

JEWELS of the PALACE

Royal Recipes from Old Korea

Korean Food Promotion Institute

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With the international success of the TV drama *Daejangeum* as inspiration, this remarkable book illuminates the heart of Korean classical cuisine through historical context, anecdote and 70 richly illustrated representative recipes.

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A history book heroine is reborn in a hit TV drama...

The kings of Joseon would rule the Korean peninsula from 1392 until the dynasty was replaced by Japanese colonial rule in 1910. Its legacy remains powerful. *The Annals of the Joseon Dynasty* mentions a woman named 'Daejanggeum'. She lived during the reign of King Jungjong (1506~1544), and had been a low-ranking court lady who gained the king's trust and was promoted to the highest-ranked lady in the kitchen as well as royal physician. Tiny snippets of information would provide the inspiration for one of the most successful Asian television dramas of all time when South Korea's MBC created an entire drama series, named *Daejanggeum* ('Jewel in the Palace'). Set largely in the palace kitchens of mid-Joseon, the series proved an immediate hit with domestic audiences and became a phenomenon across Asia and beyond. Some researchers speculated that the spinoff effect from the drama added billions in value to Korea's national brand, while overseas interest in Korean cuisine soared. Why so popular? Cuisine takes centre stage. Colourful set designs, dramatic plotlines, a haunting soundtrack and a sympathetic lead character were key, but food was the dominant element, and the producers knew they had to get it right.

However, the royal cuisine of the time was no longer well known. The last royal cook was Han Hee-soon, who preserved, recorded and passed down many recipes and practices. She was succeeded by her apprentice, Hwang Hae-seong, then Hwang's daughter Han Bok Ryeo – hired by MBC as advisor. She pored over the old documents and cookbooks *Sangayorok* (c.1450) and *Eumshikdimibang* (c.1670).

Many unusual and rare ingredients had to be substituted; pork belly stood in for bear's paw, while beef was the substitute for whale. The common Chinese belief that food and medicine stem from the same source was widespread in Joseon. *Daejanggeum* would show this theory in action, with the heroine working not just in the royal kitchen but also in the Royal Institution of Medicine and Pharmaceuticals, whose staff played a role similar to dieticians of modern times.

It was a huge challenge for Han Bok Ryeo and her staff to prepare all the necessary food for shooting scenes over very short time slots. For scenes featuring one of the king's meals, about 15 dishes were required; for feast scenes, about 100 dishes were needed. The series would eventually feature over 1,600 dishes!

However, the result is priceless. An exhaustive, beautifully illustrated and explained record of the finest of Korean classical cuisine filled with practical and mouth-watering recipes.

