

Pyongyang Raengmyon as a Constructed National Food Symbol of the DPRK

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Abstract

A dish of buckwheat noodles in cold broth (*raengmyŏn*) has existed in Korean diet at least for several centuries and was mainly spread in the northern regions of the peninsula. However, in the situation of national division in the latter half of the 1980s, the DPRK realized the need to elaborate its independent vision of cultural authenticity in the sphere of national cuisine and to construct its own national food symbol. This is how the name Pyongyang Raengmyon has been actively promoted in the North Korean media and propaganda sources since the late 1980s until today. The combination of the dish's name (*raengmyŏn*) with the name of the North Korean capital city was intended to form a clear and strong link between Korean cuisine and the DPRK. This article examines how and when Pyongyang Raengmyon has been made into a North Korean national food symbol and explores the reasons behind this process. The case of Pyongyang Raengmyon as an example of the North Korean national food symbol construction is not only interesting in its own right but also illustrates how food issues can serve as an instrument of ideology and cultural politics of a country.

Keywords: Pyongyang Raengmyon, Korean cuisine, national food symbol, North Korean cultural politics

Introduction

S/N Korean Humanities' second issue of 2023 (vol. 9, no. 2) featured the topic of North Korean cuisine as a venue of national cultural heritage protection. The authors discussed differences and commonalities in North and South Koreans' perceptions of national food, and Pyongyang Raengmyon (Pyongyang-style buckwheat noodles in cold broth) was one of the important items among them (Jeon 2023; Kim 2023). However, this dish can be scrutinized not only as a significant example of Korean cultural heritage to be preserved but also as a meaningful national food symbol that is used by the DPRK to represent the country and its culture inside Korea and abroad.

The term “national food symbol” stands for a dish or food product that is declared in a society as the signature of a certain national food tradition. Usually, the national food symbol status is attributed to either the dish that is most commonly consumed in the everyday diet of the citizens of a nation or the one that is the most suitable for producing an appealing image of the food tradition in question. These symbols are imagined constructs, and that is why they can change depending on time period, historic conditions or shifts in the world diet tendencies and fashions (Osetrova 2016a, 37, 136–137). For example, during colonial times a *shinsollo* (Korean royal cuisine style hot pot) was the dish to symbolically stand for the whole Korean cuisine while the fermented side dish kimchi, which is today celebrated as the main gastronomic emblem of Korea, was a point of national embarrassment due to its strong smell (Joo 2000, 306). Later in the 1980s, South Korea became much stronger politically and economically. To show its new status, it started to promote proudly grilled beef *pulgogi* as its representative delicacy to demonstrate that meat—never a staple for traditional Korean foodscape—became a part of their regular diet. Also, it was due to the development of Korean livestock farming and beef imports (Na 1994).

This article argues that since the mid-1980s Pyongyang Raengmyon has gradually turned into the main national

food symbol of the DPRK to represent the independent North Korean food culture. The name of the North Korean capital city “Pyongyang” was added to the name of the dish *raengmyŏn*, and such a combination had created a strong and clear link between Korean cuisine and the DPRK. This was done as a response to the similar initiatives of South Korea that it had taken since the latter half of the 1980s by elevating the symbolic status of the side dish “kimchi” in order to strengthen its cultural identity in the sphere of national cuisine.

The article examines how and when Pyongyang Raengmyon was established as the national food symbol of the DPRK and explores the reasons behind this process. It starts by describing the contemporary representation of Pyongyang Raengmyon in the North Korean media and mass discourse and then provides the data proving that before the 1980s the dish was called differently and the word “Pyongyang” was not included in the official name of the dish. The article proceeds by the discussion of the reasons for this novation and finally looks into the recent events regarding the position of Pyongyang Raengmyon after its inscription the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (2022).

The study is undertaken via the analysis of North Korean cookbooks and other culinary literature from the 1950s, 1960s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s, official media resources, evidence provided by defectors and foreigners who lived and worked in the DPRK, and materials from the author’s field research of North Korean restaurants operated in Moscow in 2016 and from the visit to Pyongyang in October 2017.

Before going into the details of the food symbol construction, it is important to state that the dish of buckwheat noodles in cold broth (literally, *raengmyŏn*, or *naengmyŏn* if pronounced in South Korean way) has existed in Korean diet at least for several centuries. It originated in the northern regions of the peninsula and later spread around the country (Joo 2013, 127–128). However, in spite of the fact that the dish is consumed on both parts of Korea, it was used to be considered as a delicacy of the North. The article argues that it was more the name Pyongyang Raengmyon that has been

constructed as a national food symbol of the DPRK since the latter half of the 1980s, not the dish. The dish itself has existed long before.

Pyongyang Raengmyon: The Main National Dish of the DPRK Today

Today, Pyongyang Raengmyon is a national dish number one in the DPRK. It is the main treat for all foreign guests visiting North Korea from presidents and high-level officials to exchange students and it is the core menu item of the central North Korean restaurant Ongnyugwan that is famous for being the guardian of the North Korean national food tradition (Pak and Kim 2016, 4–9).



Figure 1. A North Korean stamp of 2003 featuring Pyongyang Raengmyon against the background of Ongnyugwan restaurant (photo by author, Pyongyang, October 2017).

Almost all contemporary North Korean sources regardless of the target audience (domestic or foreign) name this dish “the most well-known,” “the most internationally acclaimed,” outstanding in terms of taste, health benefits, and historical value in Korean culinary tradition. One can find such an introduction in any sort of North Korean literature be it a

multivolume culinary encyclopedia, academic research, a cookbook, or a simple article in a newspaper and even a stamp (see Figure 1). For example, here is a recent text (2023) from the website of Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) titled “*Minjok-ŭi charang p’yŏngyang raengmyŏn p’ungsŭp*” [*Pyongyang Raengmyon custom, pride of Korean Nation*]:

Pyongyang cold noodle is one of the typical national dishes of Korea. In the medieval period, cold noodle of the northwestern area (Phyongan [sic] Province), especially Pyongyang cold noodle, had been regarded as the best among the noodles in Korea. Pyongyang cold noodle is famous for its noodle material, noodle broth, garnish, seasoning, etc. Its main material is buckwheat. From olden times, the Korean people had prepared Pyongyang [sic] cold noodle for reception of guests at ordinary times and celebrating ceremonies.

The traditional Pyongyang cold noodle custom has been further developed and enriched under the Workers’ Party of Korea’s policy of protecting national heritage. A noodle contest would be held significantly among restaurants in the capital city of Pyongyang to develop its taste. Books on Pyongyang cold noodle were published to help people know better about the traditional Pyongyang cold noodle custom of the nation.¹

¹ KCNA, “Minjok-ŭi charang p’yŏngyang raengmyŏn p’ungsŭp” [Pyongyang Raengmyon custom, pride of Korean Nation]: January 9, 2023, <http://www.kcna.kp/en/article/q/c21b27f406e19caa969ec5fc309bdee6.kcmsf>.

Here we can find all standard wording for Pyongyang Raengmyon’s official presentation as a national food symbol (Osetrova 2022, 306). First, it points out the deep historical roots and the nutritional and cultural value of the dish. Second, it places the dish into the political dimension by highlighting the role of the Worker’s Party of Korea in its promotion.

The standard description of the dish these days should also mention the unique character of the dish, its worldwide recognition and the special role the national leader played to promote it. Here is an older example (2007) from a section titled “Irŭmnan minjok ūmshik” [Renowned national food] in a major North Korean women’s monthly magazine *Chosŏn nyŏsŏng* [Korean women].

The Great Leader Comrade Kim Jung-il pointed out: “Pyongyang Raengmyon has been well-known from the olden days.” Among the different sorts of noodles that our people consume, Pyongyang Raengmyon is the one that is famous around the world for its old history. . . . Pyongyang Raengmyon is an outstanding heritage of our ancestors who reached an unprecedented level in the structure of nutrition and food processing. Therefore, each family must carefully preserve and pass on to the future generations this heritage of our food culture and thus make it even more refined and convenient in everyday life. (*Chosŏn nyŏsŏng*, October 2007, 52)

The dish has also become a research object in the academic narrative. For example, here is an extract from a paper of a North Korean history professor Kim Kyŏngch'an presented at the third international conference held at Kim Il Sung University in 2014. It says that “Pyongyang Raengmyon is the most representative sort of Korean noodle dish that vividly reflects the creative potential and wisdom of our people. . . . People from other countries who had ever tried Pyongyang Raengmyon cannot forget the taste for the rest of their lives and if they come to Korea again, the first thing they do is having a bowl of Pyongyang Raengmyon” (Kim 2014, 96–97). He also explains in detail the ingredients and cooking method of the dish and thus argues that it really stands apart from all others.



Figure 2. A photo from a North Korean wall calendar for 2016 (the first January page) featuring Pyongyang Raengmyon. The text right to the picture says that buckwheat (the basic ingredient of the dish) contains a lot of cystine, which makes the skin soft, and rutin, a type of vitamin D, is effective in preventing and treating high blood pressure and arteriosclerosis. In addition, it is rich in essential amino acids such as tryptophan, which is often lacking in other grains, and also contains a lot of proteolytic enzymes and soluble fiber enzymes, which are good for digestion (photo by author, 2024).

The similar representation is possible to see in North Korean restaurants operating outside the DPRK where Pyongyang Raengmyon is always the main specialty. For example, in 2016 the Moscow restaurant Koryo had the image of the dish on the cover of its menu and the guests were even provided with separately printed information leaflets in the Russian language explaining the special features of the dish (another leaflet was prepared only for kimchi). The leaflet highlighted the outstanding health benefits of Pyongyang Raengmyon and specifically stated:

It has long been believed that if you eat cold noodles, you can live a long life, like a long strand of noodles, so it has become one of the customs for the Korean people to eat *raengmyŏn* noodles on birthdays. (Osetrova, 2016b, 373)

All these details (health benefits, historical background, and connection to Korean cultural traditions and values) are supposed to convince the reader that Pyongyang Raengmyon is indeed an extremely ancient and culturally meaningful element of Korean traditional cuisine. However, there is evidence proving that at least the name and symbolic meanings of Pyongyang Raengmyon were artificially constructed not earlier than the latter half of the 1980s.

The Timeline of Construction

Soviet and German specialists who studied in the DPRK during the period between the end of 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s remarked that in those years the name Pyongyang Raengmyon had not been used by Koreans in their everyday life, and although the dish of noodles in cold broth had been popular back then, it was simply called *kuksu* (a basic Korean word for noodles), not Pyongyang Raengmyon.²

It is possible to find the confirmation for this statement in the defectors' accounts as well. A director of the Institute of North Korean Cuisine Dr. Lee Ae Ran, who was born and spent the first part of her life in the DPRK working in the field

² Interviews with Ivan Zakharchenko who studied in Pyongyang in the 1980s and later worked there as a Soviet journalist and professor Sonja Häussler from Stockholm University. At the beginning of her professional career, professor Häussler spent a year as a language student at Kim Il Sung University in Pyongyang (1982–1983).

of public catering (defected in the end of the 1990s), writes in her book *North Korean Gourmet* that before the 1990s the name *raengmyŏn* was not much used in the DPRK, and the dish of buckwheat noodles in cold broth was more often called *memil kuksu* [buckwheat noodles]. She also added that such items as Pyongyang Naengmyon or Hamhung Naengmyon that are well spread in the South today and are perceived in mass opinion as popular North Korean delicacies were not easy to find in the Northern eateries at the time when she lived there (Lee 2012, 24).

North Korean cookbooks available to the author also support the idea that the name Pyongyang Raengmyon has not been widely used in the DPRK before the latter half of the 1980s. For example, if we look into the cookbook of 1956, we will not be able to find the dish named *raengmyŏn* or *naengmyŏn* in the contents, even in the section *naengguk* [cold soups] (Chosŏn Nyŏsŏngsa 1956). The 1960 cookbook that is fully devoted to the national cuisine includes several recipes for different kinds of *kuksu*, but there is no mentioning of Pyongyang Raengmyon among them (Chu and Yun 1960).

The Grand Dictionary on North Korea published in Republic of Korea in 1979 also does not have a separate entry on Pyongyang Raengmyon. However, there is an article about noodle restaurants (*kuksuchip*) mentioning that there were restaurants in the capital and main provincial cities that served different types of noodles including regular *kuksu* as well as *naengmyŏn* [noodles in cold broth] and *onmyŏn* [noodles in hot broth] (Committee for the Compilation of the Grand Dictionary on North Korea 1979, 224), but not a word about *naengmyŏn* from Pyongyang.

In a large-format Pyongyang photo album published by the Foreign Languages Publishing House in 1980, there are photos of above-mentioned restaurant Ongnyugwan (opened in 1960), which is today specifically famous for Pyongyang Raengmyon, the number one dish on its menu for many years already. However, in the album of 1980 there is no photo of this dish, and the restaurant is presented with the images of hot-pot *shinsŏllo* and some other dishes including rice, rice cakes, assorted vegetables, grilled fish, and seafood but not Pyongyang Raengmyon (Foreign Languages Publishing

House 1980, 117–120). Ongnyugwan was renovated in 2006 and a huge granite wall was erected to the right of the main entrance with the restaurant history records engraved on it. The text on the wall already mentions Pyongyang Raengmyon as a dish that the Great Leader Kim Jong-il gave detailed instructions on how to cook and serve to people in the restaurant.

Kim Jong-il exerted more influential leadership than other North Korean leaders in the construction of the nation's official food narrative (Osetrova 2022, 311–318). He wrote many texts devoted exclusively to the national cuisine and food products—e.g., meat (2007), sturgeon (2008), grilled meat *pulgogi* (2009), and dishes made of terrapin (2010). In June 2004, he gave the well-known speech “Minjok ūmshik-ŭl chŏkkŭk changnyŏ-hago paljŏnshik’yŏ-nagaya handa” [We must actively promote and develop national cuisine], which became the foundation of the official attitude towards the development of national cuisine and the North Korean policy in this sphere since then (Kim 2006, 237–244). In that speech, the traditional dish of noodles in cold broth is called nothing else but Pyongyang Raengmyon (238). Besides this, there are many other sources where one can find Kim Jong-il's ideas regarding national cuisine, the special place of Pyongyang Raengmyon in it, and curious details about its

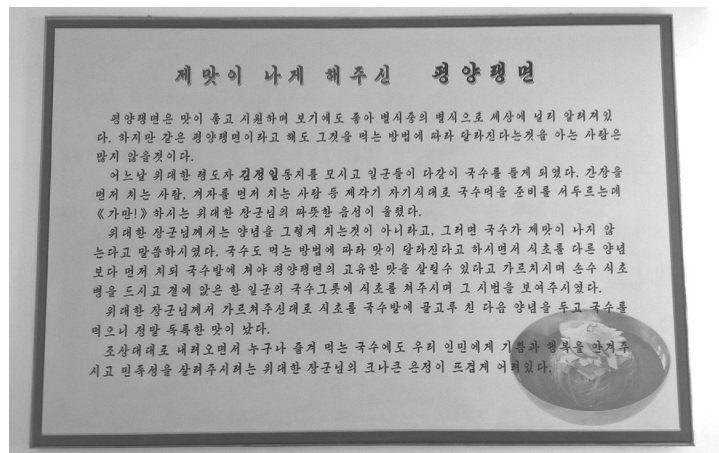


Figure 3. A poster introducing the best way of seasoning Pyongyang Raengmyon suggested by the great leader Kim Jong-il (photo by author, taken at Pyongyang Jang Chol Gu University of Commerce, Pyongyang, October 23, 2017).

consumption. Below (figure 3) is the poster displayed at the Culinary Department of Pyongyang Jang Chol Gu University of Commerce, which tells the story of a lunch where Kim Jong-il taught his companions in what order to add seasonings to Pyongyang Raengmyon to get the best taste of the dish. It says that first the vinegar should be added to the noodles' threads and only later should other seasonings like soy sauce or mustard be added. According to the poster, this fact is not well known to the majority of common Pyongyang Raengmyon lovers in spite of the dish's broad international reputation.

Tatiana Gabroussenko who researches North Korean literature and mass culture also points out that in films or fictions produced in the DPRK before the mid-1990s one finds no mention of cold noodles at all because the dish—as any flour-based food—were considered too humble and low-status to represent the Korean culinary tradition. Gabroussenko marks out that the movies glorifying the virtues of authentic national dishes started to come out only from the 2000s. The first movie of this kind—*Ongnyu P'unggyŏng*—came out in 2000 and was devoted right to buckwheat noodles (Gabroussenko 2018). The protagonist is a chef that works in the famous restaurant Ongnyugwan and is looking forward to creating the best recipe of the dish. The hit song of the movie “P'yŏngyang raengmyŏn cheil-ilse” [Pyongyang noodles are the best] also added weight to the strengthening of the dish's symbolic status.

All these examples let us make a preliminary conclusion that at least until the beginning of the 1980s the name Pyongyang Raengmyon was not in active use in the DPRK. The dish of buckwheat noodles in cold broth did exist in the North Korean dietary life but it was called different names and it was not presented as the main North Korean national food symbol but just as one of the seasonal meals typical for Korean diet. However, if we look in the cookbooks of the 1980s and later, we can already find there the name Pyongyang Raengmyon. For example, in the 1984 cookbook titled *Chosŏn minjong ūmshik* [Korean national food] there is already a recipe under this name (Yun 1984, 87). And in the 1985 cookbook the dish called Pyongyang Raengmyon is already included in the list of the “most famous Korean

dishes” (*irŭmnan chosŏn ūmshik*) (Kong, Kim, Chŏng, and Ch’ŏn 1985).

From these data, we can assume that since the middle of the 1980s the name Pyongyang Raengmyon has gradually started to get circulated in the North Korean written sources and by the end of the decade the dish began to be actively promoted as a national food symbol inside and outside the DPRK. However, it didn’t happen overnight, and this is why it is possible to find the old name of the dish “Pyongyang Kuksu” in the later sources. For example, in the section “Nutrition” of the reference book titled *Korea: kratkie svedeniya* [Korea in brief] published in Pyongyang in 1987 for foreigners, we read:

In particular, kuksu made from buckwheat flour is very popular. Pyongyang Kuksu with cold broth is also made from buckwheat flour. Very tasty Pyongyang Kuksu with sticky threads and cold, cooling, pleasant-tasting broth. (Pang 1987, 327–328)

Or in the cookbook of 1990 *Mat choŭn kuksu* [Good taste noodles], the dish is already presented as the main one among many other types of noodles. That is why it goes first in the long list of the recipes but the name is still Pyongyang Kuksu, not Pyongyang Raengmyon (Ch’oe 1990, 60–61). However, in the following years, the more recent the resource, the less likely it is to contain other names of the dish, as the name Pyongyang Raengmyon displaced them completely.

The Reasons for the Construction of a National Food Symbol

The need to construct an independent North Korean national food symbol in the latter half of the 1980s can be explained by several reasons. First, that period witnessed the general turn in the DPRK’s official attitude towards its traditional culture. Since the late 1960s, the main ideological line had been determined by the struggle against the archaic heritage of traditional culture and the goal to turn the society into

one ideologically homogeneous entity (Sukhinin 2003, 405). Under this circumstance, old Korean traditions were often suppressed, being labelled “feudal” and “reactionary” (Lankov 2013). However, in the latter half of the 1980s, this stance was revised, and Korean traditional culture started to get gradually promoted among the general public of the DPRK. Alexander Zhebin, a Russian specialist on North Korean politics, argues that the DPRK chose to revive the attention towards the national traditions, believing that it would ensure the North moral leadership in the process of rapprochement and possible future unification with the South. Besides this, Zhebin explains this shift by the DPRK’s rejection of globalization trends that the country saw as an attempt to impose the American way of life on other parts of the world (Zhebin 2006, 157).

The change in the DPRK’s official attitude towards its traditional culture got reflected in the sphere of national cuisine as well. Of course, back then the topic of national cuisine was not a priority within the internal or external propaganda. The North Korean people’s nutrition was provided by the state distribution system and that is why was formulated more in the terms of socialist justice and equality rather than traditional dietary customs. Yet, the promotion of Pyongyang Raengmyon as the main food symbol of the DPRK can be explained as a certain sign (though not as significant as other parts of social life) of the interest towards national traditions in the sphere of Korean foodways.

Second, the need to construct the DPRK’s national food symbol can be understood as its response to the similar initiatives that the South took at that time. For the Republic of Korea, the 1980s marked the arrival of strong gastro-nationalistic rhetoric, which was also accelerated by the globalization trends (Osetrova 2016a, 52–53). On the one hand, the 1980s certainly brought foreign food items and eating practices into the South Korean foodscape, especially after the liberalization of food imports in 1987. On the other hand, there was also resistance to the western influence from the government as well as from the ordinary customers in order to protect national food culture (Nelson 2000). Against this background, when global and local trends were in constant

tension, the official South Korean discourse started to present national food as the basic element of Korean national identity to be praised, researched, and properly preserved. As a result of these measures in the 1980s, the Republic of Korea attributed the status of the main national food symbol to a spicy side dish kimchi, and at some level of public discourse the dish was even declared the epitome of Korean national character (Han 2000). The first private museum of kimchi was opened in Seoul in 1986, and two years later, shortly before the opening of the 24th Summer Olympics, this museum was moved to South Korea's greatest exhibition venue COEX so it could attract mass attention of the domestic audience and the foreign guests who visited the Republic of Korea to see the Olympics.

In this situation, the DPRK felt the need to select a food symbol to represent its vision of the national foodways. What is more, the symbol was to demonstrate that it was exclusively North Korean one that managed to preserve the unique Korean culinary traditions and protected them from the harmful foreign influence. This is how the name Pyongyang Raengmyon started to be actively promoted in the North Korean media and propaganda sources since the latter half of the 1980s. The combination of the dish name raengmyŏn with the name of the North Korean capital city was intended to form a strong and clear link between Korean cuisine and the DPRK. It also needs to be noted that the Chosŏn Ryori Hyŏphoe [North Korean Association of Korean Cuisine] was established in 1987. This step can be interpreted as the intention of the North Korean authorities to pay more attention to the national cuisine as an ideological tool as well as a practical institution to work with the culinary issues.

This is not to say that the DPRK did not see kimchi as its national food symbol as well. This spicy side dish was also promoted as a national gastronomic treasure inside and outside the country. Curiously enough, the DPRK could even openly refer to the American sources if the latter presented the North Korean culture in a preferable way. For example, more than once North Koreans proudly mentioned in their media that in 2006 a popular American magazine *Health* named kimchi on its list of top five "World's Healthiest Foods"

(Kang, Han, and Kim 2013, 142). But kimchi has been common in both parts of the peninsula and that is why did not fit the status of exclusively North Korean food symbol. For that reason, Pyongyang Raengmyon turned out to be a better option.

Pyongyang Raengmyon as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage

The DPRK authorities' decision to inscribe Pyongyang Raengmyon on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity ushered in a new stage in the process of construction of the dish as a North Korean national food symbol. The authorities had planned to do it since the latter half of the 2010s as I was told during my meeting with the representatives of the Chosŏn Ryori Hyŏphoe in October 2017.³ The plan finally came to success at the end of 2022 (UNESCO 2022), but was preceded by the inclusion of the custom first in the national inventory of intangible cultural heritage in November 2013. Besides this, the DPRK also registered Pyongyang Raengmyon as an appellation of origin with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in August 2008 (Kim 2023, 50), the same year it ratified the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (adopted by UNESCO in 2003).

We can see that these activities started mostly after Kim Jong-un came to power (2012). This means that the new leader saw the cooperation with UNESCO as an important element to achieve the goals he had set for the development of his country. As Kim Jihon and Kim Myoung-Shin (2023) show in their detailed analysis of changes in North Korean heritage law and policy under Kim Jong-un, the state has seriously updated its domestic legislation related to cultural and natural heritage in order to join international conventions and programmes so they contribute later to the development of North Korean tourism and national promotion. Like his predecessors, Kim Jong-un has been stressing the need to “develop and enrich” the traditional eating patterns among

³ Kim Yŏngil and Yi Yŏngch'ŏl (representatives of the Chosŏn Ryori Hyŏphoe), interview by the author, Pyongyang, the DPRK, October 25, 2017.

other tasks to support national culture and protect it from harmful foreign influence (Kim 2015, 5–6). This is why he approved the measures to promote national cuisine.

At present time, there are four North Korean cultural practices inscribed on the UNESCO intangible heritage list where two out of four items relate to national foodways (the tradition of kimchi-making and the custom of Pyongyang Raengmyon).⁴ This demonstrates that the authorities see the national cuisine as an effective resource to elevate the North Korean international cultural image. It is interesting to note that the domestic North Korean list of intangible cultural properties includes more than thirty various dishes and drinks of traditional diet (Kim 2023, 53–54), but only kimchi-making and Pyongyang Raengmyon custom were chosen to be nominated for UNESCO intangible cultural heritage status. This proves their special position as national food symbols representing the DPRK internationally.

According to the UNESCO guidelines, the state that has its intangible cultural heritage nominated for inclusion in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity is supposed to list the available published references providing supplementary information on the nominated cultural practice. Interestingly, for Pyongyang Raengmyon the DPRK committee first listed the medieval ode *Yongbiŏch'ŏn'ga* [Songs of the dragons flying to heaven] (1447) and a premodern book on Korean seasonal customs *Tonggukseshigi* [Seasonal customs of the eastern kingdom] (1849), which obviously say nothing about Pyongyang Raengmyon but just mention briefly old Korean tradition of noodle eating in general. The committee also includes the book of 1925 that mentions the custom of eating buckwheat noodles even though it is called *memil kuksu*, not Pyongyang Raengmyon, in the book. The contemporary literature listed in the nomination form use the name Pyongyang Raengmyon, but it was all published not earlier than the 1990s.⁵ This fact also supports this article's main argument that the name Pyongyang Raengmyon is quite a recent invention.

⁴ The other two are the folk song "Arirang" (inscribed in 2014) and Korean national wrestling *ssireum* (joint South-North inscription in 2018).

⁵ UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 17th session, nomination file no. 01695 for inscription in 2022 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, p. 16.

Conclusion

The case of Pyongyang Raengmyon as an example of the DPRK's construction of national food symbols is not only interesting in its own right but also matters as an illustration of how national food issues become an instrument of ideology and cultural politics of a country. With this instrument, the North Korean propaganda could solve its immediate tasks such as building an independent gastronomic image of the country to contrast its vision of Korean food culture against the South one and prove that its vision reflects the authentic Korean foodways. Also, due to the strong connection between food traditions and everyday life, the former becomes an effective tool to strengthen the feeling of the collective identity. In this regard, the construction of a common national food symbol can contribute to unifying the North Korean people, reinforcing the connection between the people and the state's leadership, and reconfirming the strength of the Juche ideology.

It is interesting to note that Pyongyang Raengmyon is not the only case to show the inter-Korean competition over the cultural authenticity. Another example of this kind is the reestablishment of tea cultivation practices in both Koreas in the 1980s (Osetrova 2022, 318–321).

These examples demonstrate that both Koreas closely monitor each other's activities in the sphere of national cuisine promotion and respond immediately if the other side makes a move. Such a mutual influence can be seen in the cases of construction of national food symbols, reinvention of tea drinking culture, inscription of kimchi-making on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (2013 for the Republic of Korea, 2015 for the DPRK), and more broadly, in the general reconsideration of the status of national food as an instrument to forge a country's global image. The recent initiative of the DPRK to inscribe Pyongyang Raengmyon on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (2022) can also be interpreted as a measure that the state took to achieve several important goals. First, thanks

to this initiative, it could present its national food culture and traditions to the world and receive guarantees of their protection and access to UNESCO's global management expertise. Second, it obtained the chance to demonstrate to their population that they are working hard to showcase North Korean national culture abroad. Finally, this inscription also provided a way to combat the DPRK's global reputation of a starving country.

The last but not the least proof of the strong symbolic status of Pyongyang Raengmyon, which is unlikely to be changed in the near future is the fact that Pyongyang Raengmyon has been the main treat during all inter-Korean summits taken place on the Korean peninsula so far. All three South Korean presidents who went to meet their North counterparts—Kim Dae-jung, Roh Moo-hyun and Moon Jae-in—were treated to Pyongyang Raengmyon during their visits to the North, and it was heavily covered in the press as a meaningful symbolic sign of mutual respect and rapprochement. In May 2022, an article came out in one of major South Korean newspapers titled “Yunsökyöl taet’ongnyöng p’yöngyang naengmyön möngnün nal” [The day when President Yoon Suk Yeol eats Pyongyang Raengmyon] (Chöng 2022) in which the author writes that the day when Pyongyang Raengmyon appears in the South Korean authorities’ menu may become the start of the new stage of inter-Korean reconciliation.

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