

# The Evolution of *Bulgogi* over the Past 100 Years\*

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## Abstract

*The purpose of this research is to examine the history of bulgogi's transition and development over the past century. While bulgogi carries on the legacy of Korean traditional roasted meat, it is simultaneously a very unique cuisine, of which the recipe and meaning have changed over time according to shifting economic and social conditions. As a result, bulgogi is not merely a simple dish; rather, the term embodies numerous symbolic meanings of Korean food culture. The origin of this seasoned roast meat can be traced back to the Goguryeo dynasty (37 BC–AD 668). In different historical periods and social contexts, bulgogi has gone through unusual and dynamic transitions of cooking methods, such as roasting and boiling. One of its first transitional periods (1920s–1960s) is marked by the use of grilled beef that originates from neobiani and the commercialized cooking process of roasting. During the developmental phase of bulgogi (1960s–1990s), bulgogi boiled in meat broth appeared, quickly gaining popularity. The phase of decline in bulgogi consumption and popularity was followed by the revival of bulgogi (after the 1990s), when it was adapted through various cooking methods.*

**Keywords:** grilled *bulgogi*, beef broth *bulgogi*, *neobiani*, roast meat, Korean food culture

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## Introduction

*Bulgogi* is a representative food of Korea that is popular both at the domestic and global levels. Furthermore, *bulgogi* has shifted from a mere cuisine to a symbol of Korean culture, a cultural heritage that has developed within Korea's long history. In 2010, *bulgogi* was listed in the Korean astronaut's menu along with *kimchi* and *bibimbap*.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, it has spread to foreign countries and has become the origin of Japan's *yakiniku*.

The most prominent characteristic of *bulgogi* is that it is "sliced and marinated roast meat." The tradition of Korean marinated roast beef can be traced back to the Goguryeo dynasty (37 BC–AD 668), when it existed as *maekjeok*, or pre-marinated roasted meat on a skewer. *Maekjeok* then evolved into *seoryamyek*, marinated beef roasted and soaked in cold water three times, a cooking method which was used throughout the Goryeo dynasty (918–1392) and the Joseon dynasty (1392–1910), and later evolved once more into *neobiani* after the Joseon dynasty (Lee 1985, 178–179; Kang 1987, 178). Finally, in the modern era, *neobiani* became *bulgogi* (Lee 1985, 180).

The process of cooking *neobiani* includes thinly slicing and making cuts in the beef, then marinating and roasting it after sufficiently seasoning it. *Neobiani* was a dish that had a distinct identity, derived from its seasoning which was made with soy sauce and usually mixed with salt, pepper, scallion, sesame oil, sugar, garlic, and pear juice (Lee 2010, 38). However, the concept of *bulgogi* was comprehensive, including both *neobiani* and roasted meat. The evolution of *bulgogi* has been very unique, involving two cooking methods: roasting and boiling. Specifically, "grilled *bulgogi*" (*seoksoe bulgogi*) that originated from *neobiani* evolved into "beef broth *bulgogi*" (*yuksu bulgogi*). Beef broth *bulgogi* made with meat broth is more familiar to Koreans today, but a new light is being shed on grilled *bulgogi* and both are now referred to as *bulgogi*.

The period in which *neobiani* became *bulgogi* was a tumultuous era in

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1. "Bulgogi, bibimbap ujuin sikdan-e oreunda" (*Bulgogi and Bibimbap Listed as Astronaut's Menu*), *Hankook Ilbo*, February 2, 2010.

Korean history that underwent Japanese colonization, liberation, and the Korean War. Even amidst such historical turbulences, food culture related to meat was steadily diffused to the public, establishing a cultural platform for Korean cuisine. Meanwhile, *bulgogi* began to be formally commercialized and became a foundation of the dining out culture. Later, as meat consumption rates gradually increased alongside industrial growth and economic advancement, the cooking methods of meat also started to change: from a stew, with the focus on the broth, to roast meat that emphasizes the meat itself. Over time, *bulgogi* gained increased public acceptance and eventually became a representative Korean food.

This article examines the historical transformations of a Korean dish, *bulgogi*, with a particular focus on its appearance, popularization, decline, and revival. Specific research priorities include the development of different cooking methods over time and the changes in the consumption culture of *bulgogi*. To address these issues, this research breaks down the past 100 years into the following three distinct phases: the 1920s when the term *bulgogi* first appeared in a printed document, the 1960s when beef broth *bulgogi* was introduced, and the 1990s when *bulgogi*'s popularity dropped. These phases are labeled as follows: "the advent of *bulgogi*" (1920s–1960s), "the development of *bulgogi*" (1960s–1990s), and "the decline of *bulgogi* and its revival" (post-1990s).

The research explains different cooking styles of *bulgogi* and classifies *bulgogi* into two types for the convenience of further discussion:<sup>2</sup>

1. Grilled *bulgogi*: roasted *bulgogi* with no soup, cooked either in a grill, frying pan, or *bulgogi* plate.
2. Beef broth *bulgogi*: *bulgogi* boiled with beef broth and vegetables such as mushrooms in a *bulgogi* plate, frying pan, or stew pot.

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2. The way *bulgogi* is categorized depends on the cooking method: grilled without broth or boiled with broth. Based on the cooking method, each type would be referred to as either "grilled *bulgogi*" or "boiled *bulgogi*," or put in other words, "*bulgogi* without broth" or "*bulgogi* with broth." However, in consideration of restaurant common practices, the two types will be referred to as "grilled *bulgogi*" and "beef broth *bulgogi*" in this research.



Figure 1. Grilled *Bulgogi*

Source: Official website of Gwangyang City ([http://www.gwangyang.go.kr/tour\\_culture/list/view.jsp?gym\\_id=50&gym\\_mcate=41&gym\\_tcate=1](http://www.gwangyang.go.kr/tour_culture/list/view.jsp?gym_id=50&gym_mcate=41&gym_tcate=1)).



Figure 2. Beef Broth *Bulgogi*

Source: Picture taken by the author at Hanilkwan.

To address the questions raised in this research, literary texts were closely examined and oral interviews were conducted. Primary sources such as modern cookbooks, newspapers, magazines, almanacs, data from the Statistics Korea, memoirs, and the dictionary published by the Japanese colonial government of Korea were used to review and analyze the available historical literature on this topic.<sup>3</sup> Generally speaking, recorded documents

3. The Media Gaon of the Korea Press Foundation ([www.mediagaon.or.kr](http://www.mediagaon.or.kr)), Korean History Data Integration System ([www.koreanhistory.or.kr](http://www.koreanhistory.or.kr)), past newspapers from the portal website Naver ([www.naver.com](http://www.naver.com)), and the website of the National Library of Korea ([www.nl.go.kr](http://www.nl.go.kr)) were used as references. Newspaper articles from *Gungmin Sinbo*, a Korean newspaper published by the pro-Japanese during the Japanese colonial period, and *Mansebo*, a Korean newspaper published by Cheondogyo, are also included. Korean magazines such as *Byeolgeongon* (meaning “Another World,” a magazine published by the Gaebyeoksa Press and run by Cheondogyo), *Gaebyeok* (meaning “Genesis,” a magazine published by the Gaebyeok Press run by Cheondogyo), *Samcheolli* (meaning “Three Thousand Miles,” published by Korean poet Kim Dong-hwan), *Donggwang* (meaning “Eastern Light,” published by Heungsadan), *Yeowon* (meaning “Women’s Gardens,” a women’s magazine published by Hankwonsa), *Shin Dong-A* (Meaning “New Dong-A,” published by the newspaper company Dong-A Ilbosa), *Modeon ilbon*

related to food culture are very limited, and even more so when they pertain to the development process of dining out culture. Therefore, oral interviews proved to be a very useful resource; the history of the food could be traced through the memories or stories told by people in the food industry, such as managers and owners of long-standing traditional Korean restaurants. Interviews for this research were conducted from August 2009 to April 2010. Interviewees included three specialists in the Korean food culture and people related to historically significant *bulgogi* restaurants such as Hanilkwan, Woolaeoak,<sup>4</sup> Okdoljip, and Jingogae. To ensure maximum accuracy and reliability of these sources, cross-examinations between the interviewer and interviewees were conducted and official literary documents were consulted.

## The Advent of *Bulgogi* (1920s–1960s)

### *The Beginning of Bulgogi*

When the dish *bulgogi* first appeared is not known precisely, but the word *bulgogi* can be found in literary documents since the 1920s. Thus, the decision was made to designate the 1920s as the beginning phase of *bulgogi* for the purposes of this research and the following section will examine how the word *bulgogi* appeared in literary documents during this developmental phase.

Among the literary documents examined, the word *bulgogi* first appears in a story written by Hyeon Jin-geon, titled “Tarakja” (A Corruptor), published in the *Gaebyeok* (April 1, 1922). The story takes place in a restaurant called Myeongwolgwang in Korea. The following is a scene in which the two characters “I” and “Kim Seung-ji,” who are in a triangular

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(Modern Japan), and *Wolgan sikdang* (Restaurant Monthly) were also used in this research. Most of the mentioned documents were used in research of the Japanese colonial era. Furthermore, literary works, movies, and songs were also examined for a closer study of the Korean meat culture.

4. This article uses the names that the restaurants currently use, “Hanilkwan” and “Woolaeoak.”

love relationship, confront each other at a *gisaeng*'s<sup>5</sup> house.

“Will you only go in if I go?” I asked, glaring at him as I shot him a blade of challenge with my smile. . . . His face was like a lump of *bulgogi*, being cooked over brightly burning charcoal. Although I could not observe my own face, my face was probably no different than his.

The way *bulgogi* mentioned in this passage can be interpreted in two different ways. First, *bulgogi* could refer to the specific dish that originates from *neobiani*, as Myeongwolgwang may have had *bulgogi* on its menu. Second, the phrase “a lump of *bulgogi*, being cooked over brightly burning charcoal” suggests a distinction between *neobiani*, which is “thinly sliced and marinated roast beef,” and *bulgogi* “a lump of roasted meat.” Considering the context, it makes sense to understand *bulgogi* as any type of “roasted meat.” Either way, what is noteworthy is that the word *bulgogi* appeared in a story written in 1922.

Later, the word *bulgogi* also appears in the memoir of Kim Hyeong-min, the first mayor of Seoul. Mayor Kim arrived in Honolulu after boarding a boat from Japan to start his study abroad in the year 1926.<sup>6</sup> There, he happened to meet his uncle's wife who had immigrated to Hawaii after his uncle passed away. The memoir states, “On Sundays, my aunt personally cooked food for her sons. She often made *bulgogi* and meat broth” (H. Kim 1987, 65). *Bulgogi* in this quote refers to the Korean *bulgogi* that originated from *neobiani* and not just any roasted meat. Also, the possibility that his aunt may have encountered *bulgogi* in Korea before going to Hawaii indicates that the dish could have possibly existed in Jeollabuk-do, which is the home province of Mayor Kim.<sup>7</sup>

5. Korean female entertainers who act as hostesses, entertaining men through various performances such as singing and dancing.

6. Kim Hyeong-min, the first mayor of Seoul, was born in Wanju, Jeollabuk-do province in 1907. He entered Ohio Wesleyan University in September 1928 and graduated in June 1932.

7. The fact that the text is retrieved from a 1987 memoir suggests a possibility that whatever dish the character ate was later recorded in retrospect as *bulgogi*. Simply put, at the time that he ate the dish in Hawaii, the dish may have had a different name than *bulgogi*. However, it is certain that it was equivalent to the dish that is called *bulgogi* today.

In addition, *Koseki to fuzoku* 古蹟と風俗 (Historical Remains and Wind) (1927), a piece of Japanese literature, also mentions that “there is *bulgogi* along with soybean sprouts and *kimchi* in a Korean restaurant that sells rice served in soup” (quoted in S. Kim 2006, 162). The book does not clarify whether the *bulgogi* was a form of *neobiani* or any type of roasted meat, but it is clear that *bulgogi* was sold commercially in Korean restaurants.

An article titled “*Bulgogi*, the Specialty of Morandae, Has Been Banned” was published by *Dong-A Ilbo* (May 5, 1935). In a famous amusement park called Morandae located in Pyongyang, the “smoke coming from cooking *bulgogi* is going to the pine trees” and making them dry, “so cooking *bulgogi*, the specialty of Morandae pine forest, in open air will be banned.” Based on this article, it can be inferred that Pyongyang’s specialty *bulgogi* during the Japanese colonial era was grilled *bulgogi*, which produces a lot of smoke when roasted, not beef broth *bulgogi*.

Another important source of data is the serialized novel, “Simnyeon-hu” (After Ten Years), written by Yi Gi-yeong and published in the *Samcheolli* magazine (June 1, 1936). The passage reads: “Since it has been a long time we have gathered quietly, why don’t we drink a cup of *makkeolli* (Korean rice wine) and share our inmost thoughts. *Bulgogi* being cooked in Gyeongsang-do [does make me think of alcohol].” Though this passage does not make any further mention of what *bulgogi* is, it is important to note that *bulgogi* existed in Gyeongsang-do province and that it was eaten as a side dish consumed with alcohol.

*Bulgogi* is also found in the Korean edition of the Japanese magazine, *Modan nihon* モダン日本 (Modern Japan) published in 1939.<sup>8</sup> A discussion hosted by Japanese novelist Hamamoto Hiroshi took place as part of “A Symposium on New Korea” between the Korean writer Ma Hae-song and Japan participants who were knowledgeable about Korea. A part of the

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8. *Modan nihon* is a monthly magazine created in October 1930 by a publisher Bungei Shunjusha 文藝春秋社. In November 1939 and August 1940, the special edition called Joseon version was published twice in Joseon Korea to celebrate the 10-year anniversary of the magazine. The Joseon version was published by Ma Hae-song, who was known as a Joseon intellectual (Modan Nihonsha 2007, 513-514).

discussion includes roasted meat:

Dogo: *Bulgogi* from Pyeongyang is delicious.

Hamamoto: There are two delicious restaurants at Morandae. People used to go eat there with *gisaeng* at night.

This data reveals that *bulgogi* was famous for its taste in 1939 and as shown in the former 1935 *Dong-A Ilbo* article, *bulgogi* and *galbi* were commercialized dishes sold at Morandae in Pyongyang.

Not only does *bulgogi* appear in literary documents, but also in a popular song released in 1938 titled, “Oppa-neun punggak jaengi-ya” (My Elder Brother is a Street Musician). It was sung by Bak Hyang-rim and released by Columbia Production. The lyric goes: “*Oppa* is a street musician / *Oppa* is ill-tempered, huh / I don’t know / I don’t know / I don’t know about him eating all of my side dishes / He eats *bulgogi* and *tteokbokki* (rice cakes in hot sauce) by himself / and only gives me bean sprouts.” *Bulgogi* mentioned here can be understood as a dish that is similar to *neobiani* and is eaten as a side dish. The implication is that *bulgogi* was publicly well known enough in the 1930s to be mentioned in a pop song. Although the word carried different meanings, it is noteworthy that the word *bulgogi* was widely used throughout all parts of Korea, including Seoul and Pyongyang as well as Gyeongsang-do and Jeolla-do provinces, in the mid-1930s.

In addition, the Japanese word *yakiniku* was also used along with *bulgogi* during the period of Japanese colonization. An article titled “An Appeal to Raise the Price of Pyongyang Specialty *Bulgogi*” published in *Maeil Shinbo* (July 30, 1941) states, “The appeal to raise the price of Pyongyang’s specialty, *yakiniku*, is attracting public attention.” It can be implied that the word *bulgogi* was used interchangeably or together with *yakiniku*.

Korean literature writer Yi Hyo-seok wrote in a column titled “Yugyeong<sup>9</sup> sikbo” (Nourishing the Body in Pyongyang), published in the

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9. Another name of Pyongyang (M. Bang 2003, 67).

magazine *Yeoseong* (Women) (June 1939): “One of the major dishes enjoyed by the people of Pyongyang is *yakiniku* and this food seems to reflect some human characteristics of Pyongyang. The cooking process is very simple and the taste is also plain.” Yi’s description of *yakiniku* as having “a very simple cooking process” suggests that people in Pyongyang roasted raw meat to make the dish, rather than using thinly sliced marinated meat. Jo Pung-yeon also stated that “Pyongyang-style *bulgogi* is roast beef that has not been marinated and is eaten with seasoned soy sauce. The raw meat is roasted and then dipped in seasoning before being eaten.”<sup>10</sup>

In the various literature in which *bulgogi* appeared during this period of time, *bulgogi* refers to a range of dishes from “lump of meat,” “*bulgogi* that originated from *neobiani*,” to unseasoned “Pyongyang-style *bulgogi*,” but they all share the common characteristic that the dish did not contain soup.

#### *The Formation of Restaurants Specializing in Grilled Bulgogi*

In traditionally agricultural Korea, it was almost unthinkable to slaughter a cow for beef because cows were essential laborers and a huge asset on farms. In major cities like Gyeongseong and Pyongyang, however, the consumption of beef was increasing. “Pyongyang Cattle Raised for Beef” from *Pyongyang Shinmun* (September 2, 1933), reveals that cows were starting to be raised for beef in a region in Pyongyang where “Pyongyang beef” was regarded as a premium beef (Lee 2012, 423). Likewise, in bigger cities, meat consumption was rising and *bulgogi* restaurants were emerging.

Following the opening of Hanilkwan in 1939, Woolaeoak in 1946, and Okdoljip in 1948, there was a rise in restaurants specializing in *bulgogi*. Hanilkwan received praise from gourmets for “commercializing the Korean royal cuisine *neobiani* as *bulgogi*” (Han 2001, 339). Kim Eun-suk, the current owner of Hanilkwan and the granddaughter of founder Shin Woo-kyung, gave the following response:

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10. “Sikdorak” (Gourmandism), *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, July 10, 1987.

The history of Hanilkwan begins in the year 1939, so the claim of “taking *neobiani* from royal cuisine and making the food, which was enjoyed by a small number of nobility, a popular mass food product” does not fit in the history and tradition of our restaurant. I do not see our restaurant as bringing *neobiani* from the palace to the people, but there needs to be a successful restaurant in order to expose *bulgogi* in literary documents and recipes. I think Hanilkwan contributed to that. . . . During the 1960s and the mid-1970s, no other restaurant could challenge the *bulgogi* made at Hanilkwan. It could not be compared to any other restaurant during that time. I can boldly say that the reason that *bulgogi* gained popularity among the masses is due to Hanilkwan.<sup>11</sup>

In 1957, Hanilkwan established a three-story building which was revolutionary for a restaurant at that time in Cheongjin-dong, Jongno-gu, in downtown Seoul. The thriving business success of Hanilkwan can be confirmed through the list of high taxpayers published by *Maeil Business Newspaper* (March 3, 1969). Three people were selected in the Korean food sector: “Hanilkwan Sin Yu-gyeong<sup>12</sup> 10,243,350 *won*, Samojeong Restaurant Kim Jeong-un 9,921,960 *won*, and (restaurant name not specified) Kim Jeong-gu 9,040,900 as the founders with the largest amount of shares.”

Woolaeoak was opened in 1946 by Jang Won-il who came to South Korea after managing Myongwolgwang in Pyongyang. The representative menu of the restaurant has consistently been “*bulgogi* and *naengmyeon* (cold noodles) for 46 years since its opening.” Two chefs, both from Pyongyang at the time, were in charge of the menu at Woolaeoak; chef Joosang was in charge of the *bulgogi* and chef Yu Seong-do was in charge of the *naengmyeon*. *Bulgogi* and *naengmyeon* at Woolaeoak were all served Pyongyang style. Executive Kim Ji-eok, who has been working in Woolaeoak since 1963, described the characteristic of the restaurant’s *bulgogi*:

Joosang was a person, who used a knife to carry out every step to make *bulgogi*, used only the knife to slice *bulgogi*. We did not have broth in

11. Kim Eun-suk, owner of Hanilkwan, interview by the author, January 19, 2009.

12. Typo. It was supposed to state “Sin U-gyeong,” who was the founder of Hanilkwan.

*bulgogi* . . . without soup. Just natural . . . to liven the taste of meat, we did not preserve the seasoning. All the other restaurants preserved the seasoning. That is special. Customers say that the beef is a little tough but the sauce has not permeated the beef. That is what is special about our *bulgogi*. Buying rare meat and not marinating it to produce the natural taste of meat. Just garlic, sugar, sesame oil, and soy sauce are inserted but nothing else. That is pressed with the hand a few times and is served out dry without any soup.<sup>13</sup>

Another restaurant specializing in *bulgogi* is called Okdoljip located in Seongbuk-gu, Seoul. It was opened in 1948 by Shin Ok-doll whose hometown was Seoul, then managed by the second owner Shin Won-jun. The third owners Kim Yeong-deok and Wang Yeong-hui are continuing its tradition today.

According to the website of Gwangyang city, the history of “Gwangyang *bulgogi*” dates back to the Joseon dynasty and the dish has earned a reputation for having “the best taste in the whole world, *marojeok*<sup>14</sup> on fire.” An article published in *Kyunghyang Shinmun* (January 30, 1990) about the commercialization of Gwangyang *bulgogi* introduced the restaurant Daejoong as “the origin of Gwangyang *bulgogi* that has been in service for three generations.” The restaurant Daejoong is currently located in Gwangyang-eup, Chilseong-ri. In a telephone interview, executive Kim Mi-ri said, “I do not know exactly, but the mother-in-law (executive Lee Soon-rae) of my mother-in-law started her business in the mid-1950s. I believe we were the first ones to start. The characteristic of Gwangyang *bulgogi* is instantly roasting marinated beef on charcoal fire. We use soy sauce, sugar, sesame oil, and pepper for seasoning. Scallion and garlic are not included but we serve garlic so that it can be roasted and eaten separately.”<sup>15</sup> Also, according to the official data provided by the Ulju county office, it was in 1954, the year after the end of the Korean War, when “Eonyang/Bonggye-style *bulgogi*” became commercialized.

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13. Kim Ji-eok, Woolaeoak's executive, interview by the author, September 4, 2009.

14. *Marojeok* means “meat roasted on a skewer in Gwangyang.”

15. Kim Mi-ri, telephone interview by the author, January 30, 2010.

## The Development of *Bulgogi* (1960s–1990s)

### *The Advent of Beef Broth Bulgogi*

During the period between the end of the Korean War and 1960, *bulgogi* went through a big transition. While *bulgogi*, originating from *neobiani*, used to be and continued to be served grilled, a new type of *bulgogi* served with beef broth emerged. This appearance of broth *bulgogi* accelerated the popularization of *bulgogi* and brought on *bulgogi*'s heyday. The exact point in time when broth *bulgogi* appeared is not known, but can only be conjectured based on the following three pieces of evidence. The first piece of evidence is that grilled *bulgogi* and beef broth *bulgogi* were sold together at Hanilkwan, a restaurant that contributed to popularizing *bulgogi*. Opinions of owner Kim Eun-suk and her sister Kim Yi-suk of Hanilkwan are as follows:

In the case of Hanilkwan, we started with grilled *bulgogi* at first, but as beef broth *bulgogi* was introduced, we included both of them in the menu in the 1960s. Grilled *bulgogi* was served as part of a Korean traditional set menu for more than six people. When customers ordered *bulgogi*, beef broth *bulgogi* would be served. Customers who preferred grilled *bulgogi* would specify it and we would serve it grilled for them. . . . The two existed until the mid-1980s. Grilled *bulgogi* was served with the Korean traditional set menu until 1997, but was removed from the menu after a renovation in 1997.<sup>16</sup>

The second piece of evidence is a movie called *Samdeung gwajang* (A Petty Middle Manager), produced after the April 19th Revolution in 1960 and released on May 4, 1961. In the movie, there is a scene of main characters eating *bulgogi*. As the movie approaches its ending and the conflict is resolved, family members gather around the table, where beef broth *bulgogi* is placed on top. In the scene, members of the family eat *bulgogi*

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16. Kim Eun-suk and Kim Yi-suk, Hanilkwan's owners, interview by the author, January 19, 2010.

broth with spoons.

The third piece of evidence is that Jingogae, a restaurant that opened in Chungmuro in 1963, sold beef broth *bulgogi* from the beginning. According to Jeong Gwan-hui, current owner of Jingogae and the son of its late founder Jeong Sang-cheol, “We used charcoal fire at that time and made beef broth with *bulgogi* by using a bulging, brass-yellow fire plate over the charcoal fire. The fire plate has now become a cast iron fire plate.”<sup>17</sup> The cast iron fire plate used at Jingogae was invented and patented by Jeong Sang-cheol. The cast iron fire plate had two spots that were concaved in the bulging dome to make it suitable for people to scoop up the broth.

Based on the aforementioned evidence—that both grilled and beef broth *bulgogi* were served in Hanilkwan, that beef broth *bulgogi* appeared in the 1961 movie *Samdeung gwajang*, and that beef broth *bulgogi* began being served from the opening of Jingogae in 1963—it can be safely assumed that beef broth *bulgogi* appeared during the period after the Korean War and before 1960. Later, grilled and beef broth *bulgogi* coexisted between the 1960s and the 1970s. However, grilled *bulgogi* gradually lost its popularity from the 1980s and the term *bulgogi* came to mean beef broth *bulgogi*.

How grilled *bulgogi* originated from *neobiani* and developed into beef broth *bulgogi* is not yet fully understood. Written data on the advent of beef broth *bulgogi* is extremely rare to find. While the lack of such data could be compensated by in-depth interviews with managers of historical *bulgogi* restaurants, second-generation managers, let alone the original



Figure 3. A Scene from *Samdeung gwajang* (1961) Showing Beef Broth *Bulgogi*

Source: Korean Film Archive (<http://www.koreafilms.or.kr>).

17. Jeong Gwan-hui, Jingogae's owner, interview by the author, April 8, 2010.

managers themselves, are no longer living. Thus, interviews with third-generation managers were conducted. Although specific details and information may be lost regarding the historical background, this research aims to examine several influential factors that contributed to the advent of beef broth *bulgogi*.

First, Korean traditional food *jeongol* (pot stew) is considered to have been influential. *Jeongol* is thinly sliced marinated meat boiled in hot broth, with a mixture of seafood, mushrooms, and vegetables (Kang 1987, 127). There are two kinds of traditional methods for meat roasting in Korea: *jeok* meaning roasting meat on a skewer directly over a barbeque fire and *beon* meaning roasting meat directly over fire using an iron plate or rocks, rather than skewers. With the increase of iron production, the skewers used for *jeok* were gradually replaced by cooking grates. However, *beon*, using an iron plate called *beoncheol*, became popular and common. Another name for *beoncheol* was *jeoncheol* (S. Kim 1997, 346). The term *jeoncheol* appeared for the first time in text in the book *Wonhaeng eulmyo jeongni uigwe* (Records of King Jeongjo's Procession to His Father's Tomb in the Eulmyo Year), a record of the royal events that were held on the occasion of King Jeongjo's visit to his father's tomb in Hwaseong with his mother on her 60th birthday in 1795. During this period of time, iron plates were called *jeoncheol* and *jeolliptu*. All sides of *jeolliptu* were used to cook beef and the dented spot in the middle collected juice from the roast meat. Vegetables were then put into the dented spot and were boiled together. *Jeoncheol* came to be called *jeongol* by the end of the nineteenth century, and the term *jeongol* first appeared in *Siui jeonseo*, a recipe book written in the late nineteenth century. *Jeoncheol* was a term used in the royal palace while *jeongol* was used in noble houses. *Jeoncheol*, designed to be put over a charcoal burner, was also used to cook marinated beef, and the custom in which people cook and share the marinated beef together, sitting around the fire, was called *nallohoe* 暖爐會. The history of *jeoncheol* goes back to 1700, and since the charcoal burner is no longer used, a plate shaped like a soldier's hat is used nowadays. However, the plate is used differently from the past as meat is put where the vegetables used to be put, so that the broth from meat was collected where the meat

used to be roasted and vegetables were also cooked with the beef (S. Kim 2006, 209-212).

A description in the *Gyeongdo japji* 京都雜誌 (Customs of the Capital) states, “*gwa* 鍋, a type of pot shaped like a *jeollip* (soldier’s hat), is used to roast beef in the center and boil vegetables around the edge,” similar to the way that *bulgogi* is roasted on a plate nowadays called *beon*, which uses an iron plate. On the other hand, *nallohoe* mentioned in *Dongguk sesigi* (Seasonal Customs of the Eastern Kingdom), a book written by Hong Seok-mo on Korean customs, is described as grilling *bulgogi* over charcoal fire, or *jeok*, which uses a grill (S. Kim 1997, 348).

Both types of *bulgogi* follow the Korean tradition of roast meat, where, according to different cooking devices, grilled *bulgogi* cooked with direct fire on a grill has its roots in *jeok* and broth *bulgogi* cooked over a fire plate from *beon*. Beef broth *bulgogi* can be thought of as broth added to a *beon* type, and a dish that influenced this is beef *jeongol*. As *jeongol* is named according to its main ingredient, beef *jeongol* is made with beef and mushrooms as its main ingredients.

Moreover, the presumption that *bulgogi jeongol* was influenced by beef *jeongol* is supported by the fact that the name *bulgogi jeongol* was prevalently used. One such example is in the 1968 movie *Hyuil* (Holiday) directed by Lee Man-hee. A signboard with the words *bulgogi jeongol* can be seen on a street. There is no direct scene of the food *bulgogi* in the movie but the words on the signboard, *bulgogi jeongol*, clearly indicate that it was made with beef broth. Also, an article in the *Dong-A Ilbo* (March 2, 1952) states, “the delicious smell of *bulgogi jeongol*.” It can be assumed that the name *bulgogi jeongol* was later abridged to *bulgogi*.

Second, the lack of beef supply can be considered another influencing factor. Since grilled *bulgogi* was cooked with no other ingredients than beef, the quality of meat was very important. As a result, sirloin and tenderloin, the best cuts of beef, were used for the dish. However, due to the Japanese colonization of Korea and the Korean War, the nation faced a serious shortage of beef. In 1946, immediately after the liberation of Korea from Japanese rule, even though the number of cows in South Korea was “557,000 including dairy cattle” (*Chosun Ilbo*, January 18, 1947), according



Figure 4. *Bulgogi jeongol* on a Sign-board in the Movie *Hyuil* (1968)

Source: Korean Film Archive (<http://www.koreafilm.or.kr>).

to a newspaper article published during the period, “people in line waiting to buy one *geun* (600 g) of beef had to endure a long wait” (*Chosun Ilbo*, December 30, 1947). In addition, due to the skyrocketing price of beef, “average citizens could never afford to eat beef in their lifetime” (*Chosun Ilbo*, December 30, 1947). Moreover, the Korean War drastically impacted the ownership of cows; in 1953, the number of cows plummeted to 392,000 (*JoongAng Ilbo*, July 29, 1975). Given such circumstances, the need to make a beef dish that could be cooked easily without high-quality parts of beef, using sup-

plementary ingredients, such as vegetables, started to rise.

Third, given that the new dining culture was impacted by the increasing prevalence of the nuclear family, beef broth *bulgogi* became a practical menu that could be eaten with rice. In regards to the changes and transitions of *bulgogi* at their restaurant, Kim Eun-suk and Kim Yi-suk, owners of Hanilkwan, state:

The period in which grilled *bulgogi* was removed from the menus at Hanilkwan overlaps with the period when family feast culture developed. In the past, when family feasts such as the sixtieth birthday and wedding receptions were held, over three hundred people were gathered to celebrate. Grilled *bulgogi* was included in the Korean traditional set menu in such occasions. However, this family culture started to change in the 1980s. Rather than ordering a set menu for a table, families gathered in small numbers and ordered beef broth *bulgogi* as the main menu.<sup>18</sup>

18. Kim Eun-suk and Kim Yi-suk, Hanilkwan’s owners, interview by the author, January 19, 2010.

Earlier, grilled *bulgogi* was one of the many side dishes served in traditional Korean full-course set meals. But with changing family structures, it seemed more practical to replace grilled *bulgogi* with beef broth *bulgogi*, which could serve as a main dish that all members of a nuclear family could share. Also, in the movie *Don* (Money) released in 1958, there is a scene of a restaurant selling a menu item called *bulgogi baekban* (*bulgogi* set menu with rice). What can be inferred from this scene is that *bulgogi* and rice were served together.

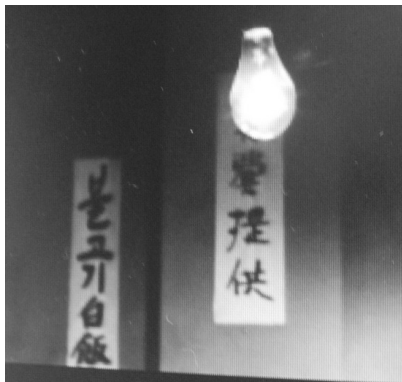


Figure 5. *Bulgogi baekban*, as Seen on a Sign of a Restaurant in the Movie *Don* (1958)

Source: Korean Film Archive (<http://www.koreafilm.or.kr>).

### *The Popularization of Bulgogi*

During this time, *bulgogi* held on firmly to its place as the most popular dine-out menu and Koreans' favorite food. In a survey conducted in 1985, "The most popular food that Koreans ate when dining out was *naengmyeon* in the summer (48%) and *bulgogi* (14%) in the winter."<sup>19</sup> In addition, in a 1984 survey conducted on foreigners by the Agriculture and Fishery Development Corporation, *bulgogi* ranked first as the most popular food.

Meanwhile, the frequency of *bulgogi* consumption in homes can be inferred from an article published in the women's magazine *Yeowon* in November 1962. The article, "November's Menu," suggests 90 menus for the month, and *bulgogi* is included twice for dinner. It is stated that author Mun Su-jae's focus on the menu planning was "balanced nutrition" and food that was "economically suitable for middle-class homes." This suggests that *bulgogi* was a dish that a "middle-class home" of the early 1960s

19. "Leespr yeon josa" (Survey by the Research Institute Leespr), *Maeil Business Newspaper*, May 6, 1985.

could easily be recommended to eat. *Bulgogi* was not only a popular dish at restaurants, but also a common food that could be cooked at home. In addition, a 1961 article in *Yeowon* that states *bulgogi* sandwiches as a common breakfast suggests that *bulgogi* was a widespread dish for at least particular classes of people.

The origin of a *bulgogi* plate can somewhat be identified with the history of *jeoncheol* as examined above, but the process of how the plate developed into its current *bulgogi* plate is unknown. The only official traceable record is related to the patent of a *bulgogi* plate at the Korean Industrial Property Office. The first person to get a patent on a *bulgogi* grill was Park Young-chan on February 22, 1962. The *bulgogi* grill, as seen in Figure 6, was not a grill put together by a wire but was the same as the present *bulgogi* plate.

The first patented *bulgogi* grill was not merely dome-style: a part of the plate was made to rotate, so that opening and closing the fire and air holes could control the level of fire. Based on the sophistication of its technology, this plate is not likely to be the original *bulgogi* plate, but an upgraded product of a simpler model that had not been granted a patent.

Meanwhile, a *Chosun Ilbo* (April 9, 1963) report that “Korean *bulgogi* has become popular in the South-east Asian region. . . . A thousand *bulgogi* plates have been exported to Thailand at a 70 percent profit margin” reveals that beef broth *bulgogi* cooked on a *bulgogi* plate was a big hit and Korean food culture had dispersed to the Southeast Asian region.

During this period, the term *bulgogi* was used to signify various meanings in various contexts. First, *bulgogi*

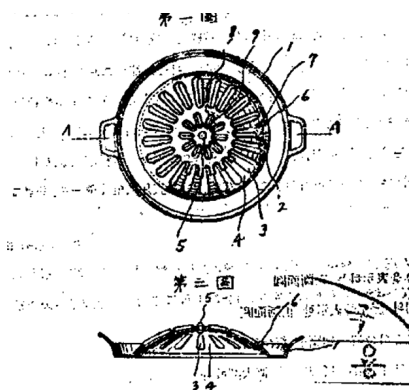


Figure 6. Patent Application of a *Bulgogi* Grill in 1962

Source: Website of the Korean Industrial Property Office (<http://kipat.kipris.or.kr/kipat/resulta.do?next=ResultList>).

was used almost interchangeably with *neobiani* meaning grilled *bulgogi*. According to *Godeung yori silseup* (High-Level Cooking Practice), published by Bang Shin-young in 1958, “In standard language, it is called either *neobiani* or roast meat. It is commonly called *bulgogi*, but that is a vulgar name” (S. Bang 1958, 84). Thus, although *bulgogi* was a crude name for *neobiani*, it was the same “thinly sliced marinated roast beef” as *neobiani*.

Second, *bulgogi* also carried the meaning “meat roasted over fire.” An example of this can be found in an article titled “Miguksik bulgogi babekyu” (Barbeque, American-Style *Bulgogi*) in *Kyunghyang Shinmun* (December 10, 1961):

The history of *bulgogi* would have started as mankind started to use fire. Thus, there will be no people on Earth that do not know how to make *bulgogi*. The tools, means, seasonings, and know-hows on how to make seasonings will be in all kinds of types and forms. . . . Americans eat *bulgogi* as their main food and vegetables, bread and corn as their side dish. . . . Barbecue, American-style *bulgogi*, is fun to make while Korean *bulgogi* is fun to eat.

In parts of the above text, *bulgogi* clearly means “meat roasted over fire.” However, in the sentence that compares the types of roast meat, “Barbecue, American-style *bulgogi*, is fun to make while Korean *bulgogi* is fun to eat,” “Korean *bulgogi*” indicates the Korean traditional food *bulgogi*. Thus, both “meat roasted over fire” and “Korean traditional food *bulgogi*” are used to mean *bulgogi*. With the widespread usage of the word *bulgogi*, terms such as pork *bulgogi* (*Dong-A Ilbo*, September 13, 1961), sparrow *bulgogi* (*Dong-A Ilbo*, February 2, 1960), and fox *bulgogi* (*Shin Dong-A*, March 1968) also started to appear. Third, the meaning of the term *bulgogi* expanded to include not only meat but also “all kinds of food roasted over fire,” including seafood and vegetables. The extended usage of the term in various contexts, such as to describe seafood, is exemplified by dish names appearing in magazine articles, such as “horse mackerel *bulgogi*” (Yeowon, November 1968) and “squid *bulgogi*” (Yeowon, November 1962). Other contexts in which the term *bulgogi* has been used include vegetables, as exemplified by “eggplant *bulgogi*,” which is “a mixture of

eggplant and pork marinated with either red wine or sugar and roasted over seasoned *bulgogi* soy sauce.”<sup>20</sup>

Fourth, roast meat sprinkled with salt was also called *bulgogi*. Kim Dae-hyeon, a musical composer, introduced the food of his hometown, Hamheung “salt *bulgogi*,” in the following way:

I think highly of the salt *bulgogi* roasted in the mountain. I roast meat by heating small rocks about the size of a fist over fire, putting meat over the rocks and sprinkling salt over it. . . . The ingenuous taste is a stunning flavor that is not as tender as marinated *bulgogi*, making me eat more and more. No more words are needed to describe how good it is to be eaten as a side dish for rice or drinks.<sup>21</sup>

Likewise, *bulgogi* is not only a common name for *neobiani* but the range of meaning has also broadened from “roasted meat over fire” to “roasted seafood and vegetables,” and from “marinated roast beef” to “salt-seasoned roast meat.”

## The Decline of *Bulgogi* and Its Revival (Post-1990s)

### *Bulgogi's Decline*

*Bulgogi*, which had long been a representative of Korean roasted meat, began to decline in popularity from the early 1990s, shortly after the 1988 Seoul Olympics, while non-marinated sirloin and non-marinated *galbi* with no seasoning increasingly gained popularity. The following text from a 1992 newspaper article effectively reflects on this trend:

Originally, among many other fine traditional Korean dishes, seasoned *galbi* and *bulgogi* have enjoyed their reputation for their laborious,

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20. “Daeboreum eumsik joribeop: gaji bulgogi” (The Great Full Moon Day’s Recipe: Eggplant *Bulgogi*), *Maeil Business Newspaper*, February 6, 1971.

21. “Na-ui sikdorak, sogeum bulgogi-wa hamheung naengmyeon” (My Gourmandism, Salted *Bulgogi* and Hamheung *naengmyeon*), *Shin Dong-A*, February 1968.

high-quality preparation that takes a lot of time and effort. Their exquisiteness has attracted many foreigners and their fine taste and quality have won much recognition, enough to represent Korean food culture. However, seasoned dishes were unable to maintain their prestigious status because of people's lack of trust in restaurants that may use seasoning to boost the taste of low-quality meat.<sup>22</sup>

*Wolgan sikdang* (Restaurant Monthly) (October 1994) also stated the changing appetites among customers: "As the quality of taste among customers became enhanced, the tendency to reduce the amount of seasoning and enjoy the natural taste of the food itself has rapidly increased. The main menus of large Korean restaurants have changed from *bulgogi* and marinated *galbi* to fresh tenderloin and fresh *galbi* without any seasoning."

The declining popularity of *bulgogi* is reflected in the shifting demands for and the decrease of price of beef cuts for *bulgogi* during this period. Specifically, the high demands for beef cuts for roast beef such as *galbi* and sirloin impacted the demands for *bulgogi* beef cuts, and according to beef sales trends in May 2004, average daily sales of beef cuts for *bulgogi* had decreased by over 20 percent, compared to the same period in the previous year. In addition, the price had dropped by around 2,000 *won* for what used to be worth 4,000 *won* per 100 grams in the previous year of 2003. This phenomenon had such an influence on the supply and demand of beef that the price of the cuts for *galbi* and sirloin, which comprise only 30 percent of the cow, skyrocketed while its counterpart for *bulgogi* was left in freezers unsold.<sup>23</sup> In the year 2004, the Korean Council of Beef Consumption Promotion started the "Let's eat *bulgogi*" campaign, stating, "The preference of *galbi gui* (grilled beef short ribs) and *deungsim gui* (grilled beef tenderloin) over Korea's representative meat dish, *bulgogi*, is aggravating the supply and demand inequality for different cuts of beef."<sup>24</sup> The traditional line of *neobiani* becoming grilled *bulgogi* has broken away and the beef broth *bulgogi* has become a boiled, not roasted food.

22. "Bulgogi-wa saengdeungsim" (*Bulgogi* and Sirloin), *Seoul Shinmun*, August 4, 1992.

23. "Soebulgogi sobi gamso" (Decrease of *Bulgogi* Consumption), *Hankyoreh*, May 28, 2004.

24. "Bulgogi meokgo him naeseoyo" (Cheers with *Bulgogi*), *Kukmin Ilbo*, May 26, 2004.

The decline of *bulgogi* can be explained by the following three reasons. First is the change in consumer tastes. From this period, the preference of customers began to shift from *bulgogi* to fresh tenderloin and fresh *galbi*, and the food culture of Korea, which was traditionally based on marinated roast meat, began changing to the preference of fresh meat. Second is the deterioration of quality of *bulgogi*. Grilled *bulgogi* that originated from *neobiani* using sirloin and tenderloin had to be made the same way as *neobiani* without any supplementary ingredients. This required the finest meat quality. However, as grilled *bulgogi* changed to beef broth *bulgogi*, soup and a lot of other supplementary ingredients, such as vegetables, were added. This caused the meat quality to deteriorate and sirloin began to be substituted with leg cuts, which were half the price of sirloin. Quantity became more important than quality. A 1985 article also reveals that substitute cuts were used in beef broth *bulgogi*. The *Maeil Business Newspaper* reported that beef cuts used for beef broth *bulgogi* were mainly classified as shoulder loin, front leg, roast meat, and steak.<sup>25</sup> These cuts clearly contrast with sirloin and tenderloin that were main ingredients of the past *neobiani* and the grilled *bulgogi* that succeeded it. Due to the relatively low price of the lower quality meat used for beef broth *bulgogi*

than for its grilled counterpart, beef broth *bulgogi* was able to gain popularity. However, people's elevated standards for food quality played a role in causing *bulgogi*'s popularity and consumption to decline.

The third reason that explains the decline of *bulgogi* is the convenience of cooking fresh meat. Marinated roast meat required several steps of cooking,

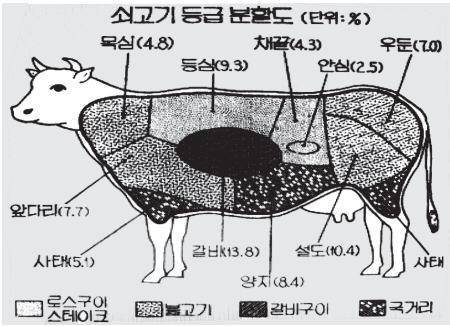


Figure 7. A Beef Cuts Diagram Published in *Maeil Business Newspaper*, July 19, 1985

25. "Soegogi deunggeup bunhaldo" (Beef Cuts Diagram), *Maeil Business Newspaper*, July 19, 1985.

such as trimming and preserving the meat for a particular amount of time after marinating. However, the convenience of fresh meat that could be cooked instantly at home or when dining outside the home gained popularity quickly.

### *The Revival of Bulgogi*

Even during the period when beef broth *bulgogi* was established as the nation's greatly enjoyed dish, grilled *bulgogi* also maintained a feeble presence. Woolaeoak has served Pyongyang-style *bulgogi* without broth since its opening in 1946. Also, Gwangyang *bulgogi* and Eonyang/Bonggye *bulgogi*, cooked in the original tradition of *neobiani*, roasted on a grill, also started to gain popularity again. Although there are differences between restaurants, Gwangyang *bulgogi* is made by roasting meat on a grill over charcoal fire right after the beef is marinated with soy sauce seasoning. This method is similar to that of traditional *neobiani*.

Eonyang/Bonggye *bulgogi* is a term that generally refers to both charcoal-broiled meat (fresh meat) and *bulgogi* (marinated meat). Charcoal-broiled meat is seasoned with salt, and *bulgogi* is marinated with all sorts of seasoning and roasted above direct charcoal fire. Regarding the cooking method of Eonyang *bulgogi*, manager Choi Hae-jun of the Eonyang Bulgogi Cooperative stated the following:

Eonyang *bulgogi* can be classified into two types, salt-sprinkled fresh meat and *bulgogi*. The type of *bulgogi* refers to a kind of meatloaf made with thinly sliced meat. While soy sauce was used to make seasoning in the past, this is rarely practiced today in order to rid the smell of soy sauce and preserve the taste of Korean beef. Instead, a different seasoning recipe is employed using salt and beef broth, but no fruits. In order to reserve the inherent taste of meat, it is seasoned, marinated for three to four hours, and directly grilled on charcoal fire.<sup>26</sup>

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26. Choi Hae-jun, manager of Eonyang Bulgogi Cooperative, telephone interview by the author, January 29, 2010.

An interesting phenomenon is that although *bulgogi* consumption slowly declined from the beginning of the 1990s, attempts to diversify *bulgogi* took advantage of *bulgogi*'s status as "the representative food of Korea." Specifically, the "*bulgogi* burger" was introduced, "Japanese *bulgogi*," *yakiniku*, was reimported, and *neobiani* began to gain attention again, revisiting the foundation of *bulgogi*.

The most representative derivative of *bulgogi* is the *bulgogi* burger, which are sold at fast food chain restaurants in Korea. From 1992 to 1998, over one hundred million *bulgogi* burgers were sold at Lotteria, a Korean domestic fast food restaurant similar to McDonald's. In addition, McDonald's started to sell *bulgogi* burgers beginning in October of 1997, and Popeye's, a chicken fast-food restaurant, also sold *bulgogi* burgers.<sup>27</sup>

*Bulgogi* also spread overseas, representing Korea. In Japan, an association of *bulgogi* restaurant owners called the All Japan Yakiniku Association was established.<sup>28</sup> Anrakutei, a restaurant specializing in *yakiniku*, was opened by manager Yu Si-gi, a Korean resident of Japan in 1963. In 2000, this restaurant had about 265 franchise restaurants centered around the Tokyo area and has grown to be the largest *yakiniku* franchise restaurant in Japan. *Yakiniku* is now viewed as "one of Japan's three popular eating out menus, along with *sushi* and the hamburger."<sup>29</sup>

As *bulgogi* gained popularity overseas, it became a representative food of Korea. *Bulgogi* officially became a symbol of Korean culture when the Ministry of Culture and Sports designated the term as one of the ten combined images representing Korean culture.<sup>30</sup>

27. "Hangukhyeong haembeogeo chulsi bum" (Korean-Style Burger Release: Big Hit), *Segye Times*, February 16, 2005; "McDonand's, Lotteria, *bulgogi* beogeo choego gyeongjaeng" (McDonand's vs. Lotteria: *Bulgogi* Burger Top Competitors), *Munhwa Ilbo*, August 8, 2002.

28. "Bulgogi il eumsik-euro gongin umjigim" (Movement to Certify *Bulgogi* as Japanese Food), *Seoul Shinmun*, May 12, 1998.

29. "Jaeil gyopo gieobin yamang-gwa seonggong I, bulgogi cheinjeom Yu Si-gi sajang" (Korean-Japanese Businessmen's Ambition and Success, Part I: *Bulgogi* Franchise President Yu Si-gi), *Dong-A Ilbo*, August 21, 2000.

30. "Hanbok, hangeul, gimchi . . . hanguk sangjing 10 seonjeong" (Hanbok, Hangeul, *Kimchi* . . . Selected as 10 Korean Symbols), *Hankyoreh*, November 30, 1996.

Overall, the transition and development process of *bulgogi* can be summed up as seen in the following figure.

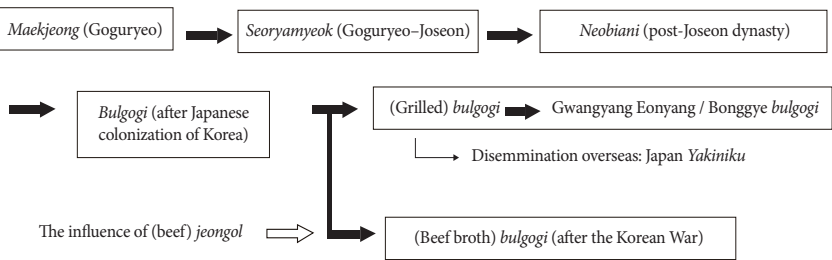


Figure 8. The Transition and Development Process of *Bulgogi*

Conclusion

Korean roast meat is divided into two types: *jeok*, meaning meat roasted on a skewer over a direct barbeque fire and *beon*, meaning meat roasted over direct fire, using an iron plate or rocks. Originating from *maekjeok* of the Goguryeo dynasty, *jeok* evolved into *seoryamyek* during the dynasties of Goryeo and Joseon and ultimately became *neobiani*. A distinctive feature of *neobiani* is that it is “thinly sliced marinated beef that is instantly roasted or roasted after preservation mixed with seasoning.” On the other hand, *bulgogi* that succeeded *neobiani* has experienced dynamic changes and transitions for a century since its appearance in the modern era. *Bulgogi* roasted over a grill is derived from *jeok*, which is a direct descendent of *neobiani*. In contrast, the beef broth *bulgogi* that later emerged in the 1960s is derived from *beon*, which uses an iron plate over fire. In short, *bulgogi* is a representative roast meat dish that includes both *jeok* and *beon*, which are two types of Korean traditional roast meat.

This study has traced the three phases of *bulgogi*’s evolution over the past century, beginning with the emergence of the modern rendition of *bulgogi* (1920s–1960s) when grilled *bulgogi*, originating from *neobiani*, became commercialized. The term *bulgogi* was found in literary documents in the 1920s and spread to wider usage nationwide in the post-

1930s, carrying various meanings from “a lump of roast meat” to *neobi-ani*. Boiled beef broth *bulgogi* appeared between the end of the Korean War and 1960. During the development of *bulgogi* from the 1960s to the 1990s, it gained popularity across the nation and gained its status as the most popular food in Korea. The period after the 1990s saw the decline in *bulgogi*’s popularity due to the rising preference for fresh meat, but grilled *bulgogi* soon found a revival in its popularity when its recipe was applied and adapted into various dishes.

Over the course of the birth and development of *bulgogi* during the past century, *bulgogi* has developed into a global brand. It now represents Korean cuisine and its nation, as its status has risen from merely the name of a dish to a symbol embedded in the country’s long cultural heritage.

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