

# K-FOOD

Combining Flavor, Health, and Nature



**K** - FOOD

**KOREAN CULTURE No.9**

**K-FOOD: Combining Flavor, Health, and Nature**

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*“The noted Chicago eatery Blackbird has kimchi on the menu, and California Pizza Kitchen is developing Korean barbecue beef pizza. In Los Angeles, crowds are lining up for street food from a pair of Korean taco trucks called Kogi. ... Redolent with garlic, sesame oil and red chili peppers, Korean food is suddenly everywhere.”*

*Juliet Chung, Wall Street Journal, March 7, 2009*

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*“There is no shortage of top-quality Korean ingredients – fish, shellfish, marbled beef – and there is great affection for kimchi, a condiment of fermented cabbage, radishes, chilli, fish sauce, garlic, and ginger. ... Korean food—spicy, quickly prepared and served—also lends itself to the informal style of restaurant that has seen Wagamama, Busaba Eathai, and Ping Pong in London, as well as Momofuku in New York, achieve such success.”*

*Nicholas Lander, Financial Times, January 21, 2011*

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*“Salt Lake City’s food scene is in for a healthy jolt. Korean food is a hot ethnic dining trend on the west and east coasts and is seeping into mainstream restaurants in Utah.”*

*Glen Warchol, The Salt Lake Tribune, Jan 05, 2012*



## PROLOGUE

A wide variety of plates and bowls are used to set a table with *hansik*, or Korean food. *Bap* (cooked rice), and a bowl of soup made from either meat and vegetables or fish, are set in front of the diner. A large pot or bowl of stew is placed at the center of the table, while various *banchan* (side dishes) are neatly arranged on the table. All of these dishes are set together, and the harmony created by the vegetable dishes and meat dishes seasoned with fermented sauces which have been made over a long period of time with care, is what makes *hansik* uniquely Korean.

Despite this uniqueness and the variety of food that is offered, the only Korean foods that were familiar to non-Koreans were the simple *bulgogi* or “Korean barbeque.” However, things have changed in recent years, and Korean food is now being recognized as a source for new and exciting culinary dishes. The reason for this is simple. People today are becoming increasingly conscious about their health, and the food that is offered is being tailored to suit these needs. Many are looking for organic or natural foods, “slow foods” and food that will help their overall well-being, and Korean cuisine meets all those requirements. Moreover, it is tasty. When asked about how they were introduced to Korean cuisine, non-Koreans responded that it piqued their interest because it was something new and it was unique, but they later fell in love with it because it was healthy

and delicious. World-renowned chefs have also been mesmerized by the kimchi-making process, with its generous amount of garlic, and have gone away to create their own style of Korean cuisine. Hallyu (Korean Wave), with an increasing interest in music and entertainment through K-Pop and K-Drama, also gave a boost in promoting Korean food.

Non-Koreans who have tasted Korean food say that it has “a unique flavor and depth” that they cannot describe. This is because it is centered around fermented foods that are carefully and patiently made over time. These include the sauces, which are infused in the dishes and cleverly hidden from view, or can be plainly visible delights, such as kimchi and *jangajji* (pickled vegetables), *doenjang jjigae* (soybean paste stew) or *makgeolli* (Korean traditional rice wine). These fermented foods are unique to Korean cuisine, and an essential part of any Korean dish is the Korean seasoning (the various sauces made from ingredients such as *ganjang* (soy sauce), *gochu* (red chili) flakes, sesame oil, wild sesame oil, minced garlic, finely chopped green onions, and ginger.)

Korea has four distinct seasons, spring, summer, autumn and winter and Korean food reflects what each season has to offer. Each of the dishes is infused with the colors, smells, textures and flavors of the season, and reflects the wisdom of the people who discovered these tastes. The abundance seasonal ingredients allows for a seemingly endless variety of dishes to be made, and of these, various *namul* (seasoned vegetable) dishes, which were blanched or combined with natural oils, made for a very healthy meal. Korean food also contains healing properties, as it was believed that “the roots of food and medicine are the same.” Food could and was used to heal not just the body but the mind as well, so it only naturally followed that the ingredients used to make dishes were



*Kimjang* (Making and Sharing Kimchi), which epitomize Koreans' culture of community and sharing, were registered with UNESCO's list of Humanity's Intangible Cultural Heritage at the end of 2013. *Kimjang* continues to develop, which companies and organizations bringing people together to make kimchi and donate it to the less fortunate for the winter. This picture is from Kimchi-Making Festival to Share Mother's Love with Multicultural Families held in 2010.

extremely important, and the food was prepared with great care. Balance was key in Korean food, and people continually sought to find ingredients that could work together in perfect harmony in order to be beneficial for human health.

This book is not only for people who love Korean cuisine, but for anyone who is even slightly interested in the dishes with the intriguing tastes and smells “that they call Korean food.”

One has to question whether there is anything that can represent a country's culture better than its food. On this note, I hope this book acts as a friendly guide, and allows you to familiarize yourself with the healthy and natural food of Korea. I also hope that the book entertains all your senses, allowing you to imagine and taste Korean food through the history and stories behind it.

## Chapter One

# K-FOOD IN THE WORLD

## K-Food: A New Global Food Trend

With the presence of Korean communities in a wide variety of countries, *hansik* (Korean food) has been making its way across international borders for many years. The people in these countries have probably even sampled Korean food while not knowing what kind of food they were really eating. Up until recently, they might have accepted Korean food to be a strange, exotic cuisine that only Koreans consume.

However, enter the 1990s and this began to change. People started to recognize that the unusual food that they had once tasted was Korean. This awakening was due to people becoming accustomed to Korean culture, from burning midnight oil with K-Drama, an enthusiastic interest in K-Pop, and the popularity of Korean-made smartphones. Altogether, this marked a new surge in interest in Korean Food. No longer was it just something different to try, but a cuisine that most people were becoming familiar with.



The sea urchin dish (Korean seaweed rice with crispy quinoa) at Jungsik (Michelin two-star Korean restaurant) in New York



Bulgoggi (marinated meat cooked on the grill)





Korean fermented seasonings (clockwise from top left):  
*ganjang* (soy sauce), *jeotgal* (salted seafood), *doenjang* (soybean paste)

By this time, there was increased awareness that the distinctive characteristic of Korean food was fermented food derived from a wide range of ingredients and spicy, salty condiments, and that it was fundamentally healthy. This interest was aided by futurist Alvin Toffler's prediction that the third taste to catch the attention of the world food scene, following salty and spicy, would be that of fermentation.

People in this modern age find it difficult to decide what and how to eat, and the word flexitarian, nominated as the most useful word in the United States in 2003, encapsulates this dilemma. In practice, food experts in the Western world proactively turned to, and publicized, Korean food. Western media, too, have printed favorable reports, and people who have tried it praise it for its taste and health benefits.

Prominent food columnist Mark Bittman, whose *Minimalist* series ran in *The New York Times* (*NYT*) for more than 13 years, went on a meat-restricted, largely plant-based diet, or what can otherwise be conceived

of as a blended menu of Korean food and flexitarianism. He saw amazing improvements in his body weight and blood sugar levels through this change in diet (*NYT*, 2013.4.23). He mentioned eating, at least two or three times a week, a chopped salad of salted vegetables (while admitting his uncertainty as to whether the salting technique was Middle Eastern or Korean). In another column, he suggested *juk* (Korean porridge) for breakfast (*NYT*, 2013.9.17), and elsewhere, he related having gotten together once with some childhood friends at a Korean restaurant and persuading them to try *galbi* (braised short ribs). Even back in the day when most were unfamiliar with Korean cuisine, Bittman recognized its outstanding nutritional value and health benefits. In his column "Exploring the World of Kimchi, the Spicy Korean Staple" (*NYT*, 1996.4.10), he

Prominent food columnist Mark Bittman's *NYT* column on *bulgogi*





International star chef David Chang has been creating new flavors by blending traditional Korean cooking methods with various Western culinary techniques. One of his dishes making waves in New York is this *bossam* (napa wraps with pork).

described vividly how several American chefs have ventured into kimchi territory, while also sharing a few of their recipes for this spicy dish and his own reduced *gochu* (red chili) flake kimchi recipe, adjusted to suit his tolerance level. His recent claim to kimchi fandom had him declaring that, “kimchi is a remarkable dish. Super-high flavor, no fat, and lots of varieties that go with almost everything.” I can understand why people eat kimchi daily,” in an interview with a Korean paper (*JoongAng Daily*, 2009.2.1). While promoting this meat-restricted, plant-based diet to his readers, he added that for quite some time, he had often had Korean dishes, and even tried his hand at preparing them.

*The Wall Street Journal* (2009.3.7) ran an article that reported how, for many years, Korean food remained in traditional restaurants in areas where most Korean immigrants settled, such as in Hawaii or Los Angeles. In recent years though, the symbolic Korean flavors of pungent garlic,

sesame oil, and spicy *gochu* (Korean chili) can be found everywhere. Leading the pack are *bulgogi* (marinated meat cooked on the grill) and kimchi. California Pizza Kitchen, a leading American pizza chain with around 250 branches, launched the Korean BBQ Pizza as a seasonal menu item in April 2013. This pizza, which featured the Korean toppings of *bulgogi* and kimchi salad, was well-received. The Bulgogi Burger at Burger Tex is another crowd favorite. On the restaurant front, items like kimchi pasta and kimchi with lobster are debuting on menus.

In Los Angeles, there is the specialty served up from Korean chef Roy Choi’s Korean taco truck Kogi-Korean-BBQ-TO-GO, the kimchi taco for \$2 a pop. With its frequent SNS updates on its whereabouts, Kogi is a big hit. According to news outlets like the *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, and the BBC, hundreds of people form queues at the truck, and a whiff of this street-food-selling truck hitting New York’s Midtown soon after L.A. kept



In L.A., Kogi-Korean-BBQ-TO-GO, the Korean street food truck (right), and its most popular item, the kimchi taco (left). You know that it is a big thing when it is being mentioned by the *NYT*, *Newsweek*, and the BBC.

K-Pop fans enjoying *bibimbap* during the Hallyu festival K-Con, held in L.A. in August 2013.



its popularity strong.

The current “it” dish on the New York restaurant scene might just be *bossam* (napa wraps with pork). Detailing his recipe in the *NYT* article “*The Bo Ssam Miracle*” (2012.1.12), Korean chef David Chang had taken to inventively blend Eastern with Western culinary techniques to debut a refreshing texture for this traditional dish. The high praise for his skills stems from the ease with which the non-chef can recreate this flavor simply by following his recipe.

Korean food can also be a healthy alternative for the teenager. A *NYT* article (2012.7.10) described how camp food in the U.S. has gradually evolved to become “camp cuisine,” with a recent camp menu offering *bibimbap* (mixed rice with meat and assorted vegetables). Here, camp-hired chefs provide a variety of *bibimbap* toppings for campers to choose off the buffet table. White rice moistened with leeks. Brown rice. Onions and chopped celery, both tossed in sesame oil and slow roasted. Warmed carrots with ginger and garlic, ringed by steamed broccoli. And roasted tofu and eggplant. “Camp food is so much healthier than food at home,” one camper said. Meanwhile, home cooks can whip up *bibimbap* themselves from five easy recipes, each featuring tuna, tofu, clams, chicken or beef, as introduced in another *NYT* piece (2012.2.24).

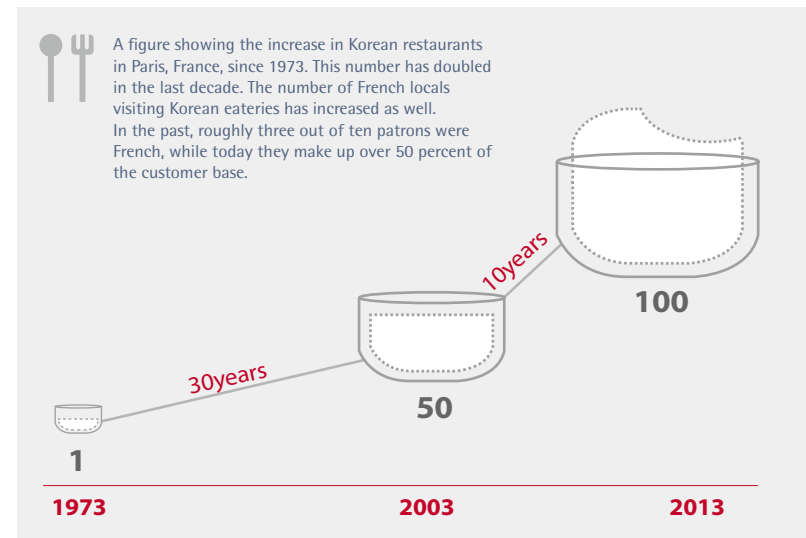
It is not just in the U.S. where interest in *hansik* has been on the increase. When the K-Pop concert SM Town was held in Paris in early 2013, over 350 Korean lunch boxes, comprising white rice and soup, salad, vegetable *banchan* (side dishes), *bulgogi* or *japchae* (stir-fried glass noodles and vegetables), each priced at €8, were sold daily in one downtown shop. One Parisian who frequented the shop several times that week said, “The food is delicious and well-balanced, and the taste is

extremely delicate.” In fact, the number of French locals visiting Korean eateries has increased, from roughly three out of 10 patrons in a Korean restaurant in the past, to now making up over 50 percent of the customer base.

In Beijing, all seats are snapped up within the hour when the Korean cultural center holds a kimchi-making lecture, while in Hangzhou, you have to wait in line at the Korean restaurant if you want to have *dolsot* (hot stone pot) *bibimbap*. Major Japanese supermarkets, such as Ito-Yokado and Tokyu Store, have expanded their Korean food corners and now offer a wide range of Korean food products like kimchi, Korean snacks, and *tteokbokki* (stir-fried rice cake). Then there is *makgeolli*, Korea’s traditional rice wine: It is easy to find Japanese seeking a shot of this traditional liquor in Japan’s bars and restaurants, and many young Japanese even fly to Korea to attend *makgeolli* sommelier courses.

To meet the growing interest in Korean cuisine in Russia, courses in Korean cuisine have opened up for Russian students training to become chefs. In April 2011, a memorandum of understanding was signed with a number of Russian universities specializing in nutrition and the food industry to groom Russian chefs specializing in Korean cuisine in a five-year training program, with courses conducted by the Korean corporation World Food Culture Center.

Elsewhere, chefs in five-star New York hotel kitchens are also picking up Korean preparation techniques. At the Mandarin Oriental Hotel, where state guests often stay when in New York, the chefs received kimchi-making lessons from a top Korean kimchi expert and were surprised to see for themselves how much garlic and *jeotgal* (salted seafood) were added with the salt sandwiched in-between each cabbage leaf. Executive chef Toni



Robertson explained that “a growing number of hotel guests are requesting kimchi, and we have also started to include this on the banquet menu.” This prompted them to learn the proper technique directly from the kimchi master. She added that kimchi is becoming “really popular” in New York right now, and that she is planning to experiment with some kimchi dishes.

In keeping with what Robertson said, kimchi seems to be loved by many famous people. Former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg is said to have become a kimchi lover after visiting New York’s swanky Korean restaurant Kum Gang San. In February 2013, First Lady Michelle Obama created some buzz when she tweeted, “Last week, we picked Napa cabbage in the garden. Now, we’re using it to make kimchi in the kitchen. Make it at home,” together with the recipe and a photo showing glass jars of her kimchi.

Last year, food experts from all over the world convened in Spain to



A contemporary reinterpretation of traditional Korean food flavors for the welcome party banquet at 2012 Madrid Fusion.

Top right: *bibimbap* with *banchan* (mixed rice with side dishes)

Bottom right: *sinseollo* (royal hotpot)

sample and discuss Korean food, the latest inspiration for health food. About 130 participants from various countries, including top chefs, food industry CEOs, and food columnists, gathered at the historical Casino de Madrid hotel in the heart of Madrid, upon being invited to the 2012 Madrid Fusion event. Since 2002, Madrid Fusion has been the platform that launched and showcased international food trends for the last eleven years. Every year, the event's organizers select a featured country's cuisine to introduce to the audience, and it was Korea's turn for that honor in 2012.

Leading up to the event, that was to be held January 24-26, 2012, was a feast with the theme "An invitation to Korean food." From nine hors d'oeuvres, including ginseng, fish roe and *yukhoe* (beef tartare), to the eight-course meal with *japchae*, *sinseollo* (royal hotpot), and *bibimbap*, the Korean culinary offerings captivated the taste buds of participants. Microsoft's ex-chief technology officer and author of cookbook *Modernist Cuisine* Nathan Myhrvold was present at the feast, and praised the course as "an excellent balance." More compliments poured in from the

international crowd of experts for the food, such as that from Rafael Ansón Oliart, the president of Spain's Royal Academy of Gastronomy seated at the head table, who described Korean food as having "an indescribable delicateness."

For the following three days, world-renowned chefs busied themselves with demonstrating their culinary skills through the theme of fermented foods. First up on the first day of the event was Fernando del Cerro, who specializes in cuisine based on the use of locally grown fresh produce, with his kimchi-style cabbage appetizer and accompanying talk on a type of non-spicy kimchi, "*baek* kimchi (white kimchi) and *dongchimi* (radish water kimchi): An exquisite blend of fermenting, acidity, unique taste, and freshness." Master chef Joan Roca of the world's top restaurant El Celler de Can Roca presented his twist on Korean fermented food while declaring

Spanish three-star Michelin chef Quique Dacosta using *jang* (sauce) in his demonstration at the 2012 Madrid Fusion.





Korean natural cooking researcher Yim Ji-ho has received a lot of attention for creating *namul* (seasoned vegetables) dishes using fermented sauces and healthy vegetables sourced from around Korea.

his surprise that something as old as Korean food could fit so well with modern trends.

The Korean chefs also dazzled, with representation by natural cooking researcher Yim Ji-ho, molecular gastronomy chef Sang-hoon Degeimbre from Belgium, new Korean food leader Yim Jungsik from New York, Lotte Hotel Seoul's head chef Lee Byeong-woo, and Buddhist temple cuisine expert nun, the Venerable Seon Jae. Their array of fresh vegetables fermented with Korean condiments like *ganjang* (soy sauce) and *doenjang* (soybean paste), an alternative interpretation of the everyday *doenjang jiggae* (soybean paste stew), and molecular gastronomy fermented dishes

met with a standing ovation from industry experts.

The natural, healthy diet of vegetables and fermentation had its day at 2012 Madrid Fusion. There was the acknowledgment that, with its diverse food preparation methods, this fare did not pale next to meat and fish dishes. Certainly, there was a spot for vegetables and fermentation next to the other world food trends of slow food, organic farming, and eco-gastronomy. The event demonstrated that, in the fine hands of masters like Joan Roca, kimchi, sauces, and fermented vegetables could be reworked to be the next food the world should be paying attention to.

International top chefs have entered their verdict and the moment has come for Korean food to present itself to the world as an exceptional, innately deeply flavored health food. Since 2009, special interest in Korea's traditional fermented foods have spurred chefs to answer the call of Korean food festival "Seoul Gourmet," where the boundaries of

Chefs invited to 2012 Seoul Gourmet (from left): Tetsuya Wakuda, Akira Back, Gennaro Esposito, Alex Atala, Magnus Nilsson, Pedro Subijana, Thomas Bühner, and Johan Agrell





The international chefs invited to 2011 Seoul Gourmet take part in a Korean cooking immersion experience. Sang-hoon Degeimbre (left) and Pascal Barbot (right).

food techniques are pushed with bold mixing of the intricate flavors of traditional condiments.

The harmonious blend of tastes from *jangajji* (pickled vegetables) and fermented foods kindled surprise and interest in fermented foods from world class chefs, including three-star Michelin chef Pedro Subijana from Spain, Swedish chef Magnus Nilsson who uses only local seasonal produce, and Korean-born, Las Vegas-based Akira Back, executive chef at the Yellowtail Japanese Restaurant & Lounge at the five-star Bellagio resort and casino. Acclaimed Australian chef Tetsuya Wakuda opined that the taste was uniquely *umami* (the savory “fifth taste”), something very different from Japanese fermentation. In the sea of praise, three-star Michelin chef Michel Troisgros identified the potential of *bulgogi* to make it



Gennaro Esposito (left) and Thomas Buhner (right) invited to 2012 Seoul Gourmet taste *jangajji* (pickled vegetables), as part of the Savor Korea program in Unhyeongung Palace in central Seoul.

big on the world food scene, being an uncomplicated food and also closely intertwined with the Korean identity, but cautioned that the term “fermented food” may hold negative connotations in some parts of Europe. He suggested understanding the cultural differences regarding fermentation before gradually introducing these dishes to those audiences.

Korean medicinal food (foods based on traditional Korean medicine) left a deep impression on German three-star Michelin chef Thomas Buhner, who noted how Koreans are concerned about how to eat healthily. He indicated he wanted to learn more about it.

Brazilian chef Alex Atala of D.O.M., a restaurant ranked fourth on San Pellegrino World’s 50 Best Restaurants, remarked, “I have been fascinated by fermentation, the balance between strong and delicate flavors, and the combination of vegetables and meats,” adding that even though it could take several years, he would like to conduct research into how this is done with these seemingly incompatible ingredients.

Luigi Biadetto, an Italian master pastry chef, came to realize how often fermentation is used in Korea, and added that such fermented foods really reflect Korean culture. “I’d like to combine Korean rice and beans for my dessert menus during my stay at the festival.”

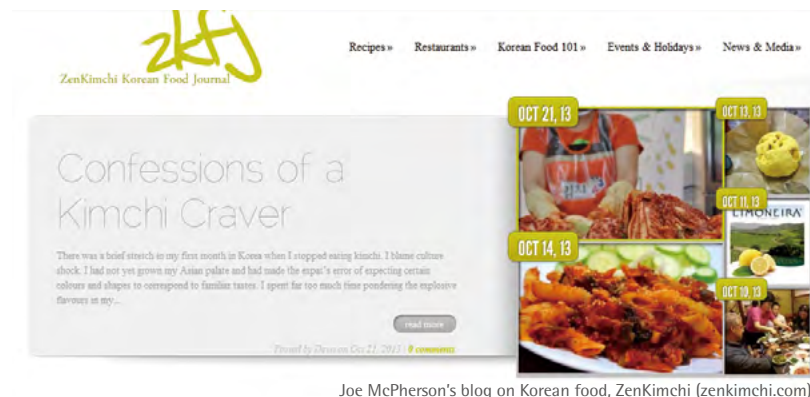
Korean food can be considered a creation possible only through the cooperation of human and nature. The time-consuming and painstakingly nurtured flavors of *doenjang*, *ganjang*, *gochujang* (red chili paste), and fermented foods, like kimchi and *jangajji* (pickled vegetables), are no longer sensations that only Koreans can understand. The multifaceted flavors that have inspired the world’s top chefs to explore and show-off are awaiting a world that is seeking the healthy gourmet complement to slow food, organic farming, and wellbeing.

## Non-Koreans Share Korean Cuisine with the World

There is just something about kimchi and *gochujang* (red chili paste). Initially fiercely spicy, the tastes grow on you as you go along. Some non-Koreans describe it as addictive, and it does not stop there. There are



Korean food blogger Joe McPherson speaking on the globalization of Korean food at TEDx Seoul.



those who have continued to declare their love for Korean food through English-language blogs, sharing with the wider audience tidbits on this delicious and healthy cuisine. Regularly introducing various Korean dishes as they fall in love with the fresh ingredients and natural flavors, some have found fame as Korean food bloggers.

One such blogger is Joe McPherson of ZenKimchi (zenkimchi.com), who started off writing about his experiences with Korean food in 2004. At a time where there was little such information in the blogosphere, many people from around the world visited his blog for information on what Korean food was, how to prepare it, and what some good places to eat it were from the non-Korean’s perspective. The blog has since grown and includes contributions from fellow Korean food-loving bloggers about their Korean food encounters. Meanwhile, McPherson has been actively introducing Korean food to the world through efforts like sharing his recipes with non-Koreans residing in Korea through various Korean media, and also spoke at TEDx Seoul on the globalization of Korean food.

There is also Daniel Gray of Seoul Eats (seouleats.com). Gray became

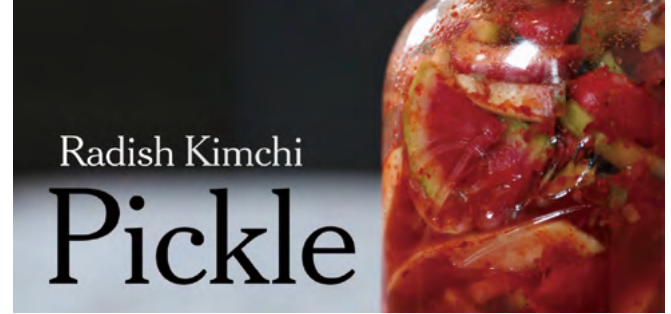




Daniel Gray of Seoul Eats (seouleats.com) explaining Korean ingredients during a tour of a Seoul market with non-Korean tourists.

well-known after posting reviews of Seoul restaurants on his blog, which he said he started after realizing how delicious Korean food was in Seoul. He has also realized his concept to allow non-Korean tourists to Korea to fully immerse themselves in Korean food through O'ngo Food Communications, a public relations company he established. Here, they offer unique experiences for the tourist who is curious about Korean food, such as a visit to Noryangjin Fish Market that is smack in Seoul's center, a temple cuisine cooking class or a *makgeolli* (Korean traditional rice wine) course. Gray grew up in the United States as a Korean adoptee, but is back in Korea to find his roots and actively promotes Korean culture and the true taste of Seoul.

Some books on Korean food have been penned by overseas food writers. Now residing in England, American Marc Millon is the author of one such book. *Flavours of Korea* introduces Korean culture to readers alongside about 150 Korean food recipes, including *bibimbap* (mixed rice



NYT food columnist Melissa Clark's kimchi dish from a March 2013 piece. This "radish kimchi pickle" recipe can be seen on nytimes.com and youtube.com.



with meat and assorted vegetables), *japchae* (stir-fried glass noodles and vegetables), kimchi, *bulgogi* (marinated meat cooked on the grill), and *pajeon* (green onion pancake). His Korean grandmother ran a restaurant in Honolulu until World War 2, and under her influence, Millon not just grew up on *bulgogi* and *pajeon*, but also takes his broccoli Korean-style: blanched and served with *gochujang* dip, and holds *samgyeopsal* (grilled pork belly) parties with close friends. No stranger to having kimchi at his maternal grandmother's dining table, he remarked, "She believed that garnishing a Western meal with Korean food gave it more flavor." In Millon's opinion, the draws of Korean food are charbroiled fish, *bibimbap*, noodles, kimchi, and street food. Furthermore, if Korean restaurants could recreate the warmth and gregariousness that Korean people are known for, he suggested non-Koreans will find it easier to approach Korean food.

Other than books, interest in delicious Korean food recipes can be



The winner of food blog Eater.com's "Eater's Greatest Burger in America Contest", the *bibimbap* burger, a Korean food-inspired recipe by American chef Angelo Sosa.

found in foreign media. Detailing her kimchi-inspired pickling recipe “radish kimchi pickle” in her column, the *NYT* food columnist Melissa Clark (2013.3.6) also showed followers via video how to make this modified *kkakdugi* (radish kimchi)-like dish with *gochu* (red chili) flakes tossed in for some kimchi flavor. With tips to make this recipe more accessible overseas, such as to utilize everyday ingredients like watermelon radish, and to substitute fish sauce and dried shrimp with minced anchovies, she transformed a traditional flavor into one that can be reproduced with ease by Americans as part of an everyday meal.

In the sweltering deserts of the Middle East, Korean food is known as healthy food. One of these proponents is the tremendously popular chef Osama El-Sayed, who gave a nod to the fermented goodness of the cuisine while noting the world’s shift toward healthy diets during a television broadcast in November 2012. His well-received TV show *It’s More Delicious with Osama* airs on state-run Dubai TV in the United Arab Emirates and is watched by Arab audiences in 22 countries. The show has introduced not just the usual Korean fare of *galbi*, *bulgogi*, *bibimbap*, and kimchi, but also necessary accompanying condiments like *gochujang* (red chili paste), *doenjang* (soybean paste), and *jeotgal* (salted seafood). In an unprecedented move for the TV station, there was a specially-themed 2008 episode that focused on Korean food after interest in the subject grew as K-Pop and K-Drama became all the rage in the Middle East. Chef Osama made a trip to Korea for this segment. He then made a comment about how a large number of Arabs were “smitten with the taste of Korea,” with hot favorites being *galbi jjim* (braised short ribs) and *galbi gui* (grilled short ribs), because the sweet and spicy garlic and ginger-infused marinade of these meaty dishes well-suited the Arab palate.

The food blog Eater.com started its “Eater’s Greatest Burger in America Contest” in 2011. Out of 11,789 tasters, 32.3 percent voted to make the delicious No. 1 a burger with a refreshing yet familiar ring. Stuffed inside the burger were julienned carrots, squash, and bean sprouts, with meat, egg yolk, and crunchy cabbage spread on top and doused in spicy sauce. This was not put together by a Korean, but by American chef Angelo Sosa. This was Sosa’s *bibimbap* burger. Sosa, a household name after appearances on the famous American reality show *Top Chef*, says when you close your eyes, it tastes just like *bibimbap*, even though there is no rice in this concoction with vegetables marinated in *gochujang*, sugar, and rice vinegar. His New York restaurant Social Eatz dishes up other burgers inspired by Korean cuisine, including a *bulgogi* burger and *gochujang*-marinated *galbi*, and is especially popular with the younger crowd that loves casual food. New Yorkers, who are known to dine out, enthusiastically seek new and delicious foods. In this case, the unique tastes and fragrances of Korean sauces like *gochujang* and *doenjang* in this interesting twist to traditional *bibimbap* are a hit. Sosa has been to Korea, where he learned how to make kimchi and *doenjang*, in a *doenjang* farm, as well as visited a *makgeolli* brewery. His exploration on this journey into fermented tastes was shown on NBC in 2012.

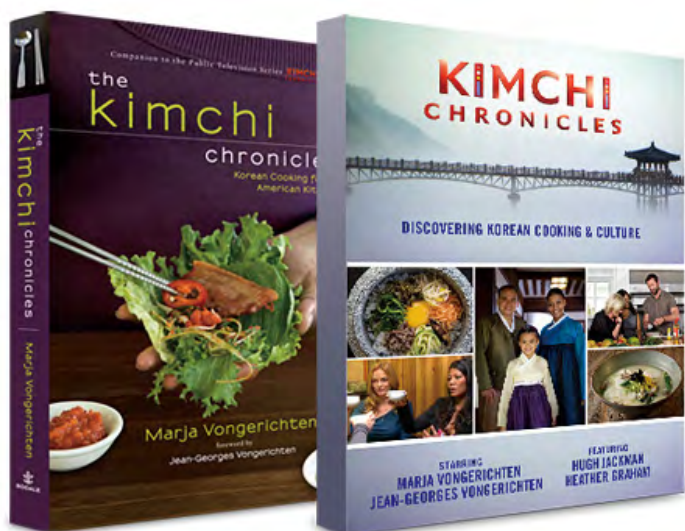
*Kimchi Chronicles*, a 13-part American food program that aired on PBS in 2011, vividly brought to life the Korean taste when it delved into the Korean landscape of kimchi, meat, *hanjeongsik* (full-course Korean set meal), *guksu* (noodles), bean dishes, rice, the specialties of Jeju Island, top Seoul restaurants, and street food. This program, a tale of a journey in search of a hometown and also a homegrown palate, was hosted by one of the world’s most famous chefs, Jean-Georges Vongerichten and his



*Kimchi Chronicles*, an American travelogue featuring Korean food. Famous three-star Michelin chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten and wife Marja traveled through Korea for over a month, exploring and experiencing Korean food. The documentary also features guest appearances by actors Hugh Jackman and Heather Graham.

The Vongerichtens: back in the U.S. and sharing what they picked up in Korea with Hugh Jackman and wife (top), sampling *hanjeongsik* (full-course Korean set meal) in a Seoul restaurant (middle), and listening to an explanation of green tea in the middle of a green tea field on Jeju Island (bottom).





The *Kimchi Chronicles* cookbook (left), Series DVD of *Kimchi Chronicles* (right)

wife Marja, a Korean adoptee who was born to a Korean mother and an African-American father. Born in Alsace, France, Jean-Georges runs several restaurants in New York, including the eponymous Jean Georges, that are often featured in trendy TV dramas. His accolades include three Michelin stars, four stars from *The New York Times*, as well as Best Cookbook Award from the James Beard Foundation in 1999 with his “Cooking at Home with a Four Star Chef.” With these credentials, the couple’s Korea culinary journey was no mere overview. To explore the original Korean food flavor, they went straight to the source: they cooked and dined on abalone, sea cucumber, and seaweed fresh from the nets of Jeju Island’s female divers (*haenyeo*); they visited Chodang in Gangneung to satisfy *sundubu*

(soft tofu)-loving Jean-Georges; for *makguksu* (cold buckwheat noodles), they went to its famed hometown of Chuncheon; and they tasted chemical-free green tea on a green tea farm. Having sampled these original flavors, the chef in him set to innovate, serving up prawns topped with *hallabong* (a locally grown hybrid citrus fruit) and spicy mayonnaise on Jeju Island, white fish garnished with kimchi, and a kimchi hotdog inspired by a street food encounter. Even authentic *bulgogi* (marinated meat cooked on the grill) was dished up in the blink of an eye by this master chef.

Hollywood superstar Hugh Jackman and his wife also made appearances on the show, sweating buckets as they tackled a *gochujang*-laced sandwich prepared by Jean-Georges. Actress Heather Graham can be seen with Marja in a shabby stall at Gwangjang Market, exclaiming in delight as they nibble on *bindaetteok*, crispy mung bean pancakes. As these celebrities enjoyed Seoul’s street food and tried their hands at cooking Korean food, it was obvious that Korean food had come into its own. The celebrities were already familiar with these dishes, and they were eager to learn more about them.

As their gastronomical travels drew to an end, Jean-Georges acknowledged the health benefits of Korean food and the rich variety of flavors. He added a note of caution about not tampering with Korean dishes’ unique flavor when trying to localize them, and that with the infinite combinations of Korean ingredients, Korean food can give new inspiration to chefs all over the world. Take it from the master that there will be nothing better to captivate an international audience than with authentic flavors. Practicing what he preaches, he has included steak with kimchi butter and a hot dog with kimchi relish on his menus. Episodes of *Kimchi Chronicles* can be found on YouTube.

# Kimjang (Making and Sharing Kimchi) Makes UNESCO List

UNESCO on Dec. 5 in Baku, Azerbaijan, said *kimjang*, the culture of making and sharing kimchi, was added to its list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This means 16 Korean items are on the prestigious list, including the royal ancestral ritual at Jongmyo Shrine in Seoul and the music associated with it (2001), the folk dance *ganggangsullae* (2009), the martial art *taekkyeon* (2011), and the folk song “Arirang” (2012).

The United Nations cultural promotion body said *kimjang* received the designation because of its status as an important cultural legacy that has helped forge the Korean identity and a sense of belonging, as well as reinforce the solidarity of the Korean community.

*Kimjang* is the distinctly Korean tradition of preparing large quantities of kimchi, the country’s renowned spicy fermented vegetable dish, in preparation for winter. More than half the year is spent cultivating the ingredients used in *kimjang*, while a family needs two or three days just to acquire and prepare the multitude of ingredients needed to make kimchi. *Kimjang* is a major yearly event that brings together immediate family, more distant relatives, and neighbors to work together. In the past, the well-to-do would use leftover ingredients from *kimjang* to make food and throw a feast for the neighborhood. In exchange for helping, poorer families would get the cabbage and seasonings they needed to do their own *kimjang*. The spirit of sharing that is part and parcel of *kimjang* continues

In Korea, during the kimchi-making season—late fall and early winter—the whole family gathers together and discusses the events of the past year while preparing large quantities of kimchi to eat during the long winter.



One of the major examples of *kimjang* in Korea today is charity for helping the needy. Volunteers make large amounts of kimchi together and then hand it out to low-income households.

in the present day, with companies and organizations holding *kimjang* events in which volunteers make kimchi and distribute it to the less fortunate. This popular activity is not held just in winter but every season.

UNESCO has praised *kimjang* as a notable intangible heritage of humanity, saying families and neighbors come together and share stories during *kimjang* and the spirit of sharing is put into practice as Koreans share the kimchi they make with each other.

The kimchi made during *kimjang* is an important part of the Korean diet, and the condiment’s health benefits are proven. With only 32 kcal per 100 grams, this cabbage-based food is low in calories and high in dietary fiber. Regular intake of dietary fiber prevents constipation, reduces bad cholesterol, and cleanses the body. Kimchi, which is designated Staple Food No. 49 by the Korean government, is also a rich source of vitamins and minerals, including vitamin C and beta-carotene, while B vitamins are synthesized during the fermentation process. It also offers high levels of calcium, iron, and phosphorus, which make bones stronger and reduce anemia. Garlic, an essential ingredient in kimchi, contains allicin, a compound with potent antibacterial properties. Garlic allows the body to retain longer vitamin B1 (thiamin), boosting energy levels and providing a sense of calm. Gochu (red chili pepper), an essential seasoning for kimchi, contains more vitamin C than any other vegetable and inhibits the growth of harmful microorganisms, aiding the production of lactobacilli while kimchi is fermented. The inclusion of red chili pepper significantly adds to the overall nutritional value of the dish. Together, chili pepper and garlic maximize kimchi’s anti-cancer effects.

When fermented, kimchi is full of lactic acid bacteria, fiber, and vitamins, evidence of kimchi’s effectiveness in fighting diabetes, heart disease and obesity and preventing stomach and colorectal cancer. Because of its growing worldwide popularity, kimchi is exported to 52 countries. The magazine *Health* selected kimchi as one of the world’s five healthiest foods in 2006.



## Chapter Two

# K-FOOD, A HARMONY OF TASTE, HEALTH, AND NATURE

## Nutritional Balance in the Korean Diet

In 2009, Korea's Rural Development Administration and the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) launched a series of clinical research trials as part of a three-year collaboration with one of the USDA-ARS research agencies Beltsville Human Nutrition Research Center and John Hopkins Hospital on "the effect of a Korean diet on human health." The research compared the recommended dietary allowances in typical Korean and American dietary profiles. With an increase in obesity in the U.S. due to poor dietary habits and insufficient physical activity, the USDA issues and updates dietary guidelines every five years. This research project was significant as it examined the implementation of dietary guidelines for Americans based on the intake of Korean food.

The research found that by adopting a Korean diet, American participants in the study demonstrated a reduction in the key risk factors

in lifestyle diseases, namely cholesterol and blood sugar. Compared to consuming a typical American diet, there was more than five times the reduction of cholesterol with Korean food consumption, which was 1.5 times above the recommendation of the USDA. The analysis suggested that the effects were due to sufficient consumption of plants through the variety of vegetables and kimchi, fermented products (kimchi, *jeotgal* (salted seafood), and sauces), grains and legumes, as well as the low-fat method of food preparation. It was noteworthy that the average Korean diet approximates the healthy diet outlined in the USDA guidelines.

The Korean dining table can be complicated. The rice-centered diet involves a main dish co-star, a sidekick of soup or broth brewed from options like vegetables, meat, and *doenjang* (soybean paste), and also accessories of little dishes of *banchan* (side dishes) of vegetables and condiments. Let us take a look at what exactly is the role of each of these items on the dining table.



Typical Korean meal:  
*bap* (cooked rice), *guk*  
(soup), grilled fish  
or meat, and a few  
vegetable *banchan*



Left: *ssal bap* (cooked white rice)

Right: grains that can be mixed into cooked rice, (clockwise from top) sorghum, millet, Job's tears

## Rice, the Staple for Koreans

*Bap* (cooked rice) is the staple item for Koreans. It neutralizes spicy and salty tastes, and provides a sense of satiety. Korean *bap* needs to be set to boil on a carefully controlled stove in order to bring out its inherent stickiness, and is not stirred until done, unlike Italian risotto. In the cooking process, the rice grains are initially set to boil under a strong fire, which is reduced to a medium flame when the water starts boiling. When nearly all the water has evaporated, the flame is turned to low so that the innate stickiness of each grain of rice will be locked in. Before the cooking process begins, the rice grains are thoroughly washed and left to soak for 30 minutes to absorb sufficient moisture. Add enough water, that is, about 1.2 times the amount of rice in the pot, and it is all set to go on the stove. Each Korean will have a preferred method of cooking rice, be it using an electric rice cooker, a pressure cooker, or a pot, and each method results in a different flavor.

Apart from white rice, there is *hyeonmi bap* (cooked brown rice) from unpolished grains. These grains are darker in color. Although brown rice

has a rough texture, it is perceived to be more nutritious as the germ, which is full of nutrients, is intact. Thus brown rice is a better option especially for diabetics, because they do not produce enough insulin to fully digest the starch of the rice. The dietary fiber is also good for the intestinal tract, and both brown rice and multigrain rice are considered superior to plain white rice.

### The Culture of Side Dishes: Food That Goes Well with Rice

*Banchan* (side dishes), in its broadest sense, denotes the dishes that accompany the staple of *bap* (cooked rice) in a meal. These side dishes are typically the smaller items on the table that complement the rice and also support the main dish, which might be a grilled item, a steamed dish, or a soup.

The basic *banchan* that are ubiquitous at every meal are referred to as *mitbanchan*. The notion of pairing rice with various *mitbanchan* is akin to dining on Spanish tapas.

Although Koreans use seasonal ingredients to prepare what might be spicy, salty, sour, wet, or dry *banchan*, first and foremost, they consider the harmony and balance of these dishes when they plan the meal. Secondly, the selection of *banchan* depends on whether the meal is merely the usual simple, daily affair, or if guests have been invited over to dine.

For the typical daily meal, there are the usual suspects: a standard bowl of rice and bowl of soup, positioned with a set of chopsticks and spoon. The side dishes that are meant for sharing, possibly kimchi, *jangajji* (pickled vegetables), vegetables, and dips, will be lined up in the middle of the table. Only chopsticks are used for these.

Out of all the possibilities with *banchan*, the vegetable-based sides are



Various *banchan*, which are generally prepared using vegetables.





An example of a typical *jeongsik* (set meal with an entrée) or *baekban* (set meal without an entrée) one might get in Korea, comprising *bap* (cooked rice), *guk* (soup), *jjigae* (stew), and *banchan* (side dishes). One can often request one or two refills of the side dishes.

rather remarkable. Greens can be eaten raw and with a dip, or blanched and seasoned with condiments. Blanching them promotes a greater intake of vegetables than one might otherwise consume. The seasoning of these vegetables is largely according to the fragrance of the ingredient. There are the choices of *ganjang* (soy sauce), *doenjang* (soybean paste), and salt to add for taste, and others including *gochu* (red chili) flakes, chopped scallions, or minced garlic are sprinkled according to one's preference. The final touch is always the untouched, pressed essence of what is a dose of linoleic and omega-3 fatty acids: vegetable-derived sesame seed oil. This and its alternative of perilla oil both add some sheen to the greens. These vegetable *banchan* contain not just dietary fiber, but when combined with vegetable oil, provide sufficient calories and nutrition to make it a first-rate healthy side dish.

What makes a Korean meal more hearty are the soup dishes of *jeongol* (hotpot) or *jjigae* (stew) — which will be discussed at length in the next section — dishes that are grilled or steamed, and stir-fried cuisine. If you were to visit a Korean restaurant, one of these items would be the main,

and up for order, while pre-prepared *mitbanchan*, which depends on what is available during that season, would be served with the dish you ordered.

Non-Koreans might marvel at *banchan* culture when they first come across Korean food. Maybe they clean up the little plates and request seconds. When you ask for more *banchan*, most restaurants will do so as a matter of course. This exchange can be interpreted in terms of *jeong*, which in Korean culture conveys a sense of love and closeness for another person. The Korean people are said to be full of *jeong*. Traditionally the sharing of food fostered a sense of connection with your neighbor, while to sincerely host and offer a stranger food was considered an act of etiquette. In the case of *banchan*, *jeong* would be to continuously refill your *banchan* dishes to allow you to fully enjoy your meal.

### Noodles: Another Essential Food

In a well-established food culture, a wide range of noodle-based dishes are often available to accompany highlights of the cuisine. Korean cuisine is no different. Korean noodle dishes stand out in the midst of fiery hot Korean food as they are typically not spicy, with the exception of *bibim guksu* (spicy noodles), and are suitable for young children and non-Koreans who are less accustomed to spicy food. For these mild dishes, Koreans often garnish the noodles with spicy kimchi.

Korean noodles were in the past originally meant to be served on special days, but they have evolved into everyday fare, often enjoyed as lunch. They are





Janchi guksu (banquet noodles)



Kal guksu (noodle soup)



Mulnaengmyeon (cold buckwheat noodles)

made not only from wheat flour, but also buckwheat flour and starch, which gives them their consistency. The noodles come topped with finely sliced cucumbers, carrots, squash, mushrooms, beef, egg, kimchi, and/or seaweed. With a diverse range of stocks, ranging from chicken and beef, to anchovies, kelp, seafood, and even ground beans, the taste of the soup and noodles come together to give each dish a distinct flavor. There is more nutritional balance in this than simply having noodles made from cereal/grain flour.

As the name suggests, *janchi guksu* (banquet noodles) had been the dish offered to guests at events like weddings and birthday celebrations. The message of congratulations was even set in the appearance of the noodles themselves, with the long strands symbolic of wishes for a long and happy life. This dish is the most refreshing and clean of all Korean noodles. The soup is steeped in the flavor of well-dried anchovies and kelp, with other seafood sometimes making a guest appearance. Wheat flour is pulled into strips of *somyeon* (noodles made of flour, cut extremely thin) that are naturally dried to result in a soft texture when cooked. The noodles are placed in a bowl and then the prepared soup

and garnishes are added. A seasoning sauce of *ganjang* (soy sauce), leeks, and *gochu* (red chili) flakes give an extra kick to the dish.

*Kal guksu* (noodle soup) is the most popular Korean noodle dish. Unlike *janchi guksu* with its thin *somyeon*, *kal guksu* is characterized by its thick, coarse noodles. Regardless of whether it is *jang kal guksu* with *doenjang*-flavored anchovy kelp soup, chicken *kal guksu* in chicken broth, or *bajirak* (clam) *kal guksu*, the soup is always garnished with vegetables like squash or potatoes, and simmered.

Then there is the cold dish of *naengmyeon* (buckwheat noodles). In different parts of Korea, the base of buckwheat flour can include also potato starch, sweet potato starch, or arrowroot starch, which gives regional *naengmyeon* their own unique flavor. In an age without refrigeration, *naengmyeon* was a winter meal, but with the advent of refrigeration, it is now the most popular meal to have when the summer heat is most intense.

### **Soup Dishes: Guk (Soup), Tang (Soup), Jjigae (Stew), Jeongol (Hotpot)**

A Korean soup dish can be thought of as a meal that encourages people to get together and dine, as it becomes just a matter of increasing the amount one prepares for the meal when more people join in. At the heart of rice-based Korean food culture, where simply adding kimchi and a soup to rice would suffice as a good meal, is the idea of eating together and building community. To understand soup dishes, one can order them in this sequence, from *guk* (soup), *tang* (soup), *jjigae* (stew), to *jeongol* (hotpot), according to the size of the dish.

*Tojang guk* refers to soup brewed from *doenjang* (soybean paste) and

lots of vegetables. *Doenjang* is dissolved in water to give this soup its flavor, while the bean protein from the soy paste makes up for the lack of protein in a plant-based diet. Moreover, the various kinds of seaweed added to the soup can promote detoxification in the human body.

One distinct feature is the remarkable role that Korean soups play in the body's recuperative process. There is the hangover soup *haejang guk* that Koreans seek the following day after an evening of binge drinking. It consists of iron-rich congealed *seonji* (ox blood), dried cabbage leaves that provide high dietary fiber, and bean sprouts that contain aspartic acid, which is said to be effective for alcohol detoxification. These ingredients are said to be good for the liver, and can restore immune health.



Chard doenjang guk  
(soybean paste soup)



Kimchi jjigae  
(kimchi stew)



Cheonggukjang jjigae  
(rich soybean paste stew)



Samgye tang  
(ginseng chicken soup)



Seolleong tang  
(ox bone soup)



Sogogi mandu jeongol  
(beef dumpling hotpot)

There is also *tang*, or rich soup derived from meat, bone, fish, or seafood, as opposed to being plant-based. Some famous examples are *samgye tang* (ginseng chicken soup), *galbi tang* (short rib soup), and *seolleong tang* (ox bone soup), a full-bodied broth from the bubbling of cow head meat, lean meat, internal organs, and bone for over 10 hours. *Seolleong tang*, in particular, has a distinctive strong bone flavor that cannot be found in clear soups boiled from lean meat. The soup appears milky white and creamy as soluble components; colloid, in the beef bones are dissolved during the cooking process. The companion to this dish is well-ripened *kkakdugi* (radish kimchi). With the rich levels of protein and calcium in this infusion, *seolleong tang* is known to be a highly nutritious meal that serves to rejuvenate and invigorate. As a result, this dish is often enjoyed in midsummer, when one is spent from profuse sweating, or during the changing of seasons in early autumn, where one's body needs to take to adjustment.

*Jeongol* (hotpot) is the stew that is prepared right at the table. Familiar items include beef *jeongol*, octopus *jeongol*, mushroom *jeongol*, and tofu *jeongol*. Although *jeongol* is largely a hearty meal with plenty of rich ingredients, the contents are not mixed and jumbled up in the pot. There is careful consideration made as to the color palette when selecting and combining the ingredients. The fresh blacks, reds, greens, and yellows are laid out neatly in the pot and presented to the diners in its raw form. The stock is poured in carefully, and the pot then left to simmer.

Next up is *jjigae* (stew). The preparation for this soup occurs behind the scenes, in the kitchen, and it is dished out when ready to serve. *Jjigae* is a very common meal, and Koreans love their mixture of stewed kimchi, pork, and tofu, that is kimchi *jjigae* (kimchi stew). Another popular choice



*Sinseollo*  
(royal hot pot):  
the most formal  
of all Korean  
soups. The name  
of this dish means  
"the bowl used by  
the gods."

is *doenjang jjigae* (soybean paste stew), which is boiled from anchovy and kelp stock, with added chunks of vegetables, tofu, and shellfish (commonly clams). The variety of Korean stews are highly diverse in flavor, such as *sundubu jjigae* (soft tofu stew) and its pudding-like softness, *cheonggukjang jjigae* (rich soybean paste stew) with its distinctive fermented bean fragrance, and *budae jjigae* (sausage stew) with its ham and kimchi. *Jjigae* is saltier than other Korean soups, so there has been a trend toward moderating the sodium level in *jjigae*.

Finally, there is the high priest of Korean soups, *sinseollo* (royal hot pot), which used to be enjoyed only in the royal court. It has a special cooking pot, with a cylinder in the middle for the placement of hot charcoal to heat the dish. Meatballs, *jeon* (pancakes), vegetables and nuts bob around the cylinder in a clear meat soup, and can be eaten while the soup continues to bubble in this special pot. The flavor of the soup is accentuated through

this process, with these specially selected ingredients enriching the soup. The name of this dish means "the bowl used by the gods." Far from being common fare, even today *sinseollo* can only be found in high-end Korean restaurants.

### Central Dishes: Jjim (Steamed), Jorim (Braised in Soy Sauce), Gui (Grilled), Bokkeum (Stir-Fry), Jeon (Pancake)

Korean meat dishes rarely have additional oils or fats used during preparation, and are mainly steamed or grilled. One example is *galbi jjim* (braised short ribs), which is lean meat chops simmered under a low flame. This allows the bone marrow to seep out and infuse the meat with extra flavor. There is also the soft delicacy that is the Korean sausage *sundae*. Here, pig intestines are usually stuffed with vermicelli, congealed pig's blood, glutinous rice, and cabbage. This is then steamed.

*Galbi jjim*  
(braised short  
ribs), which refers  
to lean meat  
simmered over a  
low flame.



In the case of *jorim* (braised in soy sauce), the marinades can be rather strong. The main ingredient for *jorim* sauce is *ganjang* (soy sauce), but a spicy version for fish can be prepared using *gochu* (red chili) flakes to mask the fishy odor. Braised mackerel with radish, and braised hairtail with potatoes, are two fish *jorim* dishes frequently found on the Korean dining table.

One of the most famous *gui* is what is also referred to as Korean barbecue. This is really meat *gui* dishes, where the cooking is done on the dining table on a heated grill. It would not be too much of a stretch to say that in various countries, Korean barbecue made inroads even before the notion of the Korean nation. To prepare *galbi gui* (grilled short ribs), ribs with a good layer of meat on them are first cut up and marinated, then spread on the grill to be cooked over hot charcoal. Tiny cuts are made in the meat so that the *ganjang* marinade can be better absorbed, and pear juice is used to sweeten and tenderize the meat.

*Bulgogi* (marinated meat cooked on the grill), is by far the most popular Korean dish. Mushrooms and a marinade of onion and pear juice result



Clockwise from left: *bulgogi* (marinated meat cooked on the grill), *samgyeopsal* (grilled pork belly), *godeungeo jorim* (braised mackerel)

in sweet, meaty extracts. *Bulgogi* can be pan fried in one's own home, or ordered at specialist *bulgogi* restaurants that cook it on a special rounded, convex *bulgogi* pan that allows marinade and liquids to drain off at the edge. Even though *bulgogi* looks like a *gui*, there is a fair amount of meat juices produced.

The pork grill most popular with Koreans would arguably be *samgyeopsal* (grilled pork belly). The meat and fat are in three layers, as the name “three-layer meat” implies, and also brings to mind bacon. After any exertion that involves a lot of dust, such as spring cleaning, Koreans will invariably kick back with soju and *samgyeopsal* to alleviate their fatigue. The reason for this is that *samgyeopsal* is thought to absorb little particles like dust, and in doing so enhance the health of the bronchial tubes and lungs. As such, *samgyeopsal* is seen to play a part in helping the body to expel these pollutants. The dish is often accompanied by

*Galbi gui* (grilled short ribs)



*Saengseon jjim* (braised fish)





Jeyuk bokkeum (stir-fried pork)



Jeon (pancake)

cloves of garlic, sliced onion, lettuce, sesame leaves, and cucumber and carrot sticks. Save for salt-grilled meats, a spicy-sweet *gochujang* (red chili paste) marinade can be slicked on top to rid the pork of its distinctive meat odor. In addition to grilled meat, there are also fish, vegetable, and mushroom grills.

Aside from these grilled dishes, there are also *jeon* and stir-fries that use vegetable oil in their preparation. Notably, less oil is used in frying *jeon* than in frying *twigim* (deep-fried food), so the taste is more aromatic. Common *jeon* items include tofu *jeon*, seafood *jeon*, *bindae tteok* (mung bean pancake), and kimchi *jeon*.

*Bokkeum* (stir-fry) is the easiest and fastest way to whip up a great tasting dish even with dissimilar ingredients, and it works with anything, from meat to seafood to vegetables. Some examples are *ojingeo bokkeum* (stir-fried squid), *nakji bokkeum* (stir-fried octopus), and *jeyuk bokkeum* (stir-fried pork), all marinated with spicy *gochu* flakes and then served with rice as a simple one-dish meal.

## Two Kinds of Hanjeongsik: All at Once and Separate Courses

Traditionally, Korean table setting calls for all dishes to be presented together. During the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910), *yangban* (noblemen) were typically served on individual tables (which were portable, rather like trays). When entertaining guests, however, everyone was seated around a large dining table and the food was served there to encourage socializing. With the influx of foreign cultural influences, the latter method became more common, and is now pervasive in modern Korean food culture.

In the absence of any knowledge about Korean table settings, seeing a table replete with tiny dishes can be a bewildering experience. This setting is not so much about displaying the many delicious items, but about arranging the items closely in a harmonious balance of tastes, nutritional value, and cooking methods. But this is not the only way that food is served in Korea today. Even among Korean restaurants that cater to Korean customers, there are some that serve the food in courses. For example, salad or rice porridge might be served first, followed by the main course, with the dessert appearing at the end.



*Hanjeongsik* at a high-class restaurant served in the traditional style, with all the dishes brought out at once. This contrasts with the more recent invention of full-course *hanjeongsik*, in which items are served at the diner's pace. Such a meal would start with soft *juk* (porridge) and salad, followed by the entrée, *bap* (cooked rice) and accompanying dishes, and finally dessert.

### Hanjeongsik table setting of Seokparang



- 1 Juk (porridge) or bap (cooked rice) 2 Mul kimchi (water kimchi) or guk (soup)
- 3 Haemul bokkeum (stir-fried seafood) 4 Jeon (pancake) 5 Daeha jjim (steamed fleshy prwan)
- 6 Neobiani (marinated grilled beef slices) 7 Vegetable salad 8 Sinseollo (royal hot pot)
- 9 Saengseon jjim (braised fish) 10 Chiljeolpan (platter of seven delicacies)
- 11 Bossam (napa wraps with pork) 12 Mero gui (grilled patagonian toothfish) and vinegared chives muchim (salad)
- 13 Banchan (side dishes) including namul (seasoned vegetables), jangajji (pickled vegetables), and kimchi

There are two dining situations that should be mentioned here. First of all, there is the usual Korean table setting, which seeks balance in arranging the rice, soup, *mitbanchan* (basic side dishes), and main dish. Rice and soup, which can be either *jeongol* or *jjigae*, are served separately to each individual. One starts with a spoonful of soup and a bite of rice before turning to the *banchan* (side dishes). As the flavors of the *banchan* reach one's palate, one might need another spoonful of rice to tame the saltiness of the food. Next up is a little bit of the *gui* (grilled), and a second sip of *jeongol*. Care must be taken to regulate the temperatures of the served dishes, especially since the dishes are served at the same time. The thick earthenware bowl *ttukbaegi* is used keep the soup hot. Along with the *mitbanchan* (basic side dishes), the soup is there to complement the rice. The real highlight of the meal is the main dish, which might be a *bokkeum* (stir-fry), *jjim* (braised in soy sauce), *gui*, or *jjim* (steamed). All in all, it's really up to the diner to dig into the *banchan* that he or she likes and to just nibble at those that are less appealing. But, as one might expect, sampling all the presented banchan would be the best for one's health.

As with the meat *gui* dishes, there is a simple sequence of what to focus on when eating. While one tucks into the starters of salad or porridge, the grill is given time to heat up, and the meat allowed to cook. Even though the restaurant staff can assist with the grilling, there is really no one better to flip the cuts of meat than the person who is going to be eating them. While the staff cleans or changes the grill, one can concentrate on the noodles or rice.



Seokparang, a restaurant converted from a favorite villa of Joseon Dynasty Regent Heungseon Daewongun (1820–1898). At this deluxe establishment, guests can appreciate one of the most beautiful gardens in Seoul as they dine on high-end *hanjeongsik*.

Next is *hanjeongsik* (full-course Korean set meal) that is served in courses. In recent years, high-end Korean restaurants have relaxed their old habit of serving all of the dishes at the same time. Chefs have realized that it is difficult for non-Koreans unaccustomed to the old style to appreciate the harmony of the food when there are so many unfamiliar dishes on the table. Such chefs have devised a new system, offering different *hanjeongsik* course meals, the price of which depends on the number of banchan and the quality of ingredients. Customers can choose the *hanjeongsik* course that includes the main dish that they want to eat.

An example will make this easier to understand. A starter of soft *jeonbokjuk* (rice porridge with abalone) or *sundubu* (soft tofu) comes with a salad of fresh greens or *geotjeori* (fresh kimchi). The soup might be a clear shellfish soup, *miyeokguk* (seaweed soup), *bugeotguk* (dried pollack soup), or beef radish soup. The next stage, the main course, includes soft *jeon*, perhaps of fish, chives, or three-colored *samsaekjeon* (usually made with kimchi, pumpkin, and leek), and the entrée, which might be meat *gui*, *bulgogi*, *bossam* (napa wraps with pork), or grilled fish. After sampling all these dishes comes the rice-centered phase of the meal with an accompanying soup or *jjigae*, kimchi and other *banchan*. The last course could be a sweet dessert, perhaps pumpkin porridge, *sikhye* (sweet rice punch), or *omija cha* (schisandra berry tea), served with simple *hangwa* (Korean traditional pastries). It is now common for high-class Korean restaurants – even those that cater to Koreans – to provide full-course meals instead of serving all of the dishes at once.

## Nutritional Value and Health Benefits of Korean Ingredients

### Fermented Foods, the Product of Time

*Jang* (sauce) cannot be made and aged without the help of microorganisms, and admittedly, we cannot just credit man's wisdom in the creation of Korean sauces. The entire process of procuring *jang* is no easy task, and makes the end product all the more precious. *Jang* can be considered an important element of Korean food and provides it with its unique sense of identity. Fermented foods have a large amount of lactic acid bacteria. In Western countries, lactic acid bacteria is generally consumed through fermented milk, whereas in Korean food, lactic acid bacteria naturally arises in the process of aging *jang* and is thus consumed along with the sauce. Though developed to enhance taste, Korean sauces play a greater role in contributing to better health.

A collection of pottery filled with fermented sauces like *ganjang* (soy sauce), *doenjang* (soy paste), and *gochujang* (red chili paste). Also known as "the pottery that breathes," it is shaped using clay and then baked. The surface is microporous and creates an optimal environment for storing and aging food.



Nutrients are better absorbed when human intestines have sufficient numbers of good bacteria, and we are less likely to gain weight even without cutting down food intake. The good bacteria is especially beneficial for those suffering from an atopic disease, as this suggests an immune system imbalance. Research conducted at Swansea Medical School in the United Kingdom found that the risk of atopy and allergy-related diseases can be reduced over 40 percent with an increased daily intake of lactic acid bacteria. Lactic acid bacteria are vulnerable to heat, but even if they die by the time they reach the intestines, they will act as food for the live lactic acid bacteria present in the gut. The primary fermented items that Koreans regularly eat are kimchi, which is consumed raw, and *doenjang* (soybean paste) which is by and large used in *jjigae* (stew). Consuming cooked fermented products is highly beneficial for the lactic acid bacteria in the gut.

To say fermentation takes a fair bit of work would be an understatement. Getting to the final product when making *doenjang* and *ganjang* (soy sauce) takes a very long time. First of all, blocks of fermented soybeans have to be made. Yellow soybeans are steamed until completely soft and mashed up, then shaped into brick-like portions, tied up with straw, and left to hang in a naturally ventilated space to dry for about two months. This is the first phase of the process. The reason for using straw to bundle the brick is because dried straw contains living *Bacillus subtilis*, which aids the fermentation process. *Bacillus subtilis* absorbs the protein from the beans and that triggers the start of the fermentation. After the microbes have done their part, that is when the human work comes in. Temperature control is very important to ferment the boiled soybean blocks. After covering them with blankets in a warm, controlled space, after about





Making ganjang and doenjang

The beans are soaked in water, steamed for three to four hours, and molded into soybean blocks, which is then left to dry. The fermented soybean block is put in a clay jar with salt water to make *ganjang*. The mixture is left to mature for 40 to 60 days. Chili pepper and charcoal are added as they have a sterilizing effect. The resulting liquid is *ganjang* and the remaining solid matter is used to make *doenjang*.

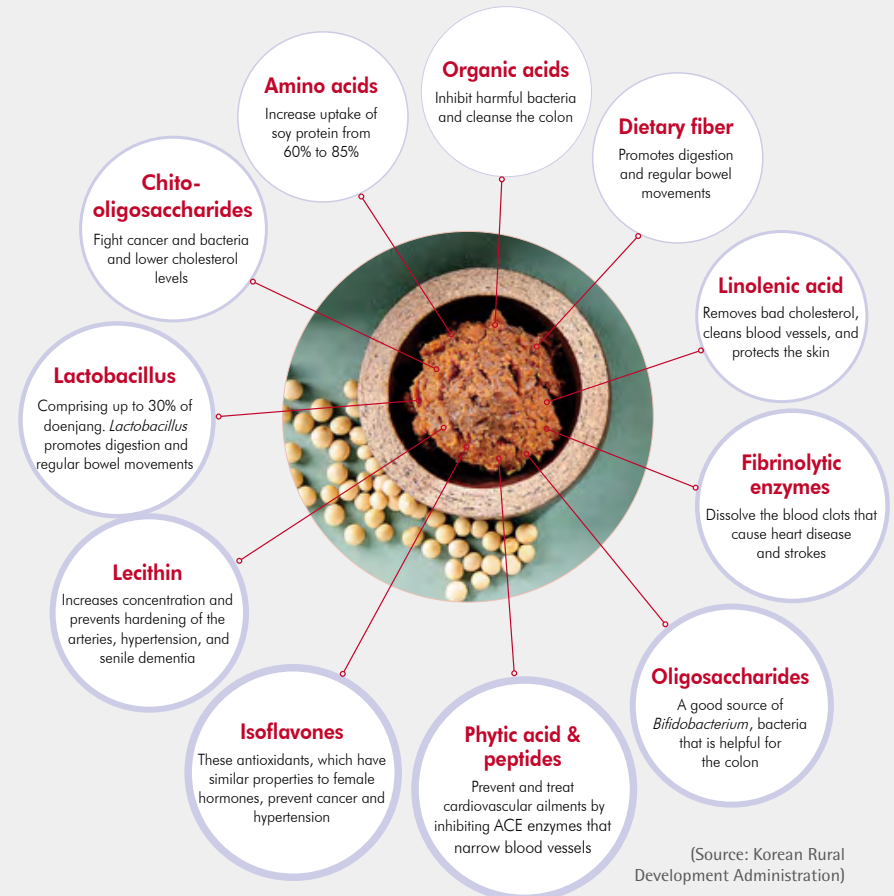
two weeks, a layer of frost-like white mold will bloom. These molds (e.g., *Mucorales*, *Lichtheimia*, *Aspergillus*) require a higher temperature than that in phase one. The bacilli are good for human health, and here they kick start more fermentation. The product in this second phase is again exposed to strong sunlight to dry out, and this completes the process of making the fermented soybean block. All this labor is just the fermented soybean block, which is but one ingredient yet to be utilized for *doenjang*.

The fermented soybean block is allowed to age while waiting for spring to come. Fermentation is enhanced as the sun's rays become stronger.

Eventually, the fermented soybean block is thoroughly cleaned and placed in a large traditional jar with brine of salinity of about 17 ppt. Charcoal and dried *gochu* (red chili) are added for their sterilizing effect, the jar is covered, and then it is another two to four months wait.

The time has come for the *ganjang* (soy sauce) and *doenjang* to

### Nutrients in Doenjang and Their Health Benefits: The Magic of Fermentation



(Source: Korean Rural Development Administration)

separate. A jet-black liquid will ooze out of the well-aged block, and this is *ganjang*. There is no standardized recipe for fermentation, so each household ends up with a different sauce flavor. The longer the *ganjang* is left alone, the better the taste. The remnants in the pot can be taken out and mashed up to become *doenjang*. There is also the very differently flavored *cheonggukjang* (rich soybean paste), which is fermented from the same soybeans but only for a shorter period of two to three days.

Widely used in kimchi seasoning, *jeotgal* (salted seafood) refers to fermented seafood. Fish like *myeolchi* (anchovies) and *hwangseokeo* (yellow croaker) are fermented through salting, and you can get fully fermented fish sauce if you let *jeotgal* be for another year or so.

There is no forgetting the most representative of all Korean fermented

Korea's famous fermented vegetable, kimchi. *Jeotgal* (salted seafood) and seasoning are added to salted vegetables, following which the mixture is left to ferment at a low temperature. The result is a dish rich in vitamins and minerals. The lactobacillus it contains enhances intestinal regulation and digestion and stimulates a healthy appetite.



products, the famous kimchi. *Jeotgal* and its resultant fermented fish sauce are added, according to taste, to a mixture of boiled grains such as glutinous rice. The fermentation magic starts when this is added to cabbage. Kimchi's little helper is ferment bacillus, which assists the cabbage to become sufficiently acidic, hence transforming into crispy and well-ripened kimchi.

The fermenting of the salted Korean vegetables of *jangajji* (pickled vegetables)

occurs at the ripening stage of the fermentation process. These food items are ever dependable *mitbanchan* (basic side dishes) dishes, ready to appear and complement any meal at any time. These *banchan* are prepared by adding firm vegetables to *ganjang*, *gochujang*, or *doenjang*, to allow the sauce flavors to permeate the vegetables chunks evenly. *Jeotgal* and *jangajji* are especially salty, and as such, are best used delicately to flavor a meal, and should not be consumed in large amounts.

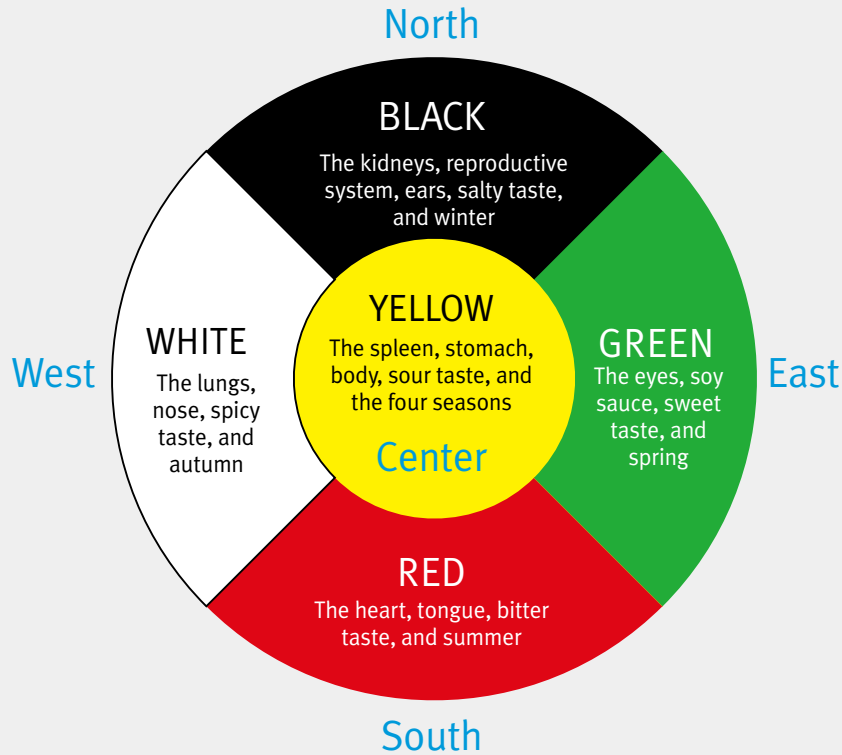
### Food with Five Colors

The five colors of Korea can be seen in both the lovely multicolor-striped traditional *saekdong jeogori* (Korean traditional jacket with colorful stripes) and in *bibimbap* (mixed rice with meat and assorted vegetables) garnish. These are the five colors of green (east), white (west), red (south), black (north), and yellow (center), and they each represent the five cardinal positions as well as the seasons, days of the week, and



*Jeotgal*, prepared using various salted seafood, can be enjoyed with *bap* (cooked rice) as *mitbanchan* (basic side dishes) or used as a condiment to make kimchi.

## Food with Five Colors



The five colors representing the five cardinal positions can be seen in many Korean dishes, such as *bibimbap* (left), *gujeolpan* (platter of nine delicacies; middle), and the grains that make up five-grain rice (right).

the cosmos. Eastern philosophy holds that yin and yang, as well as the five elements, all played a part in the creation of the universe, and the influence of these concepts are pervasive in Korean culture and lifestyle. Heaven and earth, respectively, represent the yang and yin, and interaction and relation between the two results in dynamic energies represented by the five elements of wood (Thursday), metal (Friday), fire (Tuesday), water (Wednesday), and earth (Saturday). The moon and sun are used to represent Monday and Sunday, respectively while the rest of the days of the week are named after the five elements.

This Eastern principle that everything that happens in the universe can be understood from these five colors applies to Korean food. Among Korean garnishes are the green of scallions, the white of egg white, the red of ripe *gochu* (red chili), the black of manna lichen and shiitake mushrooms, and the yellow of yolk, which together symbolize the five cardinal positions of east, west, south, north, and center. It might just be a bowl of rice, but it holds the cosmos, and harmony of Eastern belief with nature ought to be sought. In *bibimbap*, there is the white rice, green vegetables, red *yukhoe* (beef tartare), black mushroom fry, and yellow egg. To mix all these well and eat would suggest the harmony of the universe.

Unsurprisingly, the human body is also associated with the five colors. Food preferences for different tastes depend on how healthy, or unhealthy, the five organs of liver, heart, spleen, lungs, and kidneys are. This forms the basis of food therapy in Korean traditional medicine.

Green (blue-green, east) is the color of fresh buds and sprouts, and is associated with the eyes, *ganjang* (soy sauce), sweet taste, and spring. Korean traditional medicine views there to be a relationship between fresh buds and good liver health. Green color foods are rich in antioxidants,

and include green tea, spinach, and plums. White color (west) represents the lungs, nose, spicy taste, and autumn. White color foods, such as burdock, lotus root, and bellflower root, are said to be good for those with respiratory difficulties. It is general knowledge among Koreans that eating bellflower root helps to ease a prolonged cough. Red color (south) stands for the heart, tongue, bitter taste, and summer. While kimchi, *gochu* and tomatoes are representative reds, the high concentration of capsaicin in red *gochu* is worth a mention as this contributes to high antioxidant content and also anti-cancer attributes. Black color (north) is associated with the kidneys, reproductive system, ears, salty taste, and winter. Weak kidneys result in poor energy levels, weakening bones, and hair loss. Leading the black food craze are anthocyanin-rich substances, which can strengthen the immune system, lower blood cholesterol, and regulate the body's rhythm. Black rice, black beans, and black sesame are some examples of black food. Yellow color (center) is linked to the spleen, stomach, body, sour taste, and the four seasons. Representative foods like sweet pumpkin and ginger help with digestion, while carrots and egg yolk promote growth and development.

White rice with an array of red, green, yellow, and dark-colored *banchan* (side dishes) represent the harmonious balance of the five colors. In a way, Korean food contains the entire universe in its pursuit of harmony with nature.

### Medicine and Food Have the Same Roots

Spring onions, garlic, *gochu* (red chili) flakes, and sesame salt are referred to as seasonings, and are often used in Korean food to help bring out the flavor in the food. The reference to the medicinal seems to have been seamlessly absorbed into this concept. Congruent with a Korean idiom



Various vegetables, fruits, and dried flowers with medicinal value are frequently added to Korean dishes, such as mugwort, mulberry leaves, Job's tears, bellflower, dandelion leaves, *ogapi* (acanthopanax), and *omija* (schizandra berry).

that translates into “medicine and food have the same roots,” Koreans view seasonings to be akin to preparing traditional medicine. Everyday food is thought of as a tonic, and when the body becomes sick, the first thing is to tweak one's diet to overcome illness.

In the kitchen, homemakers select ingredients based on the health of family members. When numbers on the bathroom scale go up, one of the changes will be from white rice to brown. Instead of grilling, meats are boiled so that less oil is consumed. Black sesame, black beans, and black rice are mixed into powder when white hairs start appearing. For those taking exams, omega-3 fatty acid-rich walnuts and pine nuts are boiled into soft porridge. For the little ones, *banchan* (side dishes) are made unspicy, and special care is taken to choose ingredients that will enhance development and stave off respiratory problems. And at the height of summer, nourishing foods are prepared to boost energy levels to fight the effects of prolonged exposure to the seasonal heat.

A fair number of the vegetables, fruits, and berries in a Korean meal

are recognized for their medicinal value, and can be categorized as medicinal plants. Often part of Korean traditional medicine prescriptions, mugwort, mulberry leaves, Job's tears, bellflower, dandelion leaves, *ogapi* (acanthopanax), *omija* (schizandra berry) are also commonly eaten in daily fare. During the change of seasons, bellflower root is brewed as a drink. Mulberry leaf tea and *omija* tea are taken consistently to regulate blood pressure. Good for the liver, dandelion is taken as a bitterish *ssam* (leaf wraps). *Miyeok guk* (seaweed soup) can double up as an daily soup, but is made a priority for the new mother during postnatal care. The seaweed is said to help with uterine contractions, and new mothers drink this soup as if it were medicine to recuperate after giving birth.

The notion that food can be medicine is inherent in traditional food culture. The use of herbal medicine in food preparation can be understood as the fusion of Korean medicine, food science, culinary arts, and dietetics. Dishes like black chicken ginseng soup and chicken with milk vetch root are examples of Korean cuisine that have blended common ingredients with traditional herbs to help bolster immunity.



*Miyeok guk* (seaweed soup) can double as an everyday soup, but is an essential dish for the new mother during postnatal care. The seaweed is said to help with uterine contractions, and new mothers drink this soup as if it were medicine to recuperate after giving birth.

## Food that Is One with Nature: Temple Food

*Sachal eumsik* (temple food), which is eaten by Buddhist monastics in their temples, is characterized by its vegetarian dishes and simple and concise food preparation. Meat is strictly avoided, as is garlic, wild chives, green onions, and *heunggeo* (a vegetable that grows along the border with China), as they are said to stimulate the senses and disrupt the meditation or self-cultivation process. All dishes, including *namul* (seasoned vegetables) dishes, are made without the use of green onions or garlic, which notably are staple ingredients in any Korean



dish. Anchovies are also not used in the broth or soups. So a lot of thought and deliberation must have gone into creating these seemingly simple, delicate dishes. Instead of anchovies, shiitake mushrooms are used to make the stock, and mountain herbs and spices are used to season dishes instead of the *osincha* (the five banned ingredients), giving the dishes a completely new texture and flavor. Instead of using meat to make the stock, ingredients like kelp powder, shiitake mushroom powder, and wild sesame seed powder are used to flavor the dishes. A lot of *doenjang* (soybean paste) and *gochujang* (red chili paste) is used, while sesame oil and wild sesame oil is used to supplement the fat that is lost from refraining from meat. Other nutrients that would normally be found in meat are provided by fried foods, such as *bugak* (deep fried vegetables coated with glutinous rice paste) and *jeon* (pancake). They allow the use of *gochu* flake (Korean chili flake) in their kimchi, but salt is normally used instead of garlic and *jeotgal* (salted seafood), while *doenjang* and *ganjang* are also used on occasion. Their kimchi, which would be considered quite bland by most, is made in large quantities and eaten along with *jangajji* (pickled vegetables). Most of their ingredients are found in the mountains where their temples are located, and the dishes are not tailored to suit the diner's palate so much as to present the ingredients in their truest form. No wonder that these dishes are extremely healthy, and thus many are taking an active interest in temple food.

Buddhist temple stays experiences allow visitors to try these dishes first hand, and also to learn the recipes from famous monastics who are temple food experts. Of these dishes, quite a few have been created by monastics while they were searching for a cure to an illness, or to improve their overall health and well-being. Thus, they are not only vegetarian dishes, but are dishes with medicinal properties and health benefits, as well. These natural foods will restore the balance of the body and mind, which has been disrupted by excessive caloric intake and over-indulgence.

## Leading Ingredients, Seasonings, and Cooking Techniques

### Seasonings Used in Fermentation

One comment made by many non-Koreans upon tasting Korean food is that it has an “indescribable deep flavor.” The salty taste of the food isn't the result of adding salt to taste, but rather the end product of a fermentation process, where enzymes from good bacteria break down organic matter and stimulate fermentation to result in a biologically derived salty taste. This fermented salt taste can be distinctly discerned. The main examples are bean-fermented *ganjang* (soy sauce) and *doenjang* (soybean paste), as well as animal protein-fermented *jeotguk* (salted seafood broth) from anchovies and other fish.

One ingredient always present in braised and steamed Korean dishes, and also with *muchim* (salad), would be *ganjang*, which can be thought of as the essence of Korean seasoning. One kind of *ganjang* called *cheongjang* is clear and thin due to its shorter aging period, and is typically used to flavor soups. Dark and thick *jin ganjang* is *ganjang* that had been nicely aged for over five years, and this is brewed into a thicker concoction for use with *jorim* (braised in soy sauce) and *muchim* dishes often featuring licorice, black bean, and jujube. *Doenjang*, *ganjang*'s fraternal twin out of the same fermentation process, is used not just in *doenjang jjigae* (soybean paste stew), but also *tojang guk* (thick soybean paste soup) or as a dressing for Korean *muchim* and general salads.

A couple of drops of *jeotguk* are enough to add savor to the saltiness. Fermenting animal-proteins from fish like anchovies and sand lance with salt and then straining them can give rise to this salty taste. This is a different kind of savor from plant-based *ganjang*. Because of its intense



Korean fermented condiments  
Clockwise from left: *gochujang* (red chili paste), plum liquid, *ganjang* (soy sauce), *myeolchi jeotguk* (salted seafood broth made with anchovy)

flavor, *jeotguk* is widely used when making kimchi. In smaller quantities, it goes well with a dash of salt and *doenjang* to enhance the flavor of soups. With salads like *geotjeori* (fresh kimchi), a drop or two of *jeotguk* results in a flavor that is subtly different from when *ganjang* alone is used as a seasoning.

Likewise, the fermented fieriness of *gochujang* (red chili paste) differs from the one-dimensional hotness of plain *gochu* (red chili) flakes. The former is a combined fermented spicy from sweetish malt, fermented soybean block powder, sticky texture from glutinous rice flour, and, of course, *gochu* flakes. Plum liquid is derived when equal parts of plum and sugar are left to sit for three months. Sugar is the fermenter, so the process starts once secreted plum juice comes into contact with the sugar. *Muchim* dishes make use of plum liquid for a delicate sweet taste. It goes without saying that the nutritional value of plums is an added benefit.

## Cancer-fighting Foods and Superfoods

Many ingredients used in Korean cooking are considered superfoods, or having anticancer properties. There is the trend toward substituting white rice with brown rice, which is generally thought to be healthier. White rice is polished, and thus easily digestible, but nowadays many Koreans are opting for health in the rough, unpolished grains of brown rice. Notably, its rice germ, dietary fiber, and bioactive rice bran are said to be effective in cancer prevention. Bran extract can inhibit DNA damage, and has been known to be effective in suppressing carcinogenesis in early-stage liver cancer.

Brown rice with beans deserves to be called a Korean-style superfood. Research by the Korean Cancer Society reported that isoflavones found in beans reduce the risk of breast cancer and prostate cancer. Specifically, daily isoflavone intake of 25.3mg significantly reduced the risks of these cancers. This is equivalent to 90g of black beans. What this means is, to hit the daily recommended amount just takes 30g of black beans mixed into each meal. In addition, there is also the fermented bean product of *doenjang* (soy

paste), which has even greater anti-cancer properties than just beans alone. So the next time you prepare *jjigae* (stew), toss in more bean goodness of tofu, pumpkin, and green chili; apart from isoflavones, the body can get good doses of vitamin C, beta-carotene, and dietary fiber. Bean sprouts grow year round, in all seasons, and unsurprisingly, they are the most common vegetable on the Korean dining table. Together with the other nutrients inherent to beans, these sprouts also have higher fiber content.

Another oft-used ingredient in Korean dishes is seaweed. Seaweed in the form of *miyeok guk* (seaweed soup) is customary on birthdays and in postnatal care. Seaweed is a very agreeable food, thus is used to season various dishes. Its alginic acid and pectin help prevent the absorption of carcinogens, and also stimulate colonic motility to discharge toxins from the body. Its polysaccharide fucoidan reduces growth and metastasis of malignant tumors, while iodine has proven efficacy in preventing breast cancer.

Two common Korean ingredients, spinach and garlic, made it to a list

A sample of healthy Korean dishes and ingredients; from left, *hyeonmi kong bap* (cooked brown rice with beans), seasoned blanched spinach, bean sprouts, seaweed *muchim* (salad), and garlic.



of superfoods featured in the American magazine *Time*. The folic acid of spinach reportedly helps to prevent colon and breast cancers, while carotenoid inhibits cancer cell growth. In Korean cuisine, spinach is hardly eaten raw, but often blanched and then seasoned. Garlic, on the other hand, is consumed uncooked in two main ways. The most basic condiment in Korean food, garlic is used generously in minced form to prepare kimchi. Elsewhere, fresh garlic is used to make *jangajji* (pickled vegetables) for *mitbanchan* (basic side dishes). Either way, the allicin in garlic is not tampered and destroyed by heat, leaving the anticancer benefits, unique aroma, and spicy sting intact.

Kimchi is rich in anti-cancer substances. Studies have supported the effectiveness of kimchi's main ingredients of radish and cabbage, among other vegetables in the cabbage family, in the fight against stomach, colorectal, and breast cancers. This is also not forgetting the efficacy of minced garlic, a liberal amount of which is used in kimchi seasoning. Lastly, health effects are enhanced when these ingredients go through the fermentation process. In 2006, the American nutrition magazine *Health* selected kimchi as one of the world's five healthiest foods. According to the article, "kimchi is loaded with vitamins A, B, and C, but its biggest benefit may be in its 'healthy bacteria' called lactobacilli." The article also reported that "studies show fermented cabbage has compounds that may prevent the growth of cancer."

### **Blanching, seasoning, and steaming**

Korean plant-based dishes are worth paying attention to when the worries of high calorie foods and a meat-based diet hit home. Korean food involves a diverse range of vegetable preparation methods, and one of the stars



Healthy blanched Korean vegetable dishes  
Left: pumpkin leaf and cabbage *ssam* (leaf wraps)  
Right: *namul* (seasoned vegetable) prepared from blanched vegetables and seasoning

of such cooking would be natural vegetation from the hills and fields. The cooking methods are also healthy.

Blanch the vegetables in boiling water, drizzle a little seasoning on top, such as salt, *doenjang* (soybean paste), sesame salt, or sesame oil, and there you have *namul* (seasoned vegetables). Bean protein from *doenjang* and omega-3 fatty acids from oil enhance the nutritional value of these dishes. It is easy to consume more vegetables at a shot as they shrink after being simmered in boiling water. Greens with large leaves, like lettuce, aster, perilla, pumpkin, napa cabbage, and cabbage, are great to go with *ssam* (leaf wraps). Steaming is recommended for the coarse pumpkin leaf, tough cabbage leaf, and astringent aster leaf before consumption.

Compared to eating raw greens, with the Korean cooking techniques of seasoning, blanching, and steaming, vegetable intake can be boosted easily. These dishes are low calorie and high fiber, with no stir-frying or deep-frying involved.





Linoleic acid-rich sesame plant (left) and omega-3 fatty acid-rich perilla plant (right). Their seeds are pressed to extract vegetable oils.

## Using vegetable oils

The healthy “it” diet, the Mediterranean diet, emphasizes the nutritional role of olive oil. The crème de la crème of olive oil is extra virgin olive oil, which is produced by mechanical pressing. There are also oils extracted by pressing that are ubiquitous and ready to serve in every Korean kitchen. These are sesame and perilla seed oils, both of which provide Korean dishes their aromatic fragrance and slick gloss. A drop of oil as final seasoning after the flame is turned off gives a subtle change to the food’s flavor. Although these oils can be used when frying *jeon* (pancake), they are largely added after all the cooking is done. This is because these oils degrade when heated, hence they are healthier when added to the food in this state. In particular, these oils are used to season blanched vegetable dishes.

A vegetable diet with added healthy fats is ideal. Perilla seed oil is an excellent source of omega-3 fatty acids, which protect cells and improve metabolism, while sesame seed oil is rich in linoleic acid that blocks cholesterol from forming, which helps ameliorate atherosclerosis.

## Stock

Other than *doenjang* (soybean paste), several other ingredients are required in the preparation of *doenjang jjigae* (soybean paste stew). The first thing to prepare is the stock. Some of the ingredients that go into this

pot are anchovies, kelp, and dried prawns. Anchovy stock is the sine qua non of Korean soup dishes. One can consider the soup base as one of the secret ingredients of a good Korean dish.

Anchovy kelp stock is the most common in Korean cooking, such that Koreans have dried kelp and well-dried anchovies at hand in their kitchen cupboards. Dried seafood is also used, but depending on the dish, these items may just be in the pot to boil, then tossed out leaving the stock behind. For meat stock, lean beef brisket is used. Herbs like spring onion roots or *ogapi* (acanthopanax) are added to rid the stock of its meaty smell. The leftover water from washing rice is also included in the stock. Since they cannot consume meat, vegetarian monks instead use shiitake mushrooms and their extracts to prepare stock.

The dried ingredients from the stockpot can be made into natural seasoning powder. Shrimp powder, shiitake powder, kelp powder, and anchovy powder can be made and sprinkled directly on other dishes. This gives these ingredients a second life, making use of their goodness entirely, and not discarding them after simmering the broth.



Natural seasoning powder from leftover stock ingredients that are dried and ground into powder (left), anchovy kelp stock (right).

# Royal Cuisine and Food for the Nobility

Royal cuisine was the product of countless hours of effort and dedication by a host of people whose sole purpose was to create fine dishes worthy of the king and the royal family. No wonder then that so many fine dishes with exquisite attention to detail were produced over time. French cuisine was able to improve upon the extravagant dishes enjoyed by its royals through the centuries to finally perfect the art and have it recognized as a world cultural heritage, and similar things can be expected of Korean food. Royal cuisine can be the cornerstone to creating Korean haute cuisine that is universally recognized.

The royal table laid out for the king was referred to as *surasang*. Two different tables were set. One had a *baek ban* (cooked white rice) and the other had a *hong ban* (cooked red rice) made of sweet rice and red beans. Each of these tables had 12 *banchan* (side dishes) to go with them, and great care was taken to making it as easy as possible for the king to eat, with a *sanggung* (lady in waiting) always serving the king as he dined. Ingredients were finely chopped, ground, and made into patties, or meatball-like creations so that the king would not have to chew too much before swallowing, and instead of producing strong-tasting dishes seasoned with hot *gochu* (red chili) and *gochu* flakes, the food was usually seasoned with thick *ganjang* (soy sauce). Tables served at banquets were even more flamboyant, and included *tteok* (rice cake), *gangjeong* (sweet rice puffs), *jeon* (pancake) and *sanjeok* (Korean

The *surasang* (royal cuisine) featured at the G-20 Seoul Summit in 2010



The breakfast setting at Nongam House (Head Household of the Nongam Descendants) in Andong, Gyeongsangbuk-do, Korea. Andong is famous as the home of many Confucian scholars in Korea.

shish kebabs) along with various food towers referred to as *goimsang*. This was later adopted by the common folk, and is still used today to set tables at a 60th or 70th birthday ceremony.

Royal cuisine is hardly something of the past. Much research is going into finding those who have kept and continued the flavors taught to them by their royal cook ancestors, and people are studying Korean cuisine within the category of traditional cuisine. At modern Korean restaurants, royal dishes such as *sinseollo* (royal hot pot), *gujeolpan* (platter of nine delicacies) and *tangpyeongchae* (mung bean jelly mixed with vegetables and beef) are offered on the menu. And of these menus, the *gungjung tteokbokki* (royal stir-fried rice cake) seasoned with *ganjang* instead of *gochujang* (red chili paste) is the most familiar and easily enjoyed dish.

Aside from royal cuisine, the nobility of the Joseon Dynasty also enjoyed fine food. Even today, famous *jongga* (head family) have carried on the tradition, creating the dishes and observing all memorial ceremonies as they would've done in the past.

A characteristic of this food for the noble class is that a lot of time and effort goes into making them. The ingredients in the sauces must be finely chopped until the hands become sore, and even the egg garnish must be sliced in a particular way. As you can see, presentation, not only taste, was extremely important for the noble class, and these customs and attitudes towards food are embedded in Korean cuisine today.



## Chapter Three

# THE MOST POPULAR K-FOODS

## Kimchi

Kimchi is without a doubt the star of Korean food. This vegetable dish has almost no fat, yet is rich in flavor and nutrition thanks to the generous amount of seasoning and seafood added to the dish. Its spicy flavor and sparkling, tart texture complements almost any Korean dish, thus giving it a permanent place at the Korean dining table alongside *bap* (cooked rice).

Kimchi can also spice up Western cuisine. It can be served with steak or finely chopped and added to sauces to accompany hamburgers, pasta, and hotdogs.

The flavor of kimchi also reduces the heavy or rich aftertaste of butter, and it goes especially well with tomato sauce.

The spiciness of kimchi can be tailored to suit one's taste by simply reducing the amount of *gochu* (red chili) flakes. Discretion is urged though, to see that this does not impact the flavor.

There are more than 100 varieties of kimchi made in Korea. Although napa cabbage is the main vegetable used to make kimchi, many other vegetables such as white radishes, cucumbers, cabbages, radishes, and onions can be pickled in salt and seasoned to create a new variety of kimchi.

One can use their favorite vegetables, fresh from nearby markets, to create kimchi dishes that can be eaten like pickles.

As a fermented food, kimchi has many health benefits. Harmful bacteria are killed by the salt or brining process, and only the beneficial lactic acid bacteria remain. The good bacteria, along with the fiber found in napa cabbage, promote secretion of digestive enzymes, therefore making it difficult for harmful bacteria to grow. The garlic and *gochu* (red chili) used as secondary ingredients and in the seasoning also contain allicin and capsaicin, which are known to have antioxidants, and also antibacterial and anti-cancer properties.

Of all the types of kimchi consumed, more than 70 percent is the spicy napa cabbage kimchi. But not all types of kimchi are spicy.

*Baek* kimchi (white kimchi) and *dongchimi* (radish water kimchi) contain no *gochu* flakes and are ideal for those who are trying kimchi for the first time. In Korea, these dishes are popular choices for parents with small children. Kimchi can also be used in a variety of dishes.

It can be boiled, along with pork and tofu, to create kimchi *jjigae* (stew), or fried with *bap* (cooked rice) to create kimchi *bokkeum bap* (fried rice). Kimchi *mandu* (dumplings) are prepared by mixing minced meat, chopped kimchi, and vegetables, while steaming kimchi with short ribs or other cuts of meat creates the delightful kimchi *jjim* (braised meat with kimchi). Kimchi *jeon* (pancake) is made by mixing a batter of flour, kimchi, and thinly sliced zucchini, and frying this in a nicely oiled pan.



# Baechu Kimchi (Napa Cabbage Kimchi) Recipe

## Ingredients

### Main ingredients

3.5kg *baechu* (1 large or 2 medium-size napa cabbages)

### Secondary ingredients

500g coarse salt (for pickling)

2,500ml water (for pickling)

1,200g white radish

200g shallots

300g *minari* (Korean parsley)

### Seasonings

500g *gochu* (red chili) flake

150g minced garlic

50g minced ginger

200g yellow corvina or shrimp *jeotgal* (salted seafood)

100g fresh oysters

Salt and sugar to taste

*\* Leeks or scallions can be substitutes for shallots or minari. If jeotgal is difficult to obtain, anchovies and salt can be added to taste.*



## Salting the napa cabbage

1. Cut the napa cabbage into quarters/four pieces. Don't use a knife to cut all the way through. Instead, stop midway, and use your hands to pull the cabbage apart.
2. Sprinkle 50g of coarse salt directly onto the cabbage. Dissolve the remaining salt in water for a brine solution (about 15 percent salinity.) Make sure the salt reaches the undersides of the cabbage leaves, and then pour the brine over the cabbage so that it is just covered. Leave for five hours, making sure to flip the cabbage over now and then to ensure equal distribution.
3. Take the cabbage out of the brine solution and rinse with water.
4. Drain the cabbage of excess water.



## Making the seasonings

1. Wash the white radish and thinly slice into pieces measuring 5cm x 0.2cm x 0.2cm.
2. Wash the minari and shallots, and cut into 4cm-long pieces.
3. Coarsely mince the jeotgal. Be careful not to mince too much. Don't throw away the *jeotguk* (salted seafood broth), as this will be used next.
4. In a wide bowl, place the *gochu* (red chili) flakes in water and leave to swell. Add the *jeotgal* and *jeotguk* (salted seafood broth), minced garlic and minced ginger and stir. Add the sliced white radish and vegetables, and then lightly mix. Season with salt and sugar to taste.
5. Fresh seafood, such as oysters, can be added as the last step if desired. Once added, mix lightly.



## Seasoning the cabbage, and putting the finishing touches

1. Place the napa cabbage pieces in a large bowl, and then insert the seasoning under each cabbage leaf. Make sure not to add too much seasoning; a light sweep on each leaf will do.
2. After each leaf is coated, use the top leaf to wrap the cabbage piece.
3. Carefully place each wrapped cabbage piece in an airtight container, making sure that the cut side is facing up. Gently but firmly press on each cabbage piece and pack tightly.
4. Leave the container out at room temperature until the kimchi gives off a slightly sour/acidic smell, (this may take one to three days, depending on the weather and season) and then store the container in the fridge.
5. Cut the kimchi just before serving, and carefully arrange on a plate.

*\* A step-by-step guide with visuals on how to make kimchi can be found on the YouTube channel "The Taste of Korea."*

## **Bibimbap:** **Mixed Rice with Meat and Assorted Vegetables**

*Bibimbap* is unique in that it brings together seemingly ordinary ingredients to create a spectacular and flavorful dish. One can also mix ingredients in any way desired, to suit his or her taste. A traditional *bibimbap* dish includes steamed rice cooked in stock, along with a host of other high-quality ingredients such as assorted *namul* (seasoned vegetables) and *yukhoe* (beef tartare).



Yet again, this dish need not be so complicated. A convenient option is to mix readily available or preferred ingredients to prepare this meal. For example, chopped cabbage or lettuce, seasoned spinach, fried carrot, fried minced beef, and a fried egg (sunny side up) can be added to a bowl of rice to create something simple, yet tasty. *Bibimbap* is usually mixed with sesame oil and *gochujang* (red chili paste), but one can also mix it with *ganjang* (soy sauce). To create a healthy, nutritious and tasty vegetarian dish, simply omit the meat and egg.

*Bibimbap* is fun to prepare because it is so versatile. It is normally eaten by mixing rice and *namul*, but creative alternatives include placing the ingredients on a bun to make burgers, or even as tortilla stuffing. Simply prepare some *namul* using vegetables such as carrots, spinach, and bean sprouts, and season with a light sprinkling of sesame oil, *gochujang* and sesame. Place them in a bun along with some fresh lettuce or cabbage and a fried egg to create a well-balanced, nutritious meal.

*Bibimbap* can also be transformed into buffet-style party platters, like *bibimbap* canapés. Simply prepare sliced baguettes or lightly flavored biscuits. Add some *namul*, slice up fresh vegetables, prepare a little portion of fried beef marinated in *ganjang*, and fried tofu. Then prepare various sauces. Create interesting and fun sauces by mixing *gochujang* with tomato sauce, finely chopped spring onions with sesame oil, sesame and *ganjang*, or *doenjang* with peanut butter. Guests can then choose the ingredients of their choice, add a sauce, and enjoy it on their baguette or biscuit.

Having sparkling water at the table will also add to their culinary experience, as it gently moderates the taste of the mixed ingredients and prepares diners for the next combination.

# Bibimbap Recipe

## Ingredients

### Main ingredients (Serves 1)

- 100g white rice
- 130ml water

### Secondary ingredients

- 1 egg
- 30g bean sprouts
- 30g spinach
- 20g minced beef (sirloin)
- 20g bracken
- 20g carrot

### Bean sprout seasoning

- 0.4ml sesame oil / 0.4g salt

### Spinach seasoning

- 0.4ml sesame oil / 0.4g salt

### Minced beef seasoning

- 1.5ml *ganjang* (soy sauce)
- 0.5g sugar
- 0.5ml sesame oil
- 0.5g finely chopped spring onion
- 0.5g minced garlic
- Pepper to taste

### Bracken seasoning

- 1.5ml *ganjang*
- 0.5ml sesame oil
- 0.5g finely chopped spring onion
- 0.5g minced garlic

### Other ingredients

- A pinch of salt
- A light sprinkling of sesame oil
- Sesame seeds
- Cooking oil (used when frying)
- 14g *gochujang* (red chili paste) (used to taste)



## Method

1. Prepare some steamed rice. First, wash the rice, place in a pot with water, and then place over high heat. Once it starts to boil, cook over medium heat until the water evaporates, and then cook over low heat for about 10 more minutes.
2. Blanch the bean sprouts and spinach, and mix with seasoning.
3. Pre-marinate the beef (sirloin), and then fry in a pan.
4. Thinly slice the carrot, and then fry in a pan, seasoning lightly with salt.
5. Fry the bracken, along with the seasoning.
6. Fry the egg sunny side up. Place the rice and ingredients neatly in a bowl.
7. Add *gochujang* and serve.



## Bulgogi: Marinated Meat Cooked on the Grill

*Bulgogi* is a meat dish prepared by marinating beef in a Korean seasoning.

This seasoning is prepared by mixing *ganjang* (soy sauce), sugar, minced garlic, finely chopped spring onions, roasted sesame seeds, pepper, and sesame oil. The cut of meat used will alter the taste of a dish, but *bulgogi* is made with thinly sliced strips of beef sirloin, which have a slightly fatty texture. The meat is first marinated in pear and onion juices to make it tender, then the seasoning is added. Once the marinated beef strips are placed on a shallow grill or pan, the juices from the meat mix with the seasoning, creating tasty gravy that hugs the meat.

*Bulgogi* is a dish that Koreans thoroughly enjoy. Its history can be traced back to the Goguryeo Dynasty (37 B.C~668 A.D), which was one of the

Three Kingdoms of Korea. It is believed that the dish started out as a kebab-style dish known as *maekjeok*, where meat was seasoned with a sauce and garlic, skewered, and cooked over open fire. The dish evolved over time and became a royal cuisine during the Joseon Dynasty (1392~1910) referred to as *neobiani*. Beef was sliced into nice, thick pieces, and then scored to make it tender. This was then placed on a grate over an open fire, and grilled.

These days, meat is thinly sliced when making *bulgogi*. This is probably because of the changes in dining styles in which meat is expected to cook quickly. At restaurants that specialize in *bulgogi*, *mul naengmyeon* (cold buckwheat noodles) is also offered on the menu, which is the perfect way to wrap up a good *bulgogi* meal.

If a full serving of *bulgogi* on a grill or pan is too heavy, one can choose *ttukbaegi bulgogi* (hot pot *bulgogi*). This dish, perfect for one, is cheap but tasty and has more broth than the regular *bulgogi* dish. The meat is boiled and cooked in the broth, then served in an earthenware pot, which keeps it nice and hot on the dining table. Glass noodles can also be added, and the act of trying to eat the slippery noodles with chopsticks adds to the fun. *Ttukbaegi bulgogi* is always served with *bap* (cooked rice) and *banchan* (side dishes), and is more than enough to make a satisfying meal. When *bulgogi* is poured over *bap* and served on one plate, it is called *bulgogi deopbap* (*bulgogi* with rice).

*Bulgogi* is not only delicious, but easy to prepare. These days, ready-made *bulgogi* marinade can be purchased at stores. The sauce can also be easily made from scratch anywhere in the world, if one has access to *ganjang*.





## Bulgogi Recipe

### Ingredients

#### Main ingredients (Serves 4)

400g beef sirloin

#### Marinade

1/4 pear

1/2 onion

#### Secondary ingredients

2 bundles of spring onions

15g mushrooms



### Bulgogi seasoning

60ml *ganjang* (soy sauce)

15g sugar

30g finely chopped spring onions

15g minced garlic

15g crushed sesame seeds

15ml sesame oil

A pinch of pepper

### Method

1. Thinly slice the beef 0.3cm thick. Then slice the meat into bite-size portions.
2. Grate the pear and onion into juice.
3. Place the meat in the pear and onion juices, gently mix by hand to coat the meat in the juices, and then leave for 10 minutes to tenderize.
4. Mix all the ingredients for the *bulgogi* seasoning in a bowl.
5. Slice the spring onions diagonally.
6. Wash the mushrooms, and then shred into bite-size pieces.
7. Place the tenderized meat (from step 3) into the seasoning (from step 4), add the sliced spring onions, and leave for a further 30 minutes.
8. Heat a fry pan or *bulgogi* grate, lightly grease with cooking oil, and then evenly spread the meat on the pan to cook.
9. Cook the mushrooms on the pan together and enjoy.

## Bossam: Napa Wraps with Pork

In surveys of longevity in Korea, *suyuk* (boiled beef or pork slices) always makes it onto the list. *Suyuk* is made by boiling or steaming the meat, ensuring that excess fat drips cleanly away. This is a healthy dish allows the elderly with weak digestive systems to consume an adequate amount of protein, while being easy on the stomach.

*Bossam* is a dish where boiled pork is wrapped in kimchi before eating. Specially made *bossam* kimchi is sweeter than ordinary kimchi, due to extra ingredients like oysters, raw chestnuts, jujubes, pine nuts, and a bit more sugar than regular kimchi seasoning. And because it's served straight away, it doesn't contain the acidic or tart flavor of kimchi. The





These side dishes are typically the smaller items on the table that act to complement the rice and also support the main dish, that might be a grilled item, a steamed dish, or a soup.

*bossam* kimchi leaves or cabbage leaves, along with the kimchi seasoning, is plated separately to the meat, leaving it to the diner to wrap the ingredients prior to eating.

When eating *bossam*, one places a kimchi leaf on a plate, dips the meat in *saeu jeot* (salted shrimp), and neatly wraps it with the kimchi leaf before taking a bite. The dish is especially tasty when eaten with salted shrimp sauce, which not only enhances the flavor of the meat, but also helps its digestion.

If it's difficult to prepare the *bossam* kimchi seasoning, one can enjoy the meat by wrapping it in lettuce and dipping it in *ssamjang* (red soy paste dip). The neatly wrapped parcels are a great addition to any party or friendly gathering.

Recently, *bossam* dishes created by Korean chefs are said to be quite popular in the U.S. These dishes have been slightly altered to suit the American palate. The *suyuk* used is made into a beef or pork confit, using the French technique of slowly cooking meat in its own rendered fat which adds a delicious crunch to the exterior of the meat. Alternatively, the meat can be braised. *Bossam* is fast becoming a trendy Korean dish that is of interest to chefs. A detailed recipe on making a localized *bossam* dish was also introduced on *The New York Times* Web site.

## Bossam Recipe

### Ingredients

#### Main ingredients (Serves six)

1kg *samgyeopsal* (pork belly)  
30ml *saeu jeot* (salted shrimp)

#### Ingredients for the broth

10g whole cloves of garlic  
40g ginger  
1/2 onion  
14g spring onion  
7g peppercorns  
10g *doenjang*  
1,000ml water  
70ml *cheongju* (refined rice wine)  
10g cloves

#### *Bossam* kimchi ingredients

(Refer to the kimchi seasoning recipe.)

\* *Fresh oysters, sliced raw chestnuts and pear, and pine nuts can be added to the seasoning.*



### Method

1. (Purchase the pork belly with the skin on.) Cut the pork belly into four pieces.
2. In a pot of water, add the broth ingredients and bring to a boil. Add the meat, and cook over medium heat for 30 minutes, and then over low heat for a further 10 minutes.
3. Thinly slice the cooked meat, and plate with the *bossam* kimchi. Serve with *saeu jeot* or anchovies on the side.



## Japchae: Stir-fried Glass Noodles and Vegetables

*Japchae* is a combination of two words. The “*jap*” refers to “mixing or gathering various things” and “*chae*” means vegetables. *Japchae* is one of Korea’s leading party dishes, and always takes its place on a festive table. The main idea of the dish is to combine noodles with *namul* (seasoned vegetables), and *ganjang* (soy sauce), sugar and sesame oil add a sweet



and aromatic taste to the dish. The noodles are not spicy as no *gochu* (red chili) flakes are added.

The most important part of the dish is the chewy glass noodles. The *dangmyeon*, made from sweet potato starch, becomes clear, plump, and taut when cooked. Its consistency allows it to be seasoned and mixed with various other *namul* without breaking easily. The usual components of this dish are spinach *namul*, fried carrot, fried onion, seasoned mushrooms, and marinated beef strips, but because this noodle dish is so versatile, one can add or leave out ingredients according to individual taste. For example, cocktail shrimp or slices of cooked squid can be added instead of beef to make seafood *japchae*. The dish also goes well with crunchy cucumber pickles or kimchi that can be enjoyed on the side.

*Japchae*, which is sometimes referred to as Korean pasta can be recommended to someone who is looking for a Korean dish that can complement wine, because it has a combination of meat and vegetables, and is lightly marinated with *ganjang* and sugar. While white wine, such as a Riesling, with its aromatic, flowery and robust flavor goes well with *japchae*, sparkling wines are a good match as well.

Despite the extra time and effort needed to finely slice and fry or blanch the vegetables for *japchae*, overall this dish is extremely easy to prepare.

The *namul* that goes into the dish can also be mixed with *bap* (cooked rice) and *gochujang* to make *bibimbap*.

## Japchae Recipe

### Ingredients

#### Main ingredients (Serves four)

- 100g glass noodles
- 80g pork or beef sirloin
- 80g spinach
- 30g shiitake mushrooms
- 40g carrot

#### Ingredients for the seasoning

- Spinach seasoning (1ml sesame oil, 1g salt)
- Pork marinade (6ml *ganjang* (soy sauce), 1ml sesame oil, 2g spring onions, 2g garlic, pinch of pepper)
- Dangmyeon* seasoning (22ml *ganjang* (soy sauce), 5ml sesame oil, 2g sugar)
- Cooking oil, a pinch of salt, and 3g of sesame seeds should be ready.



### Method

1. Immerse the noodles in water and allow them to swell.
2. Prepare the spinach leaves by neatly trimming the stalk and rinsing in water. In a pot of water, add a pinch of salt and blanch the spinach. Rinse in cold water, squeeze out the excess moisture, and season (refer to ingredients above).
3. Finely slice the onion, carrots, and shiitake mushrooms into pieces measuring roughly 5cm x 0.2cm x 0.2cm. Slice the pork into similar-size pieces, and then marinate. Add some cooking oil to a pan and fry the vegetables separately, adding a pinch of salt to taste. Fry the pork in a well-oiled pan.
4. Take the noodles (from step 1) and cook in boiling water for about 5 minutes until they become clear. Take out, rinse in cold water, and strain to remove excess moisture. In a well-oiled pan, lightly fry the noodles while adding the seasoning (refer to ingredients above).
5. Add the seasoned vegetables and meat to the noodles, and lightly stir-fry.
6. Sprinkle sesame seeds on the finished product.



## Haemul Pajeon: Seafood and Green Onion Pancakes

*Jeon* (pancake) is a dish made by lightly coating meat, fish, or vegetables with flour and batter, and then shallow frying on a griddle. They can be made by cutting the ingredients into bite-sized pieces before frying, or by mixing the ingredients with a batter made of flour and water, and then ladling one scoop at a time onto a well-greased pan, much like making pancakes. *Haemul pajeon* is made using the latter method, are served with a sour sauce made of *ganjang* and vinegar. The pancake is cut into bite-



size portions that can be neatly dipped into the sauce before eating.

Many Koreans crave a nice, hot *jeon* on a rainy day. The exact reason remains a mystery. It may be because the sound of the pancake frying on the pan reminds them of the pitter-patter of rain, but others have put forward a more scientific explanation, saying the protein found in flour increases the levels of serotonin, a hormone which has a calming effect.

Many non-Koreans are attracted to traditional markets, like Gwangjang Market in Seoul and Dongrae Market in Busan, thanks to the buttery, delicious smell of oil frying in a pan. Many are particularly drawn to *haemul pajeon*, as it reminds them of pizza, and are pleasantly surprised to find that it is not spicy. A hot *haemul pajeon* grilled on a pan in the middle of a market is a world away from the formality of Korean food served at traditional Korean restaurants, and is food for ordinary folk. Dongrae Market used to be famous for its *haemul pajeon*, which was widely enjoyed by those who visited and worked at the market. With Busan being a port city, the pancakes there were made from fresh seafood caught locally, and with fresh spring onions grown in the nearby city of Gijang.

Apart from *haemul pajeon*, there are other types of Korean pancake. Instead of green onions, chives can be used to make *buchu jeon* (chive pancakes). There is also kimchi *jeon* (kimchi pancake), or *nokdu bindaetteok* (mung bean pancake) that is made by mixing stone ground mung beans with mung bean sprouts, kimchi and bracken, and then frying in oil. All are delicious and go well with *makgeolli* (Korean traditional rice wine).

## Haemul Pajeon Recipe

### Ingredients

#### Main ingredients (Serves four)

- 100g chives
- 80g clam meat
- 60g adductor muscle of shellfish (the part that attaches the meat to the shell)
- 60g squid
- 60g shrimp
- 10g green *gochu* (green pepper)
- 10g red *gochu* (red pepper)

#### Batter mix

- 150g glutinous rice flour
  - 80g non-glutinous rice flour
  - 90g pan frying powder mix (Korean pancake mix)
  - 400ml water
- Also prepare some cooking oil.

### Method

1. Blanch the clam meat, squid and shrimp. Cut into small, bite-size pieces.
2. Slice the shellfish adductor muscles.
3. Chop the chives to about 5cm in length. Remove the seeds from the red and green peppers and finely slice.
4. Place the flour mix in a bowl, add water, and then stir until smooth.
5. Add the seafood and vegetables to the batter, then stir lightly.
6. Add plenty of oil to a pan, and reduce to a low heat once the pan is well heated. Ladle out 100ml of the seafood and vegetable mixture onto the pan, and then thinly spread out. Flip, then cover the pan with a lid. Allow the mixture to cook.
7. Remove the lid. Add more oil to the pan, and cook the pancake over high heat until the outside is nice, golden, and crispy.
8. Remove from pan and serve on a plate.



## Makgeolli: Korean Traditional Rice Wine

*Makgeolli* is a harmonious blend of flavor and texture. It has the smooth texture of cream and the fizziness of a carbonated drink, along with an appropriate alcohol content of six to seven percent. Not only that, the drink is full of beneficial lactobacillus yeast. The word *makgeolli* means “undistilled alcohol” or “alcohol that is drunk right away,” and once you know the process of brewing *makgeolli*, you will understand why. Rice, malt, yeast, and pure water are required to prepare this drink. First, the rice must be steamed to make hard-boiled rice. Malt and yeast are then mixed in well with the rice. Following this, pure water is added and the mixture is left for a week to ferment. If the mixture is fermenting properly, it should give off a strong aroma. Once fermented, the mixture should

resemble a grain stew. The rice and yeast mix is then strained, and the liquid is referred to as *makgeolli*.

The best way to enjoy *makgeolli* is to drink it immediately upon straining. Because of this, *makgeolli* enthusiasts travel the country to visit breweries to experience the various aromas and flavors of regional rice wine. Drinking it while fresh also means that they get to taste the rice wine before it becomes tainted during the distribution process. Where there is fresh water, that there is sure to be a brewery nearby, and there are so many *makgeolli* breweries scattered across the country that one can produce a *makgeolli* brewery map.

If you look closely at the label on a *makgeolli* bottle, you may find the word “saeng” printed before the name of the wine. Saeng means “raw” or “fresh,” and this is added in front of the name to indicate that the rice wine is “alive” or “fresh” like fresh vegetables. Bottled *makgeolli* still contains live yeast. Because of this, a bottle of *saeng makgeolli* expires quickly, but contains millions of beneficial bacteria. To extend the shelf life of *makgeolli*, some companies take extra care to completely disinfect their bottles and add carbonic acid to their wines, but these wines are no match to the naturally fermented carbonated taste made the traditional way.

*Makgeolli* cocktails have been gaining popularity recently. Bartenders are coming up with exciting *makgeolli* cocktails by mixing them with a variety of liquors, pears, milk, strawberries, *yuja* (Korean citrus), espresso coffee, and even wines. *Makgeolli* goes especially well with fruit, and a general rice wine concoction contains three parts *makgeolli* and one part fruit juice. Orange juice *makgeolli* cocktails are said to be extremely popular in Japan.



# Korean Street Food

Street food in Korea is sold at small street-side stalls and usually eaten while standing.

Examples include *tteokbokki* (stir-fried rice cake) made by stir-frying *tteok* made from rice or flour in a *gochujang* (red chili paste) sauce, and *eomuk* (fish cakes), made by deep-frying a mixture of fish paste, vegetables, and flour. The port city of Busan is especially famous for its tasty *eomuk*, which is usually skewered on a wooden stick and then placed in a hot soup or broth.

*Twigim* (deep-fried) is another popular snack. An assortment of seafood and vegetables is available, including squid, shrimp, and sweet potato. There is also *gimmari*, a deep-fried snack of seaweed-wrapped seasoned glass noodles. One can request to have their fried goods lathered in hot *tteokbokki* sauce if desired.

*Sundae* (Korean sausage) is made by stuffing pig intestines with a filling made of seasoned glass noodles, vegetables, and *seonji* (pig' blood). The sausages are steamed, sliced, and served with salt on the side.

These types of inexpensive Korean street snacks are referred to as *bunsik*, and can also be found in small restaurants known as *bunsikjip*. At these types of restaurants, you can eat these snacks while sitting down, and *ramyeon* (instant noodles) are also on the menu. A wide array of instant noodles in all forms and flavors can be had just by going to a nearby Korean

The sight of customers standing and nibbling on lights snacks like *tteokbokki* (stir-fried rice cake) and *eomuk* (fish cakes) is common in any market in Korea.



Clockwise from top left, *bungeobbang* (fish shaped waffles filled with red bean paste), one of the *pojangmacha* (small food kiosks on wheels) streets that can be found in any Korean city, *twigim* (deep-fried food), a solitary *pojangmacha* serving up a cheap supper of liquor and snacks

supermarket. If on vacation in Korea, it may be a fun idea for your Asian food experience by selecting a favorite ramen to take home as a souvenir.

Come winter, the selection of snacks gets even bigger. On a cold winter's day, vendors selling toasty warm snacks like roasted chestnuts, roasted sweet potato, and *bungoebbang* (fish-shaped waffles filled with red bean paste) look especially inviting. A *hoffip* (bar) will also stop you in your tracks and offer a nice spot to to grab a quick glass of cold beer and fried chicken. *Chimaek*, which stands for "chicken and *maekju* (beer)," is a favorite among Koreans on a hot summer night. And because it is usually enjoyed in a lively, fun setting together with friends, *chimaek* is considered the perfect snack to blow away stress.

*Pojangmacha* (small food kiosks on wheels) offer a different sort of entertainment and food. They offer tasty yet affordable nibbles or appetizers that can be eaten while drinking soju. For customers who cannot afford such snacks while sipping on their alcohol, owners are generous enough to allow them to drink the broth of the *eomuk tang* (fish cake soup). Korean street food is so endearing and possess such unexplainable charm, even those wearing luxury designer suits find themselves at a stall holding *tteokbokki* in one hand and an *eomuk* in the other.



Bibimbap by Vienna's Kim Kocht

## Chapter Four

# STAR KOREAN CHEFS AND THEIR K-FOOD CREATIONS

The provocative aroma of Korean condiments and marinades has wafted across the big stage and is spreading fast as top quality dishes are produced in restaurants around the world. Michelin-rated chefs are putting their twist on traditional Korean dishes such as kimchi, *gochujang* (red chili paste), and *bossam* (napa wraps with pork), and are adding these creations to their highly coveted menus. These professional chefs work in a competitive industry where they must satisfy the palates of diners while proving their artistic flair, as well as keeping their restaurants afloat. This suggests that Korean food has piqued not just the interest of these fresh creative culinary minds, but is also sufficiently appealing to open the doors to a new gastronomical world for people around the world who have seen their palates engage with beautiful flavors.

This is a look at how Korean food is taking its place in the world. Meet the Korean chefs who have garnered Michelin stars, those who have become best-selling authors, and others who have debuted cooking shows and found themselves on the road to fame.





Danji's hallmark "bulgogi sliders," a reinterpretation of traditional *bulgogi*

### Hooni Kim, Owner-chef of New York's Danji, the First Korean Restaurant to Earn a Michelin Star

Chef Hooni Kim's restaurant offers up both traditional and fusion Korean cuisine, but something else has preoccupied this chef preoccupies. His top concern is being "the Korean restaurant that uses good ingredients." This is evident just by taking a peek at Danji's menu, which has a footnote, "We are proud to serve Creekstone Farms® beef, Niman Ranch® pork, and Bell & Evans® chicken. All of our meat and poultry is raised on a 100% vegetarian diet with no antibiotics or growth hormones." A detailed analysis of Kim's success has shown that a key factor is his use of fresh ingredients to create his dishes. This, along with his scientific approach to cooking has helped him secure his Michelin star.

At Danji, it takes a full two days to make *galbi jjim* (braised short ribs). Fat from the meat is removed, and the cut of meat placed in an oven to ensure that essential moisture and juices from the meat are not lost. The meat is then placed in an oven heated to exactly 162.7 degrees Celsius, and braised for two hours and 45 minutes.

Prices are an appealing factor at Danji. All items on the menu are carefully and beautifully plated, yet most of them cost around \$15. The only item that exceeds \$20 is the *sundubu jjigae* (soft tofu stew) for two. Kim's dishes can be enjoyed by anyone, including students. Wealthy patrons with a keen eye for fine cuisine are also known to frequent his restaurant, tasting every dish on the menu.

Danji divides its menu into two categories: traditional and modern. On the traditional menu are dishes such as Korean-style fried chicken, *sogogi gochu japchae* (beef and vegetable *japchae* (stir-fried glass noodles and vegetables)), *eundaegu jorim* (braised black cod), and *haemul sundubu jjigae*). The modern menu offers up fusion cuisine, an inventive blend of Western cooking techniques and ingredients to traditional Korean dishes.

Inside Danji in New York City (left) and Hooni Kim, Danji's owner-chef (right)



Examples include the *sujeonggwa* cocktail (cinnamon punch cocktail) made by combining *sujeonggwa* (cinnamon punch) and whiskey, and the spam kimchi *bokkeum bap* (kimchi fried rice) with a fried egg on top.

Although both traditional and modern Korean dishes are available on the menu, the traditional dishes are more popular. Some of Kim's regular patrons are none other than his former employers and culinary teachers, all of whom are famous chefs in New York.

On the back of his success, Kim has opened up a second Korean restaurant called Hanjan that advocates and promotes "real Korean food." Items such as *haemul doenjang jjigae* (seafood soybean paste stew) and *jokbal* (pigs' feet) are offered on the menu. He also organized an interesting event for connoisseurs centered on the theme of *jang* (sauces). The smell of *doenjang* (soybean paste) filled the air, and *godeunego ganjang jorim* (braised mackerel in soy sauce) was made available to taste.

Korean cuisine, carrying the original flavors and textures of history, is captivating the taste buds of New Yorkers.

Chef Hooni Kim graduated from the University of California at Berkeley's College of Engineering, and went to medical school at the University of Connecticut before deciding to pursue a new career path. He enrolled at the French Culinary Institute (FCI) and went on to become a chef. He spent most of his childhood living abroad, but his parents never let him forget his roots, sending him to Korea once in a while so that he could experience the culture and taste the food. This planted a dream in the young Kim to create uniquely Korean dishes while outside of Korea. He has now fulfilled that dream.



Nature: Daikon, Acidulated Carrots, Olive oil, Flowers and Herbs (interpretation of kimchi)

### **Sang-hoon Degeimbre, Michelin Two-Star Chef at L'Air du Temps, Combines Artistry with Science**

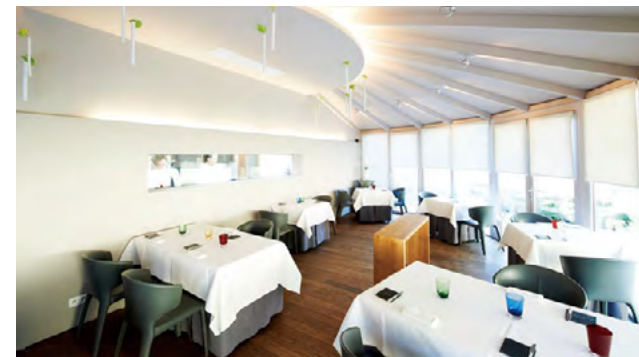
Chef Sang-Hoon Degeimbre's restaurant, L'Air du Temps is situated in the tranquil village of Eghezee, a 40-minute drive from the Belgian capital of Brussels. His kitchen brings to mind a scientific laboratory, with its weighing scales, thermometers, liquid nitrogen, laboratory vacuum chamber, and distiller. To Degeimbre, the taste of a dish cannot be left to sheer luck. It is the product of accurate and precisely calculated steps.



Michelin two-star chef Sang-hoon Degeimbre

This molecular gastronomy chef strips each and every dish down to its core, the molecules, and approaches cooking like a scientific experiment to devise new flavors and textures. For example, he uses a distiller to ensure that the fragrance of *omija* is well-infused in a pear. A kitchen that looks like a science lab may seem far removed from good food, but Degeimbre uses seasonal ingredients to add that touch of romance to his creations and tell a story through his dishes. With traditional French cooking as the starting point, he uses molecular gastronomy as a magic wand to bring out innate flavors, embellishing his dishes with Korean ingredients to create unique dishes that convey his style.

Degeimbre is not only a chef, but also a scientist and farmer. Impressed with fermented foods from Korea, he has been working with chemical engineers from a Brussels institute that focuses on food science for several years to research producing a substance that can trigger the fermentation of cabbage juice in kimchi. He set his restaurant in the peaceful town to improve his access to the best butter and pigeon meat for his creations.



The interior of L'Air du Temps in Eghezee, Belgium

Furthermore, with help from farmers, he himself took up farming so that he could have ready access to fresh vegetables. The scientist in him makes sure that he keeps tabs on the vegetables being cultivated on his plot of land near his restaurant, so that he can research into improving their breeding and varieties.

One of his signature dishes is “French-style *bossam*.” Here, the Korean dish meets French cooking techniques to metamorphosize into a refreshing molecular version. In his rendition, oysters, cabbage, and pork are diced into small cubes and neatly placed on a plate before being decorated with *gochujang*.

Degeimbre’s roe deer *galbi jjim* (braised short ribs) is a Korean dish that cannot be found in Korea. He came across the sweet seasoning of the dish while eating out in Korea, and decided that it was the perfect way to tenderize and flavor the tough meat of roe deer.

His continuous efforts to reinvent traditional dishes using the techniques of molecular gastronomy have earned him two Michelin stars.

## Kim Sohyi of Vienna's Kim Kocht Brings Gochujang and Chopsticks to Austria and Germany

Kim Sohyi's restaurant, Kim Kocht, located in the heart of Austria's capital, serves up fine dining course meals comprising seafood and assorted vegetables. Eastern Europe is known for its love of meat, and Kim's attempt at creating healthy dishes with less meat used and incorporating more seafood and fresh vegetables did not go unnoticed. Moreover, the design of the restaurant, with its open kitchen, created a buzz. There is no barrier between the chefs in the kitchen and diners in the dining area, and the whole experience makes patrons feel like they are watching a cooking class in action. Diners are also given chopsticks for their Korean food orders of *bibimbap* (mixed rice with meat and assorted vegetables), *bulgogi* (marinated meat cooked on the grill) and *samgyeopsal* (grilled pork belly), among other Korean dishes.

Her signature dish is the Grammeln tuna steak, through which the cheap ingredient of pork scratching (Grammeln) is transformed into haute cuisine with a pairing with tuna. The cracklings are finely sliced and the fat removed. These are then stir-fried along with a Korean cuisine-inspired mixture of *gochujang* (red chili paste), *ganjang* (soy sauce), various spices,

and sweet Korean pear. The eventual sauce is finally drizzled over a seared tuna steak. The Austrian restaurant guide "A la carte" has ranked Kim's restaurant as third on its list of best restaurants in Vienna, critiquing her dishes as an ingenious collaboration of ingredients representing the best of Austrian, Korean and Southeast Asian cuisine. Kim also started producing her own line of Kim Kocht wines with her sommelier husband, after failing to find a wine that complemented her dishes.

Her list of accomplishments does not end there. Her bright personality and gift of gab, purported characteristics of people from her native province of Gyeongsang-do contributed to her success with her own cooking show in Germany and Austria. Kim won the Grand Prize in Foreign Cuisine category at the 2008 "A la carte" awards, while her cookbook received the Best Asian Cookbook Award at the Gourmand World Cookbook Awards in 2004.

Kim admits that when she first opened her restaurant in Austria, she doubted whether non-Koreans would enjoy the pungent Korean tastes that she loves. One of her first dishes was an authentic *geotjeori* (fresh kimchi) dish made with *bomdong* (Korean spring cabbage), lettuce, and soft napa cabbage, lightly tossed in a mix of *ganjang*, minced garlic, chopped spring onions, sesame oil, *gochu* flakes, vinegar and *jeotgal* (salted seafood). Despite her concerns over the aroma and taste of *jeotgal*, her Korean-style salad became a huge hit. The rest is history.



Vienna restaurant Kim Kocht's Chef Kim Sohyi, who has won accolades for her cookbook and appearances on German and Austrian TV



Kim Kocht's popular "tuna burger," an combination of rice, tuna, egg, vegetables, and bulgogi sauce

## David Chang of Momofuku, a Michelin Two-Star Chef Selected by TIME as One of the World's 100 Most Influential People

Chef David Chang, who is in the midst of creating a Momofuku empire, has a few hit dishes under his belt. Of those, his pork buns and oyster *bossam* (napa wraps with pork and oysters), which are written on his menu as “bo ssäm,” are recognized as Korean dishes.

Almost everyone who knows or has heard of him knows about his love of pork, and he creates the most delightful of dishes using his favorite ingredient. And of course, one cannot leave out *suyuk* (boiled pork slices) and *bossam* when it comes to pork dishes. Chang seems to know this well.

His famous pork buns are made by seasoning boiled *samgyeopsal* (pork belly) with hoisin sauce, and then inserting the meat in a bun. For his “bo ssäm” dish, he uses pork hindquarters instead of pork belly. He adds to the diner’s experience by serving his pork dish like a fully laid out Korean



Momofuku's famous fusion "pork buns," which are inspired by *bossam* (napa wraps with pork)



New York hotspot, the Momofuku ssäm bar (top). Twice nominated for *TIME* magazine's "100 Most Influential People" (2010, 2012) and James Beard Foundation Outstanding Chef (2013), Chef David Chang (bottom)



dining table. *Bap* (cooked rice) and *ssam* (leaf wraps), kimchi, twelve oysters, and Chang's signature "bo ssäm" dish are carefully set on a table. This recipe can be found in his 2009 cookbook *Momofuku Cookbook*, and has also been featured in *The New York Times*.

As one will find out by reading the recipe, Chang creatively tweaked his preparation of the meat to suit the palate of the locals. Instead of boiling the meat, which is a less appetizing texture for Americans, Chang roasts the meat in a low-temperature oven for six hours before placing it in a pot and putting it back in the oven at a higher temperature, letting the meat braise in its juices. Before slicing the meat, a light brush of sugar gives it a caramel coating, and the sweet, crunchy texture makes it distinct from traditional *bossam*. The pork slices are served with vinaigrette made from finely chopped green onions and ginger, soy sauce and sherry vinegar, along with *ssamjang* (red soy paste dip) made with *gochujang* (red chili paste), *doenjang* (soybean paste), sherry vinegar and a hint of oil. And instead of the traditional napa wraps, the meal is served with fresh lettuce leaves. Chang used his Korean muse to boldly inspire a dish that could entice the taste buds of New Yorkers hungry for something new.

A second-generation Korean American, Chang is the epitome of a success story in the U.S. culinary market. His name has been consecutively given honors at the James Beard Foundation Awards, which is the culinary equivalent of the Oscars. Not only that, he was listed twice, once in 2010 and again in 2012, on *TIME* magazine's list of "100 Most Influential People."

Undeniably, the two-star Michelin chef is a trendsetter and changing the face of food in New York City.



"Bibim," a tomato arugula sorbet inspired by *bibimbap*'s vegetable garnishes

### **Yim Jungsik, Michelin Two-Star Chef at Jungsik, Captivates New Yorkers with Fusion Korean Cuisine**

Upon seeing Yim Jungsik's dishes, one cannot help but gasp in surprise at the food's presentation. Then customers sit there and scratch their heads thinking, "Is this really a Korean dish?" This is because his dishes bear no semblance to what one normally thinks of as Korean food. But after tasting the food, those question marks are turned into exclamation marks, with the flavors of the dish throwing a delightful twist at the end. When analyzed ingredient by ingredient, plate by plate, his dishes are truly Korean and enjoyed even more by those who have a solid understanding of Korean cuisine.



Michelin two-star chef Yim Jungsik

For example, Yim has made over the ordinary *myeolchi dashima yuksu* (anchovy kelp stock) into a soup dish by adding mushrooms and garnishing it with a poached egg that has a crispy texture like *nurungji* (scorched rice). He has turned *miyeok guk* (seaweed soup) containing beef stock, seaweed and rice, into risotto, accompanied with kimchi. In his hands, this ordinary soup, commonly eaten on birthdays, is instantly transformed into a five-star dish.

But his signature dish is without a doubt *ogammanjok bossam* (Five Senses Satisfaction pork belly). He uses French cooking methods to create this *bossam* dish. First, he places a piece of *myeongi namul jangajji* (pickled mountain garlic leaves), and brushes it with potato puree and also sultana and ginger jam. He makes confit pork by cooking *suyuk* (boiled pork slices) in its own fat, giving the meat a crunchy texture, after which he places the meat on the *jangajji*. This is then garnished with finely chopped *gochu jangajji* (pickled Korean chilies).

Yim has not only tackled main dishes, but tried his hand at desserts as well. In his dessert *jangdok*, a piece of chocolate shaped like a traditional

Korean earthenware jar is used to store various pastes and sauces. If one is familiar with how earthenware is used in Korean cooking, the appearance of the dessert is enough to bring a smile to one's face. He also adds a Korean touch to his ice cream by placing some *dan pat juk* (sweet red bean porridge) on the side.

Yim refers to his creations, which embody everything Korean but appear to be anything but, as “New Korean (cuisine).”

Yim graduated from the Culinary Institute of America, after which he opened his restaurant in Seoul's upscale Gangnam district. His Korean fusion cuisine proved popular in an area known for its expensive tastes, and riding on the back of that success, he went to America to test the waters. His first venture was the fancy fusion restaurant Jungsik in Tribeca, Manhattan, which received a Michelin star within its first year. Jungsik has also been introduced in print media such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *New York Magazine*.

The interior of Jungsik in New York





## EPILOGUE

I'd be absolutely delighted if anyone his or her gains an interest in Korean cuisine after reading this book, and even more so if it compels one to try his or her hand at making it. For those new to Korean food, I recommend the most familiar and famous dishes such as *bulgogi* (marinated meat cooked on the grill) and *galbi* (braised short ribs). For those who are more adventurous and seeking something new, I highly recommend making the various *namul* (seasoned vegetables) dishes that make up a Korean table, *bibimbap* (mixed rice with meat and assorted vegetables), *makgeolli* (Korean traditional rice wine) or *haemul pajeon* (seafood and green onion pancake). *Chimaek* (chicken and *maekju* (beer)), with its Korean-style fried chicken and garlic soy sauce, is also becoming increasingly popular in various parts of the world.

For those with a deep interest in Korean food but don't know where to start, here's a tip. It doesn't have to be complicated. Start with small steps. For example, you can enjoy a delicious Koreanized meal simply by replacing the pickles that accompany a meat dish with kimchi. The tart, spicy taste of kimchi goes so well with steaks, in pasta sauces, and on hot dogs, and even reduces that oily taste that some of these dishes have. And if making kimchi looks difficult, one doesn't even have to worry because it can be bought from a Korean grocer. Other simple ways to make kimchi



can be found from various sources, such as *The New York Times* and YouTube. Changing the intensity or spiciness of kimchi also allows it to be enjoyed with other dishes, or one can start by making *baek* kimchi (white kimchi), or *mul* kimchi (water kimchi) which doesn't contain *gochu* flakes.

Other ways are replacing bread with *ssal bap* (cooked white rice). If one gets used to the flavor, they can be a little more adventurous and try *hyeonmi bap* (cooked brown rice), which is healthy and great for those on a diet. Another recommendation is pouring Korean seasoning (made with *ganjang* (soy sauce), sesame oil, sesame seeds, minced garlic, and finely chopped green onions) over their steaks instead of gravy, or adding vinegar to the mixture to make vinaigrette for salads. As long as there is *bap* (cooked rice), a salad of sorts and kimchi on the table, you can say you've fixed yourself a great Korean meal.

If one becomes accustomed to eating *bap*, then *jjigae* (stew) is a great way to enhance the culinary experience. *Sundubu jjigae* (soft tofu stew) is made a little less spicy and perfect for the novice stew eater. It has a soft, creamy texture, and one can add a little soy sauce at the table to suit individual taste. Moreover, tofu is a tasty and easy way to consume the nutrients available in soybeans. If one is curious to find what *doenjang* (soybean paste) made from fermented soybeans taste like, but is a little hesitant, mixing it with *gochujang* (red chili paste) to make *ssamjang* (red soy paste dip) and enjoying it with some meat and lettuce is a great way to start.

For those into cooking, then they should try making various *namul* dishes. This is a great way to eat more vegetables, and by eating a small portion of each of the assortment of *namul* dishes, you will have consumed a nutritious, well-balanced meal without even knowing it. Sesame oil or wild sesame oil is usually used to season these vegetables,

and one can also add a favorite sauce to the *namul* and eat it with bread. They can also use *namul* they've prepared to create another Korean dish, *bibimbap*.

The more you study Korean food, you will find that the possibilities and combinations of dishes and flavors are endless.

Eating kimchi and adding some Korean seasoning to the meal is a simple, yet effective way to start. I hope that Korean cuisine, with its simple yet tasty creations, is truly on its way to creating a wave that will sweep the world with its "third taste" of fermentation, as noted by futurist Alvin Toffler.

I also sincerely hope that the natural and well-balanced Korean meal will give the gift of health to those lucky enough to have discovered it.



## Further Reading

### Books on K-Food

Institute of Traditional Korean Food (2008) *The Beauty of Korean Food: With 100 Best-Loved Recipes*. Hollym

Debra Samuels & Taekyung Chung (2008) *The Korean Table: From Barbecue to Bibimbap 100 Easy-To-Prepare Recipes*. Tuttle Publishing

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Lauryn Chun & Olga Massov (2012) *The Kimchi Cookbook: 60 Traditional and Modern Ways to Make and Eat Kimch*. Ten Speed Press

Maangchi (2012) *Cooking Korean Food with Maangchi: Book 1, 2, & 3*. Kindle Edition

Sophia Hoem (2012) *Korean Food American Style: Korean Fusion Foods and More*. Xlibris Corporation

Karen Solomon (2013) *Asian Pickles: Korea: Recipes for Spicy, Sour, Salty, Cured, and Fermented Kimchi and Banchan*. Ten Speed Press

### Websites on K-Food

The Taste of Korea (Korean Food Foundation) [www.hansik.org/en/index.do](http://www.hansik.org/en/index.do)

Koreataste [www.koreataste.org](http://www.koreataste.org)

ZenKimchi [www.zenkimchi.com](http://www.zenkimchi.com)

Seoul Eats [www.seouleats.com](http://www.seouleats.com)

Maangchi [www.maangchi.com](http://www.maangchi.com)

TriFood: Celebrating Korean Food [www.trifood.com](http://www.trifood.com)

### Cooking Classes on K-Food

Food & Culture Korea – Korean Food Cooking Class [koreanrecipe.co.kr](http://koreanrecipe.co.kr)

O’ngo Food Communications [www.ongofood.com](http://www.ongofood.com)

Chongga Kimchi World [kimchiworld.org/Eng/main.asp](http://kimchiworld.org/Eng/main.asp)

Yoo’s Family [www.yoosfamily.com](http://www.yoosfamily.com)

Tteok Museum [www.tkmuseum.or.kr/eng/index.htm](http://www.tkmuseum.or.kr/eng/index.htm)



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### Yun Jin-ah

Yun is a former reporter for the food magazine *Cookand*. She graduated from Kyung Hee University with a bachelor's in Korean Language and Literature. She has been active as a food columnist for many media outlets such as KBS Radio, TBN (Traffic Broadcasting Network) and *Cookand*. Her book *Eumsik lyagi* (A Story of Food), published by Sallim Books, was chosen as the best food-related book of 2008 by *The Dong-A Ilbo*. Critics praised her book for its simple yet fun storytelling and its extensive and useful information.

## CREDITS

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Yonhap News, Imagetoday, Korea Tourism Organization, Newsbank Image, Korean Food Foundation, Dreamville Entertainment, L'Air du Temps in Eghezee, Jungsik, Momofuku Ssam Bar, Sempio, Kimchi Chronicles, JEl University Korean Food Globalization Exhibition, The Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea, Ganghwa-gun Specialty Crop Promotional Website





In addition to being delicious, Korean food is also healthy and natural, making it perfectly suited for the global culinary trends of health consciousness, slow food, and environmental sensitivity. At first, people are attracted to Korean food because of its distinctive taste, but they later come to love it for its health benefits. Korean food is based on the philosophy that one's food should be one's medicine. In fact, doctors have even used Korean food instead of medicine to treat chronic diseases.