

Jihyun Knudsen
6 August 2010
West Bountiful, Utah

Korean Lost Tooth Tradition **Customary Folklore**

Informant Data

Name: Jihyun Knudsen
Gender: Female
Home Region: Osan, South Korea
Age: 38
Relation to Collector: Sister-in-law
Ethnic Background: Korean

Background and Context

In America, many people practice the tradition of the tooth fairy, which comes to take a child's lost tooth and leaves money (as long as the tooth has been placed under the child's pillow). A similar tradition is practiced in Korea, but instead of a tooth fairy coming, the hope is that a magpie will come take the tooth. Magpies in Korean culture are associated with good luck, and hearing a magpie sing in the morning means that good news or a good guest will be coming. Jihyun Knudsen also did research that says that anciently a magpie was thought to be a messenger between God and people. With this in mind, perhaps this tradition began as a type of prayer; however today it is a secular tradition.

Also, like in many cultures, good teeth are important in Korea. Jihyun explained a Korean belief that there are five blessings a man can hope to have as he gets older: 1) good teeth, 2) good wife, 3) good posterity, 4) wealth, and 5) a long life.

Folklore Item

How Collected: At a family event, we were talking about my daughter losing a tooth. Jihyun replied with the following example. Via email, I asked her to again tell about the tradition so I could document it.

Text: In Korea, when a child loses his or her tooth, he or she says “까치야 까치야 현 이 줄게 새 이 다오” [“Magpie, Magpie, I will give my old tooth, please give me a new tooth.”] and then throws the old tooth on the roof.

Performance of the Item

This tradition may not be as widespread now, but when Jihyun was a child everybody performed this custom. The tradition has a whimsical quality that is comparable to the idea of tooth fairies.

David Allred
Male, 36
13 July 2010