

Soju

Hyunhee Park offers the first global historical study of soju, the distinctive distilled drink of Korea. Searching for soju's origins, Park leads us into the vast, complex world of premodern Eurasia. She demonstrates how the Mongol conquests of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries wove together hemispheric flows of trade, empire, and scientific and technological transfer and created the conditions for the development of a singularly Korean drink. Soju's rise in Korea marked the evolution of a new material culture through ongoing interactions between the global and local and between tradition and innovation in the adaptation and localization of new technologies. Park's vivid new history shows how these cross-cultural encounters laid the foundations for the creation of a globally connected world.

Hyunhee Park is Associate Professor of History at the City University of New York, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, and the CUNY Graduate Center.

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Soju

A Global History

Hyunhee Park

City University of New York



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University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi - 110025, India
103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108816113

DOI: 10.1017/9781108895774

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First published 2021

First paperback edition 2022

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data

Names: Park, Hyunhee, 1972– author.

Title: Soju : a global history / Hyunhee Park, City University of New York.

Description: Cambridge ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 2021. |

Series: Asian connections | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020042864 (print) | LCCN 2020042865 (ebook) | ISBN

9781108842013 (hardback) | ISBN 9781108895774 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Soju.

Classification: LCC TP607.S65 P37 (print) | LCC TP607.S65 (ebook) | DDC

663/.5–dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020042864>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020042865>

ISBN 978-1-108-84201-3 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-108-81611-3 Paperback

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For my husband, Fumihiko

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Acknowledgments

Some have asked me how much I must love alcoholic beverages, given that I have suddenly turned to research on them. In fact, when my colleague Paul Buell proposed that I join his project, *A Comparative Investigation of Distillation Technologies, Wine Production, and Fermented Products*, and investigate the case of Korean soju, I never remotely imagined that I would write a monograph on the topic. Once I had delved into it further, however, I was struck by the potential richness of the subject. I became particularly interested in the significance alcoholic drinks have had in human lives and cultures since ancient times, as key components of both food and medicine. I discovered that in terms of the history of alcoholic drinks, the invention of distillation technology became a key innovation since it enabled longer preservation of fermented alcohols and, by extension, of other kinds of food and medicine. The study of distillation also helps us understand exchanges of technology among different societies in premodern times, when there was no refrigeration or other forms of reliable preservation, other than traditional ones such as drying. Indeed, my confrontation with the history of distillation produced a kind of “eureka” moment for me. For me, in any case, studying the history of cross-cultural contacts is always a humbling experience, and studying this new topic affected me even more so. I was also surprised to discover that the history of the main Korean distilled liquor, soju, worked well too as a means for positioning Korea in a global history extending throughout Afro-Eurasia in its premodern connections. This topic also suggests how much present-day societies owe to the long-term developments, and the exchanges, of the past.

In such a context, without my colleagues who invited me to explore this new topic and who have given me their continuous support, I would not have been able to write this book. Of course, my deepest gratitude goes first to Paul Buell, who first introduced me to the research topic in 2013. Since I first joined his project, Paul could have not been more generous with his endless support, and has always responded promptly to my queries and shared many important thoughts and insights about the

topic. I also appreciate the help of my initial co-research project members, including Angela Schottenhammer, Ana Valenzuela, Maria de la Paz Solano-Pérez, Batdorj Batjargal, Dashdondog Bayarsaikhan, and Moldir Oskenbay, who provided various forms of assistance and inspiration ever since we met for the first conference at Salzburg University funded by a Eurasia Pacific Uninet grant in 2015.

Because it was my first entry into serious research on both food history and Korean history, the substantial support of experts in relevant fields was crucial. As a renowned expert on the history of Korean and East Asian food histories, Joo Young-ha helped me to critically approach relevant topics, including recent developments of Korean soju that often have been exaggerated by nationalist rhetoric. As the topic involves the history of science and technology, it was also crucial to find support from experts in that field. I was so fortunate to receive the warm support and encouragement from Shin Dongwon and Lim Jongtae after I presented my first foray into the topic at the 14th International Conference on the History of Science in East Asia (ICHSEA) in Paris in 2015, and the 15th ICHSEA in Jeonju in 2019; their sharp insights and valuable comments proved critical to developing my initial manuscript. I would also like to thank many other scholars who read the entire text or parts of my book manuscript and gave me important advice and feedback, including Morris Rossabi, Eugene Anderson, Alexandr Gorokhovskiy, Linda Feng, Seol Paehwan, Ana Valenzuela, Maria de la Paz Solano-Pérez, Limor Yungman, and Gideon Shelach-Lavi. I also thank the two anonymous readers for the press, whose suggestions, corrections, and bibliographical advice saved me from many embarrassing mistakes. The responsibility for any remaining gaffs and blunders is entirely my own.

I would also like to thank many other colleagues who shared their wisdom with me at conferences where I shared my developing work and otherwise gave generously of their ideas, insights, resources, and helpful criticism. These include Kim Hodong, Yi Eunjeung, Kaveh Hemmat, Michael Hope, Oh Young-Ju, Kim Choong Hyeon, Yoon Sungje, Joseph Lee, Kang In Uk, Michal Biran, Yuri Pines, Lee Jung, Seo Jung-Min, Anne Gerritsen, Shim Jae-hoon, Kim Young-jae, Choi Duk-Kyung, Jou Kyung-Chul, Chung Chungkee, Jeong Myung Hyun, Kim Janggoo, Lee Kang Hahn, Sung Baik-yong, Nam Jong Kuk, Park Yong-jin, Cho Wonhee, Kang Changhwa, colleagues at the Institute for Textual and Oral Histories of Food (ITOHF), the Korean Research Institute of Science, Technology and Civilization (KRISTC) at Chonbuk National University, and the Atlantic World Workshop in New York University. I also wish to express many thanks to my dear colleagues at John Jay College, in particular Allison Kavey and David Munns, for their

xii Acknowledgments

unstinting help, advice, and encouragement. Financial and institutional support that expedited this research includes a Korea Foundation Field Research Fellowship, the fellowship from the Central Eurasian Studies Institute of the Institute of Humanities at Seoul National University, the PSC-CUNY awards from the City University of New York, a CUNY scholar incentive award, and a book publication grant from the Office for the Advancement of Research at CUNY John Jay College. I cannot overlook thanking Tansen Sen and Lucy Rymer for recommending that my initial research topic be listed among the titles of the Asian Connections series at Cambridge University Press, Danielle McClellan for providing intelligent and knowledgeable English academic editing, and Matilde Grimaldi for providing professional illustrations of many figures and maps that would help readers follow the book's arguments easily.

Finally, I wish to express my profound gratitude to all the members of my family. My study would not have been made possible without the continuous encouragement given to me by my parents, Park Dongho and Choi Bonghwa, and my little brother Park Jun Hee and sister-in-law Oh Yeon Joung. Jun Hee's encouragement to travel to Andong in person to visit the Andong Soju museum and collect relevant sources during my stay in Korea in the summer of 2014 helped me decide to launch this project; while Jun Hee was not able to accompany me for this trip as he had hoped, my parents were willing to accompany me instead and encouraged me to work on this project. My in-laws in Japan were also a source of true encouragement and support; my brother-in-law Takahiko and his wife Rie brought me to a local sake factory and museum during my trip to visit their family in Iwaki city. Finally, I would like to give my utmost thanks to my husband, Fumihiko Kobayashi, who has been with me all this time and has supported me in so many ways, through his valuable ideas, insights, and happiness.

Note on Transliteration and Other Conventions

In citing English-language materials, I copy titles and the names of authors as published. When transliterating Asian-language names and titles, I use the McCune–Reischauer system of romanization for Korean, the Pinyin system for Chinese, the modified Hepburn system employed by the Library of Congress for Japanese, and the Library of Congress system for Arabic. As for Korean authors' names, I give their preferred English spellings in the body text; however, for the notes and Works Cited, I use the McCune–Reischauer romanization for primary spellings and provide their preferred English spellings in parentheses. I have also treated terms of Persian and Turkish origin as if they were Arabic. Common words and place names, such as *arak* and “Ryukyu,” appear in the generally accepted English form without diacritics. Unlike Korean and Arabic, Chinese writing consists of morphosyllabic characters, therefore the book includes characters in the cases of important words not easily found in the book's bibliography. Names and terms of Mongolian origin have been transliterated according to Antoine Mostaert's scheme as modified by F. W. Cleaves, except for these deviations: č is rendered as ch; š as sh; ɣ is gh, q is kh, and ǰ is j.

Citations from some Korean official sources such as the *Chosŏn wangjo sillok* include a source's date (presented as reign year, lunar month, and day) and relevant document numbers in the online database (see the Works Cited for a web address).