



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

State and Food in South Korea : moulding the national diet in wartime and beyond

Park, K.H.

Citation

Park, K. H. (2013, February 21). *State and Food in South Korea : moulding the national diet in wartime and beyond*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/20552>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/20552>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/20552> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

Author: Park, Kyoung-Hee

Title: State and food in South Korea : moulding the national diet in wartime and beyond

Issue Date: 2013-02-21

Summary

This study examines the governmental policies through which people's food practices were intervened in, controlled and modified in twentieth-century South Korea. The study's main focus is on the wars that occurred in twentieth-century Korea, as it acted as an important stimulus in increasing state interference in the daily diet of the people and contributed to the transformation of Korean foodways.

As elsewhere, controls over food played a central role in the policies of the authorities which took power in Korea. However, an examination of the modern Korean diet is particularly interesting due to the fact that the last century was one of the most turbulent eras in Korean history, during which a large number of momentous historical events occurred. Dramatic social changes – the experience of the Second World War under Japan's colonial rule (1910-1945), occupation by the United States and the Soviet Union (1945-1948), the division of the country into North and South Korea under the Cold War rivalry between these two countries (1948-), and the outbreak of the Korean War (1950-1953) – brought dramatic influences to bear on the country's politics and economy. The specific social context was a potent factor behind the Korean authorities' maintenance of rigid control over the food practices of the Korean people. Despite constant changes in the administration – from the Japanese colonial authorities and the US Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) to the South Korean government – food-related policies have remained at the core of the country's politics due to the overwhelming importance of food as a political tool. Modern Korean foodways have been greatly influenced by state policies that were formulated and implemented against a backdrop of war (and the threat of it), colonialism and industrialization, all of which were entangled with each other in complex ways.

The main purposes of this study are twofold: first, it documents the adoption of the matter of the people's diet as the focus of economic policies in order to sustain national fighting power, and investigates the wide range of channels through which the authorities devoted consistent efforts to controlling the daily diet of the Korean people. Second, it

Summary

demonstrates how the food-control programmes, once developed as war strategies, were not abolished after the end of the wars, but rather reinforced as part of the government's post-war social management. The goal of this study is to explore the long-term impact of colonial Japan's wartime food policies on the formation of the dietary practices of Koreans in the latter half of the twentieth century by demonstrating that the wartime reforms instituted during the Second World War laid the foundations for post-colonial food policies in South Korea.

This study is largely divided into three parts – food distribution, food consumption and food education – which represent the areas through which state control measures were transferred and implemented. The first part of this project includes three chapters which deal with the issue of food rationing. Chapter One demonstrates the revival of the Japanese system of food rationing in post-colonial Korea, chiefly focusing on the role of the USAMGIK, which resurrected the Japanese machinery of food management to handle the food shortages in decolonized Korea. The first section looks at the Japanese staple-food distribution programmes implemented between 1940 and 1945, and the second covers the rationing controls under the USAMGIK (1945-1948) and during the formative years of the South Korean government (1948-1950). The centralized food-control system that originated with the colonial administration was further reinforced by the post-colonial authorities of the country, and this set the overall tone for the country's food policies for decades to come.

Chapter Two describes the process of the restoration of the Japanese food programme after 1945, following the same time frame as Chapter One. A major focus is placed on the role of the *aegukpan* ('patriotic units'), the civilian groups involved in the administration of food rationing. The first section examines their pivotal role within the Japanese food-control mechanism, and the following section demonstrates that they were entrusted with exactly the same roles by the post-colonial governments in Korea. Notwithstanding the authorities' efforts, the government system of food control remained incomplete, and there was a widespread black market, which is dealt with in Chapter Three. Emerging under the ill-fated Japanese food management system in the late 1930s, the black market was an established part of Korean people's everyday lives and continued to exist in liberated Korea alongside the Japanese rationing system. This chapter covers the period

Summary

between 1937 and 1950.

The second part of this study looks at the state's control over food consumption, dealing with the state's war mobilization campaigns carried out in the name of the improvement of daily life. The first section of Chapter Four focuses on the Japanese war campaigns during the Second World War, which appropriated the structure of the Rural Revitalization Campaign (*Nongch'on chinhŭng undong*) initiated in 1932 in colonial Korea. As discussed in the second section of this chapter, the Japanese campaigns for war mobilization were revived in 1951 in liberated Korea in an effort to address yet another conflict, the Korean War. The wartime campaigns of the South Korean government remained intact until 1960, long after the cease-fire agreement of 1953, allowing the authorities to intervene in the daily diet of the people for the purposes of post-war social reorganization and the modernization of the country.

Food consumption is closely related to women, who were chiefly responsible for managing family meals in Korea. Chapter Five attempts to show how the transformation of the Korean diet proceeded as the result of an intricate and interactive relationship between women, colonialism and the state's policies of mass mobilization. The first section documents the unique role of female Japanese immigrants in colonial Korea. As intermediaries between the state and the Korean public, they were actively involved in the Korean dietary reforms during the Second World War. The following section focuses on Korean women's active participation in *Saemaŭl Undong*, the state reform projects aimed at national economic development in 1970s' South Korea. The women's engagement in the state's projects for dietary reform emerged as a powerful influence on the transformation of the Korean diet. A focus on women's roles provides a fruitful angle for gaining a fuller understanding of the mechanism of the state's intervention in the private sphere.

The function of education as the principal vehicle for the implementation of the state's nutritional policy and the shaping of Korean food practices is documented in the third part. The first section of Chapter Six considers the emergence of home economics during the first half of the twentieth century in Korea. It shows that this modern scientific

Summary

discipline for women was disseminated alongside the ideology of the ‘wise mother, good wife’ (*hyŏnmo yangch’ŏ*), the idealized Korean womanhood, shaped under the influence of the Japanese concept of the ‘good wife, wise mother’. The second section discusses the growing importance of home economics in Japanese wartime austerity policy. The colonial authorities’ serious efforts to disseminate nutritional science in order to train Korean women to manage their family diet economically during the war years are elaborated in this section. While the political connotations are invisible, the principles of home economics definitely prevailed in the highly politicised war situation.

Chapter Seven concentrates on South Korean food education, an area to which the authorities attached great importance in the reshaping of the eating habits of the people. The first section examines the school lunch programme as a reflection of state food policies during the last five decades of the twentieth century. Originally intended to achieve the improvement of nutritional intake amongst school children, the lunch programme became less focused on the recipient’s nutritional needs and more concerned with the larger forces of state food policies. The food on the children’s lunch trays was strategically selected so that it was beneficial for the country’s economic development. The development of the lunch programme, and the shift from bread to rice (mixed with other grain) as its staple food, clearly demonstrates that the policy of food education in the country has been shaped more by surplus food than ideas about healthy diets. The second section of this chapter deals with the *honbunsik changnyŏ* campaigns (which encouraged the eating of barley and wheat-based foods), with special emphasis on various projects carried out in the school curriculum in order to change the eating habits of pupils. The utility of the formal school system, an effective mechanism for reshaping individual thoughts and attitudes, enabled the Korean authorities to control the daily diet of the people.

The legacy of Japanese colonialism is one of the most sensitive subjects to be handled in Korean historiography and, until recently, there has been reluctance amongst academics to deal with this issue. However, as this study has demonstrated, the Japanese system of wartime food control was revived and further reinforced by the post-colonial authorities in an effort to support the Korean War and the Cold War, as well as the economic

Summary

development of the country. As the focus of politics in South Korea, the state food control system instituted during the Second World War by the Japanese colonial government formed the foundations for post-colonial Korean food policies.

However, the preservation of the Japanese food system in post-colonial Korea denotes something far more significant than mere reuse of the colonial machinery. The centralized food control system that originated under Japanese imperialism left a crucial legacy that shaped the state–society relationship in liberated Korea. The Japanese colonial government’s domination was by no means merely repressive; rather, there were various disciplinary institutions, such as the educational system and mass campaigns, which allowed the authorities to intervene in and control the everyday lives of the people. Together with the state’s vast control over civilian food consumption, the various disciplinary mechanisms through which state controls could be effectively imposed continued to function for the purpose of social control over the people’s diet in post-colonial Korea. The power relationships between the state and the people, connected by the heritage of the colonial experience, were, and still are, fundamental in moulding the foodways in contemporary Korea.