

Rice Cuisine and Cultural Practice in Contemporary Korean Dietary Life*

Kwang Ok KIM

Abstract

This paper analyzes the contents, forms, and consumption patterns of rice dishes in order to understand underlying meanings of diversification and invention of dishes as cultural commodities in the globalizing food market. The recent renaissance of culinary culture in Korea reveals many interesting cases for anthropological interpretation. Along with globalization of dietary life, people invent new items of rice cuisine and (re)produce new perspectives on the positive qualities of national foods in what can be seen as an expression of cultural nationalism. However, through careful examination of rice cuisine in Korea and comparison with other Asian countries, this paper interprets the phenomena as a cultural practice of the philosophy of sinto buri (“body and earth are one”) to postmodern life.

Keywords: *sinto buri*, well-being, *bap*, globalization, localization, multinationalization, dietary structure, culinary system, aesthetics, personal creation of taste, renaissance of national food

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Kwang Ok KIM is Professor in the Department of Anthropology at Seoul National University. He received his Ph.D. in anthropology from Oxford University in 1980. He is the author of many books and papers, including *Joseon yangban-ui saenghwal segye* (*Yangban: The Life World of Korean Scholar-Gentry*) (2004) and *Power and Sustainability of the Chinese State* (co-authored, 2009). E-mail: kokim@snu.ac.kr.

Introduction

Comparing Korea with other Asian countries where the staple food is rice, the present paper pays special attention to the proliferation of rice cuisine as well as the distinctive dietary structures and modes of culinary service in Korea. Taking food as a genre of culture rather than a medico-nutritional sphere, this paper analyzes the contents, forms, and consumption patterns of rice dishes in order to understand underlying meanings of diversification and invention of dishes as cultural commodities in the globalizing food market.

In China, at the end of a luxurious banquet, guests are served a main dish of either plain steamed rice, fried rice, noodles, or dumplings. Plain rice and noodles are also staple foods in Japan. Similarly, cooked rice (*bap*) is the staple item in everyday meals in Korea,¹ with the traditional mode of serving in the form of set meals (*han-jeongsik*) and home-style meals (*gajeongsik*) in which all dishes are served at once, together with rice and soup (*guk*). Recently, some “modern” restaurants have adopted Western custom of serving meals in courses, with different parts of the meal brought out at different times. In Korea, this practice has come to mean rice served at the end of the meal along with soup and kimchi (Korean fermented vegetable). Here we see also proliferation of new kinds of *bap*, each of which has been invented as an individual dish.

Items, forms, and quality of food, as well as their symbolic meanings, change through the processes of interactive encounters, competi-

1. *Bap* in Korean means a main food, mostly made of grains including rice. There are many kinds of *bap* such as rice, barley, foxtail millet, sorghum, and African millet. Rice is classified by methods of cultivation, such as wet paddy versus dry paddy, as well as the physical qualities of the rice, such as plain rice glutinous rice, white rice, red rice, and black rice. It can be further enriched by adding chestnuts, walnuts, pine nuts, soy beans, lentils, red beans, bean sprouts, wild plants, and even pieces of meat or oysters to make a proper bowl of *bap*. At the First Full Moon Festival, for example, the Chinese eat a soup of *yuanshao* while the Koreans eat *ogok-bap* (five-grain-*bap*) which is made of glutinous rice, millet, sorghum, black beans, and red beans, and often also includes chestnuts, jujubes, pine nuts, and ginkgo nuts.

tion, compromise, innovation, and invention (Gillet 2000; Watson 1997; Yan 2000). Also, food and cuisine should be approached in the context of the various social and cultural elements practiced both by producer and consumer.

Ethnographic discussion here focuses on the rice (*ssal*)² and grains (*gok*) that have traditionally been used as ingredients for the staple food, *bap*.³ In addition to *bap*, grains including rice are also used to make confectionaries, cakes, and liquor.⁴ In traditional Korea, cooked rice was the most prestigious staple and its consumption was an indicator of economic wealth for families, while porridge (*juk*) was regarded as inferior and an indicator of poor economic status.

In this paper, I would like to show the fluctuation of the social position of the traditional staple food, *bap* and *juk*, in the national cultural and historical context, and to examine the recent invention of various forms of *bap* as part of a changed life style. I will discuss the importance of rice and grains in the field of food studies, which has been dominated by studies focusing on meat and specialty items in national cuisines.

Biography of Rice in Korea

There have been numerous discussions on the cultural meaning of rice in Asian nations. Although rice has long been a national symbol, reflecting the historical antiquity of its cultivation (Ohnuki-Tierney

2. In Korea, rice is classified as *byeo* (rice in the field), *narak* (rice harvested but not husked), and *ssal* (husked rice). Cooked rice for everyday consumption is called *ssalbak* while offerings for the soul of the dead are called *me*. The honorific term for a meal set for a king is *sura*, that for the elderly is *jinji* while *bap* is a term for general use and for people of inferior status.

3. For Koreans, the politico-economic importance of *bap* is expressed by their beliefs that *bap* is the Heaven, meaning that to have something to eat is as important as worshipping the God/Heaven. They also say that only after having a proper meal, one can appreciate the (famous) beauty of Geumgangsan mountain.

4. Rice is also used for medicines and in cosmetics such as soap, shampoo, skin lotion, and skin cream.

1993; Kim 2006), it is only recently that rice has become commonly available to people of Korea, Japan, and North China. In premodern Korea, rice was a prestigious and expensive foodstuff, so most people lived on millet, barley, beans, corns, potatoes, and sweet potatoes.

In China, while elderly people still have vivid memories of hunger, their children enjoy a typical peasant food, *wowotao* (steamed corn flour) as a nostalgia dessert at luxurious banquets. In Korea, a family was regarded as rich if its members were able to eat rice at each meal. During the Japanese colonial occupation of Korea (1910-1945), the government built the ports of Mokpo and Gunsan to export Korean rice to Japan to ensure their own food sufficiency. During World War II, in order to feed the Japanese soldiers, the government confiscated grain while locals kept themselves from starvation by subsisting on the industrialized remnants of bean and sesame supplied by the colonial government.⁵ In shaman rituals, hungry ghosts lamented their miserable life of hunger while their fertile rice field was robbed by the Japanese (Kim 2006). After World War, Korea was divided and devastated by the Korean War (1950-1953). Until the late 1960s, Koreans suffered shortages of grains and relied heavily upon foreign aids, including Vietnamese rice and American corn. So, in the past “rice with meat” was referred to as the index of wealth one might expect to achieve. North Korea’s founder Kim Il Sung once said in a speech to his poverty-stricken people there would come a day when all would enjoy “*ipap-e gogiguk*” (rice and soup with meat), and Kim Jong Il reemphasized this idea of food security in his New Year address of 2010, saying he would realize his father’s sixty-year-old dream.⁶

In order to solve the perennial shortage of rice, the government prohibited the industrial use of rice in the 1960s and organized a cultural campaign to eat rice mixed with barley or millet. Importing massive quantities of wheat from the United States, the government also implemented a campaign to shift people’s diet away from rice by

5. The war cabinet of Japan extracted oil from beans and sesame and fed Koreans with its leftovers.

6. *Ssal* (rice) is also called *ipssal*; *ssalbap* (cooked rice) is called *ipap*.

popularizing flour-based foods. Medical doctors, nutrition scientists, and culinary professionals appeared in mass media to extol the positive aspects of flour food and the negative effects of excessive intake of carbohydrates such as rice in relation to health, disease, mode of physical growth, refinement of culinary life, convenience of food preparation, and a whole slurry of social issues. Under this government-manipulated science to invent the popular imagination of interaction between flour foods and physical as well as mental superiority, people gradually accepted wheat bread as a substitute for traditional staple food.

Traditionally, during the three-month spring famine from March until early May called *bori gogae* (literally, “barley hump”), grain shortages between the end of the winter stocks and the barley harvest caused widespread hunger. The development of a new, high-yield variety of rice called *tongilbyeo* (“unification rice”) in the mid-1970s helped solve this problem. However, the government still attempted to diversify the populace’s foodways to incorporate a wider variety of grains beyond rice. Medical and nutritional scientists warned of the dangers of “excessive” rice consumption, along with peppers and salt, which were blamed for a variety of diseases, as part of the effort to get more people to adopt a Western-pattern diet.

Those born before the 1960s still express a strong conviction that flour does not afford the same level of physical energy as rice (*bapsim*). Within modernity’s theoretical framework, traditional meals consisting of rice, kimchi, and bean paste came to be contrasted with Western meals of bread, milk, and meat. In this way, young urbanites’ tastes began to be domesticated by the Western dietary structure despite the fact that a majority of Koreans insist rice to be their national staple food. Though traditional Korean meals predominate in rural regions, the consumption of rice has declined sharply since the 1990s, while meat consumption has rapidly increased.⁷

7. The government statistics reveals that the annual average consumption of rice per head has decreased in the following fashion: 93.6kg (2000), 88.1kg (2001), 87.0kg (2002), 83.2kg (2003), 82.0kg (2004), 80.7kg (2005), 78.8kg (2006), 76.9kg (2007), 75.8kg (2008), and 74.0kg (2009). See Statistics Korea (2000-2009).

Sinto buri and the Culture of Well-Being

Old people still have nostalgic memories of now-disappeared restaurants such as Hanilgwan and Joseonok in Seoul where they tasted the economic growth with barbecued beef (*bulgogi*) and grilled beef ribs (*galbi gui*)⁸ since the mid-1970s. At that time, young “salary men” used to spend hours in shabby restaurants drinking *soju* and eating cheap barbecued intestines (*gopchang gui*) or stewed beef intestines (*gopchang jeongol*).

Starting in the mid-1980s as part of preparations for the 1988 Seoul Olympics, the Korean government opened the markets to foreign material culture, especially Western imports, including food and fashion. Facing this increasing influx of foreign culture, a group of intellectuals organized a popular nationalistic cultural movement that used rice as a symbol of national identity and sovereignty. Despite such efforts by intellectuals, bread and meat continued to increase in popularity.

The late 1980s to 1990s can be seen as a period of competition between global modernity and local nationalism. Radical changes occurred in the foodscape of Korea during this period, including the appearance of a new breed of fancy restaurants, along with fast-food chains such as McDonald’s and KFC and “family restaurants” such as T.G.I. Friday’s and Coco’s. Soda and instant coffee became “national drinks” until they were replaced by mineral water and “whole bean coffee” (instead of instant coffee) around 2000, when Italian restaurants began to challenge the popularity of McDonald’s and KFC (Bak 2005). Many kinds of bread and delicacies have been introduced at luxurious bakeries, too. At present, the newly emerging urban middle class have bread and fresh coffee for breakfast at home or at neighborhood bakeries. Occasions to have meals outside the home have increased, and meals are mainly beef, chicken, or pork prepared in either Western or Korean style.

8. These restaurants introduced the new custom of eating a bowl of cold noodles, *naengmyeon*, at the end of a meal of grilled meat. Alternatively, many of these also served *galbitang*, a soup made with beef ribs.

In the 1980s, some intellectuals displeased by such drastic changes in the foodscape organized various kinds of cultural activism to protect and preserve “national foods.” The Agricultural Cooperative Federation adopted and popularized the idea of *sinto buri* (“Body and earth are one”) from the philosophy of Cheontae Buddhism, which believes in the inseparability of the karma of a person and that of his surroundings (Kim 1994; Pemberton 2002; Walraven 2002). According to this philosophy, health is maintained only when human physiology maintains harmony with food, which is produced by the water, soil, air, wind, and sunshine in the land where the person lives. This is also connected with traditional idea of *pungsu*, the geomantic analysis of the relationship between human conditions and the physical arrangement of nature. Along with growing nationalistic fever, these movements earned popular acclaim as a form of resistance against the modernization and science that had promoted excessive use of chemicals and antibiotics in agricultural products. It was a countercultural movement against the expansion of Western modernity that many Korean people regarded to have destroyed traditional life and food systems, as well as the national agricultural economy.

Under the slogan “Ours is good,” active members of the movement insisted that they should cultivate indigenous crops with traditional methods and technologies, while rejecting the use of chemicals and antibiotics. Agricultural goods thus produced are branded as *yuginong* (organic), are thus more expensive than conventionally produced goods, and are consumed by the urban middle class.⁹ The idea of *sinto buri* is now a philosophy that dominates the foodways

9. Grocery stores classify agricultural products in four categories: organic, transitory, nonagricultural chemical and low-chemical agricultural goods. Products cultivated from fields that have not been exposed to chemical fertilizers for three years or more can be classified as “organic.” If no chemicals have been used for more than a year, the products are considered transitory. If less than one-third of the recommended amount of chemical fertilizer is used, those products are labeled nonagricultural chemical goods, while products from the soil where half of the recommended quantity of chemicals were used are classified as low chemical agricultural goods. The prices vary accordingly, with organic the highest and therefore the most prestigious, and its consumption is associated with higher socioeconomic status.

of Koreans as a whole. Eating rice, grains, and vegetables, as well as the roots, leaves, and fruits of wild plants gradually came into fashion among the middle class. Foods once rejected as backwards by Koreans due to Western distaste have been re-embraced due to advances in both food science and cultural nationalism: soybean paste, kimchi,¹⁰ seasoned sesame leaves, shrimp, fish, and many kinds of shellfish. In spite of this, there has been competition between Korean traditional cuisine and various foreign foodways, often expressed in the generational gap and gendered culture.

At the start of the twenty-first century, a group of cultural entrepreneurs pursued food as an important cultural genre in which national or ethnic traditions compete with and challenge one another. They actively disseminated discourses on the superiority of Korean food, both in terms of nutrition and aesthetics. Among many cultural enterprises emerging at this time were restaurants and culinary experts who formulated various forms of *bap*. This return-to-tradition movement aligned with people's self-critique on the meat-centered gluttony they indulged in during the 1980s and 1990s. As the ideas of *sinto buri* and "well-being" converge, the consumption of rice, grains, and vegetables has begun to concomitantly increase.

"Well-being," a newly introduced English word, became popularized in everyday life of Koreans in the early 2000s. It carries multiple meanings of good/ideal quality of life, wealth, and a cultured lifestyle.¹¹ People who adhere to this philosophy enjoy food as another genre of aesthetics or art, rather than as a nutritive necessity. They appreciate the color, shape, taste, and fragrance of a dish, the atmosphere of the restaurant, and the manner of service. They try to find philosophy and cultural symbols in what they eat. These people enjoy traveling to fashionable restaurants and trying new dishes. It

10. See Han (1994) for more discourse on kimchi.

11. See Bornstein et al. (2003), Brim et al. (2004), Mathews and Izquierdo (2009), and Nussbaum and Sen (1993) concerning a new philosophy of life as discussed in the Western world. In Korea, however, this word is used in mass-media advertisement for food and consumption without any clear idea of its origin. Some Koreans translate it into *chamsari* (true living).

becomes part of middle-class people's "well-being life" to travel, take photos, enjoy wildflowers and landscapes, practice yoga, swim, golf, and exercise at fitness centers, visit Buddhist temples for meditation, attend cultural programs at museums, art galleries, and concert halls, visit traditional houses in the countryside, and participate in study trips to cultural heritage sites. They are focused on natural food, using local ingredients and prepared through traditional methods. Mostly interested in pseudo-medical science concerning health and bodily fitness, they are preoccupied with whether a food represents "nature." Not only ingredients but also taste and color should be all "natural," they insist.

Words such as organic, non-GM, clean and pure, natural, pollution-free, sunshine, water, air, wind, soil, environment, ecology, and sustainability are used to emphasize the superior quality of the individual foodstuffs. Other important words in the well-being movement are related with human values such as life, love, motherhood, family ties, mind or heart, sincerity, responsibility, and trust. For example, the photo, name, telephone number, and e-mail address of the cultivator are printed on the bag or tag of a product to connote trustworthiness or sincerity. Agribusiness companies also adopt words that connote naturalness and purity, such as Chungjungwon (meaning "clean and pure garden"), Haechandle (meaning "field of sunshine"), Sannaedeul (meaning "mountain-brook-field"), and Pulmuone (meaning "garden of traditional wind blowers") in order to appeal to the consumer's imagination of nature and humanity.

Rice in Renaissance of Korean Culinary Culture

Bap (Cooked Rice) as a Cuisine

In traditional food service in Korea, all dishes are placed on the table at the same time, unlike Chinese or Western styles of food service in which entrees are served one at a time. At a traditional Korean banquet, individuals can sample several dishes according to their prefer-

ences so that at any given moment diners enjoy their own selection of tastes. Flavors are created through a combination of the chef's skills and diner's choices. Therefore, not only the quality of the chef but also the quality of basic condiments or seasonings, such as soy sauce, soybean paste, red pepper paste, and other supplementary sauces is important to the quality and taste of the food. The Korean table is a space where maker and consumer compromise creatively to define the taste of a dish.

In restaurants of relatively high fame today, many different kinds of *bap* made of varying grains appear as an independent or individual dish. Some restaurants that specialize in *bap* explain that they grow special breeds of rice and grains in specially designed fields, which



Figure 1. A Korean table setting, where all dishes are served simultaneously

Figure 2. A scene where a foreign couple and a Korean couple enjoy a Korean table d'hôte



are selected on the analysis of the geomantic arrangement of land, water, air, and sunshine.

Rice is cultivated in several colors in addition to the well-known white variety—including red, black, green, and yellow, which together with white are the five colors representing the five cardinal directions and five elements in Korean cosmology.¹² Koreans regard the color red as the most auspicious element to expel evil spirits, enhance life essence and fertility, and enrich fortune and happiness. Some folklore-oriented people explain the use of colored rice as being based on this symbolism. Colored rice is still produced only in small quantities and is thus expensive. Red and black rice are especially expensive, as these kinds of rice were once consumed exclusively by emperors and kings. Nowadays, colored rice grains are mixed with white rice when cooking *bap*; however, only cooked white rice (*me*) is offered at rituals for ancestors and spirits.

The brand name and place of production is usually printed on rice packaging, accompanied by advertising slogans such as “Odae rice is selected from the highest-quality rice, and cultivated by organic methods in Cheorwon in the pollution-free DMZ where the air, wind, water, and sunshine are all fresh,” or “‘His Majesty, the King’s Rice,’ is the same rice that was used exclusively for the king’s meals in the past. The rice was cultivated in the very paddy in Yeosu that produced the royal rice and is strictly controlled by the County Agricultural Cooperation.”

In contemporary Korea, *bap* is made with rice and grains including millet, sorghum, barley, and corn. It is also sometimes made with

12. Red represents the south, life essence, and summer, and is symbolized by a mythical animal called the red peacock. Black represents the north, land of death, and winter, and is symbolized by a black turtle with a dragon’s head. Green or blue represents the east, spring, and youth, and is symbolized by the blue dragon, while white represents the west, pure land of eternal life for souls of the dead, and autumn, and is symbolized by a white tiger. Yellow symbolizes the center of the universe, ruler, and human being. As such, yellow, the color of gold, is the color of emperor and king. Water, iron, wood, soil, and fire are the five elements of the cosmos.

beans,¹³ bean sprouts, potatoes, sweet potatoes, pumpkin, dried wild plants, mushrooms, or roots such as ginseng or balloon flower (*doraji*). Also, there are various types of cooked rice enriched with pine nuts, ginkgo, chestnut, jujube, and/or walnut. As a topping, some even use flower petals. In the past, people cooked rice in a large iron pot. Since the early 1980s, some restaurants have served *bap* in a small pot-shaped bowl made of special stone called *gopdol*. In the late 1980s, they began to cook rice in small, individual stone pots for each customer. As stone retains relatively intense heat for a prolonged period of time, it produces a scorched layer of rice crust called *nurungji*; diners will often pour water into the stone bowl to turn this layer into a broth called *sungnyung*. Restaurants that use electric cookers cannot make *nurungji* and so imported inexpensive scorched rice from China. However, food safety concerns were raised when some of the imported *nurungji* was found to have been coated with antiseptic chemicals, and consequently many restaurants have replaced *sungnyung* with tea or coffee.

Nowadays, it is common to see that the restaurateur or chef would come out to explain the special aspect of the *bap* the restaurant serves, i.e., the kind of rice, technical method and process of drying and husking the harvested rice, and the process of making *bap* (as a kind of industrial secret or intellectual property, it is usually mystified). Also, the quality of the water, amount of heat, ratio of grains, cooking time, and other factors are said to be important. In addition, some restaurants started serving *dolsotbap* (nutritious rice cooked in a stone pot) as well as a dish of rice steamed in bamboo, which adds a distinctive fragrance to the rice. Since bamboo is known to thrive in unpolluted soil and air, such rice is regarded as being particularly untainted. In this way, restaurants compete for people's imagination of nature, science, and philosophy on the one hand, and try to persuade people to recognize that the restaurant provides unpolluted, high-quality, and refined food as they treat cus-

13. The most popular of these are soybeans, green beans, mung beans, black beans, and red beans.

tomers as their family members.

Many local governments and the Agricultural Cooperative Federation have organized festivals to advertize the superiority of their local agricultural products. Rice is one of the main items to represent the locality. At the annual rice festival held by the county government of Icheon, one of the most popular programs is the competition for the title “Master of Rice Cooking” (*ssalbak myeongin*), where women representing their villages compete for top honors regarding the quality and taste of their cooked rice. They use their own secret methods and show off their skills in preparing rice and *nurungji*.

Recently, Koreans have enthusiastically embraced the new phrase *chinhwangyeong* (environmentally friendly) to their locally produced rice. In the early 1980s, ethnically Korean Chinese agricultural scientists took rice seeds from Korea and successfully transplanted them in the northeast provinces of China, including Liaoning, Jilin, and Heilongjiang. This new breed, called “Northeast Rice” (*dongbeimi*), is regarded as the best in China, and began to be exported back to Korea in the 2000s. This “imported rice” is much cheaper, but is not popular because it is not organic, and thought to be polluted by excessive use of agricultural chemicals and preservative antiseptics. This Chinese rice is used for mainly for industrial food and liquor.

Bibimbap (*Mixed Rice*)

Mixed rice, *bibimbap*, has become so popular that it is now regarded as one of the representative items of Korean cuisine. The two most well-known types of *bibimbap* are Jeonju *bibimbap* and Andong *bibimbap* (also known as *heot jesabap*). Jeonju *bibimbap* consists of rice, vegetables of various colors to symbolize the five cosmological elements (Jeong 2007), raw seasoned ground beef, sesame oil, red-pepper paste, and often a fried or raw egg. *Bibimbap* in Andong stems from Confucian ancestral rites and the rites held for important scholars. In addition to rice, the same vegetables used at these ceremonies, such as shredded turnip, boiled cabbage, bean sprouts, and

fiddlehead ferns are mixed in, along with other ritual foods including fried tofu, and are seasoned with soy sauce instead of pepper paste. Seasoning is very restricted, as in the normal foods offered at ancestral rites and memorial services. Andong *bibimbap* is much simpler and more “Confucian” than the colorful and heavily seasoned Jeonju version.

The popularity of *bibimbap* is growing along with concern and interest in the “well-being” lifestyle. It also offers a taste of individuality, since diners can adjust the flavor of individual servings by adding pepper paste, sesame oil, or soy sauce in order to suit their preferences. *Bibimbap* is another cultural space where one can exercise choice and selection to create a distinctive taste rather than enjoying it as produced by someone else.

Ssambap (*Wrapped Rice*)

Another cooked rice dish that features a unique Korean way of eating rice is *ssambap*. In *ssambap*, lettuce or another large leafy vegetable is used to wrap up various combinations of meat, fish, rice, seasoning, and other vegetables. Koreans often wrap *hoe*, or raw fish similar to Japanese-style *sashimi*, and vegetables together in the same way.¹⁴ Eating vegetable with other food is ubiquitous throughout the world but it is unique in the Korean case of *ssam* in terms of methods of consumption. In the case of a hamburger, for instance, lettuce and/or sliced onion are put in between pieces of cooked meat inside of a bun, instead of putting individually selected food on top of a leaf of vegetable and wrapping it, as is done with the Korean *ssam*. The different ways of eating affect the taste. When we eat hamburgers, we first chew the flour-made bun before our tongue reaches the vegeta-

14. Japanese would insist that they should eat *sashimi* as is without other additions in order to appreciate the pure taste of it. However, Koreans would insist that raw fish should be eaten together with natural vegetables so that they can enjoy a taste and fragrance produced by the combination. It is said in Korea that stomach cancer is higher among the Japanese who eat *sashimi* without vegetables than Koreans who eat *hoe* with vegetables.

bles. In the case of Korean *ssam*, however, it is the vegetable that the teeth and sensory part of tongue first touch before they reach food inside. This means that Koreans taste fresh vegetable before they enjoy the taste of other components such as rice, meat, and fish. The Korean way of eating wrapped-rice (*ssambap*) allows each diner the individual choice among many dishes placed on the table so that he/she may create a customized taste experience. The wrap is thought to have originated among poorer families that could not afford proper side dishes. This style of serving and eating became popular in the “well-being” movement as a result of its emphasis on fresh vegetables, which once were only seasonal leafy vegetables. But thanks to greenhouse cultivation and transnational market networks, choices have recently expanded.

As Korea entered a postindustrial era in the 1990s, the idea of “eating nature” began to spread in popularity. Restaurants with names like Gohyang (native town), Todamjip (house with mud wall), and Chogajip (thatched house) appeared, catering to the privileged urban middle class, as it allowed them to imagine their native home or countryside they left behind. These restaurants serve home-style peasant food that claims to spring from before the intensive economic growth of the postwar period. Soybean paste soup, steamed barley or millet, rice with bean sprouts, and home-style meals with various small side dishes are outstanding examples of this penchant for simpler, less ostentatious cuisine. Instead of plentiful *bulgogi* or *galbi*, diners consume broiled mackerel or saury, once considered cheap fish for the populace. Those relatively inexpensive food items are usually presented and commoditized as having been directly transported from the farmer or fisherman. Lettuce wraps, green pepper, red pepper paste or soybean paste, and mixed *bap* with rice and millet, etc. are the primary items which trigger nostalgic memories of preindustrial Korea for an older generation (Kim 2001). Because of the nostalgic values these foods evoke, expensive restaurants that specialize in these foods have appeared, though they rely upon a middle- and upper-middle-class customer base.

Gimbap (*Seaweed Rice Rolls*)

Rice wrapped in seaweed is a popular food among many Koreans. The Japanese also wrap rice in seaweed for a kind of *sushi* called *norimaki* that usually features one or two food items, such as pieces of tuna or cucumber, placed in white rice. In contrast, Korean *gimbap* contains more ingredients, including a variety of vegetables and meat. It is convenient and contains a number of foods that normally appear as side dishes in Korean meals, making it popular on picnics and lunches. Office workers and students may grab one on their way to office or school, or have it as a simple lunch when they do not have enough time to enjoy a proper meal.

Juk (*Porridge*) and Mieum (*Gruel*)

Another interesting new trend is the growing popularity of *juk* and *mieum*. In the past, gruel was mainly given to infants, the aged, and the sick who cannot eat solid foods. Since it was also a way of making a little bit of grain stretch by using more water, consuming porridge was considered a sign of poverty. For Koreans, “living on a bowl of barley porridge” was a common expression used to describe the miserable economic condition of a family.¹⁵ On the other hand, wealthy Koreans, including members of the royal court, dined on gruel made from expensive grains; these various *juk* and *mieum* were considered a nutritious and prestigious meal for the privileged.

Since the early 2000s, many small chain restaurants specializing in porridge have appeared, serving porridge similar to the kind wealthy people used to enjoy in the premodern period. Basic rice or

15. Kwon O-sang, a member of Independent Movement Organization under the Japanese colonial rule, was tortured to death by the police. At his funeral, his mother served the guests with only a small bowl of millet gruel saying, “Our land has been robbed (by the Japanese) and thus we have nothing to treat you properly. Only when we get our nation back can we serve you proper meals with white rice.”

millet porridge is enhanced with green beans, red beans, sesame, pine nuts, mushrooms, vegetables, abalone, crab, shrimp, ginseng, meat, or fish. Pine nuts, sesame, walnuts, and peanuts are favored ingredients as a vegetable oil substitute for animal fat, considered to be unhealthy due to its saturated fat and cholesterol content. Beans are considered very nutritious: green bean porridge is especially popular in summer because it is believed to keep the body cool, while red bean porridge (*patjuk*) is usually eaten during the winter, though it can also be enjoyed on summer days. Following Korean color symbolism, people make *patjuk* on the day of the winter solstice (*dongji*) and throw a little on the ground in order to expel evil spirits.

Porridge has likewise become an item common on “well-being” menus because it is simple to eat and full of natural ingredients. Simplicity and naturalness are two important elements in the well-being lifestyle. In the past, preparing a good lunch box for her children and husband was part of what was expected of a “wise mother and good wife,” but nowadays in Korea, a good wife is expected to prepare a breakfast of fresh gruel with stuffs good for health and nutrition such as black sesame, pine, beans, and vegetables like carrots and pumpkins. Freshly made vegetable juice, full of minerals and vitamins, may be an alternative.

In the northeast provinces of China where Chinese Koreans have lived, sesame seeds and pumpkins have recently become one of the main items for export to South Korea, where they are used to make sesame seed porridge (*kkaejuk*) and pumpkin porridge (*hobakjuk*). In this way, the revival of traditional foodstuffs led to the construction of transnational networks for agricultural business between Korea and China.

Tteok (*Rice Cake*)

There are more than 200 kinds of rice cakes in Korea. They are usually made from rice, other grains, vegetables, flowers, fruit, or other wild plants, and are often categorized based on the preparation methods used, including how the primary grain was processed, whether it

was fermented, and what cooking methods were used, such as steaming or frying. It is generally a food for special occasions, such as rites of passage and holidays.

Steamed white rice cake (*baekseolgi*), cylinder-shaped white rice cake (*garaetteok*), rice cake coated with bean powder (*injeolmi*), rice cake balls (*gyeongdan*), pan-fried rice cake (*hwajeon*), rainbow rice cake (*muji-gaetteok*), and layered rice cake (*sirutteok*) are representative rice cakes. Steamed rice cake covered with red beans, called either *pattteok* or *sirutteok*, is believed to have special meaning since, as in the case of red bean gruel at the winter solstice, red is an auspicious color thought to expel evil spirits and enhance life essence and fertility, making it a ritual food for spirits or gods. The *gosatteok* is distributed among neighbors, establishing networks of relationships in the act of constructing community.

Since the 1980s, it has become customary to celebrate birthdays, weddings, and other congratulatory events with Western-style flour cakes. When compared with hand-made traditional rice cakes, mass-produced Western-style cakes are relatively cheap. The popularity of traditional rice cakes has declined in favor of soft, sweet, creamy, flour-based cakes decorated with chocolates, fruit, or whipped cream. However, an increasing number of people have for breakfast plain glutinous rice cakes such as *injeolmi*, *baekseolgi*, *jeungpyeon*, or glutinous rice cakes stuffed or topped with beans, pumpkin, chestnuts, or jujubes. Rice cakes for breakfast are perceived as being simpler and more convenient than a traditional breakfast, while still being healthier than bread.

Garaetteok is occasionally used in ritual offerings, such as ancestral worship (*jesa*) and sacrificial offerings to spirits (*gosa*). More recently, *garaetteok* has become popular among young kids in a dish called *tteokbokki*, made by drenching *garaetteok* in a spicy-sweet sauce. Under the slogan, "Globalize Korean Food," a group of ambitious culinary professionals and government-supported organizations launched a special project to develop various forms of *tteokbokki* as a representative item of Korean cuisine in the twenty-first-century global food market.

The contemporary food culture of Korea is understood in the context of a combination of ideas of *sinto buri* and the well-being lifestyle. This combination provides modern people with a space in which they can recall what they have abandoned for the sake of modernity. For those modernists, it is a symbolic experience of attempting a cultural conversion in their search for well-being through reappropriation of the premodernity of native place, time, and indigenous (backward) way of life (Moon 1997). Visiting restaurants to taste high-quality *bap* in this context is not a simple gastronomic tour by the leisure class, but a cultural pilgrimage to search for a mythic time and nature that they have lost or given up in the process of Western-oriented modernization. At their everyday table, they eat Western-style, meat-centered meals. From time to time, however, they depart from their routine to hold rituals that recall their (imagined) primordial sacred world of food.

The combination is also related with the rise of Asian localization to face globalization. Prior to 2000, the Western lifestyle was synonymous with modernity and associated with science, civilization, and culture. Recently, however, Asian/Korean traditional cuisines have been more closely examined, particularly with regards to health benefits, obesity prevention, and effect on longevity. In Western countries such as the United States and parts of Europe, Thai, Vietnamese, and Indian cuisines have become popular, and Japanese *sashimi* and *sushi* have come to be widely savored. Both Western and Asian people have begun to adopt new perspectives on Asian Others, and culinary experiences provide an important space of understanding them. Globalization makes the transnational flow of cultures inevitable and people come to enjoy other cultures, especially in the field of food and fashion. While bagels and cream cheese and Jewish *kosher* foods are becoming fashionable among the Korean middle class, Korean restaurants for *ssambap* and *bibimbap* are becoming popular among New Yorkers.

The contemporary combination of the *sinto buri* and well-being concepts in Korea's food culture can also be understood in the context of a growing emphasis on aesthetics rather than cost, which

focuses on the color, shape, decoration, and taste of a dish. In addition, anecdotal and scientific knowledge is stressed over nutritional analysis. At the same time, there is a new appreciation of national or local food. Also, the distinction between haute cuisine and peasant food has become blurred. As we see in the changes in the position of *ssam* and *juk*, some traditionally peasant foods have become high cuisine, while many items of haute cuisine are reinvented as royal cuisine and become popular dishes.¹⁶

The recent fashion in food described here can be understood in the context of globalization that leads to cultural encounters and competition between cuisines. It also explains how the tastes of Western people have changed to the extent that they have begun to appreciate and accommodate the tastes of Korean and Asian foods. Koreans also have begun to reconsider their attitude toward their food as the locus of cultural identity. It has become fashionable to enjoy anthropological examinations of their food culture and appreciate their traditional local cuisines.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have reviewed how, in Korea, during the past half-century, people's foodways have gone through a great transformation in content, quality, and manner, focusing on the case of rice. One may call this change "Westernization," depicting a general tendency toward increasingly casual table manners as well as consumption of meat and fast foods, while the consumption of vegetables and rice decreases, especially among the younger generations. However, I would like to point out that contemporary Korea can be said to be in a process of dynamic competition and compromise between the global process of multinationalization of foodways, rather than simple Westernization, and there has been a distinct renaissance of national culinary culture since late 1990s.

16. See Moon (2010) in this volume.

The more Koreans come to enjoy diversified foods of foreign origin, the more they become conscious of the tradition or authenticity of their “national” foods and foodways. They have vigorously reproduced and even invented many items of “national” cuisine with amplified cultural and scientific theories of Korean food, and at the same time have talked about their idea of transnational expansion of Korean food in the context of globalization.

People have adopted a new perspective to reinterpret their traditional meals in which all condiments and dishes are served at the same time. At the Chinese and the Western table where dishes are served one by one, an eater has no other choice than to enjoy the taste of a dish as it is prepared. At the Korean table, however, diners can select among various condiments and dishes to combine with *bap* to create different personal tastes, although they sit at the same table. Also, *bap* and to some extent *juk* have become independent items of cuisine. The invention of *dolsotbap* accelerated diversification of rice cuisine through mixing different kinds of grains, beans, vegetables, and even meat and fish. *Bibimbap*, *ssam*, and *gimbap* are diversified to become additional representatives of popular cuisine. Another new fashion is to eat *tteok* for breakfast, and young people enjoy *tteokbokki* to the extent that it has been chosen for the ambitious globalization project of Korean cuisine.

Koreans’ affection toward rice as their “self” can also be observed in diversification in the industrialization and commodification of rice. In addition to a base for liquor and confectionaries, rice is used in many other industrial commodities such as soap, shampoo, and cosmetics. One may argue that Korean cultural nationalism is responsible for recent positive reinterpretations of rice and Korean dishes once seen as unsophisticated, including kimchi, soybean paste, and hot red pepper paste. However, it should be understood in a more complex historical and cultural context in which *sinto buri* and well-being converged in a way that made a traditional diet into a fashionable trend in the era of globalization.

It is in this context that we can understand the use of new vocabulary in the advertisements and brand names of agricultural

products, as part of efforts to shape people's imagination of harmony between nature and culture and beyond the inhuman sciences and capitalism. Especially in the field of agricultural products, the term "domestically produced" (*guksan*) is seen as a way to guarantee its quality. Tofu is labeled as a "100 percent Korean product" (100 percent *guksan*) if it has been processed in Korea, although the raw ingredients are GM soybeans imported from the United States, and thus people are willing to pay higher prices. Also, words such as cleanness, purity, nature, sunshine, air, water, wind, non-pollution, indigenous, and purely Korean, as well as love, mind, Mother's hands, sincere mind, and other such phrases are used in advertisements.

To anthropomorphize agricultural commodities in this way is a countercultural response to the recent modernity that separates food from the world of humanity in the name of science and civilization. People taste their cultural imaginations and meanings through selection of foods. The widespread use of the term "eco-friendly" also reflects Koreans' rising consciousness regarding food safety problems that may be caused by GMO bioscience and the excessive use of insecticides, agricultural chemicals, fertilizer, antiseptics, and antibiotics. Many Korean and Japanese agribusiness companies produce their products in specially rented land in China, but they use exclusive organic technology or OEM systems in order to minimize food safety problems.

The position of a food or dish changes incessantly. Especially as globalization brings various foods from across the world into our everyday meals, local foods once abandoned are being revived and (re)invented; these foods are valued not simply as a source of nutrition but rather as culture and aesthetics within an ideological amalgamation of *sinto buri* and well-being. The newly emerging genres of rice cuisine can be understood not only as an attempt to construct the cultural identity of the nation, but also as a postmodern lifestyle centered on enjoying local culture once abandoned in favor of the Western definition of modernity. It is not a competition between globalization and localization, but a compromise and conspiracy

between the two. The renaissance of “national” culinary culture in contemporary Korea is meaningfully practiced only in its relation with growing multinationalization and globalization of foreign foods in people’s everyday dietary lives.

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GLOSSARY

<i>baekseolgi</i>	백설기	<i>ipap-e gogiguk</i>	이팍에 고기국
<i>bap</i>	밥	<i>ipssal</i>	입쌀
<i>bibimbap</i>	비빔밥	<i>jesatteok</i>	제사떡
<i>bori gogae</i>	보리고개	<i>jeungpyeon</i>	蒸片
<i>bulgogi</i>	불고기	<i>jinji</i>	진지
<i>chamsari</i>	참살이	<i>juk</i>	粥
Cheontae	天台	<i>kkaejuk</i>	깨죽
<i>chinhwangyeong</i>	親環境	<i>me</i>	메
<i>dolsotbap</i>	돌솥밥	<i>mieum</i>	米飮
<i>dongbeimi</i> (Ch.)	東北米	<i>mujigae tteok</i>	무지개떡
<i>dongji</i>	冬至	<i>naengmyeon</i>	냉면
<i>doraji</i>	도라지	<i>norimaki</i> (J.)	海苔卷
<i>gajeongsik</i>	家庭食	<i>nurungji</i>	누룽지
<i>galbi</i>	갈비	<i>patjuk</i>	팥죽
<i>galbitang</i>	갈비탕	<i>pattteok</i>	팥떡
<i>galbi gui</i>	갈비구이	<i>pungsu</i>	風水
<i>garaetteok</i>	가래떡	<i>sashimi</i> (J.)	刺身
<i>gimbap</i>	김밥	<i>sinto buri</i>	身土不二
<i>gok</i>	穀	<i>sirutteok</i>	시루떡
<i>gopchang gui</i>	곱창구이	<i>soju</i>	소주
<i>gopdol</i>	곱돌	<i>ssal</i>	쌀
<i>gosa</i>	告祀	<i>ssalbak myeongin</i>	쌀밥명인
<i>gosatteok</i>	고사떡	<i>ssambap</i>	쌈밥
<i>guk</i>	국	<i>sungnyung</i>	승냥
<i>guksan</i>	國産	<i>sushi</i> (J.)	寿司
<i>gyeongdan</i>	瓊團	<i>sura</i>	水刺
<i>hanjeongsik</i>	韓定食	<i>tongilbyeo</i>	통일벼
<i>heot jesabap</i>	헛제사밥	<i>tteok</i>	떡
<i>hobakjuk</i>	호박죽	<i>tteokbokki</i>	떡볶이
<i>hoe</i>	膾	<i>wowotao</i> (Ch.)	窩窩套
<i>hwajeon</i>	花煎	<i>yuanshao</i> (Ch.)	元宵
<i>injeolmi</i>	인절미	<i>yuginong</i>	有機農

(Ch.: Chinese, J.: Japanese)