucian elements with shamanic influence, and that scholars debate which is which. The Jangnye article adds a history: burial in the Three Kingdoms, cremation under Buddhism in Goryeo, and burial established again under Joseon Confucianism, with Christian influence since the 17th century.

- **Time.** The body stays in the house for three days (rarely five to seven). The Jangnye article describes three days and nights, with the coffin placed after two days and burial in the morning of the third day, ending with a *jesa* (Chapter 6).
- **At death.** White cotton is used to ascertain death. A declaration is made in the four directions. Three bowls of food, three coins and three pairs of shoes are set out for the messengers who come for the dead.
- **Preparing the body.** The body is washed, grave clothes put on, and rice put in the mouth, and the article describes a seven-layer shroud. The grave clothes are often prepared in advance by people in their sixties.

- **The burial site.** The eldest son finds a site with a geomancer (*pungsu-jiri*): water in front, a tiger hill and a dragon hill to left and right, and a turtle hill behind. Burial is said to come from the Confucian idea of preserving the body.
- **Roles.** The eldest son's wife handles the food. The article says men are expected to restrain their grief.
- **Shamanic rites.** The article says they are "diminishing in commonality", with *gut* performed by *mudang* (Chapter 6) to help souls that "fail to completely or properly transition" and might otherwise bring bad fate; *ssitgim-gut* (the cleansing rite) is the one named.

The state enters the cemetery

The Korean funeral article says a **1912** colonial ordinance set up public cemeteries and cremation, which clashed with burial beliefs and boosted the fengshui professions. It also mentions *jayeonjang*, natural burial or scattering, among contemporary options. I did not research current cemetery or cremation law, and these articles give me no figures for how often each method is used today. If you need either, use official statistics rather than this chapter.

Reading a Life-Cycle Claim

1. **Home or hired hall?** The same ceremony can be an old family rite and a booked package; the sources describe both.
2. **Which period?** "Traditional" marriage in the Goryeo article is very unlike the Joseon one, and unlike the modern one.
3. **Whose hedge?** "Possibly", "reportedly" and "often" are signals that no figure stands behind a claim.
4. **Which tradition?** Funeral customs mix Confucian, Buddhist, shamanic and Christian elements, and scholars disagree about the proportions.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Describe the *doljabi*: what happens, and what any three of the objects are said to predict. Then give one part of the first-birthday day that the article says is a more recent custom, and one way the day has changed.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Explain why the *hwangap* is held at 60 and why it is held *before* the actual birthday. Then give two reasons the article offers for its declining weight, and say which words show that the claims are hedged.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Describe *pyebaek* and how it has changed. Then give three features of a traditional funeral from the articles, and say what this chapter did not research about funerals and weddings.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Dol (first birthday):** *samsinsang* offering, *hanbok*, *dolsang*, *doljabi* object choice; now often a hired-venue party
- **Hwangap (60th):** end of the sexagenary cycle; held before the birthday; filial duty; then *jingap*, *gohui* (70), *huisu* (77), *misu* (88)
- **Marriage history:** matrilocal into early Joseon; Goryeo ceremonies at the bride's home, no dowry
- **Wedding today:** hall ceremony, cash gifts, then *pyebaek* with jujubes and chestnuts; hotel weddings allowed fully in 1999
- **Funeral:** three days; geomancer picks the site; Confucian and shamanic elements mixed; 1912 ordinance on public cemeteries

- **Not researched:** current marriage, cemetery and cremation law; usage figures
- **Check:** the *dolbanji* origin, the hwangap decline, the Joseon marriage section, the 1912 ordinance

Next chapter: The Festival Boom, which asks how many of today's festivals are new, who pays for them, and how the Gangneung Dano Festival and the Seoul Lantern Festival are described.

Korean Festivals and Traditional Life

Course 1 · Chapter 8 · The Festival Boom

Chapter 1 said that many Korean festivals are new. This chapter looks at that claim through three examples: a heritage-listed festival that was revived, a lantern festival created for a tourism campaign, and a small regional festival built on a half-remembered ferry route. It also follows up a promise from Chapter 5, to check how the Gangneung Dano Festival is described.

> **How this chapter was checked**
>
> The facts here come from Wikipedia's articles on Gangneung Danoje, the Seoul Lantern Festival, Festivals in South Korea and Intangible cultural heritage of South Korea, as I read them. I read the Gangneung Danoje article in full and the others in part. I read no official festival sites, visitor statistics or the cited scholarship, so every figure below is an article's claim. The article for Gangneung cites a chapter by Kim Kwang Ok (2020) that I did not read.

The Broad Claim

The Festivals in South Korea article opens: "Many new festivals have originated in South Korea in response to the country's tourism initiatives. Contributing to this growth is a gradual change to a five-day work week and greater leisure." It gives no count of festivals and no dates for this growth, so I treat it as a stated trend and not a measured one. The article's own entries are also dated: its Hwacheon Sancheoneo Ice Festival entry gives 2012 dates, and its Seoul Lantern Festival entry describes November on Cheonggyecheon, which the newer article says is no longer the usual time.

A festival built on a forgotten route

The article's entry for the Jjokbae (*Jokbae*) Festival in Hwacheon shows how a festival can be made from a memory. It says a ferry route for salt ran between Incheon and Hwacheon in the Goryeo period, that dams have ended the water routes, and that "nobody remembers the ferry and the boats in Hwacheon at past any more". The festival, "started" in 2003, "reproduce[s] the images of boats" from that past, with a boat-building contest, valley hiking and farm stays. That is one entry's account of a festival whose theme is a lost practice and whose programme is

mostly recreation. It is not a claim of continuity with anything older. The same article's Hwacheon Sancheoneo Ice Festival is described as held each January on the strength of the town's ice conditions, with no older tradition claimed.

A Revived Rite: Gangneung Danoje

Chapter 5 said the Gangneung Dano Festival is described as UNESCO-designated and promised to verify it. The Gangneung Danoje article says so directly: "Since 1967, it has been a National Intangible Cultural Heritage of South Korea, and since 2005 it has been on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity." In the History section, it is "National Important Intangible Cultural Property No. 13". That settles the Chapter 5 flag, as the article's claim.

Topic	What the article says
Length	"Traditionally held for 47 days", from the 20th day of the 3rd lunar month to the 7th day of the 5th. The main events run from the 1st to the 7th day of the 5th month; earlier stages include ritual brewing, rites at a mountain-god shrine, a procession and a "marriage of the gods".
Purpose	"To appease the local gods, and in turn to receive their blessings."
Mix	Confucian, shamanic and Buddhist elements; the main stage hosts shamanic rituals, mask plays and markets.
Origins	"Unclear": "at least 400 years old, and possibly... over 1000 years old". A definite attestation is from 1603 (a scholar-official's 1611 text).
Colonial period	Repressed in 1910–1945, but merchants "were able to convince colonial authorities" to let some rites continue.
After the Korean War	Research and recreation from the 1950s, using "Records from a Japanese survey in the 1930s and interviews from elders".
The state	The group organising it "reportedly clashed" with a government "in general unfavorable to folk customs"; the government "reportedly became more open" in the late 1970s; folk customs became "sources of pride" in the 1980s; federal and state support rose in the 1990s and 2000s.

Topic	What the article says
Scale	"623,000 visitors to the festival in 2023"; 6,527 households donated 16,800 kg of rice for the ritual brewing that year.

Old, revived, or both?

The article calls the festival's origins unclear and says it was nearly lost, then "reconstructed" from a colonial-era survey and elders' memories. It also says Gangneung is "reportedly the only city to have consistently hosted a Dano festival" through the colonial period and the war. These claims sit together without being reconciled: a continuous tradition and a reconstruction. The article's source list includes a chapter titled "After the heritage – The fate of Gangneng Danoje between religious ritual and cultural festival", which suggests scholars see tension between the festival's ritual role and its festival role, but I did not read it and report only its title. The article also describes the 2021 event as "the 13th Gangneung Dano Festival", which I cannot square with a rite said to be centuries old. I take it to count editions under a modern organising body, but the article does not say so.

A New Festival: the Seoul Lantern Festival

The Seoul Lantern Festival is a useful contrast. The article says it began in 2009, "to celebrate the 'Visit Korea Year 2010 to 2012'", and the Festivals article adds that the first one ran alongside the restored Cheonggyecheon stream. Lanterns link it to Buddha's Birthday (Chapter 6), but nothing in either article claims a ritual origin.

- **Growth, by the articles' figures.** The 2009 festival drew "over 520,000" visitors by the Festivals article, which gives 12 days; the Seoul Lantern article says the first festival lasted 5 days. The two articles disagree on the length. For 2010, the Seoul article says 2.3 million visitors, including 370,000 foreign tourists; for 2014, 3.14 million, with 630,000 foreign visitors.
- **Change.** The festival moved from November on Cheonggyecheon to December in Gwanghwamun Plaza from 2022 in one account, while the article's 2024 and 2025 sections place it on Cheonggyecheon again. The article is inconsistent about the venue, and I cannot say which is right.

- **Themes.** They change every year: the history of Seoul, Baekje, world heritage, light art. The theme is chosen, not inherited.

The Jinju complaint

The article's Criticism section says the city of Jinju "criticized the festival severely", calling it "a copy of their Jinju Namgang Yudeung Festival", which began in 2000 as a public requiem for about 70,000 soldiers and civilians who died in the 1593 battle at Jinju Castle. It reports that more than 20 Jinju associations asked for Seoul's festival to be discontinued, that there was a one-man protest at Seoul City Hall, and that the two cities agreed to change the Korean name of Seoul's festival. The Festivals article puts the Jinju festival's lantern origin in the 1592 siege, as a tool for signals and for messages between soldiers and families. Both are the articles' accounts and I did not check them. The dispute shows that a lantern festival can be a memorial to some and a tourist event to others, and that the same idea can be claimed by two places.

The Heritage System

The Intangible cultural heritage of South Korea article gives the frame for Gangneung's listing. It says national designations are maintained by the Cultural Heritage Administration, that there is a separate local-level designation administered by provinces or cities, and that "practices of particular importance can be designated as Important Intangible Cultural Properties". The system comes from "the 1962 Cultural Property Protection Law", which "was modelled on the Japanese 1950 Law", and the article says these early initiatives "influenced UNESCO" in its 2003 Convention. It says that as of 2025, twenty-three South Korean elements are inscribed on the UNESCO list. I did not read the 1962 law, the Convention or the Cultural Heritage Administration's own material, so I cannot say how designation works in practice.

Reading a Festival Claim

1. **Who started it, and why?** A ritual's own community, a city tourism office and a campaign slogan produce different festivals, and the sources say which is which only in some cases.
2. **Continuous or reconstructed?** "Revived from surveys and elders" and "never stopped" are different claims.

3. **Is a visitor figure comparable?** A count of attendees at a free outdoor festival is not a count of participants in a ritual.
4. **Is the article current?** Dates, venues and visitor counts in a list article can be out of date.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Give the two designations the Gangneung Danoje article gives, with years, and say which flag from Chapter 5 this settles. Then name two things the article says about how the festival was revived.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Say when and why the Seoul Lantern Festival started, and give one disagreement between the two articles about it. Then describe the Jinju complaint and how it ended.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Explain how the Jjokbae Festival differs from Gangneung Danoje in what it claims about the past. Then give two questions you would ask before calling any of the three festivals in this chapter "traditional".

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Boom claim:** new festivals from tourism initiatives, a five-day work week and leisure; no counts given

- **Gangneung Danoje:** national designation 1967 (No. 13); UNESCO list 2005; attested 1603; revived after the colonial period and war; 623,000 visitors in 2023
- **Seoul Lantern Festival:** from 2009, for Visit Korea Year; themes change yearly; Jinju complained it copied the Namgang Yudeung Festival (from 2000)
- **Jjokbae Festival:** from 2003; recreates a forgotten salt ferry route
- **Heritage system:** 1962 Cultural Property Protection Law, modelled on Japan's 1950 law; national and local designations; 23 UNESCO elements as of 2025
- **Check:** 2009 festival length, the Seoul venue, "13th" Dano count, all visitor figures

Next chapter: Two Festivals Up Close, which compares the Andong Mask Dance Festival and the Boryeong Mud Festival, and says plainly if either is poorly documented.

Korean Festivals and Traditional Life

Course 1 · Chapter 9 · Two Festivals Up Close

Chapter 8 set a revived rite beside a festival made for tourism. This chapter takes two closer cases at the two ends of that range: the Hahoe mask-dance ritual in Andong, and the Boryeong Mud Festival. One is described as centuries old and a ritual; the other has a documented start in 1998 and a stated commercial purpose.

> **How this chapter was checked, and a change of plan**
>
> The outline named the Andong Mask Dance Festival. Wikipedia has no article on it. The Andong article only lists its name (and says the Andong Folk Festival is held "in mid October"), and the Hahoetal article says Andong "hosts an international mask dance festival every October". That is all I found: no start year, programme or visitor figures. So with your agreement, this chapter covers the well-documented **Hahoe mask-dance ritual** behind the festival instead, says clearly how little I found about the festival, and ends with places to look yourself. The facts below come from Wikipedia's articles on Hahoe byeolsingut talnori, Hahoetal, Hahoe Folk Village, Andong and Boryeong Mud Festival, as I read them. For the first four I read the opening sections or all of the article, but not every cited source. All figures are the articles' claims.

Case One: The Hahoe Mask-Dance Ritual

The article on *Hahoe byeolsingut talnori* (하회별신굿탈놀이) describes a masked dance-drama "performed every three, five, or ten years at the request of the village deity in Hahoe, Andong". It adds that the village is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the dance-drama an Important Intangible Cultural Property, and a set of thirteen masks a National Treasure. In the Ritual section it says that it is "performed irregularly at the end of December and early January in order to appease the deity Seonangsin", has "a five-hundred year history" and was designated Important Intangible Cultural Property No. 69 in 1980.

The setting: Hahoe village

The Hahoe Folk Village article describes a village founded in the "14th-15th century" (its History section says the 15th), home to the Pungsan Ryu clan as "a one-clan community since that

time", listed with Yangdong as a World Heritage Site in 2010, with "around 1 million visitors every year". It names the mask drama among the folk arts the village keeps. It also calls *Byeolsin-gut* "a shamanist rite honoring the communal spirits of the village". The article's own text is inconsistent on the founding date and spells the rite two ways, so I rely on it for the village's general character and not for dates.

The ritual

- **Preparation.** After "a period of purification and confinement", there is a procession and then the drama.
- **The drama.** Eight episodes (*madang*): shaman, lions, butcher, old widow, apostate monk, nobleman and scholar, wedding ceremony, wedding night. The article stresses "considerable ribaldry" and satire of "apostate Buddhist priests and the nobility". It adds that the wedding-night episode is so lifelike that "minors and women are not allowed to watch". That is the article's claim about the past, and I cannot say whether it holds today.
- **The annual rite.** The article separates it from the special ritual: the yearly *dong-je* includes charms and prayers, "but no masked drama".
- **Weekly shows.** The Hahoetal article says a preservation society "performs the dance drama weekly at the Hahoe folk village for tourists". So a ritual performed at long intervals for a deity has a tourist form that is regular.

The masks

The Hahoetal article says the masks "originated in the Hahoe Folk Village and Byeongsan Village" and that the oldest is in the National Museum of Korea. The government named them National Treasure No. 121 (1964, according to the talnori article). Unlike most Korean festival masks, which are made of gourd or paper and "are often burned", these are carved from solid alder wood and "returned to their shrines as they are considered sacred objects". The article adds that to view them "a person has to offer a ritual to the spirits".

Where the two articles disagree

- **Age.** The Hahoetal article says the ceremonies "date back to the 12th century"; the talnori article says "five-hundred year history".
- **Mask count.** Hahoetal says "of the twelve original masks, nine remain". The talnori article says eleven Hahoe masks survive, plus two from Byeongsan, thirteen in all, and lists the bachelor mask as lost.

- **Origin story.** Hahoetal gives a legend in which a young man named Hur was told in a dream to carve the masks unseen, and died when a young woman watched him through a hole in the paper window; the ritual honours them as local deities. The article calls the origin "not clearly known" and the story "colorful". It is a legend and not a record.

These are the articles' differences, and I did not check them against the museum or heritage records.

The Andong festival, as far as I found it

The Andong Folk Festival is "held in mid October every year" (Andong article). The same article lists the "Andong International Mask Dance Festival" under "Festival", and the Hahoetal article says the city hosts it every October. It says nothing about when it began, what it includes, how many visit or how it relates to the village ritual. Reading these lines together, the festival is a city event that draws on a village tradition, but that is my inference and not a source's statement. It is the kind of thing worth checking before repeating.

If the Andong festival interests you

It does sound worth a closer look: a satirical folk drama, sacred masks and a city festival around them. Places to start, with what I know about each:

- **Wikipedia, "Hahoe byeolsingut talnori" and "Hahoetal"**: the two articles used here; their reference lists point to the underlying sources.
- **UNESCO, "Historic Villages of Korea: Hahoe and Yangdong"**: listed in the Hahoe article's external links; I did not open it.
- **The Hahoe Mask Museum** and **Korea National Heritage Online** (the Cultural Heritage Administration's site): both listed as external links in the Hahoe and heritage articles; I did not open them.
- **The festival's own official site and the Andong city tourism office**: the likely source of dates, programme and visitor counts. I have not located or checked them, so check for yourself that a page is official.
- **Kim Kwang Ok, "After the heritage"** (Chapter 8): about Gangneung, not Andong, but it takes up the tension between ritual and festival that this case raises.

Case Two: The Boryeong Mud Festival

The Boryeong Mud Festival article says it is "an annual festival" held in summer on Daecheon Beach, near Boryeong, about 200 km south of Seoul; the first was in 1998, and "by 2007, the festival attracted 2.2 million visitors". It says plainly that it "was originally conceived as a marketing vehicle for Boryeong mud cosmetics".

When	What the article says
Until the 1990s	Daecheon's mud flats "made the beach unappealing to tourists", though they are important for migrating birds.
Early 1990s	Boryeong's coal mines closed; the regional economy "plummeted".
1994	The Daecheon mayor, inspired by a movie scene of a couple in a mud bath, saw a possible boost to the local economy. A pharmacy professor's study found the mud rich in bentonite and germanium. The first tourist business, a mud massage house, opened in July.
1995–97	A new mayor pushed a mud mask project and eight mud cosmetics, which "had little commercial success as the product was mostly unknown".
1998	A professor proposed a festival focused on mud to spread awareness of the products. The first was held on 16–19 July at Daecheon Beach, and "its success exceeded all expectations".
Today	Mud pools, slides, a mud prison, mud skiing, body painting, a stage, a cosmetics market and fireworks. It is ticketed. A "mud barbecue" was added in 2023.

The article gives the festival a final weekend as its best-known part, "usually on the second weekend in July", and describes it as "popular with Korea's western population". I do not know what that phrase means, whether the region or foreign residents, and the article does not say.

Putting Them Side by Side

	Hahoe mask-dance ritual	Boryeong Mud Festival
Stated purpose	To appease the village deity; satire in the drama	To market mud cosmetics and revive the local economy
Age claimed	About 500 years, or back to the 12th century (the articles differ)	1998
Timing	Irregular, every 3, 5 or 10 years, in winter	Annual, about two weeks in July
Heritage status	Important Intangible Cultural Property No. 69 (1980); masks National Treasure No. 121	None stated in the article
Tourism	Weekly shows for tourists; a city festival in October	2.2 million visitors by 2007 (the article's claim)
How well documented here	The ritual and masks well; the Andong festival hardly at all	Well, though much seems to come from promotion

Neither is the "real" one

Both are real events with real participants. The mud festival is new by its own account, and a plain marketing success. The Hahoe ritual is old by its articles' accounts, and it too now has a tourist form. Chapter 1's test applies to both: for any festival, ask what the record shows, what legend says and what marketing says.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Describe the Hahoe byeolsingut talnori: its purpose, how often it is performed, and three of its eight episodes. Then name two things on which the Hahoetal and talnori articles disagree.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Trace how the Boryeong Mud Festival came to exist, using at least four steps from the table. Then say what the article states as its original purpose.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Say what I found about the Andong festival itself and what I did not, and why I changed the case study. Then pick one source from the "If the Andong festival interests you" box and say what question you would try to answer with it.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Hahoe byeolsingut talnori:** masked drama for the village deity every 3, 5 or 10 years; eight episodes; satire of monks and nobles; Important Intangible Cultural Property No. 69 (1980)
- **Hahoetal masks:** carved alder wood, kept in shrines, not burned; National Treasure No. 121
- **Andong festival:** "every October" / "mid October"; no start year, programme or figures found
- **Boryeong Mud Festival:** first held 16–19 July 1998 on Daecheon Beach; conceived to market mud cosmetics; 2.2 million visitors by 2007 (claim)
- **Check:** Hahoe's age (12th century vs ~500 years), mask count (9 of 12 vs 13), the founding date of the village, the "Korea's western population" phrase, the Andong festival's details

Next chapter: Dress, Food and Home, which looks at *hanbok*, *hanok*, traditional food and the systems that protect them.

Korean Festivals and Traditional Life

Course 1 · Chapter 10 · Dress, Food and Home

Festivals and ceremonies need clothes, food and a place to hold them. This chapter looks at the three things that appear in every earlier chapter: the hanbok people wear, the hanok house, and the food of the kitchen and the court, with kimjang (kimchi-making) as the main case. For each it asks the question the course keeps asking: what is old, what was named or promoted later, and who says so.

> **How this chapter was checked**
>
> The facts here come from Wikipedia's articles on Hanbok, Hanok, Gimjang, Kimchi and Korean royal court cuisine, as I read them. The Hanbok article is very long and I read its opening, Etymology, South Korea, Misconception and Hanbok Wave sections, not its detailed garment and history sections. For the court cuisine article I read only the opening and history. I read no museum or official sources, and every date and figure is an article's claim.

Hanbok

The Hanbok article defines the *hanbok* as "the traditional clothing of the Korean people", built on four items: *jeogori* (top), *baji* (trousers), *chima* (skirt) and *po* (coat). It says the core arrangement "has remained consistent for a long time" while "length, width, and shape have gradually changed". It dates the earliest depictions to the Three Kingdoms period and says Goguryeo tomb murals (4th to 6th century) show a basic structure "established by at least this time".

A late name

The article's Etymology section says the term *hanbok* "came into use relatively recently, beginning in the 1800s", and that its first known use is in an 1881 document, where it distinguished Korean clothing "from Japanese and Western-style clothing". Other terms such as *uri-ot* ("our clothes") and *chosŏn-ot* were used at the same time. After the division of Korea, "South Korea has preferred the term hanbok while North Korea has preferred the term Chosŏn-

ot". So the clothing is described as ancient, but the word that now names it is a product of a period when Koreans needed to tell their clothes from foreign ones.

Colour, modern shape and use

- **White.** The article says "many Koreans have preferred white hanbok", seen as pure and symbolising light and the sun, and that attempts in the Joseon period and the colonial period to ban white clothes "ultimately failed". It also says some interpretations link colours and patterns to folk beliefs or shamanism, which it presents only as "some interpretations".
- **Joseon pattern.** Modern hanbok "are typically patterned after the hanbok worn in the Joseon period, especially those worn by the nobility and royalty". So the modern festival hanbok copies the clothes of the top of society, and not the everyday clothes of most people.
- **A correction.** The article's "Misconception" section says the high-waisted, chest-covering skirt now seen as typical "did not exist in hanbok before about 1920", and that the original *chima* was tied at the waist. I read that section as an article claim, and it is short and loosely written, so I would want a second source.
- **Occasions.** Today South Koreans wear it "for formal or semi-formal occasions" such as weddings, festivals and ceremonies, which matches Chapters 3, 4 and 7.

What the state does

The article reports several official measures. In 1996 the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism "established Hanbok Day to encourage South Korean citizens to wear the hanbok". The government "has supported the resurgence of interest in hanbok by sponsoring fashion designers", and, for tourists in Seoul, wearing hanbok makes a visit to the five grand palaces free. In 2020 the ministry and a craft agency launched the **Hanbok Wave** initiative "to promote hanbok globally". Each year a celebrity "muse" (the article lists a figure skater, singers, actors) inspires designs from four hanbok makers, and the ministry funds promotion, including billboards in Seoul, New York, Paris and Milan. The article also says K-pop artists such as BTS and Blackpink have worn hanbok in music videos. I take all of this as the article's description of promotion, and I did not check the ministry's own materials.

> **Tradition as a campaign**

A tradition that "needs a Hanbok Day" and a "Hanbok Wave" is one whose daily use has dropped, and one the state has chosen to promote. That does not make the clothing less real or old. It does mean that "Koreans wear hanbok" needs the question "on which occasions?", and the article's answer is: formal and festival ones.

Hanok

The Hanok article defines the *hanok* as "a traditional Korean house", with origins "in pit houses from the early Neolithic period around 6,000 BCE" and a traditional form "completed in the late Joseon period". It describes a design principle, *baesanimsu*: a mountain behind and a river in front. Layouts are said to vary by region: square with a central courtyard in the cold north, L-shaped in the centre, open and in a line in the south. The features it stresses are the *ondol*, a floor-based heating system; the *daecheong*, a cool wooden-floor hall; tiled roofs (*giwa*); and windows and doors of *hanji* paper.

The word is also late

- The article says "hanok" first appeared "in a paper about houses on April 23, 1907", at a time when *jooga* and *jaetaek* were more widely used.
- It says the word entered a Korean dictionary in 1975, defined as the opposite of "western house".
- It reports that after the 1970s, apartments and terraced houses were built and "many hanok were demolished everywhere", and that after the Korean War "several hanok of historical value were demolished". Only small clusters remain in the larger cities.
- In a broad sense, "hanok" covers thatched and shingle-roofed houses too, but the general meaning is the tile-roofed *giwa-jib*.

The article's Preservation section lists preserved places: Bukchon and Namsangol in Seoul, Hahoe (Chapter 9) and Yangdong, the Korean Folk Village in Yongin, Jeonju Hanok Village (over 800 houses) and the Gahoe-dong and Gye-dong areas of Seoul, "many" of whose houses have been remodelled into cafés, restaurants or teahouses. A preserved village can be a living neighbourhood or a tourist site, and the article does not distinguish.

The article's praise

The Hanok article says hanok were "environment-friendly" and that their natural materials "do not cause pollution", and that early heating and cooling were "so effective that they are still in use". These read like advocacy, not measurement. The article gives no sources I could see for those claims, so I report them as its view.

Food: Kimjang and the Court Table

The Gimjang article describes *gimjang* (also *kimjang*) as "the traditional process of preparation and preservation of kimchi... in the wintertime", in which people for a month "starting from the tenth month of the year" prepare large quantities to last the winter. Groups gather to cut, wash and salt the vegetables, and before industrialisation the work "was traditionally shared by familial contacts". Kimchi was traditionally stored in earthenware jars buried to the neck; the article says that in cities people keep jars on balconies or use refrigerators made for kimchi.

- **Heritage listing.** Gimjang "was listed as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage in December 2013 and the 133rd Korean Intangible Cultural Property". The Kimchi article gives the UNESCO title "Gimjang, making and sharing kimchi in the Republic of Korea", and says the practice "reaffirms Korean identity and strengthens family cooperation". It points out that kimchi itself is not listed, only the culture of making it.
- **History of the ingredients.** The Gimjang article says recipes "date back to at least the 13th century" and that red pepper was added "in the 17th century". The modern red kimchi is therefore much younger than the practice's earliest recorded form, by the article's account.
- **Two Koreas.** The Kimchi article notes that North Korea also had its own kimchi-making inscribed in 2015, and that its kimchi "tends to be less spicy and less red". It is a short factual mention, and this course does not go further.
- **Disputes.** The Kimchi article also reports disputes over standards and imports (with Japan in 1996, and with China, including a 2012 effective ban on imports and a 2020 standards dispute). These concern trade and are outside this course, and I mention them only to show that "who owns kimchi" is a live argument, not a settled one.

A calendar slip in the source

The Gimjang article says the work starts "from the tenth month of the year" and, a few lines later, "in the cooler weather of November". The first reads as a month count and the

second as a Gregorian month, and the article does not say which calendar it means. Chapter 2's lesson applies: ask which calendar a source is using before comparing dates.

The royal court table

The court cuisine article describes the food "traditionally consumed at the court of the Joseon Dynasty" and says there "has been a revival of this cookery style in the 21st century". It says that "twelve dishes should be served along with rice and soup", mostly in bronzeware, that five meals were generally served daily (three full courses and two lighter ones), that ingredients from the eight provinces were presented in turn each month, and that the cooks were women "of commoner or low-status families". It notes that records of earlier banquets mostly list "a vast variety of foods without mentioning the specific foods present". Whatever the modern restaurant calls "royal cuisine", the article's evidence for the earlier court is partial, and its own claim of a "revival" implies the revived form is not a straight continuation.

Reading a Claim About Dress, Food or Home

1. **The thing or the word?** Hanbok and hanok are described as old, and both words are described as modern.
2. **Whose version?** Modern hanbok copies Joseon court dress; the "royal" table is a revival.
3. **What is promoted?** A day, a "wave" and free palace entry show where official effort goes.
4. **Is it listed, and what exactly?** UNESCO listed the culture of kimjang, not kimchi.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Name the four basic parts of the hanbok, and say how the article dates the garment and the word. Then give two things the state does to promote hanbok, with years where the article gives them.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Give two features of the hanok, and explain what the article says about when the word "hanok" appeared and why many hanok disappeared. Then say why the article's praise of hanok is treated here as the article's view.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Describe gimjang and say exactly what was listed by UNESCO and when. Then give the calendar slip in the Gimjang article, and one reason a "royal cuisine" restaurant is not simply the old court table.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Hanbok:** *jeogori*, *baji*, *chima*, *po*; Goguryeo murals; word first used 1881; modern style copies Joseon court dress; Hanbok Day 1996; Hanbok Wave 2020
- **Hanok:** *ondol*, *daecheong*, *giwa*, *hanji*; word first seen 1907, in a dictionary 1975; many demolished after the Korean War and from the 1970s
- **Gimjang:** winter kimchi-making; UNESCO December 2013 (the culture of making, not kimchi); 133rd Korean Intangible Cultural Property; red pepper 17th century
- **Court cuisine:** twelve dishes with rice and soup; five meals a day; revived in the 21st century
- **Check:** the 1920 skirt claim, the "tenth month"/November slip, the hanok praise, the revival's link to the old court table

Next chapter: Capstone: Tradition and Its Claims, where you apply the course's method to a festival, a ceremony or a custom of your own choosing, with a checklist.

Korean Festivals and Traditional Life

Course 1 · Chapter 11 · Tradition and Its Claims

This last chapter adds no new sources. It gathers what the earlier chapters found into five threads, turns the method into a checklist, and tests the checklist on a sentence that appears on many tourist pages. The aim is a way of reading, so that the next claim you meet about "Korean tradition" can be sorted into record, legend and marketing.

> **How this chapter was checked**
>
> Every fact below was taken from Chapters 1 to 10 of this course, where it is attributed to the Wikipedia articles I read. I did not add or re-check any source for this chapter. That means the flags raised in earlier chapters are still open, and the list at the end of this chapter says which.

Five Threads

1. The calendar

Korean festivals sit on two calendars. The public holidays are partly fixed by Gregorian date and partly by the lunar calendar: Seollal, Buddha's Birthday and Chuseok move across the solar year (Chapter 2 gave the extremes: Seollal between 22 January and 19 February, Chuseok between 8 September and 6 October). The seasonal days of Chapter 5 follow the solar terms and the lunar months. Dates also change by decision: National Foundation Day was moved to a fixed 3 October "for convenience", and Children's Day and Workers' Day were changed more than once. **Lesson:** ask which calendar a source uses, as the Gimjang article's "tenth month" and "November" showed in Chapter 10.

2. The family

Most of the rites in the course happen at home: the New Year bows and the *charye* of Chapters 3 and 4, the ancestral rites of Chapter 6, and the first birthday, 60th birthday, wedding and funeral of Chapter 7. The sources describe change in each: rites for two generations or only for parents, a first birthday in a hired hall, a *hwangap* that has lost weight, a *pyebaek* after the reception. **Lesson:** "traditional" in the sources usually names the older form, and the modern form is often described as a booked or shortened version of it.

3. Faith

Chapter 6 found Confucian, Buddhist and shamanic elements mixed in rites, with scholars disagreeing about the proportions, and found that survey answers about affiliation do not describe practice. The same mixing appeared in Dano (an older Korean rite merged with a Chinese one, Chapter 5), in funerals (Chapter 7) and in the Gangneung and Hahoe rituals (Chapters 8 and 9). **Lesson:** labels such as "shamanism" or "superstition" have histories, and some began as insults.

4. The state

The state appears as legislator, banner-raiser and promoter. It decided which days are national days and public holidays (Chapters 1 and 2); it banned Seollal in 1907, then made it a "folk day" in 1985 and a national holiday in 1989 (Chapter 3); it designates cultural heritage under the 1962 law and sponsors Hanbok Day (1996) and the Hanbok Wave (2020) (Chapters 8 and 10). The same articles report that the state was "in general unfavorable to folk customs" until the late 1970s (Chapter 8). **Lesson:** the state is not a neutral recorder of tradition, and what it protects, bans and promotes changes over time.

5. Tourism

The Festivals in South Korea article attributes many new festivals to tourism initiatives and a shorter work week. The Seoul Lantern Festival began in 2009 for a tourism campaign, the Boryeong Mud Festival in 1998 as a "marketing vehicle" for cosmetics, and Hahoe's ritual has weekly shows for tourists (Chapters 8 and 9). **Lesson:** being made for visitors does not make a festival false. It does mean that the age claimed in its publicity needs checking.

The Checklist

Question	What to look for
1. Who says so?	An owner for every claim: an article, a ministry, a scholar, a tourism office. Wikipedia's articles here are starting points, and their cited sources are where to go next.
2. The thing or the word?	The practice may be old and the name recent (*hanbok*, *hanok*, the 1881 and 1907 first uses).

Question	What to look for
3. Record, legend or marketing?	A dated text is a record; a founding story is a legend; "5,000 years" with no source is neither.
4. Continuous or revived?	"Never stopped" and "reconstructed from a survey and elders" are different claims (Gangneung Danoje).
5. Which calendar?	Lunar, solar or the state's chosen date.
6. Who benefits?	A ministry, a city, a seller. That does not make a claim wrong; it says where to look for a second source.
7. Practice or affiliation?	A survey of belonging does not record what people do.
8. What is hedged?	"Reportedly", "possibly", "often", "more citations needed": each marks a missing figure or source.
9. What is missing?	A source that cannot be found (the Andong festival, Chapter 9) is a result too, and should be reported as one.

Trying It: a Sentence from a Tourist Page

"Chuseok is Korea's ancient 5,000-year-old Thanksgiving."

Using only what the course found (Chapter 4):

- **Who says?** No owner is given, which already weakens the sentence. The Chuseok article attributes wrestling's "5,000 years" to no source I could see.
- **Thing or word?** "Thanksgiving" is an English word borrowed from another country's holiday, and the course flagged "Korean Thanksgiving" as a caution.
- **Origins.** The articles give two origin stories (the *gabae* weaving contest and a harvest-moon origin) and describe both as belief, not record.
- **Calendar.** It falls on the 15th day of the 8th lunar month, between 8 September and 6 October in the solar calendar, and is a public holiday of three days (Chapter 2).
- **Verdict.** A practice with real family rites and recorded customs, wrapped in an unsourced age and a borrowed label. The safe version is: "Chuseok is a three-day

public holiday on the 15th day of the 8th lunar month, observed with ancestral rites and a harvest meal; its origin stories are traditional accounts and not dated records."

What Is Still Open

The earlier chapters raised flags that I could not close with the sources I read. They remain open, and anyone using this course should treat them as questions, not findings:

- The "moon house" placement in Seollal and Daeboreum (Chapters 3 and 5).
- The two *songpyeon* origin stories that differ between articles (Chapter 4).
- The "4 times a year" count for *charye* and the Protestant discrepancy (Chapter 6).
- The Joseon section of the marriage article and the whole of current marriage, cemetery and cremation law (Chapter 7).
- The "13th" Dano count, the 2009 lantern festival length and the Seoul venue (Chapter 8).
- Hahoe's age, the mask counts and the Andong festival's details (Chapter 9).
- The 1920 skirt claim and the hanok praise (Chapter 10).

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Choose any three of the five threads. For each, name one example from the course and say what the checklist question it teaches is.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Apply the checklist to this sentence: "The Seoul Lantern Festival is an ancient Buddhist tradition." Use at least four of the nine questions and give a safer version of the sentence, using only facts from Chapters 6 and 8.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Pick one festival, ceremony or custom from the course and write five lines for a reader: what it is, what the sources record, what they only claim, what is still open, and where to look next. Keep every claim attributed.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Threads:** calendar, family, faith, state, tourism
- **Checklist:** who says so; thing or word; record, legend or marketing; continuous or revived; which calendar; who benefits; practice or affiliation; what is hedged; what is missing
- **Method:** attribute every claim, hedge what you cannot check, and report a gap as a result
- **Still open:** the flags listed above

End of course. Related courses: K-Pop and Korean Cookery have their own chapters on the subjects this course touches only briefly.