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Changes to American, Korean, and Chinese Barbecue Over Centuries

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I am Chinese, and my father is a great cook of Chinese barbecue. This winter break, he came to United States and cooked Chinese barbecue for my friends and me. I had not eaten it for almost a year, and I felt excited. One might say that barbecue also exists in the United States, but American barbecue differs from Chinese barbecue. Americans prefer to cook steak and pork. Chinese prefer to cook small pieces of meat on sticks. Because my hometown, Qingdao, is close to Korea, I wondered in my childhood what Korean barbecue tastes like. After eating Korean barbecue with my parents in Qingdao, I started to love it.

Korean barbecue chefs prefer to cook meat slices and eat them with lettuce leaves and white rice. When I, as a child, said to my father “I do not like to eat it,” my father always said that he could not choose what to eat in his childhood because the “great leap forward” and natural hazard made the great famine in China in 1960s. All people over the world do not have enough food to eat in ancient times, so they use barbecue to survive not for the great taste. In recent years, we get relatively enough food to eat, and we focus more on the tastes of food.

What are the origins of barbecue methods and how have national barbecue traditions in United States, Korea, and China changed through the years until now? In the 21st century, barbecue technologies include smoking, baking, braising, and grilling. People, who like barbecue, use these technologies to cook food and enjoy relaxing time with each other. Barbecue gives them more room to cook, eat, drink,

chat, and play. Barbecue is not only a method of cooking a meal, but it is also an event, which makes people more relaxed, happy, and leads to a closer relationship with each other.

Eating barbecue – on a large square and walking around to talk with friends in the United States and China and eating barbecue on a table and sitting close with families in Korea and China – helps people build these relationships. Therefore, while barbecue seems to have been a cooking method for survival during ancient times in the United States, Korea, and China, it has become an event for families and friends to build closer communicative relationships in these three countries in the 21st century.

About 500 years ago, American barbecue slow-cook is supposedly used to keep meat fresh for a long time and to survive. About barbeque, Reed (2007) said,

In the first decades of the 1500s Spanish explorers in the Caribbean found the locals using frameworks of sticks to support meat over fires. They did this either to slow-cook it or to cure and preserve it—as we do with country hams and jerky today—which one depends on the heat of the fire and the height of the framework. (p. 139)

About 500 years ago, ancient American hunted animals for survive. When they got a lot of meat on one day, they could not eat all. Barbecue saved the hunters' life by keeping the meat in good condition for long time. Then hunters could survive with the stored meat when they got nothing in hunting. Also, ancient people have relatively more time to wait for the food to cook, and they are tired to cook meat after the intensive hunting, so they could use slow-cook barbecue method after hunting. They could sleep and relax to wait for the

cooked meat.

The hunters did not need to worry that the meat would be over roasted since the heat over fire was not very high. In the 21st century, many people cannot spend a lot of time on cooking food because of relatively fast-paced of life, and smoked barbecue is relatively slow. However, urban people also enjoy barbecue, so they developed the baking, braising, and grilling technologies, which cook food more quickly and more conveniently.

In the 21st century, barbecue in the United States seems to not only be a method of eating, but also it gives friends more space to go around talking with anyone since the cooking processes facilitates social interaction. To cook American barbecue, firstly, Americans put many variant ingredients on beef, chicken, and pork. Different ingredients can cater to variant people from different areas and tastes. Secondly, the barbecue holder summons people to join in the barbecue, and the holder cooks the meat on a grill outside. Guests eat the barbecued food around the grill.

According to Moss (2011), “It has long had a remarkable power to bring people together from diverse walks of life, helping them celebrate important events, debate contentious issues, and have a good time” (p. 25). I still remember that when I first came to the United States, I joined in a barbecue party at the University of Missouri, Columbia. Since barbecue food can cater to many tastes, people from different countries went to this party to celebrate the start of the new semester. There were so many new students like me, and I enjoyed the barbecue food with friends. Because of this party, almost every student, who was new in this school, made friends.

This party made us gather in a square, and we were relaxed, so we could find the friendly students whose habits were similar to ours. Since barbecue party owns large space for students to walk around, students can go closer to chat with each other and make friends. If the party were without barbecue perhaps less new students would have come. The new students might think that they could do nothing for the party, and they would chat with unfamiliar students directly, which is kind of strange. International students during their first time to come to the United States might not have good language skills, so they would not come to this party because they were afraid. Fortunately, this party had barbecue and students only walked around and enjoyed some food without worrying about unfamiliar people or being embarrassed that they were bored or did not know what to do.

The original Korean barbecue seems to be beef grilled with skewers, called neobiani (너비아니). (For more information, Korean language readers, see <http://100.nate.com/dicsearch/pentry.html?s=K&i=244223&v=44>). This is the origin of bulgogi, the traditional Korean barbecue. According to Hong et al. (2011), “Bulgogi is barbecued or pan-fried beef that has been marinated with a mixture of soy sauce, sugar, minced garlic, green onion, black pepper, and sesame oil, and so on. Other ingredients such as ground pear or honey, which vary by region and recipe, can also be used” (p. 308). This is the traditional Korean barbecue, which is special for thin pieces of beef. This kind of Korean barbecue is still on markets. People who like eating the sweet food may like this kind of Korean barbecue.

In the 21st century, Korean barbecue was supposed to expand to more kinds of food

than only beef to grill which is cooked inside, and become the good dinner for relaxing in a quiet place for chatting with families. We can see that Korea has many different kinds of barbecue food in addition to bulgogi. Koreans do not only barbecue beef, but they also cook pork and chicken. Korean chefs also improve their barbecue by offering barbecue meat with other food. For example, I really enjoy the slices of streaky pork in Korean barbecue.

Koreans eat the barbecue pork with Korean chili sauce, white rice, and leaves of lettuce, which sets good balance of the ratio from meat to vegetables. In the family dinner, parents do not need to worry that eating barbecue results in eating less vegetables for children. American barbecue is an outside event, but Korean barbecue uses powerful extractor hoods to move the barbecue inside. For Korean barbecue, cooking processes, firstly, people sit around a table waiting for the cooked food, and the grill is kept with hoods on the table. People can sit comfortable and relaxed because of table grills that people do not need to walk around to find someone like American barbecue. When the food is completely cooked, people who sit around can eat it directly.

Secondly, people put charcoal in grill and set fire to it. Then people choose the meat they like to put on the grill which makes people comfortable because they choose what they want to eat. For example, I really enjoy eating Korean barbecue with families. It makes a great environment for chatting because Korean barbecue makes families sit closer, and they can share the food they cooked. My families always talk about the childhood events and share the funny things they experienced with each other in dinner time. Also, they do not need to worry about the smoke from cooking because of the powerful extractor hood.

The original method of Chinese barbecue seems to use high temperature to sterilize raw meat to avoid illness. Fu Xi, who reigned the first of the Three Sovereigns of ancient China, taught Chinese how to hunt, fish, and trap. (For Chinese language readers, see http://www.china.com.cn/news/zhuanti/zhcx/2007-10/06/content_9005548.htm). Then Chinese started eating meat rather than wild fruits on trees. However, the raw meat did not taste good and caused illness. Fu Xi invented the method, which is using fire to cook meat, to avoid illness. Therefore, the original Chinese barbecue is set up; eaters enjoy the tastes and maintained health.

In the 21st century, Chinese barbecue can be both inside and outside and becomes the great event for families and friends to get closer relationship because of eating with families on a table or cooking with friends. In the 21st century, Chinese expand the barbecue methods in many ways, both cooking inside and outside. Because of the development of technology, barbecue is no longer limited to fire, but it also uses characteristic electronic machines to cook food. Indoor Chinese barbecue is made by many kinds of roasting machines. As Chan and Tse (2001) observe, “There are three main types of roaster used in the production of the four types of Chinese barbecue items: the suckling pig roaster, the medium-size pig roaster and the duck roaster” (p. 46).

These machines can use electricity or coal to roast the meat. The famous food, roast Beijing duck, is made by these kinds of machines and tastes really good by special technology, which is putting ingredients on duck and grilling it in a special oven with appropriate temperature. People can have dinner with families to eat the inside Chinese barbecue, which is similar to the

Korean barbecue. Families sit comfortably around a table and talk about interesting events in a great environment.

To cook Chinese barbecue outside, firstly, a cook needs to put ingredients in the small piece of meat. Secondly, a cook puts charcoal in grill and sets fire to it. Other people prepare the meat that make the small on a stick. Then the cook takes the sticks of meats on the grill. It is similar to the American barbecue that friends walk around and play with each other. Friends can eat around with the grill. However, the tastes of Chinese barbecue are not similar to the American barbecue. Now, Chinese people may consider about the nutrition of barbecue, and they start to barbecue vegetables, such as eggplant, potato, Chinese chives, and so on. Chinese barbecue differs from others. It is not eaten with liquid sauce, but it is cooked with salt, five-spice powder, paprika, and cumin.

In conclusion, barbecue has developed over a long time. The origin of barbecue is only a method to keep the meat fresh in the United States, to cook beef slices in Korea, and to sterilize meat in China. These three countries used the barbecue cooking method for survival in the past. In the 21st century, barbecue becomes an occasion for an improved relationship party with friends in the United States, relaxed and communicative dinner with families in Korea, and communicative family dinners or closer relationship party with friends in China. With the development of our quality of life, we do not need to worry about how to cook food to survive, but we use food as a social culture communication.

Therefore, we develop the barbecue as a tool for getting a great communication. In the 21st century, people are always busy with earning money, and they believe that if they are rich, they will get anything they

want. There are less communications with others than before. For example, the Mid-autumn Festival in China, many Chinese know that we need to eat the moon cakes on that day, but we always forget the origin of it that families who live individually come back to family reunion. People should spend more time with families and friends and appreciate the relationship among families and friends. Getting more communications with families and friends means getting more happiness in our life. Barbecue is one of those ways to have more communication with people.

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