Street Food in Northeast Asia: Borrowed, Then Made Local

Name Date Class

Reading

1 It is seven in the morning in Tianjin, and a line has formed at a cart with a large round griddle. The vendor pours **batter** onto the hot surface and spreads it into a thin circle. Next come an egg, a brush of sauce, and a piece of crisp fried dough, and then the whole thing is folded into a package and handed over. The sale takes about two minutes. This is jianbing, and trade at stalls like this one is always **brisk** at breakfast time, because people in a hurry will pay for something hot, cheap, and fast.

2 Legend says that the dish is almost 2,000 years old, and that it began when a famous strategist needed to feed soldiers who had lost their woks. Nobody can prove the story. Whatever the truth, the dish is now so closely tied to Tianjin that in 2017 the city added the skill of making it to its list of local **intangible** cultural heritage.

3 Cross the Yellow Sea to Seoul and the snack on every corner is tteokbokki, chewy rice cakes in a red chili sauce. The version that most Koreans know today is **attributed** to a vendor named Ma Bok-rim, who is said to have created it in 1953 in the Sindang district. The details vary: in some tellings she dropped a rice cake into a bowl of black bean noodles, and in others she mixed black bean paste and chili paste on purpose. Earlier tteokbokki was a mild royal court dish flavored with soy sauce. One newspaper analysis notes that the red version was not a **standardized** recipe at first and spread in the late 1960s, when it began appearing near schools.

4 A second Korean favorite has a journey of its own. Hotteok, a thick pancake filled with brown sugar and nuts, is usually said to have arrived with Chinese **merchants** after 1882, when soldiers from China's Qing dynasty were sent to Seoul during an uprising known as the Imo Incident. Because some Chinese pancakes were **savory**, the sellers are said to have changed the filling to suit Korean tastes, and hotteok became a hot winter snack that people eat from a paper cup. Stories like this are hard to confirm, so the details deserve some caution.

5 Bungeoppang took a similar route. This fish-shaped pastry filled with sweet red bean paste **resembles** taiyaki, which was first sold in Tokyo in 1909 by a shop that was struggling to sell round cakes. The shop reshaped the cakes as sea bream, a fish that stood for good luck and was too expensive for most people to eat. The shop's founder reportedly wanted ordinary people to taste an expensive fish at a low price, so a luxury symbol became an **affordable** treat. Taiyaki later reached Korea, where Koreans began making their own version in the shape of a carp. Today bungeoppang is described as an **iconic** and **nostalgic** winter snack in Korea.

6 Japan's food stalls, called yatai, were hit by new **regulations** before the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, and their numbers fell. Seoul reportedly cleared many street stalls before the 1988 Games as well. Fukuoka is the main exception in Japan. By one count it had about 450 stalls in the 1960s, and recent counts range from about 100 to 150. Under the city's rules, a permit could not be **transferred** beyond one generation, so the number of stalls began to **dwindle** year by year. A city ordinance that took effect in 2013 set a target of 110 to 120 stalls, and the city has since chosen new operators through public applications. It also had to **enforce** its rules: in one review, officials suspected that about 30 percent of the stalls were run by people who did not hold the permit.

7 Taken together, these snacks suggest a pattern. A pancake crosses a border and becomes sweeter. A fish changes from a sea bream to a carp. Each food was reshaped by someone who needed to sell something, and each city has had to decide how much room its sellers should have. Does a street food belong to the place where it was invented, the place where it became popular, or the people who keep cooking it?

Vocabulary Matching

Match each word from the reading with its meaning. Write the letter on the line.

1	**batter**	_____	**A**	quick and busy, with many customers
2	**brisk**	_____	**B**	passed from one person to another
3	**intangible**	_____	**C**	to become smaller or fewer, slowly
4	**attributed**	_____	**D**	cheap enough that most people can pay for it
5	**standardized**	_____	**E**	looks like or is similar to something else
6	**merchants**	_____	**F**	to make people obey a rule or law
7	**savory**	_____	**G**	made the same way every time, by fixed rules
8	**resembles**	_____	**H**	not physical, such as a skill or a tradition
9	**affordable**	_____	**I**	salty or spicy in flavor, not sweet
10	**iconic**	_____	**J**	feeling a warm longing for the past
11	**nostalgic**	_____	**K**	official rules that control how something is done
12	**regulations**	_____	**L**	said to have been made by a particular person
13	**transferred**	_____	**M**	people whose job is buying and selling goods
14	**dwindle**	_____	**N**	a liquid mixture of flour and eggs for cooking
15	**enforce**	_____	**O**	very famous and seen as a symbol of something

Fill in the Blank

Choose a word from the box to complete each sentence. Use each word once. The words are already in the correct form.

affordable	**attributed**	**batter**	**brisk**	**dwindle**	**enforce**	**intangible**	**merchants**	**nostalgic**
regulations	**resembles**	**savory**	**standardized**	**transferred**				

1 Whisk the _____ until there are no lumps left.

2 Business was _____ on the first day of the festival.

3 Friendship is _____ , but its value is very real.

4 The song is _____ to a poet from the eighth century.

5 The test is _____ , so every student answers the same questions.

6 _____ carried silk and spices across the desert.

7 I prefer _____ snacks, such as cheese and crackers, to cake.

8 Her handwriting closely _____ her mother's.

9 The new cafe serves _____ lunches for students.

10 The old song made him feel _____ for his school days.

11 Safety _____ require every worker to wear a helmet.

12 The company _____ the files to a new computer.

13 Our savings _____ quickly when we eat out every night.

14 Police cannot _____ a law that nobody knows about.

Comprehension Questions

Answer in your notebook or discuss with a partner. Questions 10 to 12 are IELTS-style.

1 How is jianbing made in the opening scene, and why is the trade at the cart brisk in the morning?

2 What does the reading say about the legend of jianbing, and what did Tianjin do in 2017?

3 Who is modern red tteokbokki attributed to, and why does the reading say the details vary?

4 How was earlier tteokbokki different from the red version most people know today?

5 According to the usual account, how did hotteok arrive in Korea, and what change did the sellers make?

6 What is the connection between bungeoppang and taiyaki?

7 Why did the Japanese shop reshape its cakes as sea bream?

8 What happened to street stalls in Japan before the 1964 Olympics, and how has Fukuoka tried to keep its stalls?

9 What pattern does the writer see across these snacks, and what question ends the reading?

IELTS-Style Questions

10 **True, False, or Not Given:** *"Hotteok was first invented in China."* Explain your answer using evidence from the reading.

11 **Yes, No, or Not Given:** *"The writer believes that stories about the origins of street foods should be treated with some caution."* Explain your answer using evidence from the reading.

12 **Author's purpose:** Why does the writer begin with a detailed scene at a jianbing cart in Tianjin? What does this opening add to the reading?

True or False

Circle T (true) or F (false) according to the reading. Write a correction for each false statement on the dotted line.

1 **T / F** The reading begins in a city in the morning, at a jianbing cart.

2 **T / F** A jianbing sale takes about twenty minutes.

3 **T / F** The reading says that the legend of jianbing has been proved.

4 **T / F** Tianjin added the skill of making jianbing to a local heritage list in 2017.

5 **T / F** Red tteokbokki is attributed to a vendor named Ma Bok-rim.

6 **T / F** All the accounts agree on exactly how Ma Bok-rim made the first red tteokbokki.

7 **T / F** Hotteok is usually said to have arrived with Chinese merchants.

8 **T / F** Taiyaki was first sold in Seoul in 1909.

9 **T / F** Fukuoka is described as the main exception to the decline of yatai in Japan.

10 **T / F** The reading says that Fukuoka has banned all yatai.

Discussion Questions

Talk with a partner or in a small group. The questions move from personal to more abstract.

1 What street food do you eat when the weather is cold, and where do you buy it?

2 Do you prefer sweet snacks or savory snacks? Is there a time of day when your choice changes?

3 Which street foods remind you of your childhood? What memories do they bring?

4 Is there a food in your country that was brought by people who came from another place? How has it changed?

5 The reading says some origin stories, such as the one about jianbing, cannot be proved. Why do people enjoy stories like these even when they are uncertain?

6 Food is often changed when it moves to a new place, as when hotteok became sweeter. What changes make a dish better for its new place, and what changes spoil it?

7 The shape of taiyaki came from Japan, but bungeoppang is part of everyday life in Korea. Can a food belong to more than one place?

8 Tianjin listed the skill of making jianbing as local heritage. Which food skills in your country deserve a heritage listing, and why?

9 Governments often clear street stalls before big events such as the Olympics. Is this a good way to prepare a city? Explain your view.

10 Fukuoka tried to limit each permit to one generation and later opened applications to new cooks. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each rule?

11 Officials in Fukuoka suspected that some stalls were run by people who did not hold the permit. How should a city enforce rules without hurting small vendors?

12 Many vendors work long hours for small profits. How should customers and cities treat the people who make cheap food?

13 Should a city protect street food as part of its heritage, or should vendors compete freely with restaurants? Where would you draw the line?

14 Does a street food belong to the place where it was invented, the place where it became popular, or the people who keep cooking it?

Language Focus: Relative Clauses with Who, That, and Where

A relative clause adds information about a noun. It begins with a relative pronoun such as who (for people), that or which (for things), or where (for places), and it comes directly after the noun it describes.

In the reading:

- "…a famous strategist needed to feed soldiers **who** had lost their woks."
- "…a vendor named Ma Bok-rim, **who** is said to have created it in 1953 in the Sindang district."
- "…sea bream, a fish **that** stood for good luck and was too expensive for most people to eat."

Practice: Join these two sentences with a relative clause: *"The vendor works in Tianjin. The vendor makes jianbing."* Use *who*.

_____

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Notes