

# Buddhist Temple Food in South Korea: *Interests and Agency in the Reinvention of Tradition in the Age of Globalization*

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## Abstract

*This article examines the cultural politics of Buddhist temple food in contemporary Korea. Almost forgotten by the general public, temple food has gained growing attention from the mass media since the mid-1990s. Tracing this development, it analyzes the complex interplay between popular concerns for health and economic security, and the converging and diverging interests of the state, business, and the Buddhist establishment in mobilizing cultural differences, to further larger national and transnational politics. This article argues that the reinvention of temple food as tradition serves not only to reaffirm the national identity and ease a collective anxiety about rapid social change, but also promotes national competitiveness in the global market. It also allows us to reexamine the postcolonial view of agency tied to consumption and pleasure, rather than intentional and organized action. Popular agency in this case is not so much rooted in the pleasure of consumption as in concerns for health and economic security. These concerns are also expediently appropriated by the better organized actors—the government, business, and the Buddhist establishment.*

**Keywords:** cultural politics, Buddhist temple food, reinvention of tradition, mobilization of cultural differences, popular agency, social change, cultural commodities, globalization, global market, collective identity, national competitiveness.

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## Introduction

Food is a source of nourishment and quotidian pleasure. It is also a significant aspect of individual and collective identities, as indicated by religious regulations of diet and regional variations in dietary customs (Khare 1992; Reinders 2004; Ulrich 2007). As a social fact, food signifies rank and hierarchy, intimacy and solidarity, and exclusion and distance between social groups.<sup>1</sup> In the current era of globalization, food is not only a major target of transnational agribusiness, the fast food industry, and the leisure and entertainment industries, it is also an important focal point where localized responses to globalization are articulated. To illuminate local responses that reveal the complicated process of globalization as a lived experience, this article examines the cultural politics of reinventing “traditional Buddhist temple food” (*jeontong sachal eumsik* or *jeol eumsik*) in South Korea.<sup>2</sup> Since the mid-1990s, there has been growing mass media attention to Buddhist temple food. Especially in the 2000s, cookbooks on this subject have been steadily published and Internet sites on it have multiplied. Major dailies have increasingly reported on Buddhist cuisine by focusing on these cookbook authors and Buddhist cooking classes in urban areas; within these articles, newspapers have commonly introduced handy recipes of Buddhist cuisine and restaurants specializing in temple food.<sup>3</sup> National television networks have broadcast documentaries on temple food particularly around the Buddha’s birthday (April 8 in the lunar calendar) and cable television channels have featured regular cooking shows on temple food.

The apparent revival of Buddhist temple food as Korean tradition

1. See Appadurai (1981), Chang (1977), Goody (1982), and Sterckx (2004).

2. This approach is different from historical accounts of the development of Korean Buddhist temple food and therefore this article is not concerned with the comparison of Korean temple food with temple food in other Asian societies.

3. According to my survey of major newspapers’ articles on Buddhist cuisine between January 1990 and January 2008, the number of substantial articles on the subject multiplied in the 2000s. Ninety-eight percent of the total 722 articles from the major national newspapers surveyed were published in the 2000s.

is a curious phenomenon and raises the following questions: Why is it happening at this moment after the long public oblivion of temple food? What sorts of interests are at work to generate this phenomenon? What does it mean to revive tradition in this age of globalization, characterized by the transnational flows of capital, labor, images, ideas, and technology? What does the rediscovery of the tradition reveal or illuminate about the complicated process of globalization as a lived experience? While diverse versions of Buddhist temple food have existed since Buddhism was introduced to the Korean peninsula in the late fourth century, it has been considered (by contemporary Koreans) to be food for monks and nuns living in remote temples to pursue enlightenment. In the past decade or so, however, the mass media have represented this rather esoteric category of food as an alternative diet to fast food, processed food saturated with artificial additives, and the “westernization” of dietary habits leading to serious disease. Urban middle-class women have taken Buddhist cooking classes to improve their family diet, personal health, and appearance. As this interest in healthy food has affected restaurant businesses, men and women with entrepreneurial inclinations have also taken such cooking classes to open specialty restaurants or incorporate temple food into their existing menus. This array of health concerns and economic interest among the public partly account for the surge in popularity of temple food among segments of the population.

Another recurring theme in mass media discourse on temple food is the significance of Buddhist cuisine as a source of national identity in the age of globalization; it is important to know Korean culture and maintain its unique identity not only for its own sake, but also for its economic potential. The Korean government is interested in utilizing temple food for this potential, as well as for the political purpose of affirming the unique Korean identity. Because of its economic potential, the government has supported the tourism industry and the Buddhist establishment in order to promote temple food as a cultural resource to be branded and sold as a value-added product. Aspiring to be influential in the larger society, Buddhist

orders have begun to pay some belated attention to temple food. In a nutshell, the reinvention of traditional Buddhist temple food in contemporary Korea allows us to examine the interplay between popular concerns for health and economic security, and the interests of the state, business, and the Buddhist establishment in reinventing tradition and mobilizing cultural differences, to further larger national and transnational politics. It also enables us to reflect on the postcolonial view of agency tied to consumption and pleasure, rather than intentional and organized action.

### **The Politics of “Invented Tradition” and Local Culture in the Age of Transnational Globalization**

As Joseph Gusfield (1967) argues, the idea of tradition is the product of rapid social change, accompanied by a pervasive sense of loss and temporal distance from what has passed. It connotes a self-conscious relation to the past, and an attempt to identify it with continuity in the midst of disruptive change. Contemporary globalization has accelerated social change, as exemplified by the spread of the market economy and transnational flows, and it has generated a growing public interest in localized traditions. In his theory of cultural globalization, which underscores the constitutive role of imagination mediated by the combined effect of the mass media and migration in shaping the modern subjectivity, Arjun Appadurai argues that “space and time are themselves socialized and localized through complex and deliberate practices of performance, representation, and action” (1996, 180). Hence, locality needs to be understood as “a structure of feeling” (to use Raymond Williams’ words), rather than a geographical space, that emerges from the practices of local subjects in the forms of “resistance, irony, selectivity and in general, agency” (1996, 7). Similarly, Richard Wilk observes that globalization seems to “produce local culture and promote the constant formation of new focus of local identity, dress, cuisine, music, dance and language” (2006, 10).

In his seminal work on invented traditions in the context of Modern Europe, Eric Hobsbawm observes that such traditions are intended to establish social cohesion among members of a group, legitimize existing institutions and authorities, and inculcate conventional values and behavior in individuals (1983, 11). In this constructionist view of tradition, he highlights the dominant role that the state and organized political and social movements played, between 1870 and 1914, in inventing such traditions as political ceremonials, national myths, and national sports (1983, 283). While Hobsbawm recognizes unofficial social groups and businesses as significant actors in this invention, the prominence of official political actors in his work reflects the era marked by the spread and consolidation of the nation-state (and colonial empire) as the political unit. In his historical study, the salience of political interests over economic and popular ones also reflects his focus on European metropolises without analyzing the economic exploitation of their colonies and the difficulty in accessing the unrecorded lives of ordinary people in the past.<sup>4</sup>

As I discuss below, in the case of Buddhist temple food in contemporary Korea, however, popular and economic interests (rather than political interests in social cohesion) play a conspicuous role in the cultural politics of reinventing tradition in the current era of globalization. Popular concerns for health and economic security are not merely the object of manipulation by the state, business, and religion, but also a formative element in shaping the actions of these major institutions. Responding to the economic potential of temple food that became trendy among middle-class urbanites, the state began to promote temple food as tradition. I argue that the reinvention of this tradition serves not only to reaffirm national identity and ease a collective anxiety about rapid social change, but also promotes national competitiveness in the global market. In the face of deterritorialization,

4. Yet Hobsbawm considers the importance of popular sentiments regarding the effectiveness of invented traditions when he writes that “it also seems clear that the most successful examples of manipulation are those which exploit practices which clearly meet a felt—not necessarily a clearly understood—need among particular bodies of people” (1983, 307).

torializing globalization, tradition appeals as a source of territorializing the collective identity of Korea, and a crucial means to differentiate one's commodity from others' in the global market. This analysis of the cultural politics of reinventing temple food as tradition does not deny the continuing political function of tradition as the source of authority and legitimacy of a nation-state. Rather, it highlights the fact that such political function hinges on the effective appropriation of popular interests in health and economic security to enhance the state's economic performance.

Analysis of cultural politics also allows us to examine the post-Enlightenment view of agency that is not rooted in the rationality of political intention, which has been promoted by a dominant brand of postcolonial studies in American academia.<sup>5</sup> In line with the postcolonial concept of agency, Appadurai explores the agency of people who encounter the forces of globalization in their consumption of mass-mediated popular culture, rather than organized and intentional movements. While he recognizes that the consumers of mass-mediated commercial culture are not free agents and that consumption is frequently embedded in repetitious regulations of individual behavior, he highlights the pleasure involved in the consumption that generates agency. Appadurai further contends that the transnational flow of mass-mediated images, ideas, and sensations engenders a "diasporic public sphere" that undermines the nation-state bounded by a given territory (Appadurai 1996, 19). From the angle of the cultural politics of reinventing tradition, however, it is too premature to announce the near end of the epoch with the emergence of the diasporic public sphere in urban areas in the world. Because such a fluid public sphere is open to ongoing interplay among converging and diverging popular and institutional interests, the consumerist agency rooted in pleasure is often appropriated by better organized political and economic interests. Moreover, as analyzed below in the cultural

5. For the discussion of postcolonial agency, see Homi Bhabha's "Of Mimicry and Man" and "Interrogating Identity: Franz Fanon and the Postcolonial Prerogative" in Bhabha (1994).

politics of reinventing temple food, popular agency in this case is not so much rooted in the pleasure of consumption as in concerns for health and economic security. These concerns are also expediently appropriated by the government, business, and the Buddhist establishment. While this article does not focus on the historical development of Korean Buddhist temple food, a brief discussion of its history is needed to contextualize the contemporary cultural politics of reinventing it as tradition.

### A Brief History of Buddhist Cuisine in Korea and Its Contemporary Characteristics

Mahāyāna Buddhism was introduced to the Korean Peninsula during the Three Kingdoms period (4th-7th centuries). Goguryeo, one of the three kingdoms, first adopted Buddhism as its court religion in 372. The other kingdoms of Baekje and Silla accepted Buddhism in 384 and 528, respectively. Under the patronage of these royal courts, numerous Buddhist temples were built and the commandment against eating meat was disseminated. During the Unified Silla period (668-935), the prohibition against meat-eating was modified but Buddhist temples spread tea-drinking as a central component of Buddhist rituals. During the Goryeo dynasty (919-1392), which adopted Buddhism as the state religion, the prohibition against meat-eating became strict and temples invented various culinary techniques to prepare vegetarian dishes and preserve them (General Affairs Office 2006, 22). Marinated and fermented vegetables, the predecessors of *gimchi*, were developed along with vegetable soup (*guk*), lettuce wraps (*ssam*), and salad (*namul muchim*). Wang Geon, the founder of the Goryeo dynasty, instituted two annual Buddhist festivals, Yeondeunghoe (gathering for the lighting of lotus lamps) and Palgwanhoe (gathering to observe the eight prohibitions).<sup>6</sup> These nation-

6. The first festival was organized to commemorate Buddha on a full-moon night of the first lunar month of the lunar calendar, and the second one was held to wish

al festivals and other ceremonies catering to wealthy aristocratic patrons facilitated the development of elaborate vegetarian cuisine and the spread of tea-drinking (KBCEG 2006, 7).

The aristocratic Buddhist cuisine underwent a transformation during the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910), which established Neo-Confucianism as the state ideology and suppressed Buddhism. The Confucian dynasty imposed a series of legal restrictions on monks and temples. It restricted the number of monks and forbade them from entering the capital. It closed hundreds of temples and banned the construction of new ones. It also confiscated such properties as land and slaves from temples. Consequently, Buddhism became confined to the countryside, where its followers were illiterate and poor peasants and women (Buswell 1992a, 23). Impoverished and marginalized in the process of this sociopolitical change, Buddhism since this period has concentrated on other-worldly activities of meditation (*seon*) and studies of scriptures.<sup>7</sup> As Buddhism lost its wealthy and powerful patronage by royal court and nobility, opulent Buddhist ceremonies accompanied by luxurious temple food disappeared. Tea-drinking declined and temple food was reduced to the mainstay of vegetarian culinary dishes, which would resemble rural peasants' diets (Kim 1995, 10).

Rustic vegetarian cuisine continued to characterize Buddhist cuisine in Korea, outliving tumultuous sociopolitical change during Japanese colonial rule. The colonial power, with its strong Buddhist tradition, tried to support Buddhism in Korea; at the turn of the nineteenth century, Japan pressed the declining Joseon court to eliminate restrictions on Buddhist activities in the capital and allow monks to enter cities for the first time after a roughly three-century hiatus

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prosperity for the royal court under the auspices of indigenous Korean spirits in the eleventh lunar month of the calendar (Buswell 2005, 9).

7. This meditative tradition (*seon*) was introduced to Korea by a Silla monk in the late 7th century, but it remained subordinate to the earlier tradition of scholasticism and did not become dominant until the 13th century. By the beginning of the 16th century, however, the meditative tradition overshadowed all other branches of Korean Buddhism (Buswell 1992a, 21-22; 1992b, 9).

(Buswell 1992a, 24). During its colonial rule of Korea (1910-1945), Japan introduced the practice of marriage into the Buddhist priesthood in Korea, where monks and nuns had observed strict celibacy for centuries, sowing the seed of internecine conflict within Buddhism after Independence. This internal strife over marriage not only led to the division of Buddhism into the Jogye Order (which has upheld celibate priesthood and dominated contemporary Korean Buddhism) and the Taego Order (which has accepted married priesthood) in 1962, but also aborted the potential to revive Buddhism in contemporary Korea for a few decades.

Against the backdrop of this checkered political and social history, Buddhist cuisine in Korea developed into a distinct form of vegetarian diet that has been prepared and consumed by monks and nuns. At the same time, as will be discussed below, there are some significant differences between Buddhist temple food and a generic category of vegetarian food in terms of Buddhist injunctions against the use of "stimulating vegetables" and artificial or chemical ingredients. Two factors were significant to the emergence of temple food as an integral part of the monastic culture. First, unlike Buddhist temples in South Asia that were built in residential neighborhoods, temples in Korea were mostly located in mountains away from populous residential areas due to the history of the persecution of Buddhism. Hence, while monks in South Asia obtained their daily food through alms collections from local villagers, monks and nuns in Korea cultivated or collected their own food. Second, as mentioned above, Korean Buddhism stressed meditation as the vehicle to achieve enlightenment, and monks and nuns devoted their lives to meditative training (*suhaeng*) (KBCEG 2006, 4). Hence, food is conceived as a means to achieve enlightenment. While food is recognized as being essential to the human body, it is not viewed as a source of bodily indulgence and pleasure. Rather, it is a source of nourishment and even medicine to gain and sustain physical health and composure, and thereby cultivate human capacity to obtain enlightenment. This metaphysical and instrumental view of food is also reflected in how food eaten by monks and nuns is characterized: regular food (*sangsik*), porridge



(*juksik*), and medicinal food (*byeonginsik*). Buddhist Sutras recommend that the porridge is eaten for breakfast, the regular food for lunch, and fruit juice (which is included in the regular food) for dinner. The medicinal food includes such categories of food as fish, meat, and alcohol that are banned for a healthy person. The Sutras admonished monks and laity against gluttony and eating within two hours before sleep, and considered these practices to be toxic (KBCEG 2006, 14-16).

The significance of food as an instrument of enlightenment underlies specific guidelines of Buddhist cuisine. First, a carnivorous diet is prohibited (with dairy products allowed), because it requires killing living life forms that are caught in the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. The *Nirvana Sutra* (Yeolbangyeong), a major sutra of Mahāyāna Buddhism, teaches that eating meat destroys the seed of compassion toward living beings (KBCEG 2006, 11). Second, five pungent or stimulating vegetables (*osincha*) are forbidden because they are believed to intensify sexual desire when they are eaten cooked, and are believed to make people aggressive and impetuous when eaten raw. Those vegetables include chive (*buchu*), garlic (*maneul*), scallion (*pa*), wild rocambole<sup>8</sup> (*dalle*), and Persian dropwort (*honggeo*).<sup>9</sup> Ginger and peppers are not included in the category of these five stimulating vegetables because the criterion is not a spicy taste but a lingering smell and stimulation after eating them. Third, alcohol is also forbidden because it intoxicates people, destroys their wisdom, and disrupts their training.

Three basic principles underlie general culinary techniques in Buddhist cuisine in contemporary Korea: 1) how to make fibrous grains and vegetables soft and palatable (*yuyeon*), 2) how to prepare

8. This is "a name used erratically for more than one plant in the onion family." It occasionally refers to a form of garlic that has chive-like leaves with a milder flavor than garlic, and tiny bulbs forming from the flower head. It grows wild throughout Europe, often in dry or rugged places. See Davidson (2006, 667).

9. Persian dropwort grows in Iran and Afghanistan and was called *augwa* in medieval Persian. It is similar to a Korean vegetable, *minari*, which has a strong scent and flavor and therefore is commonly used in fish soup or stew.

clean food that is not contaminated (*cheongjeong*), and 3) how to comply with Buddhist teachings and the law of nature (*yeobeop*) (KBCEG 2006, 17). Due to the prohibition against meat-eating and the emphasis on harmony with nature, Buddhist cuisine uses seasonal and local vegetables, fruits, grains, legumes, and seaweeds. The concern with clean food forbids the use of chemical additives and other synthetic ingredients and has promoted the development of natural flavor enhancers like mushroom broth, seaweed broth, and wild sesame. The emphasis on harmony with nature has enabled the development of various culinary methods designed to preserve natural ingredients' own flavors and textures, even minimizing the use of (natural) condiments.<sup>10</sup>

### The Reinvention of Traditional Temple Food in Contemporary Korea: Converging and Diverging Interests and Popular Agency Appropriated

While popular interest in Buddhist cuisine has grown rapidly in larger society, its practice in actual temples has been in gradual decline, along with the stagnant shortage of new recruits for the priesthood in recent decades.<sup>11</sup> As a result, there are many temples without abbots and some temples do not even have a monk; such temples are taken care of by local laities.<sup>12</sup> This broad problem is reflected in the dietary practices in many Buddhist temples in Korea. According to a national

10. The commonly used condiments are roasted sesame oil, salt, soy sauce, sugar, red pepper paste and powder, sesame salt, fermented soy bean paste, black sesame seeds, and barley glucose syrup (KBCEG 2006, 74).

11. As of 2004, the Jogye Order, the largest order representing over 90% of the Buddhist population in Korea, had approximately 12,000 monks and nuns (*Kyunghyang Daily News*, July 2, 2004). According to a Jogye Order census, in 1986 it controlled 1,628 temples and had ordained some 7,708 monks and 4,153 nuns (Buswell 1992a, 34).

12. This information is based on my conversation with the nun Hongseung in June of 2007. During that month, I took an intensive cooking course with her and conducted fieldwork at her temple food research center in Yangjae-dong, Seoul.

survey of 31 major temples (17 monasteries and 14 nunneries) conducted by the Korean Buddhist Culture Enterprise Group of the Jogye Order in early 2006, the characteristics of contemporary Buddhist cuisine discussed above have been undermined in the process of industrialization and urbanization. First, while monks and nuns continue to cultivate vegetables and beans for their own use, a majority of those surveyed combine this practice with the purchase of food ingredients from traditional markets (81.8%), big supermarkets (9.1%) and local grocers (4.5%). There is also a significant gender difference in food consumption. In the case of monasteries, 26.7% of them purchase all food ingredients, whereas none of the nunneries purchase all food ingredients. The reasons for the use of commercial food ingredients include difficulties involved in cultivation (45.5%), absence of labor (32.7%), lack of land (12.7%) and lack of time (9.1%) (KBCEG 2006, 94-95). The growing practice of purchasing commercial food ingredients undermines the principle of *cheongjeong*. Second, while none of the nunneries use the *osincha* in nun's meals, 26.2% of the monasteries occasionally use them and 6.6% of the monasteries use them frequently to enhance flavor and health. A parallel trend is observed in the use of artificial flavor enhancers. While a majority of the temples do not use any synthetic flavor enhancers in their cooking, 28.9% use them occasionally. These growing practices violate the principles of *cheongjeong* and *yeobeop* (KBCEG 2006, 98, 100). Against the backdrop of the decline of Buddhist cuisine in contemporary temples, culinary experts, consumers, the state, business, and the Buddhist establishment are involved in reinventing temple food in the name of its rediscovery and preservation.

### *The Emergence of Individual Buddhist Culinary Experts*

Just as national cookbooks in contemporary India can be categorized as the literature of exile and nostalgia that is usually written by authors who reside outside India (Appadurai 1988, 18), the reinvention of Buddhist temple food as indigenous tradition in contemporary Korea implies its codification by nuns, monks, and lay experts who

commonly reside outside the conventional monastic context (in remote mountains). Prior to the publication of Buddhist cookbooks in the 2000s,<sup>13</sup> popular texts focusing on the subject were rare. One exception was Kim Yeon-sik, a former Buddhist monk, who has written on Buddhist cuisine since 1971 when he first published temple food recipes in the *Busan Ilbo* (April 16, 1971).<sup>14</sup> This absence of texts reflects the legacy of monastic life in Korean Buddhism, as mentioned above, which has elevated the importance of meditation and scriptural studies and neglected ritual performance. In this ascetic monastic culture, cooking has not been considered a prestigious activity, and therefore has been relegated to novice monks and lay women (*bosal*) at the bottom of the temple hierarchy (Buswell 1992a, 117, 118). Dietary knowledge in general and recipes in particular, have been orally transmitted from one generation to the next mostly through informal learning and practices (General Affairs Office 2006, 7; Kim 1995, 11). As late as the early 1990s, the Bohyeonhoe, an association of Buddhist nuns, was one of a few venues for preserving temple food (*Hankyoreh*, November 25, 1992). Another rare venue in the 1990s was a dozen vegetarian restaurants inspired by Buddhist cuisine.<sup>15</sup>

It was not until the 1990s that a few monks and nuns of a younger generation, who cross the boundary between monasteries and the larger society, began to draw increasing mass media attention to their research on temple food, due to its appeal to the popular

13. For example, see Jeokmun (2000), Jeong (2000), Seonjae (2000), Kim Yeon-sik (2002), Yi (2002), Daeon (2003; 2008), and Hongseung (2003).

14. This information is based on my conversation with Kim Yeon-sik in July 2008 and *Kyunghyang Daily News*, March 8, 2002.

15. *Munhwa Ilbo*, April 23, 1996. The original model for this category of restaurant was a specialty restaurant that Kim Yeon-sik opened in 1980 and has run ever since. When he opened this restaurant, he was criticized by the Jogye Order and individual monks who viewed his unusual activity as "unfit" for a Buddhist monk. Finally, he left the order and later joined the Taego Order and has also been pursuing his career as a painter. Currently, he is the Chair of the Department of Temple Food Culture Studies at Tongsan Buddhist College. This information is based on my conversation with him in July 2008.

concern for health and economic security. In late 1992, monk Jeogmun, a sophomore at a Buddhist Seminary (*Seungga daehak*) at the time, founded the first Traditional Buddhist Temple Food Culture Studies Center, composed of his fellow students at the seminary.<sup>16</sup> Since then, as the director of the center, he has promoted the preservation of temple food and its “scientific studies” through publications, lectures, exhibitions, and regular cooking classes.<sup>17</sup> He became the Abbot of the Sudosa temple in Pyeongtaek, Gyeonggi-do province in 2003 and made this temple a major site of annual temple food festivals.<sup>18</sup> In 1993, nun Seonjae, a student of the Buddhist Seminary at the time, wrote her thesis on Buddhist temple food culture, and began in 1995 a two-year long Buddhist cooking show on the Buddhist Television Network. She has a unique family background, with her maternal grandmother being a court lady of the royal kitchen in the Joseon dynasty. In 2001, she established the Seonjae Temple Food Studies Academy in the Buddhist Nuns’ Center (Biguni Hoegwan) in Seoul, and has taught regular cooking classes there and given lectures outside the Center. She has also been an adjunct professor at the Home Economics Department at Dongguk University, to train experts on Buddhist cuisine.<sup>19</sup> In 1995, Kim Yeon-sik wrote a paper exploring the potential of temple food for advancing the restaurant business at the Graduate School of Industrial Education at Chung-Ang University in Seoul, and presented it at a seminar organized at the university the following year.<sup>20</sup> Nun Dae-an, an abbot of Geumseoam temple in Gyeongsangnam-do province, founded the Geumdang Temple Food Studies Center to research and teach about temple food in the provincial area and beyond. She became interested in temple food in order

16. *Hankyoreh*, November 25, 1992.

17. *Hankyoreh*, May 16, 1996; *Kyunghyang Daily News*, May 16, 2002.

18. *Kyunghyang Daily News*, November 7, 2003.

19. This information about her activities is based on my interview with her in July 2008. See also *Kyunghyang Daily News*, May 16, 2002 and *Hankyoreh*, March 29, 2006.

20. This information is based on my conversation with him in July 2008. See also *Munhwa Ilbo*, April 23, 1996.

to cure her own illnesses, and studied traditional medicine in China for six years.<sup>21</sup> Nun Hongseung, a former officer of the Academy of Dissemination of Buddhism in the Jogye Order, opened her temple food studies center in Seoul in late 2005.<sup>22</sup> She has taught cooking classes and given lectures in Seoul and provincial areas, and in 2008 she moved to Busan to continue her activities at the newly opened Asia Seon Culture Center.<sup>23</sup> As these experts have gained media attention and offered regular cooking classes, other lay practitioners have emerged to publish books on Buddhist temple food and run specialty restaurants.

The current revival of Buddhist temple food by priests and lay practitioners indicates its reinvention in the following senses. First, Buddhist temple food is gaining popular attention outside the monastic settings where it had previously been ignored. According to the national survey mentioned above, most of the 31 temples surveyed do not pay attention to the transmission of temple food to the younger generation of nuns and monks. A majority of these temples neither offer Buddhist cuisine classes (83.3 percent) nor intend to establish such classes in the future (70.4 percent) (KBCEG 2006, 110). This institutional indifference has been the main cause of the decline in temple food in a rapidly industrializing Korea. The national survey also documents that monks and nuns are not directly involved in cooking in a majority of the 31 temples, and *bosal* are entirely or primarily responsible for cooking. While there is a significant gender difference between the monasteries and the nunneries,<sup>24</sup> the combination of institutional negligence and lack of culinary practices among monks and nuns themselves, contribute to the marginalization of temple food.

21. *Seoul Shinmun*, May 21, 2004.

22. *Munhwa Ilbo*, May 23, 2007.

23. This information is based on my interview with her in June 2007 and our phone conversation in July 2008.

24. Cooking is done by monks only in 1.6% of the monasteries; in 28.6% of the monasteries monks collaborate with *bosals* for cooking. In contrast, nuns cook their own meals in 42.9% of the nunneries, and in 28.6% of the nunneries they collaborate with *bosals* (KBCEG 2006, 90).



Second, those five leading experts discussed above do not concur as to what constitutes the body of temple food. My individual interviews with three of them reveal that they harbor different views concerning how much innovation is acceptable while still maintaining the integrity of temple food and how Buddhist teaching guides the preparation and consumption of temple food (beyond mere vegetarianism).<sup>25</sup> Despite institutional attempts to standardize and codify temple food recipes (HED 2006; KBCEG 2006), some experts insist on the traditional recipes collected exclusively from old monks and nuns, whereas others are willing to incorporate fusion dishes. For example, Kim Yeon-sik maintains the orthodox view of what constitutes Buddhist temple food and is critical of other practitioners who incorporate contemporary innovations or fusion dishes into it. Nun Seonjae is somewhat more open to innovation but insists on the strict observance of the injunction against the use of *osincha* and chemical or artificial ingredients. She also emphasizes the importance of attitudes and state of mind in preparing and consuming temple food; hence it is not desirable to cook and sell temple food for profit; nor is it desirable to consume it while occupied with vicious or destructive ideas. Nun Hong-seung is more active (than the other two experts) about integrating fusion dishes and new ingredients (like colorful peppers and broccoli) into temple food.<sup>26</sup> She also offers a special class designed for chefs and restaurateurs who approach temple food as a business idea. These heterogeneous views are reflected in the content of the recent compilation of the standard recipes for temple food mentioned above. It contains not only traditional dishes using old Buddhist food ingredients such as lotus roots and leaves, mushrooms, and soybean products, but also such popular non-Buddhist dishes as seaweed rice

25. Newspaper articles on these five experts also corroborate my findings. Because of different ideas and views, they have not maintained a regular professional network to develop collaboration except for a 2006 seminar sponsored by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Culture and Tourism Committee of the National Assembly. For this seminar, see General Affairs Office (2006).

26. Similarly, monk Jeokmun stressed the importance of using natural ingredients to make healthful food regardless of their origins (*Hankook Ilbo*, December 20, 2002).

rolls (*gimbap*) with tofu in place of meat, or sweet and sour mushrooms instead of pork (*tangsuyuk*) (HED 2006, 49-52).

The differences among the leading experts coexist with their shared interests in preserving and disseminating temple food as a valuable element of Korean culture, and its relevance for contemporary Koreans. Hence they hope to promote systematic studies to excavate buried knowledge and preserve disappearing knowledge about temple food, and reach out to the wider public through diverse forms of mass media, ranging from newspapers to the Internet. At the same time, while they have joined government-sponsored projects to promote temple food, they are cautious about the negative implications of such projects, including the loss of Buddhist teaching and spirit through excessive commercialization and popularization.

Third, as amply illustrated by current publications, temple food tends to be colorful and sophisticated in its visual presentation, using natural plant colors and decorative displays of dishes. This visual emphasis is present even in simple dishes using traditional Buddhist ingredients. The range of innovations in the reinvention of temple food demonstrates that culinary practitioners are actively accommodating urban middle-class tastes and practical needs. In the era of globalization, the willingness of leading culinary experts to innovate and learn from non-Buddhist culinary practices has made the tradition of temple food a fluid category, rather than an exclusionary nativist one.

#### *Popular Interest in Health and Economic Security*

Widespread public concerns about unhealthy processed food and fast food lie at the heart of the growing popularity of Buddhist temple food as an alternative health food or even as preventive medicine. According to a report published by the Ministry of Health and Welfare (1997, 2002),<sup>27</sup> there has been a significant dietary shift among Koreans, indicated by the decreasing consumption of grains and the increasing consumption of fat and meat. Between 1969 and 1994,

27. Quoted from KBCEG (2006), p. 28.

calories from carbohydrates diminished from 80% to 65%, whereas those from fat more than doubled from 7% to 19%. The average per capita annual consumption of rice, the staple food, decreased from 120 kilograms in 1990 to 77 kilograms in 2007.<sup>28</sup> According to statistics compiled by the Korean Meat Processing Industry Association, the consumption of meat steadily increased by an annual average of 7% between 1987 and 2006, with the exceptions of 1998 and 2004, reflecting the scare of mad cow disease.<sup>29</sup> As a result, average daily per capita meat consumption more than doubled from 47 grams in 1986 to 107 grams in 2002.<sup>30</sup>

With these drastic shifts in dietary practices, Koreans have encountered escalating problems of diet-related illness and obesity since the 1990s. The most common illnesses among Koreans now include cancer, heart disease, and diabetes related to the over-consumption of fat, refined sugar, and salt, and the under-consumption of complex carbohydrates.<sup>31</sup> In the 2000s, breast cancer has ranked first among female cancer patients, and rectal cancer has ranked second among all cancer patients. Overall, breast cancer, prostate cancer, and rectal cancer, which are associated with high incomes and the aforementioned dietary change, have increased far more rapidly than stomach cancer, liver cancer and uterine cancer, which are linked to low incomes and poor hygiene.<sup>32</sup> In line with this epidemiological shift, obesity among Koreans has drastically increased. In 2005, the Health Insurance Public Corporation reported that about 31 percent of the adult population over 40 years old were obese (as defined by a body mass index of 25 and higher), as a result of a rapid increase in obesity over the past three years,<sup>33</sup> and 43 percent of the entire population is either overweight or obese.<sup>34</sup>

28. *Chungbuk Media*, June 8, 2008; *Finance and Economy News*, January 18, 2008.

29. *Seoul Economic Daily*, May 28, 2008.

30. *Maeil Business Newspaper*, February 3, 2004.

31. KBCEG 2006, 29; *Oh My News*, October 22, 2005.

32. *Kukmin Daily*, January 7, 2008; *Seoul Shinmun*, October 22, 2007; *Kangwon Ilbo*, September 6, 2007; *Dong-A Ilbo*, June 20, 2007.

33. *Kyunghyang Daily News*, September 20, 2005.

34. *Munhwa Ilbo*, January 23, 2006.

The global outbreak of mad cow disease and avian flu and the local outbreak of contaminated food have sensitized the Korean public to food safety.<sup>35</sup> The local spread of atopic allergies has also contributed to public concern about food safety. There are a growing number of children suffering from atopic symptoms, which are associated with processed food in particular and environmental pollution in general. A national survey conducted by the Korean Association for Child Allergy and Respiratory Disease Studies reported that 25% of elementary school respondents and 13% of junior high school respondents were diagnosed for atopic dermatitis.<sup>36</sup> As a result, according to a national survey conducted by Research Plus, a professional polling institute, almost 62% of 1,000 adult respondents replied that they believed the food they consumed daily was "unsafe," and only 11% replied that it was "safe."<sup>37</sup>

The array of negative health consequences, coupled with shifting dietary habits and the problem of food safety discussed above, has stirred numerous Koreans to reflect on the safety and quality of the food they consume daily, and has sensitized them to pay attention to alternatives to mass-produced processed food. In particular, mothers who are still primarily responsible for the care of their families look for dietary remedies for ailments suffered by their children and other family members. A growing number of middle-class mothers frequent food co-operatives specializing in organic and healthy food, which have been spreading in urban areas.<sup>38</sup> Capitalizing on this popular concern, urban supermarkets in Korea now commonly carry organic vegetables, fruits, and grains or Korean agricultural products that have been promoted as being tastier and healthier than foreign

35. *Korea Economic Daily*, June 11, 2004; *Dong-A Ilbo*, December 25, 2003; *Hankyoreh*, September 28, 2001.

36. *Money Today*, March 28, 2007.

37. *Hankyoreh*, June 15, 2004.

38. The number of food cooperatives that directly link urban consumers to rural producers multiplied in the 2000s and their membership surpassed 100,000 in 2003. The production of environmentally friendly agricultural products increased tenfold between 2000 and 2003 (*Hankyoreh*, June 15, 2004).

imports requiring long-distance transportation.

Appropriating the widespread public concern about food safety and health, the mass media have disseminated useful (and not so useful) information about food and health problems to attract viewers and readers. Large food manufacturers also take advantage of this pervasive concern and promote various food commodities in the name of health and well-being. The popular interest in health converges with the leading culinary experts' shared view on the relevance of temple food for contemporary Koreans. Yet the mass media have been more than a passive broker between consumers and Buddhist culinary experts. In collaboration with the food industry and related retail businesses, the mass media have represented temple food as the indigenous example of "slow food" that relies on natural condiments and flavor enhancers, seasonal fruits and vegetables, and fermented and preserved food ingredients beneficial for health.<sup>39</sup>

This aggressive marketing reflects local appropriation of the global spread of the "slow food movement," which began in Bra, Italy, in the late 1980s (Petrini 2001) and was introduced to Korea between 2002 and 2003. The introduction of the slow food movement developed into active promotion of the "well-being lifestyle" or "slow living" by business interests and the mass media. By 2003, the "well-being life style" had become very trendy.<sup>40</sup> Hotels have featured food festivals and seasonal and weekend events to introduce Buddhist temple food to middle-class consumers searching for well-being and a higher quality of life. Major department stores have created special corners for temple food, in addition to organic food, carrying various products ranging from fermented bean paste to preserved pickles and snacks. Big food companies have competed to attract consumers with

39. *Kyunghyang Daily News*, April 2, 2001; *Hankook Ilbo*, December 20, 2002; *Seoul Shinmun*, September 3, 2003; *Kyunghyang Daily News*, October 31, 2003; *Kyunghyang Daily News*, November 28, 2003; *Munhwa Ilbo*, April 16, 2004.

40. *Hankook Ilbo*, January 16, 2004; *Seoul Shinmun*, May 21, 2004; *Korea Economic Daily*, February 27, 2004. The "well-being life style" emerged as a trend in 2003 and has been a slogan for a wide range of commercials.

trendy temple food events and cooking classes.<sup>41</sup>

Urban middle-class mothers take courses on Buddhist cuisine not only in Buddhist organizations<sup>42</sup> but also in non-sectarian public and private cultural centers located downtown and in their neighborhoods.<sup>43</sup> These classes teach diverse recipes along with varying degrees of emphasis on Buddhist ideas about food, eating, health, and life; they are offered at various levels, depending on the level of culinary skills necessary for recipes. While these classes observe the basic tenets of vegetarianism and avoidance of the *osinchaе*, those who take the classes are free to innovate and selectively practice what they learn. This flexibility is fairly common because a majority of students in the classes are not Buddhists. It is noteworthy that temple food is appealing to the general public as a healthy alternative, regardless of religious orientations. According to some Buddhist culinary experts, roughly 60% of students in their cooking classes are Protestant, and approximately 15% are Catholics.<sup>44</sup> During my own fieldwork in nun Hongseung's Temple Food Studies Center, I found that a majority of students were non-Buddhist, whereas Buddhist believers made up about 40% of students in cooking classes.<sup>45</sup>

While married women make up the largest group among students of Buddhist cooking classes, young or middle-aged men with entrepreneurial interests constitute a significant minority. Unlike urban middle-class mothers, they study Buddhist cooking to become a specialist chef, open a specialty restaurant or incorporate Buddhist dishes into already existing menus in their restaurants. To accommo-

41. *Segye Times*, September 30, 2005; *Seoul Economic Daily*, August 15, 2006.

42. For example, the major Buddhist organizations include the National Buddhist Nuns' Center in Seoul, Heungbeop Temple in Busan, and several temple food studies centers established by the aforementioned Buddhist culinary experts.

43. *Maeil Business Newspaper*, February 25, 2000. By 2007, temple food cooking classes were no longer an exclusively urban phenomenon. An Agricultural Technology Center began to offer such classes for local residents (*Incheon Times*, April 16, 2007).

44. *Kyunghyang Daily News*, May 16, 2002.

45. This information is based on my interviews with the nun and her assistants for cooking classes in June 2007.

date this specific business concern, some of the temple food study centers mentioned above offer special or intensive courses for this entrepreneurial group. In light of the current well-being trend and the ever-growing practice of dining out in urban Korea, such considerations appear to be practical, if they can capture their customers' capricious palates.<sup>46</sup> The economic potential of temple food is particularly appealing to Koreans because of the employment structure in the country; among industrialized countries, Korea has one of the lowest percentages of people employed by large corporations, and one of the highest percentages of self-employed workers.<sup>47</sup> This self-employed group has increased in the aftermath of the Asian economic crisis (1997-1998) which aggravated employment insecurity in the name of flexible labor markets in this era of globalization. This means a large number of Koreans are faced with unstable and insecure employment, and therefore, small business remains one of the few viable employment options.

*The Government's Interest in the Economic Potential of Temple Food and Development of the "Han Brand"*

The popular interests in health and economic security that have contributed to the popularity of temple food converge with the government's interest in keeping the body of its population healthy and productive. Sharing the culinary experts' interest in preserving and disseminating temple food, the government is also interested in its promotion as a valuable element of Korean culture to reaffirm Korean identity in the era of globalization. For example, it has sponsored "temple stay programs" to educate young Koreans, who are perceived to be "Westernized." This political interest in Korean identity resonates with a populace searching for stability and meaning in the midst of globalization marked by unstable employment and "Westernization." NGOs also use temple visits to educate foreigners about

46. *Korea Economic Daily*, August 28, 2006.

47. KEF and the Chosun Ilbo (2007).

Korean culture.<sup>48</sup>

The governmental interest in temple food, however, is primarily economic (unlike its political interest in group cohesion and ensuring loyalty) in this era of "global cultural economy" (Appadurai 1996, 27). The central government has been keen on the economic potential of temple food as a cultural commodity tied to tourism, identifying it as the new strategic industry that would lead economic growth in the 21st century.<sup>49</sup> Since the late 1990s, the Korean Tourism Public Corporation (KTPC) has paid attention to Buddhist rituals and practices in general, and temple food in particular, as a cultural resource to be marketed for the promotion of international and domestic tourism. It has encouraged Buddhist orders to develop Buddhist cultural products. In 1998, the KTPC collaborated with Bongwonsa temple to perform Yeongsanjae, a forgotten ritual that symbolically enacts the Buddha's address to the laity, which was designated as an Intangible Cultural Treasure and an experiential commodity presented to foreign tourists. This revived performance was accompanied by the display and tasting of temple food.<sup>50</sup> For tourist consumption, the ritual was expediently reduced to a 35-minute performance from its original three-day version. In 1999, expanding on the idea of cultural products marketed to tourists, the KTPC attempted to turn Buddhist rituals in major temples in the Seoul area into tourist commodities.<sup>51</sup> During the 2002 World Cup Soccer event, it asked 25 major Buddhist temples nationwide to host temple stay programs that included the

48. For instance, the Taegu chapter of People to People organized a visit to a Buddhist temple for American GIs' stationed in Korea, as an integral part of its annual local event to expose GIs to Korean culture (*Maeil Shinmun*, October 23, 2006).

49. *Segey Times*, February 28, 2005. The government tries to develop Korea as a major stopover site for European tourists headed to Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific area. Among such tourists, women and retirees are targeted for their interests in health and food, and they are provided with specialty Korean food like temple food, herbal medicine, and royal court cuisine.

50. *Dong-A Ilbo*, December 7, 1997.

51. Jogyesa temple, Bongeunsa temple and Hwagyesa temple in the Jogye Order were selected, and Bongwonsa temple in the Taego Order was selected (*Munhwa Ilbo*, August 6, 1999).

tasting of temple food as an integral part of consuming the experiential commodity.<sup>52</sup> In addition to international sports events, international political conferences such as the ASEM were used as occasions for introducing temple food to a wider array of domestic and foreign visitors by bringing together the Buddhist establishment, businesses, and leading culinary experts. Between 2004 and 2006, the government subsidized the Jogye Order's project to build a "Traditional Buddhist Culture Industry Support Center" (Jeontong Bulgyo Munhwa Saneop Jiwon Ssenteo), equipped with a meditation center, performance center, and research facilities, in order to develop cultural products to be marketed. The government funded approximately half of the 25 billion Korean won invested in the construction of the support center.<sup>53</sup>

Behind the series of government efforts to develop Buddhist cultural commodities, there are two significant sociopolitical developments that allow for the rise of Buddhist culture in general, and temple food in particular, as a tourist commodity: a) the increase of leisure time in the 2000s among the employed, with the recent adoption of a five-day work week; and b) administrative decentralization pursued through the strengthening of local government autonomy (*jibang jachi*) since the 1990s. The growth of leisure time has led to the expansion of leisure and entertainment industries, including tourism. To stressed urbanites, Buddhist temples, usually located in mountains, are appealing sites for restful vacations. The revival of local rule in 1991 with the election of local assembly members<sup>54</sup> has also facilitated the growth of diverse interests in local culture, primarily because of the potential for producing tourist commodities. Local governments invented regional food festivals such as the Grand Gangwon Province Potato Festival, Grand Southern Province Food Festival, Busan Jagalchi Cultural Tourism Festival, Hanbat Food Festi-

52. *Hankook Ilbo*, February 8, 2002.

53. *Seoul Shinmun*, March 10, 2004; *Korea Economic Daily*, December 23, 2004.

54. The local rule was initially introduced in South Korea in 1952 but suppressed until the early 1990s. The revival of local assembly elections was followed by that of governors and mayors in 1995.

val, and Halla Cultural Festival. Since 1994, the KTPC has sponsored these folk food festivals as a regular feature of local culture festivals, held every October. In particular, the Grand Southern Province Food Festival, organized near famous old Buddhist temples like Songgwangsa temple and Seonamsa temple, has featured a display of temple food. In 2002, the local government sponsored a symposium to develop the southern food as a brand.<sup>55</sup> Since 2004, Gyeonggi-do province has developed "slow food villages" to market local specialty food as an integral part of its "well-being tourism" industry. Ten villages were chosen for their specialty food items, including Sudosa temple mentioned above, which has become a center of the temple food festival. These slow villages have been popular among Seoulites as a weekend retreat course; the number of visitors to these villages grew from 46,000 in 2004, to 240,000 in 2005, and the province expected over one million visitors in 2006.<sup>56</sup>

The (central) government's interest in temple food as a unique cultural commodity (*munhwa sangpum*) evolved into the project to develop the "Han brand." Han refers to Korean-ness and the brand is a vehicle to sell Korean cultural products in the global market. This project is inspired by the unexpected economic success of Korean popular culture—television dramas, popular music, and film—in the late 1990s and early 2000s, which began in China, Taiwan, and Japan, and has spread to Vietnam and other Southeast and West Asian countries.<sup>57</sup> This phenomenon, commonly called the "Korean wave" or *hallyu*, is crucial to the thinking behind the Han-brand project.<sup>58</sup> In the global market, where ideas and images circulate transnationally along with people, money, and other tangible material goods, a

55. *Hankyoreh*, October 11, 1996; *Munhwa Ilbo*, September 19, 1997; *Kukmin Daily*, October 9, 2002; *Dong-A Ilbo*, October 1, 2005.

56. In 2005, this tourism industry increased the aggregate rural household income to 2.7 billion won from 600 million won (in 2004). *Hankook Ilbo*, April 5, 2004; *Korea Herald Business*, April 7, 2004; *Financial News*, May 24, 2005; *Munhwa Ilbo*, July 7, 2006.

57. Bak (2005, ch. 1).

58. See Bak (2005), Yu et al. (2005), Kim (2006), and Kang (2006).



unique cultural identity and tradition can be a source of value-added products. Under the project, the Han brand encompasses a range of unique cultural items, including Korean food (*hansik*), Korean clothes (*hanbok*), the Korean alphabet (Hangeul), Korean architecture (*hanok*), Korean music (*hanguk eumak*), and Korean paper (*hanji*). Like any other branded commodities, the list of the Han brand can expand and shift altogether because brand capitalism is about the accumulation of profit through selling abstract ideas about, and images of, success, glamour, happiness, and sophistication, rather than selling specific and fixed material products.<sup>59</sup> In 2006, the Korean government began to explore ways to brand temple food and encourage the Jogye Order and scholarly community to develop value-added cultural products.<sup>60</sup> In response, the Jogye Order established the Traditional Buddhist Temple Food Culture Preservation Society to exhibit temple food at the Han Brand Expo, held in September, 2006.<sup>61</sup>

The government's economic interest in temple food led to collaboration between the KTPC and the Buddhist establishment around high-profile international or local events through which temple food is publicized and the governmental support for instituting some elements of the infrastructure of Buddhist culture industry. Although it is rather ambiguous at the current stage of the Han brand project who will be the main beneficiary of the economic effort to capitalize on temple food, there is potential for economic conflict between the Buddhist establishment and tourism industry that are brought together by the government for the project. The bigger the economic success of the temple food marketing and sales, the sharper the competition between these two actors is likely to be. It is also likely that these two actors will compete for control over the content of temple food as a raw material for producing value added products. If this competition indeed develops, the heterogeneous views of the body of

59. Klein (1999, ch. 2).

60. KBCEG (2006, ch. 6).

61. *Dong-A Ilbo*, September 21, 2006.

temple food held by the leading Buddhist culinary experts can turn into an intellectual tool to wage a fight in the economic (culture) war. As discussed below, the Buddhist establishment has begun to assert its position as a major player in capitalizing on temple food as Korean tradition.

#### *The Buddhist Establishment's Interest in Strengthening Its Influence*

Belatedly responding to the mass media and the government's attention to temple food, the Buddhist Order of Jogye joined the reinvention of temple food to strengthen Buddhism's influence in the larger society. It established the Academy of Dissemination of Buddhism and has collaborated with the Group for Korean Buddhist Traditional Culture Experience (Hanguk Bulgyo Jeontong Munhwa Cheheom Saeopdan).<sup>62</sup> The academy has developed various types of temple retreat programs to attract urban families, looking for affordable leisure activities. Building on the experience of accommodating foreign tourists during international events, temples have hosted weekend camps and vacation camps, which include meditation practices and the eating of temple food. The academy also developed temple stay programs for school children during their summer and winter vacations.<sup>63</sup> Major temples have begun to provide both the Buddhist and non-Buddhist public with ingenious programs that combine temple retreats or visits with film festivals, rock music concerts, and therapy sessions beyond the established practices of meditation and sampling of temple food.<sup>64</sup> In response to the popularity of these programs, Haeinsa temple, a major temple renowned for its strong tradition of meditation, held a big entertainment festival that featured a fashion show, music concert, dance performance, and poetry reading, along with Buddhist temple food and meditation.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, Woljeongsa temple and Sangwonsa temple in Gangwon-do province

62. *Hankyoreh*, October 3, 2002.

63. *Seoul Shinmun*, January 5, 2006.

64. *Segye Times*, July 29, 2004; *Hankook Ilbo*, June 24, 2005.

65. *Hankyoreh*, May 17, 2007.

hosted large-scale Buddhist cultural festivals that drew over 100,000 visitors.<sup>66</sup> This type of cultural festival emerged as a common feature of Buddhist temple events held in autumn.<sup>67</sup>

Under the auspices of the government, the Jogye Order and its culinary experts participated in such business events as the World Cultures Exposition and Food Expositions.<sup>68</sup> The Buddhist Broadcasting System worked with Jay Convention Inc. to organize the 2006 Korean Buddhism Expo to promote Buddhist culture and develop cultural products to be marketed.<sup>69</sup> In August 2006, the Jogye Order organized a seminar on the popularization of temple food and announced its plan to open temple food specialty restaurants in order to develop temple food as a tourist commodity.<sup>70</sup> It also brought individual culinary experts together to form the aforementioned Traditional Buddhist Temple Food Culture Preservation Society to facilitate the standardization of temple food textbooks and educate temple food experts. The society also planned to construct a temple food culture center to disseminate information among the wider public.<sup>71</sup>

## Conclusion

The reinvention of Buddhist temple food as tradition in contemporary Korea reveals the complex interplay between popular concerns for health and economic security and the interests of the government, business, and the Buddhist establishment, in the service of larger national and transnational politics. These concerns and interests converge, and at times diverge. The popular concerns converge with the interests of the Buddhist establishment to promote its culture and expand its influence. These political interests of the establishment are

66. *Korea Economic Daily*, September 26, 2007.

67. *Kyunghyang Daily News*, October 6, 2007.

68. *Financial News*, May 16, 2003.

69. *Korea Economic Daily*, March 8, 2006; *Seoul Shinmun*, March 9, 2006.

70. *Hankyoreh*, August 30, 2006.

71. *Hankyoreh*, January 31, 2007; *Kyunghyang Daily News*, May 31, 2007.

inevitably entangled with its economic interest in capitalizing on temple food. On the economic front, the establishment can be drawn into a conflict with the tourism industry, with whom it has collaborated in the initial development of the Buddhist culture industry. At the same time, Buddhist political and economic interests dovetail with the government's interest in developing Buddhist cultural commodities that can be competitively sold in a global market. This governmental interest converges with the interests of the tourism industry to reap profits domestically and internationally from leisure and entertainment activities. Yet the salient economic interests of the state, as well as the institutional interests of the Buddhist establishment, tend to be at odds with the culinary experts' interest in preserving the integrity of temple food.

The cultural politics of reinventing temple food generates different meanings of tradition for the various parties involved. To grassroots Koreans, traditional temple food means a valuable alternative to unhealthy processed food and the "Westernization" of dietary habits, and a useful business idea for a specialty restaurant in an era of increasing employment insecurity. For the government, which has a strong legacy of directing economic development, this tradition means primarily a strategic cultural asset to be capitalized on as the national economy has shifted from labor-intensive manufacturing to capital-intensive manufacturing, in addition to information and culture industries. Secondly, it signifies a source of Korean identity to be reaffirmed in the age of globalization, particularly for the younger generation who grew up in industrialized Korea. For the Buddhist establishment, temple food represents a valuable legacy which can strengthen Buddhism's influence in the larger society.

The close collaboration between the government and the Buddhist establishment in the cultural politics of reinventing temple food has its historical precedents. Over a millennium ago, Buddhism as the state ideology enjoyed immense material and political support from royal courts in exchange for its promotion of the state's welfare. The most visible aspects of Buddhist culture in contemporary Korea are usually products of the symbiotic relationship between Buddhism

and the state, including the idea and practices of “state-protecting Buddhism” (*hoguk bulgyo*). In contemporary Korea, Buddhist monks not only perform mandatory military service, but the Jogye Order has also maintained the Monks’ Militia for National Defense (*hoguk seungdan*), which all monks are required to join (Buswell 1992b, 2). In the era of globalization, Korean Buddhism aspires to regain a position of sociopolitical influence by serving the governmental interest in developing distinct cultural commodities. Indeed, the Jogye Order has tried to revive its popular influence during the past decade or so. For example, it repackaged its “lotus lanterns festival” (*yeondeung chukje*) as a national festival reaching out to the general public beyond Buddhist believers.<sup>72</sup> In 2007, the number of participants in this festival reached 300,000. The Jogye Order aspires to transform this festival into a distinct Korean festival open to all peoples in the world.<sup>73</sup>

In the midst of converging and diverging interests involved in reinventing temple food, the agency of the grassroots population lies in the concerns for health and economic security. Although the production and consumption of temple food would involve culinary and dietary pleasure, what has popularized temple food is not so much pleasure as concerns for health and economic security. These urgent and serious concerns triggered the mass media, food industry, and related businesses to capitalize on them. Responding to the growing popular appeal of temple food and building on the economic success of the Korean wave, the government has appropriated temple food to reinvigorate its economic program in the age of globalization, making local cultural differences a profitable resource.

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72. *Dong-A Daily*, May 12, 1996.

73. *Korea Economic Daily*, May 17, 2007.

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## GLOSSARY

Bongwonsa	奉元寺	maeul	마을
bosal	菩薩	munhwa sangpum	文化商品
buchu	부추	namul muchim	나물무침
byeonginsik	病人食	osinchae	五辛菜
cheongjeong	淸淨	pa	과
dalle	달래	Palgwanhoe	八關會
gimbap	김밥	sangsik	常食
gimchi	김치	seon	仙
guk	국	Seonamsa	禪庵寺
Haeinsa	海印寺	Songgwangsa	松廣寺
hallyu	韓流	ssam	쌈
hanbok	韓服	suhaeng	修行
Hangeul	한글	tangsuyuk	糖水肉
hanguk eumak	韓國飲食	Woljeongsa	月精寺
hanji	韓紙	yeobeop	如法
hanok	韓屋	Yeolbanyeong	涅槃經
hansik	韓食	Yeondeunghoe	燃燈會
honggeo	홍거	yuyeon	柔軟
jeol eumsik	절飲食	Sangwonsa	上院寺
jeontong sachal eumsik	傳統寺刹飲食	hoguk bulgyo	護國佛教
jibang jachi	地方自治	hoguk seungdan	護國 僧團
juksik	粥食	yeongdeung chukje	燃燈祝祭