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## Original Article

# Jongka, the traditional Korean family: Exploring *jongka* food in the context of Korean food categories



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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** *Jongka* food is the implementation of *banka* food in *jongka*, where in *banka* food stems from royal cuisine that has been passed on to *yangban* (nobleman) family. *Jongka* food is historically passed down, and connects different time periods between generations in the same spatial context of *jongka*, is a traditional Korean family system, where the eldest sons have kept their family lineage alive through generations dating over 400 years since the mid-Chosun era. *Jongka bulcheonwi* stems from Korea; however, its Confucian ceremonial culture now only remains in Korea.

**Methods:** This study examines the concept and formation process of *jongka*, and introduces everyday family food, as well as old cookbooks that contain their recipes. The *bulcheonwi* ceremony table-setting and ancestral ritual food, as seen in actual *jongka* sites, are also described.

**Results:** This study has examined 6 types of food in six different *jongka* houses, passed down through *jongbu*, were analyzed. Thus, the importance of discovering more *jongka* food, and recording such findings, is emphasized. Moreover, the *bulcheonwi* ancestral ritual food table setting through three-dimensional maps and a layout plan from two *jongka* is presented. *Pyeon* (餠) and *jeok* (炙), which are parts of ancestral ritual food, and carry different meanings for different families, were introduced, presenting examples from four *jongka*. Moreover, existing literature was assessed to identify the sources of *jeok* building principles and theoretical backgrounds.

**Conclusion:** *Jongson* and *jongbu* have protected the *jongtaek* (noble house), and inherited their family's foods by living by *bongjesa* (奉祭祀) and *jeopbinkaek* (接賓客). It is important to continuously discover and record of *jongka* and ancestral ritual foods used in *bulcheonwi*. This study aims to allow society to perceive *jongka* as a unique Korean cultural heritage that all of society protects and shares, instead of regarding them as families with old histories. (For further clarification on the terms mentioned in this article, please see "Supplementary file".)

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## 1. Introduction

Korea is a nation on a peninsula located in Northeast Asia. It is connected to the Chinese seas to the west and the continent that houses China to the north, and thus, has long been influenced by Chinese culture. However, in this process, Korea has formed its own unique history and culture throughout the era of the Chosun dynasty and its modern days. Its food culture has been fundamentally unique from China [1].

Food embodies the lives, actions, and spirits of a country's citizens, taking form as the food of a nation. Therefore, the entire food culture of Korea can be termed the Korean food, of which diversity is a leading characteristic. A table is set with a diverse range of side dishes that surround *bap* (cooked rice) and *kuk* (dishes with broth). The clear divisions of four seasons have allowed Koreans to grow a diverse range of seasonal vegetables. Moreover, fermented foods such as *kimchi* (fermented vegetable), *jeotgal* (fermented fish products), *kochujang* (red pepper paste), *doenjang* (fermented soybean paste), and *kanjang* (fermented soybean seasoning) are developed to cover for shortfalls in food quantity [1]. This diversity allowed for the division of Korean food into different forms. It is impossible to strictly define the boundaries of categories of Korean food depending on the criteria and form. However, there are a number of terminologies used to

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refer Korean food. For example, these categories include royal cuisine, *banka* (nobleman house) food, *jongka* food, traditional food, and local food. These terms have some similarities, and as they are rooted in Korean food, they cannot be explained while leaving out other terminologies.

During the era of Chosun dynasty (1392–1910), the society was divided into the royal family, *yangban* (nobleman), and peasant classes. As the living styles and cultures differed by each class, their food also manifested differently [2]. The royal cuisine, eaten by the royal family, developed the most in the sovereign Chosun. Feasts were held in the palaces, with the leftover materials, foods, and cooking methods passed onto the *yangban* families, developing into *banka* food. Starting in the mid-Chosun dynasty, the political influence of *yangbans* grew and powers formed around different schools of thought and ideologies. The *banka* food of the *yangban* families settled into *jongka* food, as *jongka* was formed with *bulcheonwi* status. For the peasants who had little to do with political powers, their food mainly focused on what they grew, developing into local food. Local food is a type of food that has been preferred by the people of a specific region over at least 100 years, and that later becomes recognized as traditional food as historicity develops around it [3].

Ultimately, *jongka* food refers to the food that settled in the *yangban* class and is the link between the royal palace and *banka*. On the other hand, it also has elements of spatially defined local food, as the food utilizes the agricultural produce of a region, in an era where regional powers had been divided. Moreover, local-style *jongka* food has also been passed down through generations, comprising traditional food with its temporality and historicity. *Jongka* food is also a type of food that has been passed down, and connects different time periods between generations. As such, it is also called *naerim* (pass-down) food.

To date, Korea has achieved a high level of industrialization, and focused on productivity for rapid economic growth. Productivity, which has always been Korea's objective, blocked the development of diversity. The study of Korean food was also focused on growth, concentrating on the present and the future. However, Korea has begun to realize that growth needs to be built on the traditions and histories of the past. Therefore, this study aims to expand on the diversity of Korean food by studying *jongka* food, which has not been researched to date and bestow new values on Korean food cultures.

### 1.1. *Jongka*, the Korean traditional family system

The era of Chosun dynasty, with over 500 years of history, was based on Confucianism and neo-Confucianism at the core of its rule. *Jongka* (宗家) refers to the familial construction of the noble families (士大夫家) of Chosun, which was based on the *jongbeop* system (宗法制度) of the Zhou Dynasty of China [4]. After the mid-Chosun dynasty, *jongka* became the traditional house system passed down for generations. The Korean dictionary defines *jongka* as “the house of the head of a family as according to the family tree” [5]. *Jongson* and *jongbu*, who continued the history of *jongka*, look to the two principles of *bongjesa* (奉祭祀), hosting the ancestral rites, as well as *jeopbinkaek* (接賓客), tending to guests who visit the *jongtaek* (*jongka* house), and protects the family.

According to a recent report, there were 1,153 *jongka* in Korea. On a regional basis, 43.8% of the *jongka*, or 505 of them, are in Gyeongang-do. This was followed by 220 in the Seoul and Gyeonggi-do (19.1%), 172 in Chungcheong-do (14.9%), 164 in Chonla-do (14.2%), 68 in Kangwon-do (5.9%), and 24 in Jeju-do (2.1%) [6].

### 1.2. *Bulcheonwi* ancestral rites and food passed down over hundreds of years

To highlight the achievements of celebrated scholars in the Chosun dynasty, the king awarded *siho* (posthumous name, 諡號) [7]. After an individual has received *siho*, their ancestors keep the *shinju* (mortality tablet) of the awarded ancestor, refusing to move the tablet even after four generations, and offer ancestral rites. These are the *bulcheonwi* (不遷位) ancestral rites [8,9] (Fig. 2). The *Bulcheonwi* ancestral rites were born out of ancient China; however, China no longer engages in this practice. It has been passed onto Korea, and remains the only active Confucianist ceremony still performed today [10]. Currently, the majority of *jongka* houses are *pajongka* (派宗家), with the *bulcheonwi* ancestors as the *jungsijo* (中始祖). They were formed around *sajok* (士族), for the purposes of defining regional identities and the differentiation of *yehak* (禮學) in the 16–17<sup>th</sup> centuries [11]. (see Fig. 1)

The ceremonial culture of Chosun has continued to linger to the modern day, with *jongka* houses at its core. In particular, with the basic virtues of *bongjesa* and *jeopbinkaek*, the ritual food for the ancestors also developed. *Jongka* houses hold more than 10 ancestral rites per year, with *kijesa* (忌祭祀), which honors ancestors for up to four generations, *bulcheonwi* ancestral rites, and in the new year, *dano* (*surit-nal*; Korean festival), *hansik*, and *chuseok*. Among these rites, *bulcheonwi* rites are attended by more people, and have more food on the table of ancestral ritual food, which refers to all foods on the aforementioned table. These are placed on the table under certain guidelines by the descendants of a house to properly honor their ancestors. Types of ancestral ritual food are diverse, including *ban* (飯), *kaeng* (羹), *myeon* (麵), *pyeon* (餠), *pyeoncheong* (餠湯), *tang* (湯), *jeok* (炙), *po* (脯), *jeon* (煎), *sukchae* (熟菜), *chimchae* (沈菜), *hae* (醃), *hye* (醃), *silkwa* (實果), *jokwa* (造果), and *jeongkwa* (正果) [12]. These foods are characterized with special and significant meanings in the names, materials, and cooking methods, unlike everyday food. The different houses, the main houses of the surnames, regions of residence, *hakmaek* (學脈), the academic relationship between a teacher and his student, and *honban* (婚班), referring to the marriages between influential houses, act on the different attributes of food, and strengthen their symbolic meanings. In the interconnectedness of various attributes that are diversely connected, ancestral ritual food creates honor that differs by the family (家家禮, different customs of every family) with different names and stories contained within them [12].

## 2. *Jongka* food and records for the next generation

### 2.1. *Jongka* food passed down through generations from *jongbu*

The *jongbu* of *jongka*, based on agricultural societies, typically grow their own produce to be used for cooking. The basic ingredients are laced with the efforts and care of *jongbu*, such as growing beans for *jang* (fermented soybean products) or rice for alcohol. It is with these ingredients that their mothers-in-law taught them how to make traditional fermented food, such as *jang*, alcohol, *cho*, *jangajji* (pickled vegetable), and *kimchi*, and their own experiences are molded into what is now the food cooking techniques of their own houses. However, *jongbu* continues to make food in a non-scientific method that relies on their experience and memory with eyeballed measurements and their senses, rather than measuring the ingredients and condiments.

To classify between everyday food, consumed on a daily basis, and *jongka* food, the researcher has applied the following criteria: first, food that has been passed down for more than two generations through *jongbu*; second, food created with domestic ingredients (excluding fusion food made with foreign ingredients and

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