

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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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

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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; γ is gh, q is kh, and j̄ 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).

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