

Japanese and South Korean Gastrodiplomacy: An Analysis of Culinary Ethics in Cultural Diplomacy Strategies

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyse the gastrodiplomacy of Japan and South Korea within the framework of cultural diplomacy, with a focus on culinary ethics. The method employed is descriptive qualitative, using Japan and South Korea as case studies both countries share rich culinary traditions and have successfully utilised food as a means to strengthen their national image. The findings indicate that Japan promotes washoku through values of harmony and respect for nature, whilst South Korea leverages the Hallyu Wave by emphasising collectivism and the dynamics of popular culture. This case study positions culinary ethics as a form of soft power, applied through distinct strategies by each country. The results show that dining etiquette is not merely a social norm, but also a strategic instrument in forming cultural identity and influence at a global level.

Keywords: *Smart Green Tourism Technology, Technology Acceptance Model, Tourist Satisfaction, Destination Loyalty, Smart Tourism*

INTRODUCTION

In the context of contemporary international relations, the gastrodiplomacy of Japan and South Korea has become a crucial instrument of cultural diplomacy, where cuisine is no longer merely a symbol of domestic tradition but also a reflection of the ethics and social values projected onto the global stage (Untari et al., 2025). Gastrodiplomacy, as a diplomatic concept that relies on cuisine to strengthen international relations, utilizes food as soft power to build a positive national image and strengthen cross-border cultural interactions (Untari et al., 2025). In this context,

Japan and South Korea demonstrate two distinct models of gastrodiploamcy strategies, yet both utilize culinary ethics as a window into cultural understanding and social values (Yulliana et al., 2023).

A number of previous studies confirm that gastrodiploamcy functions not only as an economic and tourism tool but also as a cultural-ethical instrument capable of fostering cross-national understanding (Untari et al., 2025) . The article "Examining the Role of Food in Strengthening International Relations" (2025) demonstrates that Japanese and Korean gastrodiploamcy, through restaurants, festivals, and official policies, serves as a means to strengthen political and social ties. A study conducted by (Yulliana et al., 2023) highlights differing approaches: Japan places greater emphasis on the stability of traditions and the promotion of cultural heritage, while South Korea is more adaptive and dynamic by integrating Hallyu (the Korean Wave) into its gastrodiploamcy strategy. A study conducted by shows that kimchi and Korean food have become powerful symbols of national identity in cultural diplomacy. Meanwhile, the article "Gastrodiploamcy: Introducing Culture through Flavor" asserts that gastrodiploamcy holds great potential for building more harmonious and mutually respectful relations between nations (Brain, 2024) .

The objective of this study is to analyze culinary ethics as a philosophical foundation in the gastrodiploamcy strategies of Japan and South Korea, by examining the principles of food philosophy, cultural sustainability practices, representations of national identity, and their cross-cultural adaptations. The method employed is a qualitative approach using critical literature analysis and comparative studies, integrating reviews of soft power theory (Nye, 2004), cultural diplomacy, culinary ethics, and documented case studies of Japanese and South Korean gastrodiploamcy from reputable journals and theses. The secondary data used includes journal articles, policy reports, and official government studies on gastrodiploamcy, making this research descriptive-analytical and comparative in nature.

The research findings indicate that Japanese gastrodiploamcy focuses on the ethics and aesthetics of dining that emphasize harmony, balance, and respect for nature, framed within the philosophy of washoku as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage (Yulliana et al., 2023) . In contrast, South Korea's gastrodiploamcy emphasizes Confucian social values and the dynamics of popular culture, with dining ethics reflecting age hierarchy and respect for seniority, integrated with Hallyu. This analysis confirms that culinary ethics are a key element distinguishing the gastrodiploamcy strategies of the two countries, with Japan prioritizing the stability of tradition and South Korea leveraging innovation and cross-cultural adaptation (Untari et al., 2025) . The research discussion highlights the positive impact of gastrodiploamcy grounded in culinary ethics, as it fosters deeper cultural understanding and promotes peaceful cross-cultural dialogue (Juniarti et al., 2021) . The research's contribution lies in strengthening the theoretical framework of culinary ethics within cultural diplomacy strategies, which can serve as a reference for researchers, policy practitioners, and cultural content creators in Indonesia and other Asian countries in designing more ethical and sustainable gastrodiploamcy strategies (Untari et al., 2025)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gastronomy and gastrodiploamcy are not merely about cooking knowledge and the taste of food, but rather cultural practices that embody social values, history, and national identity. Gastrodiploamcy, according to the concept outlined in the article "Examining the Role of Food in Strengthening International Relations," describes how food is used as a tool to build international relationships and understanding through cultural practices. This study highlights Japan and South Korea as examples of countries that strengthen cultural ties through culinary festivals, international restaurants, and official "policies" . The theory of soft power, introduced by Joseph S. Nye Jr., serves as the primary foundation for gastrodiploamcy as a tool for building cultural influence without coercion. In this context, food functions as a symbol that captures attention and emotionally reinforces national identity. Studies on nation-branding strategies through gastrodiploamcy confirm that food serves as a tool for communicating a nation's identity, values, and way of thinking to the world. The article "Traditional Food as an Instrument of Cultural Diplomacy" further emphasizes that traditional food is not merely an instrument of identity but also a medium for social values such as patience and wisdom (Nadhiroh, 2025) .

Culinary etiquette, as norms and dining practices, reflects the social order and cultural values within a society. In Japan, dining etiquette rooted in the philosophy of washoku emphasizes harmony, aesthetics, and respect for nature, which the government promotes as a representation of national culture. Conversely, in South Korea, dining etiquette is grounded in Confucianism, which emphasizes social hierarchy, respect for seniority, and community solidarity. A study on washoku strategies in Japanese gastrodiploamcy demonstrates how official state policies reinforce these philosophical principles in gastrodiploamcy practices (Shaafiyah, 2022) . Cultural diplomacy and gastrodiploamcy function as public diplomacy that builds a long-term image through cultural exchange, including food. Studies on Hallyu and South Korean gastrodiploamcy demonstrate how the popularity of popular culture boosts global interest in Korean cuisine, thereby making food a dynamic and interactive tool of diplomacy (Juniarti et al., 2021) . Unlike previous studies, which generally focused on soft power strategies and nation branding in a descriptive manner, this study employs a culinary ethics analysis grounded in food philosophy to examine philosophical principles, sustainability practices, identity representation, and cross-cultural adaptation in the gastrodiploamcy of both nations.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach as the primary method. According to (Lamont, 2015) qualitative methods can be either descriptive or explanatory. This approach allows the researcher to focus on the process of depicting and interpreting the research problem, the events under study, and the collected data. The observed data and phenomena are then analyzed, interpreted, and summarized to address the research questions established. Subsequently, the collected data and phenomena are analyzed, interpreted, and synthesized to directly answer the research questions. Data collection involves gathering information from relevant sources, such as academic articles, scientific journals, and official websites related to the research topic. A qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to deeply understand the symbolic meanings embedded in the dining etiquette practices of Japanese and South Korean societies. According to (Moleong 2016) qualitative research seeks to understand social phenomena holistically through descriptions within their natural contexts. This approach is highly relevant for examining cultural practices, symbols, and values that cannot be measured quantitatively.

DISCUSSION

Gastrodiploamcy is a form of cultural diplomacy focused on enhancing mutual understanding between nations through the introduction of cuisine and the culture underpinning it. As part of cultural identity, food possesses universal appeal. Flavors and culinary experiences transcend linguistic and geographical boundaries, making them an effective tool for building international relations (Sharma & Sharma, 2020). Melissen (2017) explains that gastrodiploamcy can be understood as part of a soft power strategy that emphasizes influence through a country's cultural appeal and positive values. Koentjaraningrat (1998) explains that food can be understood through its preparation process and presentation, which reflect a society's value system and lifestyle. Thus, culinary culture encompasses all aspects related to food, from production processes and historical development to the identity and values embedded within it.

The Philosophy of Japanese Food

For the Japanese people, sushi is a traditional dish that represents national identity. Its preparation follows distinctive Japanese principles, particularly in color arrangement for aesthetic appeal and the selection of healthy, natural ingredients. The techniques used tend to be simple to preserve the authenticity of flavor and nutritional content. The presentation of sushi showcases a harmony of color and form that offers both a visual and gustatory experience.

Sushi embodies three core values: harmony in the combination of ingredients, simplicity in presentation , and attention to aesthetics. Furthermore, perfection in Japanese cuisine demands high skill and meticulousness. The

tradition of saying “itadakimasu” before eating expresses gratitude toward nature, the ingredients, and the chef. After eating, “gochisousama deshita” is spoken as a form of thanks.

Onigiri is typically consumed individually in a neat manner, reflecting the values of discipline and responsibility. Even in simple actions like disposing of trash, the Japanese people maintain cleanliness and order. Bento also demonstrates a balance of color, composition, and nutrition, while reflecting minimalist aesthetics and visual harmony.

Korean Food Philosophy

In Korean culture, kimchi holds philosophical significance related to the balance of Yin and Yang. The variety of flavors in kimchi reflects this balance and is believed to offer health benefits.

Ramyeon reflects the modern character of Korean society. A relaxed way of eating, including slurping, is considered normal. However, hierarchical values are still upheld by giving priority to elders. Ramyeon is also associated with the concept of jeong, which is emotional warmth in social relationships.

Bibimbap reflects harmony and collectivity. The colorful ingredients symbolize cosmic balance (obangsaek). The process of mixing the ingredients illustrates unity in diversity. Dining etiquette, such as not leaving food on the plate, demonstrates respect for food and the harmony of the ingredients.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Both countries view cuisine as a strategic asset to strengthen soft power and build national image. Japan emphasizes a tradition-based approach through the washoku campaign, which prioritizes harmony, aesthetics, and respect for nature. Meanwhile, South Korea relies on Hallyu and popular culture to promote its cuisine globally. Dining etiquette in both countries demonstrates that gastrodiploacy is not only about taste but also the cultural values that shape global perceptions of a nation. Thus, cuisine is not merely a promotional tool but also a profound representation of cultural identity.

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