

# The small plates



Banchan is both singular and plural

I thought about the semi basement flat we once lived in as a child a lot, and the smell of frying onions. Nothing else was there in my memory as far as I could remember, but both my sister and my mother are adamant that it also had fish cakes in it. Perhaps. It is entirely possible that what I remember is the beginning of the dish, where gently fried onions provide the backbone of what it would become a stir fried eomuk. But my memories are clear, and only fixated on deliciously sweet fragrance of soy sauce onions that are caramelising sweetly in sugar and butter soft garlic. I remember my mother's rustic, almost reluctant hands. My mother sliced the onions against the old wooden chopping board that definitely had seen better days. But the clumpy sound of blunt

knife hitting the board comforted me in the strangest ways. The small musky aired flat was the home gave my mother her first standup kitchen sink, and her brand new two ring gas hob became the most prized possession that made her life easy. Small fridge with even smaller freezer wasn't always filled full but she had a real knack for fruitful cooking that could turn a few small

handful of radishes into tantalisingly spicy salads. She simmered sweet summer courgettes with salted prawns, and made perfectly steamed custardy eggs that had the faint ocean flavoured saltiness. She was thrifty enough to know that old newspapers were best saved for frying fish, to soak up the spitting oil and smell. My mother was an inventive cook with generous hands; always preserving and fermenting the vegetables of season. She was purposefully frugal with good taste. Her food was unfussy and had the a soul of rural country, heavily influenced by my maternal grandmother's traditional cooking that belonged to the coastal town that bordered land and sea. Her small plates of sharing dishes moved fluidly from

spring to winter, and our rice table was small but honest with so much love and respect for the produces in abundance. We went foraging together in spring to near by mountains to see the earth awake with the gift of wild bitter greens. Forrest green mugworts were the taste of my childhood in April, which became chewy rice cakes I liked. Summer in that house was flavoured with strawberry jams in jars that lasted until the next autumn, while winter was dedicated to the bone broths. I remember my father digging a hole to bury the earthenware beneath the ground late into the night for the ceremonial event of family gimjang before the first frost in winter. Times were simple and innocent. There were enough twinkling stars

in the sky to wish for our dreams and I had more time in the world to sit by my mother to watch her salt the vats of cabbages in awe. And this is the memories of my ordinary childhood that I miss the most. – Banchan, both singular and plural, accompanies every meal and offers variety of textures and flavours alongside kimchi. When I was growing up, it was often said you can tell how good the cook is by the spread of banchan dishes offered at table. Wherever you go, you are likely to be welcomed with the arrays of small plates that soon fill up the entire table, way before the main event takes the centre stage. I do think banchan is such a unique culture in Korean cuisine that thumbs up the kind hearted and generous

## Sautéed courgette

I often think there is remarkable similitude between Italian and Korean cooking. Both cuisines are lead by seasonal produces with emphasis on honest cooking that respects the natural characters of ingredients. And this particular dish always reminds me of the way Italians treat their greens: sautéed simply in plenty of good oil with nothing much other than few cloves of garlic and maybe a pinch of flaked chilli. You can really taste the courgettes for what they are here, hence the dish is often cooked with young courgettes back home in Korea, to celebrate their wonderful sweetness.

Fresh chilli added here is for the colour rather than heat.

### Serves 4

1.5 tbsp extra virgin olive oil  
2 cloves of garlic, minced  
300g courgettes, sliced into half moon shape  
¼ onion, thinly sliced  
½ tsp flaky sea salt  
1 tbsp mirin  
½ tsp toasted white sesame seeds, lightly crushed  
½ long mild red chilli, deseeded and thinly sliced  
sesame seeds

Add the olive oil and minced garlic to a cold sauté pan and place it over medium heat. I like to start them in a cold pan to slowly infuse the flavour into the oil. It will soon start to make lightly sizzling sound and smell very fragrant. Garlic shouldn't colour, so soon as it is warmed up to this point, add the courgettes and sliced onion along with salt. Stir the pan occasionally and sauté gently over lower side of medium heat for 5 minutes. Do check on the pan from time to time as you might want to add a splash of water, if the pan looks a little dry but not too much so that it makes the puddle.

After 5 minutes, add the mirin and cook for further 5 minutes or until courgettes are cooked to your preference. I like mine tender but not completely mushy so there is still a little bite left in them. Some people prefer it more stewed down thus often place the lid on at this stage to steam the courgettes completely. It is entirely up to you.

When the courgette are cooked to your preference, check for final seasoning and add touch more salt to taste. Remove from the heat. Stir in the crushed sesame seeds and sliced chilli.

The dish makes a great component for Bibimbap (p.xxx) and can be served both warm or cold. It will keep well for 3 to 4 days in the fridge stored in an airtight container.





# Sautéed Radish

Korean radish (Mu) is slightly rounder and shorter than more widely known daikon radish, and tastes mildly spicy with peppery undertone. Spring crops are often used to make radish kimchi as they are still fairly firm and dense where as summer crops are considered more watery and rather spicy with little sweetness, so the dishes are often prepared with addition of sugar to balance the flavour. As the radish season peaks through autumn and early winter, crops harvested around this time are considered the most sweetest of all varieties. Winter radish is especially treasured in Korea, for its density that lends refreshingly crunchy bite and almost effervescent sweetness that outdoes its spicy character.

I adore the undeniably simple cooking that champions the humble radish here. Radishes when cooked, its mildly spicy character softens into wonderfully comforting neutral taste and the firm flesh becomes tender and soothingly sweet. Perilla oil, often used to neutralise the bitterness in cooking, acts to lift and glorifies the radishes and gives the dish slightly nutty undertone. In the absence of perilla oil, it can be substituted with more common toasted sesame oil, though I think it is well worth trying. Perilla oil has a low smoking point, much like toasted sesame oil. To compensate this, I use vegetable oil as carrier oil here.

The way radish is cut is especially important as sliced against the grain, radishes will break down and turn into a mush: cut the radishes into 5cm long pieces first, then each pieces sliced thinly lengthways before cutting them into matchsticks.

**Serves 4**

- 1 tbsp perilla oil
- ¼ tbsp vegetable oil
- 400g daikon radish, julienned
- 1 tbsp mirin
- 2 cloves of garlic, minced
- 1 tsp flaky sea salt
- 1 spring onion, minced
- 1 tsp toasted white sesame seeds

Heat both perilla and vegetable oils in a sauté pan over a medium flame. Add the radishes along with mirin and garlic. Give it a gentle stir from time to time and cook for 7 minutes. If the pan appears little dry at this point, add a splash of water (about 1-2 tbsp at a time) to get it going. Radishes will change colour from opaque white to slightly translucent as it cooks, and you should be able to smell the nutty aromas of perilla oil as well as faintly sweet scent of radishes.

When radishes are softened, add the salt to season - don't be tempted to add the salt at the beginning as it will draw out too much water. Add a splash of water to continue cooking for 5 minutes until it's tender. Stir in the spring onion and toasted sesame seeds, and cook for couple more minutes until the spring onion has softened a little but still looking vibrantly green in colour.





# Spring onion pancake

In Korea, people often say ‘one must eat buchimgae (Korean savoury pancakes) on a rainy day’ or ‘rainy day calls for buchimgae and makgeolli (traditional Korean rice wine)’. Many believes eating crispy shallow fried savoury pancakes dipped in a vinegary dipping sauce has a real mood lifting effect on a dreary wet day. Some say the sizzling sound of cold pancake batter hitting the hot oil and frying resemble the pitter-pattering sound of raindrops hitting the ground and whistling wind, hence we subconsciously crave the fried pancakes.

The phrase ‘gosohada’ which describes the food that smells or tastes nutty, is often used for well made pancakes, as freshly fried golden pancakes are aromatic and savoury. The salivating nutty aroma of pancake translates perfectly into the delicately crispy batter and the deep umami of charred spring onions really hit the high notes when saturated in salty sweet vinegary dipping sauce.

Tapioca flour yields a light and airy batter that are similar to premixed pancake flour used by many Korean home cooks. It is a good versatile basic batter, so do try it with different fillings such as chopped up kimchi, shredded sweet courgettes or odds and ends vegetables need using up. I found the texture of batter improves with overnight rest in the fridge as the gluten relaxes, but if cut short with time, resting the batter for 30 minutes will do. The basic batter will last up to three days in the fridge, stored in a airtight container.

**Makes 3 x 7.5 inch pancakes**

- for the batter**  
150g plain flour  
50g tapioca flour  
2 tbsp cornflour  
½ tsp flaky sea salt  
¼ tsp baking powder  
250g fridge cold water  
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2 eggs, lightly whisked  
3 bunches of spring onions (about 350g)  
100g squid, cleaned and sliced into small bitesize\* (optional)  
50g prawns, roughly chopped\* (optional)  
1 mild long red chill, sliced diagonally  
vegetable oil, for frying  
-  
Serve with Chive Dipping Sauce (p.xxx) or Soy Pickled Onion with brine (p.xx)

Place all dry ingredients for the batter in a large mixing bowl and give it a brief stir before adding the cold water. Whisk thoroughly until smooth and refrigerate to rest the batter for overnight or for 30 minutes, if rushed. The batter might seem rather thin but no need to worry. It will thicken to the right pouring consistency as flour swells while resting.

Trim the spring onions so that it fits comfortably lengthways in the frying pan you are using. Cut any large ones in half lengthways too, so that they are all similar thickness. Lightly whisk the eggs and set aside. Combine the sliced squid and chopped prawns in a bowl if using, so you can easily reach out to scatter on top of pancake. Have all components ready and close by as assembling the pancakes will require your attention at certain stages.

Heat generous amount of vegetable oil (about 2 tbsp) in a large frying pan over a medium flame. Lay the third of spring onions in a single layer, spreading out fairly evenly with not too much gaps

in between. Carefully ladle the third of batter onto the spring onion, spreading to loosely cover and fill the gaps in between. You will notice the soft whistling sound when the cold batter hits the pan.

Scatter the red chillies on top of the spring onion and seafood, if using. Drizzle the third of whisked egg on top.

The heat of the oil should be hot enough to crisp up but not smoking so it burns. If the heat is too low, the pancake will soak up too much grease. Maintain the medium heat throughout. Listen to the gently sizzling sound and the consistent bubbles around the edges of the pancake as you cook. They are all the good signs. Soon, you will notice the edges of the pancake starts to crisp up. You may need to add touch more oil occasionally around the edges of the pan, if it appears or sounds a little dry.

After 3 to 4 minutes, the top of the pancake will appear partially cooked: you will notice dry patches which



indicates the batter is almost cooked. Drizzle a little more vegetable oil on top to help evenly crisp up the other side and carefully flip it over. Press the centre gently to help them settle. Cook for further 3 minutes or until cooked through and golden. Repeat the steps if making all three pancakes in one go.

Serve immediately with dipping sauce on the side and a pair of kitchen scissors to cut the pancakes. Leftover pancakes can be stored in the fridge and brought to the room temperature before being reheated in a hot pan with little oil to crisp up.

# Cut cabbage kimchi

**Serves 2**

You will need a 2.5 to 3 litre volume jar or container, or equivalent.

**for the salting**

1.5kg Chinese cabbage  
130g coarse sea salt  
2 litre water

**for the flour paste**

180ml quick stock (p.xxx)  
1.5 tbsp glutinous rice flour

**for the kimchi paste**

35g garlic, peeled and crushed  
30g ginger, peeled and roughly chopped  
1 long red chilli (about 20g), roughly chopped  
25ml fish sauce (substitute with soy sauce to make vegan)  
50g gochugaru (Korean red pepper flakes)  
30g Demerara sugar  
1 tsp shrimp paste (substitute with barley miso to make vegan)  
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400g daikon radish, julienned  
100g carrot, julienned  
½ onion, thinly sliced  
4 spring onion, chopped

When I first came to London over two decades ago, kimchi was not as readily available as it is now. I am proud and amazed to see the jars appear in the local supermarkets and for it to become an ingredient that most of us are familiar with. We've all learned how to weave in the bold and funky flavours of kimchi into the western pantry and there is definitely a healthy appetite and steady growth for making our own at home, which is just so wonderful to witness.

The most classic type of kimchi we mainly associate with is made with Chinese cabbage. They are either quartered with its leaves remain attached to core and swaddled tightly like a baby before being packed in the jar or simply cut into bite size pieces for the convenience. Generally speaking, the fermentation process takes little longer for the former to reach the optimum population of lactic acid bacteria, making it suitable to keep the large batches for longer period of time. Meanwhile, the bacterial growth happens relatively faster in cut cabbages thus tend to develop flavours quicker which is really effective for smaller batches.

As home refrigerator temperature constantly fluctuates with daily use, I much prefer to make cut kimchi which allows me to enjoy smaller batches, albeit more frequent feed of properly ripened kimchi, instead of large batches sitting there at length with impaired flavour due to the inconsistent condition. Plus, there is no need for red stained chopping board or messy fingers with cut kimchi!

The process does take up a whole day, but is straight forward and mostly hands off. Please do not rush salting, rinsing and draining - I really think these first three steps do determine the end result, so please give it some love and respect it deserves.

To prepare the cabbage, remove any wilted green outer leaves. Slice the base of the cabbage in half lengthways and gently pull them apart to tear away the leaves to split naturally. The edges will look gnarly and uneven - that is exactly what we want. Then half it again exactly the same way, so you end up with quartered cabbage. Remove the cores and cut into fairly large bite size pieces; especially the softer ends. Transfer the cut cabbages to a large mixing bowl or container, layering the salt as you go along. Use up all of the salt. Pour 2 litres of water over the cabbages and press it down gently to submerge. Cover and leave it brine for 4 hours, flipping the top and bottom halfway through to ensure even salting.

Meanwhile, place the stock and glutinous rice flour in a small saucepan. Whisk until smooth and bring to gentle simmer on low heat, stirring constantly to make sure the flour doesn't clump together. After

couple of minutes, you will soon feel the heaviness of liquid starting to cling. Continue to cook the paste while stirring for 5 minutes or so, until it thickens into wallpaper paste consistency. When the colour of mixture become little more translucent than opaque white, remove from the heat and set aside to cool completely.

To make the kimchi paste, blitz together the garlic, ginger, red chilli and fish sauce (or soy sauce to make vegan) in a food processor, until smooth. Transfer to a lidded container and stir in gochugaru, sugar and shrimp paste (barley miso to make vegan), along with cooled down flour paste. Combine well and refrigerate until needed.

After 4 hours, add the julienned radish and carrot to the cabbage, and submerge completely in brine. Leave to soak for further 30 minutes.





# Spicy Pulled Beef Soup

**Serves 6**

**for the stock**

450g beef (mixture of bavette and shin or brisket)  
200g daikon radish, cut into large chunks  
1 leek, cut in half crossways  
½ onion, cleaned with skin left on  
5 pieces of 2 inch x 3 inch dasima  
1 tbsp black peppercorns  
2.5 litre water  
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300g beansprouts  
250g leek, white parts only, halved and sliced into 5cm baton

**for the seasoning**

3 tbsp vegetable oil  
4 tbsp gochugaru (Korean red pepper flakes)  
2 tbsp mirin  
2 tbsp soy sauce  
2 tbsp soup soy sauce (light soy sauce)  
1 tbsp roasted sesame oil  
2 tbsp fish sauce  
½ tsp freshly cracked black pepper  
30g garlic, minced  
-  
6 spring onions, cut into 5cm batons  
flaky sea salt, to season

This spicy beef soup begins with gently simmering the meat with in aromatic bath to create the base stock. Cooked meat pieces are then hand shredded and marinated in spicy seasoning along with pre blanched vegetables that typically include dried fernbrake, taro stem, sweet potato stem, beansprouts and/or Korean spring onion. This dish in particular, really benefits from the slow process that respects the traditional method of handling each ingredients separately. In return, it ensures the harmonious infusion of flavours and textures you can distinguish, both individually but also together.

Korean food isn't widely known as regional, but the way dish is prepared, and the final balance of seasoning changes dramatically as you travel, with locals adopting ingredients more common to the area. In Seoul, it is more prevalent for the beef to be cooked with bones to yield the stock that is richer and meatier, and more flavoursome meat. True Seoul style of soup is also often made with only Korean spring onion as choice of vegetable, which contributes natural sweetness and clean tasting depth. Korean spring onion named daepa, is much bigger than the western counter part. It perhaps looks more like leek, although taste quite different: the white parts taste quite oniony and fragrant, while the green parts resemble the look and taste of spring onion, but a little punchier. I opt for mixture of leek and spring onion here, to bring the fair representation of the dish and a good balance of allium flavour.

Don't let the time consuming aspect put you off. Once you get the hang of the process, which is the most hands on part, it is actually rather straight forward to bring the dish together.

Pat dry the beef with kitchen towel to remove the sitting blood, if any. Cut the beef into 6cm long chunks, ensuring the grains run evenly lengthways. Place the beef in a large stock pot, along with daikon radish, leek, onion, dasima and black peppercorns. Top with 2.5 litre of water and bring to boil. You will notice the scums rising to the surface as it reaches the boiling point. Skim off but don't worry too much - it will all sort itself out as it simmers. Lower the heat immediately and maintain the low simmer with small bubbles rising intermittently. Cook for 2.5 hours or until tender, but remove the dasima after 1 hour.

Meat doesn't need to be fork tender but tender enough to hand shred into chunky pieces. Remove the meat and set aside to cool. When the stock is cooled down a little, carefully pass the beef stock through the strainer into a heat proof jug or directly into the heavy bottomed lidded pan you will be cooking

the soup in. Measure out 1.2 litre of stock and reserve - I do this by weighing the liquid as I pour the stock through the strainer. Save any leftover stock for another time. Discard the solid.

Meanwhile, bring a pan of salted water to boil. Blanch the leek very briefly to wilt. Rinse under the cold water, drain well and set aside. Blanch the beansprouts in the same water for 3 minutes, so they are floppy and softened. Rinse under cold water and drain. Squeeze the water out quite firmly and set aside.

Put the vegetable oil and gochugaru into a small cold sauce pan. Place it over a low heat to gently warm up the oil. As it warms up, gochugaru will start to bloom. Stir constantly to move the gochugaru around to stop it from burning. You will notice the flakes starts to swell and become more like an oily paste. It will start to smell very



fragrant and feel almost aerated. It takes about 4 minutes total. Remove from the heat. Transfer to a large heat proof mixing bowl. Add the mirin, both of soy sauce, sesame oil, fish sauce, ground pepper and garlic. Give it a good stir and set aside.

When the meat has cooled down enough to handle, shred them lengthways into fairly chunky pieces using two forks or hands. Put them into the mixing bowl above, along with the blanched leeks and beansprouts. Toss everything together by hands (with gloves on) to combine, gently massage and pinching the ingredients - I do think the warmth of your fingers and gentle pressure of hands really help to coat every bit of meat and vegetables more harmoniously.

To bring the dish together, transfer seasoned meat and vegetables into a large heavy bottomed lidded pan with 1.2 litre of reserved beef stock. Place the pan over high heat to bring it up to boil with the lid on, then immediately lower the heat to simmer for 35 minutes or so with lid on ajar. Check for seasoning and adjust the seasoning with salt (about 1/2 tsp). You want to taste the sort of heat that gently tickles the back of throat and touch of mellow sweetness that comes from the leeks. Add the spring onions and simmer for further 10 minutes.

When ready, divide the soup into deep soup bowls and serve immediately while steaming hot with plain steamed rice.



## Grilled salt and Sugar cured mackerel

Mackerel in Korea is often sold pre brined in heavily salted water then salted again for the preservation: swaddled tightly in coarse white crystals of mineral rich salt, its delicate ocean blue skin becomes taught, and flesh turns firm and meaty. It smells like sea, and eats like the holiday bbq of dreams with sandy feet treading in and out of water, swigging cold beers with the waft of charcoal grilled catch of the day tickling your throat.

Properly salt cured mackerel is treasured for its deliciousness, thanks to the magical bacterial transformation that happens during the curing process that greatly improves the taste of fish, intensifying every flesh and skin into mouth salivating gift of the ocean.

The simple curing I use here is by no means an answer to the wonder of heavy cure, rather a user friendly way to enjoy the oily fish to replicate the flavours I grew up to adore. And I hope you will, too.

Grill gently over the embers of coals if weather permits, otherwise, slid it under the oven grill until the skin chars and blisters. Anise Pickled Rhubarb (p.xx) is particularly good on the side, so as the wasabi spiked onion salad (Yangpa Jeorim p.xxx). But equally, squeeze of lemon serves the fish just fine, too.

### **Serves 2 or 4 as starter**

2 mackerel, head removed, cleaned and butterflied or 4 fillets  
2 tsp flaky sea salt  
2 tsp golden granulated sugar  
1 tbsp sake  
1 tbsp vegetable oil

Pat dry the fish with paper kitchen towel and lay them onto a flat tray in one single layer, skin side down. Sprinkle evenly with 1 tsp of salt and 1 tsp of sugar, then turn to lay them skin side up and sprinkle with the rest of salt and sugar. Refrigerate uncovered for minimum 1 hour and up to overnight.

Preheat the oven grill on high. Line the shallow rimmed grill safe baking tray with foil and place it in the oven to heat. This is so when the fish is laid onto the hot tray, it starts to cook immediately from both top and bottom.

Combine sake and vegetable oil in a bowl.

Remove the mackerel from fridge and gently brush the sake and oil mixture on both sides of the fish. Carefully remove the foil lined tray from the oven which should be nice and hot. Place the mackerels skin side up and grill on high for about 4 minutes on skin side only until it chars and blisters in places. There is no need to flip to cook the flesh side - it should be perfectly cooked.

To serve, transfer to 2 or 4 individual plates with wedge of lemon on the side.





Rice



A family who eats together stays together

My sister once send me letter. The sister who is always good and obedient: one that doesn't cross the line. She stood in to fill the gaps when I left home to relieve my suffocating brain free on the other side of the ocean. My little sister became the eldest and stayed closer to my parents.

She saw my mother sigh over dinner many nights in a row. She was the one who had

to pick up the pieces when my parents quibbled about unpaid bills mounting up. Things back home tasted sour and bitter even from the distance. Phone call with my mother became less frequent but lengthy. There was a certain kind of tone that screamed anger and despair. I dreaded her calls, and the way she blamed everyone for every small things drowned me.

Apparently, my parents argued day and night. My mother tried to salvage the pieces of her broken life from the wreckage while my father stubbornly stood believing in the salvation of miracle. He'd worked hard through the rain and snow, to turn the dust into pennies. Such loss of his fortune overnight did not register in his head. The hunger driven blood that ran deep in his vein refused to

accept the truth, until the men in uniforms came to put stickers on everything my family owned. They emptied out my vacant bedroom full of nostalgia and took my old piano away. Things happened slowly but also cruelly fast. It took them a lifetime to build a life that felt comfortable at last, but it all vanished into the thin air like it was all just a dream. My mother weeped in silence and my father did not know where and how to start it all over again.

It didn't seem all that fair. But it was all gone. Part of who I am, also felt lost.

My mother did not struggle where she was left at, or frightened of her future. Though, this is only what I assume, not fully the truth.

The letter from my sister read the blurry lines of where my parents have now

moved to and the other in between things I ought to know. I sat on the floor, not knowing what to feel. I just wanted to eat my mother's rice porridge, to scoop and swallow reluctantly while gazing at the far distance. Every words hit me like a brick and my heart felt black and blue. I was desperate to shake off the shivering air that kept on clinging onto my numbing skin to rip my flesh apart. But I was left alone howling, not knowing where my home is now.

I know that was the day I lost a piece of me. I lost the only thing that gave me the illusion of home I came from. There was no longer a home I could return to. Anything and everything that used to belong to me to remind me of my youth; teenage years; childhood; the beginning, no longer

existed in ways I could feel or touch. It was only left in my head to reimagine and dream to fill the gaps.

My mother told me to hold it together. 'You lost home, not a mother.' was often the thing she would say to stop me from shedding tears in sadness. It got stuck at my throat like a big lump of stone I could neither swallow or throw up. It took me years to realise how paralysed I was then. And just how hungry I was for the sense of home.

She once or twice said, 'Is it because I threw the money carelessly?' It could be true. I sometimes wondered that too. One summer when my mother was angry with my father, she threw her handbag full of cash. The night was terribly humid with torrential rain. The entire takings of weeks or a month



worth of their work were mostly left on the side of wet road, where the water channeled into the gutter. She returned home, with my father carrying the bag of wet cash. He left again for a fresh air or might have stormed off to the bedroom.

Both of my siblings and I listened to my mother sit in silence, not knowing how to fix the situation. Three of us unpacked the tightly stuck sodden notes and try to lay them out onto the heated floor to dry them out. When my mother was finished with her empty stare, she casually murmured she didn't care about the money, and suggested we order some pizza and a giant bottle of coca-cola. She didn't bother with cooking. My father went without food with lost appetite, while the rest of us all sat together to picnic on the floor

with boxes of thick crusted pizza topped with sliced salty and bitter black olives and cubed green and yellow peppers. My mother did not talk about what happened. Instead, she unwillingly chomped on dry crusts, joking about how some lucky person might land on the rest of sodden cash. She ate her feelings while we swallowed the atmosphere.

Pizza is still not my favourite thing to eat, in the same way that I am frightened to eat brothly cold naengmyeon noodles as I once choked badly on them. Funny that it took me these many years to figure out why, and the makeups of what filled the gaps between my bones and flesh of my body. Even the struggles I had after becoming a mother started to make more sense.

My mother used to say that I was a always difficult child. So much so, she was only able to stomach few grains of raw rice to sustain her pregnancy with me. I know I challenged her values relentlessly. I persistently negotiated my beliefs against hers and my fathers. She often told me to wait until I have a child just like me and see what it feels like to be a mother. But she was also the one who always told me to go and see the world, and be whoever I want to be.

When my daughter was born, I missed my mother terribly, all the while feeling relieved that she was not there to tell me what to do. I was angry at the thoughts of my mother's absence. I wanted her to make me bowls of steaming hot rice steeped in seaweed soup like any other Korean mums. I

would have quite liked her to shush my baby in her arms to sleep, so I can recover from the cuts and sores of the birth. Instead, I stood up every evening to cook whatever came manageable, to feel some sense of control to reassure me that everything I ever needed was all here. Though, it didn't take long for me to crumble. And I did eventually let my fragile mind shatter into millions of pieces to let it all run wild. Small part of me knew, I had to find my own way home to myself, to be the mother that I wanted to be.

When my mother spent couple of summers in Florence, in an act of exercising her long forgotten freedom, we finally met up in the foreign city. Our pink and olive skinned daughter with dark brown hair saw my mother for the first

time. She was already almost two and a half years old and spoke a good english for her age, but barely knew any Korean words other than 'umma' or 'appa'. My mother wanted to hold her granddaughter tight, but my baby held my fingers tighter, unsure of the strange faced woman speaking the foreign language that her mother shyly spoke. I don't know if my daughter ever heard me call my mother 'umma' that time.

Hot air so humid, the sweat dripped down from our foreheads even without the addition of steaming hot soup, but my mother made us baeksuk in almost 40 degrees of Italian heatwave. Sticky rice studded with chewy dried red jujube was perfectly starchy. It was the thing she often made back home, with needle and threads to patch

up the skin of chicken to hold the rice that were stuffed in cavity. I sorted through the grains of sticky white rice with my chopsticks to bring it closer to my mouth to indulge in the tenderness that felt rare and precious.

My sister signed her letter off with 'Don't worry. And make sure to eat (rice).'

Some years ago, I took my young family home to see my little sister get married. Unable to quantify our feelings in words, we shared many bowls of rice, instead of thousands of words.

You know, people say distance makes heart grow fonder, but I'm not sure if that's true. Maybe short time apart is a good tonic that relinquishes the relationship, but in my case, long time apart (building another life) so far away made my heart drift, unable hold any of it or them close.

# Mixed rice with vegetables

Serves 2

topping suggestions

- Sautéed Courgette p.xx
- Sautéed Radish p.xx
- Spicy Radish Salad p.xx
- Beansprout Salad Two Ways p.xx
- Seasoned Spinach p.xx
- Spring Bitter Greens with Doenjang p.xx

for the mushrooms

- 4 rehydrated dried shiitake mushrooms
- 1 tbsp soy sauce
- 2 tsp mirin
- 1 tsp roasted sesame oil
- ½ tsp golden granulated sugar
- ¼ tsp freshly cracked black pepper
- 1 clove of garlic, minced
- ½ tbsp vegetable oil
- 4 tbsp mushroom soaked water, or water

for the carrots

- 200g carrots, julienned
- 1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- flaky sea salt, to season
- 1 tbsp mirin
- 1 tbsp rice wine vinegar

- to finish
- 3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 2 eggs
- 300g cooked short grain rice
- roasted sesame oil
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- Serve with gochujang or Yakgochujang (p.xxx) sauce to taste.

Bibim translates as ‘to mix’ and bap means cooked rice. It is essentially a rice bowl with toppings that you mix together to eat. It’s a well known Korean dish loved by all for its eye catching visuals and deliciousness which happens to be incredibly nutritious, too.

What is little less known though, is that there are almost 10 regional varieties (think Italian ragù for instance), showcasing countless combinations of vegetables and proteins, and each iterations share different cooking techniques influenced by the local culture and history. Many typically utilise the seasonal ingredients more common to the regions, and restaurants specialising regional varieties pride in championing the meticulous process that respects the tradition of individually seasoning each elements, to create overall harmony and balance: to bring the togetherness.

I thought carefully about how best to write a recipe for such an iconic dish as bibimbap, and felt that it couldn’t be any more apt, for me to draw the attention to the culture of bibimbap at home, focusing on how the bowl is built in practice, rather than as a single recipe.

At home, it is not always an elaborate affair of number of different vegetables and proteins, though they are usually thoughtfully curated to give both textural and visual contrast. Often times, the dish is influenced by odds and ends of namul (seasoned vegetables) banchan dishes that need eating. It can be as simple as just one namul, such as Spicy Radish Salad (p.xx) thrown into a bowl with gnarly fried egg with perfectly runny yolk. All you need is a good dollop of straight up gochujang paste and a drizzle of gorgeously aromatic toasted sesame oil to bind everything together. It can be as simple or as complex you want it to be: completely adaptable.

Soy sauce seasoned dried shiitake mushrooms are really flavoursome and have pleasant chewiness that adds interesting texture to the dish - it’s brilliant way to used up already rehydrated mushrooms from making stocks (p.xx). Vinegar marinated carrots are my go to filling - also great for Three Coloured Seaweed Rice Roll (p.xxx), which is sautéed just enough to soften and finished with subtle acidity to bring the brightness.

For the mushrooms, squeeze the excess water out and reserve the mushroom water. Thinly slice the mushrooms, including the stalks - they are perfectly edible. Place the sliced mushrooms into a small mixing bowl. Add the soy sauce, mirin, sugar, black pepper, garlic and sesame oil. Let it marinate for 10 minutes or so, while you cook the carrots. You can come back to the mushrooms after the carrots to cook them in the same pan.

For the carrots, heat the olive oil in a sauté pan over a medium flame. Add the carrots and sauté gently for couple of minutes with a good pinch

of salt. You should notice the tint of deep orangey yellow seeping into the oil and smells quite fragrant. Remove from the heat when the carrots appear softened. Transfer the carrots to a bowl while hot. Add the mirin and vinegar. Combine well and cover the bowl with a plate to let it further steam and marinate in residual heat.

Now return to the mushrooms. Heat the vegetable oil in the same pan you fried the carrots, over a medium flame. Add the marinated mushrooms into the pan and sauté gently for 2 minutes. You will notice the smell of garlic and sweet soy sauce. Add 3 tbsp of mushroom soaked



water or just plain water to the pan. Let it come to gentle bubble then lower the heat. Simmer for 10 minutes or until the mushrooms have absorbed all the liquid. It should look glossy and plump. Check for seasoning. You may want to add a little salt, or touch more sugar. Remove from the heat.

To fry the eggs, heat the olive oil in a frying pan for couple of minutes, over a medium flame. You want the oil to get nice and hot enough, so when you crack the eggs in it sizzles, but not smoking. Crack the eggs in, ensuring they are not too close. Let it fry for

2 minutes without touching. After 2 minutes, tilt the pan slightly away from you to pool the oil, and carefully baste around the whites that still appears raw. Keep the yolk nice and runny. You should have perfectly fried egg with crispy edges. Remove from the heat.

To serve, divide the warm steamed rice into a individual bowl. Arrange the choice of vegetables on top, along with the fried egg. Serve with 1tbsp each (or less if prefer less heat) of gochujang or Yakgochujang (p.xxx) and top with a drizzle of sesame oil.



# Buckwheat noodles in icy pink broth

If bibim naengmyeon (p.xxx) was bold and loud energy of the young and vibrant extrovert, I think mul naengmyeon is tastefully demure elegance of introvert. Modest in its appearance, a soft nest of springy buckwheat noodles are drenched in ice cold broth; the river of barely frozen slushy liquid quenches the thirst and cools down the body from the inside to rescue from the sweltering heat of Korean summer.

Traditionally, mixture of beef brisket and shin are simmered together for hours, with addition of beef bones to yield the depth, and meticulously processed to remove the fat to ensure the clarity, before being combined with tangy juice from radish water kimchi to balance. It is nuanced delicately with subtle acidity and effervesce of ferment, which are then, personalised once more with nose tickling heat of mustard and vinegar you add at the table, as you wish. It eats delicately and boasts refreshing finish that can come across as almost bland, which often bewilders people with the lack of flavour that is hard to detect.

The dish usually demands couple of days to process, thus this is not the sort of thing home cooks often make it from scratch; it is a lot cheaper to buy it from the restaurant in Korea.

What we have here isn't the traditional beefy broth, but rather relatively easy fix to satisfy the cravings on a hot day, providing you are well equipped with water kimchi on hand.

Water kimchi (p.xx) will need around 5 days to ferment perfectly for the dish and a couple of days for the Beetroot Stained Vinegar Pickled Radish (p.xx) to take on the decent level of sourness. Serve the broth ice cold straight from the freezer, preferably partially frozen.

Naengmyeon noodles can be found in asian grocers and online; they are springy and have particularly resistant chewiness which can be tricky to cut with teeth, so best serve with scissors to cut them before eating. In any case you find it difficult to source, thin soba noodles will make a suitable substitution.

**Serves 2**

250ml cold water  
40ml cider vinegar  
1 tbsp yondu seasoning  
sauce  
1 tsp english mustard  
250ml juice from Water  
kimchi (p.xx)

**for the topping**

80g Beetroot Stained  
Vinegar Pickled Radish  
(p.xx)  
1 hard boiled egg, peeled  
and halved  
-  
2 servings of naengmyeon  
noodles  
toasted white sesame  
seeds

Combine the cold water with vinegar, yondu, mustard and juice from water kimchi. Stir well and transfer it to a freezer safe container. Chill in the freezer for couple of hours until partially frozen. Alternatively, store it in the fridge.

Before you are ready to serve, prepare the toppings; now is a good time to boil the egg.

Bring a large pan of water to rapid boil and cook the noodles according to the packet instructions. Naengmyeon noodles overcook very easily, so do keep an eye on them. Carefully drain the noodles and rinse well under cold running water a few times to remove the starch, using a scrubbing motion with hands. Drain thoroughly then divide the noodles into two bowls, followed by radish pickles and halved egg on top. Carefully divide the chilled broth between the bowls and sprinkle with toasted sesame seeds.



# Sweet Rice Doughnuts

This is a popular old school Korean snack which I think, deserves more recognition - strangely, it is very little known outside of Korea. This could be partly to do with the fact more often than not, most of recipes call for what we call 'wet' rice flour: freshly milled rice flour made from pre soaked rice.

In traditional baking, wet rice flour was preferred because of its excellence in retaining the moisture, resulting more moist and chewier rice cakes that keep well. However, nowadays, more recipes are being developed using dry flour for home baking for the convenience.

I've tried to compensate the lack of moisture in dry flour by introducing additional fatty liquid - from butter and milk - to the dough. It delivers unassumingly brilliant texture, when deep fried into rich golden brown dough balls. You will be welcomed with hairline cracked crispy doughnut skin that reveals exquisitely chewy, pillow soft interior at first bite.

Make the double batch: 20 is never enough.

**Makes around 20  
golfball sized balls**

250g glutinous rice flour  
50g plain flour  
¼ tsp baking powder  
½ tsp bicarbonate soda  
40g golden caster sugar  
¼ tsp fine sea salt  
30g unsalted  
butter, melted  
80ml warm full fat milk  
150ml hot water  
(around 80°C)

**for the cinnamon sugar**

2 tbsp golden  
caster sugar  
½ tsp ground cinnamon  
-  
vegetable oil for deep  
frying

Sift both flours, baking powder and bicarbonate soda into a large mixing bowl. Add the sugar and salt to the flour mix.

In a pourable and heatproof jug, combine the melted butter and warm milk. Stir into the flour mix, using wooden spoon or chopsticks. Gradually pour in the hot water and continue to mix until it resembles rough crumbs. Do this in few stages as your flour may not need as much water or might need touch more than stated here.

When the dough is cooled down enough to touch, start bringing them together by gently kneading them until it feels supple and the surface of the dough appears smooth.

Place the dough in a reusable plastic bag or wrap with clingfilm. Rest for at least 1 hour in the fridge or overnight.

After 1 hour or overnight rest, divide the dough into four equal sized portion, so you have more manageable volume to work with. Work one piece at the time - keep the remaining dough covered. Shape the dough roughly into a log, then divide it into 5 small golfball sized dough balls. The texture of dough may feel unusual and a little crumbly. Don't worry if this happens - just squeeze the dough firmly to shape.

Combine the sugar and cinnamon together in a bowl or a rimmed roasting tray. Have another plate or tray ready lined with some paper kitchen towel.

Fill a saucepan suitable for deep frying with vegetable oil. It should be filled deep enough to submerge the dough balls. Heat to 160°C. When it reaches 160°C, turn the heat off and carefully drop the dough balls into the pan - ensure not to overcrowd the pan. Keep it off the heat for 2 minutes. After 2 minutes, dough will start to move and float a little.

Turn the heat back on and maintain the temperate at 160°C. Fry for 5 minutes, making sure to gently push them down with heat proof sieve or wired skimmer as the dough will continuously float up. After 5 minutes, doughnuts should appear golden brown and cooked though. Transfer to a plate lined with paper to absorb excess oil. You may need to do it in batches.

When all of the batches are done, roll them in cinnamon spiced sugar while hot and serve immediately.

