Original Article

Jongka, the traditional Korean family: Exploring jongka food in the context of Korean food categories

Chang Hyeon Lee, Young Kim*

National Institute of Agricultural Sciences, Rural Development Administration, Wanju, South Korea

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 28 February 2018
Accepted 28 February 2018
Available online 2 March 2018

Keywords:
Ancestral ritual food
Bulcheonwi
Category
Jongka
Jongka food
Korean food

ABSTRACT

Background: Jongka food is the implementation of banka food in jongka, where in banka food stems from royal cuisine that has been passed on to yangban (nobleman) family. Jongka food is historically passed down, and connects different time periods between generations in the same spatial context of jongka, is a traditional Korean family system, where the eldest sons have kept their family lineage alive through generations dating over 400 years since the mid-Chosun era. Jongka bulcheonwi stems from Korea; however, its Confucian ceremonial culture now only remains in Korea.

Methods: This study examines the concept and formation process of jongka, and introduces everyday family food, as well as old cookbooks that contain their recipes. The bulcheonwi ceremony table-setting and ancestral ritual food, as seen in actual jongka sites, are also described.

Results: This study has examined 6 types of food in six different jongka houses, passed down through jongbu, were analyzed. Thus, the importance of discovering more jongka food, and recording such findings, is emphasized. Moreover, the bulcheonwi ancestral ritual food table setting through three-dimensional maps and a layout plan from two jongka is presented. Pyeon (鎮) and jeok (奠), which are parts of ancestral ritual food, and carry different meanings for different families, were introduced, presenting examples from four jongka. Moreover, existing literature was assessed to identify the sources of jeok building principles and theoretical backgrounds.

Conclusion: Jongson and jongbu have protected the jongtaek (noble house), and inherited their family’s foods by living by bongjesa (奉祭場) and jeopbinkaek (接賓客). It is important to continuously discover and record of jongka and ancestral ritual foods used in bulcheonwi. This study aims to allow society to perceive jongka as a unique Korean cultural heritage that all of society protects and shares, instead of regarding them as families with old histories. (For further clarification on the terms mentioned in this article, please see Supplementary file). © 2018 Korea Food Research Institute. Published by Elsevier B.V. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

1. Introduction

Korea is a nation on a peninsula located in Northeast Asia. It is connected to the Chinese seas to the west and the continent that houses China to the north, and thus, has long been influenced by Chinese culture. However, in this process, Korea has formed its own unique history and culture throughout the era of the Chosun dynasty and its modern days. Its food culture has been fundamentally unique from China [1].

Food embodies the lives, actions, and spirits of a country’s citizens, taking form as the food of a nation. Therefore, the entire food culture of Korea can be termed the Korean food, of which diversity is a leading characteristic. A table is set with a diverse range of side dishes that surround bap (cooked rice) and kuk (dishes with broth). The clear divisions of four seasons have allowed Koreans to grow a diverse range of seasonal vegetables. Moreover, fermented foods such as kimchi (fermented vegetable), jeotgal (fermented fish products), kochujang (red pepper paste), doenjang (fermented soybean paste), and kanjang (fermented soybean seasoning) are developed to cover for shortfalls in food quantity [1]. This diversity allowed for the division of Korean food into different forms. It is impossible to strictly define the boundaries of categories of Korean food depending on the criteria and form. However, there are a number of terminologies used to...
refer Korean food. For example, these categories include royal cuisine, banha (nobleman house) food, jongka food, traditional food, and local food. These terms have some similarities, and as they are rooted in Korean food, they cannot be explained while leaving out other terminologies.

During the era of Chosun dynasty (1392–1910), the society was divided into the royal family, yangban (nobleman), and peasant classes. As the living styles and cultures differed by each class, their food also manifested differently [2]. The royal cuisine, eaten by the royal family, developed the most in the sovereign Chosun. Feasts were held in the palaces, with the leftover materials, foods, and cooking methods passed onto the yangban families, developing into banha food. Starting in the mid-Chosun dynasty, the political influence of yangbans grew and powers formed around different schools of thought and ideologies. The banha food of the yangban families settled into jongka food, as jongka was formed with bulcheonwi status. For the peasants who had little to do with political powers, their food mainly focused on what they grew, developing into local food. Local food is a type of food that has been preferred according to the family tree

2. Bulcheonwi ancestral rites and food passed down over hundreds of years

To highlight the achievements of celebrated scholars in the Chosun dynasty, the king awarded siho (posthumous name, 謚號) [7]. After an individual has received siho, their ancestors keep the shinju (mortuary tablet) of the awarded ancestor, refusing to move the tablet even after four generations, and offer ancestral rites. These are the bulcheonwi (不遷位) ancestral rites [8,9] (Fig. 2). The Bulcheonwi ancestral rites were born out of ancient China; however, China no longer engages in this practice. It has been passed onto Korea, and remains the only active Confucianist ceremony still performed today [10]. Currently, the majority of jongka houses are pajongka (派宗家), with the bulcheonwi ancestors as the jungsijo (中始祖). They were formed around sajok (士族), for the purposes of defining regional identities and the differentiation of yehak (儒學) in the 16–17th centuries [11]. (see Fig. 1)

The ceremonial culture of Chosun has continued to linger to the modern day, with jongka houses at its core. In particular, with the basic virtues of bongjesa and jeopbinkaek, the ritual food for the ancestors also developed. Jongka houses hold more than 10 ancestral rites per year, with kijesa (祭祀記), which honors ancestors for up to four generations, bulcheonwi ancestral rites, and in the new year, dano (suite-nal: Korean festival), hansik, and chuseok. Among these rites, bulcheonwi rites are attended by more people, and have more food on the table of ancestral ritual food, which refers to all foods on the aforementioned table. These are placed on the table under certain guidelines by the descendants of a house to properly honor their ancestors. Types of ancestral ritual food are diverse, including ban (飯), kaeng (羹), myeon (餉), pyeon (餕), pyeoncheong (餕貤), tang (湯), jeok (炙), po (鍋), jeon (煎), sukchae (熟菜), chimchae (沈菜), hae (醢), hye (醢), silkwa (實果), jokwa (造果), and jeongkwa (正果) [12]. These foods are characterized with special and significant meanings in the names, materials, and cooking methods, unlike everyday food. The different houses, the main houses of the surnames, regions of residence, hakmaek (學派), the academic relationship between a teacher and his student, and honban (婚班), referring to the marriages between influential houses, act on the different attributes of food, and strengthen their symbolic meanings. In the interconnectedness of various attributes that are diversely connected, ancestral ritual food creates honor that differs by the family (家族鑑, different customs of every family) with different names and stories contained within them [12].

2. Jongka food and records for the next generation

The era of Chosun dynasty, with over 500 years of history, was based on Confucianism and neo-Confucianism at the core of its rule. Jongka (宗家) refers to the familial construction of the noble families (士大夫家) of Chosun, which was based on the jongbep system (宗法制度) of the Zhou Dynasty of China [4]. After the mid-Chosun dynasty, jongka became the traditional house system passed down for generations. The Korean dictionary defines jongka as “the house of the head of a family as according to the family tree” [5]. Jongson and jongbu, who continued the history of jongka, look to the two principles of bongjesa (奉祭記), hosting the ancestral rites, as well as jeopbinkaek (接賓記), tending to guests who visit the jongtaek ( jongka house), and protects the family.

According to a recent report, there were 1,153 jongka in Korea. On a regional basis, 43.8% of the jongka, or 505 of them, are in Kyongsang-do. This was followed by 220 in the Seoul and Kyeongki-do (19.1%), 172 in Chungcheong-do (14.9%), 164 in Chonla-do (14.2%), 68 in Kangwon-do (5.9%), and 24 in Jeju-do (2.1%) [6].

1.1. Jongka, the Korean traditional family system

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