

KOREAN FOOD IN ART

Exploring Korean Cuisine
through Genre Paintings of the Joseon Dynasty



Hollym

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Exploring Korean Cuisine
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of the Joseon Dynasty

by

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A nation's history tracks the lives of its people, and the history of food in particular is vividly marked with the traces left by people from all walks of life. The Korean people have a culinary history that is as long and colourful as the history of the nation, recorded not only in documents, but also vividly captured in the paintings of the time. It is true to say that the history of *hansik* (Korean cuisine) has received little attention compared to other areas. Fortunately Korean culture as a whole has recently come under the spotlight, thanks to the popularity of Korean music and TV dramas, and such events as *kimjang*, the custom of making *kimchi* for the long winter, a UNESCO intangible cultural heritage, not to mention attention brought by the recent Winter Olympics and the peninsula's politics. Korean culture currently holds the world's attention.

In response to this growing interest, the Korean Food Promotion Institute has undertaken a project to revitalise the original forms of Korean cuisine to promote recognition of their value and develop a creative culinary culture based on genuine historical antecedents. Research on the original forms of Korean food has so far been centred on old documents such as the Annals of the Joseon Dynasty (*Joseon wangjo sillok*), and *Uigwe*, a collection of records of state ceremonies. This book seeks to confirm the archetypical cuisine of Korea through the genre paintings of the long Joseon Dynasty (1392-1897). These paintings, like the photographs of today, are valuable materials that convey a wealth of visual information on Korean food and culinary culture.

Korean Food in Art comprises a selection of important genre paintings and documentary paintings of the Joseon era accompanied by commentary explaining the food featured in the works. It gives a vivid account of the everyday food and culinary culture of Koreans during the period. It further describes the dishes included in table settings for special occasions such as rites of passage and Royal Banquets, as well as the process of producing the various ingredients and food preparation.



'Drinking at a Gisaeng House' by Kim Jun-geun; before 1894; colour on cotton fabric; 285x350mm. Museum für Völkerkunde Hamburg.

'Sixtieth Birthday Celebration' from 'Highlights of an Illustrious Life'; artist unknown; early 20th cent.; eight-panel folding screen; colour on paper; 515x1102mm (panel size). National Museum of Korea.



'The Markets' from 'Album of Paintings of Women' by Shin Yun-bok; late 18th to early 19th cent.; light colour on paper; 297x282mm. National Museum of Korea.



'Party in the Field' by Seong Hyeop; 19th cent.; light colour on paper; 283x297mm. National Museum of Korea.



'Pounding Rice Cakes' by Kim Jun-geun; late 19th cent.; ink on paper; 188x166mm. Museum of Ethnology, Vienna.



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Korea, lay their eggs in brackish estuaries in autumn and winter. Food of freshwater, they are sometimes caught in rivers as well. As they move to shallow waters in spring and summer to look for food, they are easily caught in April and May, which is also when they taste best.

In autumn, salmon swim upstream to lay their eggs in the sand and die soon afterwards. Generally, they are caught on their way swimming upstream. Pacific cod move to inner bays on the east and west coasts in winter to lay their eggs and are caught just before they do this. Muller are found all through Korean waters. They swim into deeper waters for the winter and shallow waters in spring when they are generally caught. Moving between seawater and freshwater, they are especially fond of the mudflats and are the most delicious of the brackish fish.

Yellow croaker spend the winter in the southwest waters of Jeju Island and in February swim northward along the west coast to lay their eggs. After moving northward in spring, they move southward again via Bohai Bay in autumn in preparation for winter. Newly hatched croaker swim south into the middle of the Yellow Sea around September. Herrings are caught all over the country between autumn and the following spring. Those caught off the west coast of Hwanghae-do Province (North Korea) are twice as big as those caught off the south coast.

Large-eyed herrings inhabit the south coast and west coast. They are caught starting around June 5, the seed sowing season, and salted and fermented. Fleety prawns are caught in large quantities in autumn and are mainly found along the west coast. Mackerel migrate to the inner bays in large schools and those caught between early and late autumn are the fattest and tastiest. Big-headed croaker are small fish only a few inches long that inhabit the islands on the south and west coasts. They are mostly salted and fermented.



The painting *Catching Fish* is one of the works in the famous collection of genre paintings titled *Album of Paintings by Immortal Kim Hong-do* (Dedicated to Kim Hong-do's posthumous). It features a traditional method of fishing with bamboo stakes forming a wing shape in the water and a net attached to the stakes to catch the fish. The idea of abundance associated with fishing and the powerful mood of the fishermen is enhanced by the flock of seagulls that has gathered above the stakes. In an attempt to get at the fish.

RICE THRESHING

(THE TASTE OF WELL-REAPED RICE)

This painting shows farm workers absorbed in the task of threshing rice to separate the grains from their husks. Pounding stacks of rice against the threshing stand, they make the grains fall. Of the six workers, one wears a headband around his topknot while another three do not, and yet another worker does not have a topknot at all, indicating that he is unmarried. These workers are likely to be poor sharecroppers, servants or farmhands. In the artist Kim Hong-do's time, men who wore topknots without a headband were generally of the lower class. In front of him is a bottle of liquor. This is a genre painting that shows the leisurely life of the upper class, who enjoyed smoking and drinking, and the life of the lower class, who worked diligently under the supervision of the upper class.



'Lunch' from 'Album of Genre Paintings' by Kim Hong-do; late 18th cent.; 270x227mm; colour on paper.

'Sixtieth Wedding Anniversary Celebration' from 'Highlights of an Illustrious Life'; artist unknown; early 20th cent.; eight-panel folding screen; colour on paper; 515x1102mm (panel size). National Museum of Korea.



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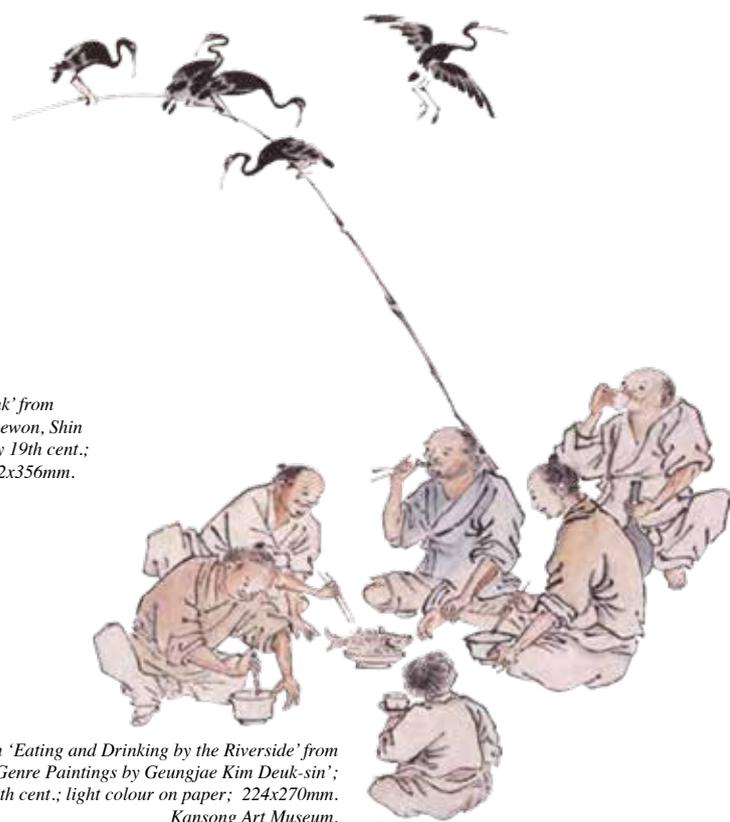
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KEY FEATURES

- This is the first publication to examine the roots and development of Korean cuisine not through historical documents and writings, but rather through the visual evidence and clues present in genre paintings of the Joseon Period (1392 - 1897).
- The art and commentary is divided into 3 principal sections (see previous page for details):
 - * Food from the Land and Sea
 - * Food in Festive Settings
 - * Food for Ceremonies and Celebrations
- Each of these 3 sections contains a number of topics represented individually by a selected painting, which is reproduced whole, and explained and contextualised using details from the painting on following pages.
- Readers are therefore presented with a selection of important genre paintings and documentary paintings accompanied by commentary explaining the food featured in the works. It gives a vivid account of the everyday food and culinary culture of the Joseon people from different walks of life. It includes the food carefully arranged on tables for special occasions such as rites of passage and royal banquets, as well as the process of producing ingredients and the preparation and cooking of the dishes.

The Korean Food Promotion Institute is a public organisation whose brief includes exhaustive research into Korean cuisine to further its aim of promoting Korean food and culinary culture internationally, as well as support for the development of content to aid in this aim. It is the recognised authority in the field.



'Raising a Cup for a Drink' from 'Album of Painting by Hyewon, Shin Yun-bok', late 18th - early 19th cent.; light colour on paper; 282x356mm. Kansong Art Museum.

Extracted from 'Eating and Drinking by the Riverside' from 'Album of Genre Paintings by Geungjae Kim Deuk-sin'; latter half of 18th cent.; light colour on paper; 224x270mm. Kansong Art Museum.