Kyung-Koo discusses several interesting cultural differences between how noodles are viewed between the Japanese and Koreans, and how these views affect class boundaries, specifically in Korea. There are two main types of noodles described: Japanese ramen and Korean ramyeon. Japanese ramen has two different forms; fresh noodles that are prepared and often served in restaurants, and instant style noodles. The type of Japanese ramen discussed in this article, unless specified otherwise, is the fresh restaurant style ramen. Korean ramyeon are instant style noodles as well, but unlike Japanese ramen (whose noodles are plain), ramyeon noodles are deep fried in oil or beef fat.

Japanese ramen originated from Chinese style Sina Soba, and saw a huge boom post World War II, as ramen was a fatty and nutritious way to beat hunger in a food poor time. This was in direct comparison to traditional style Japanese soups, which were typically made with dried or reconstituted ingredients. Instant ramen was first invented in 1958 by Nissin Foods and, after a period of rejection, became one of Japan’s greatest inventions. Korean ramyeon was first produced by Jeon Jung-yung, who wanted to produce ramyeon as a way to help deal with food shortages like the Japanese did. At the time, it was considered to be like a second rice. Ramyeon was met with great approval from poverty stricken Koreans, who could not afford real beef but could afford the instant noodles. However, public opinion did change for a short while, once it was discovered that the factories producing the ramyeon were using industrial tallow to fry the noodles.

Kyung-Koo also discusses the criticisms of the nutritional value of ramyeon. Ramyeon is very high in sodium and MSG, as well as trans fats. Critics argue that the rampant trans fats are a cause of the pimples, rashes, swollen faces, and obesity that is affecting the young generations. In addition, ramyeon heavy diets may lead to malnutrition as the noodle dish by itself does not even come close to providing the full spectrum of nutritional needs.

Due to its origins as a rice substitute and its cheap price, ramyeon was, and still is, considered to be food for the poor, even though the cost of rice has since dropped to a much more affordable price range. However, this is not to be said that ramyeon is limited to the poor. The noodle dish is still enjoyed by much of the populace, from children, to soldiers, to students, because of how quickly it cooks. Even the wealthy are thought to be secret ramyeon enthusiasts. Interestingly enough, even despite its stereotypes, ramyeon seems to be more of a modifier to class boundaries rather than a separator. Even with all of its negatives, it is met with almost patriotism, similar to me how Americans view the hamburger. There is also another problem that arises with the widespread use of instant noodles: the disintegration of the family meal. Since ramyeon takes so little time to make, it can be eaten at any time of the day, with or without others, and thus makes a set family meal time meaningless. Not eating together as a family is being made easier with the rise of instant foods. This raises the question of whether the fragmentation of family meals is brought about by the increasing consumption of ramyeon and its like, or if it is the opposite is true.

A good overview of an interesting article. You write well.