

## ***Gimbab*: Wrapped in Love**

**LEE Yoon Ju (Korea)**

Have you ever heard of the Korean dish *gimbab*? *Gim* is dried laver seaweed and *bab* is steamed white rice. *Gimbab* is a Korean dish made of cooked rice and various ingredients wrapped in a sheet of dried laver seaweed. Although it is a simple dish, it is a mainstay for Koreans when they take part in outdoor events, and as a people, they have a deep affection for this dish.

In Korea, October is the best season for school excursions. When children join a school excursion, almost all their mothers prepare *gimbab* for their lunch. *Gimbab* is almost always prepared for other occasions as well, such as sports festivals, gatherings of men and women of all ages, and outdoor events. Its prevalence at social functions has made the Korean people deeply attached to *gimbab*.

*Gimbab* is cooked as follows:

1. Cook soft rice and spread it thinly all over a sheet of laver seaweed.
2. Place yellow pickled radish, ham, and your family's favorite vegetables tidily on one of the side edges of the spread rice, and roll it.
3. Cut the roll into bite-size slices, and it's finished!

*Gimbab* is nutritionally perfect. A slice of *gimbab* looks like a work of art; in the beautiful frame of black seaweed sheets and white rice are a wide variety of vegetables, presenting a superb harmony of colors. Of course, the dish is pleasing not only to the eye but also the palate. Considering that a home-cooked Korean meal usually consists of rice and a wide variety of dishes accompanying the rice, it is not an exaggeration to say that the essence of Korean dishes is condensed into *gimbab*.

A school excursion to an aircraft exhibition was organized by a kindergarten at which I worked. One of the students at the kindergarten, a six-year boy, was from a multicultural family, and his mother is not Korean. His parents are now divorced, so he lives with his grandmother. On the day of the excursion, I saw that his bag was so full of food that it was almost about to split. He carried not only his own lunch but also food for his classmates and teachers. It seemed that it had not been prepared as lunch for him to eat on the day of the excursion. It seemed to be just a collection of the snacks that he usually eats and beverages that he usually drinks during breaks from helping his grandmother with agricultural work.

Even though he had sufficient food in his bag, he did not look happy. I asked him,

“What’s wrong? We were able to take a train. Isn’t this fun?” He replied, “It’s fun. But I don’t have any *gimbab*.”

Presumably, his grandmother was busy doing agricultural work in a rural area and had some health problems that prevented her from preparing his lunch. Additionally, although there are *gimbab* shops almost everywhere in urban areas in this country, there is no such a shop near his rural home. He was unhappy, and looked like a deflated balloon. When I told him I would share my *gimbab* with him, his entire face lit up.

At lunch time, all the students and teachers sat together in a circle, and that student sat beside me. When each of us took out our lunch from our bags, a teacher who was 10 years older than me gave him a small lunch box with food that she had prepared for him. Knowledgeable about his family situation beforehand, the teacher had prepared a lunch of *gimbab* for him. I think that receiving lunch that had been prepared exclusively for him must have made the student keenly aware of his own existence and made him feel that he was highly respected as a person to be loved.

There is no other food like *gimbab*, filled with the loving care of mothers or other care-givers. While mothers exercise ingenuity in selecting ingredients and arranging them to form beautiful patterns, children exchange their own *gimbab* and boast to each other about how good their mothers are at cooking.

There are many painful incidents covered by the media on a daily basis, and there are no distinct solutions presented. I believe that the first thing to do in such a painful situation is to fill children with precious and unforgettable memories. Moreover, I feel that mothers, as well as every adult, should do their best to ensure that children can feel that their world is full of warmth. Words alone are not enough.