

Re-Defining National Cuisine: Dietary Practices of Multi-Cultural Families in South Korea*

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This paper explores the patterns of inter-cultural adaptation and accommodation of dietary practices of 'multi-cultural families.' Foreign women married to Korean men compromise in their daily diet between the desire to eat the food of their culture and the need to adapt it to the rest of the Korean family's expectations. This domain becomes the terrain of fusion of food habits and palates as the 'border-crossing' of food and taste more or less freely practiced by the members of these families passes onto their children, thereby requiring new definitions of Korean national cuisine and what it means to be Korean. Based on ethnographic descriptions of the dietary life of multi-cultural families, the paper intends to analyze the meaning of these everyday life experiences in the context of the political and ideological discourses of multiculturalism in contemporary South Korea. It is argued in particular that food provides a meaningful space where the terms of mutual relationships, gender roles, and the concept of family are defined, negotiated, and communicated among the members of these families.

Keywords: migration, diet, ethnic food, multiculturalism, international marriage, South Korea

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INTRODUCTION

Along with the relatively good performance of the South Korean economy over the past few decades as well as with the growing international popularity of South Korean cultural products such as T.V. dramas, films, songs, and dances, various efforts have been made to re-appreciate Korean cuisine and to enhance its global recognition. The Korean Food Globalization (*Hansik Segehwa*) Campaign initiated by the Yi Myung-Bak regime is the most notable of these efforts that had been enthusiastically pursued in the belief that globalizing national cuisine would be an effective means of exporting 'culture' as well as of improving the value of the nation brand.¹

Yet, any such attempt inevitably involves continuous re-establishment of what 'Korean cuisine' actually means and how its boundaries may be set in relation to the ever-changing dietary practices of globalizing Koreans. The processes of discovering, elaborating and standardizing the court cuisine (*gungjung yori*, 宮中料理), aristocratic foods (*banga eumsik*, 班家飲食) or numerous local dishes (*hyangto eumsik*, 鄉土飲食) as something 'traditional' that have emerged uniquely and historically developed in Korean nature and soil may all be understood as part of this ongoing endeavor (K.O. Kim 1994; 2010; I.J. Hwang 1994; K.K. Han 1994; O.P. Moon 2010). What needs to be noted in these movements is the underlying assumption that Korean people share certain essential elements that constitute a 'common Korean palate.' For instance, one often comes across such an assertion as that "Only those who can discern the deep taste of Korean bean paste (*doenjang*) or the delicate differences in the tastes of various kinds of *kimchi* can be called real Koreans."

¹ The Yi Myung-Bak government declared the beginning of the state-initiated project and campaign of Korean Food Globalization in October 2008; formed the Korean Food Globalization Promotion Team with thirty-three representatives composed of relevant officials, food scientists, economists, agriculture and fishery specialists, etc. in May 2009; and inaugurated the Korean Food Foundation in March 2010 as its organizational basis. The ostensible objectives of the project were to enhance the value and competitiveness of Korea's nation brand by advertising its 'national cuisine' as a key element of its culture, that would eventually lead to the creation of new export markets for Korean agricultural and fishery products (<http://www.hansik.org>).

Such a claim is clearly based on the essentialist assumption that the ability to discern and appreciate certain tastes comprises critical elements in deciding what it means to be 'Korean' or of the 'Korean nation.' Similarly, a claim such as "Being a Korean, I cannot live a day without *kimchi*," or the philosophy of *shintoburi* (身土不二), meaning "The products from Korean soil and water are best for Korean bodies," may also be taken as good examples of popular beliefs surrounding these supposedly somatized elements. One should also note that they, implicitly or explicitly, support the view that Korean culture is a homogenous entity.

These popular beliefs notwithstanding, drastic changes witnessed today make it increasingly difficult to understand South Korean society as racially, ethnically, or culturally homogenous. Not only are the old internal gaps between generations, regions, classes, and genders widening and diversifying, but many new elements are also being introduced through an increasing number of border-crossing travelers and migrants as a result of globalization (O.P. Moon et al. 2006). This growing influence of foreign elements is found in dietary practices in particular. New types of dishes, food ingredients, and cooking methods are being introduced; and many 'ethnic'² or fusion food restaurants and groceries specializing in food items from particular countries have emerged and are catering to the needs of ever-increasing numbers of foreign residents as well as those of interested Korean clientele.

This paper will focus on internationally married couples to examine the changes in Korean dietary life resulting from the rapid increase of foreign population. What are often referred to as 'multi-cultural' families (*damunhwa gajeong*, 多文化 家庭) both by the administration and civil movement sectors in Korea provide an important and interesting space to observe changes in Korean food culture and dietary life in several respects.

First, unlike the commoditized foreign food offered at restaurants, the

² Western, Chinese, and Japanese restaurants began to emerge in Korea around the late-19th and the early-20th centuries with the opening of the country and later with Japanese colonization. In this paper, the term 'ethnic' restaurants is used to distinguish them from these foreign restaurants that have more than one hundred years of history and to designate those restaurants that have emerged since the 1980s reflecting the increase in foreign populations such as migrant workers and foreign brides as well as the changing appetites of urban middle class Koreans.

diet of internationally married families reflects contacts, contestations, and negotiations of different dietary cultures juxtaposed, offering an opportunity to examine the context of multi-cultural practices occurring at the level of daily lives. While foreign restaurants tend to emphasize 'exotic' aspects in the process of their localization (Locher 2003; H.J. Seo 2001; Y.I. Bak 2010), at the homes of internationally married families the emphasis lies on minimizing the differences and the repulsion that may result from unfamiliar diet, quite the opposite of the interests of commercialized restaurants.

Second, particular attention needs to be paid to the gendered aspects of the impact of marriage migration and dietary changes. Most of the foreign spouses who have married Koreans in recent decades are women. Due to the fact that it is the female spouse who relocates her residency and subsequently takes the role of the main food producers within the family, marriages have always been considered to be one of the critical means by which the dietary culture of one area is disseminated to and expanded in another in the traditionally patrilineal/patrilocal society of Korea (J.A. Ryoo 1996; E.S. Kim 2013). The knowledge about specific cooking methods and the ingredients of local dishes that girls acquire at their native homes prior to marriage will inevitably affect the dietary lives of the members of their married-in families, as well as the palate formation of their children in particular. It is not difficult to imagine, therefore, that the growing numbers of foreign spouses/mothers from completely alien dietary cultures will accordingly bring about more pervasive and long-lasting changes to Korean diet in general.

Studies of dietary life in families involving international marriage in Korea have mostly been conducted in the fields of nutritional studies or home economics with focuses on issues such as the status of nutritional intake of the foreign spouses, their adaptive patterns to Korean food, or policy suggestions for the purpose of educating and supporting these adaptations, etc. (J.M. Kim and N.H. Yi 2009; Y.I. Bak 2010; Y.G. Bae 2011; G.S. Oh 2010; B.S. Jang 2009; Y.A. Jo 2010; H.S. Jin 2010; and Y.H. Han 2010). Based largely on statistical surveys, however, these studies come short of providing a fully comprehensive analysis of the social and cultural implications of dietary changes caused by marriage migration. Moreover, these studies often display specific value orientations by emphasizing the need for Korean dietary education or of the state support for improving the nutritional status

of foreign spouses. In this regard, many of the existing studies do not offer satisfactory analyses of the actual processes of introduction, negotiation, or invention of new dietary elements occurring in the homes of internationally married couples that I have attempted here.

Dietary culture does not simply mean dietary preferences or trends, or the capacity to cook certain dishes. This study approaches food as a cultural genre as well as the grounds for cultural contact, and takes dietary culture to include the rules governing the ways in which food is actually prepared and consumed, the meanings given to certain foods, and what is expressed and conveyed by accepting or rejecting them, etc. (K.O. Kim 1994; 1998). It will be shown that food provides a meaningful space wherein the terms of mutual relationships, gender roles, family roles, and the concept of family are defined, negotiated, and communicated among the members of these families. Based on ethnographic descriptions of the dietary life of multi-cultural families, the paper intends to analyze the meaning of these everyday experiences in the context of the highly political and ideological discourses of multiculturalism in contemporary South Korea.

The main materials analyzed here are sixteen case studies of internationally married couples from Incheon, Bucheon, Ansan, Pyeongchon, Seongnam, Seoul, and Hampyeong in Jeonnam Province. The details of their backgrounds can be found in Table 1 below. The respondents are fourteen women and two men in their 20s (2), 30s (5), and 40s (9). Twelve of them reside in cities, three in rural areas, and one recently moved from a village to a city. Their nationalities include Philippine (11), Vietnamese (1), Chinese (Korean-Chinese, 1), Thai (1), Japanese (1), and French (1). Eleven of them reside in a nuclear family form while the remaining five live in households with extended families.

While Korean mass-media often highlights married migrant women living with their husbands' parents in rural areas, available statistics actually indicate that more than 80% of all foreign spouses, male or female, reside in urban areas (S.H. Yim 2009), and nuclear family forms are much more common than patrilineally extended families (D.H. Seol et al. 2006). In terms of gender composition, family forms, and residential background, therefore, it may be said that the sixteen cases in this study reflect the general picture of foreign spouses in contemporary South Korea. Due to the fact that the first

Table 1. Personal backgrounds of the 16 marriage migrants interviewed*

	Name (sex)	Nationality	Age	Residence	Entry	Marriage	Occupation	Family members with age	Others
1	Vu Thi Huong (F)	Vietnamese	28	Seongnam	2007	2008	Language instructor	Husband (29)	
2	April (F)	Philippine	37	Bucheon	2001	2001	Language instructor	Husband(47), Daughter(10)	
3	Angella (F)	Philippine	43	Bucheon	2003	2003	Housewife	Husband(45), Daughter(8)	
4	Armida (F)	Philippine	47	Bucheon	1992	1991	Language instructor	Husband(44), Daughter(18), Son(15)	
5	Usana (F)	Thai	46	Incheon	2005	2005	Multi-cultural instructor	Husband(48), Daughter(5), Mother-in-law(84)	Unification church
6	Mihwa (F)	Chinese	46	Incheon	1995	1998	Multi-cultural instructor	Husband(52), Son(15), Daughter(9)	Korean Chinese
7	Cala (F)	Philippine	30	Bucheon	2003	2003	Housewife	Husband(48), Son(8), Daughter(7)	Sister from Philippine
8	Cris (F)	Philippine	28	Incheon	2006	2006	English instructor	Mother-in-law(60) Husband(36)	
9	Cony (F)	Philippine	36	Bucheon	2004	2003	Housewife	Husband(41), Daughter(8)	
10	Emma (F)	Philippine	37	Bucheon	2002	2002	English instructor	Husband(49), Son(8) Mother-in-law(88)	
11	Jenny (F)	Philippine	49	Hampyeong Jeonnam	1998	1998	English instructor	Husband(51) Daughter(8), Son(10), Mother-in-law(87)	Unification church
12	Caren (F)	Philippine	46	Hampyeong Jeonnam	2000	2000	Civil servant	Mother-in-law(85) Husband(51) Three sons (10,10,4)	Unification church

Table 1. (continued)

	Name (sex)	Nationality	Age	Residence	Entry	Marriage	Occupation	Family members with age	Others
13	Mira (F)	Philippine	44	Ansan/ Hampyeong	1995	1995	Police woman	Mother-in-law (70s)** Husband (49) Two sons (15,14) Daughter (12)	Weekend couple
14	Nina (F)	Philippine	33	Hampyeong	2001	2001	English instructor	Father-in-law(70s) Husband(51) Two daughters(8,7)	Unification church
15	Jun Kajiwara (M)	Japanese	45	Pyeong-chon	2007	2009	Graduate student	Wife(35) Daughter(2)	
16	Alain (M)	French	40	Seoul	2002	1999	College instructor	Wife(40) Daughter (4)	

*All the names are pseudonyms and the ages are as of 2011 when the interviews were conducted.

**A mother-in-law resided with the family in Hampyeong before they moved to Ansan City.

case was located in a Philippine ethnic restaurant in Bucheon and extended to others via personal introductions, however, it is true that the Philippine nationality is over-represented in the case sample.³ It should also be pointed out that this study has been unable to represent marriage migrant cases of Muslim background even though it is expected that the conflicts surrounding food may be more acute in such cases due to religious reasons.

³ As of 2012, of the 148,498 aliens married to a Korean, it is reported that 63,035 (42.5%) are Chinese, including Korean Chinese; 39,352 (26.5%) are Vietnamese; 11,746 (7.9%) are Japanese; 9,611 (6.5%) are Filipinos (Immigration Office).

MULTI-ETHNICIZATION AND ‘MULTI-CULTURALISM’ IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTH KOREA

Since around the mid-1990s, the terms multi-cultures (*damunhwa*) and multi-culturalism (*damunwhajueui*) have drawn much societal as well as scholarly attention in Korea as the country that had long been believed to be single ethnic nation has faced a rapid increase of marriage migrants and migrant workers. Not only the major media and civil society but also the government seems to have acknowledged and embraced the topic; the government has in fact set ‘multi-culturalism’ as its ultimate goal, even though there has not been much concrete discussion or consensus regarding what kind of multi-culturalism or multi-cultural society it is aiming at. The ambiguity may be attributed to the fact that the concept has been adopted largely as an icon for a certain societal orientation with political and ethical connotations rather than as a reflection of the social and cultural reality of contemporary Korea. While it is generally considered to be ‘politically correct’ to be open and supportive towards multi-culturalism, and many new policy measures are being issued, there have been few serious discussions regarding the long term implications of such policies and their overall direction (G.S. Han 2007; K.K. Han 2007; H.M. Kim 2007; G.S. Oh 2007; C.S. Kim 2011; M.U. Seo 2012).

Multi-culturalism became a prevalent issue in South Korea with the recent increase in the alien population: while statistics vary, it was estimated to be 1.4 to 1.5 million as of 2010, comprising approximately 2.5 to 3.0% of the total population. While a seemingly small a ratio compared to the U.S., Canada, Australia, or other European countries, the rate at which the foreign population grew, especially in a country that has long been considered a single ethnic and cultural nation, is definitely remarkable (Kymlicka 1995; 2007; C.S. Kim 2011). In this regard, some argue that multi-culturalism has appeared in South Korea as a sort of “counter-concept” to the traditional ideology of single ethnic nationalism rather than as a reflection of an actual need for recognition and acceptance of cultural and ethnic diversity arising from changes in population composition (H.M. Kim 2007; K.K. Han 2007; C.S. Kim 2011).

Multi-ethnicization does not in itself mean multi-culturalization; the two

need to be distinguished conceptually. For instance, although internationally married couples are conventionally designated as ‘multi-cultural families’ both by policy objectives and in popular representations, the foreign spouses and the children in such families are often expected to speak Korean language, eat Korean food, and act according to Korean cultural rules. Therefore, uncritical designation of such cases as ‘multi-cultural families’ simply because they are composed of members of different ethnic backgrounds is misleading and may be confusing in regards to the initializations of any relevant policy measures.

One may also note that, as in the case of the latest feminist movements in South Korea, multi-cultural movements have been developed and led by a few socio-political activists at the central scene ahead of actual social changes, and do not reflect the accumulated demands of the foreign residents themselves. For this reason, multi-culturalism in South Korea has sometimes been characterized as “state-initiated” or “government-led” multi-culturalism (H.M. Kim 2007; K.K. Han 2007). Ethnographic studies of multi-cultural movements in contemporary South Korea indicate, however, that the implementations of these policies and supports are carried out with continuous mutual negotiations, compromises, conspiracies, criticisms, and appropriations between the state and local governments as well as diverse civil and religious groups acting in the name of and with the objectives of promoting and expanding multi-cultural ideologies and practices (M.U. Seo 2012).

While it cannot be denied that the activities of these civic organizations have considerably contributed to improving and enhancing the rights of foreign migrants in Korea, it also needs to be pointed out that there seem to be some inevitable compromises and negotiations in line with official ideologies as many of these ‘non-governmental organizations’ are dependent upon the financial resources of the state or the local governments. Also, considerable proliferation of these organizations during the ten years of progressive regimes in South Korea (1998-2008) has created a situation in which they must compete among themselves for the available governmental subsidies. These socio-political contexts may partly explain what may appear to be a somewhat exaggerated concentration or emphasis upon ‘multi-culturalism’ in contemporary South Korea in comparison with the measures and policies dealing with other discriminated-against groups in the society

(M.U. Seo 2012).

The same may also be said of the fact that the discussions and policies on multi-culturalism in Korea are set around *damunhwa gajeong*, the families consisting of foreign spouses married to Koreans, rather than around the issues of foreign workers that are not only higher in population but regarding which the issues are more burdensome and controversial politically, socially, and economically. According to Kim Hyun-mi, foreign brides and their children became the major objects of multi-cultural policies in South Korea with the implementation of the Multicultural Families Support Law in 2005, when the terms ‘multi-cultural families’ and ‘multi-cultural children’ were first introduced by a civic organization to replace terms like ‘mixed blood,’ which were considered discriminatory (H.M. Kim 2007, 103-104). Also, supporting legal immigrants who came to Korea through marriage, over migrant workers who were often considered temporary residents, seemed safer politically and was an easier fit to the policies around social integration.

As an anthropological and ethnographic study, what is primarily attempted in this paper is to describe and analyze the process of mutual adaptation or non-adaptation of the foreign spouses of international marriage with various ethnic and cultural backgrounds in their everyday life including dietary practices. Through this endeavor, it is hoped to illuminate the lives of marriage migrants as independent actors with their own agency rather than as simple objects of ideologically and politically oriented policies and civil movements. As Kim Hyun-Mi has already pointed out, foreign spouses in contemporary South Korea cannot be considered to be a homogenous group, nor to be passive and dependent beings (H.M. Kim 2007, 118-119). As will be shown below, what they face in their dietary life and their response to it varies with their individual backgrounds, their countries of origin, gender, etc. and each of them acts with different motivations and strategies in accordance with the situation in which they are placed.

Many anthropologists have noted the changes in food and food practices caused by increased movements of people, both domestic and across borders, such as the expansion of colonialism, various forms of diaspora, and voluntary migration (Mintz 1985; Appadurai 1988; Buckster 1999; Gabaccia 1998; Goody 1998; Lockwood and Lockwood 2000). Movements of people often cause changes in the dietary lives of those who move as well as of

those living in the society they move to. The studies of marriage migrants in Korea have also reported that the area where cultural differences are felt immediately and most acutely is in their diet (I.S. Kim et al. 2006; G.S. Jeong 2008). Such experiences and conflicts may cause much tension on the part of foreign spouses incorporated into these families by marriage. But, just because dietary life is something they have to deal with constantly, especially in the case of foreign brides, it may also provide a good opportunity to observe the process by which the migrant members respond to cultural differences and conflicts and resolve them; that is, the actual process of so-called ‘multiculturalization.’ As will be shown later, this process seems to provide an important means for constructing mutual relationships on the parts of those who receive the migrant members within the family as well as for the migrant members themselves.

FAMILY HISTORY AND DIETARY CULTURE OF INTERNATIONALLY MARRIED COUPLES: CASE STUDIES

Of the sixteen informants whose backgrounds are outlined in Table 1 above, I have chosen for in-depth interviews six cases of different nationalities and gender that best exemplify the diverse features of dietary adaptations in the so-called multi-cultural families in South Korea.

1) **Vu Thi Huong (Vietnamese woman aged 28 as of 2011)**

Vu Thi Huong came to Korea in 2007 as a graduate student to study Korean culture. At school, she met a Korean man who once visited the school to give a special lecture on visual media. She married him in December 2008. At the time of the interview in 2011, Thi Huong was working as a Vietnamese language instructor at a construction company that had a branch office in Vietnam while her husband worked for the media center of Seongnam City as a part-time lecturer. The couple lived in a tiny rented flat located in the old town of Seongnam City where the rents were cheaper than in the newly developed apartment blocks in the “Bundang new town” part of the city. Her husband’s parents, originally from Busan, who moved to the metropolitan

area for work, also lived nearby with the elder brother of Thi Huong's husband, who was not yet married. According to Thi Huong, her parents-in-law are very 'cool' people who did not see their relatives and sibling much, and who were not bound to customs. They did not mind even when Thi Huong and her husband decided to bypass much of the ritual propriety required at the Korean wedding ceremony, including the ritual master (*jurye*), the wedding gifts (*yemul*), and the ceremonial greeting of the bride to the parents'-in-law (*pyebaek*). The only guests from the Vietnamese bride's side were Thi Huong's parents.

As the couple is yet without children, their meals are rather simple: cereal and coffee for breakfast, if any, and simple lunch taken separately at their workplaces. It is only at suppertime when the couple takes the meal together. While it is mostly Thi Huong who prepares the supper,⁴ her husband eats everything she cooks for him and so does Thi Huong, unless the food is too spicy. Thi Huong is not used to spicy food, as people do not eat spicy food in northern Vietnam where she is from, unlike in central Vietnam where the food is known to be very spicy.

It is not easy to label the dishes cooked by Thi Huong as "Vietnamese" or "Korean," as many elements from the two national cuisines are mixed, hybridized, and even invented. For example, as Thi Huong believes that the Korean bean paste is very healthy, bean paste soup or stew is one of the regulars on the couple's dinner table, oftentimes along with *tuong ban* (Vietnamese style fermented beans) sauce on the table to be eaten with fresh vegetables or fish sauce for raw bean curd. The fish sauce, most common and essential in all Vietnamese cuisine, is rather strong in taste and smell and many Koreans cannot eat it. But Thi Huong thinks that she is lucky because her husband does not complaint about it. Also, Thi Huong uses many Vietnamese flavorings when she fries vegetables, or for meat dishes such as

⁴ Apart from the meal preparation, Thi Huong gets help from her husband in most of the housework, including dish washing, cleaning, and shopping etc. since she works longer hours than her husband. Thi Huong thinks that compared to Vietnamese men, Korean men seem to share a much larger part of the housework. Thi Huong finds it rather difficult to understand that Korean women often complain about their housework and sometimes refuse to cook for their husbands, even when they do not have a job.

chicken, beef, and pork. As a considerate gesture for her Korean husband, Thi Huong sometimes adds hot pepper powder or chili bean sauce to make the dish spicier. As she cannot cook proper Korean dishes yet, her mother-in-law who lives nearby delivers *kimchi* (pickled cabbage) or *namul* (cooked vegetables), and the mother-in-law always provides bean paste.

The basic structure of the meal is very similar in Vietnam and Korea in that rice is the main staple eaten with side dishes. The difference mostly lies with the cooking methods and flavoring of the side dishes.⁵ Whenever she has a chance to visit Vietnam, Vu Thi Huong purchases a large quantity of Vietnamese flavorings and ingredients, and brings them back to Korea since it is still rather difficult to find them in the local supermarkets. The most typical of Vietnamese flavorings are *hanh kho* and *aji-ngon*. *Hanh Koh* is used when frying meat or vegetables or in making a soup base. When making rice noodles, the dish considered most representative of Vietnamese dishes, the stock is made from the bones of cow or pig, garlic, spring onion, and dried and scorched spring-onion heads. *Hanh Kho* are these scorched spring onion heads and, when used in making soup base, it makes the taste of the soup “heartly and refreshing.” Therefore, most Vietnamese love *hanh koh* and consider it to be an indispensable ingredient for Vietnamese cooking, but it is rather difficult to obtain in Korean markets.

Aji-ngon is an artificial flavoring first introduced to Vietnam by a Japanese company, Ajinomoto in the early 1990s. When it was learned in the early 2000s that the artificial flavoring MSG(monosodium glutamate) is harmful, there arose a widespread boycott movement among Vietnamese consumers. In response to the movement, Ajinomoto produced a new brand of “natural” flavoring under the same name, using pig ribs and splint bones, and began advertising and selling it nationwide around 2003. The traditional seasoning in Vietnamese cooking used to be salt and fish sauce only. After the Japanese company developed and began to sell *aji-ngon*, however, almost all Vietnamese people, both in the cities and villages, came to use it in everyday

⁵ Yet, the taste of the same ingredients may be different: For example, the chickens in Vietnam are naturally grown and taste better than the chickens sold at Korean supermarkets, which are industrially produced and “smelly.” Similarly, although rice noodles have become widely available in Korean supermarkets, Korean rice noodles contain 93% rice, while Vietnamese noodles are 97% rice and taste slightly different.

cooking as it was considered to be both “cheap and tasty.”⁶ This case shows a typical case of “taming of the palate” by a foreign multi-national corporation.

Further occasions for cultural experience in Vu Thi Huong’s dietary life are household rituals. Being married to a Korean, Thi Huong is expected to participate in seasonal ancestral rituals of the Lunar New Year and Lunar August Full Moon held at her parents-in-law’s place. Back in Vietnam, the Lunar New Year, the 15th of the First Month, and July 15th known as *Vu Lan* are major festive seasons when ancestral rites are held. On these occasions, special foods are prepared, such as a boiled and elaborately decorated whole chicken, which is the obligatory food item. Sometimes boiled pork chunks are also offered. Another important ritual food that should be included in most festive occasions in Vietnam is *nem*. It is a wrap of rice paper with fillings of mixed meat and vegetables such as minced pork, mushrooms, scorched spring onions (*hanh kho*), boiled potato noodles, eggs, chopped carrots and chopped spring onion seasoned with pepper and salt. While Thi Huong has to learn and assist her mother-in-law in preparing foods at Korean ritual occasions, these occasions poignantly remind her of the similar festivals at home in Vietnam and especially of the foods related to such occasions. So, Thi Huong sometimes cooks those dishes for herself and friends as a way of comforting her nostalgia and homesickness.

2) April Reyes (Filipina woman aged 37 as of 2011)

April is a Filipina woman living in Bucheon with her Korean husband (aged 47) and a daughter (aged 10). She has lived there since her marriage in 2001. April’s husband, who works at a convenience store in Ansan that is owned and run by his mother, has made frequent trips to the States in the past, where he met and befriended Filipinos. He met April through a penpal and married her in February 2001 in the Philippines and they came to Korea together in March of the same year.

⁶ *Aji* in *aji-ngon* means “taste” in Japanese and *ngon* means “tasty” in Vietnamese. When Vu Thi Huong cooked dinner for me in my visit to her place for an interview, she cooked fried shrimp and broccoli and fried squid and I noticed that a large quantity of *aji-ngon* is used for both dishes.

Although April's husband is the second son, the couple has lived with his mother after marriage as his elder brother, the first son, who is supposed to live with the parents, was living in the States with his family for 25 years until they returned to Korea last year. Soon after April came to Korea in March 2001, her father-in-law, who had been ill for a long time, passed away leaving his wife by herself. The first years of co-residence were rather difficult, as April's mother-in-law could not speak a word of English, while April could not speak Korean at all. Yet, April was expected to take on the role of the first daughter-in-law. When living with her mother-in-law, for instance, April had to assist her mother-in-law in making a large quantity of *kimchi* with more than two hundreds heads of napa cabbage at each *kimjang* season in addition to the yearly making of bean paste and chili bean paste. The *kimchi* made by April and her mother-in-law was then shared with the families of April's husband's sister and younger brother as well as that of his father's sister.

She also had to prepare ritual food for the five ancestral rituals (*jesa*) offered every year to the husband's great-grand parents, grand-parents, and deceased father in addition to the seasonal offerings at the New Year and August Full Moon. At every *jesa*, April's mother-in-law makes a large quantity of food to be shared with all the relatives. April, who graduated from a college in the Philippines, worked as an English teacher in a private school, and had to take a leave from her workplace and go to her mother-in-law's place to help her at all those occasions. April thought that she had no choice but to obey her mother-in-law's wishes as she knew very well that the mother-in-law would be upset if April tried to excuse herself for the reason of her work. April once told her mother-in-law, "Mother, can you please stop preparing all these ancestral ceremonies as it is too burdensome to me?" but the mother-in-law, being the stubborn person that she was, would not bend her will.

When the couple asked to establish a separate household with their daughter after about seven years of co-residence, the mother-in-law agreed, "as long as April could cook Korean food and understand Korean culture." After establishing a separate household from the mother-in-law, life has become a lot freer and there has been a great change in their diet too. When living with the mother-in-law, April thought that there were always too many side dishes. Also, at every mealtime, other family members could not start eating

until after the mother-in-law came and sat at the table. This etiquette was particularly difficult for April to adjust to at the beginning, as sharing a family dining table was not a custom in the Philippines where people often ate individually whenever they want to. After the separation, they could behave as they pleased and cook food that they liked. Although April's mother-in-law did not restrict Philippine cuisine in the house, April did not make it because she knew that the mother-in-law did not like it and would never eat it even if April cooked it.

After the family division, April often cooks *adobo* (a fried vegetable dish with pork, vinegar, soy sauce, onions, etc. that tastes very similar to Korean chicken stew. Pork can be used in place of chicken) and *sinigang* (a typical Philippine-style soup with fish, napa cabbage, spring onion and vinegar) at home, which April's husband likes. April buys the ingredients for these dishes at a Philippine shop in Bucheon or at a supermarket in *kangnam* in the Bucheon city center. For everyday meals, April mostly cooks Korean dishes such as chicken stew (*dakdoritang*), bean paste stew, *kimchi* stew, chicken casserole with ginseng and so forth, and, when they eat out, they usually go to Korean restaurants specializing beef ribs or potato stew (*gamjatang*). Since there are Philippine dishes that taste very similar to Korean chicken stew or potato stew, April feels as though she is having Philippine foods. Since they eat more meat in the Philippines compared to the diet in Korea, April also likes meat. For breakfast, the family has ham, fried eggs, and egg stew most frequently, and fish, bean curd, potato stews for other meals of the day. Whenever she craves them, April cooks Philippine dishes such as *sinigang*. April sometimes cooks *kimchi* stew for her daughter, since the daughter who lived with her grandmother as a child loves the dish even for breakfast.

Since April had sufficiently fulfilled her responsibility as a daughter-in-law in a Korean family for nearly ten years of marriage, April's mother-in-law now took pride in April, often boasting to her friends and relatives saying, "April is a good worker!" Even after the family division, April goes to her mother-in-law's place to prepare the ritual food for ancestral ceremonies and even sets the table.⁷ April's mother-in-law expects her rather than the eldest son's

⁷ In traditional Confucian rites, the setting of the table for ancestor ceremonies (*jinseol*) used to be a male task. Only in certain regions are women allowed to participate in

wife to carry out all the family duties saying, “April will take everything over when I die.” But April has told her mother-in-law that she won’t do it, since she knows that it will be very difficult and will incur too much responsibility. April has been a Christian since she was in the Philippines and, after the family division, her husband has also converted and goes to church with her.⁸

3) Mihwa Ju (Korean Chinese woman aged 46)

Mihwa, a Korean Chinese (*joseonjok*) from Yanbian in northeast China, first came to Korea to visit a relative in 1995 when she was 28 years old. She met her husband through one of her relatives, married him in 1998, and settled in Korea. She now lives in Bucheon City with her husband, aged 52, with a fifteen-year-old son and a nine-year-old daughter. Mihwa’s husband is the first son, so she lived with his mother for the first seven years of marriage, until the mother-in-law passed away in 2005. She has painful memories from that time period because she had many difficulties arising from cultural differences and language problems. Although most Korean Chinese can speak Korean, her mother-in-law had some difficulty understanding Mihwa’s dialect perhaps because of Mihwa’s strong accent and unfamiliar expressions, although Mihwa could understand most of what her mother-in-law said. In addition to the language problem, differences between Korean and Korean Chinese customs aggravated the situation. As far as Mihwa knows, there is no such thing as “conflicts between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law” (*gobugaldeung*) in China. Thus, when her husband told her when they married that they had to live with his mother, Mihwa did not foresee much problem. After living with the mother-in-law, however, Mihwa learned how painful it is to live with a person who thinks differently and is thus difficult to communicate with. Mihwa claims that there is no such conflict in China or in Korean Chinese society.

After graduating from a high school in Yanbian, Mihwa proceeded to a college in Changchun where she majored in financial studies. Immediately

this task.

⁸ In Korea, there have been considerable religious conflicts over those converted to Christianity carrying out traditional Confucian ancestor rites (see O.P. Moon 1998).

after graduating from the college, she got a job at a bank as a civil servant where she worked for seven years until the marriage. It was a good job and Mihwa really enjoyed it. In Socialist China, all workers, men and women alike, are given housing at hire. Thus, before coming to Korea, Mihwa did not understand the situation of “having no house to live in.” So, when her mother-in-law told her to be thankful for the fact that they had their own house to live in, Mihwa could not understand. Also, many women from China, especially the Han Chinese women married to Koreans, find it very difficult to understand the Korean custom in which children have to live with the parents and take care of them, as elderly parents rarely become a burden to their children in China where they have jobs and are given a place to live.

They also find it difficult to adjust to the Korean custom of numerous yearly ancestor ceremonies or seasonal offerings, as there is no such custom in China. The Chinese practice ancestor rituals, but only once a year at Cheongmyeong (清明, *Qingming* in Chinese reading) in the spring at the gravesite with simple offerings of wine and confectioneries. As there are no death anniversary rituals for each of the deceased ancestors in China, Mihwa felt that it was a great burden to carry out the numerous death anniversary rites for ancestors every year at home. After her marriage, Mihwa prepared with her mother-in-law the yearly rituals with all the elaborate ritual foods for the deceased grandparents and her father-in-law. After her mother-in-law's death, Mihwa performs four ancestor rites every year including one for the deceased mother-in-law in a traditional Confucian style, with the door open at midnight just like her mother-in-law used to do.

The differences in gender role perceptions between China and Korea are another area that required cultural adaptation. Mihwa's own mother was a soldier in China who successfully performed both the official and household duties. Mihwa grew up with her father always praising her mother as a “great woman” and helping with a large part of the housework. In Korea, however, she found that the “patriarchal” husbands have no interests in housework and rarely lend hands to it. During the early years of Mihwa's marriage, her husband once helped her by washing dishes. Mihwa's mother-in-law was shocked to see this, and stopped him from doing it. Since then, Mihwa's husband never helps with housework even when the couple visits Mihwa's family in China, an attitude that sharply contrasts with Mihwa's elder sister's

husband. The latter, who is Chinese and the eldest son-in-law, takes full responsibility of all the chores in his wife's family even though there are two sons (Mihwa's brothers) in the family. When the family moved into a new house, he even worked on the wallpaper for the house. He also does most of the dishwashing and helps his wife take care of children. Mihwa thus feels rather uncomfortable and embarrassed around her siblings, because her husband never lends a hand when they visit Mihwa's family in China.

Since living on her own with her family, after her mother-in-law's death, Mihwa says she cooks the food of her own country "almost every day." What she meant by this was that she pan fries almost everything: for instance, she considers pan-frying vegetables with green pepper, egg plant, garlic as "her own" way of cooking. When the mother-in-law was with the family, it was her work to prepare the meal and Mihwa only helped at her side, since the mother-in-law was a good cook of Korean food. *Kimchi* stew, bean paste stew, cooked vegetables known as *namul* were the most frequent on the family's dining table then, but Mihwa found *namul* most difficult to cook. *Namul* is a dish that is seasoned with bean paste or chili bean paste sauce after lightly blanching the vegetables in boiling water, but Mihwa could never figure out what is the right taste of well cooked *namul* dishes. After the mother-in-law passed away, Mihwa fries most vegetables, even bean sprouts. She sometimes buys *namul* at a Korean supermarket, but only her husband is delighted, as Mihwa's children do not like them. Mihwa's husband, who is originally from Gyeongsang Province, loves rice with mixed *namul* vegetables and chili bean paste sauce.

Even when the mother-in-law was still alive, Mihwa never made bean paste (*doenjang*) or chili bean paste (*gochujang*), but got them from her mother-in-law's sister living in Chuncheon. After her mother-in-law passed away, Mihwa buys pre-made *kimchi* from the supermarket, but it does not constitute a great problem as neither Mihwa nor her children like *kimchi* very much, despite being one of the essential dishes on the Korean dining table. Mihwa's case shows very clearly how the children's palate can be formed according to the mother's preferences: For instance, Mihwa's two children have never developed particular preferences for meat dishes, since Chinese food is characterized by vegetable dishes cooked in various innovative styles, compared to Korean food that is more carnivorous. Similarly, while Koreans

like to barbeque raw meat and take it wrapped with leaf vegetables known as *ssam*, Chinese people always cook meat before eating and rarely barbeque meat straight-up, nor do they have *ssam* culture, that is, taking meat wrapped with various kind of vegetables and seasoned bean paste sauce. As Mihwa's children are accustomed to the Chinese cooking of their mother, they much prefer sweet and sour pork or other kinds of cooked meat dishes to the Korean style barbeque meat. Mihwa cannot make *kimchi* stew very often as she buys expensive, ready-made *kimchi*. But, even when she makes it, it is all for Mihwa's husband, as Mihwa and her children do not like it much. The only Korean food Mihwa and her children sometimes have is bean paste soup.

Also Mihwa claims that there is no place in Korea where she can have "home food," that is, properly cooked Chinese food outside her home. According to Mihwa, the food offered in Chinese restaurants in Korea by no means resembles "home taste" (*gohyang mat*) for her. The unique features of Chinese food can be found in the diverse way of cooking as well as in the variety of different sauces and spices. But the foods offered in Chinese restaurants in Korea do not have a rich taste and are often too greasy. Mihwa has a special liking for noodles and dumplings without filling called *baozi* in Chinese, but there is no place in Korea where one can have those foods. Although they boast of *jajangmyeon* (noodle with black bean paste sauce) as a specialty in many Korean Chinese restaurants, Mihwa never eats it either. According to Mihwa, while Chinese noodles have a good consistency and chewy texture, *jajangmyeon* noodles are too quickly swollen, and stick to each other. The taste of its sauce is also too sweet with too much onion and cabbage and it is not the "taste of Chinese food." If she wants to have a noodle dish, Mihwa would rather have Korean style banquet noodles (*janchi guksu*) than *jajangmyeon*, which is supposed to be Chinese food.

The food of Yanbian, Mihwa's hometown in northeast China, is more like the food of North Korea where people often have *sundae* (stuffed pig intestine) and *naengmyeon* (a cold noodle dish), but the taste of these dishes is also very different from those with the same name sold in South Korea. The *sundae* Mihwa used to have in Yanbian is made of real pig intestines stuffed with a large quantity of glutinous rice or glutinous foxtail millet, lots of chopped spring onion and very little chopped onions. On the other hand,

sundae in South Korea lacks overall flavor because it is often made of edible plastic instead of real pig intestines, potato noodles (*dangmyeon*) in place of glutinous rice, and spring onion. Therefore, when Mihwa's family eats out, they prefer Korean restaurants over Chinese restaurants. Growing up in China, Mihwa did not have fast foods such as pizza, seasoned fried chicken, fish cakes (*odeng*), *sundae* or *tteokbokki* (rice cake in hot sauce), etc. that the children sometimes eat, so she does not crave them even after moving to Korea. One of the dietary habits of Koreans that Mihwa found most difficult to adjust to was that people often cook a large quantity of food for such occasions as ancestor rituals to share with others and eat these dishes after they get cold. In China, it is very important to eat the food immediately after cooking, while it is still hot.

4) Caren (Filipina woman aged 46)

Caren is a Filipina woman who is a pious Unification Church follower married to a Korean man through a "church matching" in 2000.⁹ She now lives in a farm village in Hampyeong, Jeonnam Province with her eighty-five-year-old mother-in-law, fifty-one-year-old husband, ten-year-old twin sons and a four-year-old daughter. She works as a specially employed contract civil servant at Hampyeong County office taking care of counseling and advising for multi-cultural families. Although meal preparation at home is Caren's work, her mother-in-law lends a hand when Caren has to work late or has to go to dinner gatherings at the office. However, because she has a health problem, her mother-in-law cannot fulfill her tasks properly and the children do not like her cooking because she can only provide *kimchi*, vegetable pickles, and bean paste soup, the kind of side dishes that would appear on a rural dining table, and does not give them the kind of foods that children prefer such as sausages, ham, or pan-fried meat balls, etc. Caren nevertheless is thankful to her mother-in-law in that she can rely on her help while she carries out the office work. She regrets that her Korean husband does not

⁹ The Unification Church that has its headquarter in South Korea declares as one of its main objectives to integrate human race through marriage and has brought many Filipina and Japanese women into Korean villages.

help much with the housework and the children, as it is very common in the Philippines for fathers and male siblings to help with these things.

In addition to her work at the County office, Caren also works as a part-time English teacher at Hampyeong High School and sees herself as the main “bread winner” of the family as her income is often higher than her husband’s who is a farmer. Commenting on other foreign women in the village including many Japanese women who are the sole wage earners in the family, Caren says, “Korean rural villages can never survive without foreign women workers like us.” She also claims that they cannot endure the hardships of rural life in Korea if they do not have the faith in the Unification Church. Although it has become a little better now, Caren went through very hard times when she was first married, as her husband was in great debt and used to drink and smoke a lot.

Unlike in April’s case (Case 2) described above, Caren rarely cooks Philippine food at home, as other family members including her own children do not like it much and also because it is very hard to find ingredients, especially the vegetables, that are used in Philippine cooking in Korean rural villages. There are shops in Hampyeong town that sell limited ingredients for Philippine, Vietnamese, Indonesian or Chinese foods, but vegetables are very hard to find. Once, one of the Filipina women living in the same village as Caren went back home and brought the seeds of the typical Philippine ingredient okra and successfully grew it in the village. Later, several Filipina women in the village gathered together and cooked *pinakbet*, a typical Philippine vegetable stew dish. To cook *pinakbet*, one has to cut various vegetables including the home grown okra, green peppers, tomatoes, baby eggplants picked from the garden, and chilies. They are then left to be soaked in fish sauce for a while. Then tomatoes and onions are fried first and then simmered with the other vegetables, fish sauce, and a little water. Although the dish needs Philippine fish sauce, it is difficult to find in Korean markets, so they use salted anchovy sauce that is easy to get. *Pinakbet* is a very common dish in the Philippines that can be found in any Philippine restaurant throughout the year, but in Korea where the seasons are different, it can only be made during the summer. Although one can buy okra in big super markets in Korea these days, it cannot be found in Hampyeong.

On the whole, it is very rare for Caren to have Philippine foods in

Hampyeong, unless her Filipina friends living in nearby towns as Naju, Yeonggwang, Muan, etc. occasionally bring them to her or several Filipina women gather and cook together. Recently, one of her Filipina friends living in Naju gave her some *suman*, glutinous rice cooked in banana leaves. But the children did not want it so Caren ate it with her mother-in-law. Caren cooks mostly Korean food at home, which she learned to make from her mother-in-law, because her children do not like Philippine food. But she thinks that her mother-in-law's cooking is "old style," so she tries different dishes that she has had at restaurants, or learned about via internet searches. At the workplace, Caren usually cooks her own lunch with a female Korean colleague. Her colleague is 34 years old but is not used to home cooking as she is not yet married. So, Caren sometimes cooks Korean dishes for her by searching the Naver (a popular Korean search engine) website. If they turn out to be somewhat authentic in taste, Caren feels that she has become a real Korean.

In addition to *pinakbet* and *suman*, the Filipina women in the village cook green bean soup and eggplant *torta* together. Philippine style green bean soup looks like Korean bean paste soup and is made of dried fish stock with Philippine green beans and *ampalaya* leaves, and tastes a bit bitter. The fish stock for the soup, although easy to get in the Philippines as there are lots of different kinds of dried fish there, is hard to find in Korea, so the women use dried shrimp instead. The Philippine green beans are distributed to each individual to be kept at home. "Eggplant *torta*," peeled eggplants baked in a coating of beaten egg, is another favorite dish that Filipina women often cook and eat together. Despite the slight differences in cooking methods, there are a lot of similarities between Philippine and Korean cuisine. Caren and her friends often experiment with many new dishes made from available ingredients from the village that may be considered either Philippine or Korean dishes. For instance, the Philippine dish *bico* is very similar in looks and taste to Korean *yakbab*, which is also seasoned glutinous rice. While *bico* is made of coconut oil, as there are lots of coconuts in the Philippines, in Korea where coconut oil is difficult to find, sesame oil is used in its place, which makes the dish more aromatic in smell and flavor. Although one can find sesame oil in the Philippines, it is very expensive, so Caren and her friends usually buy it and bring it to the Philippines whenever they visit home. The cooking methods of *bico* and *yakbab* are very similar in that

glutinous rice is soaked in water for about half an hour and steamed with flavorings, but *bico* made by Filipina women does not have garnishings such as jujubes, chestnuts, or pine nuts as in the case of Korean *yakbab*.

Caren's twin sons, who are in elementary school, would never eat these foods, perhaps because they are unfamiliar with them. When Caren and her friends made *pinakbet*, the boys refused to eat it, saying they hate "Philippine smell," and only Caren's mother-in-law shared the food with them. So, Caren had to make a separate fried pork dish with vegetables for the children. Caren believes that the children do not like *pinakbet* because it is a vegetable dish. For the pork dish, Caren boils frozen pig legs, cuts them into pieces, and fries them with chopped green pepper, onions and carrots with soy sauce seasoning. For the seasoning, Caren uses honey or Japanese apricot juice instead of white sugar, which she believes to be healthier. But since apricot juice or honey is much more expensive, Caren uses them in secret without her mother-in-law's knowledge. Not only Caren, but also other Filipina women in the village do not make Philippine foods at home because their children hate them and their in-laws and husbands will not eat them either. When Caren first came to Korea, it was very difficult for her because she did not speak the Korean language and did not know what kind of Korean ingredients she could use as substitutes even when she wanted to make some Philippine dishes. Now, however, she does not feel this as much of a problem, as she has lived in Korea long enough to become accustomed to Korean foods. Also, as she has many Filipina friends in the village, they can gather together and cook Philippine foods whenever they wish.

Another major difference between Korean and Philippine cuisines is that, while there are dishes that may be considered representative "national dishes" in Korea such as *kimchi* or bean paste stew, there is no such thing in the Philippines, which is a "mixed" country comprised of diverse ethnic and cultural groups with different languages and foods. Additionally, the Philippines were historically under many different cultural influences including Spanish, Japanese, Chinese and American. Therefore, even though the common Philippine dish such as *ppansit*, made of potato noodles and looks very much like Korean *jabchae* (mixed vegetable noodles), Caren believes it to be a dish influenced by China and cannot be considered an original Philippine dish. The most distinct feature of Philippine food that

Korean people cannot get accustomed to is that Philippine foods are generally very sour and salty from heavy usage of vinegar and salt. Also, while they eat more fish and vegetables in the Philippines, Koreans eat more meat and generally prefer spicy foods. Despite these differences, the Korean custom of providing soups high in protein to the mother who has recently given birth is also practiced in the Philippines, where mothers are given thick beef broth or fish broth or sometimes barbecued pig's liver.

5) Jun Kajiwara (Japanese male, age 45)

Kajiwara is a Japanese man who married a Korean woman in September 2009 and lived in Pyeongchon near Seoul with his wife and one-year-old daughter until they recently moved to Gyeongju in southeastern Korea. Kajiwara graduated from Kyoto University in Japan in the mid 1980s and worked in a company for about ten years. As he had long been interested in Korea, however, he resigned from the company and worked in the Korea Culture Center in Tokyo for about three years before he came to Korea to pursue further studies. He met his wife at the graduate school where he studied and married her after about a year's courtship.

Although Kajiwara is a man, he prepares family meals at least three times a week, as he lived by himself for more than twenty years and likes cooking. He usually makes Japanese dishes, but he can also cook Korean dishes and particularly likes Korean bean paste. Since Japanese bean paste is made improvisatorially with soybeans that are boiled, crushed, and mixed with *kouji* (industrially produced rice malt), it loses flavor when simmered. Korean bean paste, on the other hand, is made of fermented soybean lumps and tastes richer the longer it is simmered. Kajiwara thinks that such a rich flavor in Korean fermented bean paste stew can never be found in Japan, where food production was industrialized at a much earlier time than in Korea. The fact that he can have Korean bean paste stew any time he wants is one of the reasons he is happy living in Korea. He also likes *cheonggukjang*, which is made of fast-fermented bean paste, as in the case of Japanese *natto*. But there is a slight difference in flavor between *cheonggukjang* and *natto* and he sometimes misses Japanese *natto*. Although a Korean food company *Pulmuwon* produces *natto* and sells it in major super markets, it is rather

expensive for a poor student like himself. So, he must content himself with *cheonggukjang* that tastes almost like *natto*.

Kajiwara can cook Korean dishes as well and once prepared seaweed soup for his wife's birthday meal, but he mostly makes Japanese dishes when he cooks, while his wife makes the basic Korean dishes such as bean paste stew, *kimchi* stew, seaweed soup, and so forth. The Japanese dishes that Kajiwara cooks well include *oyako donburi* made of chicken and eggs, *okonomiyaki* (a Japanese savory pancake containing a variety of ingredients such as shrimp, squid, cabbage, etc.), Japanese style curry, spaghetti and *soba* noodles, etc. Kajiwara buys large quantities of the ingredients he needs to cook Japanese dishes such as consome sticks, curry, *okonomiyaki* mix, soba soup base, etc. whenever he goes to Japan. These are difficult to obtain in Korea and are often very expensive when they are imported. Although curry mix is sold in Korea, its taste is different from Japanese curry paste. When making curry, Kajiwara likes to use "Java Curry Mix," which is rarely found in Korean markets, and uses lots of tomatoes to produce his own curry taste.¹⁰

In Japanese cooking, the most important element is the soup base known as "*dashi*" (出汁) which is also the most difficult part to make. These days, Korean supermarkets such as E-mart have bonito flakes or liquid extract (*tsuyu*) as soup base for Japanese cooking.¹¹ Kajiwara finds Korean products either too salty or inferior in taste, while imported Japanese products are too expensive. Since Kajiwara has a father who is rather fastidious in his palate and who used to teach his wife how to make *dashi* correctly, Kajiwara himself is also quite sensitive to the taste of *dashi*. One of the hardest parts of living in Korea for Kajiwara is that he cannot get used to the taste of Korean *sushi* and beer, which are two very important food items for him. *Sushi* is expensive everywhere, but it has become popularized with the emergence of affordable conveyer-belt *sushi* shops where one may have as much *sushi* as one wishes. Although Kajiwara cannot make *sushi* himself, he does not use the conveyer-belt *sushi* shops in Korea either, because it is still too expensive

¹⁰ After completing his doctorate, Kajiwara plans to open a curry restaurant in Gyeongju, a historic town in southeast Korea where he recently moved.

¹¹ *Dashi* designates the un-seasoned soup base while *tsuyu* means seasoned liquid extract soup base.

and the fish is not as fresh as that in the Japanese shops. To him, Korean beer is also very different from Japanese beer and is tasteless. So, Kajiwara would rather drink *maggeolli* (raw rice wine) or *soju* (white distilled liquor) in Korea.

Kajiwara likes to invite friends over and cook for them. On those occasions, he not only cooks Japanese dishes but also tries various new inventions by mixing Japanese and Korean ingredients. For instance, he makes a new sauce with bean paste and mayonnaise or cooks spaghetti with salted pollock roe sauce. While salted pollock roe spaghetti is a common dish in Japan, people in Korea like it because it is still new and rare in Korea. The taste of the curry Kajiwara cooks is also special for Koreans because he uses a rare stock of curry mix, such as Java Curry purchased in Japan, and lots of tomatoes to produce unique taste of his own. The fact that the price of salted pollock roe and tomatoes is much less in Korea compared to Japan enables Kajiwara to be more daring in his cooking experiments. When his wife is busy, Kajiwara also cooks weaning food for his fifteen-month-old daughter with minutely chopped vegetables, crushed bean curd, and minced meat.

6) Alain (French male aged 40)

Alain met a Korean art student studying in France in 1992 and married her in 1999. After marriage, the couple lived in France, the Netherlands, and England before they finally came to Korea in 2002. At the time of the interview in 2011, Alain was living with his wife and five-year-old daughter in Seoul and working as a French language instructor at a university. When he first came to Korea, Alain and his wife had to live with his wife's parents for about ten months before they found a place of their own. One of the major difficulties was the difference in the daily patterns between the aged parents and the young couple. Apart from the daily patterns, he also found it difficult to adjust to the cultural differences in dietary life. His parents-in-law firmly believed that "a son-in-law must be well-fed," which was rather troublesome for Alain, because he was used to taking in small portions at a time; and even though eating more than he could digest at a time was extremely uncomfortable for him, he did not know how to refuse in the appropriate manner. Once when he did refuse to eat what was offered, his mother-in-

law broke into tears, and this incident was so shocking to Alain that he never tried to refuse again, despite his own suffering.

Before coming to Korea, Alain spent parts of his life in the Netherlands and in England, and he considered himself experienced in adjusting to unfamiliar cultures and environments. He confessed, however, that when he was faced with a whole new set of challenges at the beginning of his life in Korea, this was the first time he felt deeply the difficulties of being a stranger in a foreign land and culture. One of the cultural differences in the dietary life he felt was the ‘categorization of food.’ French culture has its own distinctions regarding what types of food are to be eaten when, in what order, and in what fashion. Even though Koreans had their own system of categorization, it was so different from what Alain was used to that he had much trouble getting used to it. For example, despite his love of fish, he would never have something “smelly” for breakfast; rather, he would prefer some bread, coffee, butter, jam, and some chocolate. Once when the family was having tea together, his sister-in-law brought and offered homemade pickled peppers. Being used to having sweets, cakes, and biscuits along with tea, Alain was surprised at the fact that everyone was so casual about eating pickled peppers. It felt inappropriate to him to refuse it.

This was also true regarding alcohol consumption. In France, different types of alcohol – beer, wine, cognac, whiskey, etc. – are consumed in accordance with specific times of the day. For example, French people believe it is healthier to consume alcohol along with their meals, and that doing so in a slow fashion moderates the effects of alcohol. On the other hand, Alain had the impression that it was more common in Korea to rush their meal first and then begin drinking at another location. While French people generally drink wine along the course of their meals and cognac afterwards, Koreans seemed to believe that “all alcohol is alcohol,” and do not make clear distinctions between types. Also, while it is uncommon to give alcohol as a gift in France, it appeared common in Korea to give bottles of cognac as a gift, for the reason that “it is expensive, and therefore a good gift,” which was very hard for him to understand.

The differences in dietary habits often became more problematic among the elders who were less adaptable to cultural shifts. On their visit to Korea for the wedding, Alain’s parents – who were used to French family gatherings,

which consisted of a big meal starting around noon and proceeded over two to three hour span of time – found it difficult to adjust to the way meals were consumed in Korea. To those who were used to the French custom of serving smaller portions of food and drink in courses and talking in between while waiting, the Korean custom of spreading everything at once on a big table and eating in a relatively short period of time was quite difficult to manage. On a separate occasion, Alain’s wife’s parents invited Alain and his father over during the Full Moon Festival and served various kinds of festive Korean foods. Despite the quality of the served food, Alain’s father was unable to eat such foods at 10:00 a.m. in the morning (he said it made him sick), and had to return home with an empty stomach. When the parents of both sides gathered to eat out, each side would list the types of food undesirable to them, and the options usually narrowed down to nothing but Chinese food.

Another issue Alain found rather peculiar and difficult to understand was the concept that “Western food = higher quality food” in the Korean value system. Alain did not come from a rich family in France, and his economic status in Korea did not fall into the upper class. However, foods that are considered common and affordable in France, such as bread, wine, cheese and charcuteries, were unreasonably expensive in Korea. For example, while a block of Camembert cheese that would cost around 2,000 - 3,000 Korean Won back in France was priced around 16,000 - 17,000 Won in Korea. Although cheese is as widely available in varieties and as common a food as *kimchi* is in Korea, there is not a type of cheese that is cheap and affordable; they were all extremely overpriced. Alain had to settle with the sliced processed kind, which they call “plastic cheese” or “baby cheese” in France, meaning it is processed to be mild enough for babies. In the case of wine, which is consumed in France on an almost daily basis, he found that Koreans considered it an elegant commodity only to be consumed on special occasions or at a fancy bar with classical music playing in the background. He noticed that some Korean TV dramas depict wine with a certain level of negative connotation; he saw that the wealthy, inhumane antagonists usually indulge in exotic foods and were ‘wine drinkers,’ whereas the poor but honest, compassionate protagonists tend to eat common Korean food and drink *soju* or *maggeolli*.

Having lived in Korea for nearly a decade, Alain was well accustomed to

most Korean food. However, he still struggled with it from time to time on certain occasions, as in the ‘pickled pepper with coffee’ case, or when eating fish for breakfast. He also could not adapt to ginger, ginseng, *cheonggukjang* (fast-brewed bean paste) and other types of food with a distinct, strong smell and flavor. This includes much of what Koreans consider “healthy food” – for they often have a certain distinct, strong smell and flavor – and some of the raw fish dishes. Because both Alain and his wife worked, they divided up the task of cooking. Alain usually made breakfast, which consisted of preparing bread with jam and butter, heating milk and making coffee, and preparing fruits. When alone or making food for his child, he usually made pasta, ramen noodles or omelets, and sometimes rice with a fish dish. He used to make French-style cakes occasionally, but stopped after seeing that people did not appreciate it much. Alain’s wife made everything else, including making *kimchi* once or twice a year (they usually get it from his mother-in-law), and day to day meals usually consisting of bean paste stew, *kimchi* stew, pan-fried squash slices, or spring onions. Alain has made an attempt to learn and make some of those dishes by himself, but does not try it so often because he feels that his attempts do not meet high standards.

COLLISIONS AND MUTUAL ADAPTATIONS OF DIETARY CULTURES IN THE FAMILY

Food marks the meeting point of Nature and Culture. The making of food from gathered ingredients can be described as a process of ‘enculturalization,’ while the aspect of the formation of a new taste as a result of a marriage between two people from different cultural backgrounds can be seen as ‘somatization,’ and thus as a process of ‘naturalization.’ In that regard, the multicultural experience in the realm of dietary life is not so much a cognitive matter concerning ideas, ethics, or communication; it is rather a long-term process of multi-culturalization with substantive results. The following is an attempt to analyze the process of one’s adaptation to a food culture and dietary life, based on the aforementioned cases of households of cross-cultural marriage.

The preparation of foods and the manners in which they are divided,

distributed and consumed, are a way of practicing a culture, as well as a set ground for cultural education. In case 2, the Korean mother, by making her Filipina daughter-in-law take part in the seasonal making of bean paste, chili bean paste, and *kimchi* for the entire family and relatives (despite being a city resident), is intending to teach her daughter-in-law of a foreign background the Korean culture that she believes to be righteous. This is clearly shown in the mother's consent; when April and her husband asked, after several years of this 'training,' if they could move out, the mother approved by saying, "now that you know the ways of Korean culture and how to cook Korean food, you may move out" (Ref. case 2).

In other studies performed in rural areas, reports show that when a foreign wife refuses to eat Korean food (or if she does not show enthusiasm for it), it is considered a challenge against the authority of her husband and of her parents-in-law (Y.J. Kim 2009). Thus, there are cases where a foreign spouse is forced, rather hastily, to eat and cook Korean food when not yet accustomed to it. However, this is not limited only to the female foreign spouses in rural families. Even in the case of Alain, a Frenchman married into a Korean family from the city, the same was expected of him; his acceptance of the food made by his mother-in-law, despite all the difficulties in the means of communication, was interpreted by his mother-in-law as his acceptance of her love and consideration. Because of this, his physical capabilities to metabolize the food were of no concern to her (Ref. case 6).

Conflicts and clashes revolving around food and food culture are also clearly visible in the ways the food is divided and consumed. Studies, including two cases in this one, show two of the most common and yet difficult issues for the foreign spouses: the custom that all family members must eat together, and that no one shall pick up their spoons and begin eating until the rest of the elders did so (J.M. Kim and N.H. Yi 2010; Y.I. Bak 2010; G.S. Oh 2010). Despite the fact that the above two are customs that are dying out in the modern urban households in Korea, it seems that even the uncommon or unpopular customs and etiquettes such as these are being emphasized in families with a foreign spouse, perhaps sprouting from the parents-in-law feeling the need to educate the foreigner of traditional Korean customs in the correct manner. This was an issue, above others, to the Filipina women from rural households, to whom the custom of all of the family

members eating together, or the emphasis on prioritizing the elders in eating, were inexistent in their homeland.

The differences in the concept of gender roles and the boundaries of family also appear in the process of food preparation. While most of the interviewees agreed that it is the role of the female spouse to be in charge of preparing meals for the family, they also cited “the patriarchal nature of Korean society” to explain the fact that husbands did not help at all with housework, or the tendency of the Korean parents-in-law to expect the husband not to participate in any of the chores around the house. This was especially difficult for Filipina and Chinese (including Chinese of Korean ethnic origin. Ref. case 3) female spouses, in whose cultures it was a matter of course for husbands and fathers (of both sides) to participate openly in housework as well as childcare. In preparing meals for the family, the foreign wives, while fine with cooking for her husband, their children and husband’s parents, – the ones that they considered “family” – they all displayed a strong level of discontent at having to cook for her younger brother-in-law, his wife and children, the ones they did not consider “family,” despite living in the same house (Y.J. Kim 2009, 142).

Likewise, the customary act of the mother-in-law, at such occasions as family ancestor rites and *kimchi* making season, of making superfluous amount of food for the purpose of dispensing it to distant families is incomprehensible and challenging for most of the foreign spouses. From the viewpoint of the Korean mother-in-law, the daughter-in-law’s participation in family rites and the aforementioned act of ‘food-sharing’ is essential in keeping together the large, dispersed family, and is a crucial role especially for the wife of the first son (*matmyeoneuri*) to carry out.¹² However, for those not familiar with the Korean concept of extended family and the special role of the ‘first daughter-in-law’ within the unit, the act of making and distributing food in this manner can only seem a generous task chosen at free-will of the mother-in-law; the obligation to participate makes them complain, “Why is my labor required for making food for people who are not even of my

¹² In the case of Caren (Ref. case 2), her-mother-in-law has trained and expected Caren to take over all the responsibilities of the *matmyeoneuri* including the preparation of family ancestor rites even though Caren’s husband is the second son in the family.

family?”

Meanwhile, the changes in dietary life that occur within the internationally married, multicultural households in the aforementioned cases are far more reciprocal than they are generally assumed. The critics of multi-cultural policies in Korea argue that the policy is limited by the boundaries of “assimilation policy,” thereby imposing Korean culture upon the immigrants (I.S. Kim et al. 2006). However, at least in the realm of dietary life, the foreign spouses in these international marriages tend to create and modify their own dietary lives, autonomously adding new elements in adjustment. Despite the fact that this happens more frequently and freely within urban households, it is still hard to say that their roles in the rural households are merely repressed. Although that is not to say that they are completely without limitations in cooking, as there are preferences not to be overlooked – such as the general resistance to unfamiliar tastes, such as “vinegar-based soups,” etc. – these foreign spouses form groups within their regions to share their food, and seek ways to expand the range of acceptance (H.J. Kim 2010).

Additionally, we must take into account the fact that people of Asian backgrounds make up most of these internationally married spouses, thus making the process of adaptation in dietary culture more readily feasible; While they may differ in specific ingredients and spices, many Asian cuisines share the basic meal structure – rice accompanied with side dishes, and soup – unlike the structure of many western meals. Therefore, a simple addition of an exotic ‘side-dish’ – such as a broccoli and shrimp dish or a chicken dish made with Vietnamese spices – is enough to make this cross-cultural fusion and adaptation of foreign diets possible. Interestingly enough, different types of cuisine from specific countries in these cases are often defined and marked by a distinct spice or condiment they incorporate, or a certain way they are prepared. Such include the usage of *aji-ngo*n and fish-sauce for Vietnamese food; okra for Filipino food; the usage of curry or *dashi* unavailable in Korea for Japanese food; and the specific way of pan-frying in oil for Chinese and Korean Chinese food.¹³

¹³ According to my interview with a Korean Chinese student from Chiangbai Prefecture in Northeast China, because his father had always made bean paste stew by first stir-frying bean paste in oil, then adding water and vegetables, he believed until he went

The dietary life of internationally married couples may also be significantly influenced by the composition of the family in which they live. According to available statistics, approximately one quarter of all the internationally married couples in South Korea live in an extended family (D.H. Seol et al. 2006). It has been shown above that mothers-in-law in such families believe that teaching their foreign daughters-in-law how to cook proper Korean foods is an important means of cultural education. Likewise, an attitude on the part of married-in foreign spouses of either accepting or refusing to take Korean foods and to willingly prepare Korean meals for other family members or not is immediately taken as a sign of accommodating or resisting the new family relations. It has also been reported that, despite the conflicts between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law (*gobugaldeung*) in Korean families that have been so often mentioned, many of the Korean mothers with foreign daughters-in-law are said to be appreciative of the latter coming to a foreign land to live with their sons and try to help them adjust to the unfamiliar environment (S.D. Jeong and H.J. Yi 2009; S.D. Jeong et al. 2010).

Such a tendency can be seen in the cases in this study as well: the foreign brides are sometimes reluctant to cook the food of their homeland, as other family members do not show particular preference to such foods, but, in no cases studied did the parents-in-law actively prohibit their daughters-in-law from doing so. Even in rural families, the elderly parents willingly share the foods cooked by these foreign brides that are alien to them, and the husbands are on the whole much more adaptable to them. Also, the parents in rural families sometimes positively consider the cooking methods and the related knowledge of their foreign daughters-in-law to be more 'urban' and 'modern,' as the latter often have more education than the parents-in-law, and can communicate in English and are able to use internet services.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the accommodation of foreign foods becomes easier in a nuclear family composition after household branching, as Korean spouses are largely much more accommodating as compared to elderly parents and as it is the mother who takes the major role of forming the dietary habits of the children within a family. We have seen in case 3 above

to Beijing for college that that was the correct, traditional way of making Korean bean paste stew (personal communication).

that the children are more or less completely accustomed to the Korean-Chinese mother's cooking that uses plenty of pan-frying, etc. Similarly, cases 5 and 6 show that the fathers of foreign origin actively participate in the preparation of family meals and the introduction of foods from their home countries, thereby transforming the palate and dietary habits of not only their Korean spouses but also their children into much more enlarged and 'multi-culturalized' ones.

The dietary experiences of multi-cultural families we have examined in this paper forecast a much more fundamental cultural transformation that is different in character and extent from that derived from the recent popularity of ethnic foods noted as a more class-specific consumer pattern in some urban areas. The increase of international marriages at such a speed and extent in contemporary South Korean society indicates an emergence and a rapid increase of new kinds of "Koreans" as members of family and kin, and not as simple extra-somatic, transitory experiences of other cultures. We may also expect that the children of international marriages, as carriers of two different cultures with different perceptions of kinship, gender relations, dietary habits, linguistic traditions, sentiments, etc., will become critical agents in enlarging and diversifying the boundaries of the Korean nation and culture in the long run.

CONCLUSION

A multi-cultural society or multi-culturalism does not simply mean that people of different national and cultural backgrounds co-reside within a state territory. Nor does it simply mean enjoying and consuming the exotic foods, fashion, dance, or festivals that are often staged at the ubiquitous 'multi-cultural' events in contemporary South Korea. To officially recognize and to show concern about the people of different ethnic origins is no doubt a great step forward in Korean society that has so long been politically and culturally mystified by claims that it is a 'single ethnic nation.' For the current multi-cultural debates to become more substantiated, however, they need to be connected to societal efforts to accept and accommodate different cultural elements such as food, clothing, and housing. This means giving up any claim

to the absolute superiority of the customs, dietary habits, and life-styles that one has been used to.

Transnational immigrants, especially the spouses of the international marriages mentioned above, assume the role of the intermediary between two juxtaposed cultures, to resolve and reconcile on a personal and day-to-day basis the differences and conflicts present. This cultural-intermediary position of immigrants is certainly affected by socio-economic processes at the more macro-level, such as the relationship of the two home-countries and the difference in their economic status, etc. Still, individual tastes and preferences, along with the relational dispositions among the family members seem to be the ultimate factors that directly affect the process of adaptation and reconciliation of dietary life within a household. Nevertheless, none of these significantly outweigh the others. For example, even in the case where a Filipina mother, accountable for the main source of income for the family, is the head of the household, her children still may show repulsion toward the “Filipino smell” in their mother’s cooking. In this case, the negative attitude of the children toward their Filipina mother and her cooking may be understood as reflecting the discrimination and exclusion they have experienced at school or in society at large as ‘multi-ethnic’ children, rather than by the relative status of their mother within family.

On the whole, however, it seems that in the dietary life of internationally married couples, both ‘border crossings’ and ‘new inventions’ are relatively freely practiced in cooking methods and tastes. In contemporary South Korea, the continuous increase in both the numbers of international marriages and of children born in such families is significantly challenging the conventional conception of what it means to be Korean, especially when it is based on the supposed purity of the ‘single ethnic nation.’ Similarly, continuous border crossing practiced in the realm of everyday dietary life means blurring of the boundaries of Korean food that consequently calls for new definitions of the national cuisine. Food is often taken as a critical marker of ethnicity in terms of specific national dishes, their smells (such as curry, garlic, or soy sauce, etc.), and the ability to discern their ‘authentic’ flavor. As indicated at the beginning of this paper, the arbitrary marking functions of such national cuisines are sometimes strengthened when people move across borders in the era of globalization. What I have termed ‘multicultural practices’ in the

everyday diets of internationally married couples and their families, however, indicates a contrary trend as the proliferation of multi-ethnic and multi-cultural elements resulted from increasing marriage migration constantly blurs the accepted boundaries of the Korean nation, national culture, and national cuisine in contemporary South Korea.

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