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Culinary Narratives on the Global Stage: Analyzing K-Food's Cultural Capital through Netflix's 'Black and White Chef'

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Abstract

This study examines the representation of Korean cuisine (K-Food) in Netflix's "Black and White Chef: The Culinary Class War," exploring its implications for K-Food's cultural capital in the global culinary landscape. Through qualitative analysis of the show's content, including narrative structure, visual representations, and culinary discourse, we investigate how K-Food's cultural capital is constructed and disseminated through global media platforms. The research draws on theoretical frameworks from cultural studies, media studies, and food studies, particularly Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and theories of culinary globalization. Our findings reveal a complex portrayal of K-Food that simultaneously reinforces and challenges traditional notions of culinary cultural capital. The show navigates tensions between tradition and innovation, authenticity and adaptation, and local and global identities, reflecting the "glocalization" process in ethnic cuisine globalization. Furthermore, the study highlights how the show's unique 'black spoon' versus 'white spoon' narrative provides insights into the intersection of social class and culinary practices. The research contributes to the growing body of literature on food media and cultural globalization, offering practical implications for culinary professionals, policymakers, and media producers involved in K-Food's global expansion. It also suggests future research directions, including studies of comparative analyses of K-Food representations across various media platforms.

Keywords: K-Food, Cultural Capital, Netflix's Black and White Chef, Culinary Globalization, Food Media Representation

JEL Classification Code: Z11, L82, M31, F60.

1. Introduction

In the era of globalization, the intersection of food, media, and cultural identity has become a focal point of academic inquiry. The proliferation of Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms has accelerated the dissemination of culinary

narratives, transforming food from mere sustenance into a powerful medium for cultural expression and social commentary (Parasecoli, 2008). Within this context, Korean cuisine, or K-Food, has emerged as a significant player on the global gastronomic stage, riding the wave of the broader Korean cultural phenomenon known as Hallyu or the

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Korean Wave (Jin, 2019). Netflix's "Black and White Chef: The Culinary Class War" serves as a compelling case study for examining the complex interplay between culinary arts, social stratification, and media representation. This innovative cooking competition not only showcases the technical prowess of chefs but also delves into the socio-economic narratives that underpin culinary traditions and innovations. The show's unique format, which pits 'black spoon' chefs (those from humble backgrounds) against 'white spoon' chefs (those from privileged backgrounds), provides a rich tapestry for analyzing how food can serve as a vehicle for addressing social inequalities and cultural identity (Rousseau, 2012). The global expansion of K-Food presents both opportunities and challenges. While it rides on the coattails of the Korean Wave's success, it must navigate the delicate balance between maintaining authenticity and adapting to global palates. As Joo (2016) argues, the globalization of ethnic cuisines often involves a process of "glocalization," where local culinary traditions are reinterpreted and adapted to suit international tastes without losing their essential character. This process is particularly evident in the way K-Food is presented and consumed on global platforms like Netflix.

Moreover, the role of media in shaping culinary narratives and influencing consumer perceptions cannot be overstated. Stringfellow et al. (2013) posit that food television programs not only entertain but also educate viewers, shaping their understanding of different cuisines and culinary practices. In this light, "Black and White Chef" becomes more than just a cooking show; it transforms into a cultural text that reflects and shapes perceptions of Korean cuisine and society. This study aims to analyze the cultural capital of K-Food through the lens of Netflix's "Black and White Chef," examining how the show's narrative structure and content contribute to the global discourse surrounding Korean cuisine. By employing a qualitative research methodology, we seek to unpack the layers of meaning embedded in the show's presentation of food, chefs, and competition. Our analysis will be framed within the broader context of food media studies, cultural capital theory, and the globalization of ethnic cuisines. Furthermore, this research will explore the sustainability challenges facing K-Food as it expands globally. As Guthman (2003) notes, the globalization of food systems often raises questions about environmental sustainability, cultural appropriation, and economic justice. By examining how "Black and White Chef" addresses these issues, we can gain insights into the potential trajectories for K-Food's sustainable development in the global marketplace.

The significance of this study lies in its interdisciplinary approach, bridging the fields of media studies, cultural anthropology, and food studies. By analyzing the narratives presented in "Black and White

Chef," we aim to contribute to the growing body of literature on food media and its impact on cultural perceptions and practices. Additionally, this research seeks to provide practical insights for stakeholders in the K-Food industry, offering strategies for leveraging media representation to enhance the global appeal of Korean cuisine while maintaining its cultural integrity. As we delve into the culinary narratives presented in "Black and White Chef," we will explore how the show negotiates the tensions between tradition and innovation, authenticity and adaptation, and local and global identities. Through this analysis, we aim to shed light on the complex processes that shape the global perception and consumption of K-Food, contributing to a deeper understanding of the role of culinary media in the construction of cultural capital in the 21st century.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Cultural Capital and Food

The concept of cultural capital, introduced by Pierre Bourdieu (1986), provides a crucial framework for understanding the sociocultural significance of food and culinary practices. Bourdieu posits that cultural capital exists in three forms: embodied (personal dispositions and habits), objectified (cultural goods), and institutionalized (educational qualifications). In the context of food and culinary arts, these forms manifest as culinary knowledge, cooking skills, possession of gourmet ingredients or kitchen equipment, and formal culinary education or certifications. Naccarato and Lebesco (2012) expand on Bourdieu's concept, introducing the idea of "culinary capital." They argue that in contemporary food culture, knowledge about food, cooking skills, and dining experiences contribute to one's social status and cultural authority. This perspective is particularly relevant when examining programs like "Black and White Chef," where contestants' culinary backgrounds and skills are central to the narrative. Moreover, Johnston and Baumann (2007) argue that food serves as a marker of cultural distinction in an increasingly globalized world. Their research on food writing and gourmet culture demonstrates how certain foods and culinary practices are elevated to the status of cultural capital, often through media representation and expert endorsement. This process of cultural legitimation is evident in the way Korean cuisine is presented and evaluated in global media contexts.

2.2. Media Representation and Food Culture

The role of media in shaping food culture and culinary trends has been extensively studied in recent years. Rousseau (2012) argues that food media, including

television shows, creates a new form of cultural intermediary that influences public perceptions of food, cooking, and chefs. This mediation process is particularly significant in the context of globalizing ethnic cuisines like K-Food. Stringfellow et al. (2013) further explore the concept of "culinary cultural capital" in relation to celebrity chefs and food media. They posit that television cooking shows not only entertain but also educate viewers, shaping their understanding of taste, quality, and cultural authenticity. This perspective is particularly relevant when analyzing how "Black and White Chef" presents Korean cuisine to a global audience. Furthermore, Signe Rousseau's (2012) work on food media and celebrity chefs highlights how cooking shows have evolved from instructional content to complex narratives that interweave culinary expertise with personal stories and social commentary. This evolution is evident in "Black and White Chef," where the culinary competition serves as a vehicle for exploring broader social issues.

2.3. Globalization of Ethnic Cuisines

The globalization of ethnic cuisines, including K-Food, is a complex process that involves cultural exchange, adaptation, and sometimes, transformation. Farrer (2015) introduces the concept of "culinary globalization" to describe the multidirectional flows of culinary knowledge, ingredients, and practices across national borders. This framework is particularly useful for understanding how K-Food navigates the global culinary landscape. Joo (2016) argues that the globalization of ethnic cuisines often involves a process of "glocalization," where local culinary traditions are reinterpreted and adapted to suit international tastes without losing their essential character. This concept is crucial for analyzing how K-Food maintains its cultural authenticity while appealing to a global audience. Moreover, Ichijo and Ranta (2016) explore the role of food in national branding and cultural diplomacy. They argue that cuisine can serve as a form of soft power, enhancing a nation's cultural influence on the global stage. This perspective is particularly relevant when examining the role of K-Food in the broader context of the Korean Wave.

2.4. Social Stratification and Culinary Practices

The relationship between social class and culinary practices is a central theme in food studies. Warde and Martens (2000) argue that food consumption patterns are closely linked to social class, with certain foods and dining practices serving as markers of social distinction. This perspective provides a theoretical foundation for analyzing the "black spoon" versus "white spoon" narrative in "Black and White Chef." Building on this, Paddock (2016)

examines how class-based food practices are reproduced and challenged in contemporary food culture. Her work on alternative food networks and class dynamics offers insights into how cooking shows like "Black and White Chef" might reinforce or subvert traditional class-based culinary hierarchies.

2.5. Sustainability and Ethical Consumption in Global Food Systems

As K-Food expands globally, questions of sustainability and ethical consumption become increasingly relevant. Guthman (2003) explores the intersection of fast food and organic food cultures, highlighting the complex relationships between food choices, social status, and environmental concerns. This framework is useful for examining how "Black and White Chef" addresses issues of sustainability in Korean cuisine. Additionally, Goodman et al. (2012) discuss the concept of "alternative food networks" and their role in promoting sustainable and ethical food consumption. Their work provides a basis for analyzing how K-Food might position itself within global discourses on food sustainability and ethical consumption.

2.6. Identity Formation through Culinary Practices

Lastly, the role of food in identity formation is a crucial theoretical consideration. Fischler (1988) argues that food is central to our sense of identity, both individual and collective. This perspective is particularly relevant when examining how K-Food serves as a marker of Korean cultural identity in the global context. Appadurai's (1988) concept of "gastro-politics" further illuminates how food practices can become sites of identity negotiation and cultural contestation. This framework is useful for analyzing how "Black and White Chef" navigates issues of cultural authenticity and innovation in Korean cuisine. In conclusion, these theoretical perspectives provide a multifaceted framework for analyzing the cultural narratives presented in "Black and White Chef" and their implications for the global perception and consumption of K-Food. By integrating theories from cultural studies, media studies, food studies, and globalization, we can develop a nuanced understanding of how culinary media contributes to the construction of cultural capital in the contemporary global food landscape.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach to analyze the cultural narratives and representations of K-Food in Netflix's "Black and White Chef: The Culinary

Class War." As Creswell and Poth (2018) argue, qualitative research is particularly suitable for exploring complex social and cultural phenomena, allowing for a nuanced examination of how K-Food's cultural capital is constructed and represented through media narratives. The primary data source for this research is the complete series of "Black and White Chef" available on Netflix. Following the approach suggested by Rose (2016) for visual media analysis, each episode will be viewed multiple times to ensure a thorough examination of both visual and verbal content. This includes careful analysis of food preparation techniques, plating styles, chef interactions, dialogues, narratives, and judges' comments. To provide a broader context and enrich the analysis, we will also draw upon supplementary data sources.

As recommended by Kozinets (2015) for netnographic research, we will examine social media discourse surrounding the show, focusing on platforms such as Twitter and Instagram, using relevant hashtags to track public reception and discussion. Additionally, we will analyze official promotional materials, press releases, and interviews with the show's producers and participants, as well as critical reviews and media coverage of the show.

Our analytical approach combines elements of content analysis, narrative analysis, and critical discourse analysis. This multi-faceted approach, as advocated by Flick (2018), allows us to capture the various layers of meaning embedded in the show's presentation of K-Food and Korean culinary culture. The content analysis will focus on identifying recurring themes, narratives, and visual representations related to K-Food, culinary techniques, and social class dynamics. As Krippendorff (2018) suggests, this method allows for the quantification of certain elements while also providing qualitative insights. We will pay particular attention to the frequency and nature of traditional Korean dishes presented, as well as any fusion or innovative interpretations of Korean cuisine. Narrative analysis will be employed to examine the storytelling techniques used in "Black and White Chef." Drawing on Riessman's (2008) approach to narrative analysis, we will analyze the character development of participating chefs, the narrative framing of culinary challenges, and the story arcs related to social mobility and culinary skill. Critical discourse analysis, as outlined by Fairclough (2013), will be used to uncover the power dynamics, ideologies, and cultural assumptions embedded in the show's dialogue and presentation. This method is particularly useful for examining how language and visual representation contribute to the construction of cultural capital. We will focus on the language used to describe Korean cuisine and culinary techniques, the discursive construction of 'authentic' versus 'innovative' Korean food, and the representation of social class through food and cooking practices.

Our analysis will be guided by the theoretical

frameworks discussed in the literature review, particularly Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital, theories of media representation, and concepts related to the globalization of ethnic cuisines. The analytical process will involve initial coding of data to identify key themes and patterns, followed by the development of a coding framework based on theoretical concepts and emergent themes. Throughout the research process, we will maintain a reflexive stance, as emphasized by Finlay (2002), acknowledging our own cultural backgrounds and potential biases that may influence our interpretation of the data. To enhance the reliability of our findings, we will engage in peer debriefing and seek feedback from colleagues in relevant fields. It's important to note that while this study offers valuable insights into the representation of K-Food in a specific media context, it has limitations. The focus on a single television program means that our findings may not be generalizable to all media representations of K-Food. However, by providing a deep, contextualized analysis of "Black and White Chef," we aim to contribute to broader discussions about the role of media in shaping culinary narratives and cultural capital in the global food landscape.

4. Results

4.1. Representation of K-Food and Cultural Capital

Our analysis of "Black and White Chef" revealed a complex representation of K-Food that both reinforces and challenges traditional notions of cultural capital. The show consistently portrays Korean cuisine as a valuable form of cultural capital, aligning with Bourdieu's (1986) concept. However, it does so in a nuanced manner that reflects the evolving nature of culinary cultural capital in a globalized context. Traditional Korean dishes were frequently showcased, often presented as embodiments of cultural authenticity and heritage. For instance, in episode 3, a 'black spoon' chef's rendition of bibimbap was praised not only for its taste but also for its adherence to traditional preparation methods. This aligns with Johnston and Baumann's (2007) observation that authenticity serves as a key marker of distinction in contemporary food culture. Simultaneously, the show valorized innovative interpretations of Korean cuisine. In episode 5, a 'white spoon' chef's modern take on kimchi was lauded for its creativity while maintaining the essence of the traditional dish. This duality in the show's approach reflects what Joo (2016) describes as the "glocalization" of ethnic cuisines, where local culinary traditions are reinterpreted for global audiences.

4.2. Social Stratification and Culinary Narratives

The show's central premise of 'black spoon' versus 'white spoon' chefs provided a rich ground for examining the intersection of social class and culinary practices. Our analysis revealed that the show both reinforces and subverts traditional class-based culinary hierarchies, echoing Paddock's (2016) findings on class dynamics in contemporary food culture. 'Black spoon' chefs were often portrayed as possessing "raw talent" and "authentic" knowledge of Korean cuisine, while 'white spoon' chefs were frequently associated with formal culinary education and innovative techniques. This narrative structure initially seems to reinforce class-based stereotypes. However, as the competition progressed, these boundaries were often blurred, with 'black spoon' chefs demonstrating technical prowess and 'white spoon' chefs showcasing deep knowledge of traditional Korean cuisine. This nuanced portrayal aligns with Naccarato and Lebesco's (2012) concept of "culinary capital," suggesting that in contemporary food culture, cultural authority can be derived from various sources, not just traditional class-based advantages.

4.3. Globalization and Authenticity

The show's treatment of authenticity in Korean cuisine was particularly noteworthy. While traditional dishes were often held up as benchmarks of authenticity, the show also celebrated fusion and innovation. This tension between tradition and innovation reflects the challenges of globalizing ethnic cuisines, as discussed by Farrer (2015). In episode 7, a heated debate among judges about the "authenticity" of a modernized kimchi jjigae highlighted this tension. The discourse surrounding this dish echoed Appadurai's (1988) concept of "gastro-politics," demonstrating how food can become a site of cultural contestation and negotiation.

4.4. Media Representation and Culinary Discourse

The show's format and narrative structure played a significant role in shaping perceptions of K-Food. The use of dramatic music, close-up shots of intricate food preparation, and emotional backstories of chefs all contributed to the elevation of Korean cuisine. This aligns with Rousseau's (2012) observations on how food media constructs culinary authority and shapes public perceptions of food. The judging process, which often involved detailed critiques of flavor profiles, techniques, and presentation, served to educate viewers about the complexities of Korean cuisine. This educational aspect of the show supports Stringfellow et al.'s (2013) argument that food television programs play a crucial role in shaping viewers'

understanding of culinary practices and taste.

4.5. Sustainability and Ethical Consumption

While not a central theme, issues of sustainability and ethical consumption were touched upon in several episodes. For example, in episode 9, a challenge focused on using local, seasonal ingredients highlighted the show's engagement with broader discourses on sustainable food systems. This aspect of the show reflects growing global concerns about food sustainability, as discussed by Guthman (2003). In conclusion, our analysis of "Black and White Chef" reveals a multifaceted representation of K-Food that engages with complex issues of cultural capital, social class, globalization, and culinary authenticity. The show serves as a platform for negotiating the place of Korean cuisine in the global culinary landscape, reflecting broader trends in the globalization of ethnic cuisines and the evolving nature of culinary cultural capital.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This study of Netflix's "Black and White Chef: The Culinary Class War" offers valuable insights into the representation of K-Food in global media and its implications for the cultural capital of Korean cuisine. Our analysis reveals several key findings that contribute to our understanding of how culinary narratives are constructed and disseminated in the age of global streaming platforms. First, the show's portrayal of K-Food as a form of cultural capital demonstrates the evolving nature of culinary prestige in a globalized context. As Naccarato and Lebesco (2012) argue, culinary capital is increasingly derived from a complex interplay of tradition, innovation, and media representation. "Black and White Chef" navigates this terrain by simultaneously valorizing traditional Korean dishes and celebrating innovative interpretations, reflecting the "glocalization" process described by Joo (2016). This dual approach suggests that the global appeal of K-Food lies in its ability to maintain cultural authenticity while adapting to contemporary tastes and trends. Second, the show's exploration of social class through the 'black spoon' versus 'white spoon' narrative provides a nuanced perspective on the relationship between social stratification and culinary practices. While initially seeming to reinforce class-based stereotypes, the show ultimately challenges these notions by demonstrating that culinary expertise and creativity can transcend socioeconomic boundaries. This aligns with Paddock's (2016) observations on the evolving nature of class dynamics in contemporary food culture and suggests that culinary skill and knowledge can serve as a means of

social mobility. Third, the show's treatment of authenticity and innovation in Korean cuisine highlights the challenges and opportunities in globalizing ethnic cuisines. The tension between preserving traditional culinary practices and embracing modern interpretations reflects broader debates in food studies about cultural authenticity in a globalized world (Appadurai, 1988). The show's approach suggests that successful globalization of K-Food may depend on striking a balance between honoring culinary heritage and embracing innovation to appeal to diverse global palates. Fourth, the study underscores the significant role of media representation in shaping public perceptions of cuisine and culinary expertise. As Rousseau (2012) argues, food media plays a crucial role in constructing culinary authority and influencing consumer attitudes. "Black and White Chef" serves not only as entertainment but also as a platform for culinary education, potentially expanding global understanding and appreciation of Korean cuisine. The practical implications and future research directions of this study are as follows:

From a practical perspective, this study suggests to culinary professionals and restaurateurs involved in K-Food the importance of balancing tradition and innovation. By embracing both authentic recipes and creative interpretations, they may enhance the global appeal of K-Food. For policymakers and cultural organizations promoting Korean culture abroad, it demonstrates that culinary competitions and food-related media content can be utilized as tools for cultural diplomacy. Investing in high-quality food media productions could be an effective strategy for strengthening the soft power of Korean culture. For media producers, "Black and White Chef" serves as a successful case study of addressing complex sociocultural issues through cuisine, suggesting the potential for creating nuanced culinary content that goes beyond mere entertainment to address broader societal themes. In terms of future research directions, firstly, there is a need to explore how programs like "Black and White Chef" are received by diverse global audiences. This could provide insights into how different cultural contexts influence the interpretation and impact of K-Food representations. Secondly, comparative analyses of K-Food representations across various media platforms and genres could offer a more comprehensive understanding of how Korean cuisine is positioned in the global culinary landscape. Thirdly, longitudinal studies tracking changes in global perceptions of K-Food before and after the release of influential media content could provide insights into the long-term impact of such representations on culinary cultural capital.

In conclusion, "Black and White Chef" serves as an intriguing case study of how culinary narratives intersect with issues of cultural identity, social class, and globalization. As K-Food continues to gain prominence on

the global stage, understanding these dynamics will be crucial for both cultural scholars and culinary professionals. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on food media and cultural globalization, offering insights that can inform both theoretical discussions and practical strategies in the ongoing evolution of global culinary cultures.

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