

The Advantage of Transnational Coethnic Networks: Korean Chinese Entrepreneurship in Innovating and Globalizing Xinjiang Style Barbecue Lamb Skewers Business

跨国同族关系网络优势：朝鲜族商人在新疆风味烤串餐饮业的创新及全球化

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Abstract:

This is a case study of cross-ethnicization and globalization of an ethnic food by entrepreneurial Korean Chinese. Korean Chinese (also referred to as *Joseonjok* or *Chaoxianzu*) in China came from a strong agricultural background with little tradition of commerce and no tradition of consuming lamb meat. However, when Xinjiang style barbecue lamb skewers were introduced to their community in the early 1980s, Korean Chinese fell in love with this exotic food. Soon, Korean Chinese entrepreneurs began opening their own barbecue lamb skewer restaurants. Within the next two decades, they transformed this humble street food into a luxurious gourmet food through various innovative measures. They also globalized the barbecue lamb skewer business by expanding it to other cities in China, South Korea, Japan, the United States and beyond. Based on fieldworks conducted in Korean Chinese communities in China, South Korea and Japan, we found that their transnational

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coethnic networks were the key behind this intriguing success in their ethnic entrepreneurialism. This paper explores how the Korean Chinese developed their transnational coethnic networks, and how these networks contributed to this formerly non-coethnic lamb skewers business.

Keywords

Korean Chinese (*Joseonjok* or *Chaoxianzu*), ethnic entrepreneurship, ethnic capital, Xinjiang style barbecue lamb skewers, transnational coethnic network, cross-ethnicization of food

摘要

本文是关于朝鲜族华商如何推动民族食品跨民族化和全球化的一个个案研究。聚居于中国东北地区的朝鲜族有着丰富的农耕经验，极少经商，亦鲜食羊肉。然而，自上世纪 80 年代初新疆羊肉串传入东北地区，其新奇口感深得朝鲜族人民的喜爱。随即，朝鲜族商人开起了他们自己的羊肉串餐厅。随后的二十年里，通过不断地创新他们将这个朴素的街头小吃变成了一道精致美食，并将其推广至中国其他城市，甚至韩国等海外地区。基于对中国、韩国和日本的朝鲜族聚居区的实地考察，发现他们之间的跨国同族关系网络是他们成功创业的关键。本文旨在探索朝鲜族华商如何拓展跨国同族关系网络，进而发展朝鲜族羊肉串生意并使之生意兴盛和全球化。

关键词

朝鲜族；少数族裔创业；族裔资本；新疆风味羊肉串；跨国同族关系网络；食品的跨民族化；

1 Introduction: *Joseonjok* (*Chaoxianzu*) and Xinjiang Style Barbecue Lamb Skewers

Barbecue lamb skewers are widely consumed all over the world, particularly among the Muslims in Middle East and Central Asia, with some variations in seasoning and size. In China, it is known as Xinjiang style barbecue lamb skewers, or Xinjiang *kaochuan* (新疆烤串), and this popular street food is present in almost every urban neighborhood in

China. Originating from the Xinjiang region of North-western China, these barbecue lamb skewers were introduced to different regions including the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, on the North-eastern corner of China in the early 1980s. Some Uighur migrant peddlers began selling barbecue lamb skewers on the streets of Yanji, the capital of the Prefecture. This was not long after China's adoption of the open-door economic policy under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s. The new policy brought more freedom for people to move across regions within China and pursue entrepreneurial activities. As the country's economy grew along the coastal regions in the 1980s, people of inland regions such as Xinjiang started to migrate to other regions in search of better economic opportunities. It was in this backdrop that the Uighur street vendors brought their barbecue lamb skewers to the ethnic Korean community in Yanbian.

Lamb meat was neither popular nor important in Korean culinary tradition³ and, initially, ethnic Koreans in Yanbian (also referred to as *Joseonjok* in Korean and *Chaoxianzu* in Mandarin Chinese)⁴ did not pay much attention to this lamb meat street snack when it first came to town. It did not take much time, however, before these Xinjiang style barbecue lamb skewers gained popularity among Korean Chinese. By the mid-1980s, this Uighur street food was available in many Korean Chinese neighborhoods of urban Yanbian. The barbecue lamb skewers, known as “*yanggogi kkwem*” or “*yangkkochi*” – both meaning lamb skewers in

³ Our informants who grew up in Yanji in the 1970s and 1980s told us that lamb meat (unlike dog meat, which was always popular) was uncommon for ethnic Koreans in Yanbian before the 1980s. This changed, however, when Uighur street peddlers introduced barbecue lamb skewers in the early 1980s [interviewed with two Korean Chinese male migrants in their fifties, in Osaka, Japan in March 2018). Traditionally, popular meat for Koreans were pork, beef, chicken, and to a certain degree dog meat while lamb meat was not widely consumed. Particularly in northern regions of the Korean peninsula, which is the original homeland of most of Yanbian Korean Chinese people, dog meat was popular and there are many dog meat restaurants in Korean Chinese communities in China as well as in South Korea (Song 2014: 444–45). The new lamb skewer business gives them an opportunity to move away from dog meat business.

⁴ Korean Chinese are descendants of those Koreans who migrated to Manchuria (later called Dongbei region of China) between the 1860s and mid-1940s. Today, many of them are living in South Korea, Japan, the United States, and the United Kingdom. In this paper, while we will primarily use the term “Korean Chinese”, we will also use the terms *Joseonjok* or *Chaoxianzu* depending on the context.

local Korean dialect—were not only very much affordable, as lamb meat was generally cheaper than beef in China, but also conveniently accessible. Known for their strong drinking culture—just like their co-ethnics on the Korean Peninsula⁵ – Korean Chinese people found this Uighur ethnic food to be an excellent companion of beer and other alcoholic drinks⁶.

With the soaring popularity of barbecue lamb skewers among ethnic Koreans of the Yanbian region, some Korean Chinese entrepreneurs began opening their own businesses selling Xinjiang style barbecue lamb skewers in Yanji. Many of these earlier Korean Chinese entrepreneurs relied on savings earned from selling Chinese herbal medicines or laboring in South Korea (Song 2009: 288). After saving some money, they would return to their hometown and start their own business, which was common among the early Korean Chinese returnees from South Korea or overseas. Some chose to open Xinjiang style lamb skewer restaurants. In the process of serving Xinjiang lamb skewers, the Korean Chinese entrepreneurs learned, or more accurately ‘appropriated’, from Uighur street peddlers, and “Koreanized” the original Xinjiang lamb barbecue. In less than two decades, Korean Chinese entrepreneurs have successfully transformed this street food from Xinjiang into a popular gourmet restaurant food in their hometown and even spread it beyond Yanbian.

In the 1990s, following the trend of rapid urbanization and migration, a large number of Korean Chinese people migrated to big cities in China, such as Shenyang, Beijing, Qingdao, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, and they brought with them these “Koreanized” Xinjiang barbecue lamb skewers and opened up restaurants in those cities. As they also migrated to other countries, particularly to South Korea, Korean Chinese migrants brought with them this barbecue lamb skewer food. Particularly remarkable was their business

⁵ It was reported that South Koreans were among the heaviest drinkers in the world (WHO 2018).

⁶ For Uighurs, who are Muslims, barbecue lamb skewers are not consumed with alcohol. For Korean Chinese, meanwhile, this street food was an excellent companion to alcohol.

success in South Korea. Just like their co-ethnics in China, South Koreans rarely consumed lamb meat before, but this changed with the increased migration of the Korean Chinese. By the first decade of the 21st century, restaurants specializing in Korean Chinese barbecue lamb skewers appeared in every Korean Chinese community in South Korea and gained popularity among their co-ethnics. As popularity of the barbecue lamb skewers grew, there also rose several large restaurant chains owned and operated by Korean Chinese entrepreneurs. Today, the number of such restaurants is still growing in South Korea. As Korean Chinese barbecue lamb skewer businesses became so successful in South Korea, Korean Chinese entrepreneurs also expanded their business to metropolitan areas of other countries where there are high concentrations of ethnic Koreans, including Osaka and Tokyo in Japan, and the Koreatowns of Los Angeles and New York City (Flushing) in the United States. In this sense, Korean Chinese entrepreneurs not only popularized, but also truly globalized an ethnic food that did not originate from their own culinary tradition beyond Yanbian and the Chinese borders.

How has this intriguing process of the cross-ethnicization of food transpired? This paper purports to explore the cultural, social and economic factors behind the success story of Korean Chinese entrepreneurs' popularizing and globalizing Xinjiang barbecue lamb skewers since the 1990s.⁷ In doing so, we focus on the role of ethnic capital and transnational ethnic networks that helped such cross-ethnic, innovative, and global entrepreneurial practices of Korean Chinese entrepreneurs. It is because, as we will show later, the success of Korean Chinese entrepreneurs' barbecue lamb skewer businesses within and outside of China can be explained best with their ethnic capital and transnational co-ethnic networks. We pay particular attention to: (1) the cultural, social, and economic backgrounds of the Korean Chinese community in Yanbian that helped such cross-ethnicization of the Xinjiang barbecue

⁷ Similar cross-ethnicization and globalization of food of other ethnic groups are not rare. Korean migrants in the United States also cross-ethnicized and globalized Japanese sushi recently and now Chinese migrants are taking that over (Swanson 2016).

lamb skewers; and (2) Korean Chinese transnational co-ethnic networks in China, South Korea, Japan, the United States and beyond, and its role in forming and reproducing capital, and in expanding and globalizing their business. In this regard, this paper involves the historical, sociological, economic, and cultural explanations of the birth, transformation, innovation, and globalization of the now popular Korean Chinese barbecue lamb skewers.

Ethnic culinary origin and transformation may occur naturally without leaving clearly documented and reliable records, which makes any historical investigation of food rather challenging. We rely on data collected through a multi-pronged approach. We collected relevant information from various online and offline media of Korean Chinese communities in China, South Korea, and Japan. We also interviewed more than twenty Korean Chinese barbecue lamb skewer restaurateurs and consumers from early 2017 to late 2019. This fieldwork was conducted: in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture and the city of Qingdao, where there are numerous barbecue lamb skewers restaurants due to a high concentration of Korean Chinese and South Korean businesses and migrants; in China; the Daerim-dong areas of Seoul, South Korea, where Korean Chinese businesses are concentrated; and Osaka, Japan, where there is a strong Korean Chinese community. Most of our informants had a clear memory of the transformation of the Xinjiang style barbecue lamb skewers to Korean Chinese style barbecue lamb skewers in their hometown of Yanji.⁸ Their historical accounts were supplemented with rigorous online research of the advertisements of Korean Chinese lamb skewer restaurants in China, South Korea, Japan, and the United States. The online media-based transnational Korean Chinese communities such as “Moyiza.com” (based in South Korea), “Zoglo.net” (based in China), and “Shimteo Media” (based in Japan)

⁸ The Korean Chinese interviewees shared their knowledge of the history of lamb skewer barbecue as well as the innovative measures they adopted from the beginning and until now. One of the two authors resides in Qingdao so we had good access to the many Korean Chinese lamb skewer barbecue restaurants and their owners, who migrated to Qingdao from Yanbian and also those who had been to South Korea as migrant laborers.

provided useful source for the project as well Korean Chinese news media such as the “Yeonbyeon Daily”, “Heugryonggang Shinmun”, “Yonyeong Shinmun” (all in China) and the “Dongbug-a Shinmun” (in South Korea).

2 The Importance of Ethnic Capital and Transnational Coethnic Network

Understanding why certain ethnic groups tend to be more prone to self-employment or more entrepreneurial than other groups have been key questions in the study of socio-economic adaption, mobility, and assimilation of ethnic minority and migrant groups. This question, nevertheless, is not simple because ethnic entrepreneurialism is multifaceted and there are so many internal and external factors and circumstances – historical, cultural, structural, economic, and social—that influence on and determine the entrepreneurial behavior and economic performance of different ethnic groups. Reflecting this complexity, there have been various theoretical perspectives on this question. Some emphasize culture (Masurel et al., 2004), some stress more on structural factors, and still others consider both (Volery 2007). Recently, researchers of ethnic entrepreneurialism began to pay particular attention to ethnic capital – ethnic enclaves, intergenerational transmission of educational attainment, ethnic networks and so on – as important factor that affects the economic success of ethnic groups and ethnic entrepreneurialism (Coleman 1988; Flap et al 2000; Chen 2001; Zhou & Lin 2005). For example, the ‘ethnic resource’ available to different ethnic groups (Waldinger et al. 1990) explains different level of ethnic entrepreneurship and economic success among them. In particular, recent researches show that transnational ethnic networks are an important form of ethnic capital, and they help economic growth and entrepreneurial achievements of ethnic groups (Chen 2000; Chen & Tan 2009; Kariv et al 2009).

Among the divergent factors and explanations of ethnic entrepreneurship and economic achievements of different ethnic groups, we consider that ethnic capital and transnational co-ethnic networks are the most important factors that can explain the rapid success of Korean Chinese barbecue lamb skewers business, which was possible thanks to a series of innovation and globalization. Therefore, we will focus on these factors in the rest of the paper. Before we proceed, however, we need to point that the Korean Chinese's barbecue lamb skewers business is not a typical 'ethnic business' in conventional terms. First of all, conventionally, ethnic business was understood as a market characterized by low barriers of entry in terms of required capital, educational qualifications, relatively small-scale business, high labor-intensity and low added value, which invites overly high competition (Rath & Kloosterman 2002). This would be correct for the early Xinjiang style barbecue lamb skewer business, which Uighur street vendors introduced to the Korean Chinese community in Yanbian in the early 1980s. The Korean Chinese barbecue lamb skewer restaurant businesses developed later, however, do not fit to the conventional understanding of ethnic business. It is true that there certainly was, and currently still is, a high level of competition in Korean Chinese barbecue lamb skewer restaurant business. For the new, large, and automated restaurants, however, the barrier to entry is high as it requires at least medium to large capital investment. As this business has increasingly been gentrified both in and outside of the Korean Chinese communities of China and South Korea, the added value of this business has also grown. Secondly, while conventional ethnic business is a form of self-employment for those who do not have good chance of becoming employed (Borooah and Hart, 1999), this is not the case of Korean Chinese people as they have relatively good employment opportunities especially thanks to: (1) their high educational level; and (2) their having access

to South Korean labor market in the post-1990s era.⁹ Thirdly, Korean Chinese people, not only because of the geographically peripheral location of their settlements in the northeast corner of China, but also because of their strong agricultural background, did not really develop commercial culture before the 1980s. Nevertheless, with their high educational level and relative prosperity based on the successful cultivation of rice in the cold Dongbei region of China, Korean Chinese were also considered a model minority of China (Gao 2010). Finally, although Korean Chinese barbecue lamb skewer restaurant business initially targeted Korean Chinese customers in Yanbian, the business expanded to other cities of China, and then to South Korea, and eventually to Japan and the United States, serving non-Korean Chinese, but still mostly ethnic Korean, customers.

It is this point of the globalization of Korean Chinese barbecue lamb skewers business where the ethnic capital and transnational co-ethnic networks of Korean Chinese arose as an important basis of the ethnic entrepreneurialism of Korean Chinese people. As a geographically concentrated and tightly knit ethnic community with a successful agricultural tradition, Korean Chinese people have been able to maintain their own ethnic culture and Korean language (Park 2019). Their having maintained their ethnic tradition and language in China has become important ethnic capital: forming a strong ethnic bond not only among the Korean Chinese people, but also with their South Korean co-ethnics both in South Korea and China, Japan and the United States. The Korean language capacity of Korean Chinese became important in the late 1980s when they were re-connected to their ethnic homeland of South Korea. At the end of the Cold War, many South Koreans viewed their co-ethnics in China from an instrumental perspective, believing that the Korean Chinese people would help to promote South Korea's trade with China and South Korean capital to expand to China

⁹ Initially, Korean Chinese workers' access to South Korean labour market was restricted. However, there were many ways for them to enter South Korea's labour market both legally and illegally. By 2007, with the adoption of "Visit and Employment" visa (H-2 Visa) it became easy for Korean Chinese to work in South Korea.

(Kim & Kim 1994). As soon as the formal diplomatic normalization between China and South Korea was signed in 1992, tens of thousands Korean Chinese migrant workers entered into South Korea and by the mid-1990s they comprised nearly 30% of the foreign workforce of the country (Seol 1997). Their number continued to grow in the following two decades.

Thanks to their language ability, Korean Chinese people were also able to work for South Korean businesses that expanded into China. When small and medium size South Korean manufacturers began moving to China to take advantage of cheaper labor and a much bigger market, Korean Chinese played the role of intermediaries between the South Korean businessmen and local governments of China (Shin 2017; Lee 2017; Kim H. 2018). Such opportunities pulled Korean Chinese to the cities, where many South Korean factories and businesses relocated. The intermediary roles of the Korean Chinese helped South Korean businesses in China, and this was possible because of their Korean language capacity. Their role as intermediaries between local Chinese and their co-ethnics from South Korea as well as their work experiences in South Korea became important social capital for the Korean Chinese community in China. As they spoke the same language, it was easier for Korean Chinese to build transnational co-ethnic networks with South Koreans as well as between themselves (Luova, 2009; Yoon 2013). The high educational level of Korean Chinese was also helpful in learning new advanced management skills and business practices in South Korea. At the same time, while working for South Koreans either in China or in South Korea, Korean Chinese people developed their co-ethnic transnational network, and these networks also aided them to migrate to the countries with South Korean settlements such as Japan, United States, and Argentina. Often, the initial contact between the overseas Korean settlers and new Korean Chinese migrants would be through ethnic Korean churches. Korean ethnic churches tend to be the most important gathering places for ethnic Koreans in most of the countries including the United States and other western countries (Min 1992). This is not

exception for Korean Chinese and where there are no Korean Chinese churches nearby, they initially tend to attend ethnic Korean churches and build co-ethnic networks.

All these helped them to have some level of “bounded solidarity” and “enforceable trust” among Korean Chinese people, which was helpful for their in-group level ethnic entrepreneurialism (Portes and Zhou 1992). For example, Korean Chinese entrepreneurs in China are well-organized among themselves through associations such as the China *Joseonjok* Entrepreneurs’ Association, which has 32 chapters and over 3,000 members (Noh 2020). In addition, their high educational level (Lee 1987), and their being bilingual, or even trilingual,¹⁰ also helped them to be connected to their co-ethnics in South Korea, Japan and the United States. These transnational co-ethnic ties and reconnections to their economically advanced ethnic homeland of South Korea in the post-1980s became highly advantageous ethnic capital. Korean Chinese entrepreneurs are also well connected to their co-ethnic entrepreneurs in the world through various organizations and events such as the annual World Korean Traders Convention as well as the World OKTA (Overseas Korean Traders’ Association).

As Zhou and Lin (2005) suggest, social capital includes not just material resources of an ethnic group, but also includes more complex factors such as social relations and access to resources and opportunities. Korean Chinese have access to South Korea for labor migration, from which they can gain both financial means, as well as other intangible means such as advanced management skills and network opportunities. In particular, they have access and opportunities to migrate to other countries, following the migrations of their South Korean co-ethnics (Kim 2019), which is why there are Korean Chinese migrants virtually everywhere South Korean migrants settled. Their ethnic capital—including their co-ethnic networks—

¹⁰ Depending on their age, many Korean Chinese people tend to be trilingual: Korean, Chinese and Japanese (Lee and Lee 2015).

helps them not only to migrate to other countries, but it also supports their ethnic entrepreneurship. Their dominance in the barbecue lamb skewer business both within and outside of China was very much helped by the ethnic capital they had in the form of education and building transnational co-ethnic networks. More than that, their ethnic capital in the form of a transnational network also helped them in making some of the innovations that contributed to the expansion and globalization of Korean Chinese barbecue lamb skewer business. In the next section, we will explore what innovations were made to help their business so successful.

3 Innovations and Koreanization of Xinjiang Barbecue Lamb Skewers Business

Now, we will explore in what process Korean Chinese entrepreneurs transformed the humble Xinjiang street snack business into a lucrative gourmet restaurant business. In doing this, we will investigate how the Korean Chinese transnational co-ethnic networks have been important for them in innovating and globalizing their barbecue lamb skewer business.

3.1 Xinjiang Style Barbecue Lamb Skewers and Korean Chinese Drinking Culture

As stated above, Uighur street peddlers brought their Xinjiang style barbecue lamb skewers to the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture in the early 1980s. Very soon, this street food gained a lot of popularity among the local Korean Chinese people even though lamb meat was never popular in Korea. One of my informants, a Korean Chinese man in his mid-40s, stated on the popularity of the Xinjiang barbecue lamb skewers among Korean Chinese people in Yanji:

It was about the early 1980s when I first saw barbecue lamb skewers in Yanji. Uighur street peddlers sold grilled lamb skewers on the streets... and their barbecue lamb skewers gained a lot of popularity and we found it

making an excellent companion for beer. The barbecue lamb skewers were affordable – that’s because lamb meat was always cheaper than beef or pork then – and they were available almost everywhere in Yanji.¹¹

As the statement above clearly indicates, the driving force behind the rapid and intriguing popularity of the Xinjiang barbecue lamb skewers among the Korean Chinese people in Yanbian was their drinking culture. They are known for having a strong drinking culture, like their co-ethnics in South Korea, and they found that the exotic barbecue lamb skewers paired well with beer. According to the World Health Organization, among all Asian peoples, South Koreans are the heaviest drinkers (WHO 2018). Many of our middle-aged Korean Chinese male informants in South Korea and Japan testified that they used to eat barbecue lamb skewers when they drank beer in the streets of Yanji in the 1990s and 2000s, which is still a fond memory for them.

With the soaring popularity of Xinjiang barbecue lamb skewers among Korean Chinese people in Yanbian, there appeared more Uighur street peddlers and, soon, Korean Chinese entrepreneurs began to open restaurants that specialize on Xinjiang barbecue lamb skewers together with alcoholic beverages also. Since the Uighur street peddlers, as Muslims, were not familiar with selling alcoholic drinks, the Korean Chinese restaurants had a cultural advantage over their Uighur competitors. Now, in the Yanbian ethnic Korean community, barbecue lamb skewers are inevitably paired with beer, and Korean Chinese entrepreneurs came to dominate the business.

3.2 *Korean Chinese Barbecue Lamb Skewers Restaurants: Innovations and Koreanization*

¹¹ Mr. Bang in February 2018 in Osaka, Japan.

Initially, these Korean Chinese-owned restaurants in Yanbian sold barbecue lamb skewers that were the same as those of the Uighur street peddlers. Not long after, however, Korean Chinese restaurateurs began to apply some innovations to improve their food and business management according to the needs and preferences of their Korean customers. Such ‘improvements’ were also expedited as more and more Korean Chinese entrepreneurs jumped into this new growing business, which brought fiercer competition among them.¹² In such a competitive business environment, Korean Chinese barbecue lamb skewer restaurateurs had to work hard to attract more customers, to reduce costs and labor input. In this process, there arose several important innovations, and these innovative measures resulted in the birth of the new “Korean Chinese barbecue lamb skewers”, which made this food even more popular not only in China but also in South Korea. These innovative measures included: (1) reducing the size of meat to make it easier for one ‘Korean’ bite; (2) replacing the bamboo or willow skewers with standardized metal skewers; (3) Koreanizing the seasonings and spices; (4) serving the barbecue lamb skewers with other Korean Chinese dishes, which go well with the lamb meat dish and beer; (5) inventing a smoke-free and mechanized barbecue grill; and (6) improving table setting and other measures to improve sanitation and reduce staff’s labor.

3.2.1 Smaller Size Meat and Metal Skewer

One of the very first visible transformation of the Xinjiang style barbecue lamb skewers by Korean Chinese entrepreneurs was reducing the size of the lamb meat. The original Uighur barbecue lamb skewer vendors used large chunks of meat on skewers, which was rather big for Korean Chinese people, especially for women and children. For this reason, Korean

¹² One of the first Korean Chinese restaurateurs who opened barbecue lamb skewers restaurants in Yanji, Mr. Ryong-cheol Yun, stated the he had to think about better management of his restaurant, Pungmu, by the late 1990s due to increasing competition. [Source: http://zoglo.net/board/read/m_renwu/368264. Accessed on January 5, 2021.

Chinese restaurateurs reduced the size of the lamb meat chunks into a chewable size, roughly one third of the original size that Uighur street peddlers used.

Another innovation that the Korean Chinese restaurateurs made was replacing the original bamboo or willow skewers with metal ones. The original Uighur lamb skewers came with meat skewed on bamboo or willow sticks. Bamboo cannot be grown in Yanbian's cold climate, however, and was thus difficult to procure. Instead of importing bamboo sticks from southern provinces, the Korean Chinese restaurateurs began to use metal skewers. According to our informants, initially, they used spokes of abandoned bicycle wheels of the region.¹³ Soon, these were replaced by standardized metal skewers made from more appropriate sources. Metal skewers were also better than bamboo skewers in terms of sanitation as they can be easily washed and quickly dried. Once the even-sized metal skewers were used, then, there followed further innovation, which was the smoke-free and mechanized barbecue grill.

3.2.2 Smoke-free and Mechanized Barbecue Grill

At the Uighur street stalls, the grilling was done at street stalls by peddlers. Normally, they would grill the meat skewers all at once and re-heat them when selling to their customers. When done this way, it not only emits smoke—even though this was not a serious problem because the grilling is done outdoors—but their customers would not know when the meat was actually barbecued before being sold. In addition, such a way requires vendors' labor: they had to prepare the meat, skew the meat, as well as grill, store, and re-heat them when sold. For Korean Chinese restaurateurs, the most serious problem was the smoke emitted during the grilling, as they mostly grilled the meat indoor or customers grilled them on the grill set on table. The founder of Pungmu, also known as Fengmao (豐茂), one of the first

¹³ Two of our informants in Osaka stated that bicycle spokes were used as barbecue skewers in Yanji, and bicycle spokes were easily available everywhere as there were so many abandoned bicycles (Mr. Bang and Mr. Lim) in February 2018 in Osaka, Japan.

Korean Chinese barbecue lamb skewer restaurant in Yanji, Mr. Ryong-cheol Yun states how he had to solve the smoke problem in early days of his restaurant business:

“When I first opened my restaurant, barbecue lamb skewers were all outdoor ones and they grilled the meat outdoors. I grilled lamb skewers on metal grills, and it produced a huge amount of smoke. Especially in winter the smoke was a serious problem. We *Joseonjok* are clean people [and they wouldn’t come to such smoky place]. So, I had to think about ways to get rid of the smoke, and eventually made a smokeless grill with suction system under the grills. My shop was the first one that adopted such system and customers returned, appreciating the clean air of my restaurant [Mr. Yun Ryong-cheol’s interview reported on 27 March, 2019

http://zoglo.net/board/read/m_renwu/368264]

After resolving the problem of smoke, Mr. Yun’s Pungmu restaurant also adopted a mechanized grill system built into a table. The lamb meat is skewed onto standardized metal skewers with attached cogs, allowing the skewers to be rotated automatically and the meat to be cooked evenly on all sides. This mechanization of the barbecue grill was a revolution in this industry. Now, customers were liberated from the continuous labor of grilling the lamb skewers, and their hands became free. The result is that they can eat and drink more while sitting at the table. From the owner’s perspective, there could not be a better outcome. In addition, from the customers’ perspective, watching the unique operation of the grilling machine is also an incentive to visit the restaurant. Another important advantage of the grilling machine is that smoke can be controlled more easily as the suction equipment can be installed right above the machine. The most recent lamb skewer barbecue grills have innovated even further, now sucking the smoke from the bottom of the grill itself. Today, the popular Pungmu Lamb Skewer Barbecue Restaurant has many branches in China, South

Korea and even in Japan, in Tokyo's Shinokubo and Osaka Namba. All their restaurants use smokeless mechanized grilling machines.

3.2.3 Koreanization of the Barbecue Lamb Skewers

While they based their seasoning on the original recipe of Xinjiang style barbecue lamb seasonings and spices, Korean Chinese restaurateurs added more chili pepper powder and seasoned fermented soy paste to reduce the smell of lamb meat, which Koreans generally abhor (Yi 2019). In addition, while Uighur vendors are strict about their religious tradition and would not negotiate easily in their culinary principles, Korean Chinese restaurateurs are flexible in using any ingredients that their customers like. As Korean Chinese people are “not bound by the tradition” (Song 2014a) of lamb skewer preparation, they could be more flexible and creative in the business. For example, they would alternate pork fat and lamb meat to improve the tastes of the meat skewers as one of my informants in Qingdao states:

Normally, *Joseonjok* lamb skewer restaurants put meat and fat (pork fat, normally) alternately when they make their lamb skewers. This way, the meat would not become dry when it is grilled. Uighurs also do the same but using lamb or beef fat. Of course, they would not use pork fat.¹⁴

In addition, Korean Chinese lamb skewer restaurants also serve dishes that are popular among the ethnic Koreans in China such as sweet and sour pork cutlet. Other popularly served dishes at such lamb skewer restaurants include: potato pancakes – this is also typical Yanbian Korean Chinese food; kimchi and other side dishes; and raw garlic cloves, which can be barbecued on skewers and grilled.

¹⁴ Mr. Li, middle-aged Korean Chinese male, who used to work as a manager of a big barbecue lamb skewer restaurant chain in China. (interview held in Qingdao in December 2018).

As Korean Chinese barbecue lamb skewer restaurants are becoming more upmarket, many innovative measures were adopted for the interior design of restaurants. For example, an increasing number of Korean Chinese restaurants adopted a full glass wall for their kitchen so that customers could see inside. Mr. Yun, mentioned above, says that in his effort to upgrade his restaurant chain, he sought after various innovative interior designs from professional interior design companies in China for a centrally located full glass wall kitchen in his restaurants, however, he ultimately adopted a system designed by a South Korean company:

In my effort to improve the interior design of my restaurant chains, I searched for good interior designer companies in China. However, I ended up consulting a South Korean interior design company for full glass wall kitchen. Then, there was no such a design yet in entire China. My restaurant was the first one with such a design in China [http://zoglo.net/board/read/m_renwu/368264] (Accessed on January 26, 2021)

Another innovation of upmarket Korean Chinese lamb skewer restaurants includes tables with nested drawers on one side where all necessary utensils, spices in sachets, wet towels, and napkins are stored, and the drawers can also be pulled out to store extra servings of meat. This type of pull-out drawer, which is set underneath a table, is quite common in South Korea. Through this we can see how the Korean Chinese's transnational connection to South Korean society has helped their rapid popularization, globalization, and gentrification of their barbecue lamb skewer business in China and beyond.

4 Benefits of Transnational Co-ethnic Networks

As seen above, many of the technical and managerial innovations of the Korean Chinese barbecue lamb skewer restaurant business were made possible through the Korean Chinese transnational co-ethnic connections and networks, including their South Korean co-ethnics.

As so many Korean Chinese people have worked and lived in South Korea since the early 1990s – currently there are over half million Korean Chinese people in South Korea – there have been intensive exchanges of people, goods and ideas between the two groups of Koreans. Certainly, such intensive contacts generated prejudice and Korean Chinese migrant workers were socially discriminated and marginalized in South Korea (Lee 2017).

Nevertheless, their work and study in South Korea expanded their co-ethnic networks. In addition, Korean Chinese have migrated further to Japan, United States, the United Kingdom, and other parts of the world (Kim 2019), and in most of cases they settle in or near the areas where South Korean migrants already settled. In the United States, for example, Korean Chinese migrants live in or close to Koreatowns in Los Angeles and Flushing in New York, and there are Korean Chinese barbecue lamb skewers restaurants in both Koreatowns. In the United Kingdom as well, Korean Chinese migrants, as well as North Korean defectors, are concentrated in New Malden area of south-western London, which is the largest South Korean settlement in Europe (Lee 2012). Certainly, there is at least one Korean Chinese barbecue lamb skewer restaurant in New Malden. This is all possible because there are co-ethnic networks among the ethnic Koreans of China and South Korea.

As such, the transnational co-ethnic networks of Korean Chinese were the basis of the amazing globalization of the humble Uighur street food. Many early Korean Chinese entrepreneur restaurateurs of the barbecue lamb skewers business in Yanji and elsewhere, made some capital and also gained business experiences from their ethnic homeland of South Korea. Mr. Uk-dong Kim, who owns the barbecue lamb skewers chain stores of Gyeongseong Lamb Skewers (“Gyeongseong Yangkkochi”) in Seoul is a typical case. He first came to South Korea in 1997 and worked at a chicken restaurant franchise, where he learned restaurant management and cooking skills. Several years later, with the money earned from his previous work, he started his own barbecue lamb skewers restaurant in Seoul and

within ten years he came to manage over fifty franchise restaurants mostly in Seoul and vicinities. Mr. Kim states how his work experience in South Korea helped him to expand his business:

I learned restaurant management knowhow from my three years of work at the chicken restaurant chain in Seoul, and this knowledge and experience were essential for my success later in managing my lamb skewers restaurants.

[http://zoglo.net/board/read/m_jingying/317399 reported on 26 October 2017; accessed on 15 January 2021]

Another case that shows the advantage of Korean Chinese transnational co-ethnic networks is Mr. Seo, who owns a successful Korean Chinese barbecue lamb skewers restaurant chain in South Korea. Mr. Seo was born in a small town in Heilungjiang Province of China and after graduating high school in his hometown, he worked for a South Korean electronics company in Tianjin, China. With the money he saved from his work, as well as money borrowed from his elder sister in Japan and also friends in South Korea, he started his Chinese restaurant business in Seoul. The Korean Chinese online news media *Zoglo.net* reports his story on 19 October 2016:

When he started his restaurant business in Seoul in 2001, he borrowed money from his sister in Japan. Later, as his business expands, his friends also invested in his business... Later, Mr. Seo became the CEO of barbecue lamb skewer restaurant chain Migak and is continuously expanding his business with his *Joseonjok* friends.

[http://zoglo.net/board/read/m_shenghuo/298000 Accessed on 15 January 2021]

As the story above suggests, Korean Chinese people have worldwide co-ethnic and transnational family networks, wider than that of their initial competitors of Uighur street peddlers, thanks to their high mobility and migration access to South Korea and further chain

migrations to Japan, United States, and the United Kingdom, often following their South Korean co-ethnics. With the initial capital accumulated from their employment in South Korea and then also help from their family members and friends scattered around the world, they can start and expand their business. This also helped them to ‘up-marketize’ their barbecue lamb skewers business, making the skewers into a gourmet food. These types of luxury gourmet Korean Chinese barbecue lamb skewers are found especially throughout China, where there are concentrations of South Korean business people and migrants as well as wealthy middle class Korean Chinese people: such as Wangjing in Beijing, Hongquanlu in Shanghai, Xitajie in Shenyang, and Chengyang in Qingdao.

At the same time, the business also spread out to South Korea, first to Korean Chinese towns in Garibong-dong and Daerim-dong in Seoul, then other cities in South Korea. According to Seoul *Joseonjok* community expert, Professor Woo Park, barbecue lamb skewer restaurants began to appear in Seoul’s Korean Chinese community about 2005–2006, and this was possible because the entrepreneurs formed their initial capital through their manual labor in South Korea (Kim 2019). This was regardless of the discrimination and precarity they faced in South Korea (Park 2020). There are many Korean Chinese shops that specialize in barbecue lamb skewers in South Korea, but considering the number of advertisements of Korean Chinese barbecue lamb skewer restaurants on transnational Korean Chinese online media sites such as “Moyiza.com” and “Zoglo.net”, the number of such restaurants has grown continuously since the late 2010s. As such, Korean Chinese lamb skewer barbecue provides excellent business opportunities to many Korean Chinese migrants everywhere. This simple skewer, which was ‘invented’ in Yanbian (or more accurately, imitated from the Xinjiang lamb skewer barbecue of the Uighur people), has been reborn into a luxury food through a series of innovation, providing the transnational Korean Chinese people in South Korea excellent new business opportunities. One Korean Chinese woman in her late thirties,

who opened her small lamb skewer barbecue bar in the Daerim-dong Market of Seoul, told the author in December 2019:

I've worked as a kitchen hand for more than five years before I opened this small barbecue bar a month ago. It's also hard work for a single woman like me. But, now, at least I'm my own boss and all of my hard work turns into my own profit, and not that of another person. I've never been this excited at work since I came to this country.

Indeed, this special new food business, which is a product of the Korean Chinese transnational co-ethnic network, is helping many Korean Chinese migrants in South Korea and elsewhere by providing them important self-employment opportunities.

5. Conclusion

Korean Chinese in China neither had the tradition of consuming lamb meat nor did they have much entrepreneurial tradition. Nevertheless, when they learned the techniques of Xinjiang barbecue lamb skewers from Uighur street peddlers in the early 1980s, Korean Chinese entrepreneurs began to improve and “Koreanize” the humble street food of the Uighur people according to their own taste and needs. Within the next two decades, the Korean Chinese entrepreneurs transformed this street snack to an upmarket gourmet restaurant food through various innovative technical and culinary measures. They also globalized this “Korean Chinese barbecue lamb skewers” to other regions of China, and then to South Korea, Japan, United States and beyond. This intriguing phenomenon can be explained by their ethnic capital, particularly, their transnational work experiences in South Korea as well as with their South Korean co-ethnics in China.

Korean Chinese having kept their ethnic culture, identity, and language helped in building their transnational co-ethnic networks. This facilitated them to be reconnected to their co-ethnics of South Korea in the 1990s when they came to have opportunities to travel to and work in South Korea. As migrant workers, they mostly worked in various so-called 3D labor sectors of the country. Meanwhile, thanks to their bilingual capacity of Korean and Chinese, they were also able to play intermediary roles between the South Korean companies and factories that were relocating to China and the local governments of China after the 1990s (Shin 2017). Certainly, their work experience in South Korea was harsh, especially with social prejudice and discrimination (Song 2014a). Nevertheless, these transnational experiences also provided them with opportunities to accumulate important capital, which would help them to open their own business either in China or elsewhere. More importantly, it also offered many of them precious opportunities to learn new business practices, management skills, and entrepreneurialism.

It was in this backdrop that many Korean Chinese entrepreneurs were able to develop their barbecue lamb skewer businesses, changing the low-entry barrier, labor intensive, and low value added business into a capital-intensive, valued-added, gourmet food restaurant business in the last two decades. Thanks to this new business idea, for which Korean Chinese have more advantage than their potential competitors either in China or South Korea, Korean Chinese entrepreneurs gained a niche market in the competitive South Korean culinary sector and there they occupy an advantageous position over their co-ethnic competitors in South Korea. In China as well, Korean Chinese entrepreneurs created a niche of their own through their access to initial capital, and to the more advanced market culture of South Korea, from which they learned innovative measures. Today, Korean Chinese entrepreneurs own many successful barbecue lamb skewer restaurant chains both in China and South Korea. They also

are expanding their business to other countries such as Japan and the United States, where they have transnational co-ethnic networks.

This case of the Korean Chinese barbecue lamb skewer business testifies to the importance and power of ethnic capital, particularly transnational co-ethnic networks in regard to ethnic entrepreneurialism. Korean Chinese people's having kept their ethnic language and culture helped them to be reconnected to their co-ethnics in South Korea and gave them access to the already well established transnational co-ethnic networks, including Korean churches. Through these co-ethnic networks, they could be connected to their co-ethnics in wealthy western countries such as Japan, United States and United Kingdom. Their "ethnic capital" – particularly their co-ethnic networks – helps them not only to migrate to other countries, but also supports their entrepreneurship. These were the main differences between Korean Chinese and Uighur entrepreneurs in their ethnic resources – education, capital, and transnational co-ethnic networks – and they can explain the different degrees of success of their barbecue lamb skewer business in China. Even if both groups are ethnic minorities in China, their ethnic capital or "ethnic resource" (Waldinger et al. 1990) resulted in different business patterns among different ethnic groups.

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