

Taste of Power: How Bon Appétit, Your Majesty Turns Food into Cultural, Emotional, and Political Discourse

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Abstract: In the backdrop of the Joseon royal court, this study looks at how food is portrayed in the Korean drama *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty* (2025) as a cultural, emotional, and political discourse. The story, set exclusively in the palace kitchen, turns food into a symbol of strength, allegiance, and emotional expression. This study views the culinary practices in the drama as symbolic performances that represent Confucian principles, hierarchical order, and the complex politics of serving the sovereign, drawing on affect theory and food studies. The study examines pivotal moments in which cooks vie to appease the King, resolve diplomatic disputes, and demonstrate loyalty via their art using qualitative textual and visual analysis. The results show that food functions as both affective work and political ritual, uniting power, discipline, and emotion in a single sensory language. In the end, *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty* depicts the royal kitchen as a microcosm of power, where the cuisine's flavor represents the Joseon world's moral, emotional, and cultural fabric

Keywords: Bon Appétit Your Majesty, food culture, food studies, Korean drama, media and performance studies

Introduction

Food has changed from being a symbol of sustenance to a sophisticated language of emotion, politics, and identity in modern Korean screen culture. *Dae Jang Geum* (2003), *Let's Eat* (2013), and *Recipe for Farewell* (2022) are just a few of the dramas that have long used food to examine memory, care, and social hierarchy. By fusing culinary aesthetics with temporal imagination and contrasting contemporary cooking competitions with the royal kitchens of the Joseon era, *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty* (2025) carries on this heritage. Through this parallel narrative, the drama presents food as a tool for characters to communicate emotions, negotiate power, and find a sense of belonging, rather than just as something to be consumed.

Cooking at the Joseon court functions as a political performance, with cooks preparing meals not just to satisfy the King's palate but also to maintain the nation's metaphorical body and maintain authority. Cooking becomes a diplomatic activity, connecting the royal table with the destiny of the empire and taste with governance. In the contemporary period, on the other hand, food becomes a personal language of emotional healing and self-expression. Personal reinvention takes place in the kitchen, where responsibility and hierarchy are replaced with creativity and concern. However, *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty* shows that food still mediates connections of recognition, desire, and reliance across both temporalities.

A very personal story is hidden beneath the ceremonial exterior of royal meals. Through the food they prepare, the chefs, servants, and courtiers who work in the palace kitchen convey their aspirations, anxieties, and loves. The acts of cooking and tasting replace speech, times when compassion and rivalry blend. As a result, the kitchen becomes a microcosm of the kingdom itself, a place that is strictly regulated yet always filled with passion and ambition.

This study analyzes how *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty* uses food as a medium for political, emotional, and cultural debate. It examines how food serves as a symbol of Joseon's social system, a stage for acts of loyalty and diplomacy, and a means of expressing unspoken feelings. This study contends that the taste of food in *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty* is also the taste of power, where the sensory pleasure of eating becomes inextricably linked to the moral and political order it upholds, based on an analysis of the play's narrative and visual techniques.

This leads to research questions: (1) how food represents power, relationships, and emotion, and (2) how narrative and visual elements communicate hierarchy and affect. The study explores how *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty* turns eating into a metaphor for living by interpreting its culinary sequences as emotional and political performances. This demonstrates how the politics of taste endure despite changes in the contexts of intimacy and power.

Theoretical Review

Food Studies

Here, food studies is positioned as the main theory since it explores food as both a cultural and political text. The interdisciplinary topic of food studies investigates food not just as a biological requirement but also as a system of meaning. It views eating as a social, cultural, and political act that serves as a vehicle for expressing identity, power, class, and gender. Food studies investigate what eating means in a particular environment rather than what individuals consume.

Barthes made the case in *Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption* that food is a communication system that conveys social values, identities, and ideologies. Like a word or an image, a meal is a sign. In this study, every regal cuisine represents moral order and national pride, making it a language of allegiance and hierarchy. Then, Bourdieu demonstrates how taste, including food taste, marks social class in *Distinction*. Food preferences are influenced by power and cultural capital rather than being solely personal. In the context of this study, the contrast between the expressive food of the contemporary finalists and the ceremonial cooking of the Joseon chefs shows how taste changes from social obligation to emotional expression while still being connected to hierarchy. And Arjun Appadurai describes how food shapes imagined communities and national identity in *How to Make a National Cuisine*. In this study, Joseon cuisine, which asserts Korea's uniqueness via culinary refinement, is an instrument of cultural sovereignty due to the diplomatic friction with the Ming dynasty.

In the drama *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty*, food acts as two substantial elements: as cultural text and as political text. As cultural text means that food encodes the value of nationhood, heritage, and identity; meanwhile, as political text, food mediates diplomacy, loyalty, and governance. This way, food is also served as a symbolic economy in which distributing power through who cooks, who eats, and who judges.

In short, scholars like Roland Barthes, Pierre Bourdieu, and Arjun Appadurai have highlighted in the subject of food studies how food functions as a system of meaning, a social language that is used to express identities, hierarchies, and ideologies. The royal kitchen in the Joseon era becomes a location of political performance when viewed through this perspective in *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty*. Cooking

for the King becomes a rite of governance as the chefs realize relationships of power, loyalty, and diplomacy. The drama shows that although the meanings of food change over time, its function as a symbol of identity and power never goes away.

Food and Power in the Joseon Court

In the context of food and power in the Joseon court, the royal kitchen serves as both a setting for culinary displays and a microcosm of Joseon dynasty politics in *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty*. Food serves as a tool for discipline, governance, and symbolic communication in this context. Loyalty, morality, and patriotism are embodied in every ingredient, cooking method, and presentation. The King's chefs embody the politics of sovereignty in addition to their culinary duties. Stabilizing the body politic is equivalent to appeasing the royal taste, and feeding the monarch turns into a ritualized affirmation of order. Thus, the way food is portrayed in the play turns culinary enjoyment into a metaphor for power: mastering the art of cooking is a means of securing one's place in the precarious framework of court politics.

The conflict between creativity and obedience is dramatized by the periodic staging of culinary competitions among palace chefs. These contests reflect larger diplomatic conflicts, especially the implicit political hostility between the Ming dynasty and Joseon. Taste functions as diplomacy in the setting of preparing royal banquets for foreign dignitaries or ceremonial occasions; it is a sensory manifestation of the kingdom's cultural sophistication and independence. The series conveys the idea that food has political significance through these scenes: it communicates power, negotiates prestige, and affirms identity across cultural boundaries.

Furthermore, Foucault's idea of disciplinary power is embodied in the royal kitchen. The chefs' work is controlled by ritual accuracy, repetition, and observation. Their inventiveness is constrained by the moral requirements of serving the King, and their bodies are disciplined to represent loyalty and restraint. In this situation, food serves as both an offering and a tool of control; it upholds the sovereign's dominance while also reiterating the subjugation of those who prepare it. The rhythm of palace life is determined by the King's appetite, both literally and figuratively. *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty* reframes culinary practice as a political performance that upholds the state in the same way that it nourishes the body by emphasizing this relationship.

Affect Theory

Affect theory emphasizes how emotions are not contained within people but rather move between bodies, objects, and environments. It investigates the actions and movements of emotion. Affect is the felt aspect of experience, which includes feelings, emotions, and desires, frequently before they are expressed verbally.

In *The Politics of Emotion in Culture*, Ahmed contends that feelings influence our relationships with others and stick to things and bodies. In the drama, food bears emotional weight, including pride, comfort, longing, and care. A meal turns into an emotional item that unites people and facilitates healing. Berlant examines in *Cruel Optimism* how routine behaviors, such as eating, help people stay emotionally strong even in the face of oppressive systems. According to this study, the chefs' cooking exemplifies emotional endurance, which is the capacity to maintain feelings, compassion, and hope despite competitive or controlling systems. Meanwhile, Eve Sedgwick relates intimacy, texture, and the profound emotional impact that even seemingly insignificant actions, like sharing food, may convey. According to this study, food becomes the grammar of caring, and the shared meal serves as a silent emotional conversation, replacing formal speaking.

In the Joseon era, as portrayed in the drama, affect theory operates as follows. Although hierarchy controls emotion, it nevertheless manifests itself in deeds of dedication, loyalty, and service. Affective performance of duty, or love converted into obedience, is demonstrated by the cook's silent caring for the King. With the help of two major theories, food studies and affect theory, these frameworks enable the researcher to analyze how *Bon Appetit, Your Majesty* fuses the politics of taste with the intimacy of feeling.

Therefore, cooking, whether for a King or a camera, functions as affective labor, a means of controlling, expressing, and circulating emotion within hierarchical institutions. Through actions of feeding, consolation, and acknowledgment, food unites characters and transforms emotion into tangible and perceptual experiences.

Finally, this study explores food as a venue where structural and emotional economics converge by fusing affect theory with food studies. The intimacy of emotion and the politics of taste are linked systems that influence how people view authority, society, and themselves, rather than being mutually exclusive. In *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty* presents food as a language that unites hearts and governs bodies, a medium that upholds sovereignty in the past and sincerity in the present. Thus, this dual paradigm offers a prism through which to view how culinary culture still converts feeling into power and power into social order.

Method of the Study

Using a qualitative interpretative methodology, this study integrates cultural discourse analysis with textual and visual analysis. In the cultural text *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty*, food functions as a vehicle for identity, emotion, and power. The examination examines how culinary activities are portrayed as emotive and political acts by closely examining significant scenes from the Joseon period. The study places the drama within larger discourses of Korean historical imagination and global media culture by drawing on ideas of culinary studies, affect, and cultural temporality. The focus is on how the drama physically and narratively develops 'taste' as a political and emotional language in the past era, rather than gauging audience reaction.

Further, since the study examines dialogues, scenes, and narrative structures related to food, cooking, and eating, it uses a textual analysis approach. Then, cinematic techniques on close-up of ingredients, as well as color palette and lighting, help to reveal how authority and emotion are visually embodied through food.

Data Sources

Selected scenes and narrative sequences from the Korean drama *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty* (2025) serve as the study's major source of data. This drama explores the meanings of food, cooking, and emotion across historical and cultural contexts in the setting of the royal kitchen of the Joseon dynasty. Through deliberate sampling, particular moments and episodes were selected, with an emphasis on those that specifically highlight cooking, eating, and conversations about food as locations of intimacy, conflict, or representation.

Some important scenes include: (1) the palace culinary competition to win over the King and gain political favor; (2) the creation of ceremonial dishes symbolizing Joseon's sovereignty; and (3) intimate moments that highlight the emotional aspects of food, such as shared meals or feeding rituals.

Critical evaluations and academic publications on Korean food media and culinary portrayals in popular culture are examples of secondary sources. These resources place the main text in the context of larger discussions about Korean historical imagination, cultural diplomacy, and the aesthetics of

international media.

Data analysis

Qualitative textual and visual analysis based on affect theory and food studies frameworks was used to examine the data. To understand how the drama creates connections between power, emotion, and identity, a detailed study of food-related visual, narrative, and dialogic aspects was required. Two steps were taken in the analysis process: descriptive coding, thematic interpretation, and comparative synthesis.

Finding scenes where food is a key component of hierarchy, diplomacy, closeness, or emotion is known as descriptive coding. Character dynamics, setting, and narrative function were all taken into consideration when cataloguing each scene. Thematic interpretation is the process of looking at these scenes from the perspectives of emotion theory and food studies. For instance, scenes of emotional cooking and sharing were analyzed as affective performances of care, vulnerability, and connection (drawing from Ahmed and Berlant), while ritualized cooking moments were investigated for their representation of discipline and sovereignty (drawing from Foucault and Bourdieu).

To comprehend how cinematic form aids in the articulation of emotion and authority, consideration was given throughout the examination to visual style (such as camera angles, lighting, and close-ups of food), conversation, and gesture. The study reads *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty* as a multi-layered narrative in which food functions as both political speech and affective expression by fusing textual, visual, and cultural interpretations.

Results and Discussions

The study's conclusions reveal that *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty* presents food as a multifaceted discourse that simultaneously represents political power, emotional labor, and cultural identity. The analysis demonstrates how the drama presents cooking and eating as symbolic gestures that uphold both personal relationships and national narratives in the Joseon era. Culinary practice becomes a metaphor for how people live together, rule, and feel as characters use food as a language to negotiate belonging, hierarchy, and affection (Kwon, D., Soon-Hee, K., Chung, K., 2023). Thus, the results and discussion section highlights how food functions within the royal kitchen as a cultural, emotional, and political discourse, as well as demonstrating how power, devotion, and feeling are negotiated through cooking and dining rituals, since the focus is solely on the Joseon-era setting of *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty*. It means that every meal, ingredient, and culinary technique becomes a means of communication that upholds authority, demonstrates concern, and articulates the kingdom's moral order. In the drama, feeding the monarch becomes a ritual of identity and government as well as a matter of survival, turning culinary practice into a language of power.

Food as Cultural Discourse: The Language of Refinement and Order

In the drama, food represents the aesthetic and moral values of the Joseon dynasty. As what Nurislamingsih, R., Rizal, E., & Laksono (2024) stated that the Confucian search for harmony between nature, body, and state is symbolized by the palace cuisine, which is painstakingly prepared, artistically plated, and symbolically balanced. The chefs' command of flavor is linked to their mastery of virtue; cooking for the King calls for moral integrity, discipline, and purity of heart.

The Joseon court is portrayed in the drama as being under Confucian rule. This philosophical framework, which is based on decorum, moderation, and the moral purity of the self, even permeates the food industry (Lusiana, Y., Tjaturini, D., Supriadi, N., & Widodo, 2024). Similar to how ministers and courtiers report to the King, each chef, servant, and attendant has a defined position in the culinary

chain of command. Thus, the preparation of royal delicacies becomes a metaphor for upholding social harmony. The food served by the Royal Chef is not just usual food, but it represents something deeper than that. In episode 4, even the King feels the sensation of ‘flavors of the memory’ for what Chef Jin Young cooked for him. That day, Chef Jin Young cooked tenderloin steak for the King, and he felt an amusing feeling when his mother fed him the same dish when he was a child. Or an episode where the Chef decided to make *doenjang jiggae* (traditional Korean fermented soybean soup) for the King. The food became a symbol of sincerity and honesty, two things that she believed could slowly soften the King’s heart, which was filled with stress and anger at that time.

The Confucian belief that moral virtue is inextricably linked to aesthetic refinement and that beauty results from discipline is reflected in the meticulous selection of food, the symmetry of plating, and the ritualized serving of meals (Jia, R., & Kung, 2025). *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty* presents eating as an artistic and moral practice through its visual narrative. To highlight the contemplative nature of culinary work Lindenfield, L., & Parasecoli (2017), the camera focuses on the chef’s motions, such as the steady hands grinding herbs, the rhythmic slicing of vegetables, and the deliberate movement of fire and water. As (Bottinelli, S., & Valva, 2017; Lee, 2022) stated that the camera spends a great deal of time focusing on the professional chef’s actions as the center stage, so these scenes show that mastering the art of cooking is a kind of spiritual development, an aesthetic discipline itself. The concept of *sŏnbi* (scholarly virtue), a person whose technical proficiency is inextricably linked to moral integrity, is embodied by the royal chef, who must continuously strike a balance between taste, health, and symbolism. In this approach, the drama uses food as a medium to illustrate the Joseon notion that ethics must be experienced, felt, and even tasted, and that virtue must be demonstrated by everyday practice.

The King’s meals frequently have symbolic significance related to the stability of the state and the balance between heaven and earth. A finely seasoned rice dish or a well-balanced broth indicates the equilibrium of the realm itself, not just culinary expertise. While discontent or disease brought on by food suggests chaos or imbalance within the realm, the King’s satisfaction with a meal becomes an affirmation of the cosmic and political order. The idea that food serves as a kind of governance is emphasized by this symbolic logic: the state’s health is reflected in the sovereign body’s health (Kwon, D., Soon-Hee, K., Chung, K., 2023).

For more, there are some symbolic meanings of the food served by Chef Jin Young for the King. Chef Jin Young thinks that food is not only filling, but something that heals the heart. Of course, not only the heart of the King, but also the heart and memory of the Queen, other Royal cook assistants, and even the hearts of the enemies from the Ming dynasty, were involved during the cooking competition. This drama portrays food as a medium of emotion and healing, where food becomes a form of empathy, not to satisfy the Royal palate, but to touch the King’s humanity. Also, food served as a symbol of honesty and humility. For King Yi Heon, who lived amidst political hypocrisy and the pressures of status, the meal served by Chef Jin Young was a reminder of simplicity and sincerity, something long lost in his life. The food can also be meant to be King Yi Heon’s emotional transition. The moment when the King feels his childhood memories and warmth in the food made by Jin Young marks the beginning of the King’s character change, from a ruler who is detached from the people to someone who begins to understand the values of humanity and compassion. Lastly, the food served also portrays a social and philosophical reflection. In the context of Korean culture, traditional Korean food (such as *gochujang* butter *bibimbap*, *doenjang* pasta, and *dongnae pajeon*) symbolizes equality and social connectedness. Everyone, from commoners to nobles, can enjoy the same dishes. Therefore, some scenes also serve as a subtle critique of social stratification, that despite differences in social status, all humans remain connected by the same needs: to eat, to feel, and to be loved (“Special Exhibition Showcases Joseon Dynasty’s Royal K-Food Culture”, 2024).

Additionally, the drama positions culinary sophistication as a symbol of cultural pride and national identity. The Royal food is portrayed as a precise art form that is firmly anchored in Korean soil and seasonal cycles, separate from foreign influences. Fusion food, as displayed in the drama like *sous vide* steak with Korean seasonings, snowflake *schnitzel* with raspberry and tartar sauce, black sesame *macaroon*, and Korean rice wine beef *bourguignon*, is just an example of food as a precise art which has a precious symbolic meaning. A cultural concept of harmony between humans and the natural world is reinforced by the sourcing of ingredients in accordance with the rhythm of nature (Cha, 2023). By portraying Joseon cuisine as both a royal privilege and an embodiment of the country's spiritual and artistic legacy, *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty* contributes to a larger story of cultural preservation.

The story also shows that this quest for refinement has moral and emotional implications. The kitchen turns into a moral testing ground where diligence and accuracy are used to demonstrate dedication. Serving the monarch perfectly means using one's body to demonstrate loyalty, turning moral obedience into the palpable beauty of cuisine. In this way, food is constructed by *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty*, as a kind of cultural discipline that both elevates and confines. The Joseon civilization's artistic and moral grandeur is celebrated in the Royal kitchen, but it also highlights the hardships of life in a society where ideology dictates even taste ("Research on Joseon Royal Birthday Cuisine Memos", 2024).

In this setting, food becomes a metaphor with two sides: it is the place where morality, power, and beauty intersect, but it is also the place where individuality and emotion are repressed under ritual. Thus, the vocabulary of refinement describes both harmony and elegance as well as the sacrifices necessary to maintain them. In the end, *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty* presents cuisine as the core of Joseon's cultural identity, a living art form that transforms philosophy into a sensory experience.

Food as Emotional Discourse: Loyalty, Care, and Silent Affection

Beneath the opulence of Royal life, *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty* reveals a more nuanced emotional realm conveyed through feeding and cooking. Within the confines of palace order, the drama depicts food as a language of sentiment that enables characters to express love, appreciation, or longing. The meticulous preparation and presentation of food provide an outlet for emotional expression, which is frequently prohibited in a Royal context (Kwon, D., Soon-Hee, K., Chung, K., 2023).

Every taste and gesture a Royal chef uses to prepare a meal for the King demonstrates devotion and concern. Food's sensory appeal becomes an extension of devotion; perfecting a dish serves the King's authority and well-being in addition to his appetite. During the cooking competition, Chef Jin Young proves that food can be a medium to convey emotional discourse. To ensure that Joseon can be the winner as well as to express her silent affection to the King, Chef Jin Young decided to make three special dishes: rice wine beef *bourguignon* to symbolize fusion of cultures between French and Joseon, Peking duck (a dish associated with Ming's imperial court), and *ogolgye samgyetang* (black chicken stuffed with *ginseng*) using a scarce pressure cooker.

At the first round, rice wine beef *bourguignon* has a symbolic meaning of personal loss and nostalgia, where mothers in modern France make the dish for their children. In the second round, Peking duck symbolizes an act of both respect and challenge. And the last, *ogolgye samgyetang*, which is known for its healing and restorative properties. Symbolically, this *samgyetang* represents internal stability, revival, strength, and care for the people & the King. The big message related to the emotional discourse is about true strength comes from resilience, nourishment, and sincerity, not extravagance,

which proves the emotional power. Thus, it is clear that Jin Young's dish demonstrates how cultural identity and emotional intelligence can win over the grandest imperial power.

The kitchen becomes a place of affective labor where emotion is expressed through taste and texture during these moments of culinary compassion. Thus, the series uses food to illustrate what Sara Ahmed refers to as 'the circulation of affect', or the movement of emotions between humans and objects, where emotions are practices rather than just direct speech. Therefore, the food prepared for the King and other courtly figures is more than just a culinary artifact; it is a silent letter written in flavor, texture, and aroma. Cinematic rhythm and *mise-en-scène* are frequently used in the drama to frame these emotional encounters (Lindenfield, L., & Parasecoli, 2017). The intensity of emotion ingrained in the sensory act is highlighted by long takes of the chef's hands arranging ingredients, close-ups of heating bowls, and lingering images of the King's countenance as he enjoys a meal. The materiality of food, its warmth, fragility, and transience, invites the spectator to experience affect. In this way, cooking turns into an emotional labor of love, where the chef's passion is expressed through the tactile and temporal process of creating something that will soon vanish rather than through words (Rajan, 2023).

The Royal chef, whose work is an act of both love and sacrifice, is at the heart of this emotional economy. The chef's love must be transformed into service because they are obligated to the monarch and the palace's moral standards. This is what Duschinsky, R., & Wilson (2015) refers to as the intimate public in affective terms, a place where love and duty are inextricably linked and personal feelings are lived within social limits. Therefore, the Royal kitchen serves as both a place of employment and a location of emotional containment, where ritual is used to discipline attachment and codify care. Every dish the chef prepares becomes an offering, a form of compassion that must be unseen, unsaid, but profoundly felt.

Expressions of emotion must go through the etiquette filter in the palace. The chef cannot publicly express love or pride, just as the King cannot publicly express thanks. However, both engage in a system of affective exchange through eating. The King's solitary act of tasting a meal and pausing briefly before bestowing uncommon praise has a deep emotional impact. In the drama, this is shown by the visual representation of every taste cell of the King enjoying every bite or chew of the food made by Chef Jin Young. This is depicted in the visual representation, such as exploding fireworks, the standing nape hair, or the King dancing on the delicious food offerings. The chef's quiet devotion is validated by his restrained acknowledgement. Sophie, (2024)'s theory that emotions stick to particular things, in this case, food, and serve as a conduit for negotiating relationships in a world of power and restraint, is embodied in this instance.

Additionally, *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty*, frequently uses food to promote healing and peace-making. Conflicts within the palace, like as betrayal, jealousy, or remorse, are resolved via shared meals rather than conversation. Remorse can be tasted rather than expressed in the kitchen, which turns into a confessional setting. Eating becomes an act of forgiveness when a dish is served as an apology or a reminder because it holds the emotional remnants of the past. Thus, the emotional connection between the King and servant, authority and vulnerability, is facilitated by the sensory closeness of sharing food.

The drama's emotive discourse about food is both nostalgic and political. The ability of the chefs to control their emotions, to prepare calmly under duress, and to convert fear into accuracy becomes a gauge of their value and loyalty. In this way, emotion serves as a tool for control and a source of strength. The palace relies as much on the mastery of taste as it does on the control of emotion. The ideal chef embodies the Confucian virtue of *jungseong* (sincere dedication), feeling deeply but expressing it sparingly (Jia, R., & Kung, 2025). The drama sheds light on how emotional restraint upholds the court's moral and political framework.

Taste of Power: How *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty* Turns Food into Cultural, Emotional, and Political Discourse

However, *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty*, also permits emotional moments to slip through the formalities. Emotion momentarily overrides etiquette when a chef takes a chance on creativity to ease the King's sorrow or remembers the Queen's childhood meal that brings back memories. In the midst of the chilly architecture of power, taste becomes a mnemonic trigger, a return to humanity, warmth, and innocence. These brief interactions serve as a reminder to viewers that emotion is a living energy that unites people even in systems of limitation and cannot be completely domesticated (Sophie, 2024).

Ultimately, *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty* presents food as a language of love under duress, a language that flourishes because direct expression is prohibited. The chefs use affective labor to convey love and compassion in a way that the Royal system can comprehend: order, taste, and beauty. The emotional language of food thus reveals the paradox of the Joseon palace: it is a place of extreme discipline and profound emotions, where care must pass for ceremonial, and where every taste conveys both responsibility and desire.

Food as Political Discourse: Power, Diplomacy, and Hierarchy

Fundamentally, *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty* dramatizes the complex intrigues of the Joseon court through cuisine. Success or failure in cooking has the power to change political outcomes, and the Royal kitchen serves as an extension of the throne. The chefs' attempts to win over the King are akin to diplomatic competitions, signifying the struggle for power and favor. A skilfully prepared dish can ensure a courtier's promotion, yet an error could result in banishment or even death.

For instance, it can be seen from a scene where the King asked Chef Jin Young to serve food to the King and his ministers to save her life. This scene represents the King's power to decide whether the Chef's life can be saved or not through her cook.

King Yi Heon: *"How can meat be so tender? The more I chew, the more the juices flow and linger. The light and clean taste reaches a peak, then melts away. Wait, this seasoning.. (while taking the seasoning again). I truly cannot believe this taste. This is the very essence of savory flavor. What on earth did you make it with?"*

Jin Young: *"Simply put, it's an item I use to enrich the flavor of food. It enhances savoriness and reduces saltiness".*

King Yi Heon: *"The pickled omija and grilled green onions on the side are incredibly appetizing, and they pair perfectly with the meat. The dish is truly the greatest taste on the land. It tasted rather nostalgic and for the first time in a long while, I was satisfied with the meal".*

From the dialogue above, food preparation embodies what Michel Foucault refers to as 'biopolitical governance', the control of life and power through physical regulation. The cooks who feed the monarch contribute to maintaining the political order, and the King's hunger, well-being, and contentment become issues of state. Even the act of tasting gains political significance: the King's approval of a meal confirms both the nation's symbolic unity and his own authority. As a result, food serves as both a tool of control and a symbol for the precarious balance between survival and allegiance that characterizes Royal life.

The drama also emphasizes the Confucian governance-based ritual aspect of food politics. The Royal dinner, or *jinyeon*, is a performative declaration of order rather than just a feast. Each dish, presented in accordance with rigorous ceremonial protocol, represents a rank, a virtue, or a component of the universe. Because the monarch represents harmony between heaven, earth, and people by eating in a specified way, the act of eating thereby confirms the legitimacy of authority. A disturbance in the cosmic and moral equilibrium is indicated when this rite is broken, whether by the King's unwillingness to eat or by an inappropriate presentation. By turning the act of eating into a rite of sovereignty, *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty* illustrates how power is realized in sensory form.

Food also serves as a medium for diplomacy (Bottinelli, S., & Valva, 2017). Culinary competitions aimed at impressing Ming ambassadors or demonstrating Joseon's cultural independence are featured in a number of story arcs. These instances demonstrate how cuisine may be used as soft power, negotiating political position through taste and sophistication as opposed to using force. In episodes 8 and 9, there is a cooking competition between the Joseon and the Ming dynasty to reflect political power dynamics. The competition is more than just serving the food from each country; it is more like a political battle for national pride, or in other words, it dramatizes how food diplomacy can serve as a proxy for power. Here, the great names of Joseon and Ming are at stake. Joseon must surrender control of food resources and submit to Ming standards if they lose this competition. During the cooking battle, sabotage happened, where Ming's chef stole *gochugaru* (Korean chili powder) to obtain Joseon's secret ingredient to win the battle. The King mediates the conflict after Ji Young's *gochugaru* vanishes and eventually proposes a tie. This diplomatic solution demonstrates the King's function as a sovereign arbiter of national honor in addition to his duty as a culinary judge.

The Royal kitchen turns into a battlefield as chefs use blades to preserve the nation's dignity and diplomats use pens. The way these competitions are shown in the play highlights a key paradox: although the chefs work for the crown, their creativity also serves as a form of silent resistance, a means of claiming Korean cultural identity in the face of foreign authority.

The drama also shows how political influence permeates the kitchen's private realm. The rigid class structures of the state are mirrored in the hierarchies among palace employees, making daily cooking a struggle for survival and recognition. The battle among the cooks to serve the monarch is more about being close to power than it is about artistic ability. While a single error can result in banishment or death, a single triumph at the Royal table can raise one's social status. As a result, the kitchen turns into a Foucauldian area of discipline and surveillance where people's bodies and behaviors are continuously observed, adjusted, and punished (Cha, 2023). According to this perspective, preparing food is both a creative endeavor and a control device that uses ritualized obedience to bond subjects to authority.

Food in the Joseon court is never innocent, as *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty* reveals. It serves as a platform for the enactment and contestation of hierarchy as well as a language through which authority speaks. The palace's rhythm is determined by the King's appetite, and his authority is legitimized by the chefs' skill. As a result, every meal becomes a political performance that nourishes the state's myth as well as the monarch's body (Yoo, T. Y., & Cha, 2024). The drama reveals the complex relationship between food, authority, and ideology by turning the Royal kitchen into a theater of government. Thus, the flavor of food is also the flavor of force.

The Taste of Power: Synthesis of Culture, Politics, and Emotion

Bon Appétit, Your Majesty shows that taste is never neutral by concentrating on the Joseon kitchen, where cultural significance, emotional intensity, and political power come together. Because of the Royal chefs' passion, skill, and aspirations, food becomes a living discourse of power that establishes who is in charge, who serves, and who belongs. According to Joseon history and culture, all Royal chefs were men, but since the arrival of Jin Young, women have been in charge of the Royal kitchen.

The palace is portrayed in the drama as a sensory realm ruled by both desire and order. Food creates a moral economy where pleasure and power coexist by disciplining the body, expressing emotion, and legitimizing authority. At the end, *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty* reveals that to taste is to rule and to cook is to command at the Joseon court. The ability of the chefs to translate hierarchy and emotion into the language of food, a language that preserves the cultural and political imagination of

the era, is what gives them the 'taste of power', in addition to the King's favor.

When considered collectively, these cultural, emotional, and political dimensions show that food in *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty* serves as a living discourse that combines art, emotion, and power rather than just as ornament or spectacle. It describes how bodies, perceptions, and feelings contribute to the formation of ideology. Therefore, the Royal kitchen is both a place of beauty and a place of struggle, a place where loyalty is required, where authority tastes simultaneously sweet and bitter, and where the lines between sovereignty and service are blurred in the heat of the hearth.

The drama encourages viewers to consider how food affects human connections in hierarchical and caring environments by highlighting the politics of emotion and the affective texture of cultural ritual, as proposed by (Raman, Z., & Bok, 2024). It serves as a reminder that eating, cooking, and tasting are not merely sensory activities but also political and ethical performances, gestures that societies use to determine who can reign, serve, and feel. Ultimately, the drama also transforms eating into a moral drama: to cook is to submit, to taste is to rule, and to share food is to temporarily put aside the burden of authority in favor of fleeting, loving connection.

Conclusion

Bon Appétit, Your Majesty creates a symbolic world where food, power, and emotion are intertwined in the Joseon dynasty's Royal kitchen. The drama uses the language of food to explain how daily dining and culinary rituals combine cultural values, societal order, and individual emotions. Feeding the monarch is never just a simple act of servitude; it is a political negotiation, emotional expression, and cultural preservation (Kwon, D., Soon-Hee, K., Chung, K. R., Daily, J. W., & Park, 2023). Each ingredient and method has a moral and ideological significance that translates the kingdom's structure into a dish's texture.

According to this study, food in the Joseon palace functions as a political discourse that upholds authority through ritualized nourishment, an emotional discourse that permits affection and devotion to be expressed within the bounds of protocol, and a cultural discourse that reflects the Confucian ideals of harmony and hierarchy (Sophie, 2024). The conflicts between duty and desire, precision and emotion, subservience and agency are thus embodied in the culinary practices of the Royal cooks.

Bon Appétit, Your Majesty sheds light on the sensory aspects of power by using the palace kitchen as both a stage and a battlefield. Food becomes a method of emotional survival within inflexible structures of authority, cooking becomes a kind of governance, and tasting becomes an act of judgment. The drama implies that the taste of power is found not only in the King's consumption, but also in the hard work, devotion, and desire that enable that particular moment.

In the end, the drama shows that Joseon court cuisine is more than just a reflection of society; it is politics, culture, and emotion brought to life through food. *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty* asks its viewers to comprehend the Royal kitchen as a microcosm of the kingdom itself, where hierarchy and humanity are constantly negotiated through the delicate, disciplined art of taste, by depicting food as a living discourse.

This study presents *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty* as an important cultural text that illustrates how food functions in the Joseon court as a nexus of art, emotion, and administration. The research broadens the understanding of how culinary practices mediate affective relationships while embodying moral and political frameworks by combining food studies and affect theory. The results imply that food narratives in historical dramas might work as archives of cultural ideology, converting abstract power structures into emotional and sensory experiences.

By contrasting *Bon Appétit, Your Majesty* with other Korean period dramas like *Jewel in the Palace* or *Mr. Queen* that examine comparable intersections of power and emotion through food, further research could expand this investigation. Additional research might look into how viewers react to these culinary politics in the context of contemporary ideas of identity, hierarchy, and caring. These viewpoints would help us better comprehend how food continues to influence culture, emotion, and authority in Korean visual storytelling.

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