



Villagers pose for the camera after the ceremony. Short-haired persons in the third row are visitors to the village to pay New Year greetings



Those with long plaited hair, seen in the photo, are not girls but unmarried boys. Men take seats on the right side during the service while women are seated on the left. They don't mix seats after the age of seven.

to seniors on occasion of the festive day.

Traditional Customs Everywhere

Recluses Shun Modern Life

By Hong Son-hee

Married men wear traditional Korean full-dress attire in white and "gat" (horsehair hats) over "mangon" (horsehair headbands) while the unmarried wear their hair in braids down to their hips.

Girls are also in traditional Korean dress, and are not allowed to take seats with the boys after the age of seven, following traditional Confucian morality.

The scene is not in a Yi Dynasty painting or book but in a real community of this late 20th century in Hangdang-gol, Muggye-ri, Chongam-myon, Hadong-gun, Kyongsang-namdo.

About 90 people from 16 households turn their backs on the mundane life in this secluded utopia located on Mt. Chiri, which is isolated from modern society. They have

unique customs and believe in a unique religion.

Since long ago, it has been believed that there is an eternal paradise in the middle of Mt. Chiri, and a few people settled down there escaping from wars and natural disasters, according to the legend.

The way of living of the villagers is the same as that of the Yi Dynasty era, but what differs from the period is their religious life.

Absolute Religion

Religion is absolute in this village which the residents call "Chonghak-dong" (village of blue crane). It combines Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism and core elements from the peasants' revolution in 1984 and those from the study of Western sciences, popular among local scholars in the last century, and was founded by Kang Tae-song who reportedly attained spiritual enlightenment through his prayers

on Mt. Hoemun in 1919.

The villagers, who are vegetarian following religious rule, perform religious services once a day. They observe together seven big rituals a year, and each of the rituals lasts for 15 days. They are New Year Day, Jan. 15, Buddha's Birthday, the Moon Festival, the anniversary of the death of founder Kang, the anniversary of his birthday and the 16th of the 24 seasonal divisions.

Farming, raising cows of traditional species and growing wild bamboo are the sources of earning of the villagers.

But this antiquated village partially adopts civilized tools these days, which will not always guarantee desirable results. Electricity, three television sets, and a telephone were introduced here Feb. 1, and some bamboo-covered roofs typical of the village were changed to slate roofs due to the Saemaul Movement.



Two women pound rice in a mortar to make rice cake to be served to the ancestors in a New Year Day religious service. They wrap their mouths with cloth so that the "holy" food will not be exposed to the view of their guests and their souls.

Korea Times Photos
by Han Young-hee



"Sirum" (Korean wrestling) is a favorite sport among the young people on festive days. Villagers from different age brackets are happy in the rivalry of strength. The gentleman with short hair is an outsider.