

Consumption of Man's Best Friends: Dogs

By: Gunhwan Kim

“Woof! Woof!” dogs are barking. “Smack,” a sound of swinging club is heard. And in few minutes, one can hear humans laughing and enjoying their meal. Although South Korea is my home country and I have a huge pride for its cultures, dog consumption is a despicable and shameful reality in South Korea. Koreans believe that eating dog is very healthy and dogs are widely consumed as a famous seasonal food.

The tradition of dog meat consumption traces far back to ancient Korea. The most apparent reason for eating dogs was due to Korea's geography. Korea is very mountainous which are “conditions being less suitable for farming huge numbers of livestock” (Kim 5). And because of this, “cattle were treated with respect” (Kim 5). On the other hand, dogs were technically like a pig” (Kim 5). Pigs and dogs were only animals that could be easily raised on such geography. In the ancient times, people called dogs ““ddong-gae”, literally meaning “shit-dog,” because such dogs ate and survived on human feces, like pigs did” (Kim 5). It was more common back then to raise dogs as food rather than companions and pets. Another reason why dog eating was encouraged was due to Korea's proximity to China. In China's “classical medical texts also recommend dog meat to fortify the spirit, warm the body, and aid in recovery from illness” (Dog and Cat 1). So not only dog meat was treated as common food but people continued to eat it because it was a form of medicine as well. As the dog eating was becoming more and more common, Korea developed its own tradition. People started to eat dogs during “Bok” days, which are “three hottest days of the lunar calendar” because dog meat was believed to “overcome heat” (Dog and Cat 1). The most recent reason for development for dog consumption in Korea was caused by “Japanese colonial rule in 1910 to 1945” because “there was widespread famine” (The History). Due to the lack of money and cattle, Koreans had no choice but to rely on dogs for the primary source of meat

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during these times. Korea's dog consumption custom has risen from many sources such as its geography, different treatment of dogs, China's influence, superstitions, and lack of food during Japanese colonial rule.

The most unacceptable part of the dog consumption culture in South Korea is the cruel mistreatment of dogs. Today, dogs used for food in Korea usually are kidnapped from the street or from rural areas. These "dogs live in tiny cages, separated from their mothers at an early age and some are slaughtered as pups" (Current Situation). Sometimes they even burst dogs' eardrums or castigate them to be more obedient. Many dogs go through psychological shocks while they are captive. These vile actions are committed because Koreans believe that dog meat is more tender and effective when dogs are killed under production of high adrenaline. Dogs are "electrocuted, hanged, beaten or burned to death" (Current Situation) and "perhaps hung for a while, beaten, burned with a blow torch, boiled alive or slowly bled out" (The History) just to increase the adrenaline in the flesh for tender meat. These mistreatments are the most concerning part of the dog eating culture in Korea. Most people are not freaked out about the fact that Koreans eat dogs but their vicious mistreatment of dogs that are to be cooked.

Another major disgust of the dog eating culture in Korea comes from the Western view that dogs are companions and friends of human race. The ironic flaw of this argument is that, although it is true that dogs have been friends and companions in Western culture, "in Korea, until recently, dogs haven't been pets" (Saletan). Therefore "by the "companion" standard, it's OK to eat them" (Saletan). Also the opposing viewpoint argues that dog eating is not very barbaric considering that in Western culture, people eat cows, chickens, fish, deer, and even alligators. Just like some of these animals are grown up to be eaten, they argue that dogs are in the same situation in Korea. Their logic is that "The value of an animal depends on how you treat it. If you befriend it, it's a friend. If you raise it for food, it's food" (Saletan).

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Although many people might protect dog eating culture, even the supporters of dog meat are disgusted by inhumane treatment of dogs. They believe that the management of dogs that are to be eaten is “needlessly cruel” (Saletan). Thus it can be compromised that the most pertinent issue is stopping these unnecessarily violent methods of dealing with dogs in general.

The problem of dog eating also rises from the legal vagueness on the issue. The law on livestock says, “dogs in Korea are, by legal definition, “domestic animals” under the Livestock Act 1963 (LA) 38 while they are not included in the list of livestock under the Livestock Processing Act 1962 (LPA)” (Kim 8). This made raising and slaughtering dogs for food to be neither legal nor illegal. There was a case in 1966, in which a person was charged for selling dog meat, where “Seoul District Court judge, referring to Article 7 of the Presidential Decree of the FSA listing the scope of meat as “flesh, internal organs, tail, [etcetera] edible parts of a beast produced for food,”⁴³ ruled that dog meat is food as “it is widely eaten” (Kim 9). This was the first legal action which took a side on the issue in Korea and supported dog eating. Therefore, Korean society continued to consume dog meat until it was challenged internationally. During 1988 Seoul Olympics, the world pressured Korea to stop selling dog meat or they would refuse to participate in the event. The Korean government had no choice but to announce “initiative to ban dog meat sales in urban areas” (Kim 10). However after the Olympics these measures were abandoned. Korea was again challenged during 2002 World Cup when “the President of the International Federation of Football Association (FIFA) sent an official letter (dated November 6, 2001) to Korea requesting a ban on the sale of dog meat during the World Cup” (Kim 10-11). This time the Korean government flatly refused the request and said that Korea will not take an extensive measure due to a cultural difference.

Due to the conservative opinions, the deep root of dog eating in Korean culture, and

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resisting public towards ending the dog consumption, the measure must start with a baby step.

Currently “dog meat is the fourth most-consumed meat” (Kim 2) in South Korea. People argue that the dog eating culture disgusts Western people as “a culture that horrifies Hindus and mortifies Muslims with global emporiums hawking beef and pork” (Eating Dogs). Not only in Korea but Dog meat is a “sophisticated cuisine of China and Vietnam” as well as it is practiced “even in France, Germany and Switzerland” (Eating Dogs). Therefore it would be very hard to stop the consumption of dogs in South Korea right away. But it is still possible to prevent the future dog eating through series of steps.

There is a no doubt that even the dog eating supporters are horrified with the mistreatment of dogs. Starting with this common ground, dog eating culture can be slowly eradicated in Korea. First of all, it is necessary to push for a stronger animal anti-cruelty law that specifically prohibits unregulated or unlicensed management of dogs. Secondly, young children must be taught at a young age that eating dog has no relation with one's health, intelligence, and body temperature. Along with the regulation of dog processing, the government should impose a higher tax on dog meat. Since the business is thriving, putting tax on dog meat would increase the government's revenue greatly as well as discourage people from eating it as often. The most important part about these solutions is to persuade the government that these laws and regulations must be done because it is going to help out Korea and its government not because the dog meat industry is barbaric. It is important to point out that these laws will better Korea's representation in international level and increase the government's revenue. So supporters are not offended or would be as defensive against the new measures. Although these laws would not immediately stop the practice of eating dogs, it will help to diminish the culture slowly.

Dog consumption is very disgusting and repulsive to Western people. Dogs are beaten to death just to please the mouth of Koreans. The myths and superstitions about dog

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meat are bringing terrible mistreatment to dogs. But it is also very important to realize that dog meat is an integral part of Korean culture. To Koreans, dog meat is same as beef or pork to Western people. It is wrong to forcefully inhibit dog consumption, but it can be done through series of measures that seems to be harmless. These measures must start with an anti-cruelty law against animals. And then the government should tax dog meat for revenues which would discourage people from eating it. On the same time, it is important teach children that dog meat is not physically or mentally beneficial. Slowly but dog eating practice will diminish.

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