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Uniqueness of Korean Cuisine (1)

By Chad Meyer
Contributing Writer

Korean foods and cuisine have been refined and adapted since the Gojoseon Kingdom 4,300 years ago. While Western foods have evolved to rely mainly on salt and sugar for taste, Korean foods remain simpler, lighter, and healthier.

There is also a uniqueness that differentiates Korean cuisine from many of its Asian neighbors. And with only 3percent of the Korean population over the age of 15 overweight, clearly there is something to be taught.

The international demand for Korean cuisine is growing, but still continues to be an undertapped export absent from many Western palettes. This series of articles will examine the distinctions and benefits of a Korean food diet.

In the course of this exploration, we will also observe that Korean foods assist in preventing wrinkles, remaining thin, and living above the OECD average life expectancy.

There are numerous reasons why Korean food remains unpopular and underappreciated by Western diners. Poor perception is one of them. Just as American food can be oversimplified to hot dogs and hamburgers, Korean cuisine can be oversimplified to very hot spicy dishes without flavor. Korean food is also unhelpfully sandwiched between Chinese and Japanese cuisine.

To some degree this is unavoidable. Geography, climate, and history determine the types of vegetables and roots that are grown and consumed. Visit any Korean department store food court and you will find a selection of Japanese and Chinese foods.

Certainly these foods are popular here and have influenced local cooking. And while some traditional Korean dishes have evolved from recipes of these two countries, you will find substantial differences. Chinese food is more heavily seasoned and stronger in taste, while Japanese food usually consists of seafood and is milder in taste.

For those of us that have experienced Korean food, we know that it is much more than just fish soups, chili peppers, beans, and fermented vegetables. Korean cuisine is distinct in its color, texture, and flavor. It is a labor intensive creation that requires the preparation of numerous dishes that are both harmonizing and distinctive. The effort required to prepare Korean food towers over cuisine from other countries.

It can take days to prepare a single meal. And so, Koreans have built a cultural pride in their food that has prevented family recipes from dying. The defining constituent of Korean culture is the rich heritage of food.

Many foods are cooked in exactly the same ways as they were long ago. The methods for preparation, preserving, and pickling remain unchanged. Red peppers are used as they were when they first arrived on Portuguese trade ships in the 17th century. Kimchi, which originated in seventh century Korea, also remains largely unchanged and is consumed with every meal.

Recipes for meals like Dwenjang jjigae and cheonggukjang are hundreds of years old and are served as they were to earlier kings and queens.

Korean food is especially unique when compared to North American and European food. Western cuisine relies on dairy products to provide rich flavor. Koreans consume significantly smaller portions of yogurt, milk, and butter as local meals do not require dairy products. Milk is consumed as a drink and butter is limited to use in baked goods. Cheese, a staple of European food, remains an expensive luxury import in Korea. Prices for dairy products, in general, are nearly double that of other countries. And although you can find cheese on pizza and other foreign dishes, the local variety of cultivated cheese is generally bland and poor in quality when compared to its European counterpart.

Another unique aspect of Korean cuisine is the complimentary side dishes. Patrons of international restaurants have experienced small complementary dishes of food upon arrival at their table. Mexican restaurants, for example, offer free nacho chips and salsa.

Italian restaurants provide bread. Korean restaurants instead offer a complimentary selection of side dishes called banchan. You will find that the variety and selection varies from place to place, as does the quality. Generally, more expensive multi-dish course meals include premium banchan featuring beef, noodles, Korean pancakes, and exotic vegetables.

Less expensive restaurants offer more basic side dishes such as bean sprouts, radish, and kimchi. A trip to the Insa-dong neighborhood of Seoul will demonstrate what I mean. There, you will find a selection of traditional restaurants that offer dozens of side dishes.

If you happen to find a side dish that you like, do not be afraid to ask for more. It's nearly impossible to leave a Korean restaurant without a full stomach. Koreans pride themselves in their cooking skills and deserve to be recognized for their talents.

Don't forget to comment on the food if you enjoy it. Through uniqueness in color, flavor, texture, and taste, Korean food provides a glimpse into the cultural heritage of Korea. And with a rich history and tradition in food, there will be enough Korean dishes to keep you exploring for years to come.

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The writer is a robotics engineer working in Korea. Although he can cook Italian and American foods, Korean food remains his favorite. As Columbus discovered America, so did Chad discover the uniqueness of Korean cuisine. He can be reached at:food.korea@hotmail.com

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Uniqueness of Korean Cuisine(II): Kimchi

By Chad Meyer
Contributing Writer

This is the second part of a series focusing on the benefits of Korean cuisine and nutrition. We will continue an exploration of the Korean diet and an examination of culture, health, and longevity.

The average lifespan of Koreans continues to rise, according to the 2008 Korean Health Data Report issued by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Koreans are now living 79.1 years, above the OECD average lifespan of 78.9 years. The data links longevity, among other things, to health care expenditure per capita. But South Korea goes against the trend. According to the report, Korea, with an above-average lifespan, ranks 28th out of the 30 OECD countries in terms of health care expenditures, based on GDP. Is Korea's diet the key contributor to longevity in the Land of the Morning Calm?

Korea has one of the smallest pool of doctors of the 30 OECD countries. Koreans live longer lives and spend far less on health care than other leading countries such as Japan. And although Japanese live slightly longer, they are spending significantly more public and private money on healthcare. While individual health care spending in Korea is rising, it remains below the OECD average and well below that of Japan. South Koreans also work more hours than all the members of the OECD. With elevated stress levels from longer work hours, why do Koreans require less health care while living longer lives?

Korea may one day boast to having the oldest and longest living people in the world. The climate and geography of the Korean Peninsula have led to a land strong in agriculture. Local cuisine primarily consists of vitamin-rich vegetables and fruit, thus minimizing the harmful effects of a meat-based diet. The Korean diet is also high in antioxidants that promote longer living and is a reflection of a healthy culture.

Speaking with Koreans reveals their lifestyle of well-being. Nutrition and healthy ingredients are their primary sustenance. Until recent years, there was little demand for foreign foods in restaurants and supermarkets. The youth of today have developed tastes for pizza and fried foods, but the local demand still favors traditional foods. Both urban and rural areas of Korea continue to have a limited number of foreign restaurants curtailing the effects of excessive meat consumption. This kind of diet has allowed Koreans to avoid obesity and heart disease

Koreans to avoid obesity and heart disease.

U.S. researchers have found that people who eat two portions of beef per day are more likely to develop long-term heart conditions and diabetes. According to the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), the average American eats 66 pounds (30kg) of beef per year. Koreans consume 16 pounds (7.25kg) of beef per person per year, less than ¼ of the American consumption rate.

A staple of the Korean diet is kimchi. Kimchi is a fermented mixture of ingredients such as red pepper powder, cabbage, green onion, radish, and garlic. Its efficacy is well known, and Koreans consume 22-33 pounds (10-15kg) of kimchi per person per year. According to the Korean Ministry for Food, Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (MIFAFF), kimchi is highly nutritious, strengthens the immune system, prevents cancer, lowers blood cholesterol levels, and delays the aging process promoting longevity. The MIFAFF also states that Kimchi contains ingredients providing antibiotic effects, preventing hyperacidity, and restricting the growth of undesirable bacteria in the intestines.

A medicinal ingredient in prepared kimchi is garlic. Garlic assists in preventing cancer, reducing the risk of heart disease, and minimizing the effects of aging. Garlic is known to lower cholesterol levels in the body. It can help maintain lower blood pressure levels by thinning our blood. Thinned blood deters plaque build up in arteries and veins. It is known that regularly eating garlic can add up to four years to a person's lifespan.

Cabbage, another ingredient in kimchi, also has numerous health benefits. Cabbage is low in calories and sugar. It is high in fiber and vitamins A, B, C, and E. The high fiber content, as well as iron and sulfur, aid in digestion preventing problems in the intestines. Cabbage can inhibit infections and is known to prevent ulcers.

My personal favorite, out of the hundred or so different kimchi types that I have tried (and there more that I have not yet tried) is "ggaktugi." It uses the daikon radish as the base of the kimchi, rather than cabbage. Ggaktugi shares many of the health benefits provided by the more widely eaten cabbage kimchi.

Koreans are living longer than ever thanks to nutritious traditional food such as kimchi. Kimchi slows the effects of aging and reduces the risks of disease. If Koreans continue to resist the temptations of a Western diet in favor of traditional diets, the trend in the country's growing longevity will continue. And as the benefits of a Korean diet become internationally known, traditional dishes will explode into the restaurants of the world.

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Uniqueness of Korean Cuisine (III)

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This is the third part of a series focusing on the benefits of Korean cuisine. We will continue to explore the Korean diet and its effect on longevity and health.

A rich history and strong country pride have inspired generations of Koreans to enjoy traditional cuisine. While many of the traditional meals are rich in flavor, some Westerners have found that Korean meals are lacking in taste. I am convinced that with an understanding of local history, culture, and health, their cuisine will gain appreciation and grow in appeal. A diet merging meals from Korean and Western cultures is proven to yield higher body nutrition.

Rice cake, or ddeok, is a traditional Korean food holding numerous dietary benefits. Ddeok is recorded to have been eaten in the year 57 BC during the Three Kingdoms of Korea. When the Goryeo Kingdom (918-1392) later unified the Korean Peninsula, ddeok became a commonly consumed food. Finally, during the Chosun Kingdom(1392-1910), two hundred different types of ddeok were documented to have used a total of ninety different ingredients. However, as Western cultural influence grew in the 20th century, interest in ddeok slowly began to wane. It eventually became a traditional food served only during the Lunar New Year Day, birthdays, and weddings.

In 2002 the first rice cake cafe opened in Seoul spawning national interest. Around 2004, a health craze for traditional Korean meals kicked off and interest in health food exploded. Today, rice cakes have become an important part of the Korean diet. Found in supermarkets, department stores, public markets, street vendors, and even subway station kiosks, it is a food that has penetrated all locales.

Unlike the dry Western version, Korean rice cakes are slightly moist and appetite satisfying. They can be served alone as a meal or enjoyed as a dessert. As a dessert, rice cakes are very different from the sweeter Western cakes. The Korean variety is made from rice and only naturally sweetened with red beans and assorted fruits, and decorated with raisins, ginger, or sesame seeds.

As a low calorie meal, ddeok is a good source of protein, vitamins, and minerals. As an ingredient in soups and stews, rice cakes are a soft and chewy nourishment for your body. The taste of rice cake can vary and is a function of the preparation method used. For example, ddeok that is pounded flat becomes very chewy.

Rice cakes have also become a Korean consumable art form and a feast for the eyes. In May, the sixth annual Ddeok Exhibition and Beautiful Ddeok Contest showed off the best creations Seoul has to offer. The Institute of Traditional Korean Food uses this festival to promote ddeok. Using a palette of natural food colorings, Korean chefs have elevated rice cakes to new heights by designing museum-worthy masterpieces.

Another famous traditional health food is jook, or Korean porridge. Historically, a meal of jook was served during the longest night of the year, the winter solstice. ``Dongji patjuk" is a type of red bean jook eaten on this day. Korea's Confucian society believed that the red color of the beans warded off disease spreading spirits. This special red bean jook was even thrown at the front door to prevent these bad spirits from entering the home.

Today, jook is prepared for family members who are sick, have stomachaches, or other digestion problems. Juk is a comfort food known to warm your stomach while not upsetting your digestive system. Common types are: seafood, tuna and vegetable, beef and mushroom, pumpkin, chicken and ginseng, and pine nut. It is otherwise served

mushroom, pumpkin, chicken and ginseng, and pine nut. It is otherwise served unseasoned.

Korean porridge is also eaten for breakfast or as a late night snack since it is not heavy or greasy. Elderly people who are sensitive to body changes also choose it. And for a Korean baby, a diet of jook begins six months after birth.

Juk begins life in a rice cooker. After normal cooking, the rice is mixed with six to seven times more water in a stove pot. Over low heat, the rice is cooked and slowly expands. Considered a slow food, juk is a labor intensive meal requiring constant stirring to prevent the rice from burning. Total time for preparation is about an hour.

In Korea, Hyun Juk is one of the largest chains with locations in most Seoul neighborhoods. I interviewed the owner of the Yangjae-dong location to uncover some of the mysteries of this meal. First, I learned that seafood and tuna jook are the most popular dishes served. Seafood, such as salmon and tuna, are high in Vitamin D. A recent American study published in the Archives of Internal Medicine shows that deficiencies in vitamin D can lead to cancer, diabetes, and immune system problems affecting longevity.

The owner also said that many patrons return to the restaurant once or twice per week to enjoy Korean porridge. During the workday, a majority of the customers were young working females. At night, more men enjoyed jook. She said that Korean females are normally cautious about their diet and therefore plan on healthy meals such as jook. Korean men on the other hand, suffer from high stress levels from Korean living which brings them to the restaurant for dinner. As stress can give people upset stomachs, juk serves as a cure for indigestion.

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Uniqueness of Korean Cuisine (IV): Tea

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This is the fourth part of a series focusing on the benefits of Korean well-being. We will continue to explore the Korean diet and its relationship with longevity and health.

After spending several articles discussing different types of Korean cuisine, we will shift our focus to Korean well-being beverages. Traditional and contemporary Korean beverages hold an equal number of health benefits and remain very unique compared to Western beverages such as milk, soda, coffee, and juice.

In Korea, tea drinking is an experience characterized in social, cultural, and spiritual aspects. It has evolved from a simple drink into an herbal treatment for various ailments.

Traditional Asian medicine follows the belief that there are three hundred and sixty vital energy channels in the human body. Referred to as chi, these channels must remain unblocked in order for nature to provide balance and harmony to the body. Maintaining chi levels is preventive maintenance for the body. Along with meditation and exercise, tea is used as a treatment to unblock or repair damaged chi.

A tea drink is created by steeping processed parts of a tea bush. The buds, twigs, and leaves of a tea bush are placed in a pot of boiling water for a specified amount of time. Korean tea is a unique blend that combines the above mentioned with fruits, grains, and roots that are common to Korean medicine. Besides water, tea is the second most popular beverage in Korea.

Korean tea was first recorded to have been consumed in the year 661 during a spiritual ceremony of the Geumgwan Gaya Kingdom (42-562). The latter Goryeo Kingdom (918-1392) also has records of tea in Buddhist monk tea offerings. And during Korea's Joseon Kingdom (1392-1910), tea was consumed by the royal family and dignitaries during daily daytime tea ceremonies and on special ceremonial days. Commoners too began consuming tea towards the later years of this dynasty. During this time of Confucian philosophy, Koreans believed that tea held a role as both drink and medicine. The Korean physicians of the Joseon Kingdom divided human beings into four types based on their emotional characteristics. Different body types were determined to require different medicines. Tea creates a harmony between body and nature. As a medicine used to treat each of the specific body types, tea can successfully mend damaged health.

There are numerous health benefits to drinking tea. In some studies, tea is shown to lower cholesterol levels and protect against lung, prostate, and breast cancer. Additionally, tea is shown to reduce the risk of heart disease and aids in weight loss. Tea helps in digestion, metabolism detoxification, fatigue, and clearing our minds for improved thought processes.

The antioxidants in tea have put it in the spotlight in recent years. Tea contains large amounts of antioxidants that are believed to be linked to longevity. Oxidation is a standard process that occurs in our body and is vital to life. As a result of a normal metabolism, our cells are progressively damaged by means of cell oxidation. Environmental influences such as pollution and excessive sunlight amplify the cell damaging oxidation process.

Antioxidants reduce the pace of oxidation to our cells, thereby limiting the effects of aging. Blueberries and pomegranates hold distinction for their antioxidant properties. Green and black teas provide nearly ten times the amount of antioxidants of these fruits. While tea production in Korea is limited due to the cold climate, the warmer southern part of the country is where most tea is grown. Jeju Island, Boseong, and Jiri Mountain are prominent green tea growing locations. Jeju's teas are known to be slightly salty due to the proximity of the ocean.

All teas can be grouped into four categories: green, white, oolong, and black tea. Oolong and white teas are common in Chinese culture. In Korea, the earliest tea used for ceremonial purposes was a type of black tea. Ceremonial Korean teas were consumed on days related to the seasons as well as birthdays and anniversaries. The teas later imported and grown by Buddhist monks provided a greater variety and included green teas. Koreans believe that each of the four tea categories can heal us and influence our individual senses. Teas can be described by the following categories: bitterness, astringency, sweetness, sourness, and saltiness.

``Boricha" is a traditional roasted barley tea served with meals in restaurants. Made of

barley, ``boricha" may remind Westerners of the flavor of Cheerios cereal. ``Boricha" is served all year, as a hot beverage in the winter and as a cold drink in the summer. The Korean variety differs from the more simple Japanese form. In Korea, it is often combined with roasted corn. The sweetness of the corn helps to minimize the bitterness of the barley.

Barley tea is naturally caffeine free and is considered a good treatment for the common cold as it alleviates congestion. It is also known to relieve upset stomachs and constipation, cool the body, and cleanse the digestive system. A recent study in Japan found that barley tea increases blood viscosity. A tea similar in flavor to barley tea is ``hyeonmicha." It is made from an unpolished roasted brown rice and tastes slightly sweeter.

``Insamcha" is another common traditional Korean tea. Insamcha is a ginseng tea that can be purchased in the supermarket or department store in powder form. It is also served as a hot tea at cafes. The flavor of the ginseng varies depending on whether it was dried, not dried, or steamed. Ginger is believed to be helpful in relieving fatigue as well as protecting the liver from damage. Ginseng contains adaptogens which help to manage stress, fatigue, and anxiety. Western case studies have established that ginseng is effective in lowering blood sugar levels and lowering cholesterol. People with Type-two diabetes and high cholesterol can benefit the most from ginseng tea. Currently, additional studies are underway to link ginseng consumption with improved memory and thinking capabilities as well as increasing body energy.

Ginseng tea is prepared by slicing ginseng into thin strips. Sugar or honey is added and the combination is left to sit. The ratio is ten parts water to one part ginseng. The ginseng is then boiled for several hours with water to make the tea.

``Saenggangcha," or ginger tea, is a Korean tea served hot and enjoyed at cafes. It can also be purchased as an instant mix from the supermarket. The ginger root is cleaned and sliced thin with the skin left intact. It is stored in honey for several weeks before boiling. Ginger is commonly used as an ingredient in Asian medicine. It is recommended for cold prevention, headaches, motion sickness, diarrhea, and for those with lower than normal body temperatures.

``Omijacha" is another unique and interesting traditional Korean tea. The name omija means ``five tastes." These tastes are: sweet, sour, bitter, salty, and pungent. It can be purchased as a cold tea in the supermarket or as a hot tea at cafes. ``Omija" is an Asian Schizandra berry used in Korean medicine. It is dried before boiling. It is typically mixed with honey or watermelon juice to create ``omijacha". This berry tea is believed to tame coughing and help treat asthma.

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Uniqueness of Korean Cuisine (V): Beverages

By Chad Meyer

This is the fifth part of a series focusing on the benefits of Korean well-being. We will continue to explore the Korean diet and its relationship with longevity and health. — ED.

Traditional and contemporary Korean beverages provide a number of dietary benefits. Their role has more in common with medicine and healing agents than with simply stimulating our taste buds and quenching our thirst. Although a variety of carbonated sodas are accessible, Koreans choose to minimize the sugar pleasures from Coca Cola, Sprite, and Fanta.

These caffeinated drinks are consumed on occasion and in much smaller sizes. Korean children are not served sweetened drinks with meals either, avoiding the addictive properties of caffeine and sugar at a young age. Teenagers occasionally consume soda with friends as it infrequently infiltrates the home.

In the United States, ninety percent of adults and seventy-six percent of children consume caffeine daily. Caffeine occurs naturally in products such as tea, coffee and chocolates, and is also added to cola soft drinks. An eight-ounce cup (245ml) of coffee contains 135mg of caffeine. A twelve-ounce can of soda has 34mg of caffeine.

American adults ingest large amounts of caffeine from coffee while American children get caffeine from carbonated soda. Studies demonstrated that three to four cups of coffee per day could reduce the risk of type-two diabetes by up to thirty percent. Later studies showed that the reduced risk likely comes from the combination of caffeine, potassium, magnesium, and antioxidants found in the coffee. While coffee may not be too harmful and may have some benefits, a diet heavy in caffeine can lead to insomnia, nausea, diarrhea, and obesity through a stimulated appetite.

Water and tea are the two healthiest beverages known to mankind. Both are in abundance and have few undesired side effects. What other drinks could be considered healthy for our bodies? In order to better understand beverages and their benefits, let's take a closer look at calorie and sugar intake.

A person's metabolic rate is a measure of the energy required for involuntary body processes. A human requires roughly ten calories per pound (.45kg) of body weight to maintain life. A 200lb person would then require a 2,000-calorie diet. More than half of the required calories for living are used for breathing, maintaining body temperature, developing hormones, and maintaining a constant heart rate.

Sugar ingestion, along with calorie intake, is something we must also monitor. Human taste buds love things that are sweet. Excessive amounts of sugar, however, can increase the risk of type 2-diabetes, tooth decay, and obesity. The typical size of a Korean beverage bottle is one hundred to three hundred ounces. A Western size can of Coca Cola is twelve ounces while bottles are twenty ounces. A can of Western soda contains about 150 calories and nearly 40 grams of sugar.

For comparison, a typical packet of sugar contains four grams of sugar. A single can of soda therefore contains the equivalent of ten packets of sugar. A twenty-ounce bottle of carbonated soda holds 69 grams of sugar, the equivalent of over 17 packets of sugar. It's sickening to think how much sugar this is. Unfortunately, even some Western health drinks such as vitamin water are misleading. A twenty-ounce bottle of Glaceau Vitamin Water, for example, contains 130 calories and 33 grams of sugar!

Koreans have a tendency to listen when their bodies speak. As a Westerner, I often tolerate stomachaches, headaches, and other undesirable physical pains knowing that the sensation will eventually pass.

Instead of looking after our health, Westerners are emotionally consoled via 'comfort drinks' like Diet Coke and Diet Pepsi. The irony of diet drinks is that they really do not help your diet. Western diet drinks offer little to no nutrition and are marketed to people looking to reduce their sugar and calorie intake to fend off obesity.

The remaining non-diet Western drinks are high in calories and sugar. Although these provide no nutritional value, psychologically they provide the stimulus and pleasure that Westerners crave. Westerners want an immediate uplifting feeling regardless of the actual long-term health risk. Koreans are more proactive searching for relief from these unwelcome feelings via more natural means.

Many types of Korean drinks have specific functions. Whether it's treating indigestion, a cold, fatigue, or even a hangover, you will find a drink created for every ailment. Over-the-counter herbal drinks, vitamin drinks, juices, energy drinks, and general well-being beverages are found ubiquitously in Korea and are a representation of a culture cradled by well-being.

The Korean bottle, can, and drinking carton size are distinguishable from Western drinks. Portions are realistic and a typical three to eight ounce bottle is designed to be fully consumed during a break or resting period of the day. These drinks can be found seemingly everywhere: Korean supermarkets, convenient stores, and pharmacies all offer a large assortment of nutritional stimuli. The refrigerator case in a Korean supermarket has very little in common with the Western counterpart. And in addition to the cold case refrigerator, you'll often find a smaller warm case where coffees and teas can be found ready to drink in a hot can.

Western medical treatment for common colds and ailments are usually a combination of rest and prescribed medication. Koreans can consult a doctor or utilize a trained pharmacist who can offer several over the counter (OTC) treatments. Red ginseng is an energy drink that can be found in all pharmacies and supermarkets.

It is sold in six-ounce cans. It contains Korean red ginseng extract and vitamin C, known to combat stress and fatigue. Red ginseng is a root that becomes red while it grows over six years time. It is then processed by continuous drying and steaming. Red ginseng has many health benefits such as quenching thirst, eliminating fatigue, removing stress, preventing diabetes, preventing overeating, regulating urine flow, aiding in hangover recovery, and minimizing the effects of aging. A similar Western energy drink is Red Bull. Although Red Bull does not contain ginseng, it is functionally the same.

Served in eight-ounce cans, it contains 160 calories and 39 grams of sugar. The problem is that Red Bull simply mimics what caffeine does to our body, acting as a quick pick-me-

up. Red ginseng not only provides short-term benefits but it also provides the body with long-term nutrition, healthy skin, and an improved immune system.

Aloe Vera drinks are another unique Korean beverage. They are sold in short and tall green tinted plastic bottles. Normally containing thirty percent aloe vera gel in a drinkable form, they are rich in minerals, calcium, potassium, Vitamins B3, B1, B6, B2, and Vitamin C. Aloe vera drinks are characterized as aiding the digestive system and helping relieve gastrointestinal problems. They are also considered as a treatment for athlete's foot and acne.

Bacchus-D is a favorite energy drink in Korea. Served in small three ounce brown glass bottles, this product dominates five percent of the total Korean pharmaceutical market. Bacchus-D was created in 1963 by the pharmaceutical company Dong-A.

It was produced to combat fatigue, lower stress, improve concentration and maximize energy levels. It is yellow in color and contains royal jelly, a secretion from honeybees that is fed to queen larva. In recent years, the company acknowledged that people with Asthma and allergies to bee products should limit their exposure to royal jelly.

Bacchus-D also contains apple juice and the extracts of strawberries, oranges, and pineapples. It has a minimal aftertaste, which makes it a good alternative to Red Bull. Also considered a hangover remedy, Bacchus-D is a popular beverage to have after an evening of drinking. The total amount of caffeine is low compared with Western beverages. The eight-ounce can contains 120 calories, 29 grams of sugar, and 60mg of caffeine. This is half the dosage of caffeine of a similarly sized cup of coffee. A sugar-free version is also available.

Vita 500 is a Korean beverage that is famous for being one of the few caffeine-free energy drinks. It is produced by the Kwang Dong Corporation and contains a vitamin enriched apple juice. Each bottle contains 155 calories and 35 grams of sugar. It is very popular globally, selling over 100 million dollars worth of product in 2006. Similar to Bacchus-D, it is bottled in small six ounce brown glass bottles. It is a Vitamin C based drink designed to improve physical strength and energy. The US RDA recommends at least 60mg of Vitamin C per day for adults. Vita 500 has 500mg of Vitamin C, which is 830% of the US RDA. It also contains vitamins B2, B3, and B5. The artificial sweeteners inside unfortunately give this a slightly strong aftertaste.

Vita 500 is commonly purchased in larger ten pack cartons. During important business meetings, it is common for the attendees to bring two cases of Vita 500 for the host as a gesture of respect. When arriving, the guests will hand out one bottle to each attendee. If the meeting is with only one person, two cases totaling twenty bottles can be given to a single individual as a gift.

Besides drinking water or tea with meals, Koreans sometimes enjoy a traditional after-dinner drink in lieu of dessert. Sweet cinnamon punch, ``soo jeonggwa," can be made at home or purchased in an eight ounce can. It is a traditional Korean natural drink made of cinnamon, sugar, dried persimmon, and ginger. It is believed to assist in digestion. Another traditional Korean drink is ``Sikhye. Sikye is an inexpensive sweet rice punch. It contains barley germ powder, sweet rice, sugar, and pine nuts and is served cold over ice.

Koreans have a favorite high calorie drink that deserves recognition: banana milk. Although milk and dairy products are not indigenous to Korea, banana milk became a favorite drink care of the Binggrae Company in 1974. During this time, the Korean

economy began to flourish and banana milk became a hit.

Since then, it has been considered a contemporary reminder of the success that Korea experienced in the 1970s. Packaged in a unique small plastic capsule, Binggrae banana milk is a unique type of Korean beverage.

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Uniqueness of Korean Desserts

By Chad Meyer

This is the sixth and final part of a series focusing on the benefits of a Korean well-being lifestyle. We will explore the Korean diet and reveal that even desserts can have nutritional value. — ED.

We have spent some time examining Korean food and drinks in previous articles. Our final nutritional analysis is with Korean desserts.

Internationally, desserts are sweet dishes served after a large meal. They satisfy our senses of smell and taste and cleanse the palate after a hearty meal. In the West, it is not uncommon for women to skip dinner and leap directly to dessert trying to minimize calorie intake.

Western restaurants implant desires in our minds by positioning dessert showcases within our line of sight. From cheesecakes to ice cream, these restaurants cater to our mouth's sweet tooth.

Interestingly, Asian restaurants located in Western countries often have reputations for serving desserts worth passing over. Why? Is it because Western desserts contain dairy products that are less popular in Asia? Or is it due to the fact that Western desserts are simply too sweet? Both of these statements are correct. But the true answer lies in tradition.

Traditionally, Koreans did not consume overly sweet foods. "Ddeok," which we previously explored, along with Korean apples, pears, and persimmons are the most common traditional Korean desserts. All of these are low calorie, nutritious alternatives that the international community would enjoy.

Each of these fruits has a distinction from their Western counterparts. Korean apples can be traced back to 1103AD and were originally served as a dessert to royalty.

To this day, Korean apples are generally consumed raw and are not cooked with food. Korean pears are shaped like Western apples and exported in large quantities. They command high prices as they are considered to be among the best in the world. Like Korean apples, Korean pears are essentially sweetest and most eaten in their

Korean apples, Korean pears are especially succulent and great care is taken in their handling. Each Korean pear is wrapped individually before becoming showcased in department stores and supermarkets. These pears can remain unspoiled for several weeks and are considered healthy gifts for relatives at holidays. Pears cleanse the blood and reduce the risk of cancer coming from smoking and the overeating of red meat.

Above apples and pears, Korean persimmons are especially unique. Persimmons appear similar to an unripe tomato taste much sweeter. There are two types of persimmons harvested in Korea in October. Only one of these types can be eaten before fully ripening, but both are a good source of vitamins B2, B9, and vitamin C. And along with red ginseng, Korean persimmons are frequently used as an ingredient in hangover remedies.

“Hangwa” is another famous category of traditional Korean desserts. Hangwa consists of different types of sweets and cookies made of rice flour, honey, fruit, and roots. Hangwa is considered nutritious as it is made using natural ingredients and natural food coloring. Hangwa outlasts Western cookies in retaining flavor and not deteriorating too quickly over time. Similar to ddeok, it is an artistic food that is decorated in colors, textured with patterns, and given nature themed shapes. It is commonly found in special confectionery shops and department stores and gifted to family members during Lunar New Year's, Chuseok, weddings, and other ceremonies.

Due to the labor intensive preparation required, hangwa are considered a sophisticated traditional snack and therefore cost more than Western cookies or crackers. A box of hangwa can easily cost upwards of one hundred dollars. Traditionally served while fruit was out of season, hangwa can last long periods of time. Insadong is a famous traditional neighborhood of Seoul that houses many hangwa confectionary shops. There are too many types of hangwa to list but “dasik” is one variety that Westerners can enjoy.

Dasik is a soft round cookie that is normally accompanied by tea. Dasik is lighter and healthier than Western snacks as it is not as sweet as cookies or chocolate. Typical ingredients include: rice powder, flour, herbs, grains, sesame seeds, starch, chestnuts, green tea powder, and red ginseng powder. These ingredients are mixed together with honey to form dough. The dough is then pounded flat and pressed into molds. As the recipe for dasik originally derives from a Chinese type of cookie, dasik are frequently stamped with the Chinese characters for luck, health, and longevity.

“Pahtbingsoo,” or red bean with ice flakes, is a summertime dessert that anyone can enjoy. It consists of shaved ice, sweet red azuki beans, condensed milk, and is topped with ice cream or frozen yogurt. Whipped cream, diced ddeok, green tea powder, and corn flakes often adorn “bingsoo” as well.

The sweet azuki red beans in pahtbingsoo are cooked into a red bean paste by boiling, mashing, and adding honey. These paht are an Asian bean that has existed since 1000BC. This bean is only second in popularity to the soybean. Red beans are high in protein, iron, and calcium. A variation of this dessert is “gwa-ilbingsoo.” Gwa-il is the Korean word for fruit. Fruit with ice flakes is a great dessert for those searching for something sweeter than red azuki beans. The fruit used in this dessert can be strawberries, bananas, or kiwi. Both types of bingsoo desserts are found in cafes, department stores, and other restaurants. Apgujeong and Cheongdam are great neighborhoods to find bingsoo. A typical bowl for two costs around \$10-15 and is only 200 calories per person.

Bbang, or bread, is another healthy food that has taken off in the past decade.

Interestingly, Korean bread is an entire category of food encompassing anything baked using flour. Often sweeter than American bread, bbang is considered more of a dessert than a meal. Korean style bakeries can be found at nearly every major intersection of Seoul.

Popular chains include Paris Baguette, Shilla Myunggwa, Tous Les Jours, and Crown Bakery. Favorite breads include: hot dogs baked in croissants, chocolate covered croissants, pizza bread, panini pockets, baked rolls, croquettes, green tea cake, mango cake, and sweet loafs of bread. Croquettes are an interesting variation here. Often spelled ``koroake," these are deep fried dough stuffed with curry, potato, and vegetables.

In the past several years there has been an explosion of Waffle shops in Seoul. Street vendors sell a quickly prepared take away waffle. These finger food waffles come plain or sandwiched with ice cream. The cost is extremely low at two dollars or less.

These smaller shops can be found near universities and nightlife areas such as Ehwa University or Gangnam Station. Samcheong-Dong is a popular cultural district of Seoul with many deluxe waffles shops. This type of dessert cafe offers large Belgium-style waffles that are freshly prepared with premium ingredients and served on a dish. I have seen nothing like these in the States.

These sit down waffle dishes are topped with a mountain of ingredients including ice cream, fruit, red beans, whipped cream, and green tea powder. Often costing upwards of \$10 for a two person serving, these are desserts that cannot be skipped.

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