

CUISINE

Naengmyeon

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Early this year, members of separated families from South and North Korea met in Pyongyang where they reveled in the elation of reunion. When it was time for lunch, they were served *naengmyeon* (cold noodles) as the main course. The scene of people eating the cold noodles served in large stainless steel bowls was broadcast to the entire world. Many viewers in other countries may have felt their mouth

watering as they wondered how delicious these noodles must be to have been specially selected to be served to the family members who had been separated from one another for more than half a century.

As a favorite of displaced North Koreans, *naengmyeon* is intimately associated with memories of their former hometowns. It is comparable to the way that Italians feel about pasta or

Vietnamese about *pho*, a beef noodle soup. South Koreans also enjoy *naengmyeon* as a refreshing delicacy for beating the heat of summer.

Translated into English, *naeng* means cold and *myeon*, noodles. In China, the term noodles means simply wheat flour, but in Korea and Japan, it refers to flour dough, which is rolled and sliced, boiled in water, and served in broth. Sometimes the boiled noodles and broth are served separately. *Naengmyeon* is similar to pasta in this respect, but



Naengmyeon, cold buckwheat noodles, is a dish that often tops off a meal of *galbi*, barbecued ribs.

Italian pasta is not served with broth, and includes a variety of types other than noodles.

In most countries, noodles are usually made from regular wheat flour, but in Southeast Asian countries they are frequently made from rice, while in colder regions where buckwheat is a major crop, buckwheat noodles are common.

As such, myeon involves a range of meanings. Buckwheat, the basic ingredient of naengmyeon, is not very glutinous, which makes it difficult to roll into dough and then slice into thin noodles. Consequently, buckwheat powder is kneaded with water and placed in a cylinder with small holes in the bottom. Pressure is then applied from the top, which forces the dough through the small holes, forming noodles. The cylinder is held over a pot of boiling water so that the formed noodles fall directly into the water.

In the past, meat balls made of chopped pheasant meat were cooked and added to the broth, with the cooled noodles being served with chunks of ice. Since naengmyeon is a cold dish, as indicated by its name, you would think that it was popular mainly in summer, but many people enjoy it in winter as well.

The noodles used for naengmyeon can also be served in a hot broth. This is called *onmyeon*, hot noodles. Although the same noodles are used, the broth is prepared in a different way and with different ingredients. As such, the hot and cold noodles both use buckwheat noodles; however, they are quite different in taste and preparation.

Naengmyeon is generally categorized into two types; Pyeongyang naengmyeon and Hamheung naengmyeon, based on the region of their origin. Pyeongyang naengmyeon is served in a chilled beef broth with ice cubes, whereas Hamheung naengmyeon is served without broth, although broth can be provided separately. But in most

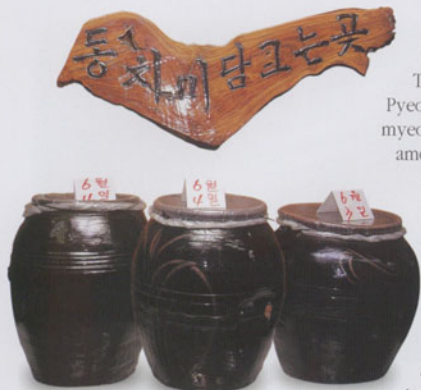


cases, Hamheung naengmyeon is eaten without the broth, and instead seasoned with chili pepper paste and garnished with vegetables and slices of beef or raw fish. Another difference is that Pyeongyang naengmyeon is not especially spicy whereas Hamheung naengmyeon is extremely spicy due to the generous amounts of chili pepper paste and mustard that are used. Those who do not like very spicy food may be intimidated by the mere sight of the fiery chili pepper sauce, but others actually relish this dish for its spiciness.

Among the various dishes that use

Naengmyeon is very popular in summer. On a sultry summer day, people flock to naengmyeon houses for a refreshing bowl of Pyeongyang style or Hamheung style cold noodles (above, right).





The juice of dongchimi, watery radish kimchi, enhances the taste of naengmyeon (above). An old press for making naengmyeon noodles (below).

buckwheat noodles is one called Chuncheon *maguksu*. While similar to Hamheung naengmyeon, it contains more vegetables and the noodles are slightly thicker. This dish originated in Gangwon-do, a mountainous province

whose capital is Chuncheon, which lends its name to this dish. The noodles are less glutinous than Pyeongyang and Hamheung naengmyeon because they call for greater amounts of buckwheat flour in the noodle dough. Recently, some food manufacturers have begun to add more starch to the noodles to make them more glutinous, which also contributes to cost-savings.

It is generally said that the quality of naengmyeon depends on its broth, which is made by boiling meat. To prepare naengmyeon stock, meat (usually beef) is boiled for a long time, and the resulting broth is then combined with the liquid from *dongchimi*, a type of watery kimchi. Radish, scallions and some green pepper are the main ingredients of dongchimi. Water is poured over these ingredients, which are then left to ferment.

To prepare naengmyeon, the noodles are first boiled, drained, and left to cool. To serve, the noodles are placed in a

large bowl, garnished with slices of pear, radish, cucumber, and boiled egg, and then the broth is added. The dish is usually served with ice. Depending on personal tastes, vinegar and mustard can be added to the broth, while the noodles are eaten with chopsticks. Naengmyeon is generally eaten at restaurants rather than being prepared at home, but dried or fresh buckwheat noodles are available at grocery stores nowadays, making it more convenient to prepare at home.

The following is a basic recipe for preparing naengmyeon at home. ♦

Ingredients for Four Servings

- 300 grams of beef (rib or shank meat)
- 15 cups of water
- 1 medium-sized scallion
- 3 cloves of garlic
- 300 grams of radish from dongchimi
- 1 pear (100g)
- 2 boiled eggs
- naengmyeon noodles (about 1.2 kg after boiling)



Ingredients for Naengmyeon Broth

- 5 cups of dongchimi water
- 5 cups of beef stock
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1 tablespoon vinegar
- 1 tablespoon white sugar

1) Beef Stock

Boil beef ribs in water with scallion and garlic. Boil until a fork or a chopstick can be easily inserted. Remove the ribs and keep wrapped in a wet dishtowel until just before serving. Let the stock cool and discard bits of fat.

2) Garnish

Cut the dongchimi radish into crescent-shape slices or long, thin slices. Cut cucumbers into thin slices, salt lightly and pan fry. Peel the pear and cut it into thick slices. Boil the eggs and cut in half. Slice the beef into pieces 3 to 4 millimeters thick.

3) Broth

Mix equal portions of the chilled beef stock with dongchimi water. Add vinegar, salt and sugar.

4) Noodles

Once the broth and garnish items are ready, boil four servings of noodles in water. When cooked, rinse the noodles in cold water several times, and drain.

5) Separate the noodles into four portions and place each portion into a large bowl. Place the sliced beef, pear, cucumber, radish and egg on top of the noodles, and gently pour in the broth.

6) Provide mustard, sugar and vinegar for seasoning depending on each diner's personal preferences.

To make naengmyeon noodles, buckwheat dough is placed in a cylindrical press with holes in the bottom and then pressure is applied from the top, which forces the dough through the small holes, forming noodles.

