



## Cultural Study of Natural Environment Exploitation: Eating Culture of the Joseon People through the Novel “*Thousand-Year Kingdom*”

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**ABSTRACT:** The novel “*Thousand-Year Kingdom*” by Kim Kyung-uk is based on a true story from history when three Dutch sailors drifted into Joseon in the 17th century. Through the narrative of Jan Jansz Weltevree - the first Westerner to set foot in Joseon-the life, society, and people of Joseon are perceived and described in a fresh and unfamiliar way, different from the evaluations of Koreans or Easterners. This study focuses on investigating the cultural utilization of the natural environment by the Joseon people in this unique literary work to understand the uniqueness of their eating culture.

**KEYWORDS:** Cultural utilization of the natural environment, Cuisine, Eating culture, Thousand-Year Kingdom.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Culture is a broad concept with numerous definitions worldwide. In seminal work, *Primitive Culture*, E.B. Tylor (2018) defined that “Culture, or civilization, taken in its broad ethnographic sense, generally includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (p. 11). In this definition, Tylor equated culture with civilization, thereby not clearly delineating the content of culture. In Vietnam, according to Tran Ngoc Them (1999), “Culture is an organic system of material and spiritual values created and accumulated by humans through practical activities, in interaction with the natural and social environment” (p. 10). He further posited that culture can be viewed as a system comprising four essential elements, namely cognitive culture, community organizational culture, culture in relation to the natural environment, and culture in relation to the social environment. Thus, the way humans interact with the natural environment is the third most important element of every cultural system. When interacting with the natural environment, humans often take advantage of beneficial resources and respond to harmful ones. Eating and drinking, for instance, are manifestations of utilizing the natural environment.

Culturology has a relatively developed history in Europe, but in Vietnam, it is a relatively new field of research. The research of many humanities and social sciences from the perspective of culturology is increasing in quantity and depth in quality. Particularly, cultural and literary studies have gained more attention recently. The reason for this trend, as summarized by Tran Le Bao (2009: 68), is that literature is not just a part of a culture, subjected to direct cultural influences, but also one of the means by which culture exists and is preserved. Literature is directly influenced by the cultural environment of its time and the unique cultural traditions of a nation while also reflecting the unique cultural psychology of a particular era and ethnic community.

On the other hand, eating is an important component when studying culture. Korean eating culture has been studied for a long time, with massive works, especially the extensive works of Joo Young-ha, such as “*Korean History on the Dining Table*” and “*Culinary Studies*” (2011), “*Korean Cuisine: If You Don’t Eat Rice, You’ll Be Hungry*” (2011), and so on. However, research on Korean cuisine through literary works is relatively scarce. Among these works, Han Kyung Ran’s “*Classical Literature: Investigating Author’s Consciousness through Food in the Works of Huh Gyun and Seong Yak-yong*” (2014) is one of the few studies that explore the topic of cuisine through literary works. This study examines the author’s sense of restraint portrayed through food and the author’s consciousness reflected in food (instincts, entertainment, solace, and perception of reality) through Huh Gyun’s work “*Tinh So Phu Bao Cao*” and Jeong Yak-yong’s collection of poems “*Tra Son Thi Van Tap*”. In this study, Han Kyung Ran also explored previous studies that focus on two directions.

- ① Direction of studying classical works on culinary culture
- ② Direction of studying food consumption in classical works

In line with the trends and research directions of foundational studies, the author chose to study literary works on the culinary culture of the Korean people, specifically the culinary culture of the Joseon era in the 17th century. Furthermore, contrary to the significance of literature as a means of expressing the unique culture of a specific era and community, research on cultural aspects



through literature is relatively scarce. Therefore, exploring and implementing this research topic will contribute to a multidimensional study of Korean culture, and the author hopes that the research results will reveal many new and interesting insights. For the above reasons, the author chose a literary work from Korea that deeply reflects the Joseon culture, especially the culinary culture, to study the cultural utilization of the natural environment by the Korean people. This topic remains relatively unexplored. Specifically, in this article, based on the theoretical foundation of Tran Ngoc Them's cultural utilization of the natural environment, the author will survey and analyze the culinary culture of the Joseon people to depict the unique cultural aspects of Korean cuisine.

## 2. INTRODUCTION TO THE AUTHOR AND HIS WORK

Kim Kyung-uk, born in 1971 in Gwangju, is a distinguished South Korean author. He earned a bachelor's degree in English Literature from Seoul National University and subsequently obtained a Ph.D. in Korean Literature from the same prestigious institution. Kim embarked on his literary journey in 1993 as a student with the Young Writer's Award bestowed by "The World of Authors" for the novel *The Lonely*. Since then, he has garnered numerous awards, including the 37th Han-kuk Il-bo Literature Award in 2004 for the short story "*Jang Guk-yeong Has Died, So What?*," the 53rd Modern Literature Award in 2007 for "99%" the 40th Dong-in Literature Award in 2009 for "*Dangerous Reading*" and the esteemed 3rd Kim Seung-ok Literature Award in 2015 for "*Forever Young*." In 2016, his mesmerizing piece "*Heaven's Door*" earned him the distinction of the 40th Ideal Literary Award. Other notable works by Kim include "*No Coffee in Baghdad Cafe*" (1996), "*Meeting Betty*" (1999), "*Who Killed Kurt Cobain?*" (2003), "*Like a Fairy Tale*" (2010), "*God Does Not Have Grandchildren*" (2011), "*The Golden Apple*" (2013), "*Time of Dogs and Wolves*" (2016), and "*The Man Who Looks in the Mirror*" (2018).

The novel "The Thousand-Year Kingdom" is based on the true story of three Dutch sailors who drifted ashore in Joseon during the 17th century. The novel depicts the lives of these foreign individuals in a foreign land through the narrative of Jan Jansz Weltevrete. "The Thousand-Year Kingdom" vividly portrays the inner lives of the main character as well as aspects of social and political life in Joseon during the early 17th century.

In 1627, three Dutch sailors named Weltevrete, Evoken, and Denison were sailing on the ship *Ouwerkerck* to Nagasaki, Japan when they were caught in a storm and shipwrecked on Jeju Island, Joseon (Korea). They were imprisoned in Jeju for about a year before being escorted to the capital on the orders of King Joseon. According to the laws of Joseon at that time, foreigners were not allowed to leave once they set foot on Joseon's territory, so three of them were forced to become soldiers imperial soldiers. Evoken was assigned to a fire-arrow unit, while Weltevrete and Denison belonged to the artillery unit. Later, Weltevrete was given the task of manufacturing cannons to serve the military.

In the following spring, an envoy from the Tatar Empire (the ethnic Manchu people who would later establish the Qing Dynasty) arrived in Joseon. If the Tatar envoy discovered the presence of Western foreigners in Joseon, they would suspect that Joseon was in contact with foreign powers and plotting betrayal. As a result, all three Dutch people were detained. On the day the Tatar envoy departed, Denison disappeared after deceiving the guards. He intercepted the Tatar envoy and pleaded for their help to leave Joseon. The Joseon court was furious, and Denison was punished severely. Later, Weltevrete and Evoken were exiled to the southern region, where they coincidentally discovered cannons left behind by the Ming Dynasty from the war against Japan. They planned to upgrade the cannons and make them more powerful. Weltevrete focused on researching the production of cannons under the gentle supervision of a friendly camp commander. However, his successor was different from him. Due to his passion for banquets and his desire to assert his authority, this person prohibited Weltevrete from manufacturing cannons any longer. The monotonous life drove Weltevrete to seek a way to escape Joseon. However, his escape plan was thwarted by Evoken, who wished to stay in Joseon instead of risking his life elsewhere. As a result, Weltevrete was discovered and imprisoned for a period of time. At the same time, news of the current commander's authoritarian and dictatorial rule reached the ears of the King of Joseon, resulting in his dismissal and exile to Jeju Island. The newly appointed commander granted freedom and restored the opportunity for Weltevrete to research and improve the cannons. Finally, Weltevrete successfully manufactured the cannons.

Meanwhile, the Tatar king changed the country's name to "Qing," meaning "purity," and proclaimed himself the Emperor. Thus, a nomadic tribe on the steppe became a ruling dynasty over all of China. The emerging empire demanded Joseon become its vassal state instead of maintaining a friendly diplomatic relationship. If Joseon refused, the Tatar Empire would invade and conquer Joseon. However, the Joseon court never agreed to the Tatar's demands for submission. Furthermore, with the hostile attitude



displayed by the Joseon court towards the Tatar, the war between the two nations was inevitable. In that winter, an army of 120,000 Tatar soldiers advanced towards Joseon. When news of the impending war reached King Joseon, the royal family, the noble officials, and a force of 12,000 troops quickly moved to Nam Han Mountain Fortress. The enemy forces surged in like an unstoppable wave. The war on Joseon soil suddenly became the war of Weltevrete and Evoken. In one battle, amidst the deafening roar of the cannons, Evoken pushed Weltevrete aside and fell dead upon him. Thus, all of Weltevrete's comrades perished, and he was left alone to fight in a foreign land among unfamiliar people and beliefs. Nevertheless, he still whispered to himself, "Even if the enemy retreats, I will continue to fight. The battle for the soul has just begun."

When Weltevrete first set foot in Joseon, he was amazed and startled by what he saw. Among the many "peculiar" aspects of Joseon society, he was particularly interested in the cuisine and eating culture. He paid meticulous attention to the food and described it vividly in his writings. Through Weltevrete's descriptions, the author will analyze the culture of the Korean people during the Joseon era from the cultural perspective of Tran Ngoc Them (1999).

### 3. Cultural Utilization of the Natural Environment: Eating in Korean Joseon Era through the novel "A Thousand-Year Kingdom".

According to Tran Ngoc Them (1999), the culture of interacting with the natural environment can be classified into the culture of utilizing the natural environment, including food, the culture of adapting to the natural environment, including clothing, housing, and transportation. Ideally, all three aspects would be presented simultaneously. However, due to the limitations of this article, the author will only analyze the eating culture of the Korean people during the Joseon era. The study of the culture in relation to clothing, housing, and transportation will be addressed in the upcoming study.

#### 3.1 Meal Structure: Emphasis on Rice and Porridge

Eating and drinking is a culture that utilizes the natural environment. Similar to Vietnam, the meal structure of the Joseon people clearly reflects the influence of the traditional agricultural culture of rice farming. It is a plant-based meal structure in which rice, made from grains, takes the central role and is mentioned first in the meal. In the novel "A Thousand-Year Kingdom", rice made from rice grains is also mentioned first when discussing the meal: "Looking at the rounded rice grains like small balls, Evoken said it was rice balls. He said the Japanese people also eat it. They must have added salt to it, so it has a slightly salty taste." (Kim Kyung Uk, 2007: 46). The origin of rice balls in Korean cuisine is not clear. However, it may have appeared since ancient times when people needed a portable meal for long journeys or on battlefields where it was not feasible to cook rice. During times of scarcity, the Korean people would make rice balls from plain rice or rice without seasonings to eat. For this reason, rice balls are considered a symbol of difficult times. The character Weltevrete described the Joseon people's rice balls as "like small balls." Here, we can see cultural differences reflected in the naming of the same concept. While the Japanese refer to this dish as "onigiri," derived from the verb "nigiru," meaning "to grasp" or "to squeeze" in Japanese, the Vietnamese call it "cơm nắm," and the Koreans call it "jumeok-bap," derived from the noun "jumeok," meaning "fist" or "to clench one's hand" in Korean. Meanwhile, Park Yeon, a Westerner, referred to this dish as "rice ball." It is further observed that the meal structure during this difficult period consisted solely of rice balls mixed with a small amount of salty salt, without any other food.

The meal structure with rice as the main and only ingredient is also reflected in the dish known as "súp gạo tẻ" (white rice porridge). "The foreign soldiers brought us bowls of white rice porridge and removed the iron and rope shackles that bound us. Their sudden act of kindness made me uneasy. I did not know if this would be our last meal. I ate the food they brought with relief and gratitude." (Kim Kyung Uk, 2007:49). Therefore, simply consuming a bowl of white rice porridge could be considered equivalent to having a complete meal.

The meal structure that emphasizes dishes prepared from grains or rice among the Koreans during the Joseon era contributed to the belief that one must "eat rice" to be considered truly "eating" like a Korean. Kim Young-ha (2011) also supported this idea in his research on Korean cuisine, where he references content from a Korean-language book titled "Mậu ngũ yển hành lục" (Record of Banquets and Travels in the Year of the Wood Horse), specifically Volume 4 written by Seo Yu-moon (1762-1822) during the Joseon period.

*When Wolsa Lee Sang-gong went on an embassy to Ming, a vizier invited him to choose a date to visit his house. On the day of the appointment, the general was busy with affairs at the palace, so the family members invited Nguyệt Sa to stay and wait for the vizier to return. However, since Nguyệt Sa arrived before the mealtime, when the family members conveyed the vizier's words and*



brought out wine and refreshments to entertain him, he declined, stating that it was already late and wanted to leave. Since he had not eaten, the family continued serving him cakes and fruits, but he remained steadfast in his decision to leave because he had not yet eaten rice. Upon the vizier's return, the household members recounted their fear that Ming envoy Nguyệt Sa might be hungry, so they served him food five times. However, he continued to assert that he had not eaten and left. Hearing this, the vizier regrettably said, "The people of Joseon perceive that if they do not eat rice, they are hungry. It seems that you have forgotten to offer him rice."

Nguyệt Sa mentioned here is none other than Lee Jeong-gun (1564-1653), who is recognized as one of the four major mid-Joseon writers. This period shows the mindset of the people during the Joseon era, when rice is regarded as the essential component of a meal. They believed that regardless of the variety of other dishes, it is essential to consume rice or grains to consider the meal complete. In addition, this belief explains why rice is considered fundamental when offering ancestral rituals in Korean culture. The absolute faith in rice led to its use as a form of currency or taxation. Rice became a substitute for currency (Kim Young-ha, 2011: 74-77). The Kingdom of a Thousand Years also addressed this issue: "The king appointed us as his close guards and pledged to provide us with 70 cattles (a unit of weight) of rice every month" (Kim Kyung Uk, 2007: 88).

The typical meal structure of the Joseon people emphasizes the importance of rice. However, what was the meal structure during formal banquets hosted by officials or in the royal court? The main food in the meal structure of royal banquets and the households of high-ranking Joseon officials first include various types of meat and fish. In the work, Park Yeon and his two companions were summoned to the royal court and were entertained by King Taejo of Joseon (1595-1649). Weltevree described the cuisine of the Joseon royal court as follows: "There was an abundance of food and drinks, from thinly sliced and grilled beef, to marinated and fragrant grilled pork, pan-fried fish wrapped in egg, stir-fried mushrooms, noodles, and wine..." (Kim Kyung Uk, 2007: 86)<sup>1</sup>. The meal structure in the homes of high-ranking Joseon officials, where Weltevree was later invited to attend, was also diverse and rich, no less than the royal court banquets. There were "various ingredients, such as beef, pork, chicken, fish, eggs, mushrooms, vegetables..." marinated with spices and seasonings before being grilled, simmered, or boiled. Thinly sliced and skillfully prepared beef and pork, thinly sliced fish with a layer of white or egg yolk, and neatly fried eggs were some of the delicacies served (Kim Kyung Uk, 2007: 102).

Through Weltevree's description, it can be seen that the meal structure of Joseon banquets was rich in various types of meat such as beef, pork, chicken, etc. As for seafood, except for fish, Park Yeon's work does not mention any representative seafood. Despite Joseon being a peninsula with a coastline stretching 8,460 km from east to west, in reality, crabs and shellfish were rare delicacies even for the royal court and the noble class of Joseon. Go Yeon Hee (2013:119) examined ancient records and found the reason: "The book *Capital of Goryeo* meticulously describes Goryeo through the eyes of Chinese envoys, stating that there is an abundance of seafood in Goryeo, and even the lowest-ranking individuals can easily buy and consume them. However, when examining later documents, it is found that it is unknown whether it was due to the need to pay tribute with a lot of seafood, but the low-ranking individuals of Joseon could not easily enjoy them," and that "crabs were among the extremely rare dishes in Joseon period."

According to Weltevree the next component in the structure of Joseon banquet meals is mushrooms and vegetables. Weltevree mentions vegetables in general without specifying each type. It can be assumed that the variety of green leafy vegetables in the eastern country would be much greater than in his homeland, and he could not possibly know all their names.

Therefore, similar to Vietnamese culture, the culinary culture of the Korean people during the Joseon period utilized plant-based resources such as vegetables. However, the Joseon Peninsula, which European visitors likened to "a sea face in a hurricane" has a large number of mountain ranges covering 70% of its total area. This is why the Korean people made extensive use of wild vegetables in their meal structure.

Although Weltevree does not mention rice or grains when describing the dishes at the banquet, he does mention wine: "The wine is clear in color but has a deep taste" (Kim Kyung Uk, 2007:86). The clear-colored wine referred to is wine made from rice, including well-known Korean wines such as Thakju, Cheongju, or Soju. Therefore, rice is not only used to make rice balls or porridge but is also utilized by Koreans in the production of rice wine for drinking.

<sup>1</sup> All quotations from the book *Kingdom of a Thousand Years* by Kim Kyung Uk (2007) in this article are translated by Nguyen Thi Thu Ha.



Regarding the taste of the food, Weltevree says, “The cuisine of heretics is both stimulating and tender. All dishes emit the smell of garlic” (Kim Kyung Uk, 2007:86). This is the distinctive taste of Korean cuisine that leaves a strong impression on foreigners. Korean dishes tend to use a variety of spices and seasonings to create a unique “complex flavor” rather than preserving the natural taste of the ingredients. Korean dishes do not just linger on the tip of the tongue; they spread throughout the mouth with a subtle, gentle flavor that is not overly sweet, fatty, or spicy. Koreans use soy sauce, scallions, garlic, sesame salt, sesame oil, chili powder, pepper, and more to season their dishes. Hence, a typical dish would require at least 5 to 6 types of seasonings to create the stimulating yet tender taste of Korean cuisine.

In addition, their food presentation is meticulous and vibrant in color, and Park Yeon exclaimed: “What captivated my gaze the most was the decoration and vibrant colors of the dishes. The high-quality dishes were shaped like towers, meticulously crafted by skilled artisans. Why would the heretics of this kingdom focus all their intellectual and cultural light solely on the dining table? The heretics elevated their cuisine to the level of artistry” (Kim Kyung Uk, 2007:102-103). Even desserts were arranged like towers: “As soon as the table was cleared, the servants immediately brought in a new small table. On the table, there were indeed peaches, apples, pears, dried persimmons, and walnuts piled up high like a tower. They were dessert items” (Kim Kyung Uk, 2007:106). The style of arranging food into tall cylindrical towers is only seen in the structure of banquet meals. The banquet dishes are stacked on top of each other, and the height varies depending on social status. Surprised by this arrangement, “Evoken, who had traveled the world and tasted diverse dishes, could not help but exclaim in awe. Denison couldn’t keep his mouth shut” (Kim Kyung Uk, 2007:102-103).

These foreign visitors were greatly impressed by the banquet table arrangement of the Joseon Koreans to the point that they doubted whether the Joseon people had poured all their intellect and culture of their civilization onto the dining table. They perceived that the Joseon table is filled with exquisite artistic qualities, completely different from their own country’s culture.

### 3.2 Eating etiquette

The scholars of the Joseon dynasty adhered to strict eating and drinking etiquette. The elementary school textbooks at that time taught children about the proper manners for eating and drinking. Scholars of Neo-Confucianism in Joseon also believed in the importance of moderation during meals (Joo Young-ha, 2011: 88-89). However, Weltevree made a different observation about the eating habits of the Joseon people in the novel “A Thousand-Year Kingdom.” “All heretics eat excessively. They eat and drink without pause. Their hurried eating and drinking aim for extreme pleasure but fall into transient excitement. They do not eat to live but live to eat. Male heretics grab food with their mouths and swallow it whole like hungry ghosts. Their gluttony devours everything, as if consuming raw and swallowing death itself, clinging tightly to the source of life” (Kim Kyung Uk, 2007: 105). After finishing their meals, they “rub their bellies, swollen like sails filled with wind, and feel content and happy” (Kim Kyung Uk, 2007: 106). Thus, it can be said that the people of Joseon might not have been aware of the amount of food they consumed, but according to Weltevree, a foreigner, he found that Koreans in Joseon were generally people who ate a lot. In fact, not only Park Yeon in the novel “A Thousand-Year Kingdom,” but also the Japanese and French people made similar observations. In the late 19th century, when missionaries came to Korea, a French missionary referred to the people of Joseon as “great eaters of Asia.” The book “Thuc Thieu” by Yi-ik (1681-1763) also mention:

“The efforts of our people in consuming food are unparalleled. Recently, someone visited Yuku (now Okinawa), and the people there sarcastically said, “Your custom is to constantly stir the rice vigorously with an iron pot and eat with metal spoons, so how could you not be poor?” Overall, they were people who had migrated to our country before, so they understood the situation well” (Joo Young-ha, 2011: 72).

In Korea, the book “Toa Vi Luc” by Oh Hee-moon (1539-1613) also mentioned that despite being in a period of war, they cooked up to 7 hob (a measure of volume) of rice for each meal (Joo Young-ha, 2011: 72-73). It is indeed a large quantity for each person to consume half a kilogram of rice per day.

Describing the phenomenon of overeating among the people of Joseon in a straightforward, direct, and vivid manner, Weltevree said, “They (the people of Joseon) do not eat to live but live to eat. Men of different religions pick up food and swallow it whole like hungry ghosts.” Surely, the people of Joseon at that time ate a lot and hastily, which surprised Weltevree.

Regarding the etiquette of treating guests at home, the people of Joseon would often say, “We apologize for not preparing many dishes,” even though a continuous array of food is presented before and during the banquet. This inevitably leaves foreign guests



dining with Koreans during the Joseon era feeling perplexed, even thinking they are being mocked. This can be clearly observed in the novel "A Thousand Years of Kingdom."

*"We apologize for not preparing many dishes."*

*"Captain, isn't that man making fun of us now?" Evoken said in shock.*

*Evoken asked the young manager if they were being teased. The young official responded with a smile.*

*"That is the way of greeting in this country."*

The behavior of the Joseon people bears a slight resemblance to that of the Vietnamese, as the hosts always strive to generously and graciously treat their guests. Therefore, when they saw the three foreign guests eating voraciously, instead of feeling offended, the high-ranking officials and nobles were delighted. However, when the guests did not eat much or declined the food, the high-ranking officials and nobles could not hide their disappointed expressions.

Another strange point that foreign visitors discovered when dining at the noble houses of Joseon was the absence of women sitting and eating together.

*"Does this house not have women?" Evoken asked the young official.*

*It was only then that I realized that all the people sitting in the room were men.*

*"Men and women cannot sit and eat together," the young official replied. (Kim Kyung Uk, 2007: 103)*

South Korea is one of the countries heavily influenced by Confucianism, and Confucianism during the Joseon period (1392-1910) reached its peak. The perspective of Confucianism emphasizes that the relationship between men and women is the foundation of all human relationships, but in reality, it emphasizes the differentiation between males and females. The absence of women and girls in the banquet for guests mentioned above is an expression of gender discrimination during the Joseon era. Joo Young-ha (2011) also states that during the Joseon period, when eating, fathers and sons or grandsons would sit at the same table, while mothers and daughters would eat separately in the kitchen area, and they would only use one spoon to eat rice due to the scarcity of eating utensils during that time.

Being influenced by Confucianism, people in East Asia, such as Japan, Korea, and Vietnam would not be surprised by this phenomenon. However, people from the Western culture may find it difficult to understand and express different thoughts. In "A Thousand Years of the Kingdom," Evoken reflects on this phenomenon as follows: "Captain, it is clear that these people are afraid that their women will fall in love with us, so they have to hide them carefully. I heard that a Chinese man locked up his wife in a separate room for ten years to isolate her because he could not bear to see her smiling at the neighboring men. (...) However, it turns out that when it comes to jealousy, the Chinese cannot compare to the men of this kingdom. That is why they had to establish the rule that men can only move around during the day, while women can only go out at night, right?"

Evoken finds it difficult to understand the phenomenon of women not being allowed to travel during the day and the absence of women sitting at the same table as men, even within the same family. It is likely that Evoken has never heard of Confucianism - a belief system that has greatly influenced Northeast Asian countries and Vietnam - so it is understandable that he is perplexed. Being a free-spirited individual who craves love, Evoken speculates that perhaps the people of Joseon Korea were afraid that their women would fall in love with Western foreigners. However, the deep-rooted reason behind these rules of dining and social interactions in Joseon Korea lies in the long-standing Confucian ideology that emphasizes male dominance and control in the country.

In addition, Weltevree also mentions the smoking culture of the Joseon people. "People of different religions smoked using long tobacco pipes made from bamboo. At both ends of the bamboo, there were tobacco containers and mouthpieces made of brass. The length of the pipe was half a vadem (1.698m), so it was impossible to light it by oneself." (Kim Kyung Uk, 2007: 120).

The tobacco pipe used by the Joseon people of Korea was made of bamboo, symbolizing for the agricultural and rural countries. This feature is similar to the tobacco pipe, a cultural symbol of Vietnam, which is also a cultural symbol. However, the difference lies in the length of the Korean pipe, which is over half a meter, making it impossible for the smokers to light it by themselves. It is no wonder that during the late Joseon period, a profession related to tobacco emerged in Korea. We can observe the occupation of tobacco harvesters in the painting "Removing Tobacco" by Kim Hong Do. When the act of tobacco harvesting became a profession, it can be understood that the people of Korea during this period favored tobacco to the extent that Weltevree had to comment: "In this kingdom, people of all ages, both men and women, enjoy smoking. Even young children casually hold tobacco pipes in their mouths while walking on the street. When holding a tobacco pipe, the faces of the followers of different religions light up with a



look of contentment and happiness. A child holding a pipe as tall as their body smiles brightly like an angel. The followers of different religions indulge in pleasure. In this country, not being able to smoke tobacco is considered disgraceful.” (Kim Kyung Uk, 2007: 120). Through Weltevree’s comments, we can understand that people from all walks of life, regardless of gender or age, including children, were swept up in the “storm” of smoking tobacco during the Joseon period in Korea. Tobacco brought a sense of pleasure and ecstasy to the people of Joseon, and not being able to smoke was not just a feeling of discomfort but also a sense of shame and embarrassment. Therefore, the widespread utilization of cigarettes is self-evident.

However, when was tobacco brought into Joseon and through which route? While there are no exact written records, the legend suggests that tobacco was introduced to Joseon from Japan during the years 1608-1616, around the time of the Japanese invasions of Korea. According to the “Nhan To Thuc Luc” (Records of Nhan To), tobacco was imported into Joseon in 1616. However, the smoking method was mentioned in the book *Chi phong loai thuyét*<sup>2</sup>, indicating that tobacco might have been introduced even earlier. Initially, when tobacco was newly introduced to Joseon, it was very expensive, with the price of one catty of tobacco reaching a significant amount of silver in 1624, making it affordable only for the noble class. However, within a few years, it became widely popular. Hendrik Hamel (1630-1692) also described the fondness of the Joseon people for tobacco in his book “*Hamel’s Journal*” - a book he wrote after escaping from 13 years of captivity in Joseon<sup>3</sup>.

In this work, the author examined the food and drinks recounted by Weltevree in the book “A Thousand-Year Kingdom” to depict the structure of meals in Joseon-era Korea. In addition, the author relies on the evidence provided by Weltevree regarding the etiquette rules of eating and drinking during the Joseon period to generalize the social behavior through the manner of hosting guests at the homes of officials and the Joseon royal court.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This article has examined the Korean cuisine presented in the work “A Thousand-Year Kingdom” by Kim Kyung Uk, while analyzing it from a cultural perspective. The research findings indicate that during the Joseon era, the Korean people placed great importance on rice-based dishes, specifically “cơm nắm” (rice balls) and rice porridge. These dishes were the main and first ones mentioned in the meal structure of the Korean people. In this work, “cơm nắm” and white rice porridge are not only the main dishes but also the only ones associated with individuals in difficult circumstances. In addition, the royal cuisine and banquet culture of Joseon Korea is depicted in a majestic and elaborate manner through Weltevree’s accounts, showcasing a wide variety of intricately decorated dishes resembling towers. This unique feature in the Korean table-setting culture is highlighted. Furthermore, tobacco also holds significant meaning as it helps depict the social and cultural landscape of 17th-century Joseon. It created a widespread “obsession” that permeated all levels of society, from commoners to the aristocracy and even the royal court of the Joseon dynasty. Through this study, we also recognize the similarities between Korean and Vietnamese cultures in various aspects, such as the emphasis on rice-based cuisine, observance of etiquette when hosting guests, and the cultural practice of smoking with long bamboo pipes.

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