

# Tradition and Transition in North Korean Food Culture

**Song Chi-Man**  
Editor-in-Chief



The feature articles in the September 2023 (Vol. 9, No. 2) issue of *S/N Korean Humanities* add a new complement to the discussion on North Korean food culture. Scholars from South and North Korea have contributed to this issue, offering a fruitful interaction between South Korea's Han'gukhak and North Korea's Chosŏnhak as the mission of the Institute of Humanities for Unification (IHU) at Konkuk University.

The first article by Youngsun Jeon (Konkuk University) examines North Korean policies on national food culture. After the Kim Jong-un regime gained power in 2012, the country took efforts to unearth intangible heritage, and a significant portion of this intangible heritage was related to dietary culture. North Korea has designated four elements of dietary culture as national intangible cultural heritage: 1) daily food available nationwide; 2) seasonal food related to holidays; 3) traditional alcohol; and 4) local food. North Korea has held various cooking competitions and has made efforts to unearth elements of traditional Korean dietary culture with a view to promote this culture. There are very similar aspects to how the two Koreas make value judgements and promote industrialization policies regarding cultural heritage that is related to traditional dietary culture. There are policy-related similarities in regard to the positive evaluations that the two Koreas make toward dietary culture, along with the proactive efforts to unearth, along with national efforts to preserve, that culture. That being said, there are differences in the specific elements of culture that the two Koreas aim to inherit and preserve. There are differences in the systems of the two Koreas in terms of the objectives and orientation of unearthing traditional culture and the criteria used to evaluate its value.

The second article by Kim Jongsuk (Korea University of Japan) focuses on North Korean efforts to preserve culinary traditions. The Pyongyang Raengmyŏn custom was registered on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This is a demonstration of how North Korea carries out activities to protect its intangible heritage, and in particular how it carries out efforts to register intangible heritage, 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 our identities as Koreans and having 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 being a social civilization. Kim Jongsuk attempted to discover the background to Pyongyang Raengmyŏn custom's registration on UNESCO's intangible heritage list by explaining the history of the custom and how expressions such as sŏnjuhomyŏn ("first liquor, then noodles") and yiraengch'iraeng ("fighting cold with cold") became deeply reflected in North Korean dietary customs, the methods to 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 Raengmyŏn itself—served in unusual bowls—became world famous for the peculiar way it is eaten.

The feature articles are followed by Han Sangwon (Chungbuk National University)'s book review of Ryang Yong-Song's *Hyŏmo p'yohyŏn-ŭn wae chaeil chosŏnin-ŭl kyŏnyanghanŭn'ga* [Why Is Hate Speech Aimed at Zainichi Koreans?]. The September 2023 issue is concluded by an interview with Fujii Takeshi, a renowned Japanese historian of contemporary Korea history, by Professor Park Min-cheol (IHU).

Since its establishment in 2009, the IHU has pioneered and expanded on the concept of "Humanities for Unification" as a unique framework for thinking about unification as a process of communication, healing, and integration of all Koreans in South Korea, North Korea, and diasporic communities. As the IHU's English-language Korean studies journal, *S/N Korean Humanities*, has played a unique bridge-building role between the worlds of Han'gukhak and Chosŏnhak in the promotion of "Integrated Korean Studies." *S/N Korean Humanities*

will continue to reinvent itself as a forum of debate for a humanities-based approach to unification and Korean studies.

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