

# Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Pyongyang Raengmyon Custom

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## Abstract

The Pyongyang Raengmyon (MR: P’yōngyang Raengmyōn) custom was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Through this, we saw how North Korea carries out activities to protect its intangible heritage, and in particular how it carries out efforts to inscribe its intangible heritage on the UNESCO list, including its culinary culture and folk and ethnic foods. The issue of preserving the culinary culture of North Korea, a nation that now aspires to be a socialist civilization, can be called an activity to discover, create, and critically and developmentally alter a food culture that was severed by the Japanese colonial era and the Korean War, and a process of recovering the North Korean and reasserting national pride and self-respect. Activities to protect cultural heritage in socialist North Korea are conducted in keeping with the spirit and essence of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, and this can be seen as the final result of the interlocking of the passion for life blossoming amid the people and state policy in a county that aspires to be a social civilization. This study attempts to discover the background to Pyongyang Raengmyon custom’s inscription on UNESCO’s Intangible World Heritage List by explaining the history of the custom and how expressions such as *sōnju humyōn* (“first liquor, then noodles”) and *iraeng ch’iraeng* (“fighting cold with cold”) became deeply reflected in the North Korean dietary customs, the methods of making the noodle dough from buckwheat, which flourishes in the northern part of Korea centered on Pyongyang, as well as the radish water kimchi broth, the garnish and the noodles, and how Pyongyang Raengmyon itself—served in unusual bowls—became world famous for the peculiar way it is eaten.

**Keywords:** UNESCO Intangible World Heritage, Pyongyang Raengmyon, *raengmyōn*, cultural heritage protection, folk customs, preserving folk cuisine, identity

# Introduction

At the 17th Session of UNESCO’s Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Rabat, Morocco, on November 30, 2022, the Pyongyang Raengmyon custom was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (KCNA, December 4). It was the second item related to North Korea’s food culture added to the UNESCO list behind the “tradition of kimchi-making.” North Korea formally asked UNESCO to list the tradition of kimchi-making as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in December of 2013. Its inscription on the list was approved at the 10th session of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Windhoek, Namibia in 2015.<sup>1</sup> North Korea had already registered Pyongyang Raengmyon as an appellation of origin with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in August 2008 (DPRK Today, March 16, 2022). About the inscription of the Pyongyang Raengmyon custom as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, North Korea’s KCNA stressed, “Through the inscription, the time-honored history and tradition of the Korean nation, which has been creditably inherited and developed with each passing day, came to be well-known to the world” (KNCA, December 4). Within North Korea, the authorities have been carrying out energetic efforts to protect intangible cultural heritage, and in February 2013, they inscribed a series of folk and national dishes and related traditions on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, including Pyongyang Raengmyon (Arirang Meari, March 20, 2019). This article seeks to explain the state of cultural heritage protection efforts in today’s socialist North Korea by summarizing aspects of UNESCO’s Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (community, tradition, and continuity) and aspects of North Korea’s own internal demands (national continuity and the need to introduce science and technology and creative activities). It also aims to identify the background to the inscription of Pyongyang Raengmyon as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural

<sup>1</sup> In a document released prior to the final deliberation on the kimchi-making custom proposed by Korea, UNESCO stated that the “Koreans share experiences among themselves to make delicious kimchi according to the season, while helping each other with raw materials and preparations.”

Heritage of Humanity by describing the historical background and customs behind the emergence of Pyongyang Raengmyon, the dish's preparation methods and the characteristics of the dish itself.

## **In Regards to UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity**

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), founded in 1946, concluded the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003 after discussion of the preservation of humanity's cultural heritage—and the importance of said preservation—which followed the conclusion of the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 1972. UNESCO recognized the importance and urgency of efforts to preserve intangible cultural heritage and adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage during a meeting in Paris from September 29 to October 17, 2003. Article 2, Definition 1 of the General Provisions section of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage defines “intangible cultural heritage” as “practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills—as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith—that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.” It further says that intangible cultural heritage is (1) passed on from generation to generation, (2) transformed and developed by communities and groups in response to their environment and history, (3) provides said communities and groups with a sense of identity and continuity, and (4) promotes respect for human diversity and creativity. That is to say, the convention is imbued with the spirit of promoting the reproduction of intangible cultural heritage by regions and communities (individuals) across generations, from the past to present, and a sense of one's own identity (ethnicity and personal identity) through independent creativity. We

can also say the convention is a product of the view that the international community needed to respect cultural diversity and work together to protect it with the loss of global cultural diversity accelerating, potentially weakening human society, and leading to the loss of sources of creativity. After the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was adopted at the 32nd session of the UNESCO General Conference on October 17, 2003, North Korea joined the convention on November 21, 2008 and conducted UNESCO workshops and the like. The country has conducted lectures to promote general understanding of efforts to protect intangible cultural heritage since 2013 and UNESCO workshops to bolster its ability to prepare recommendation documentation in 2016 and 2018. North Korea writes up regular activity reports and submits all sorts of recommendation documents to the annual Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and undertakes activities for screenings and registrations.

## In Regards to North Korea's Efforts to Protect Intangible Cultural Heritage

In North Korea, efforts to protect intangible cultural heritage began with measures to preserve national traditions with the adoption of several culture-related laws after the creation of a Cabinet committee to survey tangible cultural artifacts on November 11, 1948. A new agency was added to the National Heritage Protection Guidance Bureau in September 2012 to handle intangible heritage protection efforts, creating a unified guidance system for the overall discovery, research, screening, registration, protection and maintenance of intangible cultural heritage.

In the Law of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on Protection of Cultural Property,<sup>2</sup> amended in 2012, cultural heritage is divided into tangible cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage. Tangible heritage usually includes historical artifacts, while intangible heritage includes things such as language, oral literature, performing

<sup>2</sup> Chapter 1: Fundamentals of the Law of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on Protection of Cultural Property; Chapter 2: Excavation and Collection of Cultural Property; Chapter 3: Evaluation and Registration of Cultural Property; Chapter 4: Preservation and Management of Cultural Property; Chapter 5: Preservation of Cultural Property; Chapter 6: Guidance and Control for Cultural Property Protection Efforts.

arts, social traditions and customs, various rites and holiday events, knowledge, and experience in regards to nature and society, traditional handicrafts, medicine, national cuisine, and folk games of great historical, artistic or academic value.

Worthy of note regarding North Korea's efforts to preserve intangible cultural heritage is that they have been increasingly directed at national foods, folk foods and related customs. "National foods" refer to dishes that were created and developed with ingredients from the land and in accordance with the constitution and tastes of the people. Such dishes can change and develop. "Folk foods" are national foods with long historical traditions, foods that reflect the life customs of the nation and holiday foods throughout the year. These dishes change little. Below, this research has arranged the national foods, folk foods, food-related customs, and food processing techniques that have been registered as intangible cultural heritage in North Korea year by year (Table 1).

**Table 1.** North Korea's Registered Intangible Cultural Properties (Food and Food-Related Customs)

No.	Registration Date	Intangible Cultural Properties (food, customs, & manufacturing processes)
1	September 2012	Kimchi making
2		Makkölli brewing
3		Making sauces
4	February 2013	Pyongyang Raengmyon
5	May 2014	Royal hot pot
6	May 2015	Brewing <i>kamhongno</i> (traditional Korean liquor)
7	February 2016	Making <i>ttökkuk</i>
8	May 2016	Cultivation and use of Koryo ginseng
9		Making fruit juice
10		Brewing Tan'gun alcohol
11		Brewing <i>paekhwasil</i> (traditional Korean liquor)
12		Process of using wild ginseng
13		Making mugwort rice cakes
14		Using mung beans (including mung bean pancakes and mung bean jelly)
15		Eating red-bean porridge for the summer solstice
16		Brewing <i>ogalpisul</i> (alcohol made from the root bark of various araliaceous shrubs)
17	January 2017	<i>Sujonggwa</i> (traditional Korean cinnamon punch)

No.	Registration Date	Intangible Cultural Properties (food, customs, & manufacturing processes)
18		Terrapin cuisine
19		<i>Yakbap</i> (flavored glutinous rice mixed with honey and dates)
20		Hamgyōng Province-style dog meat
21		Hamhŭng-style potato starch noodle soup
22	May 2017	Pollack spicy soup
23		Scorched-rice water
24	October 2017	Making <i>kamju</i> (sweet rice drink)
25		<i>Chŏn'gol</i> (Korean-style stew)
26		<i>Ch'uŏtang</i> (mudfish or loach soup)
27	May 2018	Making tofu
28		Brewing <i>iganggo</i> (traditional Korean liquor)
29		Brewing <i>munbaeju</i> (traditional Korean liquor)
30	October 2018	<i>Charanaegi</i> (Korean folk remedy of drawing blood from one's palm to fight against disease)
31		Making <i>chŏtkal</i> (salted fermented shrimp)
32	January 2020	Making Pyongyang Onban
33		Taedong River <i>sungŏguk</i>
34		White apricot of Hoeryōng

Source: *Rodong Shinmun*, *Chosŏn Shinbo*, and Pak (2019).

## The Significance of Protecting Intangible Cultural Heritage

UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage aims to safeguard heritage items that express the lives of living people, not heritage that remains fixed in time, locked away in museums or used to promote tourism. That is to say, intangible cultural heritage is living heritage, which also means its nature changes over time. When traditional material is passed on to the next generation, the people "reproducing" each item, method, tool, etc. differ, so the traditions differ, too. To put this another way, since people currently living in a particular region "recreate" traditional material, we can say this is what sets intangible cultural heritage apart from tangible cultural heritage. From this standpoint, intangible cultural heritage in North Korea must be evaluated in terms of continuity of traditional



culture, the direction of state policies, and the people, groups and social constituents who live in the region in question.

About national cultural heritage, Chairman Kim Il-sung said that the history of Korea created our cultural heritage. He said the people will never permit the denial of this principle, and that people must understand that they must pass on and develop cultural heritage in a class-oriented and critical way rather than treating it in a nihilistic way (I. Kim 1970).

Since enacting its Law on Protection of Cultural Property in 2012, North Korea has been registering tangible cultural heritage such as historical artifacts and intangible cultural heritage such as national food, while abroad, it has been pushing participation in UNESCO's World Heritage and Memory of the World programs. What is the significance of North Korea's protection and registration of cultural heritage? Article 1 of the Cultural Heritage Protection Law ("Mission") says the law aims to "contribute to raising the people's national pride and self-respect by strictly erecting a system and order for the protection and maintenance of cultural heritage to protect national cultural heritage in its original condition and properly transmit and develop said heritage." It designated the principles for maintaining cultural heritage—protecting it in its original condition, properly transmitting and developing it—as well as its impact on the people—elevating national pride and self-respect. That is, we can say that the law highlighted as national policy and defined the legal position of "preserving and critically transmitting" cultural heritage and, from the perspective of its domestic impact, its "role in elevating national pride and self-respect."

Through documents released by North Korea pertaining to national foods and living culture (Jong-il Kim 2000), we can confirm the country's point of view and position that such cultural heritage must be viewed critically and transmitted. Released documents are premised on the view that North Korea was reduced to ruin by 36 years of colonial rule and the Korean War, and pointed out that: (1) the people's mastery and habituation of knowledge regarding national foods, folk foods and food culture had been temporarily severed and was wanting as a result, (2) that the people, including cadres and chefs, had wrong concepts and viewpoints regarding food

culture, and (3) that food processing must adopt science and technology, and that cooking and food culture have yet to transform into creative endeavors. Through these documents, we can see that they commonly deal with the fundamental issue of viewing food culture critically as it stands in the construction of a socialist civilization, as well altering and resolving it in a developmental way. For North Korea, which aspires to be a “socialist civilized nation,” the transmission, creation and development of national and folk foods is the process of attempting an “unprecedented path” of discovering and creating a food culture severed by the Japanese colonial era and Korean War. Of course, as far as food and food culture in a person’s life is concerned, they are hard to put a stop to if they have taken root over a long time under the influence of social causes, and as ingredients and customs passed down over the generations clearly exist, efforts should not run counter to what the people want. So, the documents stress that discovery and development of national foods must be applied to people’s lives and done in a way so that they enjoy them in their daily existence, while simultaneously calling for promoting in the discovery and creation process the reclaiming of people’s identity as Koreans and national pride and self-respect. To sum up, cultural heritage protection efforts in socialist North Korea differ little in terms of content or spirit from the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. On the contrary, we can say that North Korea is conducting its efforts in line with the spirit and essence of the convention.

Kwŏn (2019) said North Korea could promote inscription of its intangible cultural heritage on the UNESCO list because of the expansion of policies to promote intangible heritage, cultural practices and unique transmitted traditions to “control society and awaken national unity,” and that the “result of the discovery and promotion of national foods” was that dishes that placed highly in cooking contests were often registered as intangible cultural properties. To put it another way, he said efforts to discover national foods, including the development of regional and local dishes, have been gradually underway since the Arduous March, something we can confirm through the many cooking contents and exhibits

such as the Day of the Sun Cooking Celebration, Day of the Shining Star Cooking Technique Contest and other national food exhibits, as well as dog meat cooking contests and the Candy & Biscuit Sculpture Festival, and these are directly linked to intangible cultural heritage (Kwön 2019).

## In Regards to the Pyongyang Raengmyon Custom

### *The History and Customs of Pyongyang Raengmyon*

In North Korea, noodles are divided into *raengmyõn* and *k'alguksu*, depending on how they are made. *K'alguksu* are made from wheat flour and cut with a knife. Noodles produced by kneading grain flour and using techniques and tools to elongate the dough are generally called *myõn*. North Koreans have been using two words since olden times: *myõn* and *kuksu*. We can find historical records of *kuksu* in the *Sõnhwa bongsa koryõ togyõng* [Xuanhe commissioner's illustrated account of Koryõ] (1124), *Koryõsa* [History of the Koryõ Kingdom] (1451), *Ryongbi õch'õn'ga* [Songs of the dragons flying to heaven] (1445) and *Haedong yõksa* [Encyclopedic history of Korea] (early 19th century). The *Xuanhe Commissioner's Illustrated Account of Koryõ* said there were 10 kinds of food flavors, and placed noodle dishes at the top, while *the History of the Koryõ Kingdom* said noodles were served at memorial rites, and that temples made and sold them. The *Songs of the Dragons Flying to Heaven* said Ch'oe Yõng prepared noodles and side dishes every time he served guests (T. Cho 2016). In the records above, *myõn* refers to *kuksu*. These records regarding *myõn* suggest that the noodles have been around since the Three Kingdoms Period prior to the Koryõ Kingdom. Noodle dishes grew more diverse during the feudal Chosõn Kingdom, while their preparations also developed. Records tells of *k'algusku* dishes such as *chõlmyõn*, *hwamyõn*, *sumyõn*, and *sujebiguk*, as well as *t'ulguksu* dishes such as *shimyõn*, *semyõn*, *apch'angmyõn*, *raengmyõn*, *onmyõn*, *koldongmyõn*, *kõnmyõn*, *mongmyõn*, and *somaengmyõn*.

*Myõn* comes from the Chinese word *mian* 麵 and are

generally made from wheat flour. Books such as *Nongshu* 農書 [Book of agriculture] written during the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) and the *Tongsubian* 通俗編 [Collection of common words] written during the early Qing dynasty (1644–1911) include records of them. Chinese noodles are usually made from flour, though it used to be said that “in the north,” they were also made from buckwheat, which was in wide production in those regions. The Ming dynasty scholar Cheng Minzheng 程敏政 (1445–1499) wrote in his poem “Fujia mianshi xing 傅家麵食行” [Fu’s noodle trip], “Buckwheat noodles were a good food for the Emperor, and they came from the east.” China did not have buckwheat noodles in the past, nor does it have them now. Because of this, the expressions “north” or “east” referred to Korea, and Korea sent buckwheat noodles to China (Ji-wŏn Kim 2015).

In Korea, besides wheat flour, noodles were made from buckwheat, with mung beans, soybeans or millet added to the flour. According to the Chosŏn dynasty cookbook *Ŭmshik timibang* [Recipes for tasty food], *chŏlmyŏn*’s chief ingredient is buckwheat, with wheat added in as a connecting agent. In the *Chubangmun* [Book of making alcoholic beverage], buckwheat was kneaded in water in which sticky rice was boiled. This is to say, buckwheat was the top noodle ingredient of the late 1600s. The word *kuksu* embodies the meaning of “washing cold noodles in cold water” after boiling them and was a word unique to Korea (Ri 1999). Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that in Korea, the words *myŏn* and *kuksu* are synonyms for noodles.

In the Chosŏn kingdom, when people said, “Let’s go eat *kuksu*,” they meant *myŏn*, and Koreans enjoyed noodles so much that they would eat noodles for at least one of their three meals a day. Among North Koreans, expressions reportedly emerged that express their particular love of noodles. When somebody eats their second or third bowl of noodles, they say, “You have another stomach for noodles,” and there is the expression *sŏnju humyŏn* (“first liquor, then noodles”), which expresses the custom of providing special guests first with a cup of liquor, and then giving them noodles. In the old days, people often ate noodles along with rice as part of their dietary lives, while it was also customary to serve

noodles on feasts such as weddings or birthdays. To say to an unmarried man, “When are you going to serve me noodles?” meant “When will you get married?” That is to say, noodles are an indispensable dish at weddings (Ji-wŏn Kim 2015).

Moreover, it is a general culinary practice to eat cold foods in hot seasons and hot foods in cold seasons. However, in Korea, it has long been customary to eat *raengmyŏn* on the cold winter solstice, just as it has been considered customary to eat hot dog meat soup on the hot *sambok* days of summer. This dietary practice is called *iraeng ch’iraeng*, which is to say, because it’s cold outside in winter, a person’s exterior temperature drops, but their inside grows warmer, and they can keep healthy in winter by cooling their interior temperature. This reflects the Koryo-era medical principle of controlling cold with cold, but it also reflected the peculiar regard for the taste of a cold bowl of *raengmyŏn* while sitting on a warm heated floor on the cold winter solstice. Because of this characteristic, even people who disliked cold food in winter reportedly enjoyed Pyongyang Raengmyon on the solstice (Pak and Kim 2016).

Jinju Raengmyon, which is famous in the south, is said to taste best in winter. In contrast to Pyongyang Raengmyon, which mixes a bit of starch into the buckwheat flour, Jinju Raengmyon is made from pure buckwheat, but uses no pork. Ch’unch’ŏn Makguksu is another form of *raengmyŏn* (Ri 1999).

The Ongnyugwan, a restaurant that sits on the Taedong River, serves several unique traditional dishes, including Pyongyang Raengmyon (Jong-suk Kim 2020). During the historic inter-Korean summit of October 2007, the Ongnyugwan hosted a banquet for the South Korean delegation. *Chosŏn Shinbo* reporter Kang Iruk, who was covering the banquet, said he could not forget the Pyongyang Raengmyon he ate there, recalling, “I especially like noodles, so I usually have a lot to say, but the Pyongyang Raengmyon I ate there was clearly of a different quality from the countless bowls of *raengmyŏn* I’ve eaten so far. In particular, the noodles were not too tough, and as soon as you put the noodles in your mouth, the aromatic fragrance of the buckwheat quickly filled up your mouth and nose, leaving a strong impression.”

## *The Characteristics of Pyongyang Raengmyon*

Pyongyang Raengmyon is one of Pyongyang's four great dishes and a proud national dish of Korea. Pyongyang's four great dishes refer to Pyongyang Raengmyon, onban, Taedong River *sungŏguk* and *rokdujjim*. According to the old text *Tongguk seshigi* [A record of seasonal customs in Korea] (1849), *raengmyŏn* consisted of buckwheat noodles with radish kimchi, cabbage kimchi with pork on top, and the best raengmyŏn came from the Pyongan region. The *Haedong chukchi* [Bamboo branches in Korea] (1925) also called Pyongyang Raengmyon the best of the noodle dishes. This reportedly has to do with how northern Korea produces a great deal of buckwheat, and *raengmyŏn* took root in the Pyongan region, and the Pyongyang area in particular.

Pyongyang's characteristics include the noodles themselves, the broth, the toppings and garnish, the bowl the noodles are served in and the unique manner of presenting the noodles. As for Pyongyang Raengmyon's noodles, one makes the thin, thread-like noodles by kneading flour made mostly from buckwheat and pressing the dough in a noodle press. The long, drawn-out noodles are then boiled in duck broth. These noodles are called *apch'angmyŏn*. The *Chŭngbo sallim kyŏngje* [Revised and augmented forestry economy] described two methods: one using only starch powder and a gourd, and one using buckwheat powder mixed with starch like today's *raengmyŏn* noodles. It said, "Knead two sung of starch powder into one to of buckwheat powder, draw out the noodles by pressing the dough in a noodle press, boil them in water and eat." *Apch'angmyŏn* noodles are the original form of today's *raengmyŏn*, and they became unique to Korea among the three nations of today's Northeast Asia. Moreover, there are no indications that Chosŏn Kingdom documents ever mentioned fried wheat noodles like those in China. Unlike wheat noodles or starch noodles, noodles thus made are smooth, but not excessively chewy. They are not only easy to eat but have an umami flavor. Buckwheat also has more protein than other starchy foods, and in particular, it includes about 13 to 15% of the essential amino acid lysine and is rich in the vitamin rutin, which strengthens capillaries and

prevents high blood pressure and strokes (Ji-wŏn Kim 2015).

Another characteristic of *raengmyŏn* is the unique flavor of the broth the noodles are served in. With noodles, the flavor depends just as much upon the broth as it does the individual noodles themselves. Generally, with *raengmyŏn*, kimchi broth or meat broth was used, with the flavor differing according to the process. Pyongyang Raengmyon's kimchi broth is radish water kimchi broth. According to Kim Yongsuk, Emperor Kojong especially liked noodles, but he could not eat spicy or salty foods, so his *raengmyŏn* was topped with just slices of meat, pear and pine nut kernels and served in chilled radish water kimchi broth rather than meat broth. Radish water kimchi, or *tongchimi*, is a kind of radish kimchi prepared in early winter. It is made nationwide, but the radish water kimchi of Pyongyang is particularly famous. Pyongyang's radish water kimchi might use the same radish as everywhere else, but because it ferments in a well-sealed jar in a broth made from seasonings like garlic, ginger, green onion, pear, chestnuts, salted herring and sliced red pepper, it has a fine, cool flavor. Placing the noodles in such radish water kimchi broth produces a dish that is cool and full of umami flavor, making for some very good eating. As for meat broth, generally speaking, water in which meat has been boiled is used, but the flavor of Pyongyang Raengmyon's broth is renowned because of the unique ingredients and preparation methods used. Pheasant broth used to be preferred, but recently, beef, pork or chicken broth have become more common. Cooks don't just boil the beef, but also the bones, tendons, lungs, kidneys and other parts of the cow. After skimming off all the oil and foam, they season it with salt and soy sauce and boil it again with the lid off. After the smell of the soy sauce has been boiled away, the broth is left in a cool place to chill. The resulting meat broth is as clear as water and full of protein and calcium. The ideal ratio is seven parts radish kimchi water broth and three parts meat broth (Ch'oe 1990). Because Pyongyang Raengmyon is served in this sort of kimchi or meat broth, it is cooler than buckwheat noodle dishes of other regions while bringing together sweet, sour and delicate flavors all in one dish, elevating the taste.

The third characteristic of Pyongyang Raengmyon is the

unique nature of the bowl it is served in, the toppings and garnish and the manner in which the noodles are placed in the bowl. Pyongyang Raengmyon is served in a brass bowl that feels cool to the touch, in keeping with the radish water kimchi or meat broth. When placing the noodles in the bowl, a bit of broth is added to the bowl first, then the noodles are carefully placed in a heap. After this, the toppings are added on top—kimchi, meat, chicken egg, pear and cucumber, in that order. After the garnish of sliced egg, sliced onions and sliced pepper is added, the rest of the broth is poured into the bowl to visually mouthwatering effect.

Given how Pyongyang Raengmyon is thus unique in its noodles, its kimchi and meat broth, its garnish and presentation and the bowl it is served in, the very dish of *raengmyŏn* has become world renowned for the unique way it is consumed.

## Conclusion

There are other national foods that represent Korea besides *raengmyŏn*, for example, *pibimbap*, *kukpap*, and *ssam*. We can call these dishes special from a global perspective, too. For instance, with *pibimbap*, several different ingredients such as vegetables, meat or seafood are placed atop the rice and mixed with a spoon, while with *kukpap*, the soup and rice are not eaten separately, but together. Moreover, *pibimbap* and *kukpap* cannot be practically eaten without a spoon. Might we be able to find the basis for Korea’s “spoon culture” in the cuisine? While writing this article, the author felt both hopeful and curious whether Korea’s “spoon culture” might be inscribed on the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

We can say food is “human history” that reflects the lifestyle, thoughts and culture of the people living at that time. National and folk foods, while having long historical traditions, have developed amid the lives of the people through the generations, and one can believe that the socialist system itself has been directly relevant in this. However, this



researcher stresses one more time that the development in food culture in today's North Korea is based on the zest for life emerging among the people which has been able to bloom because the country's long-loved food culture and state policy that aspires to turn North Korea into a "nation of socialist civilization" are well meshed.

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