

Gastronomy as City Identity and Touris Attraction: a Case Study of Jeonju City, South Korea

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Abstract

Gastronomy is increasingly recognised as an important element in the development of tourist destinations, not only as a culinary experience, but also as a representation of a city's cultural identity. This article discusses how the city of Jeonju in South Korea capitalises on gastronomy, particularly bibimbap, as both the city's identity and an international tourist attraction. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method, based on literature analysis, secondary data, and official documentation from the city government and international institutions. The results show that Jeonju's success in positioning itself as a 'UNESCO City of Gastronomy' is not only supported by its rich local cuisine, but also by supportive government policies, protection of intangible cultural heritage, development of culinary education institutions, and the organisation of global festivals. The discussion also shows that strengthening gastronomy as a city identity can enhance the positioning of tourist destinations in the global market and encourage local creative economic growth. This study provides academic implications for the development of gastronomy-based city branding theory, as well as practical implications for other city governments that wish to make cuisine a tourist attraction.

Keywords: gastronomy; city identity; culinary tourism; city branding; Jeonju;

INTRODUCTION

Gastronomy has become one of the key elements in the development of global tourism in the 21st century. Whereas tourism was previously understood as a recreational activity centred on natural scenery, historical heritage or cultural attractions, today the culinary dimension is also gaining recognition as an equally important attraction. This phenomenon is marked by an increasing number of tourist destinations promoting local cuisine as part of their destination image, as well as a rise in the number of tourists travelling primarily to enjoy local culinary experiences. The World Food Travel Association (World Food Travel Association, 2023) confirms that culinary tourism has become one of the fastest-growing segments in the travel industry, contributing more than 30% to total tourist spending in many countries. Food is not only seen as a biological necessity, but also as a cultural experience that represents the identity of a city or nation.

It is this context that makes gastronomy not just about cooking or eating food, but also closely related to intangible cultural heritage, social practices, and destination development strategies. According to Richards (2021), gastronomy is now seen as a form of cultural capital that cities and countries can use to build their global reputation. Many cities around the world have made cuisine a key pillar of their city branding, such as Lyon in France with its bistronomy concept, Chengdu in China with its hotpot dishes, and Oaxaca in Mexico with its corn and chocolate-based cuisine. In the context of East Asia, the city of Jeonju in South Korea is one of the most interesting examples, as it has successfully positioned itself as a 'UNESCO City of Gastronomy' through its culinary icon, bibimbap.

International recognition of Jeonju grew stronger in 2012 when UNESCO designated the city as part of its Creative Cities Network in the Gastronomy category. This title puts Jeonju on par with other cities around the world that have successfully developed creativity and sustainability through cuisine, such as Popayán in Colombia, Chengdu in China, and Östersund in Sweden. This status did not come about by chance, but through a planned strategy involving the protection of intangible cultural heritage, the development of local restaurants, the establishment of international culinary education institutions, and the organisation of regular and consistent food festivals. Thus, Jeonju is not only a culinary tourist destination, but also a model for creative city development based on gastronomy.

This phenomenon is relevant to study because it has a number of important implications. First, from an academic perspective, studies on gastronomy are often fragmented between culinary, tourism and cultural studies, so research that can combine all three is needed. The Jeonju case study provides an opportunity to see how cuisine is not only positioned as a consumer product, but also as an

instrument of city branding and creative economic development. Second, from a practical perspective, Jeonju's experience can serve as a reference for other cities, including those in Indonesia, that are seeking to increase their tourist appeal through their rich local cuisine. Cities such as Yogyakarta, for example, can learn how *gudeg* is positioned not merely as a traditional dish, but also as an icon of the city's identity that supports cultural tourism.

In addition, the development of culinary tourism is closely related to changes in consumer behaviour, especially among the younger generation. According to research by Ellis et al. (2022), millennial and Gen Z travellers tend to consider local culinary experiences as one of the main motivations for their travels. They seek authenticity, creativity, and the story behind the food they consume. This is in line with the concept of the experience economy introduced by Pine and Gilmore (1999), where the main value of a product or service lies in the emotional and symbolic experiences it generates. In this context, Jeonju *bibimbap* offers not only taste, but also a narrative about history, the philosophy of the five colours, and the social practices of Korean society.

However, there are still a number of challenges in developing gastronomy-based destinations. One of them is the gap between the popularity of cuisine and the readiness of supporting tourism infrastructure. Although Jeonju is able to attract more than 14 million tourists per year (Carpio et al., 2021), the availability of international accommodation, ease of transportation, and foreign language services are still limited. This indicates that culinary branding needs to be balanced with investment in tourism infrastructure and services. In addition, globalisation also presents the challenge of homogenisation of tastes, which has the potential to reduce the authenticity of local cuisine. Therefore, protective and innovative policies are needed so that gastronomy can continue to develop without losing its identity.

Based on the above description, this study was designed to answer the main question: how does gastronomy function as a city identity and tourist attraction in the case of Jeonju, South Korea? The purpose of this study is to analyse the role of *bibimbap* and Jeonju's gastronomy policy in strengthening city branding and increasing tourist visits. This study also aims to highlight the strategies implemented by the city government, culinary industry players, and the local community in making gastronomy the basis for creative city development.

This research has a dual contribution. From an academic perspective, it enriches the literature on the relationship between gastronomy, city identity, and tourism, particularly in the context of East Asia, which has received relatively less attention than Europe or Latin America. From a practical perspective, this research can serve as a reference for city governments, tourism stakeholders, and culinary entrepreneurs in Indonesia who wish to develop culinary-based city branding. Thus, this research not only highlights the uniqueness of Jeonju, but also offers valuable lessons that can be transferred to other contexts.

Gastronomy in classical literature is defined as the art of cooking and enjoying food. Brillat-Savarin (1994) refers to gastronomy as 'the science of everything related to eating,' which includes cooking techniques, food ingredients, and even the sensory experiences produced. This definition has since evolved, as described by Gillespie and Cousins (2015), to encompass not only culinary skills, but also the social, cultural, economic, and political dimensions of culinary practices. Thus, gastronomy can be understood as a multidimensional practice that represents the collective identity of a society.

In an urban context, gastronomy is increasingly positioned as an instrument of city branding. Richards (2021) asserts that gastronomy can be used to build a unique city image, differentiate destinations from their competitors, and strengthen the narrative of local identity. For example, Lyon in France is known as the capital of gastronomy because of its unique *bistronomy*, which emphasises a balance between traditional cuisine and innovation. Chengdu in China has gained international recognition through its hotpot dishes, which are not only popular domestically but have also become a symbol of Sichuan's culinary identity. A similar thing has happened in Jeonju, South Korea, which uses *bibimbap* as an icon of city branding.

In addition to serving as a representation of culture, gastronomy can also be seen as an

intangible asset with economic value. According to Morales and Cordoba (2019), local cuisine can be an element of national or city identity that connects communities with their ancestral heritage while attracting global tourists. This identity is dynamic, as it can be influenced by modernisation, migration, and globalisation. The challenge for cities that use gastronomy as their identity is to maintain a balance between authenticity and creativity. If too much emphasis is placed on authenticity, cuisine can become exclusive and difficult to develop; conversely, if it is too innovative, cuisine can lose its cultural roots.

Jeonju provides an interesting example of how gastronomic identity is built through multi-dimensional strategies. In addition to relying on historical narratives and the philosophy of the five colours of bibimbap, the city also incorporates gastronomy into public policy, international festivals, and global culinary education. Culinary identity is not only present in everyday practices, but is also institutionalised in the form of policies, regulations, and global networks such as the UNESCO Creative Cities Network.

In addition to the experiential dimension, identity factors have also received attention in recent literature. Research by Stojanović et al. (2023) in Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina found that a strong gastronomic identity can enhance destination differentiation while strengthening local communities' sense of ownership of their cuisine. In other words, gastronomy is not only an external branding tool, but also an internal means of strengthening social cohesion. In this context, Jeonju as the city of bibimbap demonstrates how cuisine can facilitate local identity while opening up space for cultural diplomacy.

Another perspective highlights the role of gastronomy in place branding. According to a recent study by Ceylan (2024), place branding for and through gastronomy is one of the most effective strategies in modern Asian cities facing rapid modernisation. Local cuisine serves as an 'anchor of identity' that can resist the homogenising forces of globalisation, while also becoming a unique attraction for international tourists. These findings are relevant in explaining how Jeonju has managed to preserve the uniqueness of bibimbap despite being in an increasingly competitive global landscape.

Thus, this research theory is based on four main pillars: (1) gastronomy as a tourist experience (memorable experiences), (2) gastronomy as the identity and differentiation of a destination, (3) gastronomy as an instrument of city branding and place branding, and (4) gastronomy as part of the creative economy and cultural diplomacy. These four frameworks will be used to interpret the phenomenon of Jeonju as a UNESCO City of Gastronomy.

Culinary tourism can be understood as travel activities that make local culinary experiences the main or additional motivation for tourist visits. Ignatov and Smith (2006) define culinary tourism as travel that involves consumption, purchase, or participation in activities related to local food at tourist destinations. This definition is expanded by Karim (2010), who emphasises that culinary tourism destinations must have a distinctive dining atmosphere, good accessibility, culinary quality and value, as well as culinary tourism products such as festivals, food information, and menu variety.

The development of culinary tourism cannot be separated from global trends that place experience as a major factor in travel. Pine and Gilmore (1999) refer to this era as the experience economy, where the value of a product or service lies in the emotional experience it provides. In the context of tourism, food is not only enjoyed as consumption but also as a cultural experience. A tourist eating bibimbap in Jeonju, for example, is not only looking for taste, but also wants to experience the atmosphere of Hanok Village, the history of the Joseon Dynasty, and social interaction with the local community.

Data shows that culinary tourism is one of the fastest growing segments. The World Food Travel Association (2023) reports that more than 80% of global tourists say culinary activities are an important part of their trip, and about 30% admit to travelling specifically to sample local food. This phenomenon makes cuisine one of the most competitive attractions in the global tourism market. Cities that successfully capitalise on their local cuisine can increase length of stay, tourist spending, and visitor loyalty.

In the Asian context, research by Carpio, Napod, and Do (2021) on Jeonju shows that 21.94% of tourists who visited the city in 2020 cited culinary experiences as their main motivation for visiting. This figure is quite significant, considering that the majority of tourists also enjoy historical and cultural attractions. This shows that gastronomy can serve as both a primary and secondary motivation in tourism.

Another relevant dimension of gastronomy is gastrodiploacy, which is the use of cuisine as an instrument of cultural diplomacy. According to Ellis, Park, and Kim (2022), gastrodiploacy enables a city or country to enhance its international reputation through cuisine. South Korea, for example, actively promotes Hansik (traditional Korean food) as part of the Korean Wave (Hallyu), which includes music, drama, and other cultural products. Jeonju plays an important role in this strategy, as it is the main location for the promotion of traditional Korean cuisine.

The Bibimbap Festival and World Bibim Week, held annually in Jeonju, are not only tourist attractions but also means of cultural diplomacy. The presence of foreign diplomats, international chefs, and the Korean diaspora at these festivals reinforces Jeonju's image as the 'culinary capital of Korea'. Thus, gastronomy not only has an impact on the tourism economy but also on the political and diplomatic reputation of a city on the global stage.

A number of previous studies have highlighted the relationship between gastronomy, city identity, and tourism. Ignatov and Smith (2006) examined the segmentation of culinary tourism in Canada. Karim, Chi, and Geng (2010) compared culinary tourism in Italy, France, and Thailand, and found that the factors shaping culinary destinations varied in each country, including food image, unique image, and restaurant image. Lertputtarak (2012) showed that destination image and image of Thai food had a significant effect on tourists' intention to visit Pattaya. Morales and Cordoba's (2019) study on Peruvian gastronomy shows that cuisine can serve as an element of national identity that strengthens local pride and global appeal. These findings are in line with the experience of Jeonju, where bibimbap serves as a symbol of the city's identity and an economic asset.

In the context of Jeonju, research by Carpio, Napod, and Do (2021) proves that cuisine plays an important role in tourist satisfaction, quality perception, and overall experience. This study also highlights that the COVID-19 pandemic has presented new challenges for culinary tourism, but has not diminished tourists' interest in local food. Richards (2021) shows that the shift from authenticity to creativity is key to maintaining the relevance of gastronomy in the era of globalisation. This is evident in Jeonju's strategy, which not only preserves traditional recipes but also encourages culinary innovation through international chef education. Majeed et al. (2024) conclude that a 'memorable' gastro-tourism experience is formed through the interaction of taste, service, atmosphere, and accompanying cultural values.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study was designed using a qualitative approach with a case study method. This approach was chosen because the study focused on gaining an in-depth understanding of how gastronomy functions as both a city identity and a tourist attraction in the context of Jeonju City, South Korea. As stated by Yin (2018), case studies are an appropriate research strategy when researchers want to explore a phenomenon in a real-life setting, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon being studied and its socio-cultural context are not clearly visible.

Jeonju was chosen as the research location based on its reputation as a globally recognised centre of traditional South Korean cuisine. Since 2012, Jeonju has been designated as part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network in the gastronomy category. This status confirms that the city not only has a rich culinary heritage, particularly bibimbap, but has also succeeded in making gastronomy one of the pillars of creative city development. Thus, Jeonju is seen as a representative case for examining the relationship between cuisine, identity, and tourism.

The research data was obtained through literature studies, document analysis, and online observation. The literature study was conducted by reviewing relevant academic works, including journal articles, books, and proceedings discussing gastronomy, city branding, and

culinary tourism. The document analysis focused on official UNESCO reports, Jeonju City government publications, and the World Food Travel Association (WFTA) annual reports. These documents were selected because they provide a comprehensive overview of the culinary promotion policies, achievements, and strategies implemented by the government and local communities. Meanwhile, online observation was conducted by monitoring social media, tourism promotion websites, and publicly uploaded culinary festival content. This observation aimed to capture how the image of Jeonju is produced, promoted, and perceived by tourists.

Data analysis was conducted descriptively by following the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the reduction stage, researchers sorted data relevant to the research focus, such as descriptions of bibimbap, local culinary protection policies, and festival organisation. Irrelevant data, such as that related to non-culinary tourist attractions, was not included in the main analysis. The next stage was the presentation of data in the form of an organised narrative, supported by quotations, statistical figures, and comparisons with previous studies. From this presentation, the researcher then drew conclusions about the patterns and meanings that emerged.

To increase the validity of the findings, this study used source triangulation techniques. Data from academic literature is compared with official reports and online observations, so that the findings are not based on a single perspective. This triangulation is important because the phenomenon of gastronomy as a city identity is multidimensional, covering cultural, economic, political, and tourism aspects. By comparing various sources, researchers can obtain a richer and more in-depth picture.

This study has several limitations. First, the research was not conducted through direct field observations in Jeonju, but rather using secondary data and online observations. This limitation certainly affects the depth of empirical data, but it can be overcome by increasing literature triangulation. Second, the research focused on the period 2010–2023, so the analysis highlights the dynamics of Jeonju's gastronomy after the city received UNESCO recognition. Third, as a case study, the results of this study are more contextual in nature and are not intended to be generalised broadly. Nevertheless, the findings from this study can still provide relevant and inspiring insights for other cities that wish to develop culinary destinations.

Overall, the research methodology was designed to ensure that the analysis was not only descriptive but also reflective of the social, cultural, and economic dynamics surrounding the gastronomic phenomenon in Jeonju. With a case study-based qualitative approach, this research seeks to uncover the meaning behind Jeonju's culinary strategy, while also contributing academically and practically to the fields of tourism and city branding.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Jeonju as a UNESCO City of Gastronomy

Jeonju is a historic city located in North Jeolla Province, South Korea, with a population of around 650,000. The city has a strong reputation as a centre for traditional Korean cuisine. Bibimbap, a dish of mixed rice with vegetables, egg, meat and gochujang sauce, is the main culinary icon of Jeonju, distinguishing it from other cities in South Korea. The popularity of bibimbap is not limited to South Korea, but is also recognised internationally. CNN Travel (2011) even included bibimbap in its list of the 50 most delicious foods in the world, an achievement that reinforces the global reputation of this dish.

Jeonju's success in making gastronomy the identity of the city was marked by its recognition by UNESCO in 2012. Jeonju was included in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) in the gastronomy category, joining other cities such as Chengdu in China and Popayán in Colombia. This recognition was given because Jeonju not only preserves its traditional culinary heritage but also successfully integrates it with its creative city development strategy.

As a UNESCO city of gastronomy, Jeonju is required to uphold the principles of sustainability, innovation, and community involvement. The city government works with local

communities and the private sector to develop programmes that strengthen its culinary identity. For example, Jeonju established the Creative Culinary Institute of Korea, which focuses on culinary education and research, and organises an annual food festival that attracts domestic and international tourists. Thus, Jeonju has become not only a culinary destination but also a centre for innovation and cultural diplomacy.

Bibimbap as a Culinary Identity

Jeonju bibimbap has its own unique characteristics compared to variations from other cities. This dish is served with more than 30 different ingredients, including ginseng, pine nuts, chestnuts, walnuts, and fresh seasonal vegetables. The philosophy of five colours—white, black, red, yellow, and green—represents a balance of flavours as well as harmony between nature and humans in Korean culture. This shows that bibimbap is not just food, but a symbol of the philosophical values of Korean society.

There are three popular variants of bibimbap in Jeonju: 1) Classic Jeonju bibimbap, served with a raw egg yolk on top of rice and vegetables; 2) Yukhoe bibimbap, which adds raw ground beef as the main ingredient; 3) Dolsot bibimbap, served in a hot stone pot with crispy rice at the bottom. These three variants demonstrate how culinary creativity goes hand in hand with the preservation of tradition. In addition, bibimbap is usually served with 12 side dishes that enrich the dining experience. This combination makes Jeonju bibimbap a unique and complex culinary icon.

The Role of Government in Protecting Local Cuisine

Jeonju's success cannot be separated from the support of both the city government and the South Korean central government. The Jeonju government implements protective policies for local cuisine by prohibiting the establishment of international fast food restaurants in the city centre. This is done to maintain the dominance of traditional restaurants and ensure that tourists get an authentic culinary experience. In addition, the government provides subsidies to local restaurants, especially those serving bibimbap. These subsidies include discounts on water bills, tax support, and promotional assistance. With this support, the price of traditional food in Jeonju is relatively affordable compared to other cities, which ultimately increases its appeal to domestic and international tourists. The government is also actively coaching traditional restaurants to meet international quality standards. One example is Hankookjib, the oldest bibimbap restaurant in Jeonju, which is directly coached by the South Korean government and is now listed in the Michelin Guide. This policy shows that the government is not only protecting but also improving the competitiveness of local cuisine in the global market.

Culinary Festival and Gastronomic Diplomacy

The annual Jeonju Bibimbap Festival is one of the city's main culinary promotion events. The festival is usually held in October in the Hanok Village area, with various activities such as cooking competitions, cultural performances, and the making of giant bibimbap that can be enjoyed by thousands of people. In 2019, the festival attracted more than 150,000 visitors. Since 2020, the festival has been expanded into World Bibim Week, with the aim of making bibimbap a symbol of South Korea's gastrodiploamacy. The city government invites international chefs, diplomats, and figures from the Korean diaspora to participate in this event. They not only enjoy the cuisine, but also participate in cooking and creating fusion dishes that combine bibimbap with global culinary elements. This strategy strengthens Jeonju's image as an inclusive, creative, and global gastronomic city.

Human Cultural Assets and Cultural Heritage Preservation

Jeonju is also known as home to a number of human cultural assets, namely individuals recognised by the South Korean government as possessing exceptional skills in traditional arts and culture. A total of 41 of the 230 national human cultural assets reside in Jeonju, including pansori maestros, hanji calligraphers, traditional dancers, and culinary experts. Their presence provides strong cultural legitimacy for Jeonju as a centre of intangible cultural heritage. This preservation is also supported by the National Institute of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which was moved from Seoul to

Jeonju. This institution serves as a centre for research, documentation, and education on intangible culture, including gastronomy. In his way, cuisine is not only promoted as a tourist product, but also preserved as a valuable cultural heritage.

Tourist Visit Data

Jeonju's popularity as a culinary destination is reflected in its tourist visitation figures. In 2016, the city received more than 14 million tourist visits per year, or approximately 38,000 people per day (Carpio, Napod, & Do, 2021). The majority of tourists come from South Korea itself, Japan, and China. Mapping based on credit card usage, navigation applications, and social media shows that around 21% of tourists are in their 20s, 20% are in their 30s, and another 21% are in their 40s.

A field survey in 2020 showed that 68.11% of visits to Jeonju were for leisure purposes, and 21.94% of respondents stated that their main motivation was to enjoy the cuisine (Carpio et al., 2021). This data shows that cuisine is one of the dominant factors in attracting tourists to Jeonju. In addition to bibimbap, tourists also enjoy moju (cinnamon rice wine) and traditional tea. From an economic perspective, tourist spending in Jeonju reached KRW 338 million (equivalent to Rp 3.9 billion) per day in 2017. Most of this spending was allocated to culinary consumption. This proves that gastronomy is not only a tourist attraction but also a driving force for the local economy.

Discussion

Gastronomy as a City Branding Instrument

Research findings show that Jeonju has successfully positioned itself as a global culinary destination through an integrated gastronomy strategy. Jeonju not only offers bibimbap as a culinary product, but also positions it as a symbol of the city's identity. This strategy is in line with Richards' (2021) idea that gastronomy can be an instrument of city branding because it can differentiate a city from other destinations that offer similar attractions. City branding through cuisine has certain advantages. First, food is more accessible to tourists than other cultural attractions such as performing arts or crafts. Tourists can experience the city's identity first-hand simply by sampling local dishes at local restaurants. Second, food has multisensory properties that can create deep emotional impressions. The experience of tasting bibimbap in Hanok Village, for example, is not only related to taste, but also to the atmosphere of traditional architecture, the hospitality of the community, and the accompanying historical narrative.

A recent study by Petrović et al. (2023) on gastronomic experience and consumer behaviour shows that positive culinary experiences have a significant effect on tourist satisfaction while strengthening the image of the destination. In the context of Jeonju, the experience of tasting bibimbap is not just an ordinary culinary experience, but also a meaningful cultural experience. This is consistent with field data showing that most tourists to Jeonju prioritise cuisine as their main reason for visiting. Furthermore, the psychological dimension also needs to be considered. According to Zhang et al. (2024), culinary tourism experiences contribute to tourists' subjective well-being, as food serves as a means of emotional and social recreation. This is evident in the Jeonju Bibimbap Festival, where tourists not only enjoy the food but also experience a sense of togetherness in cooking and eating together. Thus, gastronomy can be understood as an experience that enriches well-being, not just as a consumer product.

However, culinary-based branding also faces challenges. One of these is maintaining a balance between authenticity and innovation. If too much emphasis is placed on authenticity, cuisine can lose its relevance amid changing global tastes. Conversely, if it is too innovative, cuisine can lose its cultural roots. Jeonju's strategy of combining the preservation of traditional recipes with innovation through international culinary education shows how this balance can be achieved. This section contains a discussion of the research data that has been presented.

The Economic Impact of Creative Gastronomy

From an economic perspective, gastronomy has proven to be an important driver of local economic growth in Jeonju. Tourist spending data shows that cuisine is the sector with the largest contribution to daily expenditure. This is in line with the WFTA (2023) report, which states that 30–

35% of global tourist spending is allocated to food and beverages. This economic contribution is not only enjoyed by the restaurant sector, but also has an impact on the wider supply chain. Local farmers benefit from increased demand for fresh vegetables, beef, and traditional ingredients. Small industries such as gochujang and doenjang producers also gain a wider market through culinary festivals and exports. Thus, gastronomy not only strengthens cultural identity, but also expands the city's creative economic base.

Furthermore, the presence of the Creative Culinary Institute of Korea in Jeonju reinforces the city's position as a centre for culinary education and research. This institution educates international chefs who then spread Korean culinary influence to various countries. This shows that gastronomy can be part of soft power strategy, where cuisine is used to increase South Korea's cultural influence on the global stage.

Gastronomic Diplomacy and Global Reputation

Jeonju also utilises gastronomy as a means of gastrodiploacy. The Bibimbap Festival and World Bibim Week are not only tourism promotion events, but also arenas for cultural diplomacy. The presence of foreign diplomats, diaspora, and international chefs makes this festival a platform for cultural exchange. This strategy is in line with the findings of Ellis, Park, and Kim (2022), which emphasise the role of cuisine in enhancing the global reputation of a country or city. Jeonju's gastrodiploacy reinforces South Korea's image as a culturally rich and innovative country. This strategy complements the promotion of Hallyu, which previously relied more on music (K-Pop) and drama (K-Drama). By incorporating cuisine into cultural diplomacy, South Korea is expanding the spectrum of the Korean Wave and strengthening its appeal in the eyes of the world. A recent study by Turker & Rossi (2023) on culinary diplomacy in Turkey and Italy reinforces this argument by showing that food festivals can be a platform for international cultural exchange. Jeonju, through World Bibim Week, has capitalised on this momentum to position itself in the global gastrodiploacy network, expanding the reach of bibimbap from a mere national dish to a global cultural symbol.

Comparison with Other Cities

To further understand Jeonju's position, it is necessary to compare it with other cities that also use cuisine as their identity. Chengdu in China, for example, has gained UNESCO recognition through its hotpot dishes. However, Chengdu's strategy emphasises industrial scale and the export of culinary products. Lyon in France is known as the capital of gastronomy due to its consistency in maintaining the quality of its restaurants and the tradition of bouchon lyonnais. Meanwhile, Oaxaca in Mexico utilises corn and chocolate-based cuisine to attract tourists while strengthening its indigenous cultural identity.

Compared to these cities, Jeonju has a more holistic approach. In addition to relying on bibimbap as an icon, the city also emphasises the preservation of intangible cultural heritage through human cultural assets and international culinary education. This makes Jeonju not only a culinary destination, but also a cultural laboratory that integrates tradition, innovation, and diplomacy. In the Indonesian context, Jeonju's experience is relevant for cities with strong culinary potential, such as Yogyakarta with its gudeg or Padang with its rendang. However, there are still many cities in Indonesia that have not seriously integrated cuisine into their city branding strategies. In fact, as demonstrated by Jeonju, cuisine can be a solution to overcome limitations in accessibility or tourism infrastructure.

From a comparative perspective, Jeonju occupies a unique position. A study by Than & Wahyudi (2024) on local cuisine and city branding in Indonesia and Myanmar shows that cities in Southeast Asia still face challenges in making cuisine a city identity. For example, Yogyakarta with its gudeg or Mandalay with its traditional Myanmar dishes have not been fully capitalised on in global branding strategies. This comparison shows that Jeonju has successfully integrated cuisine with public policy in a consistent manner, something that is still rare in Southeast Asia.

Challenges and Limitations

Despite its many successes, Jeonju also faces a number of challenges. First, limited transport

and accommodation infrastructure remains a barrier for foreign tourists. The absence of an international airport in Jeonju means that tourists must travel by road for around three hours from Seoul. Second, the limited language skills of the local community also pose a communication barrier for foreign tourists.

In addition, dependence on seasonal festivals such as the Bibimbap Festival and World Bibim Week has the potential to create fluctuations in tourist numbers. Therefore, Jeonju needs to develop a strategy to diversify its culinary attractions throughout the year, so that it does not depend on a single annual event.

Academic and Practical Implications

This discussion provides a number of important implications. From an academic perspective, this study reinforces the theory that gastronomy not only serves as a tourist attraction, but also as an instrument of city branding and gastrodiploamacy. By combining the perspectives of tourism, culture, and the creative economy, this study adds insight into the multidimensional role of gastronomy.

From a practical perspective, Jeonju's experience provides valuable lessons for other city governments. First, gastronomy can be used as a destination differentiation strategy, especially for cities that do not have high accessibility. Second, successful culinary branding requires consistent policy support, including protection of local restaurants, provision of subsidies, and strengthening of culinary education. Third, gastrodiploamacy can enhance a city's global reputation while expanding the market for culinary products. This discussion reinforces the implication that gastronomy plays a multidimensional role. It is not only a branding tool, but also an instrument of cultural diplomacy, a driver of the creative economy, and a contributor to the psychological well-being of tourists. With these layered strategies, Jeonju has provided a model that other cities, including those in Indonesia, can emulate.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that gastronomy plays a strategic role in shaping a city's identity while enhancing the appeal of tourist destinations. The case study of Jeonju in South Korea shows how bibimbap has become a culinary icon that not only reflects local cultural heritage but also serves as an instrument of city branding and gastrodiploamacy. UNESCO's recognition as a Creative City of Gastronomy in 2012 was a turning point for Jeonju to integrate cuisine into its creative city development strategy.

Jeonju's success cannot be separated from several key factors. First, the existence of protective and supportive government policies, such as banning international fast food restaurants in the city centre and providing subsidies for traditional restaurants. Second, the preservation of intangible cultural heritage through human cultural assets and cultural research institutions. Third, strengthening human resource capacity through the Creative Culinary Institute of Korea, which produces international chefs. Fourth, the organisation of global festivals such as the Bibimbap Festival and World Bibim Week, which serve as promotional events and gastrodiploamacy. With this strategy, Jeonju has succeeded in attracting more than 14 million tourists per year, with culinary spending contributing KRW 338 million per day. Gastronomy has proven to be the driving force behind the city's creative economy, expanding the agricultural supply chain and enhancing South Korea's global reputation.

This study provides several suggestions for further development. First, for the Jeonju Government. The Jeonju Government needs to diversify its culinary attractions throughout the year, so as not to rely solely on seasonal festivals. Strengthening transport infrastructure and improving multilingual services are also important to attract more international tourists. Second, for city governments in Indonesia, Jeonju's experience can be adapted to develop local cuisine as a city identity. Yogyakarta with its gudeg, Padang with its rendang, or Bandung with its creative cuisine have great potential to be promoted systematically through gastronomy-based city branding strategies.

Third, for future researchers, comparative studies between UNESCO gastronomy cities are needed to understand the variations in culinary branding strategies. Research can also deepen the

analysis of young tourists' behaviour towards culinary tourism, or explore the potential of digitalisation in promoting local cuisine. Thus, the Jeonju case study provides a concrete illustration that gastronomy is not just a matter of the kitchen, but also an important arena in tourism, city development, the creative economy, and cultural diplomacy.

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