

*Jajangmyeon* and *Junggukjip*: The Changing Position and Meaning of Chinese Food and Chinese Restaurants in Korean Society

Yang Young-Kyun

Yang Young-Kyun (Yang, Yeong-gyun) is Assistant Professor at the Academy of Korean Studies. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Pittsburgh. His publications include “Nationalism, Transnationalism, and Sport: A Case Study on Michelle Wie” (2004) and “Jungguk nongchon-ui gicheung ganbu-ui wichi-wa yeokhal-ui byeonhwa-reul tonghae bon gukga-sahoe gwan-gye” (State-Society Relationship in China: The Position and Role of the Grass-roots Level Rural Cadres) (2002). E-mail: ykyang@aks.ac.kr.

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Abstract

*This paper examines the position and meaning of Chinese food and restaurants in Korean society. Chinese restaurants opened in Korea from around the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to provide mostly male Chinese-Koreans with very simple food. Chinese foods had been cooked, sold, and consumed exclusively by Chinese-Koreans until the 1940s. In the 1950s and 1960s, though the cooking and selling of Chinese food were dominated by the Chinese, the food became a representative food for eating out for Koreans. By the 1970s, Koreans were the overwhelming majority of customers in Chinese restaurants, and Chinese cuisine became established as a part of Korean food culture. Chinese food was still almost the only item for eating out and the only foreign food, which common Korean people could easily access. They consumed “exoticness” and “convenience” through Chinese food. As Korean society became more modernized and globalized, the Koreans’ demands for food became more varied. In order to satisfy those demands, not only have the restaurants become diversified, serving various ethnic foods, but Chinese restaurants themselves have also been diverged into various styles. In those new styles of Chinese restaurants, people consume “modernity,” “exoticness,” and “authenticity.”*

**Keyword:** Chinese food, Chinese restaurant, localization, exoticness, authenticity, modernity, globalization, *jajangmyeon*

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## Introduction

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In 1988, the Ministry of Education in Korea promulgated the new rules of Korean spelling. The rules reflect the concerns of Korean language scholars regarding the glottalization of the Korean language. One of the rules is intended to ~~suppress~~minimize ~~[restrict? minimize?]~~ the use of glottalized sounds. Accordingly, the standard Korean spelling of *jjajangmyeon* has been changed to *jajangmyeon*, which brought about extensive objections in Korean society. However, many people still argue that *jjajangmyeon* is the correct spelling because most Koreans pronounce it as such.

The other controversy regarding *jajangmyeon* in Korean society is whether or not *jajangmyeon* can be found in China. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between South Korea (Republic of Korea) and China (People's Republic of China) in 1992, many Koreans have visited the PRC and argued that there was no *jajangmyeon* in China, even though they found some kind of noodle more or less similar to *jajangmyeon* in Korea. Some go even **farther** to argue that *jajangmyeon* is not a Chinese food but a Korean food. Other people, on the other hand, argue that *jajangmyeon* is certainly a Chinese food even though it was transformed considerably to accommodate Korean tastes.

These incidents show how *jajangmyeon* has been deeply rooted in Korean food culture. Also, *jajangmyeon* is not just *jajangmyeon* itself but is a symbol of Chinese cuisine. In other words, Chinese cuisine symbolized by *jajangmyeon* has been localized—Koreanized—so much so that it has become part of Korean cuisine. Until the 1970s, Chinese restaurants had maintained a dominant position as a place for dining out, at least for ordinary Koreans.

Besides these episodes, I came to be interested in Chinese food and restaurants as a research topic due to my own personal experiences. When I returned to Korea in 2000 after spending some time in the United States and China, I was surprised to find that I could eat the same Chinese food I had eaten in the United States and China. Then, I discovered that there were many styles of Chinese restaurants that appeared in Korea only recently. I also found that younger people did not enjoy eating Chinese food as much as I did.

In this paper, I will explore the historical scene where overseas Chinese put down roots in Korean society, and Chinese restaurants were expanded **first** by the Chinese and then by Koreans.<sup>1</sup> I will trace the process of the establishment of Chinese

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<sup>1</sup> Chinese restaurants are often colloquially called *junggukjip*, which literally means “Chinese house.” Thus, *junggukjip* in the title of this paper means Chinese restaurant.

food in Korean cuisine. I will also examine how strongly Korean people are attached to Koreanized Chinese food as represented by *jajangmyeon*. It can be said that *jajangmyeon* in particular became a Korean dish closely related with Korean identity, like *kimchi (gimchi)*, *bulgogi*, and *doenjang jjigae*, etc. Finally, I will deal with the recent trends of dining out, along the changing patterns of household expenditure, which reflect the changing circumstances of Korean society and the globe, especially the phenomenon of globalization. The changing positions and meanings of Chinese food in the landscape of Korean dietary culture will be discussed in this section as well. In the discussions of the past and present of Chinese food and restaurants, I will examine what people have wanted to consume through Chinese food and restaurants. In other words, I will examine what the position and meaning of them has been to Korean people.

### **The History of Chinese Restaurants**

Chinese people can be found in every corner of the earth, and many of them run Chinese restaurants. Those who cook Chinese food and run the restaurants adapt Chinese food to match local food culture so well, their menu often becomes part of the local cuisine. The Chinese who migrated into Korea were no exception. The localization or Koreanization of Chinese food and the establishment of Chinese food as a part of Korean cuisine are closely related to the historical changes of Chinese-Korean (*Hanguk hwagyo*) society.<sup>2</sup>

The overseas Chinese society began to be formed in Korea, then known as Joseon, by about four thousand soldiers and forty military merchants immediately following **Military Mutiny of 1882**. Those who settled down in Korea were mostly engaged in commerce. Korean society at that time was mostly agrarian. Chinese immigrants imported goods from China, their mother country, and sold them to Korean people. In other words, the division of labor was formulated between the Korean and the Chinese as farmers and merchants respectively (Bak 1986). The Chinese population peaked at about 82,000 in 1942. When Korea was liberated from the Japanese occupation in 1945, the number of Chinese in South Korea was just 12,000 because, in the late period of Japanese occupation, the Japanese concentrated resources on the manufacturing and mining industries. Therefore, most Chinese laborers stayed in North

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<sup>2</sup> I translated *hwagyo* into Chinese-Korean. Strictly speaking, this translation is not accurate. For the sake of convenience, however, I use this term to refer to Chinese people who settled in Korea.

Korea where factories and mines were located (Bak 1986, 71-75). The overwhelming majority of those who settled down in Korea were from Shandong province because it was geographically closest to Korea.<sup>3</sup> Their economic activities first centered on international trade with the mother country, then expanded into various economic spheres. The occupational distribution of Chinese-Koreans in 1926 shows that the percentage of commerce-transportation (51.5 %) was highest, followed by agriculture including animal husbandry and fishing (19.4 %), manufacturing-mining (13.4 %) and others (11.2 %).

In those days, the overwhelming majority of Chinese-Koreans were men.<sup>4</sup> Chinese restaurants were opened in order to serve very simple food, such as bread and noodles, to the men. In the 1910s, restaurants serving more varied dishes began to open in Seoul and Incheon, targeting merchants who were relatively better off (Seo 2003).<sup>5</sup> Statistics show that about thirty percent of the Chinese-Korean population was engaged in the restaurant business, and they ran about 650 restaurants in eleven major cities in 1922. Restaurant customers were mostly Chinese.

Chinese-Korean society underwent great changes due to the liberation of Korea and the establishment of a socialist state in **mainland** China. The Chinese-Korean population decreased, and many lost ties with their homeland. More Chinese men married Korean women because there were only a small number of Chinese women in Korea. Also, since the new Korean government tightly controlled international trade by foreigners, many Chinese-Koreans had no choice but to switch their jobs. They crowded into the restaurant business, which required very little start-up capital and could be staffed by family members only. The population of Chinese-Korean population in South Korea gradually increased from 12,000 in 1945 to 20,000 in the mid-1950s and 32,000 in 1974, but it decreased again to less than 20,000 in the early 1990s.<sup>6</sup> Chinese

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<sup>3</sup> According to Bak (1986), besides the geographic factor, there were several reasons why the Shandong people migrated into Korea. Basically, Shandong at that time was in an unstable and distressful situation because of the **Revolt of Uihwadan**, domination by mounted bandits, a high population density and natural disasters. Furthermore, in order to compete with Japan and Russia, China (the Qing dynasty) tried to expand its influence in Korea by transplanting people to Korea.

<sup>4</sup> It was not until the 1920s that the proportion of females to males reached 10 percent. This proportion continued to increase to 20 percent after the mid-1930s. That is, the general tendency was that only men came to Korea, leaving other family members behind at home. They sent money to their families and visited home around the lunar New Year's holiday.

<sup>5</sup> Restaurants, such as Gonghwachun (共和春) and Junghwaru (中華樓), were doing a splendid business in Incheon, and Aseowon (雅敍園), Daegwanwon (大觀園), and Seohaeru (西海樓) were driving a thriving business in Seoul. Only a few wealthy Koreans and Japanese went to these restaurants occasionally.

<sup>6</sup> The decrease in the population of Chinese-Koreans was largely due to the Korean government's policy towards Chinese-Koreans. The keynotes of the policy were separatism and discrimination. The hardship caused by this policy, along with changes in international circumstances, actually drove Chinese-Koreans

restaurants run by ethnic Chinese steadily increased in number from 332 in 1948 to 1,702 in 1958 and 2,454 in 1972. During the Japanese occupation, Chinese food was both cooked and consumed by Chinese people. In 1972, though, seventy-seven percent of Chinese-Koreans were engaged in the restaurant business, while most customers of Chinese restaurants were Korean. Though cooking was still monopolized by the Chinese, Chinese food found roots in Korean food culture and was enjoyed by Koreans in the early 1970s (Bak 1994).<sup>7</sup>

Now, let me briefly explore how well Chinese food in Korea is localized. First place has to be given to *jajangmyeon*. No one knows exactly when and by whom *jajangmyeon* was invented. The presumption is that a certain type of noodle brought in and eaten by Chinese people who settled in Incheon was transformed into *jajangmyeon*. It is also known that *jajangmyeon* was first sold at the Chinese restaurant, Gonghwachun, which opened in Incheon in 1905. As we have seen above, Chinese food was mostly consumed by Chinese people in these early years. It is said that Korean people only began to enjoy Chinese food in the 1950s, and we can confirm this through the changing number of Chinese people and restaurants in Korea. The number of Chinese people and restaurants was around 12,000 and 330 in 1948 respectively. The population almost doubled to about 22,000 in 1958. The number of restaurants, however, went up to 1,700, more than fivefold, in 1958, which means that a significant proportion of customers of Chinese restaurants in the late 1950s must have been Koreans. It is natural to assume, then, that the localization or Koreanization of Chinese food began in the 1950s.

Let me take *jajangmyeon* as an example of a Koreanized Chinese dish. The biggest difference between the original and the transformed *jajangmyeon* is the sauce. In making *jajangmyeon* sauce, oil and Chinese spices that are unfamiliar to Koreans are reduced and various vegetables, such as onions, potatoes, and carrots, as well as pork, water, and caramel are added to the original sauce, which is based on *chunjang* (春醬).<sup>8</sup> The transformed *jajangmyeon* is sweeter than the original due to the addition of onion and caramel. Other dishes like *tangsuyuk* and *rajogi* were also transformed to adapt to the tastes of Korean people.

In addition to taste, there are several characteristics of Koreanized Chinese

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out of Korea. Many of them immigrated to mostly Western countries, especially the United States.

<sup>7</sup> Based on the changing numbers of Chinese Koreans and Chinese restaurants, it would be more accurate to say that Korean people began to enjoy Chinese food in the late 1950s, as I will show below. However, the difference between the opinions of Bak's and mine is a matter of degree. Actually no one knows the exact proportion of Korean customers at Chinese restaurants in the 1950s or 1970s.

<sup>8</sup> The term, *chunjang*, originated from the brand name of a type of bean paste, is called *mianjiang* (麵醬), *tianjiang* (醬), *heijiang* (黑醬), etc. in China (Ju 2000).

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food that are consequences of localization. In Chinese restaurants in Korea, dishes are usually served with *danmuji*, pickled radish, onion, and *chunjang*. Recently, many Chinese restaurants also serve *gimchi* as a side dish. Obviously, this is not something you would find in China. Furthermore, serving *danmuji* is considered strange, not only because it is a Japanese food, but also because it is often called by its Japanese name, *dagguang*.

The names of Chinese dishes in Korea are quite different from their assumed original ones. They are likely to have various origins, and some seem to be the results of various transformations over a long period of time. For example, names like *udong*, *jjambong*, and *yakki mandu*, which are representative Chinese dishes in Korea, most likely come from the Japanese language. Also, the food referred to as *mandu* (饅頭) in Korea is not a *mantou* (饅頭) but a *jiaozi* (餃子) in China. The strangest name for a Chinese dish in Korea, I think, must be *syakseupin*, which is a transliteration of “shark’s fin” in English. There are also names derived from pure Korean, for example, *bokkeumbap*, *soegogi beoseot bokkeum*, *kkotbbang*, and so on. The names of many dishes are the Korean pronunciation of Chinese characters, such as *yangjangpi*, *goryangju*, *ohyang jangyuk*, *mapa dubu*, *songhwadan*, etc. (Eom 1997, 32). Some names come from Chinese names, for instance, *ganjjajang*, *nanja wanseu*, *kkanpunggi*, *ppaegal*, and so on, while others are combinations of Chinese and Korean pronunciations of Chinese names, such as *jjajangmyeon*,<sup>9</sup> *giseumyeon*, *tangsuyuk*, *rajoyuk*, etc. Still others are combinations of Chinese and pure Korean, for example, *kkanso sae-u*, *jjajangbap* (Eom 1997, 32-33).<sup>10</sup> In light of these changes to Chinese food, we can understand how successful localization has been by examining Korean people’s emotions regarding memories of Chinese food, especially *jajangmyeon*. I will return to this point later.

## Recent Trends in Chinese Food

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### *Increasing Dining Out and Decreasing Chinese Restaurants*

As the economy grows and consumption increases, eating out also increases. The term “food service industry” first appeared in the United States in the 1950s; in Korea, it

<sup>9</sup> The name, *jajangmyeon*, seems to have come from the Chinese name, *zhajiangmian* (炸醬麵).

<sup>10</sup> The terms that were derived from Chinese are, of course, not accurate. For example, the Chinese pronunciation of *kkanpunggi* (乾烹鷄) is *ganpengji*; that of *tangsu* (糖醋) is *tangcu*, and so on.

(oesik saneop) appeared in the late 1970s. Fast food restaurants led the development of the food service industry in the 1980s, and since the 1990s, family restaurants imported from the United States have led the development in Korea. Just as the food service industry grew significantly in Japan in the 1970s when the Japanese GNP per capita reached ten thousand dollars, so the market for food service grew over thirty percent annually in Korea in the 1990s when the Korean GNP per capita also reached ten thousand dollars (Sin et al. 2000).

Let us take a look at the increase in eating out from the aspect of household expenditure. In the case of Britain, when total household expenditure increased 14 times, the expenditure on total food and on eating out increased 8 times and 18 times respectively from 1960 to 1990. Eating out has occupied a steadily increasing proportion of the household expenditure on food, rising from 9.8 percent to 20.9 percent in the same period (Warde and Martens 2000, 34). In the case of Korea, between 1982 and 2002, total household expenditure increased about 7 times. Food expenditure increased around 5 times, but expenditure on eating out increased as much as 37 times.<sup>11</sup> Since British income levels and expenditure are much higher than those of Korea, the growth rate of the proportion of eating out in food expenditure as well as the percentage itself in Korea in 2002 are phenomenal.

Table 1. Household Expenditure Per Month, 1982-2002

(Unit: won; %)

	Total expenditure (won)	Food expenditure (won)	Eating out (won)	Eating out/food expenditure (%)
1982	271,501	106,938	6,243	5.84
1992	1,025,865	309,608	75,790	24.48
2002	1,960,975	520,405	230,691	44.33

Source: Korea National Statistical Office

Then, how has the proportion of Chinese food in the expenditure of eating out changed between 1982 and 2002? According to data collected by the Korean National Statistical Office, Chinese food has taken a decreasing proportion of the expenditure on eating out, falling from 10.8 percent (Korean food at 51.3 percent; Western food at 3.2 percent) in 1982 to merely 1.9 percent (Korean food at 27.2 percent; Western food at 1.1 percent) in 2002. Even though the proportions of Korean food and Western food fell, the decline rate of Chinese food was much higher, two times and three times as high as Western

<sup>11</sup> The percentage of food expenditure spent on eating out changed from 5.8 to 44.3.

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food and Korean food respectively.

It seems that the preference for Chinese food is not high, especially among the young. According to a survey of 600 college students who were food-related majors in Gangwon-do province, though the majority said they liked Chinese food,<sup>12</sup> only a small number actually went to Chinese restaurants.

*Table 2. Food of Preference When Students Eat Out (Gangwon-do province)*

(Unit: %)

	With friends	With family members
Korean	44.2	63.7
Western	10.1	11.5
<b>Chinese</b>	<b>8.3</b>	<b>10.8</b>
Japanese	0	4.0
Snack food ( <i>bunsik</i> )	31.7	1.4
Others	5.7	8.6
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Min et al. (2002).

The preference rate for Chinese food was even lower for college students in Seoul. A survey of 700 students from 11 universities showed very different results compared to the survey of Gangwon area students above. For example, one difference was that Seoul students reported a high preference for fast food, which was not included in the Gangwon area survey. Another was the vast difference in preferences for snack food, or *bunsik*, between the two groups. These discrepancies may be, I guess, related to the fact that the two surveys did not use the same standard categories for dishes and restaurants. Therefore, it may not be accurate to directly compare the results of the two surveys. However, since the variable of Chinese food was not ambiguous in the surveys, we can safely conclude that there was not a high preference for Chinese food among college students.

*Table 3. Food of Preference When Students Eat Out (Seoul)*

(Unit: %)

	With friends	For a date
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<sup>12</sup> The percentage of male respondents who said they like Chinese food was 80.7 %, compared to 58.4 % of female respondents. Only 1.1 % of both male and female students showed a negative response to Chinese food.

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Snack food ( <i>bunsik</i> )	2.7	2.0
Korean	53.4	28.3
Fast food	22.1	27.4
Western	9.7	30.2
<b>Chinese</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>0.6</b>
Japanese	1.8	4.9
Others	6.8	6.6
Total	100.0	100.0

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Source: Kim et al. 2001.

We can also conclude that young people tend to not prefer Chinese food from another investigation. A survey of 119 people between the age of eighteen and twenty-eight (the so-called X generation<sup>13</sup>) showed that only 5.0 percent of respondents preferred Chinese restaurants for eating out and 4.2 percent preferred Chinese food (Sin et al. 2000).<sup>14</sup> Thus, based on the results of those surveys, we can not only conclude that the preference for Chinese food or Chinese restaurants is not high, but we can also anticipate that the future prospects for Chinese food or restaurants are quite gloomy as the subjects of those surveys were young people.

The changing number of Chinese restaurants reflects the nationwide trends of increasing eating out and decreasing preference for Chinese food. Since I do not have the total number of Chinese restaurants nationwide, I will just analyze the restaurants in Seoul. The rapid increase in household expenditures on eating out is reflected in the changing number of restaurants. The overall number of restaurants in Seoul increased from 14,719 in 1983 to 51,076 in 2003, which means that restaurants increased by 288 percent over twenty years. However, the upward tendency of the number of Chinese restaurants fell short of this figure. The increase rate for Chinese restaurants was as low as 43 percent during the same period. In contrast, the increase rate of Japanese restaurants was highest at 511 percent, which was followed by Korean restaurants (243 %) and Western restaurants (67 %). In other words, the growth rate for Chinese restaurants was lowest. This trend also results in the decreasing proportion of Chinese restaurants. While Chinese restaurants made up 20.4 percent of all restaurants in 1983, the proportion fell to 8.4 percent in 2003.

<sup>13</sup> The term X generation was originated from Douglas Coupland's novel *X Generation* published in 1991. This term began to be used in Korea from the mid-1990s. It designates those who were roughly born in the 1970s. They grew up in relatively affluent circumstances and showed very different characteristics from the former generation (baby boomer). They were characterized by mass media oriented, liberal, individualistic, and having the strong propensity to consume. In the paper, I cited above, the term seems to designate the young people who are active in eating out as well as who tends to set the trend in eating out

<sup>14</sup>

Table 4. Numbers of Restaurants in Seoul

	Chinese	Korean	Japanese	Western	Total
1983	3,003	8,357	566	2,793	14,719
1993	3,994	26,909	2,293	9,586	42,782
2003	4,287	38,657	3,458	4,674	51,076

Source: The figures for 1983 and 1993 came from *Hanguk eumsikeop hyeophoe* (Korea Association of Restaurant Business), which I cited from Bak (1994, 107). The figure for 2003 came from the Internet Web site of *Hanguk eumsikeop junganghoe* (Korean Restaurant Association).<sup>15</sup>

Despite the overall increase in Chinese restaurants, the number of restaurants run by Chinese steadily decreased, which meant that their proportion among all Chinese restaurants also dropped. The number of Chinese restaurants in Seoul was about 1,000 in 1975, 1,585 in 1980, 3,416 in 1985 and 3,410 in 1990. However, the number of Chinese-owned Chinese restaurants in the same years was 653, 394, 328 and 219. The percentage of Chinese-owned Chinese restaurants has fallen rapidly, from roughly 65 percent in 1975, to 25 percent in 1980, 10 percent in 1985 and 6 percent in 1990. It is presumed that this percentage is much lower now because, while Chinese restaurants are increasing, it is unlikely that Chinese-owned restaurants are increasing at the same rate.

The cooking, selling, and consuming of Chinese food was monopolized by ethnic Chinese until the 1940s. In the 1950s and 1960s, though the cooking and selling of Chinese food was still dominated by Chinese, the food itself became a representative food for Koreans dining out. Cooking Chinese food was still almost monopolized by Chinese people in the 1970s—the majority of Chinese restaurants were run by Chinese as family businesses, or Chinese cooks were employed by Korean owners. But Koreans were the overwhelming majority of customers of Chinese restaurants. Chinese cuisine was thus established as a part of Korean food culture. Since the late 1970s, the cooking, selling, and consuming of Chinese food has been led by Koreans.

Until the 1970s, Chinese cuisine was almost the only foreign food with which Korean people were familiar. There were, of course, Japanese restaurants and Western restaurants, but common people could not easily access them. Big, luxurious Chinese

<sup>15</sup> There were 22,327 Chinese restaurants in Korea in March, 2005 ([www.ekra.or.kr](http://www.ekra.or.kr)).

restaurants had remained in existence as places for the upper class to visit. Ordinary Chinese food was something common people could eat on special occasions, and they could eat their fill at moderate prices, especially with double-sized portions (*gopbbaegi*).<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, it was the only food that could be delivered.<sup>17</sup> High school students used to love the occasional trips to Chinese restaurants. Some went just because they could drink alcohol with simple dishes and smoke cigarettes indoors.

Chinese restaurants began to lose their dominant position as a favorite place for eating out as other restaurants rapidly increased from the 1980s. As purchasing power grew, Korean restaurants were strengthening their influence as places where people could eat meat, especially beef. Western restaurants were recognized for their exotic cuisine and clean and elegant atmosphere. Japanese restaurants as well were making rapid inroads, utilizing images of the artistic and mysterious preparation of *sushi*, the nutritional superiority of fish, and hygienic conditions. On the contrary, even though Chinese restaurants still had powerful weapons, such as *jajangmyeon*, *jjambong*, and *tangsuyuk*, they were losing territory to the *bunsikjeom* (restaurant for snack food)<sup>18</sup> and Western restaurants, because the former provided people with cheap and abundant dishes and the latter furnished them with meeting places (Kim 1998).

Chinese restaurants have been losing their attractiveness since the 1990s, to a certain degree, due to the growing popularity of discourses on health, nutrition, and hygiene. As the discourse of *sinto buri*, which literally means that body and earth is one (i.e. native foods are healthiest), gained ground, Chinese food **took a lot of hits**. The common knowledge that Chinese food is greasy and high in calories also exerted a negative influence as many people are concerned about nutrition and adult diseases. In addition, it seems that Chinese food lost prestige because of the image that Chinese restaurants were dirty. According to my investigation, interviewees most frequently mentioned greasiness and high calories as the characteristics of Chinese food.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> It is reported that a bowl of *jajangmyeon* cost 15 won in 1960. It was very expensive relative to the levels of income and consumption of Koreans at that time. As the consumption of *jajangmyeon* by Korean people increased, it was included in the lists of commodities and services for the calculation of the consumer price index. This means that the price of *jajangmyeon* came under the scrutiny of the government. The government tried to control price hikes and suppressed the rising price of *jajangmyeon*. Consequently, ordinary people came to eat *jajangmyeon* relatively easily, and the Korean government played an important part in that change.

<sup>17</sup> Kim Gwang-eok (1998) pointed out delivery as an important reason why Chinese food appealed to the common people, because “ordering for dishes to be delivered” satisfied their need to be recognized and respected.

<sup>18</sup> The *bunsikjeom* menu includes not just flour-based meals but also various kinds of rice dishes and even some Western dishes, such as pork cutlet and hamburger steak. The distinguishing feature of these restaurants is that they serve simple meals at low prices.

<sup>19</sup> They also mentioned many merits of Chinese cuisine: it is served quickly; it has various tastes and **sues** various materials; because it is cooked at a high temperature, the nutritional loss is minimal, etc.

According to the survey of college students in Gangwon-do, 46.6 percent of the male respondents cited greasiness and 20.5 percent cited high calories as characteristic of Chinese food. Similarly, the percentages were 46.8 and 26.8 respectively for female respondents (Min et al. 2002). These impressions cause people to avoid eating Chinese food for fear that they will gain weight.<sup>20</sup>

When I asked interviewees about the décor in Chinese restaurants, almost all of them answered that they were too red. This was followed by observations that Chinese restaurants were unclean. Specifically, they said that Chinese restaurants were, by and large, small, dark, dirty, and so on. A woman in her forties said that when she thought of Chinese restaurants, cockroaches came to mind. When I asked whether or not she had actually seen cockroaches at Chinese restaurants, she answered that even though she had not seen them, she had heard such stories many times. It seems that such stories form a stereotype that is attached to Chinese restaurants. This attitude towards Chinese restaurants seems to be closely related to the declining preference among young people. The survey of the X generation in Seoul shows that when respondents choose restaurants, though they mostly value the quality of the food (36.1 %), they also give high priority to atmosphere (17.6 %), quality of service (12.6 %), and hygiene (11.9 %). When college students ate out with friends, atmosphere was the third highest deciding factor (13.0 %), right behind taste (54.7 %) and price (25.5 %). When they went on dates, however, atmosphere was reported as the most important factor in choosing restaurants (52.7 %), followed by taste (32.1 %) and price (7.6 %). In both cases, hygiene was the fourth most important factor (Kim et al. 2001). In conclusion, the preference for Chinese restaurants cannot help but fall, given the circumstances that a high percentage of people highly value atmosphere and hygiene.

In spite of these negative images, Chinese food and restaurants have already secured their position in Korean food culture. Korean people over thirty are especially likely to have special memories of *jajangmyeon* and Chinese restaurants. Many people talk about having eaten Chinese food—especially *jajangmyeon*, and maybe *tangsuyuk* if they were lucky—on special occasions, such as entrance ceremonies, graduation ceremonies, birthdays, Children’s Day, etc. This is because people rarely ate out, and when they did, Chinese restaurants were their favorite places to go, perhaps because the food was seen as exotic and inexpensive. In the 1980s, even though Chinese restaurants

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<sup>20</sup> Other characteristics of Chinese food that constitute negative images are the overuse of artificial flavors and high cholesterol. Even though these aspects of Chinese food are frequently pointed out in columns and articles about health or Chinese food, my interviewees and respondents in Min’s study never mentioned them. I think that because they were young, they were relatively unconcerned with these aspects.

began to lose their dominant position as a favorite place for eating out, with this trend strengthening since the 1990s, people still feel affection towards Chinese food, especially *jajangmyeon*. *Jajangmyeon* is a favorite food for Korean soldiers and overseas Koreans, in particular, who cannot easily eat it. Thus it can be said that *jajangmyeon* is a representative Korean dish, along with *gimchi*, *bulgogi*, *doenjang jjigae*, and others.<sup>21</sup>

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By examining the appearance of *jajangmyeon* as the theme or subject in various literary works, including novels, poems, children's stories, comic books, and essays, we can recognize how deeply Chinese food has put down roots in Korean people's lives.<sup>22</sup> *Jajangmyeon* was also used as the theme of a commercial film for a telecommunication company and a song performed by a popular singer.<sup>23</sup> In addition, *junggukjip* and *jajangmyeon* have appeared in Korean movies.<sup>24</sup>

We can also identify Korean people's attachment to *jajangmyeon* in the controversy over the pronunciation of *jajangmyeon*. As noted in the beginning of this paper, many people objected to the new rules of Korean spelling because they believed *jjajangmyeon* was the correct way to spell and pronounce the word, rather than *jajangmyeon*. I browsed Internet sites to see how people feel about this issue. The dominant majority of people preferred *jjajangmyeon* to *jajangmyeon*. The responses were very emotional. The following post by an Internet user represents those responses

<sup>21</sup> It can be said that *jajangmyeon* is closely related with Korean identity. The relationship between eating and identities is one of the hot topics of anthropological research. Various studies have been carried out on the relationship between food and ethnicity/nationality. For example, several works deal with the overview of national cuisine, the creation of national cuisine, and interactions between national or ethnic identity and national or ethnic food: an overview of Vietnamese food and identity (Poulain 1997, Vol. I & II); a close relationship between *gimchi* and Korean identity (Han 1994; Ju 1994); the creation of Indian national cuisine (Appadurai 1988) and French cuisine (Trubek 2000); "bento" and Japanese identity (Noguchi 1994); the relationship between keeping kosher and Jewish identity among Jews in Denmark (Buckster 1999), etc. Several studies also deal with the Chinese food's relationship with Chinese identity. For example, Tam (2002) pays attention to the close relationship between *yumcha* and Hong Kong identity among Hong Kong immigrants in Australia. And Tan (2001) deals with the food culture and identity of Chinese-Malaysians.

It also can be said that *jajangmyeon* has become a part of Korean food culture. Similar points are made regarding Chinese food in Japan (Cheung 2002; Tamotsu 2001), in the Philippines (Fernandez 2002), and Korea (Kim 2001).

<sup>22</sup> The examples of literary works are as follows: "Jajangmyeon," an essay by An Do-hyeon (2000); "Haengbok-eul mandeuneun jjajangmyeon," an essay by Bak Gwon-yong (1998); "Jajangmyeon," a children's story by Bak Jae-hyeop and Jo Min-yeong (2003), and "Sesang-eseo jeil madinneun jjajangmyeon," a children's story by Kwak Jae-gu (1996); "Jajangmyeon," a comic book by Bak Ha and Kim Jae-yeon (2000).

<sup>23</sup> In the commercial film, "Sinsegi tongsin 017," a *jajangmyeon* deliveryman played a major role, and *jajangmyeon* was the subject of a song, "Eomeonimkke" (To Mother), by G.O.D (a popular Korean boy band).

<sup>24</sup> Both "Bukgyeong Banjeom" (Beijing Restaurant) and "Sinjang gae-eop" (A Growing Business) were released in 1999. The former was about the blood-and-tears endeavors of the restaurateur and employees, and the latter was a cult comedy movie set in a Chinese restaurant.

well.

I eat *jjajangmyeon* but not *jajangmyeon*.

Ever since my childhood, I have eaten and loved *jjajangmyeon*.

But one day, all of a sudden, I was told that *jjajangmyeon* was not *jjajangmyeon* but *jajangmyeon*.

I was dumbfounded.

I don't eat *jajangmyeon*. In the first place, the name itself is tasteless.

I want to eat delicious *jjajangmyeon*, but I don't want to eat *jajangmyeon*.

Something that caught my attention is that all these literary works and cultural commodities were published or released in the late 1990s and after, and the majority of those who enjoy or buy them are young people, usually between their teens and thirties. Furthermore, the Internet users who actively expressed their opinions regarding the pronunciation of *jajangmyeon* are of similar ages. That is, *jajangmyeon* still means a great deal to Korean people, including the young.

#### Diversification of Chinese Restaurants

Chinese restaurants can be divided broadly into two categories: large, luxurious ones, and small, simple ones. However, even though the size, location, variety of menu items, and purpose of use differ between them, their image and food served are still similar. Broadly speaking, Chinese cuisine is divided into several basic regional types, such as Shandong, Sichuan, Guangdong, Shanghai, etc. These basic regional cuisines are further divided into many local cuisines, and this wide variety is one of the remarkable characteristics of Chinese cuisine. This diversity does not appear in Koreanized Chinese cuisine, however. Since most Chinese-Koreans came from Shandong province, the Koreanized Chinese cuisine that they have made is based on Shandong cuisine. Therefore, even though the menus differ between restaurants, the basic taste is the same. The image of Chinese restaurants has been a very stereotypical one—a dimly-lit interior decorated in strong red tones, Chinese characters on the walls, beaded hanging screens, and so on. This monotonous decor has been changing, however.

The swell in international exchanges of people and materials is the chief factor that has resulted in changes to Chinese restaurants. In Korea, in the mid-1980s, those exchanges were rapidly increasing. Around that time, fast food restaurants, such as

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McDonald's, KFC, and Burger King, were expanding in Korea, and the number of Korean people who experienced foreign culture, including food culture, started to increase rapidly. An important occasion for changing Chinese restaurants was Korea's establishment of diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China in 1992. As globalization has progressed recently,<sup>25</sup> international exchanges of people and materials have also speeded up. Not only have many people tasted "authentic" Chinese food in mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, but they have also experienced Chinese food in other countries, such as the United States, Canada, England, Singapore, Malaysia, etc. while touring, studying abroad, traveling on business, or working in foreign companies or foreign branches. These experiences have created demands for various kinds of Chinese cuisine and restaurants. The responses to these demands have been realized in several ways.

Firstly, some restaurants stress their authenticity. A common feature of these restaurants is that they bring chefs over from Hong Kong, Taiwan, or China. In terms of differences among them, some have connections to Hong Kong and maintain very modern appearances different from the image of traditional Koreanized Chinese restaurants,<sup>26</sup> while others advertise their connections to mainland China. The restaurant discussed below is an example of how authenticity is sold by restaurants and bought by consumers.

This restaurant is in a building occupied by dozens of stores located on the border of a business and residential area. The restaurant signboard is too featureless to indicate that there is anything special about the restaurant. Inside the restaurant, however, several points differentiate it from other Chinese restaurants. First, large photos of dishes labeled with the names hang on the walls. This presumes that customers are not familiar with some of the dishes served in this restaurant, and indeed, you can find unfamiliar names on the menu. Anyone who has tried Chinese food in China, however, would know some of them. The names of the dishes are further presented with their Chinese characters and the mandarin pronunciation spelled out in Korean in parentheses, for example, 鍋包肉 (*gwoboreo-u*), 京醬肉絲 (*jingjyangreo-usseu*), 宮保鷄丁 (*ggungbojiding*), etc.<sup>27</sup> Another critical feature of the menu is that there are few familiar dishes on the menu, for example, *jajangmyeon*, *jjambong*, and *tangsuyuk*. Second, gas ranges are installed in the centers of the tables, which is unusual for a

<sup>25</sup> Globalization is based on the rapid increase of economic, social, technological, and cultural exchanges crossing national and cultural boundaries.

<sup>26</sup> The connections are diverse, ranging from joint venture and partnership to franchise. Lotus Garden, Mr. Chow and Jackie's Kitchen belong to this category.

<sup>27</sup> The phonetic transcriptions of Chinese into Korean on the menu are not in accordance with standard rules. They are close to the actual pronunciations in northern China.

Chinese restaurant. This is because this restaurant's specialty is a dish named *hwogwo* (火鍋), also known as Chinese-style *sinseollo* or *syabeu syabeu*. Not only is this dish new and unusual in Korea, it is also served at specialty restaurants in China. The diner boils a light, milky-colored stock and a spicy, red stock in the **round pan with an s-shaped partition in the middle on the range**. Then they lightly cook various kinds of meat, mainly sliced lamb and beef, vegetables, tofu, dumplings, and noodles in either of the stocks, depending on their taste. The cooked food is then dipped in sauce and eaten. Third, small Korean and Chinese flags hang side by side on the wall and partitions. According to the manager, the restaurant was established in 1999 with a 320,000-dollar investment from China. Thus, it seems that the flags symbolize the partnership between the two countries.

I first visited this restaurant on the recommendation of a friend who knew that I liked *hwogwo*. As far as he knew, J restaurant was the best place to eat *hwogwo* in Korea. When I first visited the restaurant in 2001, I was struck by the fact that most of the customers were Chinese. Initially, I thought the dishes would be too expensive for migrant laborers from China, but as it turned out, most of the diners were officials from the Chinese Embassy in Seoul or businessmen who went there for a taste of home. Two or three years later, though, the majority of customers were Koreans. Some went there to taste "different" Chinese dishes, some who had traveled to China wanted to consume their "memory" of life in China, and others went to taste "mainland China."<sup>28</sup>

Secondly, some Chinese restaurants serve Chinese dishes that have been localized in foreign countries, for example, the United States, Malaysia, and Singapore, and are new to Korean society. Let us take a look at an American-style Chinese restaurant briefly. C restaurant is more or less a cafeteria that serves several simple dishes and shares many common features with such restaurants in the United States. For example, it is located in the food court of a shopping mall, and its menu is very similar, including serving fortune cookies for dessert.<sup>29</sup>

X restaurant identifies itself on its signboard as "Chinese Cuisine Specializing in Singaporean Seafood," and as "The First Singaporean Chinese Restaurant in Korea." However, this restaurant is not exactly Singaporean. The owner admitted in an interview that advertising the restaurant as "Singaporean" was a marketing strategy. He said that

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<sup>28</sup> The manager told me that a professor of Chinese literature had brought along his students to let them taste "authentic" food of mainland China. I also brought along friends and students of mine a few times to that purpose.

<sup>29</sup> Its menu includes Vegetable Fried Rice, Shrimp Fried Rice, Chicken Lo Mein, Beef with Garlic Sauce, Mongolian Beef, General Tao's Chicken, Shrimp with Broccoli, etc. That you are supposed to eat these dishes with soda or coffee is also a common feature with such restaurants in the United States. I personally enjoyed eating Beef with Garlic Sauce with a Coke when I was in the United States.

Chinese dishes in Southeast Asian countries were similar to Hokkien cuisine, as they share such characteristics as the abundant use of seafood and their own salted seafood and spices. He brought all the chefs from Indonesia, not only because their wages were low compared to Singaporeans, but also because the cuisine they cook was not very different from Singaporean cuisine.

X restaurant differentiates itself from traditional Koreanized Chinese restaurants, maintaining its identity as a Chinese restaurant with modern Singaporean colors. As far as interior design is concerned, the restaurant boasts red wallpaper, large framed mirrors and gold-colored partitions, and hangings made from small red pieces of paper on which the Chinese character, *fu* (福, *bok* in Korean), is written upside down.<sup>30</sup> Red and gold are favorite Chinese colors and can be found in almost every Chinese restaurant in Korea. On the one hand, X restaurant tries to keep its identity as Chinese by using these colors. On the other hand, however, it intends to distinguish itself from other Chinese restaurants by using a deeper shade of red and gold. On the menu, the names of dishes are written differently from the patterns usually found in Chinese restaurants, and unfamiliar dishes are also listed. The names are written in English with their Korean meanings in parentheses. For example, such well known dishes as *eohyang gaji* (魚香茄子) is written as “Eggplant with Minced Pork (*maekomhan gaji-wa dajin dwaejigogi*),” and *dongpayuk* (東坡肉) is written as “Steamed Pork with Herbs (*samgyeopsal jjim*). Both dishes, however, differ slightly in their recipes and tastes from ordinary versions. There are also Southeast Asian Chinese dishes, such as “Steamed Fish in Soy Sauce (*ganjangsoseu-ui hwareo jjim*),” “Fried Kuey Teow in Seafood (*ssalguksu haemul bokkeum*)” and so on. Furthermore, some ingredients, such as spiced and salted seafood, are partly imported from the Southeast Asian region. The final characteristic of this restaurant I would like to point out is that *jajangmyeon*, *jjambong*, and *tangsuyuk* are not included on the menu, just like J restaurant.

Customer composition is another characteristic that says a lot about this restaurant. Initially, the customers mainly consisted of acquaintances of the owner and those who lived near the restaurant and were sensitive to new trends. As the restaurant came to be widely known, a steady customer base was formed. The owner said, “The customers are those who studied abroad, and thus have fond memories of the food they ate in Chinatowns, or who had been in the service of branch offices in Southeast Asian countries, or who had frequently traveled on business and so were familiar with foreign cuisine.” This characteristic is reflected in the age and sex distribution of the steady

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<sup>30</sup> This character means “good fortune.” Hanging it upside down means that one wishes to be blessed by catching any good fortune that falls.

customers who are mostly men in their late thirties and forties.

Another new type of Chinese restaurant is the fusion restaurant. The term “fusion” began to be used regularly in music in the 1970s, and was then expanded to art, fashion, architecture, and food. Fusion food can be simply defined as food made from the combination of ingredients or recipes belonging to different cultures.<sup>31</sup> Fusion food first appeared in North America in the 1980s and became a more or less general phenomenon in the 1990s. This cultural phenomenon is closely related to globalization, which began in earnest in Korea in the late 1990s (Yi 2000). We can understand this trend better by looking at an example of a fusion Chinese restaurant.<sup>32</sup>

Let us take M restaurant as an example. Both externally and internally, the restaurant does not look Chinese. The outer walls are made up of large panes of glass covered in green canvas. The name of the restaurant is printed on the canvas in small letters. From the outside, it looks Western in style. The interior is decorated with red cloth, bamboo trees, small Asian (not just Chinese) decorative objects, and a large aquarium. The interior décor and the tableware is a mixture of Chinese and Japanese styles. The kitchen is partitioned off by large panes of glass. The most remarkable feature of this restaurant is a large wine cellar equipped with a thermostat. To sum it up, the style of the restaurant is fusion.

There are three menus—an ordinary menu, a dinner course menu, and a wine menu. On the menus, the names of dishes are written in Korean with English translation in parentheses. Some dishes are well-known, such as *ohyang jangnyuk* (sliced steamed pork with five flavors), *haemul nurungji tang* (scorched rice soup with mixed seafood), and *mapa dubu* (sautéed bean curd with minced meat in hot sauce). Around twenty percent of all the dishes are not traditional but newly invented fusion dishes, which include *dongchung hacho tongsangeo jineureomi jjim* (steamed shark’s fin with oriental medicine), *hwaiteu ssoseu-ui ssalguksu sae-u twigim* (fried prawn & rice noodle with white sauce), and others. Thus, this is a fusion “Chinese” restaurant. The manager of the restaurant said, “You have to serve foods whose national identities are clear and add twenty or so percent of fusion food. If you serve them fifty-fifty, then the restaurant becomes unidentifiable. Fusion restaurants began in earnest only three years ago. Those

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<sup>31</sup> According to this definition, the Koreanized, Americanized and Singaporeanized Chinese foods mentioned above are all said to be fusion food. However, the transformations undergone by these foods usually took place in the process of adapting foreign food to the tastes of local people. The differences we can find among McDonald’s restaurants in Korea, China, Germany and the United States are the results of adaptation, rather than fusion.

<sup>32</sup> Generally speaking, there are two kinds of fusion restaurants. One kind of restaurant serves dishes whose nationalities are mostly unidentifiable. The other deals with a majority of dishes that have a clear identity, while only a minority of them are fusion.

restaurants that served unidentifiable foods were all driven out of business.”

It seems that this restaurant’s thriving business was partly due to the increasing influence of health discourse in the late 1990s. Some customers said that the food tasted too flat and light because, according to the manager, they used as little artificial seasonings as possible and tried to make the food less greasy in order to keep it healthier. She said, however, that most customers preferred this method of cooking.<sup>33</sup> Wine might also contribute heavily to the restaurant’s success. That is partly because people think that drinking wine is good for their health, and partly because many people think that wine is an indispensable part of food culture. They also tend to think that knowledge of wine is a yardstick for their social status.<sup>34</sup> Considering that the restaurant is located in Cheongdam-dong, a representative business and residential area for the well-to-do in Seoul, the restaurant attracts those who want to identify their high social status through the consumption of wine.

Chinese restaurants and foods are changing to satisfy the diverse needs of customers. The two directions of changes I have discussed above are “authenticity” and “exoticness.” As Korean society becomes globalized and modernized, people’s experiences, direct or indirect, are more diversified. Some look for restaurants that serve foods similar to what they enjoyed when they were in China. Some want to eat foods that are the same as what they had when they were in Malaysia or Singapore on business, or what they enjoyed when they were in New York or Los Angeles as students. Still others want to consume authenticity, exoticness, or modernity in Chinese restaurants regardless of their own experiences. Whatever needs or desires people have, it is certain that they cannot be satisfied with the traditional Koreanized Chinese foods and restaurants. This is why new styles of Chinese restaurants come into being, and still new ones are forming.

## Conclusion

Let me return to the issues I raised at the beginning of this paper. The first issue is

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<sup>33</sup> She talked to me about the ways people’s concerns about food have changed in Korean society. The most important thing in the 1970s was eating their fill. People began to care about the taste of foods in the 1980s. Quality became a matter of concern in the 1990s. Since the late 1990s, people’s primary concern has turned to health.

<sup>34</sup> The proper consumption of wine by and large presupposes the acquisition of cultural knowledge. For many Korean people, therefore, the consumption of wine functions as an important constituent of class identities that they have at present or intend to have in the future (personal communication with professor Bak, Sangmi).

whether Korean people think *jajangmyeon*, which represents Koreanized Chinese cuisine, is a Korean food or a Chinese food. Most Korean people would assume that *jajangmyeon* is Chinese, because they know it was first made and sold by Chinese-Koreans and was not a traditional Korean dish. Since the early 1990s, this situation has changed as Koreans have begun to visit China. Those who visited China were hoping to find *jajangmyeon* in its original Chinese form, because they cherished the memories of *jajangmyeon* from their youth. Even one of the Korean broadcasting companies made a documentary program titled, “In Search of The Origin of *Jajangmyeon*” (Ju 2000, 18). The result of such endeavors was that no such food as *jajangmyeon* was found in China. This led to the argument that *jajangmyeon* was already a Korean food. In order to verify how people were thinking about this issue, I searched through Internet portal sites. The dominant opinion was that *jajangmyeon* had originated in China and was thus a Chinese food, even if it was so transformed and localized that it was no longer recognizably Chinese. Then, I asked those around me about this issue. Surprisingly, the majority of them responded that *jajangmyeon* is Korean because they too had heard that there was no *jajangmyeon* in China.

The other issue I raised is pronunciation. Is it *jajangmyeon* or *jjajangmyeon*? I browsed Internet sites to see how people feel about this issue. Most people responded very emotionally. Some argued that pronouncing it as *jajangmyeon* could not express the familiar taste and feeling of *jjajangmyeon*. Some went even farther, arguing that as long as the glottalized sounds existed in Korean language, *jjajangmyeon* had to be *jjajangmyeon*, not *jajangmyeon*. They even cursed the Korean linguists who framed the new rules of Korean spelling.

People’s opinions and responses to these issues show how successfully Chinese cuisine, as represented by *jajangmyeon*, has been localized in Korean society. First, it was cooked, sold, and consumed by Chinese-Koreans. Then, it was mostly cooked and sold by Chinese-Koreans and consumed by Koreans. Lastly, all those processes came to be dominated by Koreans from the late 1970s. Until the 1970s, Chinese food was the only foreign food (or food with foreign origins) that ordinary Korean people could easily enjoy. It was also the only food that could be delivered. They consumed exoticness, convenience, and **self-respect** (see note 16) through Chinese food. Even until the 1980s, Chinese food had maintained a dominant position as the item for eating out (including delivery) in everyday life. It seems that those who were young during that period felt a strong emotional attachment to Chinese food.

However, since the 1990s, the situation has changed. Chinese food now has to compete with pizza, hamburgers, and fried chicken for the position of children’s favorite

food. Even though Chinese food as represented by *jajangmyeon* still arouses people's strong affection, the dominant position of Chinese food and restaurants as a source of exoticness has been losing ground. Competition with Japanese and Western foods and restaurants grew intense in the 1990s. Recently, chiefly due to globalization, the list of competitors has expanded greatly, including Vietnamese, Thai, Indian, Italian, French, Italian, Mexican, and fusion. People consume the various ethnic foods mentioned above in order to establish and reinforce their modernized, globalized, or high-class identities. This trend, along with Korea's establishment of diplomatic relations with the PRC, brought about changes to Chinese foods and restaurants. They too have diversified. American-, Malaysian-, Singaporean-, and fusion-styles of Chinese restaurants try to meet people's diverse needs. Some also appeal to people by emphasizing their authenticity instead. People consume "familiar exoticness" in the Koreanized Chinese restaurants, and they also consume "modernity," "exoticness," and "authenticity" in the new styles of Chinese restaurants.

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**GLOSSARY**

<i>bok</i>	福	Shanghai(Ch.)	上海
Guangdong (Ch.)	廣東	Sichuan (Ch.)	四川
<i>hwagyo</i>	華僑	<i>sintoburi</i>	身土不二
Shandong (Ch.)	山東	<i>uihwadan</i>	義和團

(Ch.: Chinese)

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