

Dogs are good to eat, and/or to pet: The controversial dog-eating custom in globalized South Korea^{*1}

韓国におけるグローバル化の進行と犬食習慣の行方

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Abstract:

韓国の犬食習慣は、国内外でさまざまな議論を呼んできた。長い歴史に基づく文化的伝統であるといわれているが、大多数の韓国人が日常的に食べているわけではなく、また犬を食用とすることに嫌悪感を持つ人や、はっきり反対を唱える人も少なくない。また、オリンピックやワールドカップの主催などを契機に、韓国に国際的な注目が集まるときになると、きまってこの話題が大きく取り上げられ、激しい論争を引き起こしてきた。本稿は、韓国における犬食の社会的・歴史的背景について探り、葛藤やタブー視を注意深く見ていくことで、グローバル化が進む時代における食文化の行方を読み解こうとする試みである。

犬食の習慣は、長い歴史をもつといえる一方で、同時にそれをタブー視する傾向も韓国社会内部ではっきり認められる。その理由にも歴史的な経緯があり、同時に普遍的な象徴論理に基づく側面もある。海外の動物保護団体が犬食に反対する単独の勢力なのではない。しかし、犬食を維持、発展させようとする勢力もまた存在する。

禁じられながらも独特の存在感を示し続けている韓国の犬食習慣だが、その現代的な動態にとって二つの枠組みが決定的な役割を果たしていると思われる。一つはナショナリズムであり、もう一つは健康ブームである。一方で、犬食文化に対して真っ向から対決する勢力に動物愛護団体がある。社会全体から見れば一部の勢力に過ぎないが、その声と同調する感覚は非常に広大な社会的裾野を持っている。それが都市的ライフスタイルの中に溶け込んだペット文化に他ならない。こうした入り組んだ勢力による闘争が犬食の習慣に複雑な屈折を与え、あるときには実際以上の存在感を示すこともあるが、大きくいえばそれは周縁化されつつあるといえる。

犬食が周縁化されていくまでには、都市化や西洋化の進行とともにライフスタイルや価値観が変容し、ペット文化が社会的主流となっていく過程があり、そして前近代から存在したタブー視を含めたさまざまな層があり、それらが複雑に絡み合っている。それらは単純に外部からの押しつけに還元できる力ではなく、内発的な社会変容がその源泉をなしている。一方で、犬食を正当化する力としては、ナショナリズム、健康ブーム、そして古代的な供犠とトーテミズム文化などがある。西洋からの批判が高まるとナショナリズムが高揚し、あたかも両者の戦いが舞台を支配しているかのように見えるが、もっと大きな俯瞰図で捉えたとき、それはあくまで長大なドラマの一コマに過ぎないともいえるのである。

Keywords: : *dog-eating custom, South Korea, tradition and globalization, food taboo, pet culture*
キーワード：犬食習慣、韓国、伝統とグローバル化、食物のタブー、ペット文化

1. Why is dog-eating a problem?

When certain food “taboos” are part of a particular religious identity or respected old tradition, we feel that there exists a sacred barrier, which cannot be easily destroyed by the impact of globalization. But, on the other hand, when a certain food custom evokes repugnance or criticism from the outside, we witness a merciless advance of globalization. In today’s environment, where different peoples move across borders and diverse food customs are interchanged, the stable premises and agreed-upon taboos that have sustained cultural tradition are suddenly thrown into complicated situations.

Even a tradition that, in a local context, is grounded in its own rationality can quickly become groundless when exposed to external criticism. Such criticism is inescapable, particularly for such nations as South Korea, which has devoted itself to becoming an advanced nation, and found itself in the spotlight of the world stage when it hosted the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup. It is necessary, therefore, to understand the Korean dog-eating custom in a context in which tradition and globalization intermingle. On the other hand, exploring this problem will evince a stereotypical pattern: namely, that globalization does not bless unlimited cultural diversity and allows differences only within certain boundaries. The external symbolizing process that proclaims certain foods taboo (such as meat from whales, horses, and dogs) invites complex questions that deserve consideration from various angles. By investigating these angles, we will learn a lot of things about meanings and non-meanings of eating in our age, and about cultural dynamism and stereotypes.

The Korean dog-eating custom has been fragmentally reported overseas; the media seem to make the automatic assumption that it is a horrible, barbaric custom – rather than first examining the facts. For example, the BBC covered this custom in a May 2007 program called *Cooking in the Danger Zone: Taboo Foods*. The title alone is evocative enough to indicate the typical Western view of this issue. Such “prejudice” can be easily found, even within Korea, and causes various conflicts. By closely examining the socio-historical background of the conflicts and taboos, we will obtain some clues to guide our understanding of the future of food customs in our globalized society.

2. History and Exteriority

Korean people eat dog meat. It is said to be a cultural custom based on an old tradition, but this statement is only partially true. The majority of people do not eat dog meat on a daily basis. There are more than few who detest this custom and vocally oppose it.

It is estimated that at least one million dogs are consumed every year in South Korea. Some claim that the number is no less than three million. If this number is correct, the consumption of dog meat ranks next to that of pork, beef, and chicken. The consumption of dog meat is simply too prevalent for it to be an “exceptional” food custom.

The biggest reason for this gap in estimations is due to the ambiguous legal position of dog meat. As a matter of fact, according to the related laws^{*2}, the dog is not legally included among livestock. It is not sold at ordinary meat shops or supermarkets. Legally speaking, it is not meat; therefore, one cannot estimate the correct amount that is distributed. However, in actuality, a large amount of dog meat is processed, distributed, and consumed. It may be possible to say that the government has given the dog an ambiguous position in order to avoid apparent opposition and controversies.

To understand this ambiguity, we need to go back to the early 1980s. When the International Olympic Committee chose Seoul as the host city for the Olympic Games in the general meeting in 1981, some English animal-protection groups denounced the Korean dog-eating custom. The outcry escalated to the point that many called for a boycott of the Seoul games. The Korean government, a so-called military junta, instantly delegatized the dog meat business without any democratic negotiations, in order to quell the disturbance.

In reality, this coercive method did not wipe out the custom. Dog meat restaurants continued their business modestly, by disguising the signboards and withdrawing into back streets. Although dog flesh was not categorized as “meat,” its distribution was secure. The hidden custom remains alive until today despite the prohibition. The spotlight was shone on the custom once again, when Korea cohosted the 2002 World Cup with Japan, and the Western media restarted its coverage of this peculiar custom.

This time, however, the story developed in a different direction. Korean society had undergone democratization and built up self-confidence as a rich country. Owing in part to the emergence of the new-media environment, including the internet, people in the late 1990s began to denounce both the Western criticism and the indecisiveness of the Korean government.

To sum up, it is possible to say that the dog-eating custom first went underground as Korean tradition clashed with the exterior values represented by the West, and then seemed to surface again as time passed. But this understanding is also a partial incomplete one. Even though globalization is a key element in solving this problem, it is equally important to look at the history of how disparate powers interacted with each other within Korea, rather than focusing exclusively on how Korean society interacted with the outside. By observing both sides, we can estimate the impact of globalization not as an abstract entity, but as a major, real originator of culture change.

The ambiguous position of the dog-eating custom in Korea presupposes not only the external prohibition, but also the internal prohibition. We have referred to the ways in which foreigners’ criticism stamped a negative mark on the custom. The dog is man’s friend, and a partner of life; eating it is brutal and in such poor taste -- this kind of criticism, issued mostly by Western animal-rights and -protection groups, expelled the dog-eating custom from the mainstream of society.

But it is worth noting that this custom never occupied a position in the societal mainstream, not even in premodern times. In Korean agrarian society, the concept of “impurity” used to have crucial meanings; dog meat symbolized supreme impurity, along with menstrual blood and death. In contrast to impurity was the purity embodied by Confucian ritual space. By way of illustration: If someone experiences impurity by eating dog meat or going to a funeral, one cannot, for the time being, attend a Confucian ritual. In a village where I conducted extended field research, people were acutely conscious of this theory. Such a value is still alive in village society. At the time of village festivals, people would offer a cow, a pig, or a chicken as sacrifice, but they usually avoided a dog.

So the strong negativity toward dog-eating was extant before foreigners arrived to “civilize” Korean people. I think there are two reasons to explain this taboo: one historical, the other symbolical.

In the historical perspective, it is said that the Mongolian conquest in the 13th century constituted a major trigger to prohibit dog-eating. Since equestrian people prohibited eating dogs, this value penetrated mainly in the ruling class in the late Koryo period, along with the Mongolian

rule. But it seems that the relatively brief foreign rule was less important than the influence of Buddhism, which arrived on the Peninsula in the 4th century and became the dominant teaching up until the Koryo period (918-1392 AD). A similar trajectory can be found in Chinese history.

In China the dog-eating custom was vigorous in ancient times. According to Kei Shoran, dog meat shared popularity with beef, lamb, and pork for 1,400 years, starting as a sacrifice in the Zhou Dynasty (11th century BC). During those periods, dog meat kept its position among the major six kinds of stock (Kei 2005). But during the period of the Six Dynasties (222-589 AD), the sense of taboo started to spread. The view of dog-eating as barbaric spread throughout the whole country, along with incessant invasion, since northern equestrian peoples like Xianbei considered the dog to be their friend and indispensable for hunting. The propagation of Buddhism uprooted this custom. Even in the Guangdong region, where dog meat was very popular, it became degraded and edible only for “mean persons”; in the Qing period, people called it a food for beggars (Cho 1997). There are still many more details to be investigated in such a complex historical process. It may be too simple to claim that the distaste among the ruling class expelled the custom to the periphery of society. If the idea of taboo can be observed even today, the reason should be sought not only in the past darkness, but also in the universal inclinations of the human mind.

3. Symbolism of Liminality

The hypothesis by Edmund Leach that emphasized the “symbolic value of the boundary” is relevant here. According to Leach, the boundary, or the liminal zone, tends to have special values for human cognition, and become an object of taboo. Generally speaking, the natural process is continuous (e.g., transition of the climate), while the cultural category is discontinuous (e.g., distinction of the season). The liminal, ambiguous area between categories is suppressed as taboo. Segmentation and categorization that enable human cognition are effectuated. In doing so, cultural order can be maintained. Such principles are most easily found in the categories of animals and kinship. Leach claims that “the way in which animals are categorised with regard to edibility will have some correspondence to the way in which human beings are categorised with regard to sex relations.” (2000: 332)

In the concentric structure centering around self, the boundary will become a taboo. In kin relations, the persons between close kin and remote kin activate the strongest incest taboo. In animal categories, ambiguous beings such as dogs and horses, which are between pets and stocks, become food taboo. The taboo animal is often used in obscene abuse language; this phenomenon is connected to symbolic ambivalence (i.e., the filthy and the sacred existing at the same time). The homology of both dimensions in the space centering around self can be shown as follows:

0	distance from self	kinship categories	animal categories	taboo
I	house	family	pet	strong taboo
II	farm	remote kin	livestock	edible with certain procedure
III	field	non-relative neighbors	game	able to hunt
IV	remote	strangers	wild animals	no relations

Table 1:

Category I, which is close to self, unconditionally becomes strong taboo; category IV is so remote as to be beyond the sphere of negotiation. Only II and III are marital or edible categories. Dogs and horses located at the liminal between I and II become food taboo in many societies, and in kinship structure, the homologous ambiguous locus includes “cousins.” Besides, such anomalous beings as reptiles and insects, which are neither fish nor birds nor beasts, are inclined to become taboo. M. Douglas once analyzed the Old Testament book of Leviticus in order to explore the relationship between such anomalies and food taboos (1966). Tambiah’s work (1969) is also relevant. But here, I need to confine my analysis to the dog.

The symbolic position of the dog in Korea is closely related to the liminality and ambivalent values based upon it. The word dog, or *kae* in Korean, is one of the most frequently used derogatory terms, along with sexually abusive and class-discriminatory language. A dog is a synonym of an inferior being; you can cast a most disgraceful insult upon someone by identifying him or her with a dog. *Kae saekki* (son of a bitch), *kae gateun nom* (bastard like a dog), and other expressions combined with sexually abusive language are used in daily conversation.

The liminal position of the dog -- that is, it belongs to human society and the animal world at the same time -- can be confirmed by observing other customs related to it. It is conventionally believed that the most appropriate season of dog-eating is the hottest summer days. This consists of three *pok*, or three periods of “dog days,” between the summer solstice and the beginning of autumn. This calendar comes from the Chinese archaic cosmogony based on the five elements, and *pok* is a liminal period between rising *ying* and depressed *yang*.

According to the historical record, *Shiji*, in 676 BC the ruler Qin Degong (秦德公) sacrificed dogs and hung the torn flesh at the four gates (between the town and the outside) to prevent the summer heat and misfortune. It is said that this rite, called *pok*, evolved into the custom that people eat dog meat during the hottest summer days, or three *pok* periods*³. This custom has been maintained up to today, to the point that many Korean people eat dog meat almost exclusively during this season.

The view of the dog as a liminal animal can be easily confirmed in Korean religious traditions, including shamanism and Buddhism. In shamanistic tales, we find a white dog depicted as a guide that connects this world and the other world. In Buddhist tales, we also find a dog as a mediator that connects the two worlds. This view was connected to the folk belief that a dog was a reincarnated ancestor; as such, dog-eating has been identified with man-eating, and therefore tabooed in Buddhism.

Since Korean society has undergone dramatic and historic changes, it is impossible to claim that the “original” symbolic structure has been preserved intact. But, as Leach claims, such fragments of fact suggest the existence of animal sacrifice and totemism behind them. Namely, dog-eating was a sort of human sacrifice, and symbolically identical with man-eating. Due to this symbolism, it enacted extraordinary ritual power. Will this interpretation be just a groundless hypothesis? Let me mention the historical study of David White, who explored the liminality of the dog in a global perspective, to support this point.

According to White, the myths of a “dog-man,” who is neither man nor animal, can be found worldwide. In the West, it was a symbol of an alien, a Turk, a villain, or a wild man; in India, it represented the outcasts; and in China, it signified surrounding barbarians. That is, the dog as a liminal animal was suitable enough to symbolize the “other,” and so the myths of the dog-man as the other’s incarnation can be found in many areas of the world.

The dog-man was barbaric, but sacred. Man experienced fascination with and fear of this being. The dog has lived in the liminal zone of man's activities, protecting the hordes of stocks from wild animals like wolves, and protecting the limbo between the home and the outside. Such history nurtured the particular symbolic values of the dog, and spread the dog-man myths (1991: 15).

Ultimately, the dog, with its ambiguous roles and cultural values, its constant presence in human experience coupled with its nearness to the feral world, is the alter ego of man himself, a reflection of both human culture and human savagery. Symbolically, the dog is the animal pivot of the human universe, lurking at the threshold between wildness and domestication and all of the valences that these two ideal poles of experience hold. There is much of man in his dogs, much of the dog in us, and behind this, much of the wolf in both the dog and man. And, there is some of the Dog-Man in god.

It may be difficult to confirm such mythical ambivalence in the symbolic values of the Korean dog^{*4}. In particular, sacralization of the dog is hard to find today. But it is possible to find the operation of such mythical logics in the custom that insults the dog on one hand, and tries to improve health and vitality by assimilating its flesh on the other. I will come back to this point later. What is important here is that the dog-eating custom accompanied the history of taboo within the Korean tradition, long before criticism from the West^{*5}. Therefore, the exterior criticism will create some twisted reactions. Let's move to modern scenes to see how they are created.

4. Nationalism and Health Boom

Considering that the Korean dog-eating custom is at once prohibited and vital, I think two perspectives are playing crucial roles. One is nationalism, the other the health boom.

We have already seen that the government's ban on the dog-meat business at the time of the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games did not sweep it away, but rather just pushed it to the underground. A most representative dog dish, *kaejang-guk*, (dog soup,) had by the 1940s changed its name to *poshing-tang* (tonic soup), to convey a positive association with health food. In the 1980s more acceptable and implicit expressions were invented -- such as *yeongyang-tang* or nutrition soup, *sacheol-tang* or four season soup, *pyoung-tang* or health soup, *meongmeong-tang* or bow-wow soup, etc. The dog cuisine restaurants changed their signboards, and withdrew into back streets. People who supported the custom used camouflage and passed through the suppression of the coercive government.

In contrast, the debate over dog-eating that flared again in the late 1990s, along with the hosting of the World Cup, showed a different development. Korean society had undergone political democratization since the late 1980s. People had the internet and new media as their weapon. They overtly protested Western criticism via the net. The whole process developed on the open stage, not in the back alley. The view surfaced that the dog-eating custom is a proud food tradition, and that it is not right to sneak behind the Western insults, and deny the cultural significance.

A French actress, Brigitte Bardot, along with her Bardot Foundation, played an important role in fanning the flames of the conflict. This famous animal-welfare activist sent a letter to the Korean President to criticize the dog-eating custom at the time of the Seoul Olympic Games, and exhorted the Western media to cover this issue. In 1995, prior to the World Cup, she again sent a

letter to the President asking him to abolish the “abhorrent” custom. As her activities continued persistently, by way of letters of protest, open letters, and the boycott of Korean products, the national sentiment in Korea was escalated.

In November 2001, a Korean radio program featured a telephone interview with Bardot. As soon as her voice was broadcast saying that dog-eating was “not culture, but savagery,” the antipathy of the audience flared out. The antagonism toward her opinion was prevalent on the net, and it is said that thousands of threatening letters have been sent to her.

The reaction against the exterior criticism nurtured a self-affirmative movement. A manufacturer of folk wine produced a newspaper advertisement in 1997, with copy reading, “Let’s enjoy pushing-tang now with no shame!” This became a hot topic (see Figure 1). In 2000, at the table of inter-Korean ministerial talks held in Pyongyang, dog dishes were served on the official lunch menu for the first time. In North Korea, dog meat is called *tan kogi*, or sweet meat, and is cooked for special occasions. It was remarkably significant to treat the representatives from South with “our national traditional food,” as it reflected the détente atmosphere at that time. South Korean media reported occasionally the free conditions of dog-eating in North, which testified eloquently to the relationship between nationalism and the dog-eating custom.



Figure 1

Around the turning point of the twenty-first century, some newspapers published articles to appeal the rationality of the custom. Some dog restaurants attempted to organize their network. And, ultimately, some members of the National Assembly introduced a bill to legalize the dog meat business. The point of legalization was to control insanitary distribution and cruel butchering methods, but more attention was paid to the authorization of dog-eating.

This bill did not pass the National Assembly under the leadership of the government. But on the internet, more than 70 percent of voters expressed support for it. Even today, once this kind of discussion starts on the net, the advocates of “tradition” will appear overwhelmingly predominant. As far as the internet is concerned, people who wish to transform the position of dog-eating from a shameful custom to a proud tradition are no minority.

In 2000 Prof. Ann Yong-Geun, also known as Dr. Dogmeat, published his book *Koreans and Dog Meat*, which has supported the movement in the ideological terms. He wrote this book to propagate correct understanding of the custom, and to close the debate over “right” or “wrong.” The similar contents can be accessed on the author’s multilingual (Korean, English, French, German, Chinese, Japanese) homepage (<http://wolf.ok.ac.kr/~annyg/index.html>). As Prof. Ann’s major is dietetics, his book supports the dog-eating custom from the perspectives of both nationalism and dietetics.

It may be a normal tendency to respect health and virility in human society, but it is possible

to say that the excessive “health boom” that dominates the vicissitudes of various commodities is a characteristic phenomenon in the modern times. In South Korea, a conspicuous scene is *poshing* culture, connected to the traditional value that equates food and medicine. *Poshing-tang* is composed of *poshing* (literally meaning body maintenance) and *tang* (soup). It is an implicit expression of dog soup, or *kaejang-guk*. The word *poshing* or *poshing* culture came to be adapted to wider traditions connected to dog-eating, with negative connotations in many cases.

An article in *Kukminilbo* (July 18, 2004) reported the following: “Recently, our *poshing* culture is approaching to the extreme savagery without caring season, place, or menu. Otters, sea snakes, moon bears and other wild animals, considered to be good for health, are on the verge of extinction because of poaching and indiscriminate hunting. The shameless behavior of our *poshing* tour groups in Southeast Asia deserves international criticism.”

At the stores of Chinese medicine or Health Houses (*keongang-won*), they sell medicine and health food based on the traditional view of nature, and as a part of the business they deal with wild animals that have supposedly special effects. These include snakes, black goats, soft-shelled turtles, and the blood of deer. This phenomenon, though it may appear traditional, actually surfaced rather recently and is intrinsically tied to the heightened health boom. On the other hand, behind the *poshing* culture lie the physical disorders peculiar to modern people – those symptoms coming from irregular lifestyles, stress, excessive drink and smoke, and nutritional bias. Such “unhealthy” modern conditions cast a new spotlight on the traditional prescriptions.

However, more than a few specialists point out that there is no scientific merit to the idea that “the wild animal is good for health.” The health boom will provide a diet and cosmetology for women on one hand, and a *poshing* culture of virility for men on the other. This gender division strongly suggests that the idea in question is a cultural, rather than scientific, one.

This boom reflects the rich Korean society in an ironic way. The indiscriminate hunting of wild animals creates a dire situation for rare species, and at the same time re-invites the prevalence of parasites, the symbol of poverty. The government established the “Wildlife Protection Act” in 2002, but the poaching continues. The *poshing* culture, backed by economic power, is spreading the problem up to the global level. “The ‘*poshing* expedition’ to Southeast Asia that came into fashion in the early 1990s is still prosperous...The yearly import of dogs and soft-shelled turtles, the representative *poshing* food, is approaching ten billion *won*.”(ibid.) The scene of Korean tourists sipping bile from a tube inserted into the abdomen of a living bear has been critically reported since the 1990s.

Such a problem belongs to a subculture aimed toward the tastes of limited people, but it is joining the health boom and traditionalism to create a large stream. The dog also plays a central role in this context. Wild animals are considered to be good for health, as they are closer to nature than livestock. So, in this sense, the dog belongs to the category of wild animals along with free-range chickens, wild ducks, pheasants, and hares. The *Moran* Market, located in a suburb of Seoul, is a periodic market specializing in wild animals such as living hares, ducks, chickens, and dogs and cats. The daily turnover of dog meat is said to reach more than two billion *won*.

The health boom, though it may look traditionalist, actually includes drastic transformations, through which animals are converted from the object of sacrifice into the context of health and virility. The *Keongang-won* (health house) is said to have grown in a rapid way recently. This boom relies upon the “magical” thinking that man returns to nature by assimilating natural elements into the body and recovers health while regaining the lost wild power. In this context the

dog as a liminal animal belongs to the domain of wild animals, not livestock. But in modern Korea, there is little remaining of the traditional community, religious values, or cosmology that consider the dog as a sacrifice. As the connection to the total society and the cosmos has been waning, only the individual desire for health and virility is growing conspicuous. Along with such a surge, the dog fluctuates among the different categories of livestock, wild animal, and pet. Nevertheless, there is still a belief among the proponents that dog meat has such similar ingredients to human flesh that it is most suitable for digestion. The modern dietetics secretly gives a new life to the sense that dog-eating is somehow connected to man-eating (cf. Lévi-Strauss 2001).

Behind the harsh debates lies this ontological battle about the dog. Let's move to the other pole of the battle, pet culture.

5. Tradition or Bad Habit

In today's Korea, the whole land has been developed up to the last corner, and the majority of people are living in cities like Seoul. The concentration of urban population requires the building of high-rise housing, so the majority of Koreans are spending their lives in a standardized space, separated from nature^{*6}.

In many cases, a pet is an imported small dog that you can care for indoors. The popular breeds include Maltese, toy poodle, Shih Tzu, miniature Schnauzer, Yorkshire terrier, etc. Their inclinations are suitable for indoor care. They do not bark persistently, nor do they bother the owner very much. They do not work for hunting or nursing. They are invented breeds just to pet. So it is a "natural" sensibility to treat the dog as a "family member." Such pet culture is forming a huge market now in Korean society.

According to the Korean Kennel Club (<http://www.kkc.or.kr/>), the population that pets dogs exceeds 2,500,000, and the related market has grown up to the volume of 1,200 billion *won*. The market showed temporary stagnancy due to a depression in 2003, but it still boasts a yearly growth rate between 15 and 20 percent. The recent trend is the escalation of luxuriousness: the increase of importing luxurious "brand" breeds, even the development of special brands of perfume, cosmetics, and accessories for pets. There are exhibitions and fashion shows for dog-lovers and highly popular TV program about pets. There are hospitals, beauty salons, hotels, restaurants, funeral parlors, theme parks -- all of which are provided exclusively for dogs and dog-lovers.

The gross market is still behind that of the Japanese, but there is no basic difference between the two countries. For example, on the blog *Puppy News* (<http://puppynews.co.kr/>), the information on dogs, domestic and international, is updated daily with rich illustrations. You can easily get recent information of dogs, and announcement of events. The frequent update of recent news from Japan and the West is creating information space reflecting both local customs and global trend. Such cyberspace with no time lag is contributing to the development of pet culture as a huge market.

With this vast social landscape for background, the voice against the dog-eating custom is growing. Try to access the site of Anti-Dog Meat Movement Headquarters (<http://www.admh.org/>), and you will be welcomed with the sad expressions of caged dogs, accompanied by sad music. The passage entitled "Prayer of *nurong-i* (indigenous yellow dog)" is displayed to highlight the pitiful appeal of the dogs on their way to butchery. This is a Korean NGO site that provides a lot of materials in Korean and English to manifest their position. They oppose the dog-eating

custom not because they are conscious of foreigners' eyes, but because many Korean people abhor such inhumane and savage actions -- despite some people's insistence that it is a Korean tradition, it spread just during the period of *Choson* Dynasty (1392-1910) that banned Buddhism and monopolized Confucianism as state creed, so such an insistence would rather lead to the "corruption of our national soul and culture." "It is a cruel, faithless culture to slaughter dogs for man's health and pleasure, when those animals trust man and live as a family member. We must abolish it to protect our image as a trading country, to preserve the global environment, and to do good for our descendants".

Such a clear opposition has been rarely expressed against the dog-eating culture, but it comes from the vast social background -- namely, the pet culture embedded in the urban lifestyle. But we need some reservation concerning the view that the pet culture fights against the dog-eating culture.

As mentioned previously, because the dog-eating is an underground custom, it is difficult to grasp the reliable statistical facts. The estimation of the annual butchery ranges from one million to three million dogs. There is no reliable research to identify the number of people who practice the dog-eating custom. It is a rough picture that men eat dog meat more frequently than women, and that many eat it only in summer, so not many have daily practice. The relationship between the pet dog and the edible dog is not so clear-cut, which is one of the reasons the confirmation of the butchery number is so difficult. The dog lovers' criticism that man should not eat his friend is usually refuted by the statement that the edible dog is raised on a special farm, so the pet dog is not eaten. But this refutation is apparently against facts. A TV documentary revealed that the pet indoor dog is also traded to eat, and some even have a partial taste towards it^{*7}. According to the result of research, those who pet the dog will eat it with almost the same ratio (one third) as ordinary people^{*8}. So the battle is fought not on the level of actuality, but of idea. The real social influences of the battle are hard to evaluate. On such a premise, I will refer to the "opposition party" in Korea.

The most persistent activist groups that oppose the dog-eating are NGO for animal welfare. There are six organizations in South Korea. I have met the representatives of two groups for interviews. For their activities, the dog meat is a big issue. Animal abuse and abandoned dogs also present a big problem, deeply related to the dog-eating custom. For people abuse or abandon their dogs without hesitation, when they treat them merely as food. So the activists agree upon the point that they should terminate the custom in order to establish the idea of animal welfare in society. But their strategies and methods vary to quite a degree, from radical opposition to realistic improvement.

For instance, the Korean government revised the Animal Protection Act in 2007, and in that process, those organizations pressured the government actively. However, the government did not include the ban of dog-eating, which caused a gap between the organizations that protested and dropped out of the negotiation, and those that compromised with the government in a realistic way.

According to a representative of CARE (Coexistence of Animal Rights on Earth), established in 2002, the history of Korean animal welfare movement goes back no more than ten years. Since the very first group started its movement, expecting the exterior pressure from the West, it created many side-effects, including domestic repulsion. The aforementioned Anti-Dog Meat Movement Headquarters was also cunning enough to pick up this controversial topic with political ambition,

rather than with pure interest in dogs and animals. It is said that they suspended their activities after attracting a lot of public attention in a sentimentalist manner. The opposition movement against dog-eating developed to a remarkable degree, joining with various social actors on one hand, and arousing nationalism and delineating a clear political landscape for this problem on the other. But such turbulence is calming down. Some organizations, including CARE, still practice a summer street campaign each year to protest dog-eating, which is covered by the media as a seasonal topic. Basically, it seems that the core of their activities is proceeding at a steadier yet more obscure level.

How about the real influences of the advocates, on the other hand? I already mentioned that over 70 % voted for the legalization of dog meat on the net. But it is very unlikely that this result reflects the real social influences. It would be more probable to assume that this result reflects the atmosphere at a given moment and the nature of the internet, rather than the general voice of society. Prof. Ann, or Dr. Dogmeat, testified about this point to me:

When the dog meat controversy became the focus of attention, a lot of people used his discourse. But there has been no persistent movement. As soon as the turbulence calmed down, it was just gone. The attempt of the legalization was gone, as soon as the World Cup was completed. He could not stand still with the obsequious attitude of the Korean government towards the Western pressure, so started his research out of righteous indignation. But his endeavor has never met any real understanding or support. He was frank enough to tell me that his activities were thoroughly isolated from society*⁹.

We should not forget that besides researchers, there are other people who are engaged with breeding and butchery of dogs as an occupation. When I had several occasions to visit dog farms, I was surprised that the dogs in cage did not look like indigenous but the Japanese breed, Tosa. They have been produced from the repeated crossbreeding between the indigenous and the Tosa to promote speedy growth (5 or 6 months from birth to shipment) and special breeds for ample meat. This is another anecdote to show the development of globalization found in the crossbreeding not only of pet dogs but also of edible dogs. To repeat, since dog meat is not legally categorized as meat, their breeding and sanitation are rather sloppy.

When I had a chance to meet a butcher, he tried to show that he was proud of his occupation. Although he personally agreed with the legalization of the dog business, he told me that stockbreeders were against it in fear of the growth of dog meat, and so were dog dealers who could do their business with no aid from the government but with tax-exempt privilege. This view is common to anyone in the dog business. So it is not only the animal welfare organizations but also their opponents who reject the legalization. Only those whose views are irrelevant to real interests feel relieved with



Figure2.
Hybrid dogs in cage



Figure 3.
Dog Farm



Figure 4.
Dishes at dog cuisine restaurant

the legalization.

Seen this way, the lukewarm and ambiguous attitude of the Korean government can be evaluated as reflecting the atmosphere of the whole society. The manifest advocates are as isolated from society as the manifest oppositions. They temporarily flare out, as far as the Western media incite them. If the conflict gets escalated, the influence of the advocates grows high somewhere on the internet. But it does not grow high enough to create or maintain any persistent movement. On one hand, there are many who sustain their livelihoods with dog meat in the farms, butchery, restaurants, and Health Houses. On the other hand, the critics represented by animal welfare groups have more persistent power. But they will lose social support if they proceed in too extreme of a manner. With such an invisible scheme of the battle on the premise, it would be not clever for the government to go with only one side.

6. Invisible Social Change

In the process of the marginalization of dog-eating, there are many entangled factors: the transformations of lifestyle and values along with urbanization and Westernization; the conversion of pet culture into the social mainstream; and various premodern socio-cultural strata, including

taboo. These factors cannot be attributed simply to exterior pressure; they also come from internal social changes. On the other hand, there are other factors such as nationalism, health boom, and archaic sacrifice or totemism which justify the dog-eating. When the Western criticism is heightened, nationalism heats up, and it looks as if the battle between the two forces dominates the stage. But seen from a wider perspective, that may be just a single scene of a magnificent drama.

How, then, will the dog-eating custom develop in the future -- not only as a politicized tradition, but also as a somatized habitus? If Westernization can be summarized as a similar process with modernization and civilization, the consequence would be simple and evident. But there is still an alternative possibility. In that respect, we cannot ignore China, the “center” of the dog-eating custom.

The present situation in China looks similar to that of South Korea at the time of the Seoul Olympic Games. The undemocratic government banned dog-meat cuisine only at the time of the Beijing Olympic Games, and let the same landscape come back after that. It is not only Korean

ethnic groups that have this custom; more than a few Chinese people are said to enjoy it. The reality is yet to be revealed -- and the debate, domestic and international, is expected from now on.

As China further develops, and the self-assertion of traditional culture is heightened, the justification of the dog-eating custom may gain greater leverage. But if democratization is accompanied by social development, it would be more likely that the repulsion against the custom becomes a general trend, along with the development of animal welfare movement and the expansion of pet culture. Since it is most unlikely that the literal return to the archaic tradition constitutes the mainstream of nationalism, it is ridiculous to expect a scenario exceptional only to China.

However, with such reservations, can we really conclude that the dog-eating custom must disappear by necessity? To rephrase the same question, why not dog meat, but beef and chicken? Is there any really reasonable reason to persuade modern people? We ordinarily eat meat that has been already categorized and packaged, that is a "commodity" with no fresh trace of butchery. We are not living in the world where the distinction between livestock and friend makes any meaningful boundary.

For instance, if we see the well-known film *Our Daily Bread* (2005), which forces us to face up to the real scenes of butchery, we can easily understand the absurdity of labeling only a particular kind of meat consumption as being "savage" and "cruel." The farm, or more correctly the factory, in the advanced countries is far cleaner and more efficient than the dog farm in Korea. But this "rational" system of food production has unquestionably evolved as a slaughter machine, which is supporting "our" daily life.

Is it not taken for granted that meat-eating of any kind is essentially a horrible and evil act? It is quite natural that people who criticize dog-eating from the point of animal welfare tend to be vegetarians. The consumption of meat in general has grown rather recently along with the economic development in South Korea. The import of beef has also grown steadily. In a sense, the consumption of dog meat is not in conflict with such a recent trend.

The majority of people do not think deeply about what should be eaten, or what should not. They usually just follow the custom and consume what it allows. Be they advocates or the critics of dog-eating, they are minority. But in order to predict the future, I believe, thinking with the minority is more important than following the majority who conventionally follow the particular values of the current times. Today's stock farming as globalized industry cannot be justified as a "healthy" or "sane" culture from any perspective. If it is the original sin that man will fulfill one's carnivorous appetite by sacrificing other living creatures, learning from the archaic culture of sacrifice is not completed.

The dog-eating custom in South Korea has shown unexpected vigor, supported by nationalism and the health boom. It can be summarized that, despite the vicissitudes, it has grown to a more powerful degree in the underground, and is about to become a symbol of infidelity to the development of Korean society.

I have no intention to repeat that dog-eating is an irrational, savage custom to be abolished as soon as possible. My point is that any custom needs the social ground to sustain it, and if such a condition changes, the meaning of the custom must change, which affects its sustenance. The pet culture will also accompany the "irrational" "savage" dimension, anything but more "advanced" than *poshing* culture. Both "exploit" nature in their own fashion; it's just that their styles are in contrast to each other.

Poshing culture attempts to return to nature by assimilating wild power into the body, while pet culture attempts to humanize nature by domesticating wildness. If the former is conspicuously exploiting nature in the masculine and anthropocentric fashion by strengthening vigor and virility, the latter is also doing the same thing in the feminine and narcissistic fashion. Both attempt to transcend the distance between man and nature, but will end in either the weakening or sterilization of nature.

Anyway, there is no question that, considering every social condition, pet culture will absolutely defeat *poshing* culture sooner or later. The bizarreness of pet culture is more acceptable to the average modern lifestyle, with less conflict and contradiction. But even if the dog-eating custom disappears, it will become more and more evident that the modern lifestyle itself is full of conflict and contradiction.

Endnotes

- * 1 This paper is based on my presentation for the session, “Global Food Scenes in Asia: A Roundtable Discussion” at International Convention of Asia Scholars 6, held in Daejeon, South Korea, on August 8, 2009. I would like to thank the chair, Prof. Kageaki Kajiwara, who organized the session and gave me useful comments. Thanks are due to Prof. Ann Yong-Geun, Dr. Kim Rakhyun, NGO activists, and many others who supported my research. I would also like to extend my gratitude to anonymous reviewers for advising me to polish my draft.
- * 2 They are Livestock Processing Act (1962), Livestock Act (1963), and Food Sanitation Act (1962). For full analysis of the legal dimension of the dog meat debate, see R. E. Kim (2008). According to his examination, “it is not illegal to raise and slaughter dogs for consumption, as long as it does not violate the general anti-cruelty provisions of APA [Animal Protection Act]” (p. 208-9). The report by Korean Association for Policy Studies shows the basic stance of the Korean government (Hnaguk chǒngchaek hakhoe 2004). For academic study of the dog-eating custom in South Korea, see Ann (2000), and Chu (2004). Many related materials can be obtained on the internet and in the past issues of various magazines and newspaper.
- * 3 There is a different origin myth that the Korean dog-eating custom comes from the New Year celebration. According to this story, Korean people used to put a picture of a tiger on the main gate at the New Year. This custom was turned into the hanging of a dog at the gate for sacrifice, and eating its meat thereafter. It is questionable if this story tells anything substantial about real history, but deserves note that it still symbolizes liminality. (Kang 2000: 232)
- * 4 For further investigation, the report of folkloristic research during the colonial period, *Shakuson, Kiu, Antaku* (Confucian Ritual, Rain Ritual, and House Ritual), would provide a clue. According to this research, the rain ritual was frequently performed at the time of prolonged drought in colonial Korea, in which the dog was often sacrificed along with a cow, hog, and chicken. For instance, in Shilsǒng County, Chǒlla Nam Province, “people set up the ritual site by Dragon Hole (the vortex in the mountain river stream) where they have long believed the dragon lives. They offer wine, fruit, and dried meat that have been prepared by widows. Then they slaughter a dog, wash it with water from Dragon Hole, sprinkle its blood around there, throw its head into Dragon Hole, and pray with ritual recitation.” (Murakami 1938: 111) As this case shows, people intentionally chose “dirty animals” like a dog and hog, slaughter them, and polluted the ritual site with blood. Murakami called this process a “ceremony of impurification,” and found it to be a most prevalent part in the rain ritual (p. 142). He interpreted it as a paradoxical symbolic expression using the nature of the Dragon King that controlled the climate and hated the impurity, and as a threatening prayer and “challenge” to it. It seems that the sacrifice of the dog had a different purpose -- the dog as an *ying* animal was expected to invite rain in the overwhelming *yang* climate, drought. Anyway, it is confirmable that the dog is not just a “dirty animal” but rather a liminal being closely related to ambivalent values. Such symbolism can never be found in Confucian rites.
- * 5 It is noteworthy that the “history of taboo within the Korean tradition” had been also constructed through the complex negotiations with the outside world.
- * 6 According to statistics in 2000, the ratio of the apartment in all kinds of newly built houses in the year is as much as 85 %. The degree of high density and high rising has been growing year after year. The high-rise apartment has gained the position of the “most universal type of house” in South Korea, whether urban or rural. The Mapo Apartment built in 1962 is said to be the first example, which the military junta tried to celebrate as a “symbol of national modernization” and as a “touchstone of life revolution.” But its positive image was not generally accepted in the 1960s. The ratio of the apartment was less than 1 %. In the 1970s it gradually came to be the target of envy among middle-class people, and an object of speculation along with this tendency. After the 1980s it became commonplace for the whole nation, the scene bristled with high-rise apartments can be witnessed everywhere including the countryside. Such a “naturalized” scene has transcended the past position of modern comfortable space, and started to invite the critical reconsideration in the perspectives of closed space

isolated from public space, and of “nomadization of urban people” (Pak 2006). The spread of pet culture may be interpreted as a desperate attempt to “re-naturalize” the “anti-naturalization” of urban landscape.

- * 7 *Sobija Kobal* (Consumer Reports). July 11, 2008.
- * 8 *Puppy News*. August 8, 2006. According to the article of *Montly Choson* (Jan, 2000), 52 % of the Korean population has eaten dog meat (male 73%, female 31%). Out of them 28% eats more than once a year, 10% eats just once every few years, 14% has no habit any longer after the past experience. So the estimation that one third of the total population will habitually eat it is confirmed in this research, too.
- * 9 He has no chance to discuss this problem at his college (young students will never show interest). He can find the stage of his activities only on the net. When the controversy heated up, the many e-mails of attack and harassment crashed down the server of college. After that he moved his web site to the outside server, but he has poor responses these days. His intention is an academic and serious one. He plans to publish a second volume of his book through further research. Related works have been published as the debate heated up. But Prof. Ann assured me was the only one who has continued academic work on this issue in the country.

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