

## The Impact of K-Wave on the Rise of K-Food

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### Abstract

**Objectives** The main purpose of this paper is to analyze the growing recognition and popularity of Korean cuisine, or K-food, on the global culinary scene, driven by factors like the K Wave's influence, the health benefits and unique flavors of Korean dishes, and the active promotion by the South Korean government. Furthermore, it discusses the aesthetics and cultural significance of Korean food, highlighting its link to traditional practices.

**Methods** we conducted an analysis of various aspects of Korean cuisine primarily relying on the findings of previous studies. Additionally, we employed social network data and presented the results to explore the reasons behind the deep fascination of Korean fans with Korean cuisine. Furthermore, our social survey indicated that among the facets of Korean culture, Korean cuisine holds a particularly special place in the hearts of the majority.

**Conclusions** In conclusion, it was found that global interest in K-Culture led to widespread popularity of K-Food due to the influence of the Korean Wave, the health benefits and unique taste of Korean food, and active promotion by K-Food fans.

**Keywords** K- Wave, Hallyu, K-Food, K-Cuisine, K-Pop, K-Drama, K-Culture

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<https://www.ijkculture.com>, DOI: [doi.org/10.23159/IJKC.2023.10.312.005](https://doi.org/10.23159/IJKC.2023.10.312.005)

Received: Sep. 20. 2023 ; Reviewed: Oct. 10. 2023 ; Accepted: Oct. 15. 2023

pISSN 2951-2808 eISSN 2951-2883

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## 1. Introduction

The Korean Wave, commonly referred to as Hallyu, has exerted a profound influence on numerous global industries. Squid Game, a South Korean television series, has ascended to the peak of popularity on Netflix, while BTS, a Korean music group, maintains its supremacy on music charts worldwide. Korean conglomerates like Samsung and Kia have also emerged as major players in the tech industry, while Korean cosmetics are gaining ground in the global beauty market. Additionally, Korean Barbeque restaurants have become unique choice around the world. These remarkable achievements and contributions can all be attributed to the substantial impact of the Korean Wave

The term “Korean Wave” or “Hallyu” denotes the global popularity of South Korea's cultural economy, encompassing the export of music, entertainment, TV dramas, movies, and pop culture. South Korea has made a concerted effort to become the world's leading exporter of pop culture, setting it apart as one of the only countries

with such a goal. This strategy is aimed at boosting the country's “soft power,” a term coined by Joseph Nye, a Harvard political scientist, to describe a nation's influence through its image rather than its military or economic might. The United States' ability to market products such as Apple iPhones, Levi's jeans, and Hollywood movies by leveraging its attractive image serves as an example of soft power in action.<sup>1</sup>

One area where K-Wave has made a significant contribution is the realm of cuisine, with Korean food gaining increasing recognition. The globalization of Korean cuisine, or K-food, has been a remarkable phenomenon in recent years. With the growing popularity of Korean culture worldwide, particularly through the so-called K Wave, K food has gained significant attention and appreciation among global consumers. This has led to an increase in the number of Korean restaurants and food products available in various countries, as well as the recognition of Korean cuisine as a unique and diverse culinary tradition. The purpose of this article is to examine the factors that have contributed to the rise of K food in the global culinary scene, including the influence of K Wave, the health benefits and unique flavors of Korean cuisine, and the active promotion of Korean food by the South Korean government. By analyzing these factors, this article aims to provide insights into the ongoing globalization of Korean cuisine and its future prospects in the global market.

## 2. K-Wave and its impact on K-Food

Today's K-Wave promotion includes K-food, spreading the popularity of Korean food around the world. Park Ga-Hyun, a senior researcher at the Korea International Trade Association confirms that the “K-wave,” which began with Korean dramas and K-pop, is now affecting Korean food.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Korean Wave(Hallyu): The Rise of Korea's Cultural Economy & Pop Culture (2021). Martin Roll | OCT Asia. <https://martinroll.com>

<sup>2</sup> How Korean cuisine is rising to capture global food scene The Korea Herald (2021). Asia News Network. Mar, 2021 <https://lifestyle.inquirer.net>

A “K-Food” advertising effort was started by the Korean government in 2019 to promote Korean food internationally. This includes holding culinary events and sending Korean cooks abroad for training. As a result, in recent years, Korean cuisine has gained popularity across the globe.<sup>3</sup>

Several factors contribute to the global popularity of Korean food. Despite the considerable effort K-wave has put into it, K-food in general has a distinctive flavor and many health advantages that draw many consumers and led it to become world’s one of the famous cuisine.

Korean cuisine had a momentous year in 2021 and is expected to maintain its popularity, according to a survey by Analytics Company Spoonshot. The company's findings reveal that interest in Korean cuisine surged by almost 90% in the twelve months leading up to January 2022. Spoonshot's research analyst, Ranjana Sundaresan, stated that Korean flavors are crucial to watch out for. While Korean cuisine is already popular, there will be a greater emphasis on and demand for authentic dishes and flavors from the region due to recent impacts from pop culture.<sup>4</sup>

According to Adriana Guillen, a former Master Chef candidate, American culture has been heavily influenced by Korean culture in recent years. The popularity of Korean entertainment, such as K-pop music and TV shows like Squid Game, have played a significant role in this phenomenon. Guillen believes that as people learn more about Korean culture through these mediums, their interest in Korean cuisine grows naturally.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, the portrayal of Korean cuisine in K-dramas has piqued global interest and contributed to the expansion of K-food to the world. The vivid and enticing images of Korean cuisine seen in these shows have sparked a curiosity in viewers and motivated them to seek out Korean restaurants and try new dishes. Consequently, there

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3 How Korean cuisine is rising to capture global food scene The Korea Herald/Asia News Network. March 04.

4 From Kimchi to Bulgogi, Korean Cuisine Gaining Steam (2022). KELLY BEATON | MAR 8. <https://foodinstitute.com/tag/korean-cuisine>

5 From Kimchi to Bulgogi, Korean Cuisine Gaining Steam (2022). KELLY BEATON | MAR 8. <https://foodinstitute.com/tag/korean-cuisine>

has been a rise in demand for K food.

One of the Korean dramas that brought huge success to the growth of the Korean cuisine to the world is definitely “Dae Jang Geum” (also known as “Jewel in the Palace”). A popular Korean historical drama aired in the early 2000s influenced Korean food and culinary culture domestically and internationally. The show became incredibly popular not only in Korea but also in other parts of Asia and across many countries. The drama includes many scenes showing how various traditional Korean dishes are made and consumed. The representation of the meals in the drama contributed to their rise in popularity both domestically and abroad and served to promote Korean cuisine as a distinctive and special cuisine.

For many K-culture enthusiasts, everyday pleasures, such as eating Korean ramyeon or using chopsticks, can hold unique significance in their Korean cultural experience. It is not just the taste of the food that matters but the feeling of being Korean that comes with it. As a result, consuming Korean food has become a source of excitement for many K-culture fans. This is all because of the high impact of K wave, in particular k dramas.

The Department of Korean Food and Culinary Arts at Youngsan University conducted a survey to investigate how foreign students' preferences for Korean culture, such as K-Wave, K-Drama, K-Pop, and K-Friend, affect their attitudes towards Korean food. The survey also aimed to identify which of these factors had the strongest influence on the students' preference, satisfaction, and repurchase intention for Korean food.

The results showed that students who had higher preferences for K-Wave, K-Drama, K-Pop, and K-Friend had a stronger preference, higher satisfaction levels, and greater intention to repurchase Korean food. Among the factors, K-Wave preference was found to be the most critical for Korean food preference and satisfaction levels, followed by K-Drama preference. For repurchase intention, the most significant factor was K-Friend preference, followed by K-Drama and K-Wave preferences. Based on these findings, the study suggests that efforts should be made to promote K-Wave and K-Drama preferences and to improve the preference for K-Friend to further globalize Korean food.<sup>6</sup>

The popularity of Korean culture, particularly the K Wave, has had a significant impact on the rise of Korean cuisine or K food. The exposure of Korean culture to the global audience through K-pop, K-dramas, and K-friends has led to increased interest and demand for Korean food, which has unique flavors and health benefits. The South Korean government's active promotion of Korean food through various initiatives has also contributed to its recognition and acceptance as a distinctive cuisine. As a result, K food has become an important player in the global culinary scene.

### 3. Aesthetics and healthy benefits of Korean Food

The worldwide appeal of Korean cuisine stems from several factors. Aside from the K-wave's substantial contributions, Korean food is known for its unique taste and numerous health benefits that appeal to a broad audience. It is known for its emphasis on fresh ingredients, balanced flavors, and fermentation, which have been shown to have many health benefits. As more people become interested in healthy eating, Korean food has become an attractive choice.

The concept of medicinal food is deeply embedded in Korean culinary culture, with the belief that food and medicine are inextricably linked. Many traditional Korean ingredients and dishes are considered medicinal and eaten for health reasons. As Korean cuisine grows in popularity and becomes a cultural export, so does the emphasis on medicinal foods. Korean food is now recognized for its distinct and delicious flavors and its potential health benefits. People around the world try to find out the secret of Korean beauty. However, not everyone is aware that behind this secret is not only because of the gene or the healthy lifestyle but most importantly, healthy eating. Korean cuisine includes many products, considered one of the healthiest and most diverse foods. Korean kimchi for example, has been identified to have potential

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6 From Kimchi to Bulgogi, Korean Cuisine Gaining Steam (2022). KELLY BEATON | MAR 8. <https://foodinstitute.com/tag/korean-cuisine>

health benefits for human body including:

Improved digestion: Kimchi is a rich source of probiotics, which are beneficial bacteria that help promote healthy digestion and gut health.

Reduced inflammation: Kimchi contains anti-inflammatory compounds like flavonoids and phenolic acids, which may help to reduce inflammation throughout the body.

Enhanced immune function: The probiotics in kimchi can also help to support a healthy immune system by stimulating the production of antibodies and other immune cells.

Potential anti-cancer effects: Some studies have suggested that the compounds found in kimchi, including sulfur-containing compounds and flavonoids, may have anti-cancer properties. These compounds may help to prevent the growth and spread of cancer cells.<sup>7</sup>

It should be noted that kimchi is one of the products of typical Korean cuisine that is daily consumed, generally, whole K-food provides amazing health benefits. However, health advantages of K-food is not newly discovered, looking back its history the K-food was always unique with its healthy ingredients. The history of Korean food goes back many years. It has been heavily affected by Chinese civilization since 300 BC especially, in terms of medicine. Everything in the universe, including our body is shaped by the yin and yang energetic properties that produce the five elements -wood, fire, earth, metal, and water and their harmonious balancing colors -green, red, yellow, white, and black. A person's body is only healthy when Yin-Yang and the five elements are in balance. A traditional Korean table, therefore, holds dishes made of five colors, most of which are low in calories and rich in vegetables.<sup>8</sup>

According to scientific research, the five flavors are linked to the human body. It has been named that a sour taste is good for the liver and gallbladder, bitter one is for heart, food that tastes sweet is good for stomach, spicy ones for lungs and salty

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7 Hae-Kyung Chung, Hye Jeong Yang, Dayeon Shin, Kyung Rhan Chung (2016). Aesthetics of Korean foods: The symbol of Korean culture. *Journal of Ethnic Foods*, 3(3), 178-188.

8 J. Ethn (2019). Medicinal food understanding in Korean gastronomic culture. *Food* 6, 4. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42779-019-0003-9>

taste found to be good for kidney/. Korean scholars believe that if one of these mentioned organs gets ill, the same element's food can help recover.<sup>9</sup>

Apart from the fact that the usage of numerous ingredients in various ways attracted attention, “Dae Jang Geum” (also known as “Diamond in the Palace drama”) also gained popularity for its atheistic portrayal of traditional Korean cuisine. There is an old Korean saying, “What smells good, tastes good “. In Korean culture, beauty is one of the most significant aspects of life. The aesthetic features of individuals or objects have dominated Korean culture throughout history. The food has to have aesthetically pleasing qualities as many other things do. Korean cuisine is famous for its taste and health benefits, and its distinct beauty. In other words, Korean cuisine is highly paid attention to both taste and aesthetic appeal. Some believe that not all cultures' food is as dedicated to the beauty of its food as Korea. Therefore, it is essential to study Korean food from an aesthetic perspective.

Korean food's aesthetic qualities are deeply rooted in the country's culture and traditions, with an emphasis on balance, harmony, and beauty. Some of the key elements that contribute to the aesthetics of Korean food include some aspects: <sup>10</sup>

1. Color: Color is one of the most noticeable aspects of Korean cuisine. Many Korean dishes use a colorful range of natural ingredients, such as red peppers and vibrant green vegetables, to create a visually stunning display on the plate. Many dishes feature a variety of colors, which not only make them visually appealing but also show the nutritional value of the dish.

2. Balance: Korean cuisine emphasizes the importance of balance in flavors, textures, and nutrients. Dishes are often designed to include a balance of sweet, sour, salty, and spicy flavors, as well as a variety of textures, such as soft and crunchy. This balance not only makes the food more enjoyable to eat but also promotes health and well-being.

3. Presentation: Korean food is often presented in an artful and beautiful manner.

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<sup>9</sup> J. Ethn (2019). Medicinal food understanding in Korean gastronomic culture. Food 6, 4. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42779-019-0003-9>

<sup>10</sup> Hae-Kyung Chung, Hye Jeong Yang, Dayeon Shin, Kyung Rhan Chung (2016). Aesthetics of Korean foods: The symbol of Korean culture. Journal of Ethnic Foods, 3(3), 178-188.

Dishes are carefully arranged on the plate, with attention paid to color, shape, and texture. This enhances the visual appeal of the food and proves the importance of hospitality and respect for guests.

4. Simplicity: Korean cuisine values simplicity and naturalness in food preparation. Dishes are often made with minimal seasoning or sauces, allowing the natural flavors of the ingredients to shine through. This simplicity also reflects the traditional Korean lifestyle, which emphasizes living in harmony with nature.

Finally, the aesthetic qualities of Korean food are inextricably linked to its cultural heritage. Many dishes have been handed down through generations and have become an important part of Korean culture and identity. Korean food offers a rich and visually stunning window into the country's unique culinary culture, from the bold flavors of kimchi to the delicate beauty of a bowl of bibimbap.

#### **4. The Globalization of Korean Cuisine and Iconic Korean Food**

Korean cuisine stands out as a distinctive and globally recognized culinary tradition, characterized by a harmonious blend of ancient heritage and contemporary culinary techniques. Renowned for its exceptional and diverse flavors, Korean food has garnered widespread popularity in recent times. This cuisine is a fusion of time-honored traditions and modern cooking methods, distinguished by its healthy taste profiles, utilization of spices and fermented components, and a strong focus on fresh, locally sourced ingredients. Numerous classic Korean dishes, including staples like kimchi, bulgogi, and bibimbap, have transcended borders to become household names worldwide, enjoying widespread availability in many countries.

In addition to traditional Korean food, there are many trendy K-food that have gained popularity in recent years. Korean fried chicken, for example, has become a favorite among foodies worldwide, and Korean style ramen noodles, or “Rameyeons,” have become essential in many households. Furthermore, the delectable dessert known as bingsu has taken the culinary world by storm. Bingsu is a delightful shaved ice treat,

traditionally served with sweet and tempting toppings like fresh fruit, red bean paste, or luscious condensed milk, offering a delightful fusion of flavors and textures that continues to charm dessert aficionados everywhere.

One of the most unique tastes of Korean food is the beverage, Milkis. Introduced in 1989 by Lotte Chilsung, the largest beverage manufacturer in South Korea, Milkis is a carbonated soft drink that combines the refreshing taste of soda with the creaminess of milk. It has since become one of Korea's most famous soft drinks, and is often featured in K-dramas and K-pop videos. K -Wave as usual actively promoted Korean products including Milkis. For example, “Saranghaeyo, Milkis!”, one of the most well-known Milkis catchphrases, was made famous by actor Chow Yun-fat in the Hong Kong film A Better Tomorrow. The phrase first appeared in the film and has since become synonymous with Milkis.<sup>11</sup> and has since been actively promoted by K-dramas and K-pop idols, such as BTS, who feature the beverage in their content videos.

Another example Bingsu, which is a distinct and unique dessert in Korean cuisine that has gained immense popularity over time. Originating in the 20th century, this modern dessert was originally prepared using shaved ice and sweetened red bean paste. However, it has since evolved to incorporate a wide range of toppings and variations.

In Korea, bingsu is a highly sought-after dessert, particularly during the summer months. Its popularity has now spread to other countries around the world, with numerous Korean cafes and restaurants offering it as a specialty item.

Moreover, beyond being just a dessert, bingsu is also regarded as a social activity in Korea, where people often enjoy it in the company of friends and family at cafes or dessert shops.

In recent years, bingsu has become a popular global food trend, with many cafes and dessert shops across Asia, North America, and Europe offering their own interpretations of this unique Korean dessert. The Kwave phenomenon has contributed

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11 Why do Koreans Love Milkis? All About the Carbonated Soft Drink .FEBRUARY 6, 2022

to the increasing global interest in Korean cuisine and culture, resulting in the wider popularity of Korean foods and desserts, including bingsu.

The rise of the K-wave, or the global popularity of Korean pop culture, has helped to increase interest in Korean cuisine and culture around the world. Korean food festivals, cooking shows, and cultural events have become more common in many countries, and Korean restaurants and cafes are now found in many major cities worldwide.

Moreover, the global popularity of Korean cuisine has been supported by social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube, where foodies and fans can share pictures and videos of their favorite Korean foods and desserts. This increased exposure and visibility has helped to drive consumer interest and increase sales of Korean food products and desserts around the world.

In conclusion, Korean food is a rich and diverse cuisine that is becoming increasingly popular around the world. Known for its bold flavors, unique ingredients, and health benefits, Korean food offers a wide range of dishes that can satisfy any palate. From traditional favorites like kimchi and bibimbap to newer creations like Korean fried chicken and Korean BBQ, there is something for everyone to enjoy. As Korean food continues to gain popularity, it is clear that this cuisine will continue to make a significant impact on the culinary world.

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## K-Food의 부상에 한류가 미친 영향에 관한 연구

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### 한국어 요약

**연구 목적** K-Wave를 통해 전 세계적으로 K-Culture가 인기를 끌면서 K-Food 역시 전 세계 소비자들 사이에 큰 관심과 호평을 받고 있다. 이에 K-Food의 독특하고 다양한 세계를 탐구하고, K-Food의 부상에 영향을 준 요소들을 분석하여 K-Food의 문화적 의미에 대해 논하는 것이 본 연구의 목적이다.

**연구 방법** 본 연구에서는 먼저 선행 연구의 결과를 중심으로 K-Food의 다양한 양상을 분석하였다. 또한 K-Food 팬들이 한국 음식에 매력을 느끼는 이유를 알아보기 위해 소셜 네트워크 데이터를 활용하여 그 결과를 제시하였다. 이와 더불어 K-Food의 인지도가 높아지게 된 배경을 다양한 측면에서 분석하였다.

**결론** 한류의 부상, 즉 K-Culture의 세계적인 인기는 전 세계적으로 한국 요리와 문화에 대한 관심을 높이는 데 큰 역할을 하였다. 한식 축제, 요리 쇼, 문화 행사는 이미 많은 나라에서 보편화되었다. 더욱이 K-Food 팬과 미식가들이 자신이 좋아하는 K-Food 사진과 비디오를 소셜 미디어 플랫폼 올리는 것 역시 K-Food의 세계적인 인기에 큰 뒷받침이 되었다. 결론적으로 한류의 영향, 한식의 건강상의 이점과 독특한 맛, K-Food 팬들의 적극적인 홍보 등으로 인하여 K-Culture에 대한 세계적인 관심이 K-Food에 대한 폭넓은 인기로 이어졌음을 알 수 있었다.

**핵심어** 한류, 한식, 한국 음식, 케이푸드, 케이팝, 케이드라마, 케이컬처

이 논문은 2023년 9월 20일에 투고 완료되어,  
2023년 9월 25일부터 2023년 10월 10일까지 심사위원이 심사하고,  
2023년 10월 15일에 심사위원 및 편집위원 회의에서 게재 결정된 논문임.

