

# Bibimbap as Korean Intangible Cultural Heritage and Further It to the World

Hee Sook Lee-Niinioja<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Combining all the background materials together, I investigated Bibimbap as a significant Korean heritage, As such result I could find a possibility to recommend it further to its inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity at UNESCO.

Keyword : Bibimbap, Korean Intangible Cultural Heritage, Korean Traditional Food, Globalization

## 1. Introduction

Clifford Geertz (1973), the celebrated anthropologist, claims that culture is “a historically transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.” Culture can be viewed as a set of social rules, providing a framework that gives meaning to events, objects, and people. Through these rules, people can make sense of their surroundings, lessening uncertainty of the social circumstance. Moreover, Samovar, Porter and McDaniel (2009) describe culture as (i) learned (ii) transmitted intergenerationally (iii) symbolic (iv) dynamic, and (v) ethnocentric[1][2].

According to UNESCO’s 2003 Convention, “Intangible cultural heritage” contains the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces which communities or a group identify it as part of their cultural heritage.

Of design elements, shape is the outline of a plane figure, or the surface configuration of a form, while colours have a crucial role in our emotions. It brings out a response which takes places on many

---

<sup>1</sup> Oxford Brookes University  
e-mail : leeheesook@hotmail.com

Received(June 01.2013), Review (June 17.2013), Accepted(December 31.2013)

levels. The physical recognition of colour information contained in light as it travels from the optic nerves to the brain. To this, our cultural responses, learned from history or our use of colour in life are added.

Bibimbap is cited as one of the three popular dishes of the Chosun era, and is a famous Korean dish among foreigners. The steamed rice is topped with various vegetables with several ingredients. Its contents have proteins, vitamins, minerals, carbohydrates and fat, which makes Bibimbap a wellness food, boasting the wisdom and philosophy of ancient Korea.

Combining all the background materials together, my research aims to investigate Bibimbap as a significant Korean heritage, and to recommend it further to its inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity at UNESCO.

## **2. UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage**

1. The “intangible cultural heritage” means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills - as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith - that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize it as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. For the purposes of this Convention, consideration will be given solely to such intangible cultural heritage as is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development.
2. The “intangible cultural heritage”, as defined in paragraph 1 above, is manifested inter alia in the following domains: (a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; (b) performing arts; (c) social practices, rituals and festive events; (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; (e) traditional craftsmanship.
3. “Safeguarding” means measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement,

transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage.

4. "States Parties" means States which are bound by this Convention and among which this Convention is in force.
5. This Convention applies *mutatis mutandis* to the territories referred to in Article 33 which become Parties to this Convention in accordance with the conditions set out in that Article. To that extent the expression "States Parties" also refers to such territories.

In fact, instances of intangible cultural heritage are not limited to a single manifestation, and many include elements from multiple domains. For example, a shamanistic ritual has traditional music and dance, prayers and songs, clothing and sacred objects as well as ritual and ceremonial practices and a consciousness and knowledge of the natural world. Similarly festivals are multifaceted expressions of intangible cultural heritage which involve singing, dancing, theatre, feasting, oral tradition and storytelling, displays of craftsmanship, sports and other entertainments. Therefore, the boundaries between domains are very fluid and often change from community to community. It is hard to apply rigid categories externally, because one group considers their chanted verse as a ritual, while another perceives it as song. What one community defines as 'theatre' can be interpreted as 'dance' in a different cultural context.

When the Convention undertakes a framework for identifying intangible cultural heritage, the list of domains is inclusive, rather than exclusive. It is not necessarily to be 'complete'. States can use a different system of domains, and there was a range of variation. Some countries divide up the manifestations of intangible cultural heritage differently, while others use similar domains broadly to those of the Convention with alternative names. They add further domains or new sub-categories to existing domains.

The four examples below were inscribed in 2010 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity at UNESCO, satisfying the required five categories (R1-R5).

#### **1. The Gastronomic Meal of the French (France)**

The Gastronomic Meal of the French is a customary social practice for celebrating important moments in the lives of individuals and groups. It is a festive meal gathering people for an occasion to enjoy the art of good eating and drinking, underlining togetherness, the pleasure of taste, and the balance between

human beings and the products of nature. Important elements are selection of dishes, purchase of products, the pairing of food with wine, table setting, and smelling-tasting at table. (R1: It plays an active social role within its community, transmitted through generations as part of its identity; R2: Its inscription contributes to visibility for intangible cultural heritage, as a catalyst for mutual respect and intercultural dialogue; R3: Safeguarding measurements reflect the commitments of the community, authorities and NGOs to reinforce its transmission through education, encouraging research and promotion; R4: The nomination has been submitted following active and broad participation of communities with their free, prior and informed consent; R5: It is inscribed in the inventory of intangible cultural heritage of France.)

## 2. Gingerbread Craft from Northern Croatia(Croatia)



[Fig. 1] Certain European Monasteries

The tradition of gingerbread making appeared in certain European monasteries during the Middle Ages and came to Croatia, becoming a craft .It requires skill and speed. Each crafts-person decorates it in a specific way, often with pictures, mirrors and messages for marriages. The craft has been passed on through generations, initially to men, now to both. It is one of the most recognizable symbols of Croatian identity. Its makers are essential participants in local festivities, events and gatherings, providing a sense of identity and continuity. (R1: Gingerbread is recognized by the community as its intangible cultural heritage, adapting its traditional functions to today; R2: Its inscription contributes to the visibility of intangible cultural heritage worldwide, promoting respect for human creativity and intercultural dialogue; R3-R5.)

### 3. The Mediterranean Diet (Spain, Greece, Italy, Morocco)



[Fig. 2] The Mediterranean Diet

The Mediterranean Diet constitutes a set of skills, knowledge, practices and traditions ranging from the landscape to the table, including the crops, harvesting, fishing, conservation, processing, preparation and, particularly, consumption of food. It is characterized by a nutritional model over time and space, respecting beliefs of each community. It promotes social interaction, since communal meals are the cornerstone of social customs and festive events. It has given rise to a considerable body of knowledge, songs, maxims, tales and legends. (R1: It is a set of traditional practices, knowledge and skills passed on from generation to generation, providing a sense of belonging and continuity to the concerned communities; R2: Its inscription gives broader visibility to the diversity of intangible cultural heritage and fosters intercultural dialogue at regional and international levels; R3-R5.)[3][4].

### 4. Traditional Mexican Cuisine - Ancestral, Ongoing Community Culture, the Michoacán Paradigm (Mexico)



[Fig. 3] Traditional Mexican Cuisine

Traditional Mexican Cuisine is a comprehensive cultural model comprising farming, ritual practices, age-old skills, culinary techniques and ancestral community customs and manners. It is made possible by

collective participation in the entire traditional food chain: planting, harvesting, cooking and eating. The basis of the system is founded on corn, beans and chili; unique farming methods; cooking processes; and singular utensils. It is elaborate and symbol-laden, forming an integral part of Day of the Dead offerings. Their knowledge and techniques express community identity, reinforce social bonds, and build stronger local, regional and national identities. It also underlines traditional cuisine as a means of sustainable development. (R1: It is central to the cultural identity of the communities that practise and transmit it from generation to generation; R2: Its inscription enhances the visibility of intangible cultural heritage and promotes respect for cultural diversity and human creativity; R3-R5.)[5].

### **3. Jeonju, Korean Flavoured City with Han Style**

As known for one of Korea's oldest cities, Jeonju has 1,250 years of history. Its name was first used in 757 (16th year of Shilla King Gyeong-deok) when Wansanju was renamed to be Jeonju, the name that is intact today. In 900, Jeonju was designated as a capital city of the Baekje Dynasty, founded by Gyeon-whon, and later became the birthplace of the Chosun Dynasty's cultural renaissance. It was the political and governmental centre of Jeollado during the Chosun Dynasty, and its jurisdiction ranged from Jeollado to Jeju. Jeonju is also the centre of Jeollabukdo because of its location of the provincial government office. In the past, there have been six cities for being chosen as the capital of a dynasty in Korea, with Jeonju being celebrated as a political and cultural centre of its region.



[Fig. 4] Korea's traditional culture

Jeonju is the hub of Han Style. The Style aims to provide cultural and economic products through the active promotion of Korea's traditional culture as a collective brand. Jeonju focuses on six categories of the quint essential Han Style: Hanji, Hanok, Hansik (cuisine), Hanchum (traditional performance), Hansori (Pansori) and Hanbang (traditional medicine) based on its historic, long-standing cultural heritage assets.

Hanji is made from specially-selected trees and water, and carefully produced. The Jeonju City supports the Hanji Industry for technical and marketing through collaboration with academic, commercial institutions, and training centers.

Jeonju is well-known for its traditional Korean cuisine, and the City is promoting Jeonju cuisine as a brand of Korean food on the international stage. Jeonju hosts the Bibimbap Festival at Hanok Village area every October, developing the competitiveness of Bibimbap as an international food. Various exhibitions and events introduce Bibimbap to visitors while a cooking contest and many other events offer tasty treats (Tasty Bibim, Ambient Bibim, Style Bibim, Extra Bibim).

The City is also putting effort into making Korea's traditional performances known worldwide. For the public, many traditional legends, folk customs and dances are taught and studied to enhance knowledge of them, such as Pansori. The Jeonju Daesasup is a prestigious national contest that awards notable Pansori performances. Jeonju was one of the three Yakryeong cities, where the marketing of traditional medicine is authorised. The City tries to modernize the traditional medicine industry and support its virtues to the wider world[6][7].

Jeonju has a millennium-old history of being a place to many dynasties and reigns of royalty. Found in the centre of metropolitan city, Hanok Village has 700 historic and traditional Korean houses, which are still home to residents today. It is the best-preserved living traditional village, and is one of the most popular tourist attractions in Korea. Historically, the neighboring area of Kyo-dong, Pungnam-dong and the urban Hanok are the living record of Korea's modernization process and the transformation of housing since 1910. Several scholars and civil organization demand governmental authority to provide preservation, improvement and management under strict supervision. Jeonju's urban Hanok Village is the only place that keeps the old traditional streets, houses and structures from Korea's past.

#### **4. Land of the Bibimbap - Korea's Best Dish**

Jeonju is identified around Korea for its food. The fertile Honam Plain and the clear waters of the region are believed to be contributing factors in the city's nationwide food fame. As part of the city's signature, Bibimbap is quoted as one of the best dishes among three favourite ones of the Chosun era. Nowadays, it is one of the best favoured Korean dishes internationally. The Bibimbap rice is cooked with fresh kongnamul, then topped with 10 different vegetables along with ginkgo, a fried egg, pine nuts, chestnuts, walnuts and other ingredients. It is combined with the excellent cooking skills of the local women as well. The whole food offers a balance of proteins, vitamins, minerals, carbohydrates and fat. As a wellness food, Bibimbap has the soul of the ancient Korea[8].

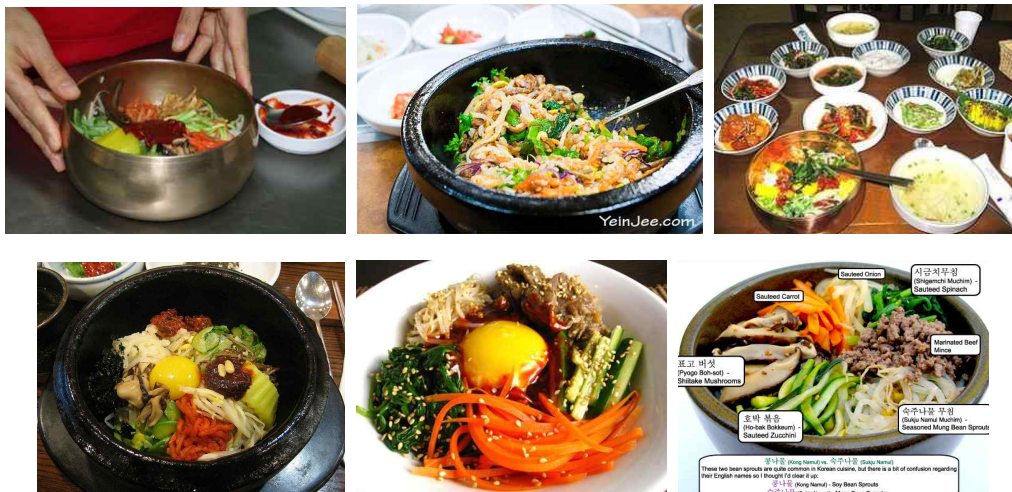


[Fig. 5] The Bibimbap

Many hypotheses concerning the origins of the bibimbap arose: (1) from the royal table, (2) a ritual food, (3) the Donghak revolution, (4) a farming season food or (5) royal flight during war time. However, the most credible source is the royal table origination. The dish was primarily served at the royal table, and after it was passed down and spread amongst the lower classes. Records say that Jeonju people began to eat Bibimbap 200 years ago.

Bibimbap was not always called "Bibimbap". Its name has gone through numerous transitions, and the basic meaning is originated from the Korean word 'bibida', meaning 'mixing', as the dish requires the rice to be mixed with its vegetable toppings.

- **Goldongjiban** - Cited in the Donggukesiki, written by Hong Seong-mo in 1849 (King Sunjo's reign). Gol means 'dizzy' and dong as 'bibimbap dong'. As a whole, goldong means 'the thorough mixing of various items'.
- **Bubimbap** - (1) Cited in Siujeonseo (unknown writer at the end of the 1800s), circulated as a recipe book for the nobility; (2) Cited in the Chosun Recipe Book, published in 1913-39 with nine editions, written by Bang Sin-yeong.
- **Bibimbap** - Its present name.



[Fig. 6] A Variety of Bibimbap

## 5. Design Elements and Principles

Design elements are the basic tool in decorative art, discussed by Greek, Roman, medieval, Renaissance and modern philosophers. In Grammar of Ornament (1856), Owen Jones put forward geometry as general principles for decoration: "All ornament should be based upon a geometrical construction", praising Alhambra palace built by the Moors, and Critchlow (1989) discussed the circle as a symbol for the 'origin' and 'end' of geometric forms. Decorative arts are based on elements of design (line, value, shape, form, space, texture, colour) and its principles (unity-variety, balance, emphasis, rhythm, proportion, size). Principles of design show the way in which the elements are aesthetically combined to arouse a sensory response, while elements, the raw materials of works of design, are

arranged to produce order in composition, supported by principles.

### **1. Shape (Element)**

Shape is the outline of a plane figure, or the surface configuration of a form. It is the fundamental means of providing recognition, identification, and categorization for specific figures and forms. The perception of shape depends on the level of visual contrast between the outline which separates a figure from its ground. Positive and negative shapes and their interrelationships are a principle of composition. Positive shapes are the subject matter itself, becoming the centre of interest, while negative shapes are the areas surrounding the positive shape. Shapes are formed by lines, areas of texture, value, and colour.

Shape varies from simple circles, triangles, and squares to complex silhouettes of nature and human form. They have both two-and three-dimensional characters. Two-dimensional shapes are bordered by lines, and are perceived as a visual unit distinct from their background, while three-dimensional ones can extend in any perceivable direction, creating forms[8][9].

Four categories of shape exist: (i) natural, (ii) geometric, (iii) abstract, and (iv) non-objective. Natural shapes originate from nature and human figures, and geometric ones arise from man-made construction. Abstract shapes are the outcome of reducing natural ones by stylisation, while non-objective ones do not originate from any recognizable source. According to the Gestalt psychology school, the mind makes the visual environment simpler, in order to understand it. Given any composition of forms, the mind has a tendency to reduce the image to the simplest and most regular shapes. Originated in Germany in the early 20th century, the school has been most influential in the field of perception. Shapes can be basic emotional symbols with a powerful impact. A clear, well-defined shape, such as a cross or a key, can generate a universal appeal as a symbol[10].

### **2. Colour and Emotions**

Daniel Goleman (1995) relates that emotion is a neural impulse due to its psycho-physiological state which moves an organism to action. Emotions may be characterized from other affective phenomena such as moods and personality traits by temporal duration. The role of emotions has been discussed since ancient Greek ethicists. Three traditions can be argued on their role in moral behavior of the Western thought. First, Plato (c.428 - 348 BC) and Immanuel Kant (1724 - 1804) regarded emotions as obstacles to good conduct. Plato compared the rational mind to a charioteer whose task was to keep his horses. Kant says that good actions were only truly moral without motivation by any emotion. Second,

Aristotle (384 - 322 BC) and economist Adam Smith (1723 - 1790) thought emotions as vital ingredients in generating moral behavior. Aristotelian ethics is based on the idea of virtue which can be optimal midpoints between emotional extremes. Smith argued that certain social emotions, like sympathy, lay at the heart of all ethical conduct. Third, all moral judgments are an expression of the speaker's emotions. For David Hume (1711 - 1776), a certain action is said to be right or wrong. The speaker has a feeling of approval or disapproval to the action.

However, the philosophy of emotions has recently addressed other questions. Paul Griffiths (1997) claims that emotions are an assorted cluster of phenomena which cannot comprise a single natural kind. Therefore, they are a key point of interest in personality theory, offending the senses, supplying feelings, or evoking reactions to colour in a space[3][4].

In the realm of emotion, colour can introduce sensory stimulation too. Of the interrelationship of colour with odour and tastes, a study shows that pink lavender, pale yellow and green hold pleasant associations with odours. The tint of coral, peach, soft yellow and light green, and the richer colours of vermilion, flamingo, pumpkin and turquoise have pleasant associations with taste. Applying any of these colours in food can appeal appetitive. Moreover, individual differences can happen in the way how to apply colour in surroundings, and personal preference depends on the individual's familiarity with certain colours, colour combinations, and the emotional connotations[1][11].

Colours play an important role in our emotions and creativity. Methods of objective impressions, clinical observations, and introspective-experimental investigations reveal a relationship between the colour association and emotions. Six/seven main colours below are associated with following emotions: red (passion), orange (vitality), yellow (cheerfulness), green (serenity), blue (infinity), violet/purple (majesty).

[Table 1] Colour representative detailed emotions

<b>colour</b>	<b>representative</b>	<b>detailed emotions</b>
red	passion	attractive, beautiful, friendly, initiating, originating, passionate, patient, persistent, pioneering, strong, warm
orange	vitality	adventuresome, bold, building, buoyant, daring, fearless, funny, inspirational, outrageous, robust, spontaneous
yellow	cheerfulness	astringent, cheerful, expressive, forgiving, happy, communicative, intelligent, logical, orderly, purifying, shining
green	serenity	balanced, connecting, efficient, expansive, flexible, free, harmonious, just, open, safe, secure, sharing
blue	infinity	accepting, calm, creative, deep, faithful, honest, open, peaceful, reliable, tranquil, trusting
violet/purple	majesty	admired, connecting, dignified, humble, intuitive, knowing, regal, respected, together, tolerant, valuable

Regarding the link between symbol and colour, ancient Mayan culture recognises the cycles of the creation in five symbolic hues (red: blood/birth; yellow: the nourishing corn; blue-green: water/fertility; black: death; white: mutation), while the Chinese corresponded five primary colours to the five primary elements, the five directions, and the four seasons. To indigenous Torajan people in Indonesia, red is a colour of blood, representing human life. White from flesh and bone symbolises purity, while yellow is god's blessing and power; black for death and darkness. As understanding colour transcends us to the realm of God, the symbol of colour and religion are closely connected, varying with time, place and culture. Even one colour can function differently in the same place, and each colour bears a history and a set of meanings physically and emotionally[2][12].

Many opposing meanings on colours are caused by (a) cultural associations - the colour of traditions, celebrations or geography; (b) political and historical associations - the colour of political parties or royalty; (c) religious and mythical associations - the colours of spiritual or magical beliefs; (d) linguistic associations - colour terminology within individual languages, and (e) contemporary usage - objects generated by modern conventions and trends.

## References

- [1] J. Albers, "The Interaction of Colour", Yale University Press, (1971).
- [2] F. Birren, "Colour Perception in Art", New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, (1976).
- [3] F. D. K. Ching, "Architecture, Form, Space, and Order", Van Nostrand Reinhold, (1996).
- [4] J. Gage, "Colour and Culture", London: Thames and Hudson, (1995).
- [5] J. Gage, "Colour and Meaning", University of California Press, (2000).
- [6] C. Geertz, "The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays", New York: Basic Books, (1973).
- [7] D. Goleman, "Emotional Intelligence", New York: Bantam Books, (1995).
- [8] P. E. Griffiths, "What Emotions Really Are: The Problem of Psychological Categories", (1997).
- [9] J. Itten, "The Elements of Colour", Van Norstrand Reinhold, (1975).
- [10] J. L. Morton, "A Guide to Colour Symbolism", Colourcom, (1998).
- [11] L. A. Samovar, R. E. Porter and E. R. McDaniel, "Intercultural Communication, A Reader", Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, (2009).
- [12] D. Sharpe, "The Psychology of Colour and Design", Nelson Hall Inc., (1982).

