Food is a constant and a necessity for life. Memories built around certain dishes, flavors, aromas, and recipes often define a large part of our identity. Sometimes, you can’t describe a taste, but you can write about how it makes your body feel, settling into a familiar childhood comfort.

The American South has such a rich food history that to know the South is to know its cuisines and all the mixtures of cultures that made it what it is. The same goes for Asian food. We share so much between our cultures and to bring all that culinary history to the American South truly creates something both unique and familiar. Thank you to all of our contributors of Kondiman South for bringing some sweetness into the wild year that is 2020.

With all the love from your co-chairs,

Onyew Kim & Angela So
A Sweet Thanks to Our Contributors

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Kichadi

In kindergarten, I was asked for a recipe.

Kichadi

- Rice, dal, onions, tomatoes
- And Mirchi
- Peas (optional)
- And a big bad PRESSURE COOKER

CAUTION: EVERYTHING COULD BLOW UP
COMFORT FOOD

The comfort of home is making Margah
like momma used to
Grocery stores lacking
International foods span more than one aisle
The taste of homeland undercut,
By Baba’s “This Is America”
Dolma, Arrias, Khemah— days of preparation
Make way for brisket, collard greens, and grandma’s sticky buns
The comfort of home
Split by
The languages of sustenance
When classmates complain
Of stinky
Lunches
Momma now only cooks
The gentrified comforts
Of Baba’s blackness
The comfort of home
Is monolingual

Tamara Al-Qaisi-Coleman
She/Her/Hers
Houston, Texas

MOLASSES CAKE

She takes the sole cup/ measuring/ her smile melting into the bowl/ Dry corn ground by strong palms/ Mvskoke flows in crumbled flakes from her lips/ There are stories in these recipes/ Spirits replaced by Jesus/ She uses her fingers to sift through flour/ Auntie braises turkey/ Grandma sings/ When I fall in love/ It will be forever/ Pulling out the old jar/ Figs made into thick molasses/ She tells her grandchildren/ Stories of love/ The farm was no place for a young girl/
Her eyes harden/ She mixes sugar and molasses/ Pouring it over the small cake/ Her own magic makes it rise/ Her mother’s braids/ Her father’s big smile/ How this cake is sustenance/ After the harvest it sat ready with soup/ Heavy in aching bellies/ Don’t call her pos-se/ but call her pe-ve-choy-ya/ Let her lost language fill the oven/ We remember/ Family/ Through food.

Tamara Al-Qaisi-Coleman
She/Her/Hers
Houston, Texas
Enter the body’s kitchen, weighted with a jarful of snow to string above the doorframe like a borealis, a deep-bellied pot, and a plastic bag ripe to rip open, stomach filled with many hungers. Scallions. Pork and beans. Vienna sausage. Coins of rice cakes. Tofu wet against the knife, the tinny suction of glistening spam. Ramen powder and onions sweeping under the nose. Spark the fire. Fire. Fire.

So much war in this stew still simmering to warm wintered throats scraped raw

Marcy Calabretta Cancio-Bello
she/her
Miami, Florida
**food preparations**

1. Add pinch of salt into water first. Choose rice, flour, or egg noodles to parboil.
2. In a frying pan, add yellow ovals of garlic in oil or animal fat.
3. Add noodles to garlic. Listen to the buzz of fat. Observe the shimmering, gliding elegance of your noodles.

Here, you have some options—
Add a can of diced tomatoes. Add capers or anchovies if feeling scandalous.
Add a splash of soy sauce and onion. Sugar. Fish sauce.
Fry an egg, or “the most beautiful flower of your dish.” Runny yolk means more of your lovely, glittering sauce. You wonder if this is authentic (insert your ethnicity) food.

Don’t you (verb) it!

Min Kang Hsiao
Houston, TX
she/her

Whenever I ask my mom how she makes a particular dish, she lists off the ingredients with no certain measurements, heat temperatures, or cooking times. To her, cooking is instinctual. It’s not a learned method, but a tradition that she somehow picked up along the way, almost like an innate superpower. And that is what it is. Whatever appears on the table appears like magic. From onions and red pepper paste to a bubbling spicy tofu soup. She would buy boxes of napa cabbage and suddenly, we had kimchi for weeks. Slowly, though, I learned that behind the magic is a lot of labor. Labor of love, but also labor that is so rooted in holding onto our Koreans.

A preservation of culture. Without our food, who are we? Can we survive never eating kimchi again?
After helping her rub salt onto each leaf of the napa cabbage, then rinsing, then rubbing the paste back onto each leaf, it’s hard to let even one sliver of kimchi go to waste.
She never taught me how to cook, but I’m steadily inheriting her magic, cooking things in my own style with a laundry list of spices, sauces, and oils. I never really know how I make something and when I try to make it again, it always tastes a little different. Here’s a little bit of my secret: sesame oil, always use fresh garlic and onion in addition to garlic and onion powder, salt AND soy sauce (in moderation), black pepper, red pepper flakes or paste, apple cider vinegar, plum juice or honey or maple syrup or plain sugar (lightly sweetening your savory foods makes the right difference), cornstarch, kambu, mushrooms, cook until it feels right, and call mom if doesn’t taste like it should.
I didn’t practice breathing or hypno-birthing until the last three weeks before my due date. I forgot to massage my perineum regularly. I listened to a TED Talk about how this woman used a yoga ball, and her baby was out in 20 minutes. But that wasn’t the case for me.

I mooed like a cow, turned my breath into the shape of the letter J throughout my body- from mouth to pelvis. I did tabletop on the bed. I sat on a yoga ball in the shower. I hated it all. The touch of water made me feel like a sad dog. Sitting hurt. Finally, they brought out this soccer goal post to put at the end of the delivery table, and I laid back with legs perched and pushed. I couldn’t stay in sync with the midwife and the nurses, and I went rogue, which meant I tore a lot of things.

I held Theo while I got stitches for what seemed like an hour. Janet kept apologizing. *I’m a perfectionist.* (Thank god for Janet.) She was repairing a second degree tear. I lost a significant amount of blood.

My mom and sister forgot the *meeyukguk*. It’s all they could talk about. I didn’t get the soup until the next day. Janet came to check on me. *Sitz bath. Witch hazel. Cold pads. The postpartum healing was to begin.*

I was afraid to walk. I hated the maneuver, from bed to standing. I panicked every time I had to pee. I walked like a duck, but I tried to resume some semblance of my domestic duties before Theo. Washing the dishes. Doing laundry. Walking the dog. But I realized I was pushing my body too much too soon. I’d bleed more. Breastfeeding was painful in the beginning. The let-down process felt like shards of glass floating in my breasts, frozen in suspension.

Fred’s mom cooked me every meal for a month. I’d ask what was in a dish, and she’d reply *I just bought it at the Chinese market. It’s good for you.* Then slowly she’d drop some clues later in the day. Soups with jujubes, wood ear mushrooms, ginseng, ginger, and fish. Dishes with chicken, radish, and grains. She served it to me on a tray with a side of sauteed pea shoots, gai choy, bok choy, tat soi, or napa cabbage.

Every morning Jackie greeted me. *It has dong quai. Dong quai is good for blood. It removes the toxins. I put dong quai in there. It’s good for you.*

She made me drink this dark brown Chinese medicine every morning which carries the thick potent air of my grandmother’s house. Licorice root, dried lyceum fruit, dried citrus peel, dried date, fresh ginger, raw honey, with lots of things of names that my brain cannot seem to grasp. Jackie told me the Chinese names of the herbs and as quickly as the words came out of her mouth, they disappeared into thin air. She offered to write them down, but it was futile. I drank the medicine out of a bowl. Sometimes I saw it on the nightstand in a thermos screaming at me. Some days I pretended I forgot or didn’t see it, but Jackie always made sure I drank the whole thermos. When she sensed I was sick of it, she brewed sweet cinnamon tea often paired with a snack of lotus seeds, ginger, something that looked like tofu but wasn’t, and crispy grains or red bean mochi balls in ginger water.

She prepared a lemongrass steam bath for me, and this is when I learned she had been a midwife. She delivered over 30 babies in France. Fred was shocked. *Ma, how come you never told me?* It’s fascinating how Asian families hold history that would seem like common knowledge in a western household. A gift of knowing dropped at seemingly unsentimental moments. Jackie thought it wasn’t relevant to share.

My postpartum check-ups happened two days after Theo was born. Then 2 weeks. And then another 2 weeks. And then another 2 weeks. And by the last check-up, Janet- who at this point already moved to Uruguay to live on a farm, I met with Ashley and a resident obstetrician. They marveled that my healing was incredibly quick. *What was I doing?*

And my only thought was it was a Chinese secret.

*Note: Stephanie is a Korean-American married to a Chinese-American whose family comes from France removed from Laos.*
April Lim

**Did You Know**

Google says loquats are from Southeast Asian
But traveled to Hawaii via Chinese immigrants. I know it’s true,
I’ve seen my mother tried to smuggle plump fruit
across transatlantic flights. She tells me
look each time. Glimpses of their sun-filled
Rinds glistening off twig-like branches, holding
Fat nectar. *You can eat the skin.*
She taught me to twist the stems closest,
the top of their tiny green hats.
twist	
twist	
twist	
snap
Kinder than plucking, no flesh exposed.
Pitted clean and plopped in jars, and sometimes
I’d get to drink their fresh juice. It was more sugar and water
Than juice to be honest, but the twinge of citrus
Still lingered long after the crystals dissolved.
Rituals
by Alinda Mac (Houston, TX; she/her)

We ring in the New Year quietly
And by “we” I mean,
Us three:


And by “us” I mean,
I mutter prayers
While blanching the napa cabbage;
A spoon chimes against a silver bowl
As Moshe mashes ground pork

I sing:

"Sydney,
Two-thirds a cup of rice wine."

The process is meant to take three hours, but
For us, it ends up being five—
In my head,
My father instructs:

"Put a small spoonful of filling
At the center,
Trace the edge with water.
Fold it in half—
Like this."

He guides our flour-dusted hands;
We are all quick learners.

At midnight,
I send Mama a photo of
Thirty dumplings;
She says:

"Chúc mừng năm mới,
Wow, nhìn thấy ngon quá
My baby is all grown up now."

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Matar Paneer
by Kirtan Nauhiyal

We sat upstairs during our Friday night dinner parties, playing
Turtles in time on the SNES until our mothers called us down
to eat. Then, next to the Styrofoam plates & plastic cutlery,
we’d find a row of steaming dishes on the formal dining table
— rohi, sabzi, dal, chawal. Some mothers were better cooks than
others, but no matter who was responsible for the spread on
that particular night, I always made straight for the matar paneer,
or “peas and cheese” as my friend Nitin called it.
Below is my mother’s recipe, without which, to this day, no
special occasion at my parents’ house can be complete.

1. **Boil 2 Roma tomatoes so the peels come off** easily. Peel & chop roughly.
2. **Over medium heat, sauté 1 tablespoon oil w/** 1/2 tsp cumin, a pinch of asafoetida powder, one
   inch of peeled & chopped ginger, and 1 small chopped
   green chile. Cook until ginger browns—don’t burn
   the cumin!
3. **Add 1/4 tsp turmeric, 1/2 tsp ground coriander,**
   and a pinch of crushed fenugreek leaves.
4. **Add 5 cashews, and continue frying until browned.**
5. **Add chopped tomato and 1 tsp salt. Cook until**
   nicely stewed — approximately 10 minutes.
6. **Let cool and transfer to blender. Grind until smooth.**
7. **Transfer back to saucepan and add 6-7 oz. thawed**
   frozen peas & 8 oz. homemade or storebought paneer.
   Cook covered for 8 minutes.
8. **Add 1/2 tsp garam masala. Cook for 2 more minutes.**
   Let cool. Serve w/ homemade rohi or if you a real
   baller, storebought naan.

~•~•~ ENJOY! •~•~
Today is Monday, November 2, 2020, less than a week from ipdong, 엽동 in Korean, which falls on Saturday, November 7 this year. The Korean phrase 엽동, ipdong, takes from a two letter Chinese phrase, 立冬, lìdōng, which means “the onset of winter” and is the nineteenth term of the twenty-four solar terms in traditional East-Asian lunisolar calendars. I am used to saying it ipdong because I grew up in Korea and learned to associate early November with ipdong and gimjang (김장 in Korean, also spelled kimjang). Gimjang is the traditional preparation and preservation of kimchi in the wintertime. Gimjang is a communal effort, a collective production of making, preserving, and sharing kimchi with the community of relatives, friends, and neighbors. In Korea, the kimchi made within five days before or after ipdong is called gimjang kimchi (김장김치), and they say it is the most delicious kimchi; it is also fermented the old-fashioned way, in a traditional Korean clay jar called dok (독 in Korean), buried in the ground over the winter. My mom has her own name for the gimjang kimchi done right—잘간사탕 (translated plainly, “red candy,” but I think “ruddy crunchy candy” gets closer to her intended meaning). She says at the end of a zingy, spicy, and salty taste of kimchi there is a flush of sweetness as one chews on. A succulent batch made at the beginning of winter is like a gift of seasonal confections for the folks who can’t have bab (밥, “a meal” or “a bowl of rice” in Korean) without kimchi.

Although from the generation starting to be raised in concrete apartments with public playgrounds and parks below, I spent my youth growing up in a house with a front yard where my parents buried a few sizeable jars for preserving various fermented vegetables and condiments, including kimchi and gochujang. For a little kid gimjang day was like a big gathering of family and friends on a Chuseok holiday (a major harvest festival in Korea). I watched the adults doing the work of cleaning, washing, and brining a pyramid of baechu (napa cabbages). They had a system; one group was doing the cleaning while the other group prepared the ingredients for the stuffing. The cabbage was set for hours to brine, then they started working on layering the stuffing in between each leaf by hand. Most Koreans know this—soonmat, 손맛, the taste of one’s hand (손, hand, 맛, taste), sometimes called the taste of or from a mother’s hand. A lot of Korean dishes, even the putatively quipped “easy-to-make” Korean side dishes such as namul (나물, dishes made with edible greens, roots, and seasoned herbs) require the haptic push and pull, the tossing and mixing to mollify or inoculate the vegetables with flavor. One can do all this without touching the food with the bare hand, but some will swear by the bacteria and yeast that live in one’s body as a secret ingredient. I agree, it can be gross. But that’s just it; it’s the non-calculable some, the unknown variable thrown into the mix that changes the bigger picture, the outcome, like the brush stroke that renders a certain color or pattern in a painting, the intangible, personal touch that makes each dish distinct. Thanks to the alchemy induced by our mothers’ fingers and propitious timing of gimjang, all winter we had delicious kimchi, sometimes even with icles when fresh from the jars. When it snowed, it was even more special—imagine brushing the snow off of the heavy jar lid to get the cold kimchi out of the subterranean container. This is inimitable—no opening of a refrigerator door, not even of the shiny new kimchi refrigerators, can bring you the cathartic joy of tasting the hot steamy rice chased by crunchy, cold kimchi brought in from outside. You have to suffer a little before indulging this beatific collision of hot and cold—running outside on a freezing winter day in your rubber slippers and blowing onto your hands to keep them from freezing as you try to get the fresh cold kimchi out of the jar serenely buried in the ground under the snow. Koreans say the fresh head of kimchi is like a breathing organism, like a sanguine heart. Though these days it’s hard to find gimjang kimchi, especially when I am living in America, every time I eat kimchi I imagine I am taking in what animates my heart. My soul, no matter how it might get covered or frozen under the snow, would always remember the color of that refulgent red and keen taste of “ruddy crunchy candy.”

--Yoon Nam
That Final Taste

for Ross

Missing you is like dessert
after a meal we spend hours on
until our teeth are red from the wine
and our bellies extend full of steak
and bread. The plates have been cleared.
Dessert is on the table. I’m savoring
the smooth sugar of panna cotta
in the warm hearth of my mouth,
until the spoon can’t reach the last bit of custard
captured in the crook of the dish. Wanting it
so badly but too shy to scoop it with my naked
tongue. To hold the dish up close to the face
and slowly seek the trapped dollop.
How bare, how naked, how vulnerable,
the moment between seek and sought.

Tiana Nobile (she/her)
New Orleans, LA (Bulbancha)
Waffle House (I)
Houston, MS - 4 out of 5 stars

Chunked hashbrowns, two over-hard eggs, a waffle (sometimes). Less than $5. The one I went back home knows my usual. I wonder if they still think of me. We dropped our blueberry waffle we shared on the floor. Once, I asked Tony something he learned during undergrad & it changed my life. Don’t lie to yourself. The Jackson 5 plays on the jukebox. Who is really loving you? This feels like home. I watch the old cook spread the potatoes across the hot-top. Their potatoes come from a large milk carton. They pile it on too tall— they should be wider not taller. You gotta get the ham over the sausage. I eat the waffle just with butter. Tony brings his own hot sauce, they store it in the back for him. Once, two friends sat by the window in Waffle House in Houston. The hanging orbs reflect infinitely above us in the glass. A friend tells the other advice & the other hermits away for a week & applies to graduate school. The grits are clogging up the grease trap. It’s not like this one. I don’t need a menu here. I save my hands for my dining. My order hasn’t changed. My order is mine. My order is muscle memory of the heart.
Ancient grandmother
Cooking so fragrant and true
Her farts flagrant too

Chinese Chives

On the phone, my mother recites a recipe. I am Goldilocks, searching for the measurement that is just right. In grocery stores, I will carefully read every label of every produce to find the right ingredients. I will stand in aisles with my cell phone in hand, researching the English names for Chinese words I cannot spell or say. Shoppers will whisk past me like I am a stubborn stone in a river. No label will say what I need: 韭菜. Before this new city, I didn’t need to search. It grows in my mother’s backyard, the spicy garlicky smell lingering in the air. I am 1,150 miles away. I will close my eyes in the grocery store and allow the smell to come back to me and help me find what I need.

Angela So (she/her)
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