

## **“Probably the best meal that I have as yet indulged in” : An American missionary’s description of Korean dishes in 1909**

*Bahar Gürsel\**

### **Introduction**

Following the Chosön-United States Treaty of Peace, Amity, Commerce and Navigation (1882), the relationship between the Korean Empire and the Western world intensified, and large groups of diplomats, missionaries and travelers arrived in the peninsula from different parts of America and Europe. The American visitors incontestably constituted one of the most vigorous, inquisitive, and enthusiastic groups among the Westerners in Korea, and composed numerous works about the culture and traditions of the peninsula in which they also denoted its history and economic, political and social conditions.

To provide a broad contextual framework regarding late nineteenth and early twentieth-century American views on Korean culinary culture and gastronomic identity, this article initially presents and analyzes pertinent excerpts from the published works of a group of missionaries, officials, and writers. Subsequently, it concentrates on and scrutinizes a letter which was sent by a young missionary to a prominent American woman who visited Korea in 1909. The menu extracted

---

\* Department of History, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Türkiye

from the indicated letter illuminates the above-mentioned young American’s genuine perception and depiction of Korean food that he tasted at the house of a young privileged elite.

### A glimpse at the history of essentials of Korean cuisine

Korean cuisine, *hansik*, encompasses a long history. “During the Unified Silla Kingdom (668-935), basic food items—such as grain, fish, shellfish, meats, vegetables, fruits, sauces and pastes, alcoholic drinks, sliced meats/fish, salt, oil, and honey—were prepared,” and Koreans developed the culture of serving the main food with side dishes in the subsequent Koryŏ period (918-1392).<sup>1</sup> Consequently, during the longstanding rule of the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910), “the Korean dietary tradition was finally refined.”<sup>2</sup> Attributable to the changes that occurred in the early twentieth century due to the accelerating impact of colonialism and war, Korean cuisine experienced several modifications, and progressively “products such as soft drinks, beer, bread and Western-style confectionery”<sup>3</sup> arrived in the peninsula.

There were local differences that demarcated the eating and cooking practices in various regions of the country. Moreover, akin to the divisions of Korean society into categories like the royal family, yangban (noblemen), and peasant classes, eating habits of these groups yielded significant and distinct diversities during the Chosŏn period. “Feasts were held in the palaces, with the leftover materials, foods, and cooking methods passed onto the *yangban* families, developing into *banga* [nobleman house] food,” which grew in to *chongga*<sup>4</sup> food—the link be-

---

1 Hae-kyung Chung and Rok-dam Park, *HANSIK, Korean Food and Drinks: Stories and Traditions*, translated by Richard Harris (Seoul: Hollym Corp., Publishers, 2021 [2020]), Part 1.

2 *Ibid.*

3 Katarzyna C. Cwiertka, *Cuisine, Colonialism and Cold War: Food in Twentieth-Century Korea* (London: Reaction Books, Ltd., 2012), 24.

tween the royal palace and *banga*—with the rising power and political influence of *yangban* families.<sup>5</sup> The peasants, on the other hand, could consume only the existing and cultivatable food items in their regions. “Farmers, who before the twentieth century formed the majority of the Korean population, rarely ate meat except for three days in summer, when dog stew was served, and a special day in winter when sparrows, wild boar, or wild rabbit were prepared.”<sup>6</sup>

In their article on the history of the Korean diet, Kim et al. emphasize the deep-rooted culinary culture of Korea through the peninsula’s agricultural history, which comprises more than 5,000 years, and delineate the four essentials of *papsang*, “Korea’s traditional meal”:

The first one is *bap* (cooked rice), which provides calories and is the main source of energy. Another important element is *kuk* (soup), which allows people to chew and swallow rice, in turn supporting the digestive system. Previously *kuk* was translated into soup, however, *kuk* is quite different from Western soup. Korean *banchan* (side dishes), make up the third element and make the food taste better to support digestion while replenishing the body with nutrition. Usually, *banchan* is made up with *namul*, legumes, and fish. The final item is *jang* (sauce, *yangnyum*), which stimulates peoples' appetite.<sup>7</sup>

---

4 Lee and Kim note that in the Korean dictionary *jongka* is defined as “the house of the head of a family as according to the family tree.” They also explicate it as “the familial construction of noble families” and “the traditional house system [which] passed down for generations.” Chang Hyeon Lee and Young Kim, “*Jongka*, the Traditional Korean Family: Exploring *Jongka* Food in the Context of Korean Food Categories,” *Journal of Ethnic Foods* 5.1 (2018): 41.

5 Lee and Kim, “*Jongka*, the Traditional Korean Family,” 41.

6 Cwiertka, *Cuisine, Colonialism and Cold War*, 9.

7 Han Soo Kim, Myung Sunny Kim, Myoung Sung Lee, Yong Soon Park, Hae Jeong Lee, Soon-ah Kang, Hyun Sook Lee, et al., “Korean Diet: Characteristics

They also explicate that conventionally *bap* is served with *kuk* and *panch'an*, and the latter includes “one type of *kimchi*, one *namul*, one vegetable dish, and one high protein dish, usually made from fish or meat, as *jjim* or *kui*.” Additionally, salted dishes like *changach'i* (vegetable pickles) and *chōtgal* (pickled/fermented seafood) are also served.<sup>8</sup> Rice—either cooked alone or mixed with bean, millet and barley—has been Koreans’ staple food, and different from “Western cuisine, there is little distinction between the main and side dishes, in Korea the side dishes are shared while the main food is served individually.”<sup>9</sup>

Hence, among the traditional Korean meal’s important pillars there are *bap*, *kuk* and *t'ang*,<sup>10</sup> and the universally recognized *kimchi*, and *kanjang* (soy sauce), *doenjang* (soybean paste), *koch'ujang* (red pepper paste) along with “chilies, sesame (seed and oil), garlic and spring onions [that] constitute what might be called a ‘Korean flavor’.”<sup>11</sup> Various cooking methods are employed in the Korean cuisine, and are constantly underlined via the names of the dishes,

The names of most Korean dishes are based on the cooking methods used, such as *bap* (cooked rice), *guk* or *tang* (soup), *jjigae* (stew), *jōngol* (hot pot), *kui* (grilled), *jeon* (pan-fried), *bokkeum* (stir-fried), *jorim* (braised and glazed), *jjim* (steamed or braised), *muchim* (seasoned or spiced), *namul* (seasoned vegetables), *po* (dried food), *jeotgal* (pickled seafood), *kimchi*, *tteok* (rice cake), etc. These terms are

---

and Historical Background,” *Journal of Ethnic Foods* 3.1 (2016): 29.

8 *Ibid.*, 28.

9 The Korea Foundation, *Traditional Food: A Taste of Korean Life* (Seoul: Seoul Selection, 2010), Chapter 2.

10 Chung et al. explicate *tang* as “stew” (2017, 242), and Kim et al. define *tang* among “*kuk*-based one bowl dishes” (2016, 30).

11 Cwiera, *Cuisine, Colonialism and Cold War*, 9.

found at the end of the dish name, like a suffix.<sup>12</sup>

In this regard, the young American missionary's letter—the focal point of this article—is a primary source that denotes the bulk of the above-mentioned food items and cooking methods by entirely referring to their original Korean names. From this perspective, compared to the majority of published works which embraced notable information and description regarding Korean cuisine, the single-page document in consideration illustrates an endeavor that intended to depict the main authentic features of *yangban* culinary experience in early twentieth-century Korea.

### **Examples from late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American accounts about Korean food**

With the increase of US-Korean relations after 1882, many American authors, missionaries, and travelers published numerous works about Chosŏn and the Korean people. This part of the article will pinpoint a number of those writers and their books for the purpose of presenting what Americans wrote and read about Korean food by the turn of the twentieth century. Hence, it will provide a general framework of the information which the aforementioned young missionary could have acquired about Korean culinary culture before he personally gained pertinent experience. For instance, Percival Lawrence Lowell (1855-1916) was an American astronomer who established the Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona by the end of the nineteenth century. He initiated the quest for the discovery of the planet Pluto and referred to the possibility of existence of life on Mars.<sup>13</sup> He was also the broth-

---

12 *Korean Food Guide in English* (Seoul: The Korea Foundation, 2014), Preparation and Cooking Methods.

13 Seo-Rae Park, "History of Astronomy in Korea," in *Astronomy across Cultures*:

er of the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Amy Lowell who was profoundly inspired by East Asia. Lowell travelled to Japan in 1883, and “was appointed as foreign secretary and counselor to the Korean special mission to the United States and lived in Korea for six months.”<sup>14</sup> His book, *Chosön: The Land of the Morning Calm* was first published in 1885 and included thorough information about Korea and Korean culinary culture. Lowell vividly explained the Korean appetite by making the remark that “[t]he average Korean does not eat that he may live, but lives that he may eat.”<sup>15</sup> In the chapter titled “A Korean Banquet,” he also provided the details of a Foreign Office banquet organized at a summerhouse which, in the writer’s own words, was “a temple to poetry”:

We took our places at a large rectangular table, eight of us in all, and were first served with soup and sul. This was the first course, and during it the table remained in virgin beauty. It was covered with mounds of food of all kinds. The dishes were brazen bowls, hemispherical in shape. These were not only filled with meats, fish, vegetables, and fruits, but their contents boldly overtopped the modest bounds the bowls suggested, and soared in dignified self-reliance far into the air. Each bowl was crammed with a compact mass, of whatever it happened to be, which then, following the figure imparted to it below, rose above the rim, and towered into a cylinder of food rounded at the top. In one this mass was meat cut into small bits; in another, sliced fish; in a third, baked dough; and so on.<sup>16</sup>

---

*The History of Non-Western Astronomy*, edited by Helaine Selin and Sun Xiaochun (Berlin: Springer-Science+Business Media, B.V., 2000), 421.

14 Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 104.

15 Percival Lowell, *Chosön: The Land of the Morning Calm* (Boston: Ticknor and Company, 1888), 55.

Rev. Daniel Lyman Gifford (1861-1900) was a graduate of McCormick Theological Seminary and a Presbyterian missionary who arrived in Seoul in 1888. He died in Korea with his wife in 1900.<sup>17</sup> Gifford's book, *Every-Day Life in Korea*, yielded a meticulous explanation of Korean dishes. Apart from emphasizing the oft-repeated dominance of rice and millet in the Korean diet, Gifford reminded his readers that Koreans consumed beans, corn, ginger, lettuce, hemp, onions, and sliced *mu*, which the writer described as "turnip or enormous white radish." They also used wheat to make liquor and made a kind of vermicelli from buckwheat with which they prepared a meal called "cook-su" (*kuksu*) that foreigners really liked. Gifford also accentuated the significance of side dishes and "paichu" (*paech'u*) kimchi to which – like the majority of his compatriots – referred as "sauerkraut."<sup>18</sup>

Aside from male missionaries, travelers and writers, American women authors in the late nineteenth century concentrated on Korea as well and depicted pertinent aspects in their works. Louise Jordan Miln (1864-1933) was an American actor, novelist, and playwright, and accompanied her husband George C. Miln, who was "a British-born Unitarian clergyman" on his "six-month tour in East and Southeast Asia" in October 1890.<sup>19</sup> Her book, *Quaint Korea*, was published in 1895. According to James F. Lee, Miln never visited Chosŏn during her stay in Asia, and the information she provided in *Quaint Korea* "comes from the notes of Mrs. Helen Q., a friend who had journeyed to Korea, and from Percival Lowell's *Chosŏn: The Land of the Morning Call*."<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the book offered flamboyant yet also

---

16 *Ibid.*, 242.

17 "Missionaries Die in Corea," *Chicago Tribune*, May 13, 1900, 1.

18 Daniel L. Gifford, *Every-Day Life in Korea: A Collection of Studies and Stories* (New York, Chicago & Toronto: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1898), 20-21.

19 J. K. Van Dover, *The Judge Dee Novels of R. H. van Gulik: The Case of the Chinese Detective and the American Reader* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2014), 166.

20 James F. Lee, "Magnificent Personality: Korea through the Eyes of Western

substantial and eloquent viewpoints about several aspects related to Korea and the Korean people.

In *Quaint Korea*, aside from referring to standard topics like Korean politics, customs, women, architecture, art, and “irreligion”, Miln also displayed her opinions about Korean food. She highlighted that fish, rice and millet were the general food for Koreans who could rarely eat meat,<sup>21</sup> and they served their meals at “a table a foot or two high, and just about as square as high” on which “small dishes of food [we]re placed, and small but often-filled cups of drink.”<sup>22</sup> Similar to the above-mentioned writers, Miln also alluded to the sincere Korean love for food, and affirmed that “no other people extract[ed] so much genuine enjoyment from eating.” The Korean people, she stated, habitually liked consuming chilies, taro, seaweed, and lily-bulbs. She even provided a rough translation of a complete but rather inaccurate “*ménu* of a very elegant Korean dinner” which comprised of “Boiled pork with rice wine, Macaroni soup, Chicken with millet wine, Boiled eggs, Pastry, Flour, Sesame and honey pudding, Dried persimmons and roasted rice with honey.”<sup>23</sup> In actual fact, the same menu had already been presented to the American readers by William Elliot Griffis (1843-1928) – the renowned writer of *Corea: The Hermit Nation* (1882) – in 1885, when he referred to the specifics of “a dinner given to the Japanese commissioners in 1876.”<sup>24</sup>

Nevertheless, the most objective, significant, and akin late nineteenth-century documents to which this article should allude are the food-related records that are located in the archive left by George

---

Women,” *Korean Culture* 14.1 (1993): 33.

21 Louise Jordan Miln, *Quaint Korea* (London: Osgood, McIlvaine & Co., 1895), 44.

22 *Ibid.*, 166-167.

23 *Ibid.*, 204-205.

24 The Japan-Korea Treaty of 1876. William Elliot Griffis, *Corea, Without and Within: Chapters on Corean History, Manners and Religion* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1885) 233.

Clayton Foulk (1856-1893). Foulk was capable of interpreting between Japanese and Korean, thus was appointed as the US naval attaché to the Kingdom of Korea in 1884, and became the acting chargé d'affaires in 1885-1886, and from 1886 to 1887. A recent article concentrates on his unofficial travel notes and personal letters of the period between November and December 1884, when he took a journey in Korea, and the documents provide first-hand and relatively unbiased information about late nineteenth-century Korean culinary culture.<sup>25</sup> In these documents, Foulk referred to the different types and varieties of food that both elite and common Koreans consumed in addition to the table composition that he observed during his journey. He did not provide the original Korean names of all the dishes, yet he conveyed valuable and thorough information about the food culture of Chosŏn.

By the turn of the twentieth century, there was a plethora of semi-fictional books, travelogues, and missionary accounts about Chosŏn published not only in the United States, but also in the entire Anglosphere. They generally revealed several biased views concerning the fundamental aspects of Korean culture and history, yet also provided reasonably accurate observations about the everyday life activities in the peninsula. Within that context, those interpretations eventually yielded a common pattern via which Korean cuisine and eating habits as well as the staples of Korean food were constantly presented to enquiring readers in the Western hemisphere.

### **Lloyd H. Snyder and his description of a Korean menu**

Lloyd Harold Snyder was twenty-one years old when he arrived in Korea in 1907. After graduating from Franklin and Marshall College in

---

25 Chae-Lin Park, "Joseon Dynasty's Food Culture Experienced by George C. Foulk in 1884," *Journal of the Korean Society of Food Culture* 35.2 (2020): 127-142.

Lancaster, Pennsylvania and Princeton University, he became “head of the English department of the Young Men’s Christian Association school and tutor to some of the Korean officials in Seoul.”<sup>26</sup> In 1911-1916, he served as the secretary of the YMCA’s Seoul Association. In early 1912, he married Elsie Lowe from Midlothian, Texas who had been in Songdo (Kaesŏng) since 1909 as “a missionary for the Methodist church.”<sup>27</sup> Similar to his wife, Lloyd H. Snyder participated in several educational activities of the Korean Mission of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. He also acted as the vice president of Songdo Higher Common School (initially named as Anglo-Korean School) in the 1920s.<sup>28</sup> In 1939, when he was a teacher in the Chosen Christian College in Seoul, he prepared a dictionary that “contained the 2300 or so Chinese characters commonly used in Korea.”<sup>29</sup> The Snyders left the country during both world wars, yet their final departure took place in 1949, and Lloyd H. Snyder died in 1957.<sup>30</sup>

Snyder was a missionary who was genuinely interested in observing “the hermit kingdom” and Koreans whom he described as “quiet, unassuming, amiable people” who possessed “a high regard for Americans and English-speaking people, and bec[a]me much attached and [we]re most devoted in their kindness and appreciation to anyone who assist[ed] or befriend[ed] them.”<sup>31</sup> In a typewritten letter – with the offi-

---

26 “Young American in Korea,” *Pittsburgh Daily Post*. July 19, 1908, 23.

27 “Marriage of Missionaries,” *The Waxahachie Daily Light*. March 8, 1912, 3.

28 A.J. Weeks, ed., *Eightieth Annual Report of the Board of Missions of the Episcopal Church South*. (Nashville, TN: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1926), 90.

29 *Sangyong Hancha Sugŏ Sajŏn, Handy Dictionary Note Book: Collection of Chinese Characters in Common Use* (Kyŏngsŏng: Chosŏn Kidokkyo Sŏhoe, Sohwa 14). The dictionary is indicated in Andrew Gosling, comp., *Jessie’s Korea: Guide to the McLaren-Human Collection in the National Library of Australia* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2007), 62, access date: July 2, 2022, <https://www.nla.gov.au/sites/default/files/mclarenguide-final17-10-whole.doc.pdf>

30 “Mrs. Lloyd Snyder, Long-Time Missionary,” *The Courier News*, May 8, 1965, 14.

cial letterhead of the YMCA's Seoul Station—sent to Maud Wood Park<sup>32</sup> on May 29, 1909, he alluded to one of his Korean acquaintances and the meal that he enjoyed at his house. At that time, Park was visiting Seoul as one of the stops of her “Around the World” tour (1909-1910) during which she aspired to inspect the conditions of women in different parts of the world. Hence, she contacted various missionaries and diplomatic staff in the countries she visited. Within that framework, Snyder's letter was apparently a document that provided advice—like obtaining a copy of the prominent Canadian missionary James Scarth Gale's (1863-1937) *Korean Sketches* (1898)—and introduced a few names with whom she could get in touch during her stay in Seoul. In addition, he provided a quasi-complete “menu which [he] had the pleasure to enjoy at the home of Mr. Min Kui Sik.” Snyder described the food he tasted as “probably the best meal that [he] ha[d] indulged in, even including those at the different consulates or at banquets at home.” He also stated that his host's father “[was] hold[ing] the highest rank next to the emperor.”<sup>33</sup>

The family name of Lloyd H. Snyder's host and the fact that his father possessed the highest position next to Emperor Sunjong (r. 1907-1910) convey the impression that he was the son of Min Pyöngsöok who had been the minister of the imperial household since 1908.<sup>34</sup> Yet a detailed inspection reveals that he was Min Kyusik, the younger of the two sons of Min Yöngghwi (1852-1935). His father “serv[ed] at one time as chief chamberlain” of Kojong—Sunjong's father—and “played

---

31 “Young American in Korea.”

32 Maud Wood Park (1871-1955) was a renowned American suffragist, women's right activist and lobbyist. She went on a world tour in 1909-1910 that was financed by the Boston Equal Suffrage Association for Good Government (BESAGG). Snyder's letter is in the folder that includes her report on Korea, which she compiled during her related visit to the country.

33 Lloyd H. Snyder to Maud Wood Park, May 29, 1909.

34 Chong-ik Kim, “Japan in Korea (1905-1910): The Techniques of Political Power,” PhD diss. (Stanford University, 1958), 110.

a key role in bringing the Chinese troops into Korea in 1894, thus provoking the Sino-Japanese war.”<sup>35</sup> Min Yŏnghwi was one of “the two most influential clan members of Kojong’s beloved wife Queen Min,” and he also witnessed the sudden death of the emperor in 1919.<sup>36</sup> He was an impressively influential figure in military and political affairs, and became a viscount after the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910. “Appointed to the Board of Hanil Bank in 1912, he became its president in 1915, and turned it over to his son Min Tae-sik (1882-1951) in 1920.”<sup>37</sup> The Mins eventually became the most important family in Korea’s financial sector in the first half of the twentieth century. After serving as the head of the Hanil Bank, Min Taesik acted as the president of the Tongil Bank in 1931-1936, and “organized his agricultural and real estate holdings under the family owned Kyesŏng Company.”<sup>38</sup> His younger brother Min Kyusik was born in 1888, “studied privately before going on for a college degree at Cambridge University,” and he “immediately assumed the post of managing director of the Hanil Bank” after returning to Korea in 1920. He became the president of his family’s Chosŏn Silk Weaving Company in 1923, and “served as president of the Tongil Bank and then the Choheung Bank until 1945, and thereafter as a director.”<sup>39</sup>

In brief, Min Kyusik was a young and prominent member of one of the most privileged families of the Korean Empire in 1909, and possibly a pupil who benefited from Snyder’s private English language lessons. The two men were also nearly of the same age; furthermore

---

35 Yŏng-ho Ch’oe and Tae-jin Yi, “The Mystery of Emperor Kojong’s Sudden Death in 1919: Were the Highest Japanese Officials Responsible?” *Korean Studies* 35 (2011): 124.

36 *Ibid.*, 125.

37 Frank B. Tipton, *Asian Firms: History, Institutions and Management* (Cheltenham, UK & Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, Inc., 2008), 78.

38 Dennis McNamara, *The Colonial Origins of Korean Enterprise, 1910-1945* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 179.

39 *Ibid.*

Snyder was “diligently studying the Korean, Japanese, and Chinese languages, and also spen[t] much of his time in investigating the economic and social conditions of the country.”<sup>40</sup> Their common interests ostensibly developed into an acquaintance between Min and Snyder.

Different from the majority of the aforementioned American writers and missionaries, in his letter to Park, Lloyd H. Snyder deliberately intended to provide the original names of the dishes that he tasted at Min’s home by using Romanized Korean. Thus, the menu he included in his letter was different from the one that Miln presented in *Quaint Korea*. This was very likely related to the fact that he had already started to learn the Korean language, and presumably, also aspired to introduce some of the essentials of the Korean cuisine in their most authentic form to Maud Wood Park. Since there are many noticeably misspelled words in Snyder’s menu, Table 1 presents the most plausible interpretation and description for each item along with Snyder’s original transliterations and explanations.

Within the confines of the information that Snyder stipulated in his letter, it is not possible to pinpoint a number of particulars about the meal which he attended at Min’s house. The number of the invited guests is imprecise, and on what occasion Snyder was among them is not discernable. Thence, by utilizing the names of the dishes which he presented to Park, a series of assumptions are going to be brought forth. Owing to the fact that Min Kyusik’s father was one of the most distinguished members of the emperor’s entourage, and during the Chosŏn Period, “some aspects of the royal cuisine influenced the dietary culture of the ruling class and diffused beyond the palace walls,”<sup>41</sup> similar to other *yangban* families’ eating habits, in all probability there was a quantity of evident resemblances between the food consumed at

---

40 “Young American in Korea.”

41 Louis N. Magner, “Korea,” in *The Cambridge World History of Food*, edited by Kenneth F. Kiple and Conee Omelas Kriemhild, Vol. II (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1186.

the Chosŏn palace and the meals which were served to Snyder at Min’s house.

Korean royal cuisine culture consisted of “royal cuisine (king’s food), ordinary cuisine, banquet cuisine, ancestral ceremonies, traditional holiday cuisine, and rites of passage,” yet the knowledge concerning the essentials of the “ordinary royal cuisine” of the Chosŏn dynasty has not been scrutinized thoroughly.<sup>42</sup> The *sangsik* memos that were prepared in 1919 following Kojong’s death are employed as primary sources to inspect that aspect. “*Sangsik* (ancestral rites table) refers to food prepared at a house of mourning,” and encompasses the meals that the deceased consumed during his lifetime. The information obtained from King Kojong’s *sangsik* yields the fact that there were around seven or nine *panch’an* in the royal cuisine besides *pap*, *kuk* and *t’ang*. “[J]eok (skewers), *jeon* (Korean pancakes), greens and salted dry fish, *kimchi*, seasonings such as soy sauce, *kochujang* (red pepper paste) and mustard as well as fruits and fruit salad for dessert” were also served.<sup>43</sup> Within this framework, Korean *yangban* cuisine shared a number of similarities with the food consumed by the Korean royal family of the early twentieth century.

In any manner, the first important aspect pertaining to Snyder’s menu is the fact that he did not entirely apprehend how Koreans served their *panch’an* separately from their main dishes, and in shared small portions. Nonetheless, he presumably prepared his menu by accentuating the dishes in an order of priority (Table 1). Within this context, the primary dish in his menu – *chanch’i kusu* (banquet noodles) – was also one of the main dishes of Min’s feast since “[d]ifferent from some Western and Chinese traditions where soup is served at either the beginning or end of the main course, in Korean cuisine it is

---

42 Hae-kyung Chung, Dayeon Shin, Kyung Rhan Chung, Soe Yeon Choi, and Nariyah Woo, “Recovering the Royal Cuisine in Chosun Dynasty and Its Esthetics,” *Journal of Ethnic Foods* 4.4 (2017): 243.

43 *Ibid.*, 242.

served as a part of the main meal.”<sup>44</sup> *Chanch'i kuksu*, which is offered particularly at feasts and banquets, is made with thin wheat noodles and “served in a hot anchovy broth to the guests” at wedding receptions or birthday celebrations because the noodles symbolize “a long, healthy life.”<sup>45</sup> Accordingly, Snyder conceivably visited Min Kyusik’s house to participate in a celebration. In his menu’s explanatory part, he referred to *chanch'i kuksu*’s popularity, compared it to the American’s noodle soup, and denoted that it was “made of rice.” By highlighting that Koreans were “frequently hold[ing] Kuk Su banquets at midnight” (Table 1), he also implied that the meal he attended might have taken place in the evening or at night.

In the second half of his menu, Snyder expressed that bread was offered during the meal, yet “the actual concept of bread is believed to have entered Korean culture in the period of Japanese occupation in the years 1910-1945...when many elements of the Western civilization came to Korea via Japan.”<sup>46</sup> Moreover, the phrase which he employed to define bread is reminiscent of an utterly dissimilar yet very popular dish. *Ppang* is the Korean word for bread; as an alternative Snyder scribbled down the expression, “*kai p'i dawk*” that instantly reminds the dish, *kalbit'ang* (beef short rib soup). “In the palace, short rib soup was prepared as a gourmet dish using a variety of ingredients,”<sup>47</sup> hence reaching the conclusion that *chanch'i kuksu* and *kalbit'ang* were the two main dishes would be credible and reasonable. Moreover, there

---

44 Michael J. Pettid, *Korean Cuisine: An Illustrated History* (London: Reaction Books, Ltd., 2008), 55.

45 Korean Culture and Information Service, *Facts about Korea: South Korea, Past and Present* (Seoul: Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, [1973] 2015), 17.

46 Jakub Krzosek, “Semantic Compositionality of Compounds in the Cognitive and Construction Grammar Frameworks: A Comparative Study of Korean and Polish Compounds,” in *Cultural Conceptualizations in Language and Communication*, edited by Barbara Lewandowska-Tomasczyk (Cham, Switzerland: Scribner Nature, 2020), 304.

47 Chung et al., “Recovering the Royal Cuisine,” 249.

is no indication of *pap* in the list, which was Korean cuisine’s most crucial staple food. This could be related to the possibility that—resembling the royal palace where *pap* was not served when there was “a pasta table” that included a dish like *mokmyŏn* (buckwheat noodles)<sup>48</sup>—rice was not offered during Min’s feast.

*Kimchi* was the most recurrently and scrupulously delineated Korean staple food in the works of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American writers and was defined by Snyder as “the best known of Korean dishes” in his menu (Table 1). During Min’s banquet, the renowned *paech’u kimch’i* (cabbage kimchi), and apparently *sunmu kimchi* (turnip kimchi) were offered to the guests. In his menu, Snyder did not individually point out some side dishes which were served to complement the main dishes. For instance, while mentioning *saengsŏn chŏn* (pan-fried fish), he stated that the fish was mixed with “potatoes, turnips, and few other vegetables” (Table 1). This detail signifies that the green vegetables were cooked—akin to the royal palace where mainly cooked *namul* (seasoned vegetables) were served—yet it does not clarify whether the potatoes were braised or sautéed. Likewise, estimating whether the white radishes—Snyder seemingly confused turnips with radishes—were pickled or braised is not possible by inspecting the related information. Similarly, when he referred to *hyŏ mitchim* (steamed/braised beef tongue),<sup>49</sup> Snyder explicated that the “boiled tongue”—which was probably a *panc’han* named *pyunyuk* that contained thin slices of boiled meat, and also consumed at the Chosŏn palace<sup>50</sup>—was served “with other vegetables boiled.”

However, his menu also revealed a list of individually specified *panc’han* including *suran* (poached eggs) which were among the

---

48 *Ibid.*, 248.

49 *Hyŏ mit gui* (roasted beef tongue) which is served in thin slices is a more commonly recognized dish, but in his menu Snyder explicitly used the word *chim* (steamed) while noting down the original name of the dish.

50 Chung et al., “Recovering the Royal Cuisine,” 246.

Chosŏn royal cuisine's *pyŏlchan*, "special treats," and consumed very frequently during the meals.<sup>51</sup> He referred to *kul* (oysters) that were presumably consumed as *chŏtgal* (pickled/fermented seafood) during the meal which Snyder attended. *Seokhwahae* (salted oysters with hot pepper) were also among the royal court's preferred *panch'an*.<sup>52</sup>

Sauces and condiments constitute an indispensable component of Korean cuisine, and Snyder alluded to one of them by employing the expression "*chVo*" in his list (Table 1). To delineate the consistency and taste of the sauce, he identified it with Worcestershire sauce, which is a well-known and widely used vinegar-based fermented condiment in the Western world. This detail signifies the possibility that the sauce offered at Min's house was *ch'ojang* (vinegar sauce), a mixture of ground pine nuts, honey, vinegar and *koch'ujang*, and was also used as a dipping sauce at the royal palace. "It was made by adding mustard powder or whole mustard to water and grinding it out, then adding vinegar, salt and sugar and leaving the mixture upside down in a warm place."<sup>53</sup>

In his letter, Snyder stated that he "missed the desserts" and regrettably, there is no consistent information regarding the offered drinks in the document. Nevertheless, he provided a few pertinent clues. One of the last items in his menu—the one that is indicated before "*chVo*"—is *kkul* (honey). Honey was one of the denoting flavors which enhanced the taste of Korean sweets and drinks, and the final piece that Snyder added to his menu—without bringing an interpretation—is "*i'o ku*". It is reminiscent of *ttŏk* (rice cakes) which were generally dipped in honey like other traditional dessert varieties. He wrote that he did not recall the item he inaccurately named as "*chul*," yet by taking into consideration its place in the menu's order, asserting that he referred to

---

51 Myŏng-ho Shin, *Joseon Royal Court Culture: Ceremonial and Daily Life* (Paju: Dolbegae, 2004), 74. Park, "Joseon Dynasty's Food Culture," 138.

52 Chung et al., "Recovering the Royal Cuisine," 248.

53 *Ibid.*

*kyul* (tangerines) would be a plausible presumption.<sup>54</sup> At the Chosŏn palace, tangerines were also served as dessert, and were deemed as a valuable fruit.<sup>55</sup>

All aspects considered, along with the resemblances shared with the food of the royal court, Min’s dinner was an emblematic paradigm of early twentieth-century traditional *jangguksang*, which was a table for lunch or a feast or reception for guests.<sup>56</sup> It included one *kuk* and believably one *t’ang* as the main dishes. Snyder provided a well-balanced list of diverse *panch’an* including two different *kimchi*, rather vaguely specified *namul*, one *chŏn*, one *chŏtgal*, one *tchim* and *suran*. The menu did not comprise dry *panch’an* like different varieties of dried fish or beef jerky and *chŏk* (skewers), yet Snyder exclusively pinpointed *ch’ojang* via a relatively accurate analogy. The information regarding the offered sweets and drinks is incomplete, but a thorough reading provides a number of impressions which yield that *ttŏk*, *kkul* and *kyul* could be among the food items that were served at Min’s banquet. Overall, in his letter, Lloyd H. Snyder efficaciously presented a quasi-complete and precise *yangban* menu to Maud Wood Park, prior to her arrival in Seoul in 1909.

## Conclusion

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries epitomized an era of intense change and transformation for Korea. With the influx of Westerners to the peninsula, the Korean people encountered new beliefs, cultures, customs, and languages, yet they also helped the newcomers in becoming acquainted with their own idiosyncratic civilization.

---

54 Another yet less probable possibility can be *juk* (porridge) which was not characteristically served for dinner.

55 Chung et al, “Recovering the Royal Cuisine,” 250.

56 *Traditional Food*, Chapter 2.

Various American diplomats, missionaries and travelers were among those strangers, and they composed numerous works that depicted Korea and its culture and history. Some of those manuscripts were replicated documents which syncretized other writers' opinions and experiences, yet some of them revealed the genuine knowledge and viewpoints of their creators. Aside from explicating Korea's political system, religion and its relationship with its neighbors, American writers focused on the country's culture and illustrated the everyday life activities of its inhabitants. Within this scope, Korea's profound culinary culture and traditions were also delineated for American readers. The majority of the books in question met on a common ground while elucidating the essentials of Korean food and common people's eating habits. They frequently highlighted Koreans' appetite, described the peninsula's agricultural products, and accentuated the utmost importance of rice, millet, *kimchi* and sauces in the Korean diet. A few of those writers denoted the significance of noodles in the Korean cuisine by employing words like "vermicelli," "cook-su" and "macaroni," and the majority of them identified *kimchi* with sauerkraut. Yet desserts and drinks were less specified in their works.

In this framework, via the letter that he sent to Maud Wood Park, Lloyd H. Snyder demonstrated a number of similarities with his contemporaries in defining the aforementioned essentials of Korean culinary culture, by also utilizing his personal experiences which he gained as an outcome of the acquaintance that he had with Min Kyusik. In his explanations concerning the meal that he had at Min's house, he emphasized the prominence of *kimchi*, exposed the popularity of noodles, and (in)directly disclosed some of the side dishes, yet did not state a single word about Koreans' most noteworthy staple food, rice. In addition, Snyder possibly misperceived hence mispronounced the names of a series of dishes in his menu. This aspect elicits the fact that he intentionally and uniquely—and dissimilar to the majority of other American missionaries, officials and writers—aspired to employ the authentic names of the dishes while arranging his menu and uti-

lized Romanized Korean words for that particular purpose. By this means, as a young American missionary who had recently started practicing the Korean language, Snyder explicated a number of well-liked Korean dishes to Park by utilizing their original names. His letter does not only manifest the genuine interest of a twentieth-century Westerner in deep-rooted and authentic attributes of Korean language and way of life, but also reveals the leading role of food as an identifier of a country's culture. Thus, it also punctuates the pertinence of concentrating on food as a means to obtain profound information about a land and its people. By conveying this type of knowledge to one of his compatriots who was going to visit Seoul, Synder decided to present Korea from a culinary perspective, and on a personal level. He introduced a minor portion of the country's food culture to an elite American woman via the menu of a dinner—which he explicitly praised—that he had at the house of a privileged Korean. By this means, he did not only offer Maud Wood Park a preliminary peek into the daily life of a *yangban*, but also provided her the occasion to become acquainted beforehand with some of the words which she was going to hear frequently after her arrival.

### Tables and Figures

**Table 1.** Lloyd H. Snyder's Menu and Its Possible Interpretation

SNYDER'S MENU		POSSIBLE INTERPRETATION	
Dish name	Explanation	Dish name	Explanation
Chang Kuk Kuk Su	Some of kind of soup Something similar to our noodle soup Made of rice. A very popular dish among the Koreans. They frequently hold Kuk Su banquets at midnight.	Janchi Guksu	Banquet-style noodles
Saing Sung Chun Ya	A mixture of bloiled [ <i>sic</i> ] fish [.] potatoes, turnips, and few other vegetables	Saeng Seon Jeon	Pan-fried fish
Hyuaw Mit Chim	Boiled tongue with other vegetables boiled	Hyeo Mit Chim	Steamed/braised beef tongue
Kul	Oysters	Gul	Oysters
Su An	Poached eggs served cold	Suran	Poached eggs
Pai Cha Kimchi	Kimchi is the best known of Korean dishes. This is a cabbage kimchi	Baechu Kimchi	Napa cabbage kimchi
Mu Kimchi	Made of something similar to our radishes	Sunmu kimchi	Turnip kimchi
Kai P'i Dawk	Bread	Galbitang (Bbang)	Beef short rib soup (Bread)
Chul	Forget what this is	Gyul	Tangerine
Guul	Honey	Kkul	Honey
ChVo	Worcestershire sauce	Chojang	Vinegar sauce
T'o Ku		Tteok	Rice cake

*Source:* Adopted from Lloyd H. Snyder's letter to Maud Wood Park (1909).

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

1. Allen, Horace Newton. *Things Korean: A Collection of Sketches and Anecdotes Missionary and Diplomatic*. New York, Chicago and Toronto: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1908.
2. *Chicago Tribune*.
3. *The Courier News*.
4. Gifford, Daniel L. *Every-Day Life in Korea: A Collection of Studies and Stories*. New York, Chicago & Toronto: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1898.
5. Griffis, William Elliot. *Corea, Without and Within: Chapters on Corean History, Manners and Religion*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1885.
6. Lowell, Percival. *Chosön: The Land of the Morning Calm*. Boston: Ticknor and Company, 1888.
7. Lloyd H. Snyder to Maud Wood Park, May 29, 1909. Harvard University-Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America/Maud Wood Park Papers (Women’s Rights Collection). Suffrage and Women’s Rights. Boston Equal Suffrage Association for Good Government (BESAGG). “Around the World” Trip. Korea Report, 1909, n.d. WRC-Pa, folder Pa-224. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. Access date: December 20, 2021. <https://nrs.lib.harvard.edu/urn-3:rad.schl:38850905>
8. Miln, Louise Jordan. *Quaint Korea*. London: Osgood, McIlvaine & Co., 1895.
9. *Pittsburgh Daily Post*.
10. *The Waxahachie Daily Light*.
11. Weeks, A.J. ed. *Eightieth Annual Report of the Board of Missions of the Episcopal Church South*. Nashville, TN: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1926.

## Secondary Sources

12. Ch'oe, Yöng-ho, and Tae-jin Yi. "The Mystery of Emperor Kojong's Sudden Death in 1919: Were the Highest Japanese Officials Responsible?" *Korean Studies* 35 (2011): 122-151.
13. Chung, Hae-kyung, and Rok-dam Park. *HANSIK, Korean Food and Drinks: Stories and Traditions*. Translated by Richard Harris. Seoul: Hollym Corp., Publishers, 2021 [2020].
14. Chung, Hae-kyung, Dayeon Shin, Kyung Rhan Chung, Soe Yeon Choi, and Nariyah Woo. "Recovering the Royal Cuisine in Chosun Dynasty and Its Esthetics." *Journal of Ethnic Foods* 4.4 (2017): 242-253.
15. Cwiertka, Katarzyna C. *Cuisine, Colonialism and Cold War: Food in Twentieth-Century Korea*. London: Reaction Books, Ltd., 2012.
16. Gosling, Andrew, comp. *Jessie's Korea: Guide to the McLaren-Human Collection in the National Library of Australia*. Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2007. Access date: July 2, 2022. <https://www.nla.gov.au/sites/default/files/mclarenguide-final17-10-whole.doc.pdf>
17. Kim, Chong-Ik. "Japan in Korea (1905-1910): The Techniques of Political Power." PhD diss., Stanford University, 1958.
18. Kim, Han Soo, Myung Sunny Kim, Myoung Sung Lee, Yong Soon Park, Hae Jeong Lee, Soon-ah Kang, Hyun Sook Lee, et al. "Korean Diet: Characteristics and Historical Background." *Journal of Ethnic Foods* 3.1 (2016): 26-31.
19. Korean Culture and Information Service. *Facts about Korea: South Korea, Past and Present*. Seoul: Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2015 [1973].
20. *Korean Food Guide in English*. Seoul: The Korea Foundation, 2014.
21. Krzosek, Jakub. "Semantic Compositionality of Compounds in the Cognitive and Construction Grammar Frameworks: A Comparative Study of Korean and Polish Compounds." In *Cultural Conceptualizations in Language and Communication*, edited by

- Barbara Lewandowska-Tomasczyk, 293-310. Cham, Switzerland: Scribner Nature, 2020.
22. Lee, Chang Hyeon, and Young Kim. “*Jongka*, the Traditional Korean Family: Exploring *Jongka* Food in the Context of Korean Food Categories.” *Journal of Ethnic Foods* 5.1 (2018): 40-53.
  23. Lee, James F. “Magnificent Personality: Korea through the Eyes of Western Women.” *Korean Culture* 14.1 (1993): 33-38.
  24. Magner, Louis N. “Korea.” In *The Cambridge World History of Food*, edited by Kenneth F. Kiple and Conee Omelas Kriemhild, 1183-1192. Vol. II. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
  25. McNamara, Dennis. *The Colonial Origins of Korean Enterprise, 1910-1945*. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
  26. Park, Chae-Lin. “Chosŏn Dynasty’s Food Culture Experienced by George C. Foulk in 1884.” *Journal of the Korean Society of Food Culture* 35.2 (2020): 127-142.
  27. Park, Seo-Rae. “History of Astronomy in Korea.” In *Astronomy across Cultures: The History of Non-Western Astronomy*, edited by Helaine Selin and Sun Xiaochun, 409-422. Berlin: Springer-Science+Business Media, B.V., 2000.
  28. Pettid, Michael J. *Korean Cuisine: An Illustrated History*. London: Reaction Books, Ltd., 2008.
  29. Shin, Myŏng-ho. *Joseon Royal Court Culture: Ceremonial and Daily Life*. Paju: Dolbegae, 2004.
  30. The Korea Foundation. *Traditional Food: A Taste of Korean Life*. Seoul: Seoul Selection, 2010.
  31. Tipton, Frank B. *Asian Firms: History, Institutions and Management*. Cheltenham, UK & Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, Inc., 2008.
  32. Van Dover, J. K. *The Judge Dee Novels of R. H. van Gulik: The Case of the Chinese Detective and the American Reader*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2014.

33. Yoshihara, Mari. *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

&lt;Abstract&gt;

**“Probably the best meal that  
I have as yet indulged in”  
: An American missionary’s description  
of Korean dishes in 1909**

*Bahar Gürsel*

In the wake of the Chosŏn-United States Treaty of Peace, Amity, Commerce and Navigation (1882), the relationship between the Korean Empire and the Western world intensified, and large groups of diplomats, missionaries and travelers arrived in the peninsula. Lloyd H. Snyder was among those newcomers and acted as a missionary educator intermittently for more than thirty years in Korea. This article employs a letter – which was sent by Snyder in 1909 to a visitor from the United States – as a primary source to elucidate how an inexperienced American missionary explicated the details of a meal that he consumed at the house of a privileged Korean. Aside from providing concise insight about Korea’s deep-rooted culinary practices and traditions and a number of pertinent examples from late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American accounts, it also demonstrates how a young American in the early 1900s perceived, scrutinized and conveyed some significant features of the gastronomic identity of Korean elites. In a historical context, the article also demonstrates the relevance and significance of food and eating habits in defining and recognizing a society’s cultural identity.

**Keywords:** Korean Empire, Korean cuisine, culinary practices, Western perspective, missionaries, cultural interaction

〈국문초록〉

## “아마 지금까지 마음껏 먹은 것 중 최고의 식사” : 1909년 미국 선교사의 한국 음식 묘사

바하르 구르셀(튀르키예 중동기술대학)

조미수호통상조약(1882)을 시작으로 조선/대한제국과 서방 세계의 관계가 강화되었고, 다수의 외교관과 선교사, 여행자들이 한반도를 찾았다. 로이드 H. 스나이더 역시 새로 조선을 찾은 이들 중 하나였고, 30년 이상 간헐적으로 교육선교사로 활동하였다. 본고에서는 스나이더가 미국에서 온 방문객에게 1901년 보낸 편지를 주 사료로 활용하여, 조선 특권층의 집에서 제공받는 식사에 대해 아직 익숙하지 않은 미국인 선교사가 세부 사항을 설명하는 방식을 밝혀내고자 하였다. 조선의 뿌리깊은 요리 풍습과 전통에 대한 간결한 통찰과 19세기 말~20세기 초 미국 기록의 적절한 수많은 예시를 제공하는 것 외에도, 해당 사료는 1900년대 초 젊은 미국인이 조선 엘리트가 가진 미식가로서의 정체성의 유의미한 특징을 인식하고, 검토하고, 전달하는 방식이 어떠했는지를 보여준다. 역사적 맥락 속에서, 본고는 또한 한 사회의 문화적 정체성을 인식하고 규정하는 데에 있어 식습관의 중요성과 관계성을 보이고자 한다.

주제어: 대한제국, 한국 음식(한식), 요리 풍습, 서구 인식, 선교사, 문화적 상호작용

