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**“Mother Said She Didn’t Like Jajangmyeon’: Ruminating on Korean Noodles During the Age of K-pop”**

*Abstract.* In 1999, the pioneering K-pop Idol group g.o.d released their debut single, “To Mother,” which chronicled the economic hardship of a single mother raising her teenage son in the face of poverty. At a pivotal point during the song’s narrative, the son complains to his mother that he is sick of eating instant ramyeon all the time, which prompts her to take money out of her emergency fund to buy him a bowl of jajangmyeon. While happily eating, the son asks his mother why she isn’t eating with him. Her answer would go on to become one of the most memorable lines in K-pop history: “Mother said that she didn’t like jajangmyeon.” In this early K-pop classic, jajangmyeon is characterized as a food of luxury and is put in direct opposition to ramyeon, which is depicted as a food of poverty. Thirteen years later, in 2012, another Kpop Idol group, T-ara, was signed by the Korean food company Nongshim to advertise its flagship product, Shin Ramyun, to consumers in Japan, the birthplace of instant noodles. In a series of short commercials, each member of T-ara, who at the time was hugely popular in Japan, were filmed cooking a different recipe using Shin Ramyun. In these clips, rather than evoking poverty and hardship, ramyeon is presented not only as a food of the young, hip, and beautiful, but also a food that is distinctively Korean. In his presentation, Robert Ji-Song Ku discusses the shifting status of two of Korea’s most iconic noodle dishes during what he calls the “Age of K-pop.” When and why did Koreans first start eating jajangmyeon and ramyeon? How have the values and meanings of the two dishes shifted or evolved over time? And more generally, some two decades after its beginning, what has been the gastronomic consequence of K-pop not only in Korea but across the Korean diaspora?

**Robert Ku** is the chair of the Department of Asian and Asian American Studies at Binghamton University of the State University of New York. Prior to Binghamton, he taught at the California Polytechnic State University at San Luis Obispo, where he chaired the Ethnic Studies Department, and at Hunter College of the City University of New York, where he directed the Asian American Studies Program. His research and teaching interests include Asian American studies, food studies, and transnational and diasporic Korean popular culture. He is the author of *Dubious Gastronomy: Eating Asian in the USA* (2014) and co-editor of *Eating Asian America: A Food Studies Reader* (2013) and *Pop Empires: Transnational and Diasporic Flows of India and Korea* (2019). In 2016, he taught in the American Culture Program at Sogang University in Seoul, Korea, as a Fulbright Scholar. Born in Korea, he grew up in Hawaii and currently lives in Binghamton, New York.