



## THE ADAPTATION OF KOREAN DINING CULTURE IN KOREAN RESTAURANT AT BANDUNG<sup>1</sup> (CASE STUDY: KOREAN HOUSE, HAN KOOK GWAN AND MUJIGAE)

Krismanto Kusbiantoro and Park Eun Hee

### Abstract

*It is undeniable that the Korean popular culture has swept the world in various aspects of life. Indonesia is no exception gets the impact of this phenomenon; it is supported by the good diplomatic relations and mutual cooperation in the economic field between the two countries. The number of Koreans in Indonesia are coupled with the development of the phenomenon, and followed by the raised of the typical Korean culinary business opportunities that characterized by the increasing number of Korean restaurants in Indonesia.*

*Eating is not merely a human primary needs, but also become part of the culture of life and civilization of a nation. How to eat, types of food and eating traditions of Korean people are very distinctive and is supposed to have an impact on the form of the space and their dining facilities. This has become one of the aspects to be considered as a selling point for Korean restaurants in foreign countries, including in Indonesia. This paper will describe comprehensively on how dining culture adaptation in Korean society, conducted in 3 Korean restaurants in Bandung, especially in the room and dining facilities.*

*Dining culture using chopsticks and spoons, sitting cross-legged and eating straight from the pan becomes the attractiveness of typical Korean restaurants. By considering the characteristics of a traditional Korean house, or hanok, the third restaurant that became a case study, namely Korean House, Han Kook Gwan and Mujigae strives to create a Korean sensation and atmosphere through three things: the use of materials and natural atmosphere in the dining area, the table and dining area design as well as the use of typical Korean dining tools.*

**Keywords:** *food culture, adaptation, restaurant, design*

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## Introduction

Korean fever or Korean wave has affected a lot of young people around the world and become a cultural phenomenon to the world in the beginning of this millennium. Like the other, Indonesia also affected by this phenomena. Nowadays, Korean popular culture becomes a trend in many aspects such as music, television drama, fashion, cosmetics, languages, foods and to gadgets. The spread of the Korean pop culture was supported by the mass media that actively spread this culture through the internet and television.

Formally, the diplomatic relation between Indonesia-South Korea has been running since the two countries signed an agreement to open their diplomatic relations in consular level in May 1966. This particular occasion has open many opportunities for both countries to cooperate in many fields in order to achieve the interest of both countries. One of the cooperation is on the economics and industries. Besides being one of the biggest markets in the Southeast Asia, Indonesia also has the advantage from the richness of natural resources and cheaper labor that interests the South Korea who are excel in capital and technology. Both countries also signed *Joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership to Promote Friendship and Cooperation in the 21st Century* on 4 December 2006 along with the visit of the President of South Korea, Roh Moo-hyun to Jakarta.

This agreement expands the opportunity of economic cooperation of various sectors coming to Indonesia. Korea who was very advanced in electronic devices and automotive industry has penetrated their products to the Indonesian market. It is proved by the establishment of the Samsung factory in Indonesia. Korean cars such as Hyundai and Kia already arrived in Indonesia and became one of the choices that enrich the Indonesian automotive market which is still dominated by Japanese manufacturers' cars. In other fields, Korea also has invested in the textile industry sector in Indonesia; particularly in the area of West Java. Currently, there are many Koreans who live in Bandung regarding to the development of the textile industry which are concentrated in the region of West Java. And nowadays, there are many Korean restaurants popping up to meet the needs of the Koreans living in Bandung.

Today, the development of the food business is growing very rapidly. Many restaurants serves variants menu to attract customers. Furthermore, there are also restaurants with international characteristics that are much in demand because it has its own uniqueness in taste and dining in such places as if consumers do internationally culinary tours, including Korean

restaurant. The target market is certainly not just to Koreans in Indonesia, but also Indonesian people who also wanted to feel the sensation of dining the Korean food and enjoy the atmosphere just like in Korea.

Eating is not merely a human primary needs, but also become part of the culture of life and civilization of a nation. Every nation has its own food culture including dining culture of the Korean. How to eat, types of food and eating traditions of the Korean are very distinctive and supposed to have an impact on the form of the space and their dining facilities. This has become one of the aspects to be considered as a selling point for Korean restaurants in foreign countries, including in Indonesia. Most Korean restaurants in Bandung were opened by a Korean businessman or local business cooperating with the Korean people. Therefore, the Korean atmosphere became one of the concerns in the design of a Korean restaurant in addition to the menu.

The problem is that there is a gap between the original ideas of the Korean restaurant that culturally appropriate to the dining culture of the Korean, with the ability implementation in Indonesia, as well as the dining habits or culture of Indonesian in general. This paper will comprehensively describe on how cultural adaptation of dining in Korean society conducted in 3 Korean restaurants in Bandung, especially in the room and dining facilities.

### Korean Dining Culture

Korean food usually consists of rice, soup, *kimchi* and a few side dishes as companion.

In Korean culture, there is one distinctive food that has a special meaning that is called *Kimchi*. *Kimchi* is made of vegetables which are low in calories with high fiber content such as cabbage, onions, beans, lettuce and so on. [Anonim, 2008: 182-183] These vegetables through traditional process produces are tend to be spicy and sour, but have a very high nutritional value. *Kimchi* is actually a food made by the empress of King Sejong to be served in *Sesi* celebration. This celebration is held once a year to accelerate the rhythm of an annual life cycle so that the person concerned will be able to be developed in the next year life cycle. In this celebration, a dinner is held with other family members and must be started by eating *kimchi*.

According to the tradition, Korean food is not served individually but served all together on the table. Therefore, the size of a dining table Koreans are usually wide enough to allow it to organize all the food on the table at the same time. While serving food, dining plates and bowls are not being laid down but laid open. They eat with chopsticks and a spoon. It is consider not





being polite to take food without chopsticks or spoons. After the oldest starts eating, others follow to eat. After the oldest finished eating, the others were allowed to leave the dinner table.

The use of chopsticks as dining utensils are usually accompanied with a spoon made of stainless steel or other kind of metals is the characteristic of Korean culinary culture. Wang (2015) wrote that the archaeological evidence shows that chopsticks are not the first dining utensils of the Korean. Initially they eat with a spoon, and the oldest archaeological evidence from Korean spoon is made from bones, which was found in Hamgyong Province dated 700-600 years BC. While the oldest chopsticks were found in the tomb of the king of Baekje / Paekche<sup>2</sup> who lived during the *Samguk* (the Three Kingdoms Period) made of bronze dated 500s AD. [Wang, 2015: 84-85]

Why from metal? Unlike the Chinese or Japanese culture that prevalently use chopsticks from wood or bamboo, the main reason for the Korean use of metal chopsticks are durability issue. Chopsticks and spoon metal is more durable, so even the simplest family is trying their best to have metal cutlery. Moreover, it cannot be denied also that in the Korean peninsula, especially in the northern part is very rich in gold, iron and copper that is widely used to make household appliances, including tableware. [Wang 2015: 87-88]

When dining with friends or acquaintances, they do not usually use a plate or bowl, but fed directly from the serving dish or pan of food. When eating noodles, Korean society accustomed to eat noodles straight from the pot in order to keep the soup noodles warm considering Korea is a country with four seasons where cold climate dominates throughout the year. When eating a bowl of rice, the bowl must not be raised as much as possible and making no sound at all while eating.

Korean people usually eat together at the table in rectangular or circular shapes and sitting on the floor or sitting cross-legged. This dining by sitting on the floor culture is a culture that is still traditional. In modern large city, the use of tables and chairs are common. However, in the celebrations, ceremonial or special events, dining by sitting on the floor is still being used.

#### The Spatial Composition of a Korean Traditional House

<sup>2</sup> See also Jinwung, 2012: 39-40

Korean traditional house or often called *Hanok*, highly viscous showing expression of natural materials such as rocks, wood, or even straw. But nowadays the house wearing straw material is rarely seen in Korea. Korean traditional house is almost unchanged from the time of the Three Kingdoms until the *Joseon* Dynasty (1392-1910). [Anonymous, 2012: 12]

One of the characteristic of *Hanok* is the form of the roof corners that is curved upwards towards the sky, or often referred to as the *Paljak* roof. *Paljak* roof is a variation of a traditional roof (most common in older buildings) with the most decorative and luxurious of all roof types with four corners are raised high and shaped triangular gable roof. [Wijaya, 2013: 2] Usually the royal buildings, *Dancheong* techniques are used to decorate with paintings with intricate patterns on the roof and other parts of the building to make the building look luxurious. The roof covering is *Giwa*, or black grooved tile roof, made of red clay.

The *hanok* floor is designed with a very typical way that related to the habits of most Korean people who love to do activities on the floor, such as sleeping, eating and sitting. The *hanok* floor is equipped with a heating called *ondol*. [Anonymous, 2012: 12] It is a kind of small fireplace under floor made just below the wooden floor of each room to warm the floor. Smoke and heat coming out of the kitchen stove under, flowing through the chimney which was built under the floor. In southern region where the temperature is warmer, *ondol* is used with wooden floors. It shaped like wooden *parquette* made of clay so that it is fireproof and has the advantage of storing heat and called the radiant heating system. Besides *ondol*, another material used is *Maru* (old pine wood material in sepia color) which is good for your back during sleep and stay comfortable and cool during the summer. [Wijaya, 2013: 3]

*Hanok* wall usually used brick and limestone (for upper-class social status) which serves to protect wooden structures from fire. The columns are made of pine wood with rounded shape and large. Most of these columns are exposed and connected all together with a typical ceiling called *Oryang*. [Wijaya, 2013: 3] So, the ceiling is simply an exposed beam structure with beautiful original columns. Interestingly *Hanok* is built without nails and simply tectonically built of wooden beams arrangement. [Anonymous, 2012: 12]

Usually in a *hanok*, there is always a pavilion which is not far from the main house. This pavilion is often used as a place of solitude, relaxation and hobby. Therefore, the pavilion has always been built in the garden area. The common form of the pavilion is made



in a traditional Korean house style; usually looks like a pagoda or like a temple that has piled roof.

Many Korean houses are adapted from the most significant development of houses during the *Joseon* Dynasty. The character of the houses regard to a strong dedication to the simplicity, modern, respect, and self-control, as well as the importance of respecting nature. [Wijaya, 2013: 3-4] Therefore, Korean culture uses many natural materials and natural elements both in the architecture, and also in the interior design. The materials are shown honestly, so it is easy to identify which materials are used. Korean people's attention towards nature makes the atmosphere of the room in the Korean house dominated by the colors of brown, yellow, red and white. The texture of the wood is very dominant in the interior, together with furniture that dominantly exposes wooden textures.

#### Adaptation in Korean Restaurants in Bandung

The spatial composition that creates Korean atmosphere in the Korean restaurant in Bandung is one of the most important "selling points" for businessmen in Korean culinary industry. It cannot be denied that the atmosphere is one of the factors which determine consumer preferences in choosing the restaurant. But not all dining cultures and Korean home design can be adapted in Indonesia, because of the availability of materials, technical capabilities and habits of the consumers in Indonesia. It is obvious that a Korean restaurant in Indonesia is intended not only for the Korean people, but also for the people of Indonesia as the largest market. Therefore, various adaptations are done, for the convenient of consumer, but still showing of the Korean culture characteristics.

Three restaurants which are used as a case study for this research are the *Korean House*, *Han Kook Gwan* and *Mujigae*. *Korean House* - is the first Korean restaurant in Bandung - and *Han Kook Gwan* representing Korean restaurant serving Korean dishes ala carte. The difference between the two restaurants is that more of local people visited *Korean House*, while most of the Korean visited *Han Kook Gwan*. While one of the franchise restaurant *Mujigae* located in one of the mall in Bandung represents a restaurant serving Korean-style fast food. The restaurant is visited by many local guests who want to eat rice and *banchan* (side dish) called *hanjounghshik* complete with a relatively affordable price. It becomes more interesting that *Korean House* and *Mujigae* are owned by local owners, while *Han Kook Gwan* is owned by a Korean who lives in Indonesia.

Adaptation to the creation of an atmosphere of Korea in the third restaurant can be categorized into 3 categories.

1. The use of natural materials such as wood, bamboo and stone

One characteristic of traditional Korean house is rich in natural atmosphere. Adaptations made on *Korean House* and *Han Kook Gwan* is to put a garden in the middle of the restaurant. The dining areas are situated around the garden and are semi open so that air flows from the garden entrance to the dining area as well as providing a view from the dining area. In *Korean House*, there is also a fish pond in the garden with a *gazebo* which is also a dining area like a pavilion in *hanok*.



Picture 1. Garden and Gazebo at *Korean House*  
Source : Personal documentation



Picture 2. Garden at *Han Kook Gwan*  
Source : Personal documentation

Predominant use of natural materials in walls, flooring and ceilings in both the restaurant is also very significant. The *Korean House* wall is unfinished (no paint) plastered brick wall. This wall becomes the background of the vertical arrangement of dried bamboo, arranged irregularly as aesthetic elements that support the natural atmosphere of the dining room. In

*Han Kook Gwan*, a natural stone wall background exposed into the cubicle partition of bamboo as divider between one dining area and another. The atmosphere created is quite similar to the many Sundanese (local ethnicity of West Java Province in Indonesia) restaurants that use bamboo constructions.



Picture 3. Dining area at *Korean House*  
Source : Personal documentation



Picture 4. Dining area at *Han Kook Gwan*  
Source : Personal documentation

The uses of natural materials are also seen in the columns and furniture of the dining areas dominantly. In *Korean House*, wooden planks wrapped the concrete columns so that it looks like a wooden column. Likewise, concrete beams in the ceilings are wrapped by wooden planks to provide more natural appearance. In *Han Kook Gwan* columns and ceiling are made of bamboos. The furniture is made of wood. The top table is made of plywood with *melamine* finishing, equipped with a grill in the centre which is embedded in the table. (See Pictures 3 and 4)

With the concept of modern fast food restaurant, *Mujigae* is not as comprehensive as the other two restaurants in the implementation of the natural atmosphere. The one of natural

elements shown *Mujigae* is the use of wood on the top table and one of the seating area. In *Mujigae* there are several types of seating area. There is a type of sofa with dining table for 2-4 people. In this type, the table is made of plywood with melamine finishing. While the wooden chairs are supported by padded synthetic leather. There is a type of bar stools and high tables. In this type, only the top tables are made from plywood with a polyurethane finish. The chairs and the table supports are made of iron. There is also a sitting area where people can sit in a built-in semi cross-legged seating area made of plywood with HPL (high pressure laminate) sheets in wooden motif. (See pictures 5 and 6)



Picture 5. Situation in dining area at *Mujigae*  
Source : Personal documentation



Picture 6. Dining area at *Mujigae*  
Source : Personal documentation

2. Table and dining area design

Typical Korean dining culture demands the restaurant to provide appropriate tables and dining areas. Korean people usually eat barbequed meat that grilled directly at the table. Therefore at the *ala carte* restaurants such as *Korean House* and *Han Kook Gwan*, each table is equipped with an embedded grill stove which is always ready whenever needed. But the design of the table with this facility cannot be found in *Mujigae* because of its characteristic as a fast food type restaurant that provides “ready to eat” food.

Apart from the grill facility, the typical Korean meal culture is the existence of

many *banchan*, or side dish or complementary food served in plates or small bowls. Every meal, there are at least 5-8 kinds of *banchan* that is presented in addition to the main meal. The main meals such as noodles served with pan and cooked meat usually served with a hotplate. Therefore, the table size in Korean restaurants is relatively large because of the grill, the main food and *banchan* in considerable amounts. The table width in *Korean House* and *Han Kook Gwan* is 100 – 120 cm and length up to 140-160 cm for the capacity of 4 persons



Picture 7. One portion of *hanjounghshik* at *Mujigae*  
Source : Personal documentation



Picture 8. One set *banchan* at *Han Kook Gwan*  
Source : Personal documentation

The habit of sitting cross-legged on the floor of the Korean while eating is also facilitated by all the three restaurants. *Korean House* and *Han Kook Gwan* provide a dining area with a low table so guests can eat sitting on wooden parquet floor with a thin mattress, like in Korea. However, most Indonesian people do not usually sit like this while eating, because it will cause pain in the legs and waist. The adaptations shown at *Mujigae*



Source : Personal documentation

are very interesting, namely by making the built-in semi cross-legged sitting area. This area is an area of a raised floor with a rectangular step declining area just like a ladder as a seat accompanied with a short table, so it seemed from afar that people are sitting cross-legged instead of sitting on the stairs. This configuration allows people to sit comfortably without losing the sensation of sitting cross-legged on the floor.



Source : Personal documentation

3. Use of a typical Korean dining utensils  
Another issue which is also an important element in creating Korean dining sensations is the use of the Korean typical dining utensils such as stainless steel chopsticks and spoons, pots, pans, hot plate and also clay pots. The use of chopsticks and long spoons of stainless steel was found on these three restaurants. However, the use of pots, pans, hot plates and also clay pots were only found in *Korean House* and *Han Kook Gwan*. The reasons of practicality make *Mujigae* use regular bowls for serving main meals. The heat of the *bibimbab* clay pot and hot plate for cooking meat produce its own sensation while eating at a Korean restaurant. (See figure 10)

#### Closing

*Hanok* elements that are not found in all these three Korean restaurants that are: *paljak* roof, *ondol* floor and *oryang* ceiling. Technical problems become the main reason for the absence of these elements in the design of Korean restaurants in Indonesia. Another

reason is the issue of context that is not fully appropriate with the conditions in Korea. For example, *ondol* that provides heat on the flooring is useless in Indonesia because of the hot tropical climate. But adaptations of Korean dining culture in Korean restaurants have been done through the use of natural materials, the design of the dining area and also use tools typical Korean dining utensils. At least these three things help to create a typical Korean atmosphere which plays an important role in determining people's preferences in choosing a restaurant.

Observing the phenomenon of the diversity of Korean restaurant design in Indonesia, need to be supported by the knowledge of Korean culture. Therefore, the study of Korea plays an important role in providing a foundation of departure in understanding this phenomenon.

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