

Cookbooks and Female Writers in Late Chosŏn Korea

Ro Sang-ho

This article examines the history of Korean cookbooks and their female authors in the late Chosŏn period. Two female authors of cookbooks—Chang Kyeongyang 張桂香 (1598–1680) and Yi Pinghŏgak 李憑虛閣 (1759–1824)—used letters and texts for the purpose of communication with and knowledge transmission to women, and in the process shaped an autonomous space for the female reading public. Prior to these female cookbook writers, male scholars were the sole authority on keeping records on Korean food, which they included as part of East Asian knowledge books (Ch. *fang shu*, K. *pangsŏ* 方書). In particular, male writers in the Koryŏ and early Chosŏn periods were interested in the medicinal effects of food. Called “food therapy” (*singnyo* 食療), the medical interest in *materia medica* formed the early literature on Korean food. Entering the late Chosŏn period, however, new authors appeared who approached eating culture from new angles. Rather than its medical effects, these writers emphasized the scholarly, gastronomic, and artistic value of Korean food in and of itself. With Yi Sugwang 李睟光 an important forerunner, male and female writers alike carefully recorded their recipes and created a new practical genre of Korean cookbooks. In this article, I aim to shed new light on the female production of cookbooks, which not only added the female experience of the kitchen to writing on food, but also renovated practical literature, freeing it from the domination of male writers and their methods of food coverage in knowledge books (*pangsŏ*) and compendiums (*ch’ongsŏ* 叢書). Specifically, female knowledge on food and cooking was expressed using the Korean vernacular alphabet, which was not the primary language of male-dominated knowledge books. These female-authored cookbooks—some notable examples being *Ŭmsik timibang* 음식디미방 (Recipes of tasty foods) and *Kyuhap ch’ongsŏ* 규합총서 (Home encyclopedia for women in the inner chamber)—can therefore be regarded as a cultural testing field in which Korean yangban women expanded the boundaries of their space and imagined their own concept of civility.

Keywords: Korean cookbooks, Yi Pinghŏgak, Chang Kyeongyang, Yi Sugwang, *Ŭmsik timibang*, *Kyuhap ch’ongsŏ*

Ro Sang-ho (sro@ewha.ac.kr) is assistant professor of Korean History in the Division of International Studies, Korean Studies Major, Ewha Womans University.

Seoul Journal of Korean Studies 29, no. 1 (June 2016): 133–157.

© 2016 Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies