Yut – Korean Board Game

Yut (sometimes Romanized as nyout or yoot) is a traditional board game played in Korea, especially during Korean New Year. The game is also called cheok-sa or sa-hee. The suffix nori means “game”.

Although its origins are unclear, some research suggest that yut was played as early as the Three Kingdoms (57 BCE - 668 CE), citing the Taiping Yulan, which states that people of Baekje played a board game similar to Chupu, which is believed to be similar to Pachisi, a board game originated in India.

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

The board and the game are known to have been used in fortune telling, particularly in mountain areas and small farming villages, but this is no longer practiced.

Equipment

The board (mal-pan, 말판) is normally made of stitched cloth. The modern board is a rectangular shape, but historically there was also a round variation. There are four straight courses and two diagonal ones. Each of the straight courses comes with five stations, the diagonal ones have five stations, too, but one is shared. This brings the number of stations to twenty-nine in total. The board is also known to be drawn onto the floor.

Instead of dice, the yut sticks are used (similar to those used in the Egyptian board game Senet). There are two kinds of yut stick: jang-jak yut (장작 묶) and bam yut (방 묶). Jang-jak yut are made of fire wood. There are four sticks of about 15 cm length and a diameter of 2 cm to 3 cm. These sticks are split into halves. Chestnut wood is most commonly used, but birch wood is also common. These woods are chosen for the weight and the fresh sound when playing. Bam yut, on the other hand, are wooden sticks of about 3 cm length. They have a diameter of about 1 cm, and again are split into halves. The bam yut are played in a small bowl, shaken in the palm, and then released.

There are small tokens (marks) used for the game, called mal (or “horse”). There are four tokens for each team, although there are no common rules what a token can be made of. The only rule is that the mals of the opponent teams must be clearly distinguishable. Apart from black and white plastic tokens generally found today, common mals are coins, buttons, small pebbles, or even chess beads (both from Western chess and Korean chess). When choosing the mal, some Koreans consider its speed, because the faster a horse runs, the better it is thought to run.
The sticks are cast to determine how far a token can advance. The score is determined by counting the sticks that are over, and those that are up. Each combination has a name. One stick over (flat side up) and three sticks up (round side up) is called do. Two sticks up and two sticks over is called gae (dog). One stick up and three sticks over is called geol. All sticks over is called yut, whereas all sticks up is called mo. A do is worth one space advancement, a gae is worth two space advancement, a geol is worth 3 space advancement, yut is worth 4 space advancement, and mo is worth 5 space advancement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stick Configuration</th>
<th>Name (Korean)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>do 도</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>gae 개</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>geol 걸</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>yut 윙</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>mo 모</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scoring: The number of points followed by a schematic representation of the sticks, as well as the name of the particular throw

**How to play**

The game is played between two partners or two teams who play in turns, sometimes it is played with more teams. Yut is a popular family game. There is no limit in the number of participants in a game, which means that the game can be played by a considerable group. When played with large groups it is not uncommon for some group members never to cast the sticks: they still participate discussing the strategy.

The start of the game is determined by each team casting the yut sticks. The team with the highest score starts first.

Each team then casts the sticks in turn, then moves a mal according to the score achieved. One turn usually consists of only one cast. However, a player achieving a yut or mo earns an extra cast for the turn; if he/she casts a yut or mo at the second cast, he/she earns an extra cast again, so there is no limit to the number of times a player can cast again before the end of a turn, provided he or she keeps casting yuts or mos. The respective scores can be played separately if wished, each given to another mal (or group of mals, see below), but a score earned from one cast cannot be split into two moves—for example, a geol (advance three steps) cannot be split into a do (one step) and a gae (two steps).

**The four possible courses of the game of Yut:**

![Diagram of Yut courses]

As long as there are mals outside the board, a team can either put a new mal onto the board according to the scores it got, or move a mal already on the board. The mals travel around the board and can move forward only. However, when landing on one of the big stations (in the corner and the centre), the
team can choose to take the shorter way should they wish to. There are four possible courses, the default course being the longest one with no abbreviation (No. 4).

If a mal lands on a station occupied by the opponent's team, the opponent's mal is removed from the course and returned to the starting position, and the current player is allowed to cast again.

If a mal lands on a station occupied by the own team, these mals can form a group and travel together from that point on. However, this bears a risk: If an opponent lands their mal on a station occupied by a group of mals of the opponent, all mals in the group are removed from the course.

For example, if one cast two *yuts* and one *do* at his/her first turn in the game, possible moves would include (see *The Stations* below for the station names):

- Put a mal on the board at the *yut* station (uses the first *yut* score); advance to *mo* (uses the *do* score), then to *sok-yut* (uses the second *yut*).
- Put a mal on the board at the *yut* station (uses first *yut* score); put another mal on the board at the same *yut* station (uses the second *yut* score), causing the two mals to move together from then on; advance them to *mo* (uses the *do*).
- Put a mal on the board at the *yut* station (uses the first *yut*); advance to *duet-geol* (uses the second *yut*), then to *duet-yut* (uses the *do*).

The game is won by the team who bring all their mals home first, that is complete the course with all their mals. A course is completed if a mal passes the station where the game is started (*cham-meoki*). Landing on cham-meoki is no finish, but any score going "beyond" this station completes a home run. Yut is often played for three or more wins.