



The Difference between Authentic and Genuine

Authentic means “real” in the sense of being made in a traditional or original way. “Authentic Korean food” is food made the same way Koreans make the food in Korea. But the food does not have to come directly from Korea. It could even be made by a non-Korean who has learned from a Korean how to make authentic Korean food. What matters is the following of the right rules. **Genuine** Korean food would really have to come from Korea. It would have to be original.

For originals there are no degrees: either it comes from there or not, whereas food or anything can be *more or less authentic*. A document that is authentic is “known to be true,” it is reliable or trustworthy. It is thus supposed to be the original, but in the end, it remains a matter of trust or of the sincerity of those by whom it has been authenticated. Strictly speaking, it does not *need to be* the original document. When the “authority” is sincere enough, the document will generally be recognized as authentic. For the genuine, sincerity does not matter: the genuine simply *is*. In the authentic, there is always some space for imitation or pretending, even if this space is supposed to be as minimal as possible. In the genuine there is no such space. The Korean food can thus be *not* genuine but still authentic if it follows – more or less – the rules of authentic Korean food.

Deductive and Inductive

Authenticity has the same root as “authority:” it depends on the strength of the authority whereas the genuine does not need an authority in order to exist.¹ Arguments from authority are inductive whereas the genuine is a matter of definition and is thus deductive. Things can be authenticated but not be “genuinized.”

Time and Space

How do we establish the right definition of “genuine Korean food”? What matters are not the rules but space and time in the sense of duration. For genuine food, things to *not* need to be prepared in a certain way. If Koreans prepare a certain food in a certain way *in Korea over a certain period of time*, then this has to be accepted as genuinely Korean, even if it contradicts some of the rules of what is commonly known as authentic Korean food. In extreme cases the

food can be genuine despite the fact that the “authorities” refuse to authenticate it. It would be genuine but not authentic.

Creation and Emergence

The gist of the difference between authentic and genuine is reflected by the difference between creation and emergence. If a Korean person instantaneously *creates* a new food, we can object that what he is doing is not really authentic (it would not be genuine either). But if the Korean food emerges in a certain space and time, then it becomes genuine simply by that fact.

Authenticity and Sincerity

It follows that for the genuine, pretending is not possible whereas for the authentic it is. Conversely, anything pretended cannot be genuine. Despite the frequent contrasting of authenticity with sincerity in history of ideas (see Trilling 1972), authenticity depends on a certain amount of sincerity whereas the genuine does not need any sincerity. The hypocrite or the pretender, that is, the non-sincere person, is not “real,” but he can move to a more authentic behavior if he pretends well. The genuinely honest person simply *is* honest and does not need to make an effort to be so. This shows that the authentic and the sincere are linked: the authentic is a sort of hyper sincere where pretending has been reduced to zero. The genuine does not have this relationship with the sincere. Lionel Trilling, in his *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1972), explains that sincerity requires to submit oneself to rules and to do so willingly and with devotion. Sincerity is located somewhere between honesty and seriousness, it is a moral seriousness in action.ⁱⁱ Sincere and authentic are similar because both are not corrupted and “pure.” The difference is that the sincere usually needs an effort to come about, whereas the authentic is supposed to exist “autonomously.” However, it has been shown above that the authentic is not as natural and autonomous as one might usually think, but that it is just a hyper sincere. It *does* need an effort.

The Age of the Authentic

Charles Taylor has shown that the revolt against an ethics of sincerity has led to an age of authenticity in culture and politics (Taylor 2007: 473-504). Since the 1960s, an individuating revolution searched for the authentic way of living. One purpose of the cultural revolutions of the 1960s was to finish with a conformist postwar society that was still steeped in mass production and that was crushing the creativity of the individual. This society talked too much about “being sincere” and thus denied people an authentic way of life. We are living in an age of authenticity, whose *raison d'être* is mainly the overcoming of sincerity. However, it has been shown above

that, ironically, there is a strong link between authenticity and sincerity. The genuine does not have this link.

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References:

Taylor, Charles. 2007. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Trilling, Lionel. 1972, *Sincerity and Authenticity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

ⁱ Authenticity has the same root as “authoritarian.” Trilling shows that traditionally, authenticity was linked to masculinity and manly ambition (p. 95). The connection happened through the sublime, which has been related to the authentic. Both the authentic and the sublime are aesthetic ideals that differ from the ideal of beauty.

ⁱⁱ It is interesting to note that “sincere” is a Latin word that moved into English and is thus present in the latter and in Romance language, but that there is no equivalent in German. “Aufrichtig” comes closest to it, but this should better be translated as “upright” and is thus not every different from “honest.” Sincerity is somewhere between honesty and seriousness, it is a moral seriousness I action.