Taste of Korea: Governmental Discourse on National Cuisine and Its Articulation of Nation-ness

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〈Abstract〉

In 2008, the Korean government announced the globalization of *hansik* (Korean cuisine) as a national project and declared 2008 the 'Year of Korean Food Globalization.' Since then, the government and its associated organizations have fostered a large number of discussions on Korean food, using public announcements, festivals, exhibitions, forums, and media outlets. The purpose of this article is to understand this growth of governmental discourse on national cuisine as a struggle for nation-ness. Due to its incomplete nature, a nation requires a constant symbolic process of the naturalization of arbitrariness, which imbues it with an aura of factuality. In this article, I argue that the Korean government utilizes national cuisine to narrate 'Korea' and sustain the binding force of the nation-state in the face of open-market structures. This study examines both the social contexts and concrete examples of the Korean government's discursive practices with regard to Korean cuisine. Based on an analysis of news articles about Korean food globalization published before and during the early Lee MyungBak administration, I argue that the Korean government's growing interest in Korean cuisine was initiated not only by its awareness of the increasing size of the global food industry, but also by its

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efforts to maintain the national unity of Korean society, which would be weakened by the KORUS FTA. In order to offer detailed properties of the governmental discourse on Korean cuisine, I examined *The Taste of Korea*, an online newsletter of the Korean Food Foundation, which had played a crucial role as the only official organization in promoting Korean food, both domestically and globally. My semiotic analysis of the newsletter shows that the Korean government emphasizes the homogeneity, uniqueness, and tradition-embeddedness of Korean cuisine. These patterned themes demonstrate that the Korean government, through the discourse of national cuisine, seeks to stress intra-national sameness and unity of Korean society, as well as the ethnic and racial purity of Korean people and culture. While situated in a Korean context, this article broadly contributes to current studies on gastronationalism by unveiling the reflective and formative roles of food discourse with regard to a discourse of the nation.

Key Words: governmental discourse, national cuisine, invented tradition, gastronationalism, Korean food globalization

On February 25, 2008, MyungBak Lee, the 17th President of South Korea, announced the globalization of *hansik* (Korean cuisine) as a national project. One month later, the Minister of Food, Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (MFAFF) declared 2008 the 'Year of Korean Food Globalization.' He announced that the Korean government would promote the sustained growth of the food and agriculture industry, establish a national food cluster, and make Korean food one of the five most popular cuisines in the world by 2017.

The Korean government's increasing interest in Korean cuisine was primarily based on an awareness of the enlarging size of the global food industries. It was also interlocked with Lee's presidential election pledges to improve the domestic agriculture and fishery industries, as well as his

policies on foreign affairs and national security. For a better understanding of this phenomenon, however, we should take into consideration the role of food in cultivating a sense of national belonging. As demonstrated by various sociological and anthropological studies, food is critical to (re) making social identities and group boundaries (Appadurai, 1981; Belasco, 2008; Bell & Valentine, 1997; Ceccraini, 2010; Cwiertka, 2006; Holtzman, 2006; Mintz & Du Bois, 2002). In particular, national cuisine strongly ties collective identity to food, and functions as a central part of gastronationalism and other nationalist projects (Bell & Valentine, 1997; Cwiertka, 2006; DeSoucey, 2010). In Korea, the government and its associated organizations have fostered a large number of discussions on Korean food to sustain the binding force of the nation-state since 2008, using public announcements, festivals, exhibitions, forums, media outlets, and organizational magazines.

The purpose of this article is to understand the growth of governmental discourse on national cuisine as a struggle for nation-ness. Due to its incomplete nature (Bhabha, 1990), a nation requires a constant symbolic process of "the naturalization of arbitrariness," which imbues it with "an aura of factuality" (Foster, 1991, p. 237). Here, I argue that the Korean government utilizes national cuisine to narrate 'Korea' and establish its cultural boundaries, which in turn, obscures the temporality and indeterminacy of the nation (Bhabha, 1990). To make this argument, I first discuss the anthropological notion of food as 'deep play' and the invented nature of national cuisine, which underlie the research agenda of this article. Then, I elucidate the economic and political backgrounds of the Korean government's increased interest in food matters to contextualize my analysis. To offer detailed properties of the governmental discourse on

Korean cuisine, I then analyze *The Taste of Korea*, the official newsletter of the Korean Food Foundation, focusing on the cover page of each volume, which features photographic images of 'traditional' Korean food.

Ⅰ. Food, National Cuisine, and National Identity

1. Food as 'Deep Play'

In our everyday lives, we tend to take culinary practices and traditions for granted. The ubiquitous nature of food-related practices particularly makes their ideological and political relevance almost invisible (Parasecoli, 2008). Yet, food means more than just 'what we eat'; indeed, people use food to speak with one another, establish rules of behavior, and reveal 'what they are' (Belasco, 2008); moreover, our foodways are embedded in economic, political, emotional, and ideological relationships among people (Cwiertka & Walraven, 2001). Thus, the study of food-related practices can signal the material structure and symbolic boundary politics of a given society across time and space (DeSoucey, 2010).

The 'culinary' turn in academia began in the late 1970s as a result of work by anthropologists, sociologists, folklorists, and historians who understood food as a multilayered and multidimensional subject (Holtzman, 2006). They see food as a vantage point for examining various issues concerning theory and research methods (Mintz & Du Bois, 2002). For example, scholars have discussed food as a system of communication and symbolic value creation, a key component of rituals and social distinction, and/or a site of memory and meaning construction (Barthes, 1979;

Holtzman, 2006; Mintz, 1985; Munn, 1986; Sutton, 2010). In particular, Appadurai (1981) utilizes Clifford Geertz' anthropological notion of deep play and argues that "food can signal rank and rivalry, solidarity and community, identity or exclusion, and intimacy or distance" (p. 494).

Drawing on these seminal studies, researchers have addressed issues of identities, memories, and boundaries through the subject matter of food. These inquiries have often been explored with such expressions as 'You are what you eat' (Scholliers, 2001), 'We are what we ate,' and 'We are where we eat' (Belasco, 2008; Bell & Valentine, 1997; Gabaccia, 1998). This close relationship between food and identity has been evident in an increasing number of recent sociological, anthropological, ethnographical, and geographical studies (see Belasco, 2008; Bell & Valentine, 1997; Gabaccia, 1998; Kanafani-Zahar, 1997; Korsmeyer, 1999; Lentz, 1999; Leitch, 2008; Wilk, 2008).

Discussions on food and belonging have not been limited to companions, villages, or kin groups. Researchers have extended their discussions to the intertwined relationships between food practices and the nation. To take an example, Preston-Werner (2009) notes that eating *gallo pinto* (rice and beans) arouses a nostalgic image of lived culture and a sense of national belonging in Costa Rica. Within East Asian contexts, Tam (2001) examines how Hong Kong people establish their national identity by eating *yumcha* (several small courses of dim sum and Chinese tea); additionally, Ohnuki-Tierney (1993) argues that rice, as the staple of the Japanese diet, plays a central role in constructing Japanese national identity. By examining transformations in Belizean food practices from colonial times to the present, Wilk (2008) demonstrates that food practices are firmly linked to the ways people identify and experience their

nationhood. In this sense, Bell and Valentine (1997) write, “Food and the nation are so commingled in popular discourses that it is often difficult not to think one through the other” (p. 168).

2. National Cuisine as a Vehicle of National Identity

The relationship between food and national identity is strongly tied to the development of national cuisine. Despite its seemingly essential nature, however, national cuisine is a modern construct (Belasco, 2008). Indeed, the proliferation of culinary nation-making was a distinguishing feature of the 19th and 20th centuries (Cwiertka, 2006). As other modern traditions conceal their invented nature (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983), national cuisine also hides its short-lived origins and complex histories of hybridity —trade links, cultural exchange, and colonialism—as well as its history of negotiation between local and foreign, private and public, and high and low (Bell & Valentine, 1997; Cwiertka, 2006). In so doing, national cuisine naturalizes a clear continuity with the past and ethnic cores, provides the illusion of a common history, and constructs intra-national sameness. Additionally, its emphasis on a shared past and ethnic cores makes what we eat a reservoir of both personal recollection and collective memories (Belasco, 2008; Holtzman, 2006).

National cuisine serves two opposed semiotic functions—the homogenization and heterogenization of actors (Appadurai, 1981). Through the study of the creation of Indian national cuisine, Appadurai (1981) argues that Indian cookbooks from the 1960s to 1980s condensed regional and local culinary diversity to a single dish in order to construct ‘the taste of India.’ Consequently, cultural, religious, and ethnic differences of Indian

people were reduced, while the unity of Indian society was enhanced. In a similar vein, Cwiertka (2006) claims that in the course of inventing Japanese national cuisine, the diversity of local food practices was replaced by a peculiar set of food practices and tastes with which the majority of Japanese people would willingly identify. On the other hand, national cuisine speaks of 'difference.' The Jewish dietary law *kashrut* is a semantic system that enables Jewish people to classify foods as either 'clean' or 'unclean,' and therefore distinguishes themselves from others (Douglas, 1966). Such distinctions clearly identify those who belong to particular cultural norms and practices, and those who do not (Palmer, 1998). Specifically, at times of national crisis, national cuisine gains enhanced symbolic values and evokes strong nationalism in confronting "filthy foreign food" (Bell & Valentine, 1997, p. 167); furthermore, it becomes a medium of cultural politics that demarcates national boundaries to defy the homogenizing force of globalization (DeSoucey, 2010).

Additionally, the ubiquity and unconsciousness of food maintain nationhood as an integral part of ordinary life. Moreover, as significant element of the material world (Palmer, 1998), food functions as a "banal flag" of national identity (Billig, 1995, p. 181). This culinary flagging may be unconsciously displayed, but constantly reminds people of the nation on a daily basis, and serves to keep people aware of where they belong and what they believe. However, most studies that approach nations through the lens of food have explored the limited dimensions of food practices, such as food production and consumption. Though food discourses are intertwined with the organization of everyday conduct and function as a "biological device" that links individuals to a multitude of governing bodies (Hiroko, 2008, p. 9), the discursive dimension of food has hardly

been studied.

Due to the rise of food television within the past two decades, scholars have begun to pay more attention to the discursive dimension of food in order to investigate such issues as class, gender, age, and ethnicity (Adema, 2000; de Solier, 2005; Hansen, 2008; Kelly, 2017; Ketchum, 2005; Oren, 2013; Parasecoli, 2008; Swenson, 2009; Wright & Sandlin, 2009). Yet, there is still a shortage of academic research on the conjuncture of food discourse and the nation. It is also noteworthy that the tendency to protect national cuisine as representative of national traditions is a transnational phenomenon; particularly, in the face of open-market structures various nation-states have asserted national claims of cultural patrimony for foods to carve out their global position (DeSoucey, 2010).[1] It is within this context that the current study critically examines the Korean government's discourse of national cuisine and its articulation of nation-ness.

Ⅱ. Research Methods

This article explores both the social contexts and concrete examples of the Korean government's discursive practices. To offer detailed properties of the governmental discourse on Korean cuisine, I examined *The Taste of Korea*, an online newsletter of the Korean Food Foundation (hereafter,

1) Those who designated their national cuisine as the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity include Croatia (2010), Mexico (2010), France (2010), South Korea (2013), Japan (2013), Georgia (2013), Cyprus/Croatia/Spain/Greece/Italy/Morocco/Portugal (2013), Turkey (2011; 2013), Armenia (2014), North Korea (2015), and the UAE/Saudi Arabia/Oman/Qatar (2015).

KFF), which had been published twice a month from August 2011 to February 2014. Although other government institutions, such as the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and the Ministry of Health and Welfare, have implemented their own food-related policies, KFF has functioned as the only official organization of Korean food globalization. KFF has manifested itself as a private, nonprofit, and nonpartisan organization; however, its policies and directions have been determined by governmental agencies. For instance, WoonCheon Jeong, a former Minister of MFAFF, was appointed as the first president of the foundation (Lee, 2010, March 17); YoonOk Kim, the first lady, was appointed as an honorary president of the Korean Food Globalization Committee—the initial form of KFF. In addition, its status became legally secured due to the enactment of the Food Industry Promotion Act and the amendment of the Enforcement Decree of the Food Industry Promotion Act.[2] Thus, KFF provides a vantage point for observing how the Korean government has promoted Korean food, and its newsletter, *The Taste of Korea*, provides a good window through which government discourse on Korean food can be observed, although it is not a popular magazine that retains significant

2) Article 17 (Globalization of Traditional Food and Dietary Culture) of the Food Industry Promotion Act states, "In cases where deemed necessary to globalize traditional food under paragraph (1), the State and local governments may subsidize expenses incurred in advertising the Korean traditional food and dietary culture, assisting Korean restaurants opening branches overseas and food industry opening overseas markets, improving competitiveness of the food industry operating overseas, etc" (Ministry of Food, Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries, 2008, March 21). In addition, Article 39 of the Enforcement Decree of the Food Industry Promotion Act entrusts authority to KFF as follows: "The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs shall entrust the affairs related to the globalization of the traditional food and dietary culture provided for in Article 17 of the Act to the institutions for Korean food globalization projects designated under Article 17-2 of the Act" (Ministry of Food, Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries, 2012, July 22).

circulation or readership in Korea.[3)]

Given that discourse includes not only written and spoken texts, but also visual images (Fairclough, 1995), this article analyzes the cover page of 27 volumes of *The Taste of Korea* published from August 2011 to September 2012. As noted above, the newsletter was published between August 2011 and February 2014, including 62 volumes. However, since the 28th volume, it used either an image that would signify the organization's mission or paintings that could symbolize Korea in general. For this reason, I focused on the first 27 volumes, which provide a photographic representation of 'traditional' Korean food on the cover page. Through an analysis of these images, I aimed to discover the patterned themes that the newsletter seek to convey with regard to Korean food, as well as the representational strategies used to justify these particular themes. Specific attention was paid to how the newsletter produces connotative meanings and transforms them into factual systems. As Barthes (1973) writes, the meanings of cultural texts in a second signification order—connotation—are constructed through the use of other sign systems. These sign systems can be loosely or tightly connected, and the relations within them can vary (Manning & Cullun-Swan, 1994). Yet, it is through these relations with other sign systems that particular cultural texts generate mythical value and meaning. With that in mind, I explored the following inquiries: 1) What food practices are represented as 'Korean' food practices?; 2) How are particular food practices visualized as 'tradition?'; and 3) How is regional and class-specific culinary diversity negotiated in the construction of the 'Taste of Korea?'

3) Although the newsletter attempts to reach a global audience, it is targeted at domestic people. Indeed, the first 10 volumes do not have an English translation.

As Fairclough (1992) points out, discourse analysis—even a textually-oriented discourse analysis—should address not only concrete texts, but also the social contexts in which the texts are embedded. Thus, before answering the above-mentioned questions, I will explain the economic and political contexts of the Korean government's strong intention to globalize Korean food. For doing this, I searched news articles on *hansik segyehwa* (Korean food globalization) published before and during the early MB (MyungBak Lee) administration via KINDS (Korean Integrated Newspaper Database System), which is provided by the Korea Press Foundation. After an initial reading of 1,618 news articles published from May 2007 to April 2012, I removed articles that did not offer a meaningful coverage of Korean food globalization, ending up with 394 articles on Korean food and 163 articles on Korean food globalization. In order to uncover the implicit and multilayered social conditions of the Korean government's increased interests in Korean food, I applied other search words that often appeared on the initial search results, such as President Lee's campaign pledges (82 articles) and the Korea-United States Free Trade Agreement (67 articles). The analysis of news articles was done through the researcher's careful reading rather than a systematic analysis, as its goal was not to identify journalistic discourse on Korean food, but to contextualize and nuance the analysis of *The Taste of Korea*. In my presentation, the main focus will be on the semiotic analysis of the newsletter; news articles will be used to historically situate my analysis, and thus avoid textual reductionism.

Ⅲ. The Economic and Political Contexts of the Government's Interest in Food

The Korean government's focused attention to food matters was initiated by its awareness of the increasing size of the global food industry, and its awareness of other countries' efforts to make their own food culture global. In his writing for <Seoul Economic Daily>, YoungMan Kim (2007, October 12), Director of the Bureau of Agricultural Marketing, stressed that the scale of the global food industry was much larger than that of the auto industry and IT industry. Indeed, the market breadth of the global food industry in 2008 was $4,800 billion USD; IT, $1,500 billion; and auto, $1,000 billion (Lee, 2008, October 1). He pointed to the Dutch and Danish cases that nurtured the food industry as a driving force of the national economy by establishing food clusters, such as the Food Valley and Öresund Clusters. Kim (2007, October 12) also referred to the efforts of Thailand, Japan, and Italy to globalize their national cuisine, with examples being Thailand's 'Kitchen to the World' project, Japan's 'TRY Japan's Good Food,' and Italy's 'Ristorante Italiano Certificate.'

Based on this awareness, WoonCheon Jeong, Minister of MFAFF, announced that MFAFF would promote the food industry, establish a national food cluster, and make Korean food one of the world's best five cuisines (Jeong, 2008, July 28). *The Taste of Korea* also introduced other countries' efforts to globalize their food and food culture as valid grounds for Korean food globalization. In January 2012, KyuYong Seo, the new Minister of MFAFF, said:

> Our goal of globalizing Korean food is being achieved in enterprising ways: to apply sustainability to our food, agriculture, forestry, and fishery industries… Other countries renowned for their culinary culture, such as Japan, Italy, and France, are devoting considerable public and private resources to make their own food culture global (Seo, 2012, p. 4).

As described above, the economic grounds and references to other countries' successful cases have been at the center of the governmental and journalistic justification of the Korean Food Globalization project. However, its implicit relation to President Lee's economic and foreign policy initiatives, which required the ratification of KORUS FTA (The Free Trade Agreement between the United States of America and the Republic of Korea),[4] should not be ignored. The market-oriented economic policy of MyungBak Lee was called MBnomics, and his stated goals were expressed in the 747 Plan: 7% annual growth in the GDP, 40,000 USD per capita, and making Korea the world's seventh-largest economy (Hwang, 2008, February 23). When he was a presidential candidate, Lee associated his economic policies with foreign and security policies, claiming that Korea had to strengthen its national security and foreign relations for a 7% annual growth in the GDP (Nam, 2007, August 23). Particularly, Lee's foreign policy initiative, the MBdoctrine, advocated tightening the US-Korea alliance. He stated that he would rebuild better relations with the United States through a greater emphasis on free market solutions (Kim, 2008, August 20). For example, at the open forum of presidential candidates held by the Korean Advanced Farmers Federation

4) Korea and the United States reached an agreement on FTA in April, 2007 under the Roh MooHyun administration. The KORUS FTA was passed in the National Assembly of Korea in November, 2011 and became effective in March, 2012.

on November 6, 2007, Lee defined the KORUS FTA as an unavoidable reality. He said, “You may say that you do not want the KORUS FTA, but you are the person who will overcome FTA,” and, “Do you think you can go easy with the current farm management? You can’t” (Jang, 2007, November 7).

Considering the ratification of the KORUS FTA as one of the critical factors in implementing MBnomics and the MBdoctrine, Lee sought a way to justify his policies and obtain the consent of those who would suffer losses caused by the KORUS FTA. Specifically, in order to reduce opposition from farmers and fishermen and compensate the putative loss of rural areas, Lee announced that he would transform the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries into the Ministry of Food, Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (Jeong, 2008, July 28). On December 20, 2007, the day after he was elected president, Lee claimed that his attempt to reorganize these ministries reflected his plan to change the concept of agriculture from a primary industry to secondary and tertiary industries that would include food processing, distribution, and service (Jeong, 2007, December 20). At a public meeting with representatives of farmers and fishermen on January 21, 2008, he also stressed that the goal to combine the food industry with agriculture and fisheries was to create added value and to avoid a potential crisis resulting from the expansion of agricultural product importation (Yim, 2008, February 14).[5] Although the economy was foregrounded,

5) Drawing on Lee’s pledges and plans, the MFAFF also established ‘Making-Money Agriculture and Fisheries, Rural Areas Worth Living In’ as a new goal of agricultural administration so as to enhance the competitiveness of Korean agriculture and to face market-opening, which would be followed by the KORUS FTA (Baek, 2008, March 19; Woo, 2008, March 16). Yet, the focus of the MFAFF was on promoting the agri-food industry rather than stabilizing rural household incomes (Baek, 2008, March 19).

Lee's governmental reorganization was not irrelevant to his attitude toward the KORUS FTA. Within this context, the Korean government began to address food as an industry and implemented the Korean Food Globalization project as a tool for improving the national economy. This close, but implicit relationship between the KORUS FTA and Korean food globalization is properly described on the weblog of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), which is designed to provide an easy explanation of the government's foreign policies to ordinary people:

> Korean food globalization will be rapidly developed as the age of FTA has arrived. Korean food globalization is the best opportunity for agriculture and fisheries, which may suffer a loss because of the FTA. Once Korean food globalization is begun by the FTA, the export of Korean agricultural products will be innovatively increased. The fear that Korean agriculture will be damaged by the FTA is groundless. Rather, due to the FTA, we will be able to expand our market and our agri-food all over the world (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade [MFAT], 2012, February 21).

Ⅳ. Features of the Governmental Palate

Within the above-mentioned economic and political contexts, *The Taste of Korea* emphasized three repetitive themes when visually representing Korean food: 1) the homogeneity of Korean food, 2) the uniqueness of Korean food, and 3) Korean food as a primordial tradition. To legitimize the homogeneity of Korean food, ewsletter employed three strategies, each of which is not exclusively distinguished. First, it reduced the class diversity of Korean food. When the newsletter portrayed *hanjeongsik* (the

traditional Korean set menus that are spatially developed) in its first volume,[6] it presented *chilcheop bansang* (a table setting composed of seven dishes, including rice and side dishes) as the standard *bansang* (table setting). However, in Korea, the number of dishes varied in the past, depending on socio-economic class, such as ordinary people, noble families, and royal families: *chilcheop bansang* was not a trans-class food practice. In other words, *The Taste of Korea* represented the food practices of a specific class as the representative and traditional food practices of Korea. Secondly, *The Taste of Korea* strategically removed the local diversity of Korean food. Through the color tone of soup (Vol. 11-1), one can recognize that the soup of *tteokguk* (rice cake soup) is made of *sagolgukmul* (beef bone stock). While people in the mid- and inland provinces of Korea enjoy beef stock, people in the southern regions, especially the coastlines, tend to cook rice cake soup with *myeolchi* (anchovy) broth. Additionally, salt is presented as the main seasoning for *kongguksu* (a cold soybean noodle soup) (Vol. 20). Yet, in *Jeollado* (Jeolla province), people often season cold soybean noodle soup with sugar. Given that food preparation and flavor principles are important elements of a national cuisine (Belasco, 2008), these examples show how

6) In this paper, I used the English translation of Korean food menus made by the Korean Food Foundation to deliver the organization's intention as it is. For example, there has been an ongoing controversy over the origin of *hanjeongsik*, as the term *jeongsik* came from the Japanese expression *teshoku*. According to a food historian and anthropologist, Youngha Joo (2011), there was no such expression as *hansik* or *hanjeongsik* before Japanese colonization. Rather, Japanese colonialists coined the term *Joseon eumsik* (food of the Joseon dynasty) in order to distinguish it from their mainland food; additionally, it was replaced by *hansik* (Korean food/cuisine) for administrative purposes when the modern form of the Korean nation-state was established. Nevertheless, the Korean Food Foundation represents *hanjeongsik* as a cultural tradition, featuring it in the first volume.

regional culinary differences are replaced by a single dish to construct a national taste (Appadurai, 1981; Cwiertka, 2006).

The last strategy, albeit overlapped with the two other strategies, was to standardize Korean food. For example, *bibimbap* has different stories regarding its origins: royal cuisine, the king's refugee food, *eumbok* (partaking of sacrificial food), temple food, and marketplace food (Lee, 2006). Also, there are various ways to cook *bibimbap,* according to different regions in Korea, such as *Seoul*, *Ahndong*, *Jinju*, *Haeju*, and *Jeonju*. Yet, the photo of *bibimbap* in the second volume represents *Jeonju*- and the royal cuisine-style as a traditional way of preparing *bibimbap*. This particular food preparation is 'anchored' as a norm or tradition by its caption, which speaks of the main ingredients of *bibimbap*: "Rice topped with various cooked vegetables such as zucchini, mushroom, and bean sprouts, plus beef and a fried egg. Served with *gochujang* (red chili paste), which should be mixed in thoroughly" (KFF, 2011, August, p. 1). By concealing the different origins and styles of *bibimbap*, the newsletter removed the diversity of taste in favor of 'decent' taste.

The second theme, the uniqueness of Korean food, was justified by two strategies: hiding the hybrid nature of Korean food and assimilating other food cultures. As Pieterse (2009) puts it, all cultures are historically mixed. The national cuisine is also a mixture of the old and new, and of the local and foreign (Cwiertka, 2006). For instance, *shinseonro* (a brass chafing dish), featured in the seventh volume, was developed as a highbrow food in Korea with the import of the Chinese *huoguo* (Chinese hot pot) in the 16th century. Though it was invented as a symbol of Korean cuisine by the Japanese in the early 20th century, it was an outcome of the cultural exchange between Korea and China (Joo, 2013).

Also, the modern form of *japchae* (a mixed dish of boiled bean threads, stir-fried vegetables, and shredded meat) (Vol. 8) could not have been developed without the import of *dangmyeon* (glass noodle) from China in the late 19th century, and of brewed soy sauce from Japan in the early 20th century (Lee, 1985; Joo, 2013). In other words, *japchae*, which has occupied an important position on Korea's feast table since the 1930s, is a joint work of the Korean, Chinese, and Japanese, which is inseparable from Japanese colonization. In addition, although the newsletter presents *gochu* (red hot pepper) as a distinctive type of Korean seasoning, it is said that red hot pepper was introduced by Japan during the *Imjin* war (Japanese invasion of Korea in 1592) (Kwon, Jeong, & Yang, 2011). However, *The Taste of Korea* did not speak of this hybridized and short-lived origin of Korean food when it introduced the above-mentioned foods. According to Fairclough (1995), discourse is constitutive both in conventional and creative ways. de Cillia, Reisigl, and Wodak (1999) further develop this idea, distinguishing four types of discursive strategies —constructive, perpetuating, transformational, and destructive. By concealing the hybrid nature of Korean food, the newsletter prevented people from recognizing significant others or other food cultures involved in the development of Korean cuisine. In so doing, it perpetuated existing myths about the uniqueness and purity of Korean cuisine, and eventually enhanced a sense of continuity to ethnic cores, whether imagined or experienced.

Another strategy is constructive rather than perpetuating. It is constructive in that it incorporates other food cultures into the features of Korean cuisine. For example, chopsticks were often horizontally placed below food on the newsletter's cover page (see Figure 1). However, this

table setting represents the Japanese style: chopsticks and spoons are vertically placed in Korea. Nevertheless, *The Taste of Korea* portrayed it as a distinctive manner or 'protocol' (Barthes, 1979) of Korean food culture. While the first strategy reinforces the uniqueness of Korean cuisine by hiding its modern and hybrid nature, the second one constructs or reinvents it by taking advantage of others' food practices.

<Figure 1> Cover photo of The Taste of Korea, Vol. 3

To portray Korean cuisine as a primordial tradition, the newsletter emphasized the embodiment of national culture in Korean food. Most food images in *The Taste of Korea* consist of five colors: yellow, blue, red, white, and black (see Figure 1).[7] These five colors imply the philosophy of Yin-Yang and the Five Elements, which had provided Korean people

7) At times, each color is replaced by analogous color. For example, red is replaced by pink, which is next to red on the color wheel; black, brown; blue, green.

with an epistemological and ontological basis in the past (Dong-A Ilbo Publication Team, 2010). In order to materialize the five colors, the newsletter occasionally added unnecessary ingredients to the food. For instance, when presenting *neobiani* (slices of seasoned roast beef) (Vol. 4), it portrayed *kim* (seaweed) as a garnish, which is an unusual way of food preparation and is unnecessary for flavor. More frequently, it directly used other traditions with a longer history, such as traditional ornaments, architecture, and fabrics, to complete the five colors when the food itself did not complete all of them (see Figure 2). Additionally, *The Taste of Korea* represented a certain food as traditional through metaphorical relations with signs of other symbolic systems (Manning & Cullun-Swan, 1994). For instance, the image of *songi-sanjeok* (pine mushroom shish kebab) is designed to arouse the imagery of Korean painting and calligraphy (see Figure 3).

<Figure 2> Cover photo of The Taste of Korea, Vol. 5

<Figure 3> Cover photo of The Taste of Korea, Vol. 27

Not surprisingly, most traditions that are directly or metaphorically called for do not include 'low' culture; only high culture was formulated as a cultural reference in *The Taste of Korea*, as Gellner (1983) notes. Such a practice implies that not all ethnic cores or cultural practices are selected as traditions: some are brought together, while others are neglected or expunged for the present purpose (Edensor, 2002). This visual strategy supports Smith (2003)'s following argument: "[Ethnic cores] will only survive and flourish as part of the repertoire of national culture if they can be made continuous with a much longer past that members of that community presume to constitute their 'heritage'" (p. 279).

By representing Korean food in a peculiar way, *The Taste of Korea* reinforced the homogeneity of the Korean people and culture. As referred to above, images of Korean food strategically serve to reduce class and local diversity in Korea. This discursive strategy of assimilation contributes to the construction of intra-national sameness (de Cillia, Reisigl, & Wodak, 1999), bridging and homogenizing regional and class differences.

In the meantime, as van Dijk (1993) explains, the discursive construction of the self always accompanies the construction of others. Within the governmental discourse of Korean food, the representation of other groups is absent, whether positive or negative. However, it does not mean that those discourses do not draw a boundary between 'us' and 'them.' Rather, they reinforce a boundary fetishism (Pieterse, 2009) by hiding the boundaries according to which Korean people identify themselves. Specifically, through deliberate representational acts, the newsletter concealed the mixed origins of Korean food and consequently reproduced a fantasy about the ethnic and racial purity of the Korean people and culture, which has been a tenet of the Korean nation since its emergence. As Smith (1991) notes, every nation-state contains civic (political) and ethnic (cultural) elements in different forms, producing a distinctive form of nationhood. In Korea, the notion of nation emerged in the early 20th century in response to Japanese colonialism (Youn, 2013), defining the Korean nation as an "ethnically homogeneous and racially distinctive collectivity" (Shin, Freda, & Yi, 1999, p. 469). In particular, the term *minjok* was developed in 1907 in order to call for strong ethnic nationalism (Chang, 2010). Since then, there has been a substantial overlap among race, ethnicity, and nation in Korea: race has functioned as a "marker" of ethnic identity and has played an "instrumental role" in defining the Korean nation (Shin, Freda, & Yi, 1999, p. 469). This conflation of race, ethnicity, and nation is connoted in the representational practices of *The Taste of Korea*.

Additionally, visual emphasis on the philosophy of Yin-Yang and the Five Elements represents Korean people as those who share ethnic cores and traditional values. For instance, the discourse of Korean food stresses

the group-oriented characteristics of Korean people by presupposing shared traditional values, such as *johwa* (balance) and *hwahap* (harmony), which are connotatively manifested in the below images (see Figure 4). Korean food is also portrayed as a 'tradition' through the juxtaposition with other cultural traditions that have a longer history. This strategy legitimizes the continuity of Koreanness to the past and enhances a sense of shared collective memories. Yet, the process of recollection is always selective: only the idealized past is recalled and reconstituted. Through the selective reproduction of "the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths, and traditions" (Smith, 2001, p. 30), *The Taste of Korea* constructed the distinctive national heritage of Korea, which in turn, would be used for each individual's identity construction. Further, visual emphasis on the idealized past and a distinctive heritage arouses a sense of Korean supremacy. Particularly, the false analogy between Korean food and a noble or royal culture, shapes a belief in the superiority of Koreanness.

<Figure 4> Cover photo of The Taste of Korea, Vol. 2, 7, and 24

Ⅴ. Conclusion

Drawing on the anthropological notion of food as deep play, this article aimed to investigate the Korean government's discourse on Korean food and its articulation of Koreanness. My analysis shows that the newsletter has constructed three different discursive themes in relation to Korean food: the homogeneity of Korean food, the uniqueness of Korean food, and Korean food as a primordial tradition. These patterned themes demonstrate that the Korean government, through the discourse of national cuisine, seeks to stress intra-national sameness and unity of Korean society, as well as the ethnic and racial purity of Korean people and culture. The findings of the discursive strategies used to legitimize these themes support two claims of ethno-symbolists: the nation is constructed through the use of primordial ethnic quality; and only the idealized past is called for the present purpose (Smith, 1991). This study also shows that national cuisine, as an invented tradition, contributes to the (re)construction and perpetuation of nation-ness, strengthening the cultural boundary between national 'we' and 'others.'

Before addressing these issues, I provided the economic and political contexts of the Korean government's increased interest in Korean cuisine. Through an analysis of news articles, I argue that the growth of the government's attention to Korean food was initiated not only by awareness of the increasing size of the global food industry, but also by efforts to maintain the national unity of Korean society, which would be weakened by the KORUS FTA. This finding enhances an understanding of the mutually formative relationship between the discourse of national cuisine

and the discourse of the nation. In other words, food discourse in Korea functions as a "biological device" that tethers individuals to the nation, as Hiroko (2008, p. 9) notes.

The Korean government's involvement with gastronationalism is not specific to the MB administration. During the government-led national festival *Gukpung 81* (National Customs 81), the 11th-12th President of South Korea, Chun Doohwan, utilized national cuisine to diminish citizens' political awareness and spread statist discourse on tradition and national subjectivity. Specifically, the Chun administration sought to arouse a sense of nostalgia and a desire for traditional culture by emphasizing *hyangto eumsik* (local food). When South Korea underwent a rapid globalization process in the late 1980s due to the worldwide sport events and international agreements, such as Asian Game in 1986, Trade Liberalization of Foreign Processed Food in 1987, The Seoul Olympics in 1988, and Liberalization of Overseas Trip in 1989, the Roh administration largely promoted a superiority of Korean cuisine and the diversity of local foods. In a similar vein, the Kim Youngsam administration (1993-1998) circulated the discourse of *shintoburi* (body and land are inseparable) in the face of global force of economic liberalization. As the 8th Multilateral Trade Negotiations—the Uruguay Round—pushed the Korean domestic agricultural industry into the global economy system and forced market-opening of agricultural products, President Kim promoted the consumption of domestic agricultural products and strengthened the linkage among body, food, and nation while he declared globalization as one of his key policies.

The MB administration's discursive practice regarding Korean cuisine, which is exemplified by KFF's newsletter, is in line with these preceding

examples in that it promoted the superiority and uniqueness of Korean food, as well as it utilized national cuisine to arouse a sense of national belonging. This discursive practice is still continuing although tactics of each regime have slightly changed depending on the historical circumstances. Indeed, KFF's initial goals, such as fostering global appreciation of Korean food culture, spurring the growth of related industries, and improving Korea's national image, are reflected in the objectives of the Korean Food Promotion Institute (KFPI), which replaced KFF in 2017 (KFF, 2012, January).[8] The MB administration stood apart from previous Governments by promoting the global expansion of Korean food, particularly through the standardization of Korean cuisine and the commodification of prestige traditions, which are demonstrated in the newsletter's removal of local/class diversity and emphasis on royal cuisine. As noted earlier, this shift took place due to the MB administration's plan to use national cuisine as a driving force of national economy, as well as efforts to reduce opposition from farmers and fishermen and sustain the national unity of Korean society, which would be weakened by the KORUS FTA. While President Chun took advantage of food as part of cultural events to justify the legitimacy of his regime, President Lee attempted to globalize Korean food in order to legitimize neoliberal market-opening and keep people from realizing the putative loss.

Given the limited sources of research materials, it is too soon to generalize the government's discourse on Korean food and Koreanness from these findings. Nevertheless, this article, as an instrumental case

8) KFPI's major initiatives include: 1) Korean food legitimacy research, 2) traditional Korean food discovery, 3) establishment of Korean food culture, and 4) define the excellence of Korean food (KFPI, n.d.).

study, helps us understand the interplay between national cuisine and nation-state, and makes three broad contributions to the literature of the nation, food, and discourse. First, by showing the continuous efforts of the Korean government to (re)construct national cuisine as a 'tradition' and to perpetuate a national/ethnic boundary, this article suggests that it is premature to confirm the "death throes" of the nation-state (Marden, 1997, p. 37); it rather demonstrates that the nation-state, as a strategic actor, still plays a significant role in producing a sense of belonging in the era of globalization. Indeed, a number of countries—Croatia, Mexico, France, Japan, Turkey, etc.—have designated their national cuisine as the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in order to carve out their global position through national cuisine. Second, while most food-focused communication studies have addressed the limited dimensions of food practices, such as food classification and consumption, this article (by looking into the discursive dimension of food matters) contributes to expanding the range of food-communication studies and diversifying the research objects of discourse analysis. Finally, while this article is rooted in the Korean context, it encourages comparative work on the reflective and formative roles of food discourse with regard to a discourse of the nation.

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