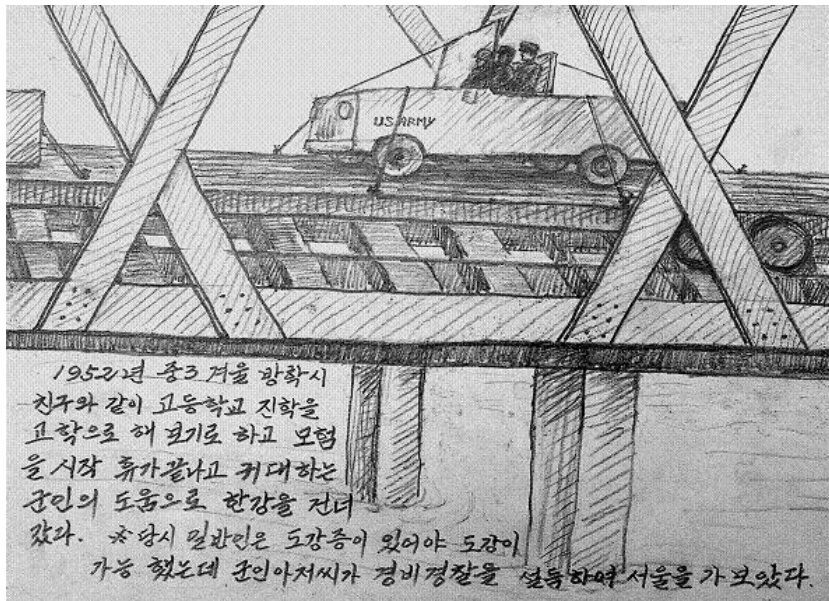




6. FUSION FOOD: STEWING IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE KOREAN WAR

Sooyoung Leam & Sonja Hempel



'Sik-gu' meaning 'family' in Korea, literally means 'people who eat together.' As the term indicates, the act of sharing food amongst your close family and friends is deeply embedded in Korean culinary culture and tradition. On every occasion that I visit Korea, spending time with family and friends means countless dinner invitations and enormous portions of food - with often more than 20 side dishes. I am always amazed by the supersize fridges in which all kinds of pickled vegetables and ready cooked dishes are stored.

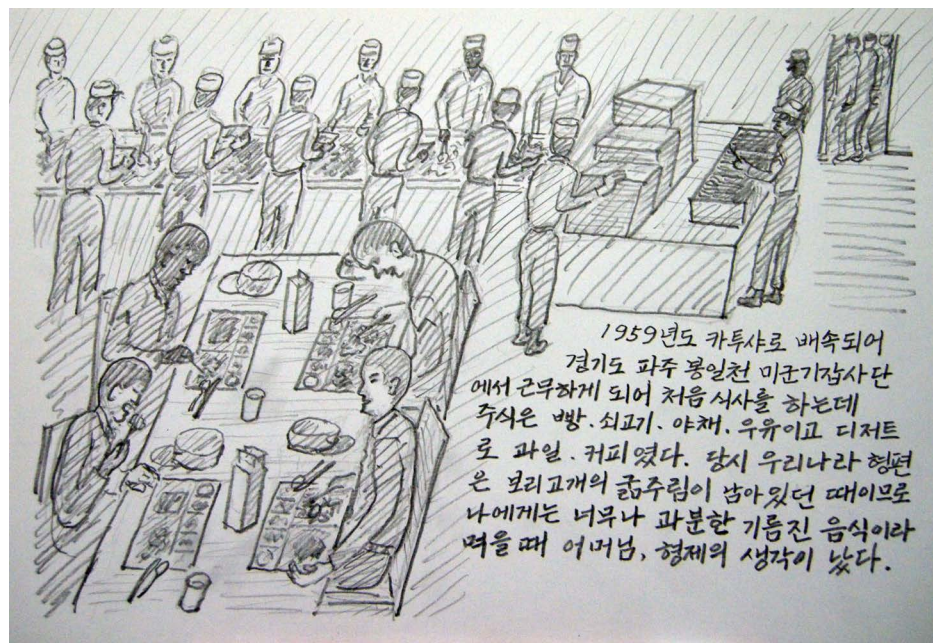
'Jjigae' - a term for any type of thick Korean stew - is one of the most ordinary of Korean dishes, and is often served in a big communal pot. While there is a huge variety in such kinds of stew, arguably the most beloved version would be 'Buddae Jjigae.' It's a spicy stew that combines "Western" processed meat such as ham, spam, sausage along with cheese and instant noodles and traditional Korean ingredients like kimchi and chilli paste. As the name of the dish suggests, ('Buddae' meaning 'army base') its history relates back to the aftermath of the

Korean War (1950-1953), which is also known as America's first 'hot war of the Cold War era.' Following the end of the Second World War, Korea, which had been colonised by Japan for more than three decades, was temporarily divided along the 38th parallel by the victorious allied forces. Hostilities between the two Koreas intensified in the subsequent years as North Korea established a communist government in 1948 with the support of the Soviet Union, while in South Korea, an anti-communist, right-wing government was founded with the support of the US and the United Nations. Thus, the ideological conflict between North and South Korea had a global reach despite the limited geographical scope of the fighting; the effects of the war continue to haunt the geopolitical and social status of the Korean peninsula to this day.

It was primarily through heavy US military intervention during the Korean War that Korea came under American influence - be it political, economic, social or cultural. In fact, the US not only sponsored the participation of the United

Nations in the conflict, but more than eighty percent of the international troops that aided the South Korean forces consisted of American soldiers. As generations of Korean artists who experienced the war like to say, "Western culture landed in Korea from the boots of the American soldiers." Buddae Jjigae is one such example which demonstrates this meshing of cultures, offering in microcosm a political history of Korea.

from poverty as a result of the conflict. In the work of Haejun Jo/Dongwhan Jo, "U.S. Army and Father", the artist asked his father to draw his memories of postwar Korea. In these drawings, one anecdote is the story of "recapturing the goat" The drawing depicts the scene of a man, whose goat ran away. He is able to enter the army base to recapture the goat without having the official permission. On his way, he manages to smuggle some food



It was initially cooked with assorted leftovers and tinned combat ration food from the American army base in Korea, most of which were smuggled by citizens who were suffering

oranges. This incident soon spread around and "goat-deed" would become a paraphrase for smuggling out food from the army base.



Today, in the city of Uijeongbu, about 20 kilometres northeast of Seoul and famous for its many army bases, there is a small road named "Uijeongbu Budaejjigae Street," full of restaurants serving this new "traditional" dish. People from all generations go to eat there, locals as well as people from Seoul who read about the place on the internet. After the Korean War, the area was known as a market place for PX-goods (goods that came from the army bases). One elderly restaurant owner from Uijeongbu Budaejjigae Street remarked that Buddae Jjigae has changed in taste nowadays due to the better quality of meat used in spam. These pre-cooked tins of pork meat were introduced by the US army during the Korean War, when meat was scarce. It is one of the key ingredients for Buddae Jjigae. Nowadays, South Korea is the biggest consumer of Spam outside the US, selling its own home-grown products from Classic Spam, Mild Spam and Bacon Spam to Garlic Spam.

Buddae Jjigae is popular amongst almost all Koreans. According to a survey conducted by Dongah Ilbo, a national Korean newspaper, it has been nominated as one of the representative meals of 20th century Korean

Cuisine. There are numerous Buddae Jjigae chain restaurants in Korea, but it is a dish that can be easily cooked at home: in fact, the real advantage of the dish is that you can easily make the dish with the leftover ingredients you have in the fridge.

Despite its widespread popularity, there had been numerous attempts to change the name of the stew, mainly due to its symbolic connection to the impoverished nation that Korea once was. At one point, the stew was also called 'Johnson Tang' (tang is another name for stew) after the former American president Lyndon B. Johnson, and more recently, some restaurants began to name it as 'Uijeongbu Jjigae' after the main Buddae Jjigae street.

By following the history and the origin of Buddae Jjigae, one can also discover underlying power structures and racial assumptions and divisions that are still prevalent in Korea. One example can be found in the frequent usage of 'Buddae' to denote anything American and its superiority: a significant number of butchers near Uijeongbu area used to be called "Buddae Butcher" or "Buddae meat" implying their meat was



of superior quality to the Korean variety. Similar examples can be found in the very structure of a military system introduced by the US: during the Korean War, South Korean soldiers were assigned to fight in US units. The integration was formalised under a program called the Korean Augmentation Troops to the US Army (KATUSA), which continued after the war. During a period of post-war economic deprivation, they had a privileged and higher regarded position in comparison to 'normal' Korean soldiers, having access to US food supplies, for example. Dongwhan Jo recalls in his drawings his first meal as a KATUSA soldier: to have meat, bread, salad, milk, coffee and fruits made him think of his starving family at home. With access to PX-goods KATUSA soldiers could make good business at the black market outside the camps. (See attached image: 2.jpg)

Interestingly, Buddae Jjigae is now being exported back to the U.S where it is perceived as typical Korean cuisine alongside other "traditional" dishes such as Bibimbap and Bulgogi.

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Based on talks with Kim, Sangdon and with the friendly help of Jan Creutzenberg and Young, Hae Sook.



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[1-2] Dongwhan Jo / Haejun Jo: U.S. Army and Father, 2005-2009. Paper, Pencil, 89 Drawings, Courtesy: Haejun Jo

[3] US army in Korea (Under Creative Commons - <https://www.flickr.com/photos/imcomkorea/6809405265/>)

[4] Alpha (Under Creative Commons - <https://www.flickr.com/photos/avlyxz/>)