Oum (2005) Authenticity and Representation - Cuisines and Identities in Korean-American Diaspora

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“You are what you eat” may sound extremely cliché but this statement is actually true. Food is an important part of culture because not only does it physically nourish the body, but also it is a form related to “emotional bonding, social relations, community building, and religious practices” and depicts various aspects of a culture and their politics (Oum, 2005: 109) sentence was a bit long and complex. Food is directly related to one’s identity and can represent many things about an individual.

Korean foods such as kimchi (define) are often related to Koreanness. When non-Koreans are willing to try Korean food, it is an indicator of their willingness to accept the Korean culture and a way of showing appreciation to the culture as well. Many Korean women who marry American GIs claim that they can’t serve or have Korean food around the house because their husbands and in-laws refuse to consume it and even have it around the house. The banning of Korean food is an indicator of rejecting the unique culture of their wives and not just the rejection of the food itself.

Contrary to that research, another study shows that many Korean American intellectuals, who are either single or married to non-Koreans, regularly cook Korean food at home and invited non-Korean friends over to indulge in the food as well. These people, however, are also those who enjoy going out to try other types of ethnic food and embrace multicultural differences. In comparison, those who look down upon Korean food are considered narrow-minded about different cultures and their ethnic food because they view it as odd and unhygienic.

Sidney Mintz states that there is no way to call a certain type of food integral national cuisine because the food itself and the style of cooking cannot be seen through “politically determined borderlines” but rather, a nation’s cuisine is just another form of expressing a nation’s unique preferences and consistency of their customs (Oum, 2005: 111). Seemingly “national foods” such as French wine, German beer, Mexican tacos, Italian pasta, and Japanese sushi have simply been commercialized through modern nationalist movements and are “invented” and not natural results of the nation’s customs.

Despite popular belief, kimchi isn’t the staple food of Korea, but is often the food that represents Korean cuisine because of its uniqueness and long history. Kimchi is an essential staple accompaniment, because it cannot be served or consumed alone and needs to be served with rice or other dishes. Kimchi can be considered a condiment instead. Because of its distinctive and rather bold odor, it has often been despised or used to make jokes, but kimchi is rather nutritious and very beneficial to one’s health.

It can be surprising that Korea’s national food is rice because Willy Jansen (year: page #) quotes notes that “humans in general prefer meat first, then tuberous roots, and only lastly grain,” because wealth is often showcased by the consumption of meat, and poverty by dry bread. Koreans have actually preferred rice over any other grain and even meat. Koreans believe that the consumption of rice alone is enough to make a satisfying meal, but often eat it with other dishes for variety. At an early age, Korean children learn the value of rice and how they are expected not to leave any rice in their bowl.

Korean meals are very different from the Western-style meals in many different ways. Korean food is eaten in a different pace, with different types of courses and only recently has added dessert to the end of the meal. Though Americans may view the same dishes that Koreans eat meal after meal as leftovers, it is not true because they are made to be preserved and saved for a later time. Although many people eat from the same dish in the Korean culture, such as dipping food in sauces, Korea’s culture definitely shines through because those who partake in the meal make sure to be careful and avoid touching the food carelessly with their chopsticks.

A good review but a little long at 657 words. Not much evidence of critical thought.