

# 'Love Goes through the Stomach'

## A Japanese–Korean Recipe for Post-conflict Reconciliation

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**ABSTRACT:** Mimicking research and practice that demonstrates the importance of seemingly mundane acts for resolving protracted conflicts, this article enquires into the potential contributions of food-related practices to post-conflict reconciliation. Based on fieldwork with a Japanese–South Korean reconciliation initiative (*Koinonia*), the argument is made that food-related practices can create the spatio-temporal conditions necessary to mitigate successfully situations that may otherwise be characterised by misunderstandings, animosity and an unwillingness to move beyond dividing lines. It is demonstrated that food-related practices have the capacity to influence reconciliation positively throughout the three stages that are perceived as vital for building lasting relationships between conflicting parties: encouragement of participation in reconciliation events (stage 1), encouragement of positive interaction during reconciliation events (stage 2) and sustainability of reconciliation events after participants re-enter daily life and the likely negative perceptions of the Other therein (stage 3).

**KEYWORDS:** commensality, conflict resolution, food, Japan, reconciliation, ritual, South Korea

'What is for some people a radical event may appear to others as a date for lunch.'  
(Sahlins 1985: 154)

### Introduction

For societies to learn to live together in a post-conflict environment, and even more so to learn to respect and trust each other, adaptations on a structural, functional and instrumental level are indispensable (Bar-Siman-Tov 2004). Equally important, however, are emotional transformations, especially the development of an empathic understanding of the other, 'being genuinely curious about another person ... emotional as well as cognitive openness, and tolerating the ambivalence this might arouse' (Halpern and Weinstein 2004: 307). Ultimately it is the relationship between individuals that determines the implementation, and success, of any structural, functional and/or instrumental reform (Bloomfield 2006).

Truth-telling (where the parties share their perspectives on, and experiences during, the conflict with each other) has become the predominant tool for achieving such transformation (Bloomfield 2006; Lederach 1997). However, the highly politicised nature of many truth-telling activities has been shown to undermine the ability of such efforts to tear down dividing lines effectively (Crocker et al. 2008), and calls for a more creative vision for reconciliation have been on the rise. These calls highlight the importance of also creating settings for social interaction between conflicting parties that are not explicitly, or solely, political. Instead emphasis is to be placed on ritualistic acts and the multi-sensoriality of life experiences captured therein (Lederach 1997; Ross 2004; Schirch 2005).

The purpose of the present article is to build on this very vision by examining the potentiality of commensality, as both mundane and ritualistic activity, for post-conflict reconciliation. Similar to sports and artistic endeavours, commensality has been recognised as a contributing factor to reconciliation on an emo-



tional–relational level (Lederach 1997; Nwoye 2010; Schirch 2005). For example, Lederach (1997) argues that the success of the Norway Channel<sup>1</sup> can at least partly be attributed to the participants living and eating together, and Nwoye (2010) notes that by offering meals to conclude 'restorative conferences' an elevated level of understanding between parties could be achieved. Despite this acknowledgement, however, only limited attention has been paid to the interrelationship between the two concepts on an analytical level. The questions of 'Why and how does commensality contribute to post-conflict reconciliation?' remain largely unanswered.

This is highly problematic. Without developing a better understanding of these questions commensality can be a 'dangerous tool'. As much as food can help bringing people together, it can keep them apart. Tsu's (1999) examination of Japanese perceptions of Kobe's Chinatown demonstrates a continuation if not a strengthening of (negative) stereotypical images through the expanded and intentional exoticisation of Chinese cuisine; and Bahloul (1989) shows how food and commensality are used to draw boundaries between Muslims and Jews in northern Africa. In these contexts and others, food is as much an instrument for inclusion as it is an instrument for exclusion and particular attention has to be paid to why, when and how commensality can be, and has been, utilised as a reconciliatory rather than a boundary-affirming event.

To do so is the goal of this article. Based on my fieldwork with a Japanese–South Korean grassroots reconciliation initiative, I will make a case for why, how and when food-related practices have (had) the capacity significantly to aid the establishment of convivial relations after violent conflict (rather than the reverse). I set out to argue that, located at the intersections of the individual and the collective, the psychological, the physical and the social (Douglas 1982; Sutton 2001), food-related practices can create the spatio-temporal conditions necessary to mitigate situations successfully that may otherwise be characterised by misunderstandings, animosity and an unwillingness to move beyond dividing lines. I will show that they can positively influence reconciliation throughout the three stages that are vital for building lasting relationships between conflicting parties: encouragement of participation in reconciliation events (stage 1), encouragement of positive interaction during reconciliation events (stage 2), and sustainability of reconciliation events after participants re-enter daily life and the likely negative perceptions of 'the other' therein (stage 3) (Lederach 1997; Ross 2004; Schirch 2005).

I do not argue that commensality alone can facilitate empathic understanding between conflicting parties and that its value is transferable to any post-conflict situation. Instead, the goal of this article is to inquire more closely into an *auxiliary* tool that has, as previously noted, received only limited attention despite growing calls for a more varied, multi-stage and contextually specific approach to reconciliation and despite the capacity of commensality not only to further but also hinder long-term peace-building. My article calls, therefore, above all for a more explicit consideration of commensality as possible ingredient for post-conflict reconciliation but not as the dish itself.

## Historical Background

My argumentation is situated in the context of contemporary Japan–South Korea relations and in the legacy of Japan's colonisation of the Korean peninsula (1910–1945).<sup>2</sup> The two countries have 'peacefully' co-existed for more than sixty-five years, they have increasingly strong diplomatic and economic ties and 'direct' conflict has remained restricted to the realm of rhetoric. However, such rhetoric – exemplified in regular visits by Japanese state officials to Yasukuni Shrine, a symbol of historical revisionism in its enshrinement of several Class A war criminals – has kept the memory of Japanese imperialism alive and it has prevented the two parties from coming to terms with their shared past in a reconciliatory fashion.

Hostilities on a rhetorical level serve as a reminder of the many atrocities committed by Imperial Japan (from labour camps to forced prostitution), of its attacks on Korean cultural identity (from required name changes to forced worship at Shinto shrines), and of contemporary Japan's ongoing unwillingness to atone for its role as perpetrator in the Pacific War. Continued struggles about Japan's treatment of its past have allowed Japanese and South Korean politicians to prolong the conflict in its imaginary and to benefit from it in national discourses where understandings of the self continue, at least in parts, to be shaped in opposition to the other. Even more so, they contribute to an overall climate of ignorance about the realities of Japan's imperial past and the suffering it has inspired ever since. Japanese aggression remains underrepresented in history textbooks and education at large, and national war memorials and museums commonly veil Japan's role as perpetrator in layers of Japanese victimhood (Berger 2012). This has engendered a continued prevalence of negative representations of the other, including ongoing acts of discrimination

against Koreans in Japan and in particular against *Zainichi Koreans* (descendants of) forced labourers who were moved to Japan during the colonial period (Hicks 1997).

During the last decade Japanese ignorance towards, and negative portrayal of, Koreans has been counteracted by the Korean Wave or *hanryu*, an increasing interest in South Korean popular culture in Japan. However, this is still to translate into a general concern for Japan's and South Korea's shared violent past and for the daily struggles of Koreans in Japan in particular. According to Han et al. (2007), *Zainichi* Koreans have experienced *hanryu* as a rise of interest in their cultural backgrounds but not in the history and politics intertwined therewith. They have to deal with an altered but ongoing set of prejudices that are derived from a popularly mediated understanding of what 'Korean' means outside of any historical context (Han et al. 2007). South Korea has become depoliticised in Japan while 'the representation of Japan in South Korea still remains a highly political one overshadowed by its colonial experience and issues of historical memory' (Hayashi and Lee 2007: 214), and this growing gap appears to have, so far, weakened any reconciliatory efforts.

This is not to say that reconciliation as adequate shared commemoration of the past and a joint, trusting vision for the future is inconceivable. One has to acknowledge that contemporary reconciliation initiatives in the Japanese–Korean context have the explicit advantage of bringing together parties that have largely inherited, though not experienced, the trauma of violent conflict. The conflicting parties no longer suffer from the direct consequences of conflict, control over their lives is largely independent of each other, and, accordingly, the conflict itself is unlikely to be a guiding feature in individuals' decision-making processes (Hewstone et al. 2008). Therefore, my discussion of commensality as a tool for reconciliation in the context of contemporary Japan–South Korea relations has to be treated with some caution and an explicit recognition of the very particular spatio-temporalities of this post-conflict environment.

### Case Study: *Koinonia*, Context and Method

The case study for my argumentation is *Koinonia*, a grassroots Japanese–Korean reconciliation initiative that has worked towards pushing Japan–South Korea relations beyond simply co-existence and beyond ignorance about the other and the legacy of violence

therein. *Koinonia* found its beginning in 1997 when two officials from TMC visited Daebang Church to negotiate the possibility of a joint summer camp for junior-high and high-school students. After TMC's Senior Pastor publicly admitted Japan's historical debt, this vision became a reality that very summer but the realisation grew that more needs to be done to bring Japanese and South Koreans together on a personal level. In 1999 TMC and Daebang Church, therefore, co-organised a seminar titled *21 Seiki no Koinonia* (21st Century Fellowship). During this seminar a TMC elder, and Second World War survivor, reflected on, acknowledged and apologised for the atrocities committed by Imperial Japan. *Koinonia* was officially inaugurated shortly thereafter with both churches affirming their commitment to contribute positively to the future development of Japan–South Korea relations.

Since then *Koinonia* has developed into a multi-layered exchange program between the two churches. Beyond joint youth camps, *Koinonia* now includes short-term trips for adult groups, long-term exchanges for university students as well as regular meetings between church officials. The destination of *Koinonia* events alternates between South Korea and Japan, and so do the groups that participate in the exchanges. *Koinonia* events are generally comprised of three components: (1) reflections on the shared colonial past, (2) celebrations of the shared Christian faith and (3) more casual social interactions during sightseeing activities, home stays and joint meals. Some time is usually reserved for seminar-style discussions about Japan's colonisation of the Korean peninsula, and some sightseeing activities are dedicated to historical commemoration as well. For example, during *Koinonia* exchanges to South Korea common sites include *Seodaemun Prison* where the Japanese held and executed Korean independence fighters, *Gyeongbokgung Palace* where Japan's imperial army murdered the last Korean Queen, and the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) between South and North Korea. These historical reflections are supplemented by various opportunities for expressions of participants' shared Christian faith as well as trips to popular shopping areas, hot spring baths, and, not to forget, to an array of Korean or Japanese restaurants.

I had the chance to work with TMC from May to November 2010 to delve more deeply into *Koinonia*, its materialisation and expressions in TMC members' lives, and the way in which *Koinonia* has shaped their understanding of South Koreans and Japan–Korea relations more broadly. In the course of my fieldwork I was able to participate in a *Koinonia* exchange for

adult men to Daebang Church from 21 May 2010 until 24 May 2010, and I attended weekly Sunday services, lunches and other events organised by TMC. I used these opportunities for informal conversations and unstructured interviews with various TMC members including (former) *Koinonia* organisers, participants and church members not directly involved in the initiative. In addition, I conducted nineteen semi-structured interviews with Japanese members of TMC, former *Koinonia* participants and organisers aged twenty-seven to seventy-four, as well as two in-depth unstructured interviews with church officials. I was also able to gain access to a variety of printed materials on *Koinonia*: written testimonies by the approximately 200 Japanese *Koinonia* participants between 1997 and 2010 (some participated multiple times), South Korean newspaper articles on *Koinonia* and other documents, such as transcripts of speeches given at *Koinonia* events and the official founding document.

In an initial analysis of *Koinonia* (Ketterer<sup>3</sup> 2011) I found that *Koinonia's* aspirations overlap closely with the most ambitious definitions of post-conflict reconciliation that surround requirements for 'emotional and cognitive reordering, which enables the development of a new relationship between former enemies' (Ross 2004: 209). *Koinonia* has not only encouraged but enabled its Japanese and South Korean participants to develop a shared narrative of the past and, by so doing, to build relationships that recognise the continued psychological and emotional dimensions thereof (Ketterer 2011). *Koinonia* has sought, and achieved, 'mutual trust, positive attitudes, and sensitivity and consideration for the other party's needs and interests' (Bar-Tal and Bennink 2004: 15), a more inclusive self-understanding between participants, and a notion of belonging that celebrates difference and not homogeneity (Hutchison and Bleiker 2008). In other words, *Koinonia* has realised the core requirements of post-conflict reconciliation.

In my quest better to understand the motivations behind, and the particularities of, *Koinonia* I also found that the traditional ingredients for post-conflict reconciliation – joint, voluntary reflections on the atrocities committed, an acknowledgement of guilt through public apologies and witness testimonies, and a continued dedication to work towards a convivial future (Bloomfield 2006; Lederach 1997) – are not sufficient to explain the accomplishments of the initiative (Ketterer 2011). Instead I argue that *Koinonia* shows that reconciliation between Japan and South Korea depends on increasing the willingness of the Japanese to learn actively about the shared past (as

mentioned earlier, South Korean critique of Japanese reconciliation efforts has largely focused on a perceived reluctance to engage openly with the atrocities committed) (Ketterer 2011). To do so in the contemporary climate of deeply engrained stereotypes and misunderstandings then requires more than truth-telling; it requires perceptions of the other to be reshaped on a more fundamental level. I suggested that this can, and in the context of *Koinonia* has been achieved based on joint events that draw on shared interests and values (in this case manifested in participants' Christian faith) and that allow for positive social, seemingly apolitical engagements such as the sharing of meals (Ketterer 2011).

In other words, I found that in the context of *Koinonia* reconciliatory relationships have, to a notable extent, been forged in the seemingly mundane. Japanese *Koinonia* members, as the most reluctant participants, were convinced to participate in truth-telling because *Koinonia* was not only political. Many participants highlighted the importance of positive social interaction and especially of sharing food with each other, of learning about each other's foodstuffs and cuisines, and of seemingly mundane conversations during and about these very meals. I found that many *Koinonia* participants joined events because of positive food expectations and that they retain fond memories of *Koinonia* because these expectations were fulfilled and even surpassed. Simultaneously, sustainability is achieved by regularly reinforcing these positive memories through non-verbal and verbal cues, for example through repeated consumption of Korean food beyond *Koinonia* and narrative exchanges about these acts of consumption.

### Stage 1: Voluntary Participation and the Culinary Lure

In my quest to understand *Koinonia* I first sought to understand why Japanese TMC members opted to join a *Koinonia* exchange. *Koinonia* has been explicitly designed to encourage conscious reflections about the atrocities committed by Imperial Japan. *Koinonia* participants are expected to face some of the most gruesome aspects of this past, and they are challenged to acknowledge publicly the inadequacies of contemporary Japan in dealing with this memory. *Seodaemun Prison*, for instance, contains life-sized dolls that re-enact Japanese (mis)treatment of Korean prisoners, and I was told that the grotesque details of some of these re-enactments frequently shock Japanese *Koinonia* participants, in particular the youth. *Koinonia*

events also require Japanese participants to render themselves vulnerable in a different way: at least one Japanese adult is usually asked to give public testimony about their understanding of Japan–Korea relations and the deficiencies therein. This includes an admission of guilt even if the participant had not been involved in, or even alive during, Japan’s colonisation of the Korean peninsula.<sup>4</sup>

Voluntary participation in such activities is crucial for the success of reconciliation events, yet it is also one of the most difficult pre-conditions to achieve (Bloomfield 2006). Tavuchis (1991) argues that perpetrators of, or even bystanders to, violence are rarely willing to apologise for their deeds even if they feel remorse. Apologies place perpetrators/bystanders into a socially vulnerable position. The decision to accept or reject an apology lies firmly with their victims, and they could at any time opt publicly to shame perpetrators and bystanders, or their perceived representatives among future generations instead. Perpetrators/bystanders may further prefer not to engage more deeply with their former victims to preserve a stereotypical image of the other. As long as stereotypes are believed to be true they can serve as justification for one’s actions and self-perception (Hewstone et al. 2008).

In direct contradiction to this, Japanese *Koinonia* participants informed me that they had been excited to join *Koinonia* events from the very beginning. Japanese participants explained that they were fully aware of *Koinonia*’s requirement for apology and repentance, and many felt insecure about this requirement as they were uncertain about what it entailed. Nevertheless, they were earnestly looking forward to *Koinonia* exchanges and the intimate encounter with South Koreans therein. Historical concerns seemed to be pushed into the background by optimistic expectations about the overall *Koinonia* experience. TMC members felt ‘safe’ to participate in *Koinonia* events because they were ‘protected’ by the institutional and spiritual legitimacy of the two churches as primary organisers, and in this space they were convinced that beyond the challenge of reconciliation, joyful events would become possible (Ketterer 2011). I found that Japanese participants joined exchanges to Daebang Church for the ‘more noble’ goal of reconciliation but also for its potentially pleasant components, in particular for “‘prospective memory” – that is, people actively planning to remember meals and how tasty they would be’ (Sutton 2008: 163; italics removed).

Several Japanese participated in a *Koinonia* exchange to South Korea because they were intrigued by the idea of being able to enjoy ‘authentic Korean food’, and, because of its authenticity, ‘better food’ as

well. I was told that while there are plenty of Korean restaurants in Japan, they are adjusted to Japanese tastes and they usually only serve *Gogigui* (Korean barbecue).<sup>5</sup> Along the same lines, a female *Koinonia* participant explained that she had enjoyed Korean melodramas for some time and, as a result thereof, she had discovered, and come to love, Korean cuisine. Yet, she was doubtful to what extent she was able to get ‘real Korean food’ in Japan. For her a *Koinonia* exchange was a possibility to develop a closer understanding of South Korea more generally but also of the ‘authenticity’ of the primary materialisation of Korea in Japan, its cuisine.

*Koinonia* participants were further lured by the promise of being able not only to enjoy authentic Korean cuisine but to do so in the company of South Koreans. To share a meal with South Koreans in South Korea would make it a truly ‘Korean’ experience, especially because Japanese participants would be able to listen to explanations about the particularities of individual dishes and about ‘proper’ ways of eating them. I was told that one could always join one of the many gourmet trips that Japanese travel agencies offered to South Korea (and some had already done so before joining *Koinonia*); yet these trips would never allow one to experience South Korean food culture in the same way as through *Koinonia*, together with South Koreans. For many it was out of the question that the culinary opportunity offered during *Koinonia* events would be anything but memorable for its authenticity through commensality and, therein, for its deliciousness.

In the context of Japan such prospective memory predicated on a desire for an authentic culinary experience does not come as a surprise. ‘Today in Japan, foodstuffs (as material) and cuisine (as concept, one that is self-aware of larger frameworks of structure, meaning, and tradition) attract constant attention on a very broad scale’ (Bestor 2011: 273). This attention has been translated into a particular fixation on the relationship between place and taste through the notion of authenticity (Bestor 2011). The internationalisation of cuisines across the world but in particular in Japan, has triggered a preoccupation with, and revival of, foodways linked to a specific locale as a way to identify and assert the self vis-à-vis the other on a national as well as on a regional scale (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993). The Japanese government has implemented and funded campaigns that encourage Japanese awareness of, and pride in, traditional local cuisines (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993), and the tourism industry has complemented these efforts (intentionally or not) by marketing famous local food products (*meibutsu*) as a,

if not *the*, primary reason for travelling to a specific location (Hashimoto and Telfer 2008). In this context a given foodstuff or dish is conceived of as the most delicious if it is consumed, or at least purchased, at its place of origin. Japanese frequently acknowledge the artificiality of this perception, but they also embrace it in a perceived need for strengthening local identity. As a result, the linkage of place, taste and authenticity has become deeply ingrained in Japanese desire for, and perception of, delicious food (Ashkenazi and Jacob 2000).

Importantly, even though this interest in food culture has focused on everything Japanese (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993), the other, or non-Japanese cuisine, has been embraced as well, at least as destination for culinary tourism. For example, Kobe's Chinatown has been flourishing as the best place to enjoy 'authentic' Chinese cuisine in Japan. According to Tsu (1999: 23), this success can be attributed to 'a calculated effort at self-exoticisation' among Kobe's Chinese population. In other words, it can be attributed to a Japanese interest in constructing the self through an opposition to the other while enjoying the other through their cuisine. This seeming paradox allows 'both groups [to] move from mutual rejection to accommodation and even celebration of their cultural differences' without transcending the 'segregating function of ... old prejudices' (Tsu 1999: 18, 32).

Accordingly, Japanese interest in culinary tourism can be framed as a space for identity construction that allows both for processes of inclusion and exclusion to occur. It can reconfirm the self in rejection of the other (many dishes in Kobe's Chinatown are described as 'grotesque' (Tsu 1999: 25)) as much as it can open up a venue for increased understanding and positive associations (Chinese dishes in Kobe's Chinatown are also described as 'innovative, and tastier than that available in other cities' (Tsu 1999: 25)). In either case culinary tourism is conceived of as a rewarding and exciting experience, and it is firmly rooted as such within Japanese food and travel culture.

*Koinonia* participants do not only confirm these observations, but their statements indicate that in the context of Japan–South Korea relations prospective memory revolving around culinary tourism has been significant for counter-balancing one of the primary obstacles to post-conflict reconciliation: voluntary participation, at least among the Japanese. To satisfy their culinary curiosity Japanese *Koinonia* participants express a willingness to interact socially with South Koreans and, as a result, to learn more about Korean culture and lifestyle through at least one identity maker of the other, Korean cuisine. In those spaces

created by (culinary) curiosity, the former adversaries can (and do) meet to lay the groundwork for a deeper and more critical engagement with each other including eventual reflections on the shared violent past. In the context of Japan, culinary tourism has allowed for *Koinonia* as reconciliation effort to 'be rooted in and responsive to the experiential and subjective realities shaping people's perspectives and needs' (Lederach 1997: 21).

Important to remember here is that *Koinonia* is, nevertheless, much more than a culinary exchange. By committing to experiencing the other in their cuisine 'at home', *Koinonia* participants also commit to partake in events that could challenge some of their most deeply held convictions about themselves and the Japanese people at large. They agree to engage actively with their past (and, to some extent, present) as perpetrator in Japan–South Korea relations, and to do so in an open and direct encounter with their victims.

## Stage 2: Inclusivity and Commensality

During *Koinonia* events, food experiences then not only succeed at fulfilling Japanese participants' expectations as culinary tourists but they go beyond. Similar to joint prayers, home-stay experiences and sightseeing events (Ketterer 2011), commensality allows for Japanese and South Korean participants to get to know each other as fellow humans and, simultaneously, to develop a collective identity as *Koinonia* participants. By so doing, it contributes to two of the core needs of reconciliation initiatives: (1) the (re)building of trusting relationships between former adversaries and (2) the transformation of exclusionary group identities towards a more inclusive self-understanding (Bloomfield 2006).

Conflict amplifies the boundaries created between groups by emphasising the one identity marker that most clearly distinguishes the parties involved: 'The in-group will be maximally differentiated from the out-group and distinctions between groups will overwhelmingly favor the in-group' (Stephan 2008: 374). When members of the two groups meet they then view each other primarily through this prism of inclusion and exclusion, even if the goal of the meeting is reconciliation. This tendency is further amplified if reconciliation efforts are limited to negotiation-style interactions as they revolve, to a significant extent, around these identities and their importance for sustaining hostilities (Schirch 2005). Accordingly, one of the primary goals of reconciliation initiatives is a softening of diverging identity markers by emphasising

a shared humanity, and possibly joint membership in an even more intimate group. 'Instead of inscribing dichotomous or even righteous forms of defining identity, this [seeks] to open a space where more accepting and empathetic configurations of community can be generated' (Hutchison and Bleiker 2008: 386).

The culinary encounters during *Koinonia* events serve this very purpose. They are used to break the boundaries created by conflict and to establish friendships between participants. Exemplary is the 2010 *Koinonia* exchange to Daebang Church. Food events had been planned carefully by both Japanese and South Korean organisers to satisfy culinary curiosity and to simultaneously encourage positive social interactions between participants. Not one dish was served more than once and for each kind of dish a speciality restaurant had been selected. Many of the restaurants were well known and featured in guidebooks (for instance, the restaurant *Tosokchon*) and others were described as hidden gems that one could only find with locals. In addition, some meals, largely breakfast, were consumed in the privacy of individual host families, and the Sunday lunch was served at Daebang Church. In 2010 *Koinonia* featured, among others, *Ssam* (leafed vegetables used to wrap pork and beef), *Gogigui* (Korean barbeque), *Jang-Uh Gui* (grilled eel), *Samgyetang* (chicken ginseng soup), *Bibimbap* (in its most basic form as mixed rice with vegetables), and *Beondegi* (boiled silkworm pupae). By structuring culinary experiences during *Koinonia* in such ways, organisers thus directly addressed and fulfilled the promise of *Koinonia* as uniquely 'authentic' culinary tourist experience.

At the same time, organisers created a venue for advancing interactions between Japanese and South Korean participants for the purpose of reconciliation. Everyone was seated along the same table, everyone ate the same dish, and Japanese and South Koreans were equally distributed with bilingual participants strategically located to allow for conversations to ensue without significant structural (linguistic) difficulties. This set-up encouraged a relaxed atmosphere among participants, and it successfully negotiated the intensity and earnestness that had been triggered by the need to encounter, and deeply reflect on, human cruelty and suffering. At the 2010 *Koinonia* event I observed much laughter and conviviality during meals. Korean participants celebrated and applauded Japanese participants' courage, and ability to enjoy, or at least endure, the more 'unusual' components of Korean cuisine such as *Beondegi* or the spiciness of many dishes. At the same time, Japanese participants were intrigued by the deliciousness of Korean food and by

the enthusiasm their hosts demonstrated when teaching them about Korean food culture. In addition, food events were talked about throughout the day. Participants discussed what would be eaten next, to what extent they were familiar with it, which one of the meals they had enjoyed the most, or which particular dish they were still looking forward to.

Importantly, acts of commensality did not distract, or take away time, from truth-telling events, which consume most activities during *Koinonia* exchanges. Instead, they allowed participants to shift gears and to get to know each other in a different, not explicitly politicised setting and, in the case of Japanese participants, a setting that they had been particularly looking forward to. Commensality reminded *Koinonia* participants of what brings them together rather than of what keeps them apart, and by so doing it encouraged a shared notion of the self as part of a larger *Koinonia* community. In the words of a Japanese *Koinonia* participant:

Even when we had limitations through our languages, or when we were in shock about the painful past, we were able to freely associate with each other through spending time with each other, in particular by eating together. I felt that we were becoming members of one big family.

This impact of commensality on the relationships between Japanese and South Koreans is most visible in participants' reflections on more intimate commensal encounters. Shared meals at restaurants were generally thought of with excitement, above all, because of their associations with culinary tourism. Yet, Japanese participants largely emphasised meals among host families and the lunch at Daebang Church as the most central for their ability to establish close relations with South Koreans. As noted by some Japanese participants, they found nothing 'special' about these meals from a culinary 'authenticity' perspective. Meals with host families were primarily consumed around the breakfast table, and while they were commonly described as more elaborate than a 'standard' breakfast, they were not perceived as a particularly Korean culinary experience. Similarly, the 2010 lunch at Daebang Church consisted of a simple *Bibimbap*, a traditional Korean dish that has become increasingly integrated into Japanese cuisine as 'non-exotic' culinary experience, similar to Korean BBQ or *Yakiniku* (Cwiertka 2006). Nevertheless, Japanese *Koinonia* participants described these meals as especially 'delicious', and for the purpose of reconciliation, most importantly, as allowing them to connect with their Korean hosts in a more meaningful way. *Koinonia* exchanges have al-

lowed Japanese and South Korean participants to become part of each other's culinary community, and through the development of a shared identity therein the two groups have been able to begin overcoming the barriers of the past.

In this context food can, therefore, truly be understood as a 'system of communication' (Douglas 1982) that has demonstrated the capacity to re-draw the boundaries between groups fundamentally. My observations do not only re-affirm existing research on the relationship between commensality, identity construction and the (re-)negotiation of social relations (Douglas 1982; Ohnuki-Tierney 1993; Sutton 2001), but they indicate an expanded relevance thereof. *Koinonia* demonstrates that commensality has the capacity to foster positive and inclusionary social relations even in this context of a protracted conflict. In other words, commensality has to be regarded as one potential tool for aiding efforts that are directed towards pushing reconciliation efforts beyond the limitations set by negotiations and historical reflection.

### Stage 3: Sustainable Reconciliation and the Remembrance of Food Events

Lastly, food also plays an important role in ensuring the sustainability of *Koinonia*. The success of reconciliation initiatives largely depends on their ability to encourage participants to integrate their (hopefully) positive experiences with the other into their daily lives and to spread the message of reconciliation beyond the immediate reach of the initiative itself. The positive relationship built during the reconciliation event has to become 'independent of the original source and ... to manifest itself whenever it is relevant to the issue at hand, regardless of the surveillance, or salience of the influencing agent' (Kelman 2004: 115). As such, post-conflict reconciliation is, above all, a long-term project, and it is subsequently deeply entangled with ongoing negotiations and disagreements about the ways relationships between groups are to evolve and to be interpreted (Bar-Tal and Bennink 2004).

Japanese *Koinonia* participants re-enter a context in which a critical engagement with the past is actively discouraged, in which advocacy for a more strongly emphasised nationalistic sentiment is prevalent, and in which discriminatory practices against South Koreans persist (Hicks 1997). Nevertheless, *Koinonia* participants have been able to maintain an ongoing amicable interaction with South Koreans and a positive remembrance of the reconciliation event itself.

Food has served as one of the primary means to this end. Many Japanese *Koinonia* participants have found it difficult to sustain an interpersonal relationship with individual South Korean *Koinonia* participants due to the language barrier; yet, they remembered them frequently and fondly, most of all, when they were enjoying a good Korean meal. After joining a *Koinonia* event, Japanese participants started integrating Korean cuisine into their eating habits. Many dined at Korean restaurants regularly and some of the female participants were taking Korean cooking classes and preparing Korean dishes at home. A few participants even started learning Korean, and some watched Korean melodramas more frequently, but the former was generally seen as too tedious to keep up with, and the latter only appealing to some. A commitment to, and a love for, Korean cuisine, on the other hand, can be found across the spectrum.

The same observations can be made in reference to Japanese participants' written testimonies. Many used the testimonies as a means to reflect on Japan's colonial responsibilities, the sorrows that had been caused and the severity of Japanese ignorance towards it. However, these reflections were frequently framed by more exhilarating memories. Many of them revolved around food and food events and some even explicitly linked positive commensal encounters with their commitment to further improve Japan-South Korea relations. For example, one Japanese participant introduced his reformed understanding of Japan-South Korea relations by listing all the delicious meals he had been able to enjoy during *Koinonia*. He explained how he had come to understand, through commensality with South Koreans, how beautiful a country Korea was and how little respect Japan had paid to its people by ignoring the pain it had caused. Another one of my interviewees also explained how food and food memories had allowed him to bring *Koinonia*'s message to members of his wider social network:

I have tried talking to Japanese who are not part of TMC about my *Koinonia* experience, but no one ... wanted to hear about the atrocities we committed in Korea. I was always asked about my food experiences, however, and ... I told them about all the good food I enjoyed with South Koreans and all of a sudden they were more interested in learning more about South Korea. They thought it could not be such a bad place.

Even TMC's senior pastor used references to food for the purpose of framing his reflections on the 2010 *Koinonia* event during a Sunday service. He passionately talked about how much he loved Korean cuisine and about how much he appreciated the (food-based)



hospitality of their South Korean partners. Only after these cheerful reflections he moved into the historical components of the event and the importance thereof. By so doing, food and food memories were used as communicative tool. It allowed the pastor to establish a positive image of South Korea among his audience and to emphasise that such image does not allow for continuing the injustices in the relationship between Japanese and South Koreans. In the context of *Koinonia* food events are, therefore, not only a primary source of remembrance that can be easily integrated into daily life but they also become a segue for remembering and reflecting on Japan–South Korea relations earnestly through the positive associations with food.

This observed strong linkage between food and memory in the context of *Koinonia* corresponds closely with existing research on the topic. The act of eating irrevocably inscribes the relationships that are negotiated through a food event in the bodies of participants (Sutton 2001, 2008). This is especially the case if these events, or variations thereof, are repeated in a regular fashion, and if they are thus integrated into the (food) structures that characterise a person's daily life (Douglas 1982; Sutton 2001). According to Sutton (2001: 17), 'food's memory power derives in part from ... the synthesis or crossing of experiences from different sensory registers ... Taste and smell have relatively few verbalized categories associated with them [and] because of this ... they instead become evocative of social situations with which they are associated'. As such, food events become deeply ingrained in a person's body and memory and they can be easily recalled during similar sensory encounters (Sutton 2001). Hence, if a food event is perceived as particularly enjoyable, it, or variations thereof, will likely be repeated or even fully integrated into food routines, and by so doing, '[create] continuity with the past' (Sutton 2008: 160; italics removed).

Japanese *Koinonia* participants have used food for this very purpose, and by so doing, food has come to play a crucial part in the reconciliation process itself. Food events constitute the anchor for remembrance and due to their overlap with amicable, engaging social encounters with South Koreans, they are remembered as both as culinary experience *and* as reconciliation. In the way they are remembered food events then encourage Japanese participants to shift their 'beliefs about the justness of the goals that underline the ... maintenance of the conflict' (Bar-Tal and Bennink 2004: 20), and as a result they encourage a long-term commitment to establishing trusting and lasting relationships. They sustain the achievements of *Koinonia* as a cordial space that allows for a new

inclusive self-understanding and trust in the other to persist.

## The Relevance of Food for Reconciliation

Because he found food to be integral for creating and re-creating social relationships and cohesion among the permanent residents of the Greek island of Kalymnos, Sutton (2001: 123) argues that 'history and meals need to be read (or eaten) together'. *Koinonia* indicates that the implications of his statement may reach even further. My findings expand Sutton's proposition to include groups that are caught in protracted conflict. *Koinonia* suggests that one can, and possibly should, bring meals and history together when the history that these meals share, or rather that they are based on, is anything but favourable to the relationships of the parties involved. In *Koinonia* we can find evidence that reflections about the shared past do not necessarily suffice to achieve reconciliation that is aimed at building relationships rather than (only) non-violent co-existence. Instead *Koinonia* suggests that a more comprehensive approach may be required and that the seemingly mundane, food, can constitute at least one of the bricks that builds the foundation for a more solid engagement with the emotionally most demanding components of post-conflict reconciliation.

In the context of post-conflict reconciliation, food and in particular acts of communal consumption can serve a ritualistic function as multi-sensorial (bodily) engagements between conflicting parties that move reconciliation efforts beyond their traditional components, verbal negotiations (Schirch 2005). As such, they do not replace traditional components but complement them by allowing for a perspectival shift in conflicting parties' view of each other (Schirch 2005). According to Crossley (2004), bodily acts, or 'body techniques' (using Mauss's terminology), allow us to render the world intelligible by uniquely connecting the subjective with the intersubjective. Rituals are inscribed in individual participants' bodies as collective multi-sensorial experiences, and as such they represent our physical and social being in the world. They have the 'capacity to "condense" meaning' (Crossley 2004: 39), to direct participants to a particular worldview, and 'to repress undesirable contents of consciousness ... by deflecting our attention and focusing and framing our experiences in particular ways' (Crossley 2004: 44). This very property makes rituals, such as food events, particularly effective tools for maintaining (and creating) conflict, but they can also precipitate its demise (Stephan 2008). Rituals can em-

phasise what conflicting groups have in common and, by so doing, they can directly counteract the dehumanising efforts that are so deeply ingrained in most conflict situations (Ross 2004).

Research on food has long argued for its importance in negotiating social relations, instances of inclusion and exclusion alike; and food's embodied properties have widely been recognised as a crucial component thereof (Sutton 2001, 2008). Because we consume food on a daily basis and regularly with others, commensality ultimately serves the purpose of structuring social relations and ingraining an awareness of them at the level of the body. As such, food and the decisions made in reference to it, negotiate relationships in a way that mimics the ritualistic requirements of post-conflict reconciliation. It addresses identity construction in a multi-sensorial capacity. It can facilitate the perspectival shift advocated by Schirch (2005) while, through its embodiment, deeply inscribing the memory thereof in its participants (Sutton 2001).

*Koinonia* demonstrates that this theoretical overlap can be realised, and already has been, in practice. It shows that food events can be understood as ritualistic practices when exercised as one of the components of targeted inter-personal reconciliation efforts. Food events can create a particular spatio-temporal condition for reconciliation events – it can predate them (prospective memory), advance them throughout and sustain them thereafter. This space allows for a new inclusivity based on largely non-verbal interactions, and by so doing, it can alter perceptions of the other in a more comprehensive manner than verbal-only exchanges ever could. Most importantly, it can do so in post-conflict settings that actively oppose the establishment of positive relations and in which a shared narrative of the (violent) past still has to be agreed upon.

This is not to say that *Koinonia* has only succeeded because of its food events. On the contrary, one has to assume that food events alone would likely fail at pushing Japanese participants beyond stereotypical perceptions of the other. By and large, exotic culinary encounters have shown to be, above all, exclusionary and advancing distances between groups even further (Heldke 2003). I contend that in the context of *Koinonia* commensality 'works' because it has been integrated into a multifaceted reconciliation initiative that recognises that empathic understanding of the other is not possible if conflict and the social relations embedded therein are only tackled in their most contested realm, truth-telling and the wider politics of inter-group relations. As I argued elsewhere (Ketterer 2011), *Koinonia*

has been able to bring Japanese and South Koreans together, and more explicitly to encourage Japanese to engage with a difficult past that they have otherwise pushed aside, because it combines a commitment to reflecting and learning about the violent past with shared ritualistic acts that reach beyond the politics of violence, specifically a joint religious faith and positive social interactions including the culinary encounters therein. Food and food events should, therefore, be viewed as one (but only one) possible ingredient for post-conflict reconciliation. As such, it deserves wider attention and recognition both in theory and in practice and both because of its potential benefits and pitfalls in its application in a post-conflict setting.

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## Notes

1. Secret talks that led to the 1993 Israel-PLO peace agreement.
2. For the purpose of this article the historical overview is focused on Japan–South Korea relations sidelining the particularities of Japanese imperialism in the wider Asia-Pacific region. Japanese post-1945 international relations have been significantly defined by its imperial legacy; however, important differences can be found in the 'state' of reconciliation between Japan and individual groups/countries depending on national discourses and varying priorities (Berger 2012). Accordingly, they are best considered in their particularities and in the context of South Korea in recognition of the importance of Japan as 'enemy' for the development of South Korean national identity (Nahm 1988).
3. My maiden name.
4. Trauma generated by conflict can be passed down from one generation to the other (Hirsch 2008). Ac-

cordingly, the need for (psychological) reconciliation remains, in particular if the conflict continues to be revived by conflicting parties (even if only through rhetoric) as has been the case in Japan–South Korea relations.

5. While Korean BBQ is commonly referred to as *Yakiniku* in Japan and often even treated as a Japanese dish abroad, the Korean term *Gogigui* was used by several of my interviewees in reference to eating Korean BBQ at a Korean restaurant.

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