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Food Lifestyle in Five Big Cities: Study on Chinese Consumers and Their Preference for Korean Food

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Abstract: Implications for strategic marketing to globalize Korean food are presented based on the data of Chinese consumers. The study identifies Chinese consumers' preferences for Korean food through market segmentation based on food lifestyle. To do so, primary food shoppers in the age groups of 20s to 50s residing in five big cities of China — Beijing, Chengdu, Chongqing, Guangzhou, and Shanghai — were surveyed and valid data of 2,045 respondents were used in the analysis. As a result of demonstrative analysis, Chinese consumers are segmented into "food safety-oriented", "convenience-oriented", "low interest in food" and "high interest in food" groups. The study indicates that the "high interest in food" and "convenience-oriented" groups appeared to be most favorable to Korean food, while the "food safety-oriented" and "low interest in food" groups were the least interested. These results suggest that different marketing strategies will be needed for each of these sub-categorized groups for the entry of Korean food products and service into the Chinese food service industry.

Key words: China; Korean food; food lifestyle; food consumption
JEL codes: M300

1. Introduction

Food consumption patterns of the urban Chinese household have changed dramatically due to the many significant and striking social and economic transformations since the late 1970s (Veeck & Veeck, 2000). More specifically, expansion of modern food shopping outlets such as retail venues (e.g., self-service supermarkets or supercenters), along with a greater variety of food products led to a change of Chinese consumers' food consumption patterns and food lifestyle (Bai, Wahl, & McCluskey, 2008). With regards, our motivation for this study is to understand the Chinese consumers' food lifestyle and their preference for Korean food in five big cities: Beijing, Chengdu, Chongqing, Guangzhou, and Shanghai.

Based on the discussion above, we seek to identify systematic patterns of food lifestyle among consumers in five cities of China, categorize common patterns based on demographic and household characteristics, and differentiate preferences for Korean food. Specific research questions of this study could be formulated as: (a) How are the Chinese consumers clustered based on the food lifestyle factor? (b) What are the demographic characteristics of such clusters? (c) How are the attitudes of each cluster towards Korean food that can be further

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explained by past experience with Korean food and future purchasing intentions? Overall, purpose of this study is to develop a marketing strategy for Korean food market based on Chinese consumers' preferences and behavior toward Korean food. Observations from the research will be able to provide academic and business implications for a better understanding of Chinese consumers.

2. Literature Review

Previous literatures can be divided into two distinct groups, one that focuses on the change of Chinese consumers' food consumption due to globalization and the other that looks into Chinese consumers' preference and purchasing behavior for Korean food.

2.1 Globalization and Change of Food Consumption in China

Consumers' purchasing behavior for food and grocery products has always been affected by a number of economic, cultural, psychological and lifestyle factors (Ali, Kapoor, & Moorthy, 2010). Since China's decision in 1978 to open up its economy, exposure to foreign culture has increased along with trade. Food purchasing patterns of urban Chinese households shifted as well due to its social and economic changes (Veeck & Burns, 2005; Grunert, Perrea, Zhou, Huang, Sørensen, & Krystallis, 2011). Consequently, interest for western and other Asian food has increased and naturally resulted in a rise of outlets for such food.

As a response to this change, studies are also diversifying their research topics on Chinese consumers' purchasing behavior for food. According Zhang (2003), extant researches can be largely categorized into two sectors: one that focused on consumers' purchasing behavior for foreign food (Samuel, Li, & McDonald, 1996; Swanson 1996; Shone, Nobuhiro, & Kaiser, 2000; Curtis & McCluskey, 2007) and the others that attempts to segment consumers' food consumption pattern based on their lifestyles (Veeck & Veeck, 2000). The former type of researches focuses on discovering unique traits regarding purchasing behaviors for food of different countries. For example, Chinese consumers who prefer Western style food were found to share statistical characteristics such as female gender, higher income levels, younger adults, and existence of children (Curtis & McCluskey, 2007). The latter type of studies on segmentation of consumers' food consumption pattern utilizes unique and different lifestyles as criteria to segment consumers (Veeck & Veeck, 2000). These lifestyles are measured based on large numbers of activities, interests, and opinions (AIO). Overall, these two types of research provide valuable insights on consumers such as their consumption patterns, market outlet choices, and consumption trends.

2.2 Preference and Consumption for Korean Food in China

Previous researches on preference of Chinese consumers for Korean food were conducted regarding factors related to preference for and satisfaction of Korean food. Most researches included surveys from Chinese tourists, students residing in Korea (Seo & Shin, 2006; Won, Lee, & Lee, 2006; Khoe & Sul, 2008) or Chinese locals residing in mainland China (Lee & Lee, 2008; Kim, Li, & Kim, 2009; Seo & Ryu, 2009). For instance, Khoe and Sul (2008) studied on Chinese students studying in Korea and extracted three common factors which were service, product, and specialty factor. All three factors were found to be significantly influenced on the degree of preference of Chinese consumers for Korean traditional food. Also, another study displayed that when selecting a Korean restaurant, quality and taste of food were bigger concerns for Chinese customers than the physical environment or the actual vibe of the restaurant (Kim et al., 2009). Also, Kim and Kim (2010) categorized food-related lifestyle of Chinese consumers into "high interest in food lifestyle", "tempting food-oriented", "ease-oriented", "economic security-oriented" groups and explored their satisfaction and loyalty on Korean restaurants.

The results of these previous researches that sampled Chinese tourists or students residing in Korea have some limitation in that the respondents are more likely to be those already passionate about Korean culture. Also, even the researches which studied the Chinese locals residing in mainland China simply focused on a single major city such as Beijing or Shanghai. Therefore, it is difficult to generalize the Chinese consumers' characteristics based on the results of previous researches.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

To fill in the gap of existing researches on Chinese consumers and their preference for Korean food, the survey sampled "primary food shopper" of the 2,045 households in China (see Table 1). In this study, primary food shoppers are defined as those who are responsible for major food purchasing for his or her household regardless of gender. Data was collected online by a certified research company over a course of 10 days starting from October 20, 2012.

Table 1 Descriptive Information

Variables		Frequency (Percent)	Variables		Frequency (Percent)
Gender	Male	514 (25.1)	Monthly Household Income (RMB)	4000-5,999	212 (10.4)
	Female	1531 (74.9)		6000-7,999	209 (10.2)
Age	20-29 years	515 (25.2)		8,000-9,999	388 (19.0)
	30-39 years	769 (37.6)		10000-11,999	338 (16.5)
	40-49 years	761 (37.2)		12000-13999	151 (7.4)
Marital State	married	1805 (88.3)		14,000-15,999	194 (9.5)
	unmarried	240 (11.7)		16,000-17,999	95 (4.6)
City	Beijing	404 (19.8)		18,000-19,999	160 (7.8)
	Chengdu	409 (20.0)		20,000-29,999	200 (9.8)
	Chongqing	408 (20.0)		30,000-49,999	75 (3.7)
	Guangzhou	409 (20.0)		50,000 more	23 (1.1)
	Shanghai	415 (20.3)	% of spending on dining in over total monthly spending		45.94%
Education	High School	156 (7.6)			
	College	483 (23.6)			
	University	1235 (60.4)	% of spending on dining out over total monthly spending		27.14%
	Postgraduate	171 (8.4)			
Total		2,045 (100.0)	Total		2,045 (100.0)

3.2 Measurement of Variables

There are two main variables used in this study. First, three food lifestyle indices that were composed of ten items such as "the higher the price of the food products, the better the quality" and "I always tend to check good ingredients in food products when I go shopping for food" (Table 2). Second, preference for Korean food that included four sets: attitude towards Korean food, previous experience of dining out at Korean restaurants, future intention to dine out at Korean restaurants, and future intention to purchase Korean food (Table 5). All survey questions were answered on a five-point Likert scale.

3.3 Statistical Analysis

First, factor analysis was conducted to develop three food lifestyle indices: Brand Conscious, Safety Conscious, and Utility Conscious. Secondly, cluster analysis was employed to determine if the respondents tended to form groups (clusters) of households based on these three food lifestyle indices. Thirdly, the means of the criterion variable for each cluster were then calculated to examine the food purchase pattern of each cluster of households. Finally, the demographic and household characteristics of each cluster were studied and statistically evaluated to generate a socioeconomic description of household. Preference for Korean Food of each cluster was also calculated. The SPSS 18.0 program (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA) was used to analyze the raw data.

Table 2 Factor Analysis Results for Food Lifestyle Indices

Factor	Measurement items	Factor loading	Eigen value (% of accumulated)	Chronbach's α
Brand conscious	The higher the price of the food products, the better the quality.	0.69	3.74 (26.21)	0.823
	Foods shown on TV advertisements are trustful.	0.78		
	I like to purchase food products recommended by famous TV stars.	0.85		
	I like to purchase food products recommended by experts (famous chefs, professors, etc.).	0.82		
Safety conscious	I always tend to check for good ingredients in food products when I go shopping.	0.80	1.64 (51.58)	0.804
	I always tend to check for harmful ingredients in food products when I go shopping.	0.79		
	I check if food products are fresh and not ill-affected by temperature.	0.74		
	I am conscious of the safety of food products when I purchase them.	0.77		
Utility conscious	I prefer to spend little time preparing for meals.	0.76	1.12 (65.06)	0.788
	I frequently purchase foods that are on sale.	0.83		

4. Results

4.1 Cluster Analysis

K-mean cluster analysis techniques were conducted to determine distinct patterns of food lifestyle. A four-cluster (four distinct groups of households) analysis was shown to provide the best results. Four clusters are named into "food safety-oriented", "convenience-oriented", "low interest in food", and "high interest in food" groups. The means and cluster size for the food lifestyle factors of each cluster are reported in Table 3. "Food safety-oriented" group consisted of consumers with high safety consciousness (mean = 4.22) but low brand (mean = 3.48) and utility consciousness (mean = 2.60). "Convenience-oriented" group consisted of consumers with high utility consciousness (mean = 3.56) but low brand (mean = 2.83) and safety consciousness (mean = 3.97). In case of the "low interest in food" group, all three of brand, safety, and utility consciousness showed low scores (2.91, 3.11, and 2.99 respectively). On the other hand, all three of brand, safety, and utility consciousness showed high scores (4.10, 4.28, and 4.03 respectively) for "high interest in food" group.

Table 3 Cluster Analysis Results

Factor \ Cluster	Food safety-oriented	Convenience-oriented	Low interest in food	High interest in food
Brand consciousness	3.48 (low)	2.83 (low)	2.91 (low)	4.10 (high)
Safety consciousness	4.22 (high)	3.97 (low)	3.11 (low)	4.28 (high)
Utility consciousness	2.60 (low)	3.56 (high)	2.99 (low)	4.03 (high)
n = 2045(100%)	493 (24.1%)	572 (28.0%)	483 (23.6%)	497 (24.3%)

4.2 Socioeconomic Characteristics

The demographic characteristics of each cluster were studied and statistically evaluated to generate a socioeconomic description of households membership (see Table 4). First of all, “food safety-oriented” group had the highest percentage of the following characteristics: male consumers, married, or in their 40s compared to the other three groups. Most consumers resided in Shanghai and Guangzhou and held university degrees. Also, they showed higher income with higher expenditure on home meals over total monthly spending compared to the other three groups.

Second, “convenience-oriented” group was also mostly in their 40s and had the highest percentage of consumers who resided in Beijing and Guangzhou. As opposed to “food safety-oriented” group, consumers seeking for convenience in food lifestyle showed lower incomes.

Table 4 Demographic Characteristics of Each Group (n, %)

		Food safety-oriented	Convenience-oriented	Low interest in food	High interest in food	Chi-square / F
Gender	Male	**148 (30.0%)**	145 (25.3%)	113 (23.4%)	108 (21.7%)	
	Female	345 (70.0%)	427 (74.7%)	370 (76.6%)	**389 (78.3%)**	
Age	20-29 years	100 (20.3%)	128 (22.4%)	**171 (35.4%)**	116 (23.3%)	47.036***
	30-39 years	177 (35.9%)	213 (37.2%)	171 (35.4%)	**208 (41.9%)**	
	40-49 year	**216 (43.8%)**	**231(40.4%)**	141 (29.2%)	173 (34.8%)	
Marital State	married	**466 (94.5%)**	71 (12.4%)	**93 (19.3%)**	49 (9.9%)	46.948***
	unmarried	7 (5.5%)	501 (87.6%)	390 (80.7%)	**448 (90.1%)**	
City	Beijing	88 (17.8%)	**123 (21.5%)**	84 (17.4%)	**109 (21.9%)**	39.278***
	Chengdu	**109 (22.1%)**	115 (20.1%)	99 (20.5%)	86 (17.3%)	
	Chongqing	88 (17.8%)	115 (20.1%)	**125 (25.9%)**	80 (16.1%)	
	Guangzhou	**104 (21.1%)**	**123 (21.5%)**	93 (19.3%)	89 (17.9%)	
	Shanghai	**104 (21.1%)**	96 (16.8%)	82 (17.0%)	**133 (26.8%)**	
Education	High School	33 (6.7%)	53 (9.3%)	**51 (10.6%)**	19 (3.8%)	34.919***
	College	112 (22.7%)	148 (25.9%)	**128 (26.5%)**	95 (19.1%)	
	University	**304 (61.7%)**	326 (57.0%)	271 (56.1%)	**334 (67.2%)**	
	Postgraduate	44 (8.9%)	45 (7.9%)	33 (6.8%)	49 (9.9%)	
Monthly Household Income (RMB)	4000- 5,999	32 (6.5%)	**80 (14.0%)**	**70 (14.5%)**	30 (6.0%)	193.715***
	6000 - 7,999	41 (8.3%)	**74 (12.9%)**	**59 (12.2%)**	35 (7.0%)	
	8,000-9,999	66 (13.4%)	**127 (22.2%)**	**121 (25.1%)**	74 (14.9%)	
	10000-11,999	81 (16.4%)	92.0 (16.1%)	79.0 (16.4%)	86 (17.3%)	
	12000-13999	28 (5.7%)	44 (7.7%)	33 (6.8%)	46 (9.3%)	
	14,000-15,999	59 (12.0%)	45 (7.9%)	50 (10.4%)	40 (8.0%)	
	16,000-17,999	**38 (7.7%)**	20 (3.5%)	13 (2.7%)	24 (4.8%)	
	18,000-19,999	**49 (9.9%)**	36 (6.3%)	21 (4.3%)	**54 (10.9%)**	
	20,000-29,999	**66 (13.4%)**	39 (6.8%)	22 (4.6%)	**73 (14.7%)**	
	30,000-49,999	**30 (6.1%)**	12 (2.1%)	6 (1.2%)	**27 (5.4%)**	
	50,000 more	3 (0.6%)	3 (0.5%)	9 (1.9%)	8 (1.6%)	
% of spending on dining in over total monthly spending		**49.62 a**	46.36 b	43.67 b	44.03 b	11118.301***
% of spending on dining out over total monthly spending		28.01 ab	24.89 c	**29.68 a**	26.31 bc	6815.131***

Notes: * $p < 0.05$. *** $p < 0.001$. a, b, c: group differences by Duncan test.

Next, consumers who are unmarried or who are in their 20s showed dominance among the “low interest in food” group. They mostly lived in Chongqing. Both of their education and income levels were reported to be low compared to the other three groups. Interesting point on this about “low interest in food” group was that it showed the lowest expenditure on home meals but the highest percentage of spending on dining out over total monthly spending among the other three groups.

Lastly, consumers in “high interest in food” group tended to be female, in their 30s, or mostly married. Consumers within this group were residents of Beijing and Shanghai and had higher levels of education. Likewise their level of income was also reported to be higher compared to the other groups.

4.3 Attitude towards Korean Food

Research then studied the attitude towards Korean food of each cluster and analyzed statistically along with past experience with Korean food and future purchase intentions (see Table 5). To begin with, "attitude towards Korean food", "food safety-oriented" and "high interest in food" group showed relatively positive attitudes towards all six categories including "Korean foods are expensive", "Korean foods are healthy", "Korean foods fit my appetite", "Korean foods are new", "Korean foods are hygienic", and "Korean foods are trendy". "High interest in food" group revealed the strongest preference for Korean food. Overall, "Korean foods are new", "Korean foods are hygienic", and "Korean foods are trendy" were the common and strong attitude felt toward Korean food among the six categories.

On the other hand, in the aspect of their actual behavior, the results turned out to be interesting. Regarding the questionnaire on past experience of dining out in Korean restaurants, "convenience-oriented" group, along with "high interest in food" group, scored high. These two groups also ranked high on intention to have meals in Korean restaurants and to purchase Korean foods.

Above results lead to two points for further consideration. First, "food safety-oriented" group which showed positive attitude toward Korean food in fact scored low in their actual past experience or future intention to purchase Korean food. Second, "convenience-oriented" group that did not reveal positive attitude toward Korean food compared with other groups actually reported more past experience with Korean food and higher intention to purchase.

Table 5 Attitude and Behavior towards Korean Food of Each Group

			Food safety-oriented	Convenience -oriented	Low interest in food	High interest in food	Chi-square / F
Attitude	Korean foods are expensive.		3.47 (0.71)a	3.47 (0.73)a	3.22 (0.70)b	3.72 (0.80)c	60.979***
	Korean foods are healthy.		**3.42 (0.73)a**	3.05 (0.66)b	2.94 (0.62)c	**3.75 (0.88)d**	208.653***
	Korean foods fit my appetite.		**3.61 (0.79)a**	3.27 (0.75)b	3.08 (0.77)c	**3.79 (0.86)d**	154.784***
	Korean foods are new.		**3.65 (0.86)a**	3.28 (0.80)b	3.08 (0.76)c	**3.91 (0.83)d**	206.353***
	Korean foods are hygienic.		**3.66 (0.73)a**	3.27 (0.69)b	3.14 (0.66)c	**3.86 (0.86)d**	165.218***
	Korean foods are trendy.		**3.46 (0.91)a**	3.10 (0.84)b	3.01 (0.80)b	**3.87 (0.86)c**	230.547***
Behavior	Past experience of dining in Korean restaurants	yes	450 (78.7%)	**427 (86.6%)**	362 (74.9%)	**461 (92.8%)**	68.267***
		no	122 (21.3%)	66 (13.4%)	121 (25.1%)	36 (7.2%)	
	Intention to dine in Korean restaurants	yes	60 (49.2%)	**46 (69.7%)**	57 (47.1%)	**28 (77.8%)**	23.266**
		no	20 (16.4%)	6 (9.1%)	29 (24.0%)	6 (16.7%)	
		no response	42 (34.4%)	14 (21.2%)	35 (28.9%)	2 (5.6%)	
	Intention to purchase Korean foods	yes	85 (44.0%)	**53 (57.0%)**	75 (41.9%)	**57 (63.3%)**	18.987**
		no	36 (18.7%)	14 (15.1%)	47 (26.3%)	13 (14.4%)	
		no response	72 (37.3%)	26 (28.0%)	57 (31.8%)	20 (22.2%)	

Notes: ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$, a, b, c: group differences by Duncan test.

5. Discussion

The objective of this study was to segment consumers based on their food lifestyle and to find their behavior and attitude towards Korean food. The following four group profiles are based on differences in demographic characteristics and preferences towards Korean food as indicated by the cross tap analysis and ANOVA results. These profiles are summarized in Table 6. The findings of this study indicate that consumers vary along several dimensions in their food lifestyle and also differ in their preference for Korean food. This implies that Korean food companies should take into account such differences when they are ready to make inroads into the Chinese market and set future strategy targeting Chinese customers.

5.1 Food Safety-oriented Segment

Food safety-oriented consumers are defined as those who have higher safety consciousness but lower brand and utility consciousness in food consumption. They tend to be slightly older than the other groups and likely to be married. They usually reside in Southern cities of China, such as Shanghai and Guangzhou. They show higher levels of income and expenditure on home meals over total monthly spending.

Based on the above results, this group could be attractive consumers to the Korean food companies in that they have high interests and preference for Korean foods. However, they also could be difficult to target because they are very passive in trying new foods. Therefore, companies should regard this food safety-oriented segment as a target group requiring lone-term investment and take premium strategy emphasizing on the safety of Korean foods to overcome their conservative purchasing behavior.

5.2 Convenience-oriented Segment

Consumers in the convenience-oriented segment share commonalities in that they are committed to higher utility but lower brand and safety consciousness in food consumption. These consumers are mostly in their 40s and have lower income. Percentage of residents in Beijing and Guangzhou is higher compared to the other segments. For these convenience-oriented consumers, level of past experience and future buying intention for Korean foods is high but preference for Korean food is uncertain and weak. Hence, Korean food companies should adopt a strategy to promote and raise awareness on overall knowledge of Korean foods and culture to enhance this segment’s preference.

5.3 Low Interest in Food

Consumers in the low interest in food segment are defined as those who are passive toward overall food consumption. This group of consumers shows lower level of overall consciousness on brand, safety, and utility. This group consists of those who are unmarried, in their 20s or have received lower levels of education. They are also low in income and mostly reside in Chongqing. They show lowest expenditure on home meals but the highest expenditure on eating out over total monthly spending.

This group of consumers would be an unattractive target to the Korean food companies since they have low interests in eating itself in their daily life and they also have lowest interest in Korean foods. Therefore, passive strategy can be useful such as just simple observation or postponement of specific actions until further behaviors and attitudes are found.

5.4 High Interest in Food

Consumers who have higher brand, safety, and utility- consciousness are categorized into the high interest in food segment. This segment shows the highest percentage of consumers who are female, in their 30s, or married. They also have higher levels of education and income, and mostly reside in Beijing and Shanghai.

This segment shows high levels throughout its current preference, past experience and future intention for consumption of Korean food. Therefore, Korean food companies should see this segment as their main target group and exercise on intensive premium strategy to link the consumers’ high interest in Korean foods and their actual purchase.

6. Limitations of the Study and Future Research

This study examined Chinese consumers and their preferences for Korean food through market segmentation based on food lifestyle using factor and cluster analysis. Overall, this paper has meaning in that it looked into the rising market of China. However, it only dealt with five cities, Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chongqing, and Chengdu, in discussing preference of Chinese consumers on Korean food. These five cities can not represent the overall level of preference in China due to the country's divergence regarding growth rate, lifestyle, and culture. In future studies, this limitation of the research may be solved by looking into more cities in China.

This research also contains limitation regarding its lack of specification. For instance, the research only discussed the general attitudes and behaviors towards Korean food regardless of specific types of food. Moreover the paper overlooks the importance of specific questions on the reasons behind consumers' preference or non-preference over Korean food.

Based on these limitations, future research can develop further by generating a more specific and diverse measurement variables regarding food lifestyles for practical implications. Better understanding of Chinese consumers can contribute to the development of new products and marketing strategies to target even the untapped shoppers of this biggest market. We hope that the results of this study provided a foundation for these future researches.

Table 6 Summary of Group Profiles

Cluster	Demographic characteristics	Attitude and purchasing behavior towards Korean food	Future strategy recommendation (priority*)
Food safety-oriented (24.1%)	•higher safety- but lower brand- and utility-consciousness •highest percentage of consumers who are male, in their 40s, married, university graduates •resides in Shanghai and Guangzhou •higher income and expenditure on dining in over total monthly spending	•Preference: high •Past purchasing experience: low •Future Intention to buy and eat : low	Long-term target group: premium strategy emphasizing on the safety of Korean foods to overcome their conservative purchasing behavior (3)
Convenience-oriented (28.0%)	•higher utility- but lower brand- and safety-consciousness • highest percentage of consumers who are in their 40s and lower in income • resides in Beijing and Guangzhou	•Preference: low •Past purchasing experience: high •Future Intention to buy and eat : high	Potential target group: attitude-changing strategy to promote and raise awareness on overall knowledge of Korean foods and culture (2)
Low interest in food (23.6%)	• lower brand- , safety- , and utility-consciousness • highest percentage of consumers who are unmarried, in their 20s and received lower levels of education and income • resides in Chongqing •lowest expenditure on dining in but highest expenditure on eating out over total monthly spending	•Preference: low •Past purchasing experience: low •Future Intention to buy and eat : low	Least attractive target group: Passive strategy in simply observing and delaying specific action until further behavior and attitude are found (4)
High interest in food (24.3%)	• higher brand- , safety- , and utility-consciousness • highest percentage of consumers who are female, in their 30s, married and received higher level of education and income • resides in Beijing and Shanghai	•Preference: high •Past experience: high •Future Intention to buy and eat : high	Main target group: intensive premium strategy to lead their high interest to Korean foods and their actual purchase (1)

Note: * Numbers in the parenthesis represent the priority that companies should consider in targeting potential Chinese consumers.

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