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Kimchi and identity

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Abstract

'Kimchi' from a local food of Korea to a global food has come across a number of hurdles and controversies regarding the authenticity of its origin, despite of everything now its being an established alternative identity of Korea. In recent times Korea has managed to conquer the whole world with its soft power i.e, food, dress, music and most importantly k-dramas. The Korean influence is not only confined to the Asian world but it has also reached and make a successful impact on west, This paper is an attempt to look through the Korean influence through their exotic local dish "kimchi"

Keywords: kimchi, Korea, traditional

Kimchi, a fermented vegetable dish often marinated in salt, shrimp and red pepper. Kimchi is identified as the pride of the Korean culture. The whole process kimchi being a traditional local food of Korea to a global food isn't a overnight miracle, but gradually developed over a due course of time, kimchi managed to hold a space amongst the favorite dishes in the foreign countries.

The journey of kimchi from a traditional Korean food to a global food started with in 1984, L.A Olympic games, just after two years, 1986 Kimchi became the official food in Seoul Asian games. In journal on March 24th, 2006, kimchi was introduced as one of the top five world health foods.

Food Value

Kimchi is a fermented fresh vegetable dish, which complimented meal in every Korean households. It is a fresh fermented vegetable dish. Recent studies on the food value of the kimchi revealed that kimchi is rich in vitamin A,B,C with healthy bacteria lactobacilli that are found in fermented food which helps in the process of digestion and prevents infections. It also contains anti-cancer values. In certain reports, it has been that kimchi is effective preventing SARS. In 2003 when numerous numbers of people died with ebola virus, Korea recorded less number of infectious people with zero death records which made the whole world surprised and enhanced the value of Kimchi.

Origin

There are two theories postulated by various scholars regarding the origin of Kimchi, one theory opined that 1,500 years ago, Chinese Paochai made in Szechwan was introduced to Korea and it later became kimchi. Another theory postulate the period when Xao-Rengin of Tang China attacked Hogaryo, his soldiers introduced the pickled vegetable from his hometown to Koreans and it became Kimchi, since these claims suggests that Chinese Paochai is the origin of kimchi, Korean Paochai is called Korean Paochai in China.

IN the recent times there is an intense debate and discourse revolved around the origin of kimchi.

Korean Food Culture

Being an agrarian society, Korea has a sharp distinction between the main food and the side dish. In Andong, unexpected guests were generally served with wheat noodles along with soya sauce and kimchi. Korea being a rice based food culture , Whanereng set up a "city of god" which had a separate ministries to dealt with agricultural affairs. Though. Korean culture has a lot of similarities with China and Japan, but there are significant differences too, this kimchi is the use of spoon . Japanese and Chinese used generally prefers noodles and chopsticks, Rice is prepared without salt in Korea. One of the similarities , I draw from the Korean food style with Indian style is that Korean food is served together they have a spoonful of rice first and then pick up the other side dishes according to their preferences, same goes with the Indian food style too, but instead of spoon Indians prefers hand.

Variations of Kimchi

Kimchi is not a homogeneous dish in Korea, it has variations within it, like radish kimchi ,green onion kimchi, cabbage kimchi, water kimchi. Kimchi is a more advanced form of saltiness source. It is a mixture of various salts like red pepper, garlic and others. It gives a mixed taste of both saltiness of soyabean paste and spicy taste of red pepper paste, it also has a sweet and sour in taste. "Mak kimchi" is for the lower caste to the "premium kimchi" is for the upper class. Which signifies that different kinds of kimchi are served depending upon ones's social status. The fact why kimchi is aall time food in Korea because it is made of vegetables from all seasons. Such as, radish- Autumn vegetable, red pepper- summer vegetable and garlic -winter product.

Tracing the Nomenclature

A lot of attempt has been made by the scholars to trace the root of the term *kimchi*, Through out their studies , they observed that Chinese character "jeo" used together with "jeo" refer to the kimchi, which in Korean called "Dimchae", it is believed that due to palatalization dimchae could have been "jimchae" in some areas of Korea. In a book Eumbikdimibang" kimchi referred to as "Timchae", this is further pronounced as "chimchae" and finally changed to a "kimchae" through the meaning of "Dimchae" or "Timchae" is clear to the scholars , there comes a drift in shifting the focus from the relying are written references to the spoken language.

Humanistic Approach of Kimchi

Every food has its own the uniqueness along with merits and demerits, kimchi is a represented example of interdependence along with the variations within it, But the kimchi never made an attempt to overpower other food, which reflects the Humanistic approach of the Korea, which not limited to its human nature but also with the food. Kimchi also holds a

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parallel connection with the wine, both the fermentation process and time matters in the manufacturing of both.

An attempt for the standardization of kimchi taste with a one page recipe might be useful for food science. Along with the other humanistic approach kimchi needs to be acknowledged by other countries as a traditional food and if possible it should be blend with them. It would mean a creation of a new kimchi in the other countries, this is an approach to the globalization of kimchi and also acknowledge the kimchi independence. The humanistic understanding of fermentation of kimchi, resemblance with the way of character building process of the human being.

Globalization

From a local traditional Korean dish kimchi has managed to hold its space in the global arena with a support of mass advertisement, while exporting kimchi to a foreign land an effort has been made to prepare the taste upon the people's preference.

Such as; in case of Japan, blend tasting of kimchi with no garlic and less chilli powder would be perfect as Japanese are not fond of garlic much. Where as, in the South Asian countries, kimchi with fish is more appreciated because of their fondness for fish.

As we all are aware of the trend of the globalization resides in the cultural assimilation, which plays a pivotal role in the global popularity of Kimchi as the efforts undertaken by the Korean government by organizing various media shows like;

- *World kimchi making competition*
- *International Kimchi cuisine contest*

Which attracts a large media coverage, recently First lady Michelle Obama's tweet on kimchi recipe received a wide media coverage, specially to the those who were inclined towards a healthy food diet.

Kimchi: As a matter of Controversy

The controversy regarding who holds the ownership of Kimchi is an intense matter of debate and discourse in the recent times between China and Korea. Koreans no doubt accepts the Chinese claims over the origin of the idea of kimchi but it denied to accept the China's claims over ownership of the Kimchi as their own. Because the process of manufacturing of both China's paochai and korea's kimchi is different in nature along with the taste. As the writings of paochae referred that it is prepared with the missing of all vegetables along with the salt in water for a time period, where as in the case of kimchi it is prepared freshly with hands by putting a layer of chilli paste along with the others one upon another mixed it well with salt and preserved it for a time being, the noticeable difference in both the methods of preservation is paochae is preserved in water where as kimchi is preserved with all paste for fermentation.

Another controversy that strikes between both the nations is the Napa cabbage, though napa cabbage was introduced in the China during the three kingdom era from China and since then the Koreans prepared napa cabbage kimchi and yet the date they imported napa cabbage from China, on this context too China claims its ownership of kimchi.

The preparation of Kimchi in Korea is a community fest, where a whole community engaged themselves in its preparation, preservation and fermentation process even UNESCO has acclaimed it as an unique cultural remark.

Kimchi : An Identity

As we all know, a culture is a complex whole which involves food, costume, tradition, religion and as such. More than a food, kimchi is an identity and pride and emotion to the Koreans. Any attempt to curb its pride is a matter of concern to the Koreans. Along with the time, Koreans actually invested their emotion in its process of manufacturing.

Metaphorically attacking Kimchi is seen as a foreign country invading their territory. Each and every Korean stands for protecting and preserving the authenticity of the kimchi as their own child.

Hence, I would like to conclude my attempt in drawing the conclusion as kimchi as the Kimchi and Korea is the two sides of the same coin.

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