Tsaagan Sar, also known as the White Moon Festival, is the celebration of the Mongolian New Year. It is based on the lunar calendar, so its date changes from one year to the next, but it symbolizes the first day of Spring, and thus, the New Year. It is a celebration that holds great cultural significance for the Mongolian people today, as it has done for centuries.

Because the Mongolian people have a very strong oral tradition for their history and customs, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly when the celebrations of Tsaagan Sar began. However, by looking at the primary sources available, and comparing their descriptions of the traditions surrounding the first day of the lunar new year, historians are able to draw logical conclusions about the origins and practices of Tsaagan Sar.

**Tsaagan Sar History**

The Secret History of the Mongols states that on the first day of the lunar year, Genghis Khan purified himself, donned new clothes, paid respect to Heaven and Earth, greeted his mother, and distributed gifts to people who were at least 60 years old.

Marco Polo also commented on the Lunar New Year (White Moon) celebration at the court of Kublai Khan. He wrote that everyone was clothed in white, for the Mongolian people deem white to be a lucky color, and it would bring them good luck for the rest of the year. Gift giving was also integral to the celebration of the new year, with people giving white gifts to each other, as well as travelling from far and wide to give gifts to Kublai.
Why White?

The Mongolian people have long ascribed certain symbolism to particular colors. White is considered sacred, as the Mongolian people were said to be descended from a white wolf and a fallow doe. White also symbolizes purity of intent, and good luck and fortune. Purity of intent is specifically represented by white foods, particularly various dairy products, rice with curds and rice with raisins. White clothing is considered to bring good fortune for the coming year.

Tsaagan Sar Ceremonial Traditions

The Tsaagan Sar celebrations last for three days. During this time, certain rituals are performed. Many of the particular traditions vary depending on the area of Mongolia, but they tend to follow a similar basic tradition.

The day before Tsaagan Sar is called Bituun, which is the New Moon. On Bituun, Mongolians clean their houses from top to bottom, and if they are herders, they also clean their barn. If the family is Buddhist (as most Mongolians are today), they light candles to represent Samsara. They also place three pieces of ice outside their door for the God Palden Lhamo’s horse to drink while he is visiting with the family.

During the night of Bituun, the family begins preparing a great feast for the Tsaagan Sar festivities. This is also the night by which everyone tries to settle all their debts, and work out any interpersonal issues, so as to start the New Year off on the right foot. It is interesting to note, that even though everyone tries to settle their debts, it is considered unlucky to seek out a debtor at their house to try to collect a debt.

During the two days of Tsaagan Sar celebrations, Mongolians visit their relatives. They always start with the eldest, usually meeting first in the house of their parents. The visits are highly
ritualized. The host is seated on the North side of the ger (yurt), with a hat upon their head. The visitor then greets their host with the traditional greeting, called the “Zolgokh”.

The Zolgokh is a traditional formal greeting, in which two people hold their arms out towards each other. The younger person puts their arms under the elder person’s, grasping their elbows to show their support for the elder person. They then touch each other’s cheeks, either with a kiss, or a sniff, and the elder person is usually presented with a gift. The eldest person is always greeted first. It is interesting to note, however, that this greeting is not exchanged between a husband and wife.

After the greetings are exchanged, guests sit around a table, and the hostess serves tea with milk and traditional dishes, such as steamed sheep, dairy products, traditional cookies, etc.

**What Makes Tsaagan Sar Different?**

Perhaps the most well known Mongolian festival is the Naadam Festival held every summer. What makes Tsaagan Sar different from the Naadam Festival?

The main difference between the two is the very nature of the celebration. The Naadam celebrates characteristics and features that are considered to be masculine to the Mongolian people. In fact, it is also referred to as “the three games of men.” It is held in midsummer and consists of competitions of wrestling, horse racing and archery.

Even though the Naadam Festival has garnered far more attention with its flashy and impressive competitions, Tsaagan Sar is considered to be a more important holiday for the Mongolian people.
In contrast to the masculinity of the Naadam, Tsaagan Sar is considered to embody more of the feminine. It represents the softer characteristics of peace and harmony, traits that the Mongolian people have valued for centuries.

Image URLs

Meal pic: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/8/86/Tsagaan_sar.jpg/290px-Tsagaan_sar.jpg


https://www.mongolia-trips.com/cdn/mn-public/tsagaan_sar-MAX-w1000h600.jpg

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Suggested further reading:


http://www.mongoluls.net/tsagaansar.shtml

https://www.viewmongolia.com/tsagaan_sar.html


Primary:


Secondary:


