Chasing Soju: A History

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my grandfather.

“백잔내기” 김창기 선생님께.

Acknowledgements

This thesis is the product of two years under the tutelage of my advisor, Professor Trent E. Maxey. From our Special Topics to our advising sessions, my conversations with you laid the very foundations of this intellectual capstone. Thank you for your encouragement and for your guidance, and for entertaining my wild and sometimes misguided last-minute[1] whims. While I may not have been the easiest advisee, I certainly hope to not have been the most unimaginative.

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I am indebted to my four grandparents. To my grandfather who taught me his love for alcohol and to my grandmother who tempered it, to my grandfather who I've almost inched out in height and to my grandmother who never fails to inch me out in width.

Thank you.

[1] Very, very last-minute. For the record, Professor Maxey may have entertained my whims but he in no way, shape, or form endorsed them. Any deficiencies in this thesis are the result of not heeding his warnings.

Note on Translations

When romanizing Korean names and terms I have followed the McCune-Reischauer romanization system, except in the cases in which conventional English romanizations already existed. A system created in 1937 by George M. McCune and Edwin O. Reischauer, it represents a phonetic rendering of the Korean alphabet, *Han'gŭl.* A modified variant was used as the official romanization system in South Korea from 1984 to 2000, and another modified variant is still used as the official romanization system in North Korea today. While many of my friends share my opinion that it is clunky and not particularly aesthetically pleasing, it is still used by convention in the Korean Studies academic community. I have decided to follow this system in my thesis given my vain hope that my thesis makes a contribution of some kind.

I have respected the conventional romanizations and spellings for Korean names and terms where appropriate. For East Asian names I have generally followed the practice of providing the surname before the first name, except in the cases in which the names were published in English using an English name order. I have generally followed the practice of italicizing romanized nouns and titles but not italicizing romanized names. When I cite longer titles of works, I have somewhat arbitrarily included spaces among the words for ease of reading (e.g. *Tongguk sesigi* for the Korean work 東國歲時記), but I did not capitalize the first letters of succeeding words to indicate that no spaces are included in the original title.

One Korean word that gave me some trouble was the word *yangjojang* (양조장), a word that can be translated into either brewery or distillery depending on the liquor produced. As this is a thesis on a distilled liquor I have decided to translate it as “distillery” unless otherwise stated.

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Preface

A Tale of Three Sojus

The year is 1999. Her Majesty the Queen Elizabeth II of the U.K. is on a state visit to South Korea when she decides to tour a village retrospectively dubbed "the most Korean place in Korea." Upon discovering that her visit will coincide with her 73rd birthday, the residents of Hahoe Village in Andong, South Korea decide to celebrate by preparing a traditional birthday feast.[2] Cho Okhwa, a resident of Andong who had been honored as an Intangible Cultural Property (*Muhyŏng munhwajae*) a decade prior, took charge of the birthday feast proceedings.[3] Cho's claim to fame was her expertise in distilling Andong soju. The South Korean government heralded Cho's craft during a push to revitalize the traditional liquor industry in the lead-up to the 1988 Seoul Olympics, and while she had heretofore primarily distilled soju in her home, Cho's soju had begun to enjoy some commercial success around the time of the Queen's visit.

There was a lot at stake for this event. South Korea had yet to enjoy its meteoric rise to fame, and this birthday feast was one on the world stage. Especially because it was prepared in conjunction with the South Korean Government and the British Embassy Seoul, we can only assume that every preparation was deliberate, including the designation of Cho Okhwa. While the feast featured many types of Korean foods, figuring prominently was a bottle of Andong soju, a liquor that was intended to represent both the most "authentically Korean" and the best of what Korea had to offer.

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[2] "Queen Elizabeth Cherishes Memory of Traditional Korean Birthday Party: Envoy." Yonhap News Agency. Accessed February 20, 2018. http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2016/06/03/0301000000AEN20160603002600315.html.

[3] Intangible Cultural Properties (*Muhyŏng munhwajae*) are specially designated for preservation by the South Korean Cultural Heritage Administration, in accordance with the 1962 Cultural Property Protection Law. This law was modeled on the Japanese 1950 Law for the Protection of Culture, and Intangible Cultural Properties (*Mukei bunkazai*) exist there as well.

Fast forward to 2014. The K-Pop star Psy, fresh off his Gangnam Style success, releases the YouTube music video for his latest song, "Hangover." Joined by the American rapper Snoop Dogg, the music video at the time of writing garnered 313,490,029 views.[4] If Psy sought to introduce Korean nightlife and drinking culture to the rest of the world, he would have been remiss to not heavily feature the jade green bottles that figure prominently in the video. These bottles are a somewhat gratuitous product placement for Jinro Chamisul, a brand familiar to any Korean but perhaps unfamiliar to the rest of the world. If you aren't familiar with this liquor, however, you may want to familiarize yourself soon: Jinro Chamisul is the most-sold spirit brand in the world by volume and boasted sales of 61.4 million 9-liter cases in 2012, compared to a paltry 24.7 million for the leading vodka brand Smirnoff.[5]

Fig. 1: Psy and Snoop Dogg sharing soju. Note the Chamisul product placement. Courtesy of YG Entertainment.

[4] An impressive sum that nevertheless pales in comparison to Psy's Music Video for his more famous song Gangnam Style, which clocks in at 3.1 billion at the time of writing.
[5] "Millionaires' Club: Soju - Drinks International - The Global Choice for Drinks Buyers." Accessed February 16, 2018. http://drinksint.com/news/fullstory.php/aid/6290/Millionaires__Club:_Soju.html.

While this figure dates from over five years ago, Chamisul seems to show no sign of slowing down. On March 3, 2018, HiteJinro Co. announced that it would not sell its Masan beer factory as previously planned, converting it to a soju factory instead to meet growing global demand (selling 150 million bottles of soju a month).[6] That a liquor with mostly local appeal in a corner of Asia nabbed the number one spot is a testament to both the popularity of soju and the drinking culture of South Korea. The sales may only rise; Psy recently signed on as the official spokesperson of the brand in the American and European markets, an indication that Jinro has plans for aggressive expansion.[7]

Now, fast forward to the present day to Tokki Soju, proudly distilled by a Brandon Hill in Brooklyn, New York. Brandon Hill is thirty-four years old, a white man hailing not from South Korea but from South Carolina. He is also the founder and producer of Tokki Soju,[8] a soju that is by some accounts one of the most "traditional" on the market. When I asked him whether he believed that he was producing an "authentic" soju, Hill told me,

> I get that question a lot. You know, I only use Korean ingredients, I only use traditional Korean techniques, and I have a degree in traditional Korean alcohol. I guess if I'm not making it authentically, I don't know how. I mean, I'm using the exact same practices that I learned during my time in Korea[9]… practices that I studied for two years. I only use *chapssal*,[10] I cultivate my *nuruk*[11] the same way that they did in the Chosŏn and Silla dynasties, I do split-layer fermentation the same way that they did, and even distill the same way that they did. I mean, I

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[6] "Hite Jinro Ditches Plan to Sell Its Beer Factory." Yonhap News Agency. Accessed March 8, 2018. http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/news/2018/03/07/0200000000AEN20180307002400320.html.

[7] Tom Dreisbach, "Move Over Vodka; Korean Soju's Taking A Shot At America," National Public Radio, September 22, 2013, https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2013/09/22/224522548/move-over-vodka-korean-sojus-taking-a-shot-at-america.

[8] Tokki is the Korean word for "rabbit," a name Hill chose for his soju as a reference to 2011, the Year of the Rabbit and the year in which he first came to Korea.

[9] Hill enrolled in a Korean traditional liquors program at the Susubori Academy in Seoul, which was then affiliated with Kyonggi University. Korea was the final stop after a long worldwide sojourn of learning liquor distilling practices in places as far-flung as Northern Africa, India, Central and South America, and Europe.

[10] Traditional Korean glutinous rice

[11] Traditional Korean fermentation starter

> guess authenticity is tough because… is soju even inherently Korean? Because the Mongols brought distillation to Korea. I think that question has weight to it, but I don't know what else to call it.[12]

When I asked him whether it'd be correct to say that he had done everything humanly possible to make Tokki Soju more "authentic," Hill answered, "as far as is legal in the United States, yes. The only thing that isn't inherently traditional is that I do apply modern science to it, because soju predates refrigeration techniques. I also apply jacketed fermenters so that it doesn't get contaminated… I think that's about it."[13]

Fig. 2: Brandon Hill pictured at the Van Brunt Stillhouse, Brooklyn, New York City. Courtesy of Brandon Hill

[12] Brandon Hill (of Tokki Soju), in conversation with the author, February 2018.
[13] Brandon Hill (of Tokki Soju), in conversation with the author, February 2018.

It seems that to Hill, the designation of "traditional" is a question of methodology. Hill and his partner (unnamed upon request) are transparent about their production methods, showcasing multiple steps of the production process on the Tokki Soju Instagram to show that at the end of the day, "we're just two guys who are making everything by hand." Hill is adamant that he only use ingredients such as organic *chapssal* or koji painstakingly cultivated on wheat using methods akin to traditional Korean methods. In contrast, most soju producers in Korea use koji produced on grains of polished rice in the Japanese fashion because it is the easiest to regulate. And heaven forbid that the folks at Tokki Soju follow the ways of the diluted mass-market soju producers, who according to Hill typically use "whatever the cheapest grain is that year." He reiterates that money is never the motivator for him and his partner:

> I only use organic stuff and I only use traditional practices and I'm not willing to sacrifice that, so the price point is a little bit higher than what people are used to… but soju is a *people's drink*, so even with my quality ingredients I'm trying to keep the price[14] as low as possible so that everyone can try it...It's always a passion project. We're not getting richer. But it's fun and we're just trying to show an accurate representation of the spirit.[15]

Hill is producing a "modern" soju that, by some metrics, is even more "authentic" or "traditional" than many of the soju products produced in Korea.

We have here a Tale of Three Sojus: Andong Soju, Jinro Chamisul, and Tokki Soju. All three are radically different products. But instead of asking how Hill is able to produce a "traditional" soju using methods at the nexus of modern science and the production methods of a bygone era, it is perhaps more instructive to ask: Why are there so few that are producing soju in such a fashion within South Korea's borders today? There are those such as Jinro who produce a

[14] A 375 mL bottle of the 23% ABV offering of Tokki Soju can be found for about $20.00 in New York City. Of course, at the upscale Korean restaurants where Tokki is generally found, the price is often much higher.
[15] Brandon Hill (of Tokki Soju), in conversation with the author, February 2018.

mass-produced diluted soju that have achieved massive commercial success and widespread recognition despite bearing little resemblance to the soju of the past. There are also those more traditional soju producers who have actually had a hard time eking out a long, established presence in South Korea. Cho Okhwa of Andong Soju was only honored by the government as an Intangible Cultural Property in 1987, and only began commercially distributing her soju in 1990. Then there are those such as Kim Taek-sang who try to exist outside of this capitalist modernity by ostensibly working for the preservation of culture rather than profit. Kim boasts of being a 10th-generation distiller turned bootlegger after the South Korean government banned the production of rice-based liquors in the 1960s, and adheres to a narrow definition of authentic soju that requires a specific, intimate, handmade process that results in a product never as consistent as Hill's Tokki Soju.

Yet despite this, soju has managed to become a national symbol of sorts. In March 2018, when Supreme Leader of North Korea Kim Jong-un hosted South Korean officials in a dinner at the Workers' Party Headquarters of North Korea, soju served both as a social lubricant and as a reminder of common heritage. As one source stated, after an obligatory glass of wine Kim Jong-un seems to have primarily toasted and consumed Pyongyang Soju throughout the feast.[16] Another source reflected that "the bottles kept coming" as the representatives of the two Koreas shared an unprecedented friendly and spirited conversation.[17] When South Korean President Moon Jae-in hosts Kim Jong-un in the inter-Korean summit on April 27, 2018, in what will be

[16] Hwang Chinyŏng, "青 '김정은이 좋아하는 술은 평양소주,'" *Asia Economy Daily*, March 8, 2018, http://www.asiae.co.kr/news/view.htm?idxno=2018030817085237727.
[17] Christine Kim, "Over Hotpot and Soju, North Korea's Kim Jong Un Joked About...," *Reuters*, March 10, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-missiles-southkorea-hospit/over-wine-and-soju-north-koreas-kim-jong-un-joked-about-himself-south-korea-officials-idUSKCN1GL0JE.

the first time since the Korean War that a North Korean leader steps foot in South Korea, the South Korean side will offer *Munbaesul,* a soju originally from the region surrounding Pyongyang but regarded as an Intangible Cultural Property in South Korea today.[18] The significance of this gesture will not be lost on the guests.

Given this anecdote and the Tale of Three Sojus above, the fact of the matter is that in contemporary South Korea, there exists a commodity called soju that is packaged, consumed, and conceived of in a certain way. But a closer look at the history of soju shows that its modern features were codified and reified in a far more recent past than any of the producers above would likely want to admit. It begs the larger question at stake: Why is it so difficult to find an easily digestible, pristine history of soju?

[18] Ch'ae Hyesŏn, "김정일은 '원샷'했는데…문 대통령-김정은 '러브샷' 볼 수 있을까," *Joongang Ilbo*, April 25, 2018, http://news.joins.com/article/22566122.

Introduction

In this thesis, I argue that soju is a useful lens with which to navigate colonial modernity and its reverberations in South Korea, with a particular focus on the post-colonial inventions of tradition. As Gerard Sasges suggests, "few things are as intimately tied to culture and identity as alcohol." Alcohol has historically sustained multivalent meanings and possibilities that were intimately tied to an evolving modernity. Evolving modernities can never be extracted from industrial capitalism, and so drinking cultures are constantly shaped by the imperatives and reverberations of colonial modernity.[19] But as we will soon see, colonial modernity in Korea has hastened a revitalization of traditions that rely on a pre-colonial past. Therefore, while this thesis seeks to contribute to the colonial modernity discussion it must make these contributions by way of a wider scope that includes the pre-colonial and the post-colonial.

Broadly, soju as a liquor relies on distillation technology introduced to the Korean peninsula relatively recently, and was then localized only to the upper-class. But somewhere along the way, there was a dramatic shift that occasioned soju's transformation into what Brandon Hill refers to as a "people's liquor." This discontinuity between the modern and the pre-modern is troubling. One attempt at an answer requires a synthesis of an analysis of the intersection of three circles: the material conditions of soju as a liquor, the Japanese Occupation (1910 - 1945) understood as a period of compressed modernization between the modern and the pre-modern, and the post-colonial inventions of tradition. Some analytical frameworks are presented in greater detail below.

[19] Gerard Sasges, "Drunken Poets and New Women: Consuming Tradition and Modernity in Colonial Vietnam," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 48 (February 1, 2017): 9.

Capitalist Modernity

One of the main ways in which soju was codified and reified in South Korea was through the demands of a capitalist modernity. Somewhere along the way, soju ceased to be a liquor that was simply distilled in wealthy homes for private consumption. By the end of the twentieth century, it became a commercialized product highly responsive to and molded by market trends, industrial production capabilities, and revenue concerns that rendered it an undeniable product of capitalism. At one point the soju market even became the battlegrounds of a *chaebŏl* system so distinctive of South Korean capitalism. However, while most historical scholarship on South Korean capitalism takes as its starting point the rapid growth of the South Korean economy in the 1960s and 1970s, some scholars have chosen to place the roots of this growth in an earlier time. The Japanese Occupation, as it is for most Korean historical scholarship, remains the elephant in the room.

Nationalist narratives that trace the origins of capitalism to native Korean sources preceding the Occupation have found support on both sides of the Korean border. One historical current places these roots in the increasing commercialization of the 17th and 18th centuries. This school argues that the protracted Japanese and Manchu invasions weakened the Chosŏn court's control of the domestic economy and led to the rise of a new market-oriented entrepreneurial merchant class and the beginnings of a free wage labor force. In short, these scholars comb through history to identify some of the preconditions of Western industrial capitalism first identified by Marx, arguing under the framework of the "universality of capitalist development" that had Korea been left to its own devices and not been colonized, it would have developed an economic structure recognizable as capitalism today. However, while this historical

current grants Chosŏn Korea with greater agency in a field fraught with narratives that treat the colonial relationship as unidirectional, most historians agree that the degree of commercialization was nevertheless not in the same ballpark as that of Tokugawa Japan or pre-industrial Europe. According to Carter J. Eckert, modern industrial technology was not invented but imported in Korea, irretrievably linking Korean capitalism with Japanese colonialism. Attempting to decisively prove whether or not Korea would have achieved industrialization on its own terms is perhaps akin to what Eckert calls a "futile quest for apples in an orange grove."[20] But the fact of the import-invent debate obscures the real questions of industrialization: by whom, on what terms, and for what purpose?

Eckert asserts that it was not until 1919, after nine years of the Occupation, that industrial capitalism truly took off in Korea. From 1919 until 1945, Japanese capital spurred on a wave of industrialization that resulted in the emergence of a new class of industrial bourgeoisie.[21] This industrialization was bound with a technological impetus that provided the groundwork for a self-regulating market economy. As Karl Polanyi writes, "we do not intend to assert that the machine caused that which happened, but we insist that once elaborate machines and plants were used for production in a commercial society, the idea of a self-regulating market was bound to take shape."[22] The Japanese promoted Korean industry broadly in order to use Korea as an "economic stepping-stone for Japan's growing and increasingly aggressive imperialist ambitions on the Asian continent," and industrialization was therefore oriented more towards export to new

[20] Carter J. Eckert, *Offspring of Empire: The Koch'ang Kims and the Colonial Origins of Korean Capitalism, 1876-1945* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 2-4.
[21] Eckert, *Offspring of Empire*, 27.
[22] Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1944), 40.

continental markets than towards domestic Korean needs.[23] But it was in the promotion of this industry and of capitalism as a whole that soju began to be talked about in the colonial period as more than a liquor or a livelihood - it became a commodity and an industrial product that could be marketed, bought, and sold.

In addition, partly as a response to the Korean nationalist movements of 1919, the Japanese undertook a calculated "divide and conquer" strategy by granting special privileges to the emerging Korean industrial bourgeoisie in order to promote class differentiation and conflict. While the European industrial bourgeoisie became champions of liberalism and nationalism throughout the nineteenth century, the Korean industrial bourgeoisie instead became ardent supporters of the Japanese wartime policy of *Naisen Ittai* (Japan and Korea as One) and on the whole retarded the march of Korean nationalism. The modern day reverberations of this industrial model include that of dictatorial economic intervention powers vested in the state and the cozy relationship between capitalists and the forces of authoritarianism, which played a critical role in the development of diluted soju as a mass-market commodity throughout the twentieth century.[24] Under this frame of analysis, the authoritarian South Korean state of the 1960s and 1970s was able to swiftly enact grain restrictions and taxation schemes that precipitated the widespread consumption of cheap diluted soju, and then was able to revitalize and reinvent a tradition of "traditional liquors" in the run-up to the Olympics in the 1980s, precisely because the groundwork for this economic dictatorial capacity had already been set during the Japanese Occupation. In addition, the *chaebŏl* system that allowed for a select few diluted soju producers, including Jinro, to attain oligopolistic control of not only the South

[23] Eckert, *Offspring of Empire*, 43-44, 47, 255, 258.
[24] Eckert, *Offspring of Empire*, 43-44, 47, 255, 258.

Korean domestic market but also the international market as a whole had its roots in the economic scheme of industrial bourgeoisie working in close contact with an authoritarian state structure that was established during the colonial period.

The Japanese Occupation and the development of Korean industrial capitalism enabled the birth of mass-market diluted soju, which eventually came to be associated with something that was "quintessentially Korean." Somewhere along the way, a liquor that had previously only been enjoyed by the upper-class began to be consumed on multiple levels of Korean society, in spite of or perhaps because of the class differentiation that Japanese colonialism had engendered. We require a further-reaching framework of analysis than capitalist modernity alone to attempt to answer the question of how this came about.

Colonial Modernity

Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson's 1999 publication of *Colonial Modernity in Korea* marked the emergence of a historical framework that will be henceforth referred to as Colonial Modernity. Colonial Modernity asserted that colonialism, anti-colonial nationalism, and modernization emerged simultaneously during the Japanese Occupation. Compared to North and South Korean nationalist historical approaches that often served as legitimation projects for their respective sides of the demilitarized zone, Shin and Robinson declared that the collective purpose of the Colonial Modernity historians was to examine how "writing around, beneath, and beyond the nationalist approaches" could enhance our understanding of the Korean colonial period, and by extension the post-colonial state. Nationalism under the Colonial Modernity

construct was no longer a means of legitimation but rather a fluid category that was constantly negotiated throughout the colonial era.[25]

Perhaps most relevant to our study is that Colonial Modernity directly challenged the nationalist assertion that the Korean identity emerged in resistance to heavy-handed Japanese colonial subjugation. Colonial Modernity noted that the Japanese forced assimilation policies occasionally achieved the opposite of what they intended, ironically leading in some cases not to an eradication but to a strengthening of the Korean identity. An excellent example of this is Michael Robinson's essay on the Kyŏngsŏng Broadcast Corporation (KBC), a radio network established in Korea by the Japanese authorities in the 1920s. The KBC sought to promote propaganda and otherwise tighten control through the media of the daily lives of the Koreans. But introducing Korean language programming in order to reach as many Koreans as possible led to the standardization of the Korean language and the development of native music forms, resulting in a strengthening of a distinct Korean identity contrary to the goals of the Japanese colonial authorities.[26] Under this construction, the Korean identity did not only emerge in resistance to the Japanese, but also sometimes in association with or even independently of their colonial policies.

While Colonial Modernity took the North American academe by storm, some historians criticized the framework for what they perceived to be an incomplete interrogation of modernization. In his introduction to the 2013 conference volume *Colonial Rule and Social*

[25] Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson, eds., *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, 1st ed., vol. 184 (Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 2-3.
[26] Michael Robinson, "Broadcasting, Cultural Hegemony, and Colonial Modernity in Korea, 1924–1945," in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, 1st ed., vol. 184 (Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 52–69.

Change (ed. Hong Yung Lee, Yong Chool Ha, and Clark W. Sorensen),[27] Hong Yung Lee argued that Colonial Modernity failed to methodologically distinguish between "colonial modernity" and "modernization" during the colonial period. According to Lee, modernization had a certain historical inevitability that required a distinct analytic separation from the experience of colonialism. Partha Chatterjee's famous line rings true here:

> The idea that colonialism was only incidental to the history of the development of modern institutions and technologies of power in the countries of Asia and Africa is now very much with us… the progress of modernity is a project in which we are all, albeit with varying degrees of enthusiasm, still deeply implicated.[28]

But what is concerning is that not studying modernization independently of colonialism raises its own problems. Modernity is commonly associated with values such as rationalism, individualism, industrialism, nationalism, and the Enlightenment. But given that colonialism by definition prioritizes the political imperatives of the imperial state, colonialism only has room for what Lee terms "selective modernization": the introduction of only those modern ideas and institutions that do not undermine the political supremacy of the colonizer.[29] According to Lee, Colonial Modernity does not sufficiently reconcile selective modernization, nor does it make room for the Korean nationalists that were anti-colonization but pro-modernization.

One way out of this conundrum is Partha Chatterjee's conception of modernity in two separate domains: the material and the spiritual. Chatterjee conceived of the material domain as the "domain of the 'outside,' of the economy and of state craft, of science and technology,"

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[27] I should note that Clark W. Sorensen edited and contributed to *Colonial Rule* ("The Korean Family in Colonial Space - Caught between Modernization and Assimilation") but also contributed to the original *Colonial Modernity* ("National Identity and the Creation of the Category 'Peasant' in Colonial Korea").
[28] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1993), 14.
[29] Hong Yung Lee, Yong-Chool Ha, and Clark W. Sorensen, eds. *Colonial Rule and Social Change in Korea, 1910-1945*. Seattle: Center for Korea Studies Publicatons, 2013: 17.

whereas the spiritual domain was the "'inner' bearing the 'essential' marks of cultural identity."[30] One can see, as Lee points out, how Korean nationalists would be far more amenable to modernization on Japanese terms in the material domain than in the spiritual domain. This conception has produced some useful results, with one notable example being Andre Schmid's careful study of the attitudes towards modernization among Korean elites right before and after Annexation.[31] According to Lee, Schmid's conclusion was that while both nationalists and colonialists advocated for modernization, nationalists approached modernization with the intent of strengthening the Korean nation whereas colonialists embraced modernization to justify colonial rule. This conception presents a picture of the colonialists hijacking and co-opting the nationalist rhetoric on modernity as the country failed to modernize, such as in the abortive Gabo Reforms of 1894 - 1896. This would then enable the nationalist Koreans of this era with the capacity for modernist dreams without the concomitant colonial baggage.

The resultant, oversimplified picture may not be completely satisfying. This framework also spawns concerns about whether the two sides of the material-spiritual binary can truly be divorced. While we may agree that the material-spiritual dual conception of modernity presents a more complex picture than the scheme of Japanese colonial actors and Korean passive recipients, there is little evidence that, as Lee argues, such is the scheme of Colonial Modernity. Robert Oppenheim responded in his review of the work that the *Colonial Rule* contributors are mischaracterizing those of *Colonial Modernity*, and he esteemed the latter as a group that worked with modernity as an "ambivalent sociocultural condition and ideal" and not as a process of

[30] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1993), 6.
[31] Andre Schmid, *Korea Between Empires* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

"economistic modernization" understood only in terms of success and failure.[32] Colonial Modernity, at least for the purposes of our own study, is not dead.

With the complexity of modernity and modernization in mind, Chulwoo Lee's essay on the "modernization of power" provides fresh insights for our study of soju. Liberated from the nationalist conception of colonial development as a zero-sum game, Lee argues that a new legal-governmental apparatus was organized and instituted so that the state could "extend its power and control to minute details of life untouched by the traditional Korean state."[33] Lee builds upon previous work by Hyman Kublin, who noted as a unique characteristic of Japanese colonialism an "excessive attention," that is, the census collection and storage of information that was meant to be used to engineer society in order to preserve order and achieve material progress in ways preordained by Japanese norms.[34] The Government-General's use of statistical data to measure and assess performance, assert legitimacy, and determine future governance marked an emergence of *savoir-pouvoir*, famously introduced by Michel Foucault as "knowledge-power." Lee notes that the logic behind these population censuses, officially termed "surveys of national strength" (*kokusei chōsa*), was a new notion of government that totalized demography, territory, and material resources in pursuit of the general health of society.[35] But Lee overlooks how the act of census collection might in itself be bound up in the logics of *savoir-pouvoir*. Borrowing Shantanu Havaldar's articulation of the arguments of Michel Foucault and Bernard Cohn, this type of colonial knowledge production often took the form of Koreans answering questions

[32] Robert Oppenheim, "Colonial Rule and Social Change in Korea, 1910-1945," *Historian* 77, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 153–54, https://doi.org/10.1111/hisn.12056_37.
[33] Chulwoo Lee, "Modernity, Legality, and Power in Korea Under Japanese Rule," in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, 1st ed., vol. 184 (Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 23-24.
[34] Hyman Kublin, "The Evolution of Japanese Colonialism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 2, no. 1 (1959): 80.
[35] Chulwoo Lee, "Modernity, Legality, and Power in Korea Under Japanese Rule," 38-39.

about themselves within the confines of Japanese understandings of Korea, thereby essentializing their own socio-cultural formations. In census collection, then, the Japanese legal-governmental apparatus imposed a rigid, essentialized view of Korea that the Korean respondents in turn re-imposed upon themselves.[36]

All of the exigencies above motivated liquor taxation during the Japanese Occupation, a significant part of our analysis. Liquor taxation was a vehicle by which the Japanese legal-governmental apparatus regulated and reorganized liquor production around Japanese capital, which was crucial to the development of diluted soju but spelled disaster for the tradition of home-brewing that had existed for centuries. Brewing for home consumption was severely restricted, and laws on minimum and maximum quantities of production forced many smaller breweries to shut down. This may have been a calculated move in order to "expunge traditional ways of life in the name of civilization," and many colonialists of the era do indeed deploy the rhetoric of sanitation and cleanliness in support of prohibiting home-brewing. Another motivating force was that of government revenue. Taken together, liquor and tobacco taxes increased from 5% of government revenues in 1910 to 29% by 1920, and by the time the state instituted a tobacco monopoly, liquor taxes accounted for 20% of all tax revenues. But Lee esteems above all liquor's "instrumentality in the interjection of state power into the daily lives of people." Liquor taxation and the concomitant restrictions provided pretexts for raids against the unauthorized brewing of liquor. Government officials had access to information on birthdays, anniversaries, and dates for ancestral rites, and would storm the premises in search of bootlegged liquor during or after these ceremonies. State regulation and commercialization of what had

[36] Shantanu Havaldar, "Favourites of Fallen Kings: Eunuchs and the Colonial Transition in Northern India" (Amherst College, 2018), 18.

heretofore been a private, non-commercial activity rendered liquor production a reminder of the unprecedented reach of the modernization of colonial power.[37]

Reinvention of Tradition

Arjun Appadurai writes of his youth in Bombay, "I saw and smelled modernity reading *Life* and American college catalogs at the United States Information Service library, seeing B-grade films (and some A-grade ones) from Hollywood at the Eros Theater...," thereby demonstrating that the advent of modernity brought with it not only new material environments but also new ways of regarding the world.[38] But these new environments and new ways of thinking sometimes displaced existing modes of living and ruptured continuities with a communal pre-modern past. Defining "tradition" to be the common "culture" that arose from these claimed continuities, scholars such as Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger have demonstrated that these traditions are often the "conscious products of modern state formation" and have therefore been subject to processes of reinvention and revitalization.[39] The aforementioned two terms are preferred in this thesis instead of the more common term "invention," given that the assertion that a tradition was "invented" immediately conjures up images of a past that is artificial and by extension inauthentic. It should not be surprising, then, that many within and without the academe have accused those who write on "invented tradition" of having a "politically revisionist and anti-native rubric," especially in the case of deploying

[37] Chulwoo Lee, "Modernity, Legality, and Power in Korea Under Japanese Rule," 39, 41-42.
[38] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, 1 edition, Public Worlds 1 (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 1.
[39] Laurel Kendall, ed., *Consuming Korean Tradition in Early and Late Modernity: Commodification, Tourism, and Performance* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2011), 4.

these terms against non-Western peoples.[40] Especially given the painful recent history of colonization in Korea, the terms "reinvention" and "revitalization" are preferred here so as to minimize the undermining of cultural agency.

These processes sometimes manifested in a nostalgia for a bygone form of cultural authenticity. For instance, anthropologists of Japan have described a late twentieth-century nostalgia for a vanished rural way of life that is construed to be "authentic" by being free from the clutches of modernization and Westernization. This lost home village (*furusato*) is then aggressively merchandised in the form of tourism, cultural performances, folklore, and mass-marketed local products. While we see some parallels in South Korea of the nostalgic consumption of "rural" foods, goods, and performances in the face of the industrialization and accompanying loss of rural bearings in the 1960s and 1970s, modern South Korea and modern Japan must be compared with caution. Korea found itself launched into modernity through the Japanese colonial encounter, and as the Colonial Modernity framework demonstrates, this modernity had unextractable repercussions in the industrialization of post-colonial South Korea. Therefore, the nostalgia for a culturally authentic past evinced in modern constructions of tradition is not for a past that was lost, so much as for one that was wrested away.[41] That it is post-colonial *matters* in the reinvention and revitalization of tradition in post-colonial South Korea, and Colonial Modernity and the politics of authenticity require, at the very least, a seat at the table.

The colonial period left an indelible mark on soju. That much is true. But soju continues to be molded and shaped in the post-colonial era by exigencies that are not all post-colonial in

[40] Jocelyn Linnekin, "Cultural Invention and the Dilemma of Authenticity," *American Anthropologist*, no. 2 (1991): 446.
[41] Laurel Kendall, *Consuming Korean Tradition in Early and Late Modernity*, 5-6.

nature, that is, not all rooted in the colonial period. So even if we reckon with the colonial period with Colonial Modernity, what are we to make of how soju's more decisive features continue to be codified and reified in the modern day? Laurel Kendall suggests that the study of commodity consumption offers a way to bridge scholarship on "modernity" in the Japanese Occupation and that on "late modernity" in South Korea. After all, according to Kendall, modern South Koreans often consume tradition through modern commodity forms, whether through performances, media, department stores, or even commercial venues for food, tea, or alcohol. It is no coincidence that these venues of consumption are in many ways apparatuses of modernity that were first introduced during the colonial period.[42] In addition, as we have demonstrated, commodity consumption is enabled by a capitalist system bound up in the logics of colonialism. Stephen Vlastos takes this a step further by linking invented tradition with the emergence of capitalism, arguing that "capitalism drives the production of new cultural practices, just as the nation-state mobilizes the production of modern political traditions."[43] Finally, the consumption of tradition becomes a perhaps patriotic enterprise in modern day Korea given that many indigenous traditions were almost eradicated during the forced assimilation policies of the Japanese Occupation.

If we take soju to be an "object," we might deploy frameworks of the recently reinvigorated anthropology of material culture by beginning with the notion that objects (in the broadest sense) can be or have been imbued with a moral or emotional significance, taking on new representational forms and meanings. Anthropologists have argued time and time again that objects, especially foods, are a means of self-expression and differentiation. Among these

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[42] Laurel Kendall, *Consuming Korean Tradition in Early and Late Modernity*, 3.
[43] Stephen Vlastos, *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan*, 1st edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 9.

anthropologists, Appadurai in the *Social Life of Things* alighted the academe to the shifting signification of objects as it moved between domains.[44] Taking this further, Kendall writes that in both the colonial and the post-colonial periods, a curious phenomenon occurred in which "quotidian or once little-valued things" were rendered as "icons of Koreanness."[45]

For instance, Kyung-koo Han demonstrates an alignment between the path of kimchi and the path of South Korea throughout the second half of the twentieth century. After South Korea emerged from the Korean War, the war-torn nation's extreme poverty warranted a climate in which needless consumption was frowned upon. In addition, kimchi and other traditional foods were almost encouraged to be regarded as nonnutritious and base. Industrial kimchi producers shifted their marketing strategies in kind: Han notes that their advertisements began to emphasize values such as "hominess, tradition, authenticity, naturalness, the environment, safety, cleanliness, and nativism."[46] Even though domestic production and consumption of kimchi has shrunken as South Korea took its place in an increasingly globalized world, kimchi transitioned from an earlier identification as a "smelly and combustible food" to become not only a hip, nutritional food but also as a symbol of national identity for Koreans both at home and abroad.[47] Soju, too, has been an object of multiple and shifting value throughout the twentieth century, although this will be parsed out throughout the entirety of this thesis.

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[44] Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
[45] Kendall, *Consuming Korean Tradition*, 12-13.
[46] Kyung-Koo Han, "The 'Kimchi Wars' in Globalizing East Asia:: Consuming Class, Gender, Health, and National Identity," in *Consuming Korean Tradition in Early and Late Modernity*, Commodification, Tourism, and Performance (University of Hawai'i Press, 2011), 154.
[47] Han, "Kimchi Wars," 149.

Concluding Remarks

While much of my thesis relies on the frameworks above, I will borrow the words of Lola Milholland in saying that directly engaging with and challenging the anthropological discussions of the meaning of consumption and of dietary identity has proven to be beyond my scope. Like Milholland, in many places I am taking the subject of an anthropologist and treating it from the lens of a historian, even subordinating this subject in some places to the demands of certain historical frameworks. But I am also operating with the belief, courtesy of my advisor Professor Maxey, that History is at best omnivorous. Therefore, in contrast to Milholland, the flying buttresses of my thesis lie not in anthropology but in the historical study of modernity.[48]

My thesis does not exactly follow the mode of scholarship of Lola Milholland, Kyung-koo Han, Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, and others that are exploring cultural identity through the histories of foods. For instance, Ohnuki-Tierney uses rice as a metaphor in her book *Rice as Self* to explore the ways in which the Japanese cultural and racial identity has been conceptualized in relation to various historical Others.[49] In contrast, instead of exploring a shifting Korean cultural identity *per se*, my thesis instead seeks to study soju and its various incarnations to reveal insights and raise questions on the nature of colonial modernity and its reverberations in South Korea. Borrowing Vlastos's formulation of the reinvention of tradition, the hope is that a critical study of soju may be more heuristic than theoretical in that it raises new and important historical questions.[50]

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[48] Lola Milholland, "Bitter Medicine, Luscious Delicacy: A Cultural History of Beef in Modern Japan" (Amherst College, 2007), 15.
[49] Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, *Rice as Self: Japanese Identities through Time* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).
[50] Vlastos, *Mirror of Modernity*, 5.

Given this stated aim, I have limited the scope of my thesis to a selective history of soju in Korea and Korea alone. In doing so, I have inadvertently traced a lineage of the undivided pre-1948 "Korea" to modern-day South Korea. Therefore, actors such as China, the Mongol Empire, the United States, North Korea, and even in some cases Japan have only been cast with respect to their relevance to South Korea after 1948 and an imagined "Korea" before 1948. This is despite the fact that soju as a distilled liquor has historically been a transnational commodity, and this is also despite the fact that soju is perhaps becoming global in a new way given that Jinro Chamisul is the best-selling liquor brand not just in Korea but in the entire world. I am sorry to say that the "hook" of this thesis, Brandon Hill and Tokki Soju, are actors whose stories are incomplete without a widening of this scope to globalization and are therefore only mentioned in passing for the remainder of this thesis.

But what even is "Korea"? That North and South Korea are arbitrarily separated by an artificial border with competing claims to "Korea-ness" may obscure the issue at hand. Even the term "Korean" is laden with the contingency that throughout the colonial period, the term as the category *Chōsen-jin* was a bureaucratic, essentializing, and derogatory classification. Just as Eugene Weber argued that the French Third Republic transformed "peasants into Frenchmen," so too have Shin and Robinson suggested that the uneven spread of colonial modernity turned "peasants into Koreans."[51] Even today, terms such as "Korea" and "the Koreans" are broad generalizations that are by nature reductive, and do not account for the vast array of groupings within these classifications that overlap, contradict, and fall over one another. But as Kendall notes, we can track several historical processes that were enabled by a setting of Korea in which

[51] Shin and Robinson, *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, 14.

the imagined community was imagined as monoethnic.[52] With this in mind, I use terms such as "Korea" or "the Koreans" in the singular throughout my thesis, doing my best to position myself within a collective Korean imagination. Lola Milholland wrote that she had cast actors in her drama that did not select their roles, and in the end I have unavoidably done the same.[53]

My thesis is divided into three chapters that are organized chronologically but do not follow a chronological order. In the first chapter, I take the Korean War (1950 - 1953) as my starting point, presupposing the existence of South Korea and presupposing the notion that Korea emerged from the Japanese Occupation already renegotiating and redefining certain processes of modernity. I will investigate the popularization of diluted soju before then exploring how the more decisive features of soju as a "national liquor" were codified and reified in the latter half of the twentieth century. But the historical narratives presented in this chapter are often predicated on the existence of a "traditional Korea" in a pre-modern, pre-colonial past. Therefore my second chapter jumps back in time to a pre-colonial moment that demonstrates both the existence of a thriving liquor tradition that precedes soju and the localization of soju consumption to the upper classes. This coupled with the conspicuous absence of the rhetoric of nationhood in this chapter alights us to the fact that there was a rupture of sorts between the pre-colonial and the post-colonial moment. My third chapter on the Japanese Occupation, then, investigates this rupture further. Themes such as the tension between "local" and "national," "modern" and "traditional," and the shifting place of women are interspersed throughout.

Positioning the colonial period as a "culmination" allows us to privilege colonial modernity and its reverberations in our study of soju. However, this organization may give the

[52] Kendall, *Consuming Korean Tradition*, 146.
[53] Milholland, "Bitter Medicine, Luscious Delicacy," 13-14.

impression that the colonial period is a “missing piece” to a puzzle or is the “machine” that takes in an input and spits out an output. I will warn the reader to not let the seemingly well-defined boundaries of this organization mislead them, as this organization, like the metaphors that it may generate, is reductive, artificial, and unavoidably arbitrary. I will leave the disclaimer that the aforementioned metaphors are reductive and do not present any complete picture of soju, of colonial modernity, or even of Korea. There are times in this thesis in which I let my ambition get the better of me and I portray my Korean actors as constantly tormented by the exigencies of colonial modernity and its discontents whenever they drink a glass of soju. But I do hope that the reader will walk away viewing soju as a useful lens through which colonial modernity can be explored.

Chapter 1: The Post-Colonial

In September 2017, the HiteJinro Co., Ltd. announced the rebranding of one line of their best-selling Chamisul soju. The company offers three brands of diluted soju, differentiated by Alcohol By Volume (ABV): "Chamisul 16.9" (16.9% ABV), "Chamisul Fresh" (17.8% ABV), and "Chamisul Classic" (20.1% ABV). While the "Chamisul Fresh" line outstrips the competition and is the best-selling soju in the world, the company maintained their "Chamisul Classic" line to cater to the tastes of older generations that had grown accustomed to soju with a high ABV.[54] But the line would be called "Chamisul Classic" no more - henceforth from September 2017, this soju would be known as "Chamisul Original."

HiteJinro Head of Marketing Oh Seong-taek announced that "Chamisul Original" would be an "authentic (*chintcha*) soju for those that appreciate the authentic (*chintcha*)."[55] The Korean word *chintcha* was mentioned repeatedly, a word that can be variously translated as authentic, real, or genuine. "Even in the 'low-ABV culture' that we're living in," Oh continued, "thanks to our customers who love the taste of soju's true colors, we had a solid base for our Chamisul Classic line that we will strive to continue with Chamisul Original."[56] A label redesign featured the Jinro toad logo and the red color traditionally used on all Jinro offerings. What was new was the English word "original" transliterated in Korean and the phrase "Since 1924" featured in English.[57]

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[54] Nicholas Harkness, "Softer Soju in South Korea," *Anthropological Theory* 13, no. 1/2 (2013): 12–30.
[55] Original Text: "참이슬 오리지널은 진짜를 즐길 줄 아는 사람이 찾는 그야말로 진짜 소주."
[56] Original Text: "저도주 문화의 확산 속에서도 소주 본연의 맛을 사랑하는 소비자 덕분에 확고한 영역을 구축할 수 있었던 만큼 참이슬 오리지널의 진정한 가치를 지켜나갈 것."
[57] Choi Eun-seok, "하이트진로, '빨뚜' 참이슬…'참이슬 오리지널'로 이름 변경," *The Korean Economy (한국경제)*, September 11, 2017, http://magazine.hankyung.com/business/apps/news?popup=0&nid=01&c1=1003&nkey=2017091101137000051&mode=sub_view.

The rebranding was accompanied by a new poster campaign. Under the slogan "Authentic People, Authentic Soju" ("*chintcha saram chintcha soju*"), the poster features three men wearing clothing typical of South Korean salarymen. These three men are actually three HiteJinro employees and, perhaps for the sake of authenticity, their names and HiteJinro branch locations are featured: Kim Joon-hui of the Incheon branch, Kang Yeong-chan of the Special Western branch, and Lee Yul of the Sooncheon branch. The poster also includes traditional *anju*, or dishes typically paired with alcohol, in an ambient setting that features woodwork typical of a *hanok,* or a Korean traditional house. Irrespective of brand, soju advertisements have rarely deviated from the formula of featuring celebrity women holding a soju shot glass. It is rare for soju advertisements to feature men and rarer still for these advertisements to feature the actual consumption of soju.[58]

A look at the Chamisul Classic/Original marketing campaigns of previous years reveals a tradition of showcasing tradition. A 2015 print ad features the Korean singer-songwriter IU in what is commonly understood to be 1920s garb, with the slogan "appreciating tradition" ("*chŏngt'ongŭl chŭlginda*"). Going further back to 2013, the poster campaigns feature two Korean phrases written in brushstroke: the first, "a soju-esque soju" ("*sojudaun soju*"), and the second, "that which is 'classic' is always fresh even with the passage of time." One poster features the various phases of the moon, and the other juxtaposes the modern product with an artistic rendition that is evocative of the print media of the early twentieth century. Everything about the advertising suggests that the Chamisul Original soju is not only essentially Korean, but also a product that has a direct unbroken lineage from 1924. Even after the nation faced the

[58] Yi Chihyŏng 이지형, *Soju Iyagi 소주 이야기 [The Story of Soju]*. 살림지식총서 54. Paju, Gyeonggi-do: Sallim Books 살림지식총서, 2015: 43.

Japanese Occupation, World War II, a division in two, the Korean War, the 1960s industrialization at breakneck speed, various efforts at democratization, the IMF crisis, and globalization through Samsung, Hyundai, Korean dramas, and K-Pop, South Korea and soju seem to have come out of the past one hundred years relatively unscathed. This picture goes down well - it looks like we don't even need a chaser.

Fig. 3: Two Chamisul Classic/Original marketing posters. The first, the aforementioned "Authentic People, Authentic Soju," and the second, "appreciating tradition" featuring the Korean singer-songwriter IU. Courtesy of HiteJinro.

But what does it mean for Jinro to stake their authenticity - their state of being *chintcha* - in their origins in 1924? There is more to this claim than sheer longevity. The year 1924 is in the earlier part of the Japanese Occupation (1910 - 1945), a period of Korean history with very real reverberations that are still felt to this day. If we agree that soju is a Korean national liquor and is imbued with a national identity of sorts, then to claim that Chamisul Original is a "soju-esque

soju" is to claim that something that is so intrinsically Korean has its roots in a period of colonial subjugation. There is more truth to this statement than is immediately apparent, although this will be parsed out in greater detail in the succeeding chapters. But the question begs to be asked: How and when were the modern features of soju codified and reified?

Momentarily returning to "Authentic People, Authentic Soju" ("*chintcha saram chintcha soju*"), we find in the traditional foods on offer and the ambience and woodwork of the *hanok* a certain timelessness. But this very timelessness does not rest well with the fact that the three men featured are very real employees bound to the present. The fact of the matter is that very few modern consumers, and certainly none of the three models, have a real lived experience of 1924. But when consumers view the *hanok* and traditional foods of this ad, or the brushstrokes and prints of the other ads, they instantly recognize in these ads not only a bygone era but a certain nostalgia for this bygone era. This is a textbook example of what Arjun Appadurai calls "armchair nostalgia" - a central feature of modern merchandising that inculcates "nostalgia without lived experience or collective historical memory."[59] Consumers will recognize certain tropes of 1920s Korea, or pre-modern Chosŏn, that they have experienced through other media and need only possess the "faculty of nostalgia" to feel a loss that they have never actually suffered.

But Appadurai glosses over how the various pasts for which nostalgias are inculcated can sometimes overlap, contradict, or fall over one another. Take, for example, the coworkers drinking soju after-hours that is unambiguously presented in this ad. It is true that this is a firmly codified dimension of modern soju consumption in South Korea. As Myung Oak Kim and Sam

[59] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Public Worlds 1 (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 78.

Jaffe argue, drinking is so critical to South Korean working life that even if workers do not want to drink, they must "follow the ritual of drinking at bars, karaoke bars, and room salons" because it is a "way to establish trust."[60] But the roots of this codification may lie in a past more recent than 1924. As Robert Koehler notes, soju was often consumed by laborers in South Korea's rapid industrialization of the 1970s much as brandy was a liquor of choice for the laborers of the English Industrial Revolution, as it was a cheap, efficient way to get drunk after a long day of work.[61] Also consider the setting of the *hanok* and the choice *anju*, in addition to the fact that the ad features a group of men and no women. This is evocative of any number of things, such as the *chumak* (roadside taverns) of the Koryŏ or Chosŏn dynasties or the dilapidated *sulchip* (pubs) that gained popularity in the democratization movements of the 1960s-1980s and served as spaces for political expression.[62] These spaces were usually constituted of interior design, foods, and masculine spaces that were, if not an exact replica, at least similar enough to our modern constructions of these pasts that are evoked here. All of these things have entered the modern imagination of soju, and it is difficult to place any one historical condition that proved decisive in the codification. But soju has been codified and reified in specific forms today, and tracing these processes is precisely the objective of this chapter.

[60] Myung Oak Kim and Sam Jaffe, *The New Korea: An Inside Look at South Korea's Economic Rise*, First edition (New York: AMACOM, 2010), 188.
[61] Robert Koehler, *Korean Wines & Spirits: Drinks That Warm the Soul* (Seoul: Seoul Selection USA, Inc., 2015), 50.

[62] Sim Chuyong, "술문화로 본 그 때 그 시절," *The Yonsei Chunchu*, October 31, 2009, http://chunchu.yonsei.ac.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=14352.

Jinro Soju: Since 1924

Can we really trace the origins of HiteJinro to 1924? Sort of. Chang Hakyŏp, the man who would eventually go on to head the Jinro Corporation, did indeed found the Chinch'ŏn Brewing Company on October 3, 1924. Chang was born shortly before the Annexation of 1910 in Yonggang-gun, South P'yŏngan-do, a region historically known for soju and located today in North Korea. Given that the southern regions were a more agrarian part of the country and enjoyed more temperate weather, soju was only distilled in the south in the summers, and in small batches at that. Brewed alcoholic beverages such as *Makkŏlli* and *yakchu* were far more accessible to the inhabitants of the south than distilled liquors such as soju. In contrast, the harsher weather in the north occasioned the distilling of soju all year round in the provinces of P'yŏngan-do and Hamgyŏng-do.[63]

The eldest of six children, Chang seems to have had a happy childhood. He was well educated, and a couple months after his graduation from the Chinnamp'o Public Trade School he spent some time teaching Korean. But this stint lasted only two years. As his home region was famous for soju, it seems that Chang decided that it was soju and not education where his future lay. The 1920s was a period of intense Korean entrepreneurship, right on the heels of the 1920 repeal of the Company Ordinance that had heretofore restricted such activity.[64] With the times, Chang established his own Chinch'ŏn Brewing Company in his hometown in 1924, and chose the

[63] Yi Sŏngu 이성우, *Han'guk Shikp'um Sahoesa 韓國食品社會史 [A Social History of Korean Foods]* (Seoul: Kyomunsa 敎文社, 1984), 282.
[64] Eckert, *Offspring of Empire*, 45.

name Jinro[65] for his trademark. The company became a limited partnership business entity five years later.[66]

If both Chang and his company were based in the northern regions of Korea, why is Jinro a South Korean company today? Throughout the Japanese Occupation, Chang seems to have done quite well for himself, enough to draw the ire of the Communist government that took hold north of the 38th parallel after the end of the Japanese Occupation. After the Korean War broke, he joined thousands of others and fled from North Korea to Busan, at the southeastern tip of South Korea. There, he was a partner with the Donghwa Brewing Company and produced the trademarked Kŭmnyŏn[67] Soju for some time. He eventually liquidated his assets and founded his own Kup'o Brewing Company in 1952. Chang may have wanted to downplay his northern origins in a period in which such a background would be politically suspect, because he chose the name "Naktonggang" for his product as a reference to the regional symbol and famous river passing through Busan that played a vital role during the Korean War. He seems to have enjoyed some success with this new brewing company, as he eventually expanded from Busan to a new factory in Seoul in 1954, directly after the end of the Korean War in 1953. It was upon arriving in Seoul that he proceeded to establish the Sŏgwang Liquor Makers Inc., removing the regional symbol "Naktonggang" in favor of reinstating a name with more universal appeal. From that point on, Chang produced soju under his original trademarked name Jinro, meaning "true dew."[68]

[65] 眞露, meaning "true dew."
[66] Cho Kyŏngsik 조경식, "장학엽 (張學燁)," *Encyclopedia of Korean Culture*, 1995, http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/Contents/Index?contents_id=E0048875.
[67] 金蓮, meaning "golden lotus."
[68] Cho Kyŏngsik 조경식, "장학엽 (張學燁)," *Encyclopedia of Korean Culture*, 1995, http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/Contents/Index?contents_id=E0048875.

A Material Interlude: Distilled vs. Diluted Soju

Chang began his soju business with a traditional distilled soju that boasted an ABV of 35%. But in 1965, Jinro switched their main offering from distilled soju to diluted soju, a variant of soju introduced and popularized during the Japanese Occupation. This was by no means isolated to Jinro - throughout the twentieth century, almost every soju producer in South Korea began producing and distributing diluted soju. In fact, this was so widespread that the Korean word soju came to be associated not only with the diluted variant, but also with the jade green bottles that came to house this diluted liquor.[69] It spread to the extent that today any reference to the original distilled soju requires the adjective "*chŏnt'ong*" "traditional," and many South Koreans may even be surprised to find out that the diluted soju that they have been drinking all their lives is in fact very different from the soju that their ancestors drank prior to the Japanese Occupation. Despite boasting origins of 1924, the Chamisul Classic/Original that we explored earlier is in fact diluted soju as well. While we will present an analysis of the introduction of diluted soju in a succeeding chapter, a brief treatment of its nature is presented below.

Most dictionaries use some variant of the following definition of soju from Merriam-Webster: "a Korean vodka distilled usually from rice or sweet potato."[70] But the South Korean National Institute for the Korean Language actually prescribes not one, but two definitions for soju.[71] The first and more common definition is as follows: "a distilled liquor that is produced through the boiling of a grain-based wine or a sweet potato-based wine. It is crystal

[69] Yi Chihyŏng 이지형. *Soju Iyagi 소주 이야기 [The Story of Soju]*. 살림지식총서 54. Paju, Gyeonggi-do: Sallim Books 살림지식총서, 2015: 12.
[70] "Soju." Merriam-Webster.com. Accessed January 7, 2018. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/soju
[71] A database of "official" spellings and definitions of Korean words is available online at stdweb2.korean.go.kr/

clear and has a high ABV."[72] But while the Institute privileges the first definition, it also includes a second definition: "a diluted liquor produced by mixing water and additives to alcohol."[73]

As dictionary definitions go, this definition may seem pithy to the reader. But we can find a more comprehensive albeit biased treatment of the matter from none other than the HiteJinro Corporation. The English version of their website features a section entitled "Is soju a chemical liquor?" that presents the matter as follows:

> Soju is called 'diluted soju' for the sake of convenience: many people mistakenly think it is a low-quality chemical liquor mixed with water and alcohol. This is simply a name that is used for the purpose of classification under the Liquor Tax Act and does not reflect its characteristics. Diluted soju can actually be classified as a grain wine. It is made by fermenting rice, barley, sweet potato, and tapioca and filtering any unwanted substances by using a continuous distiller. When compared to traditional soju, which is a distilled soju, it is more accurate to call it a 'modern soju.'[74]

HiteJinro presents a friendly, easily digestible definition for diluted soju. But historians are far less amenable to this liquor. Many have chosen to attack diluted soju for not being a "real soju" by focusing on the use of tapioca.[75] Tapioca is a starch extracted from a cassava root native to Brazil. But because it can be produced cheaply and grown in poor soil, countries all over the world grow cassava and extract tapioca for a variety of different purposes, including as a base material for spirits. Ethanol can actually be produced from any material that contains starches and sugars, which is why Koreans have traditionally produced alcoholic beverages from all sorts of grains (e.g. rice, barley, wheat, corn) and root vegetables (e.g. potatoes, sweet potatoes) throughout history.

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[72] Original Text: "곡주나 고구마주 따위를 끓여서 얻는 증류식 술. 무색투명하고 알코올 성분이 많다."
[73] Original Text: "알코올에 물과 향료를 섞어서 얻는 희석식 술."
[74] HITEJINRO, "Soju, True or False," HITEJINRO's Guide to Alcoholic Beverages, accessed October 31, 2017, https://en.hitejinro.com/customer/soju_guide.asp.
[75] Yi Chihyŏng 이지형, *Soju Iyagi 소주 이야기 [The Story of Soju]*, 12.

But the twentieth century brought an unprecedented global exchange of goods, and Korean diluted soju producers naturally sought out tapioca as it was the cheapest base product available. Yi Chihyŏng estimates that about 80% of the ethanol that is diluted and sweetened to make soju is sourced from tapioca, with the remaining 20% sourced from the miscellaneous grains or root vegetables listed above. When the miscellaneous grains include rice, he writes, it is almost always either imported rice or older rice not suitable for direct consumption.[76] Thus, while HiteJinro does not publish the content of their ethanol, it is likely that the tapioca which they list last is actually the one that comprises the largest part of their final product. Given that Korean soju companies import tapioca from Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Thailand, it turns out that the lion's share of Korea's national drink is not even sourced within Korea's borders.

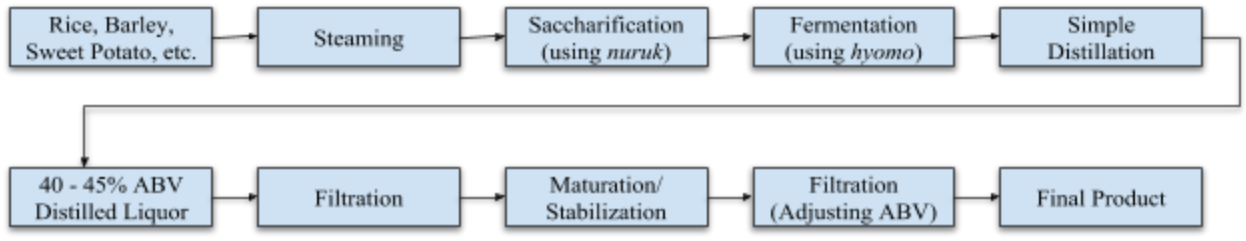
Diluted soju and distilled soju have very different production processes. If we were to break it down into simple terms, distillation is the act of using the different boiling points of liquids to separate a "pure" liquid from a "mixture" of liquids. One common application is using a process of heating, evaporating, cooling, and condensing to separate ethanol and water.[77] To produce diluted soju, then, one would have to apply continuous distillation to separate the water from the ethanol to produce an "essence"[78] before diluting the "essence" all over again with water and other additives. For the convenience of the reader, graphics illustrating the distinction between distilled soju and diluted soju (Figure A) and the production processes of distilled and diluted soju (Figures B & C) are reproduced below. These figures were compiled by Kang

[76] Yi Chihyŏng 이지형, *Soju Iyagi 소주 이야기 [The Story of Soju]*, 24.
[77] BBC, "Distillation," BBC - GCSE Bitesize, accessed March 21, 2018, http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/science/edexcel_pre_2011/oneearth/fuelsrev1.shtml.
[78] 酒精

Hee-kyung using data compiled by Bohae Brewery Co., Ltd. Director of Research Chŏng Chongt'ae in his article, "How is Soju Produced?"[79] Noteworthy observations from the three figures include the use of tapioca in diluted soju and the sharp ABV drop from 95% after distillation to less than 25% after dilution, hence the name diluted soju.

	Distilled Soju	Diluted Soju
Raw Materials Used	Grains (Rice, Barley, etc.) and/or Root Vegetables (Sweet Potato, etc.)	Grains (Rice, Barley, etc.) and/or Roots (Sweet Potato, Tapioca, etc.)
Production Methods	Produced using *Nuruk* (Korean traditional fermentation starter) and *Hyomo* (yeast)	Produced using *Hyomo* (yeast), Liquefaction, Saccharification, Enzyme Purification.
Distillation Method	Simple Distillation	Continuous Distillation
ABV After Distillation	40 - 45%	95%
ABV of Final Product	25 - 40%	< 25%
Product Examples	Traditional liquors such as *Andong Soju, Munbaeju, Igangju, Pyŏkkyeju, Yet'yang, Ch'ŏnji*	Most commercially available soju brands such as *Chamisul, ChumChurum, Good Day, C1*

Fig. 4: A comparison of distilled soju and diluted soju.



[79] Kang Hee-kyung, "A Study on the Image of Premium Soju Package Design" (Sookmyung Women's University, 1996), http://www.riss.kr/search/detail/DetailView.do?p_mat_type=be54d9b8bc7cdb09&control_no=0d43fe230279e455.

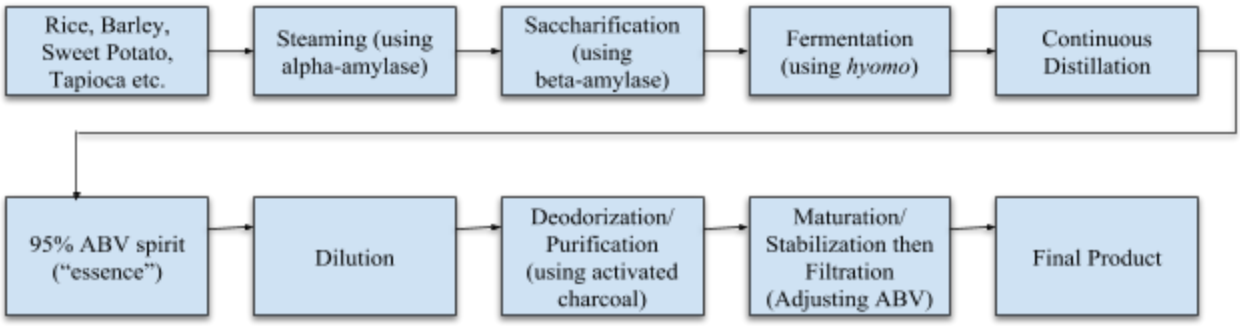


Fig. 5: A flowchart of the production processes of distilled soju (top) and diluted soju (bottom).

There may be some confusion about the "essence" that is produced through continuous distillation. Yi Sanghŭi refers to this 95% ABV essence as "undiluted soju,"[80] thereby suggesting that diluted soju is simply a dilution of "real soju."[81] But the problem with this line of analysis is that as we can see in Figures B and C, the 95% ABV ethanol is produced through a production process wildly different from that of the distilled soju. It is perhaps more accurate to say that this is an entirely different liquor that in no stage of its process was soju, especially if it used the tapioca root. Yi Chihyŏng's decision to refer to diluted soju as a "soju-tasting liquor" rings true. This is because the taste of soju is emulated through the final stages of adding various additives in the "Maturation/Stabilization then Filtration (Adjusting ABV)" phase. Under this conception, these additives are what makes the diluted soju even "soju" in the first place.

But what are we to make of this? We can attack diluted soju all we want for not being primarily sourced in Korea or for being somehow disingenuous for passing itself off as soju. We can sadly admit that one will never find a "real soju" in the back-alleys of the streets of Seoul, as Yi Chihyŏng does at the end of his discussion.[82] But the fact of the matter is that it was diluted

[80] Yi Sanghŭi refers to this 95% ABV ethanol as "소주 원액," which literally translates to "undiluted soju" or "pure soju."
[81] Yi Sanghŭi 이상희, *Sul: Han'gugŭi Sul Munhwa 술: 한국의 술 문화 (Liquor: Korea's Liquor Culture)* (Seoul: Sun Publishing, 2009), 155.
[82] Yi Chihyŏng 이지형, *Soju Iyagi 소주 이야기 [The Story of Soju]*, 12.

soju and not a traditional distilled soju such as *Andong Soju* or *Munbaeju* that broke world records or became anything remotely close to a national liquor. This diluted composite alcoholic beverage (a term we will hopefully never use again) was a liquor enabled by and defined by industrial production, marking a fundamental shift in how people relate to consumption. Borrowing HiteJinro's suggested terminology, this diluted soju is the "modern soju" that we know and love today despite its supposed inauthenticity.

Yi Chihyŏng writes that in exchange for the labels of "high-quality" and "traditional," diluted soju acquired the label of "economic cost," and it was precisely this economic cost that enabled soju to steadily become an anthem of the common man and the hard-knock life in the twentieth century.[83] Diluted soju, for all its woes and shortcomings, could be produced, distributed, and consumed cheaply, and it was this cheap cost that came to sustain its unending popularity.[84] But if we take the cost of diluted soju as a motivator for its success, what were the conditions that made this cheap cost possible? As we described in the introduction, the answer begins with taxation, government rice restrictions, and industrialization.

Taxation

The HiteJinro definition of diluted soju refers to a "Liquor Tax Act." The Liquor Tax Act was a government decree during the Japanese Occupation and will be addressed in the next chapter, although its invocation here suggests that taxation is central to the modern incarnation of soju. Indeed, taxation was actually one of the reasons for the enduring popularity of diluted soju in the twentieth century. According to Yi Sŏngu, one of the reasons why soju maintained a low

[83] Yi, Chihyŏng 이지형, *Soju Iyagi 소주 이야기 [The Story of Soju]*, 27.
[84] At South Korean convenience stores soju can be bought for about 1,700 KRW ($1.58 USD at the time of writing). Many of my friends who visit South Korea never fail to comment on how cheap it is - a cost-efficient good time.

cost was the low tax rate on soju. He notes that even after the Liberation of 1945, the South Korean government inherited and retained the liquor tax ordinances[85] of the Japanese Occupation.[86] Yi broke down the production costs and tax rates of various liquors commonly sold in Korea in 1984. The data that he compiled is reproduced in a chart below:

All values in 1984 KRW	Beer (500 mL)	Diluted Soju (360 mL)	*Valley 9 Gold Whiskey*[87] (700 mL)	*Paek'wasubong Ch'ŏngju*[88] (700 mL)	*Majuang Wine*[89] (700 mL)
Production Cost	147.24	140.65	3201.28	1174.56	1622.09
Tax	330.54	71.11	11870.60	2219.35	652.88
(Liquor Tax)	220.86	49.23	7871.10	1409.47	405.52
(Defense Tax)	66.25	4.45	2372.65	420.52	40.55
(VAT)	43.43	19.43	1626.84	389.36	206.81
Factory Price	447.78	213.76	15071.88	3393.91	2274.97
Consumer Price	620.00	290.00	18640.00	4283.00	2900.00
Percentage of Liquor Tax Shouldered by Consumer (%)	53.3	24.5	63.7	51.8	22.5

Fig. 6: The liquor taxation scheme in South Korea in 1984.

As we can see from the data, the liquor tax was no small fee. It was an important source of revenue for the government, and we can only surmise about the logic governing the tax rates for these domestic liquors. The percentage of liquor tax shouldered by the consumer ranged from 22.5% to 63.7% of the consumer price - so if a customer was purchasing a bottle of *Valley 9 Gold*

[85] 酒稅令
[86] Yi Sŏngu 이성우, *Han'guk Shikp'um Sahoesa 韓國食品社會史 [A Social History of Korean Foods]* (Seoul: Kyomunsa 敎文社, 1984): 298.
[87] A very popular whiskey brand in the 1970s-1990s in South Korea.
[88] 白花壽福. A brand of *ch'ŏngju* still commercially available today in South Korea.
[89] "Majuang Wine" was the first commercially available European-style grape wine that was sourced, produced, and distributed in South Korea.

Whiskey, over half of the money that he would be shelling out would go straight to the government! Diluted soju has the cheapest production cost, tax (liquor tax, defense tax, and VAT), factory price, and consumer price by far. Only the *Majuang Wine* outstrips soju with the lowest "Percentage of Liquor Tax Shouldered by Consumer (%)," although this is perhaps negated by the fact that its price is ten times more expensive. If we were to imagine ourselves as a South Korean of the 1980s looking to drink, there is no contest on what liquor we would most likely choose. While exact figures are not available for this time period, given that liquor taxation was an important source of government revenue throughout the Japanese Occupation, and given that the South Korean government inherited and retained these taxation schemes, we can conclude that it was within the interest of the government to maintain stringent control of liquor production and distribution.[90]

Government Rice Restrictions

After the Liberation of 1945, South Korea faced chronic food shortages that necessitated the import of grains from overseas. Yi Sŏngu argues that within this climate, the use of the scarce amount of available rice for liquor production was unthinkable. The South Korean government sought to alleviate this shortage by first accelerating the development of "grain-free liquors."[91] The government then took more drastic measures by passing the Grain Management Act[92] in 1965 which restricted the use of rice in liquor production altogether. While this may have spelled doom for Korean traditional rice wines such as *makkŏlli* and *yakchu*, many liquor producers

[90] Chulwoo Lee, "Modernity, Legality, and Power in Korea Under Japanese Rule," 39.
[91] 非穀酒
[92] 양곡관리법. The 15th article (제15조) is the most relevant, and the whole text can be accessed here: http://law.go.kr/lsInfoP.do?lsiSeq=22789#0000

instead adapted to this ban by using a starch source made up of 80% flour and 20% corn for their alcoholic beverages. But rice wines such as *makkŏlli* and *yakchu* depended heavily on the use of rice, and despite the brewers' best efforts the original taste of these wines was impossible to truly recreate. According to Yi Sŏngu, the decline in liquor quality sent the upper classes to Western beers and spirits in droves, whereas the working classes who had already developed a taste for *makkŏlli* began incorporating soju in their diets.[93]

But why did soju emerge unscathed? After all, rice had always been an important ingredient in soju production as well. Although soju producers began using *chapkok* (minor cereals) in 1962 with the institution of the "grain-free liquors policy," Yi Sŏngu writes that by the time of his writing in 1984, all soju producers exclusively used sweet potato and molasses. It is probable that Yi was referring here to traditional distilled soju, because he writes two paragraphs later that soju producers (here perhaps of the diluted variant) often purchased the "essence" alloted by the South Korean National Tax Service[94] and diluted it with water before mixing it with the following additives: "sugar, grape sugar, citric acid, saccharine, amino acid, sorbitol, inorganic salts, and other miscellaneous foodstuffs."[95] Simply put, soju being a distilled then diluted liquor shielded it from being as dependent on rice as *makkŏlli* and *yakchu* were in this era. Soju could be made sweet or bitter depending on the soju producer, but the tastes eventually came to deviate so minimally from a set standard that consumers began to choose their soju based on trademark over taste. What was consistent irrespective of producer was that grains were kept to a minimum.

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[93] Yi Sŏngu 이성우, *Han'guk Shikp'um Sahoesa*, 297.
[94] 國稅廳. Note that this was a way in which the government maintained a monopoly on the price-setting and distributing of the "essence."
[95] Original text: "설탕, 포도당, 구연산, 사카린, 아미노산, 솔비톨, 무기염류 등"
Yi Sŏngu 이성우, *Han'guk Shikp'um Sahoesa*, 297.

We can consult a 1970 U.S. Department of Agriculture report to better gauge the food consumption patterns of this era. According to the report, rice production grew at an astronomical rate throughout the 1960s. In South Korea 3.8 million tons of rice were produced in 1964, a figure that had risen to an annual 4.1 million tons by 1969 and was projected to rise even further to an annual 4.8 million tons by 1971, a stunning 27% greater than the 1964 levels. However, due to rapid urbanization[96] in pursuit of rising urban-industrial job opportunities and an explosive growth in population,[97] the 3.5% annual increase in rice production was met with a 6% annual increase in rice consumption. While total rice consumption was 3.6 million tons in 1964, the figure was projected to rise to 5.5 million tons in 1971, or 52% greater than the 1964 levels.[98] Rice production grew in this era, but it was outpaced by the growth in rice consumption which resulted in dangerous shortages across the board.

The government tried to combat the over-reliance on rice by promoting the substitution of other grains such as barley in the Korean diet. However, these promoted changes were slow to take hold, and South Korea ultimately imported about 2 million tons of grains in 1970. Rice, according to Amjad H. Gill, made up the most significant portion of these imports. The report warned that the Korean economy was not in the financial position to sustain a projected rise in import levels.[99] However, with imports buttressing the rice supply and a greater emphasis on rice production throughout the 1970s, Yi Sŏngu claims that in this decade there were some years in

[96] 29.3% of the population lived in an urban area in 1961, a figure that had risen to a projected 39.3% by 1971. Source: Amjad H. Gill, "Changing Food Consumption Patterns in the Republic of Korea," 3.
[97] The population of South Korea increased from 25 million in 1961 to a projected 33 million in 1971. Source: Amjad H. Gill, "Changing Food Consumption Patterns in the Republic of Korea," 3.
[98] Amjad H. Gill, "Changing Food Consumption Patterns in the Republic of Korea," Economic Research Service - Foreign (Economic Research Service, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, 1970), http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiug.30112018973229.
[99] Amjad H. Gill, "Changing Food Consumption Patterns in the Republic of Korea," 11.

which rice supply exceeded demand. Liquor producers responded in 1971 by re-introducing a select amount of rice-based liquors. But because the government strictly regulated the production process of these re-introduced rice-based liquors, consumers found them to be not only bland but also expensive, and these rice-based liquors failed to make a significant impact on the consumer market.[100] From this little anecdote we can argue that by 1971, the South Korean consumer base had already adjusted to the grain-free liquors that flooded the markets. Even if they did not find the chemical metallic taste to their liking, they certainly seemed to have liked the cost.

Speaking of the chemical metallic taste, Brandon Hill of Tokki Soju mentioned in our interview that one of Tokki's finer qualities is that it can be consumed at room temperature. In contrast, mass-market diluted soju is always served chilled. Hill told me that this is because diluted soju tastes so metallic, "the colder you drink it the easier it goes down." According to Hill, diluted soju producers frequently use glycol for this very reason, as its properties as an antifreeze allow distributors to store the product at very cold temperatures. Hill conducted his own set of interviews with older people in South Korea who recalled from the 1970s-1980s always shaking the soju bottle before opening it, a practice that continues to the present day (with some added tricks and bravado). He mentioned that because there were so many chemicals in the diluted soju that would sink to the bottom, many recalled shaking the liquor and then pouring out a part of it before consumption. While most producers use an emulsifier now that suspends the solution, this little anecdote serves to illustrate just how metallic these diluted soju products were at the time.[101]

[100] Yi, Sŏngu 이성우, *Han'guk Shikp'um Sahoesa*, 297.
[101] Brandon Hill (of Tokki Soju) in discussion with the author, February 2018.

Industrialization & Chaebŏl

But a stronger impetus for the widespread popularity of diluted soju in the early years of the Republic of Korea was the rapid industrialization of the 1960s. This provided not only an industrialized model in which the mass production of soju could take place, but also an industrial working class that became its consumer base. South Korea at war's end was, in the words of Bruce Cumings, a "terribly depressing place" still within the clutches of extreme privation and degradation. Much to the consternation of the Americans, South Korea under Syngman Rhee was ruined by the Korean War and stubbornly reliant on American economic aid, falling behind the rapidly industrializing but similarly devastated North throughout the 1950s.[102] Most foreign economic analysts were characteristically bleak about the country's "economic viability," consigning the nation to nothing more than a "buffer between Japan and Communist Asia."[103] But after student-led movements[104] forced the authoritarian Syngman Rhee out of the presidential office and ushered in a period of unstable parliamentary rule, a young Major General named Park Chung Hee led a bloodless coup d'état[105] in 1961 and took control of the South Korean government shortly thereafter.

Upon taking power, Park launched an economic program of aggressive industrial development that focused, among other things, upon the creation of a state that could act as a dictatorial economic force and the concentration of private economic power in a small number of conglomerates known as *chaebŏl*. The economic model that spurred and in many ways enabled

[102] According to official sources, American aid to South Korea in the years 1945-1965 numbered about 12 billion USD. In one year alone (1957), South Korea received from the United States $383 million in economic assistance, $400 million in military aid, and another $300 million for the costs of maintaining an American army presence. Source: Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 306-307.
[103] Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 310.
[104] For more information, please refer to the 4.19 혁명 (April 19 Revolution).
[105] For more information, please refer to the 5.16 군사정변 (May 16 coup).

the rapid industrial growth of South Korea had much in common with the contemporary Japanese model that had produced analogous results. Carter Eckert argues that this was no accident. He notes that Park was a former Imperial Japanese Army officer with a distinctively Japanese militaristic view of the world that he attempted to apply to the development of the nation.[106] Eckert argues in *Offspring of Empire* that Park's rapid industrial development was possible in no small part due to a "core of veteran businessmen" tempered by a different span of rapid industrial growth in the late 1930s-early 1940s, under the Japanese Occupation. Eckert's study of the legacies of colonial industrialization led him to later pronounce the patterns of industrial development as more "Korean-colonial" than Japanese, a topic we will treat in greater detail later.[107]

Jung-en Woo in his expansive study of industrialization in South Korea defines the *chaebŏl* as a "family-owned and managed group of companies that exercises monopolistic or oligopolistic control in product lines and industries."[108] While the Park Chung Hee junta took power under the banner of punishing the wealthy industrialists that had contributed to the inefficient corruption under Syngman Rhee, the Park administration eventually found a way to peacefully coexist with the *chaebŏl*. Broadly, the South Korean government would loan specific *chaebŏl* millions of dollars on negative interest as long as the loans were used to subsidize "import-substituting, heavy, chemical, and export industries."[109] A government-favored *chaebŏl*,

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[106] For more on this topic, please refer to Carter J. Eckert, *Park Chung Hee and Modern Korea: The Roots of Militarism, 1866-1945.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).
[107] Eckert, *Offspring of Empire*, 254, 255.
[108] Woo distinguishes the *chaebŏl* from the Japanese *zaibatsu* to which it is often compared (and with which it shares Chinese characters) by what he calls the "conspicuous absence" of a banking institution in the *chaebŏl*, although he concedes that this may very well change with the trend of financial liberalization.
Woo, Jung-en. *Race to the Swift: State and Finance in Korean Industrialization*. Columbia University Press, 1991: 149.
[109] Woo, *Race to the Swift*, 159.

then, was effectively a "private agency of public purpose," the public purpose being rapid growth in the specific government-designated industries.[110] The government not only incentivized the *chaebŏl* to make these long-term investments, it also wedded the *chaebŏl* to the highly nationalistic political leadership that backed these investments. The *chaebŏl* system in many ways enabled the accelerated industrialization under Park Chung Hee and his successors. However, it was also a very statist, undemocratic system that contributed to the concentration of capital in the hands of a select few.[111] Perhaps the most representative of the *chaebŏl* is the Samsung Group,[112] which interestingly got its start when the founder Yi Pyŏngch'ŏl (1910 - 1987) exported rice liquor to Daegu from his rice mill during the Japanese Occupation.[113]

For a time, the Jinro Group was a *chaebŏl* as well. We left the Jinro story with the establishment of Sŏgwang Liquor Makers Inc. in 1954. But after Chang Hakyŏp established his first subsidiary company (Sŏgwang Industries[114]) in 1961, he changed the name of his holding company to Jinro Liquor Makers Inc. in 1966, before changing it again to the Jinro Group in 1975. When Chang Hakyŏp passed away due to lung cancer in 1985, the Jinro Group followed the standard *chaebŏl* succession protocol with his son Chang Chinho (1952 - 2015) taking the helm as chairman shortly thereafter, although not without contesting claims from his uncle and cousin (also in true *chaebŏl* fashion).[115] Jinro under Chang Chinho enjoyed success for some

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[110] Woo, *Race to the Swift*, 169.
[111] Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 327.
[112] Interestingly, the name *Samsung* which means "three stars" is a play on the "three diamonds" of the Japanese *zaibatsu* Mitsubishi.
[113] Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 327.
[114] 서광산업
[115] Bruce Cumings notes that every *chaebŏl* is associated with a founding family, and that about 70% of the *chaebŏl* groups at the time of his writing (1997) are still held by members of the immediate family. As they are conglomerates, *chaebŏl* succession usually takes the form of the multiple siblings taking control of separate subsidiaries, although often not on the most amicable of terms. What is perhaps most mind-boggling to the outside observer is that just like any good aristocracy, the *chaebŏl* groups also intermarry at staggering rates - one study indicated that 31 out of the 33 largest firms in South Korea have inter-*chaebŏl* or even *chaebŏl*-state marriage

time, diversifying the business into several new industries and even collaborating with the American Coors Brewing Company to launch the best-selling Korean beer *Cass* in 1994.[116] The Jinro Group even claimed the spot of 24th largest conglomerate in South Korea in 1996, boasting 24 subsidiary companies. But underneath this apparent success was a great deal of over-expansion and financial mismanagement, and the Jinro Group was unable to survive the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 and eventually filed for bankruptcy along with other *chaebŏl* such as the Daewoo Group and the Haitai Group.

With that, the soju with which the Jinro Group had established a foothold in the world was sold off to the Hite Brewery Co., Ltd., which is why HiteJinro Co., Ltd. distributes the best-selling soju brand Chamisul today, although under the Jinro label. The disgraced former chairman Chang Chinho was eventually sentenced in 2004 to 30 months in prison for creating a slush fund of more than 600 million KRW, for which he promptly fled to Cambodia and China before dying of a heart attack in 2015.[117] The many scandals that have engulfed the *chaebŏl* groups throughout their history have led many to suspect that the end is near for the nexus of the Korean state and *chaebŏl*, most recently with the 2016 impeachment of former President Park Geun-hye, but as Bruce Cumings says, "I wouldn't hold my breath until it actually happens."[118]

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connections. Because a proper treatment of the subject is outside the scope of this thesis, I will recommend Jung-en Woo's *Race to the Swift: State and Finance in Korean Industrialization* (1991) for the curious reader. Source: Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 327.

[116] In 2017, celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay came under flak for endorsing Cass, which was recently dubbed in a tweet by cartoonist Dami Lee as "maybe the worst beer in the world." Ramsay seems unfazed by the flak, announcing, "I have fallen in love with Korean food, and it doesn't need to have an over-sophisticated, slightly unique beer that costs a fortune." One could probably write an entire thesis on the Korean beer industry, but for now we will focus on soju. Source: Won Ho-jung, "Gordon Ramsay Calls Cass a 'beer of the People,'" *The Korea Herald*, November 19, 2017, http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20171119000230.

[117] Bae Ji-sook, "Ex-Jinro Chairman's Death Reflects Honor and Disgrace of Korean Conglomerates," *The Korea Herald*, June 16, 2015, http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20150616001051.

[118] Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 331.

Regionalization in the Soju Industry

One important feature of the Korean soju industry would be impossible to comprehend without the backdrop of the oligopolistic control so characteristic of *chaeböl* and the authoritarian state structure that enabled its domination. While South Korean drinking habits and the cheap cost may indeed be factors driving the best-selling status of Jinro Chamisul, a larger reason is at play: there simply isn't much competition. The soju market is quite large: in the year 2001, the domestic soju market amounted to $827 million in sales for 2.4 billion bottles, a stunning figure that amounts to 54 bottles (about 20 liters) per capita. In the same year, soju exports totaled $55 million. But Jinro Chamisul accounts for an entire half of the domestic market, with four other firms accounting for an additional 40%.[119] The modern soju industry is characterized by oligopolistic control, with Jinro Chamisul as a Goliath among Goliaths.

There are several reasons for the predominance of Jinro. For one, the Korean government granted Jinro with several privileges such as the exclusive license to produce ginseng liquor in 1972. In addition, Jinro as a *chaeböl* had diversified interests in several different industries. One interesting feature about soju is that in times of economic hardship, sales of Jinro soju in proportion to other more expensive spirits would actually increase. This is why during the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997, Jinro's liquor division had a debt-equity ratio of 362%, whereas the Jinro *chaeböl* as a whole had a debt-equity ratio of 3,081%. This is partly how Jinro's soju division managed to emerge from the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 under new ownership, even after the other subsidiaries had fallen away.[120]

[119] Mauro F. Guillén, ed., "The Role of Small and Medium Enterprises," in *The Limits of Convergence*, Globalization and Organizational Change in Argentina, South Korea, and Spain (Princeton University Press, 2001), 111.
[120] Guillén, *The Limits of Convergence*, 112.

But a large territorial monopoly was perhaps the greatest single reason for Jinro's dominance. The origins of this territorial monopoly lie in a series of government initiatives in the 1970s-1980s. A 1996 South Korean Constitutional Court opinion that declared one of these initiatives unconstitutional gives an authoritative account of the events, as follows. In the early 1970s, the government responded to what the opinion termed a "flooded soju market"[121] by pushing ahead with a merger policy guided by the principle and final goal of "One Province, One Producer."[122] There were a total of about 400 active soju producers in this era, which the government sought to reduce and coalesce into a total of 10 soju producers for the 10 provinces of South Korea.[123]

The government succeeded in achieving "One Province, One Producer" by 1981, but not without instituting two programs: the "'Ethanol for Soju Use' Allocation System"[124] in 1970 and the "Provincial Soju Obligated Purchase System"[125] in 1976. The two programs were intended to prevent a monopoly by any one soju producer while maintaining the balanced development of rural industry. Specifically, the 1970 "'Ethanol for Soju Use' Allocation System" entailed the government allocation of the 95% ABV "essence" produced after continuous distillation and used in the production of diluted soju. What is noteworthy here is that this further demonstrates how dependent the diluted soju product was on the various additives that were added, as virtually every soju producer of this era was using the same government-allocated "essence" for their soju. Under this system, the government would allocate the aggregate demand quantity in accordance

[121] Original Text: "난립한 소주시장"
[122] Original Text: "1도1사"
[123] Kim, Yongchun et al., "주세법 제38조의7 등 위헌제청," 전원재판부 96헌가18 § (1996), http://www.law.go.kr/detcInfoP.do?mode=1&detcSeq=135400#.
[124] 소주용주정배정제도
[125] 自道燒酒 購入命令制度

with each producer's shipping results of the previous year, thereby restricting competition. In a similar fashion, given that each province had a single producer and therefore a single "provincial soju" product, the 1976 "Provincial Soju Obligated Purchase System" required 50% of the soju purchased and distributed by wholesalers to be the respective provincial soju of each retailer.

Fig. 7: (Left) A map of South Korea with the regional distribution of the diluted soju industry. Note the minimal deviation from a prescribed label/bottle design. (Right) The "Jinro toad" on top of a globe in front of the Jinro Chamisul factory in Iksan, Gyeonggi-do. Is Jinro planning world domination? Courtesy of Minju Kim.

According to the court opinion, these two programs were instituted both to restrict competition and to maintain the regional distribution of the soju industry.[126] But could other motives have been at play? Historically it is in the interest of governments to control and regulate

[126] Kim Yongchun et al., "주세법 제38조의7 등 위헌제청," 전원재판부 96헌가18 § (1996), http://www.law.go.kr/detcInfoP.do?mode=1&detcSeq=135400#.

liquor production, especially because it is so tied to a steady source of government revenue. By this point, the South Korean government was already allocating the "essence" used as the base product for all diluted soju producers. The government played a central, dictatorial role in the production of diluted soju in this era, and it may have been in their best interest to limit the number of producers to a select few for ease of regulation and control. It was neither a free market nor democratic. The same vision of capitalist modernity that gave rise to the *chaebŏl* system was likely at play.

The real winner in this arrangement was Jinro. Thanks to Chang Hakyŏp's fortuitous move from Busan to Seoul in 1954, Jinro Chamisul was well-positioned to control the Seoul Metropolitan Area and the surrounding province of Gyeonggi-do, which altogether accounts for an entire half of the nation's population.[127] Other members of this select family include the best-selling Lotte *Chumchurum* of Gangwon-do, *Ip'saeju* of Jeollanam-do, *C1* of Busan, and the *Hallasan Ollae* of Jeju Island. One could theoretically order a bottle of soju in every South Korean province, only to receive a different bottle each time.

What is so fascinating about these mergers is that, according to Yi Jihyŏng, these "regional" diluted soju brands took on fierce regional identities. Bear in mind that the diluted soju production process is more or less uniform, with only the final additives determining the taste of each liquor and alcohol content ranging from 16.5% to 19.5% ABV.[128] The soju producers therefore undertook aggressive marketing campaigns to differentiate their products. Whether it was intentional or not, these mass-market diluted soju brands became theoretically imbued with a regional flavor as if they were local specialties. Perhaps unbeknownst to the actors

[127] Guillén, *The Limits of Convergence*, 112.
[128] Yi Chihyŏng, *Soju Iyagi*, 53.

themselves, this regionalization would have eerie parallels with the local liquor traditions of pre-modern Korea, a topic we will discuss in a following chapter. If we take this to be true, the actors participated in a reinvention of a tradition that invoked nostalgia for a "local," pre-industrial past, even though they had to consume these products in a modern capitalist market in order to consume this tradition.[129] And even after these restrictions were declared unconstitutional in the 1990s, this reinvention of tradition carries on.[130]

After the repeals of these protectionist programs, the smaller provincial soju brands found themselves fighting for their lives against the ever-growing behemoths of the capital. Themselves an amalgamation of the various soju distilleries that had preceded them, the Goliaths of the soju world had to square with the even larger Goliaths that were Jinro Chamisul and Lotte Chumchurum, both of which rank in the top 10 best-selling spirits brands in the world.[131] The metropolitan brands fired the first shots when HiteJinro acquired the Jeollabuk-do provincial soju Pobae Soju in 1997.[132] Lotte Liquors similarly acquired the Chungcheongbuk-do provincial Ch'ungbuk Soju in 2011.[133] The provincial soju producers did not idly sit by in the face of the growing Goliaths. The Gyeongsangnam-do provincial soju Good Day Soju launched an assault on the behemoths in 2015, unleashing a wave of soju "cocktails" that were massively popular among consumers in their 20s. The Good Day blueberry flavor soju cocktail even ranked the highest in a 2015 consumer preferences survey on soju cocktails, sending reverberations

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[129] Kendall, *Consuming Korean Tradition*, 5-6.
[130] The government decided to relax their restrictions on the soju industry and eventually repealed the "Provincial Soju Obligated Purchase System" in 1991 and the "'Ethanol for Soju Use' Allocation System" in 1992, although the former system made a brief comeback in 1995 before finally being declared unconstitutional in 1996.
[131] Jane Ryan and Theodora Sutcliffe, "The World's Best-Selling Spirits," *Difford's Guide for Discerning Drinkers*, accessed February 20, 2018, https://www.diffordsguide.com/encyclopedia/463/bws/the-worlds-best-selling-spirits.
[132] Yi Yuchŏng, "전북 향토 소주회사 보배, 하이트진로에 합병," *The Korean Economy*, August 7, 2013, http://stock.hankyung.com/news/app/newsview.php?aid=201308070131r.
[133] Kim Yŏngi, "'향토주' 충북소주, 롯데그룹으로 넘어간다," *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, March 16, 2011, http://news.khan.co.kr/kh_news/khan_art_view.html?artid=201103162114255&code=950301.

throughout the industry of this blow from below.[134] We have yet to see whether any one soju producer will eke out a monopoly in true *chaebŏl* fashion, but many regional brands and their consumer bases have been fiercely resistant.[135] Therefore we must make clear before proceeding further that while soju may very well be the national liquor, any one soju brand is by no means the national brand, and it may indeed be the case that soju sometimes privileges the local over the national.

The Other Side of Industrialization

The Park Chung Hee administration was well attuned to the importance of a "low-wage, hardworking, and disciplined labor force" in any export-oriented industrialization. The Park labor policy prioritized the creation of favorable investment conditions for foreign capitalists, which proved to be a driving force in the flourishing of the economy taken as a whole. But these victories were won at the terrible price of repeated military crackdowns and widespread labor exploitation. Far from being supportive of workers' rights, the Park administration turned a blind eye at best to labor abuses, and actively denied workers of their rights to organize and defend themselves collectively in labor unions. This harsh reality led some historians such as Hagen Koo to pronounce the Park labor policy a failure, not only because of its undemocratic and repressive nature but also because it left behind a short-sighted system plagued with internal contradictions and labor resistance. According to Koo, Park consistently mobilized workers as nothing more than an element of production and demobilized them as a potential threat to

[134] Yi Toyŏn, "과일소주 선호도, 좋은데이 블루베리 1위," *Yonhap News*, August 4, 2015, http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr/bulletin/2015/08/04/0200000000AKR20150804136300030.HTML.
[135] Yi Jihyŏng, *Soju Iyagi*, 55.

security and national development. Koo even attributes the highly contentious industrial relations of today to labor patterns crudely established during this era.[136]

Worker disaffection was predictably widespread. While low wages were one of their chief concerns, Hagen Koo cites "exceptionally long work hours, hazardous working conditions, arbitrary exercise of power and contemptuous attitudes of managerial employees toward production workers, (and) rampant sexual harassment" as other important grievances. In short, it was more than just low wages but a repression of basic human rights that united these workers in frustration and anger. The self-immolation of workers' rights activist Chŏn T'aeil at the age of 22 in 1970 provoked widespread public outcry over these substandard labor conditions. However, the Park administration continued to shun the creation of a "legal and institutional foundation for mature industrial relations" in favor of enforcing order and control through the police, the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA), and the military security forces. It is no wonder, then, that South Korean labor activism took on a "militant, uncompromising, and violent pattern" in response to this repressive system of labor control.[137]

In the modern day soju is defined as a "hard" liquor, both because it is distilled and because it has a high ABV. But it is perhaps also "hard" in that it came to be associated with the rugged, masculine connotations of heavy labor. The growing demand for heavy labor coincided with the historical conditions of cheap diluted soju, and so naturally the young men who flocked to urban areas to answer this demand became a major consumer base for this liquor. Robert Koehler points to the higher ABV of soju in comparison to *makkŏlli* to argue for why it became

[136] Hagen Koo, "Labor Policies and Labor Relations during the Park Chung Hee Era," in *Reassessing the Park Chung Hee Era, 1961-1979: Development, Political Thought, Democracy, and Cultural Influence* (Seattle, United States: University of Washington Press, 2011), 122-123.
[137] Koo, "Labor Policies and Labor Relations during the Park Chung Hee Era," 133, 139-140.

the intoxication method of choice for these weary, homesick souls.[138] The Korean poet Pak Kip'yŏng perhaps illustrated this best with his poem, *Nodongŭi saebyŏk* (The Dawn of Labor), which he published under the pen name Pak Nohae. A selection is presented below:

> 전쟁 같은 밤일을 마치고 난 (*Battle-hardened after each night shift)*
> 새벽 쓰린 가슴 위로 *(On top of my heart stinging with the dawn)*
> 차가운 소주를 붓는다 *(I pour a cold soju)*
> 아 (*Ah*)
> 이러다간 오래 못가지 *(I can't go on much longer like this)*
> 이러다간 끝내 못가지 *(I can't last 'til the end like this)*
> …
> 늘어쳐진 육신에 *(Over my body stretched dry)*
> 또다시 다가올 내일의 노동을 위하여 *(For tomorrow's labor that will return)*
> 새벽 쓰린 가슴 위로 *(On top of my heart stinging with the dawn)*
> 차거운 소주를 붓는다 *(I pour a cold soju)*
> 소주보다 독한 깡다구를 오기를 *(For a tenacity more potent than soju)*
> 분노와 슬픔을 붓는다 *(I pour rage and sorrow)*

The pen name Pak Nohae was derived from Pak (*Pak'aebannŭn* or "Persecuted") No (*Nodongjaŭi* or "Laborer's") Hae (*Haebang* or "Liberation"). Pak Kip'yŏng or Pak Nohae was actually working as a field laborer himself when he published the above poem in 1984, which elevated him to such a high stature among activist circles that he was a wanted man by the military government, earning him the nickname "the faceless poet." We see in this poem a depiction of soju that is befitting of both its "hardness" and its restorative, medicinal qualities.[139]

Considering this consumer base and the fact that the diluted soju of this era had a very high alcohol content (about 35% ABV), soju came to be imbued with very hard, masculine connotations in this era. Drinking was a "manly activity" that was reinforced by the drinking rituals that accompanied the obligatory military service for all South Korean males. As these South Korean males grew older and coalesced into the male "peer groups" of alumni

[138] Robert Koehler, *Korean Wines & Spirits: Drinks That Warm the Soul* (Seoul: Seoul Selection USA, Inc., 2015), 50.
[139] Yi Chihyŏng, *Soju Iyagi*, 29.

associations, military service reunions, and obligatory work gatherings, soju would be a common part of their rituals of commensality and collective drunkenness. Alcohol "brings down barriers" and brings out the "true selves" of these men, allowing them to either perform acts of masculinity by taking shots in rapid succession or perform acts outside of this masculinity such as sing or cry.[140] While it was by and large a cheap liquor, it was by no means localized to only working class men. For example, official accounts of Park Chung Hee would often feature photographs of him dressed in farmer's garb and socializing with local farmers, and would otherwise play up an image of a "man of the soil." Kim Chŏngsin would write in 1970 about Park's return to his hometown in this manner:

> The villagers, old or young, thronged as far as the trail to welcome the great man who was born and grew up in their own village… President Park also met his old childhood friends late that evening… the President inquired after the health of those who were not present… The President turned to look at us correspondents with a grin. He was no longer the President but 'a farmer's son' who was drinking with his old friends. They drank and talked almost endlessly.[141]

While the account does not specify the specific liquors that Park drank on this occasion, we can garner from this account that the so-called liquors of the common man were not beneath the leader of the country. Whether it was soju or *makkŏlli* that he consumed on this occasion, these liquors seem to have united men of all social statures.

But absent from this narrative are the South Korean women. Using the lens of a hard liquor to understand South Korean labor in the 1960s - 1980s privileges able-bodied male labor and obscures female labor. Teenage women aged 18 - 22 were recruited en masse from rural areas to become an army of low-skill workers in "spinning, knitting, sewing, making footwear,

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[140] Cheng Sea-ling, "Assuming Manhood: Prostitution and Patriotic Passions in Korea," *East Asia: An International Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 62.
[141] Kim Chŏngsin, *Pakchŏnghŭi Taet'ongnyŏng: Nongminŭi Adŭri Taet'ongnyŏngi Toegikkaji* [President Park Chung Hee: From Farmer's Son to President] (Seoul: Hallym Publishers, 1971), 218.

assembling simple electronic devices, packaging food, or rote tasks like stamping nuts and bolts out of sheets of steel."[142] By the 1970s, 83% of the textile workforce and 30% of the manufacturing workforce were women. These women were usually housed in dormitories with deplorable conditions and subsisted on long hours and low pay.[143] Yet partly because they were largely excluded from the heralded heavy industries of this era, both the abuses of their human rights and their contributions to the country's growth are often glossed over. Women played such a critical role in the labor movements in this era that some two hundred young female strikers in 1979 set off a string of events that brought about the downfall of Park Chung Hee. These strikers were workers at the wig manufacturing firm Y.H. Trading Company, who eventually held a sit-in demonstration in the headquarters of the New Democratic Party, the main opposition party at the time. After the leader of the party Kim Young Sam[144] pledged his support for the strikers, he was summarily ousted from his congressional seat. Nationwide mass demonstrations over Kim Young Sam's ouster contributed to rifts among Park's senior staff, and these rifts partially led to Park Chung Hee's assassination by his own security chief in the same year.[145] A historical frame using the lens of hard liquor alone is woefully incomplete.

This is not to say that the masculine "hardness" of soju has remained static. Nicholas Harkness argues that one can find evidence of an ascendancy of "softness" in South Korean culture today through the qualitative experience of drinking soju, which he terms one of Korea's most important social rituals. Harkness uses advertisements as "conventionalizing and prescriptive representations of soju consumption" to further his claims. He cites one

[142] Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 368.
[143] Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 368.
[144] Kim Young Sam eventually served as President from 1993 to 1998. Upon his election in 1992, Kim was the first civilian to hold the office in over thirty years.
[145] Koo, "Labor Policies and Labor Relations during the Park Chung Hee Era," 136-137.

Bohae-brand soju commercial from 1982 that marketed its 30% ABV soju ("Bohae 30") with an electric guitar soundtrack, flames rising up, even the tearing of grilled meat with bare teeth - played out themes of masculinity almost comical to the modern viewer. He then compares this to a 2008 Lotte *Chomchorom* commercial featuring female K-pop star Lee Hyori. There is a stark difference - Lee Hyori chants, *Hŭndŭlgo tchogaego nŏmgigigo* ("shake, divide, swallow") as she sings with businessmen, with girlfriends, even with a motorcycle gang, all holding the distinctive jade-green bottles and participating in the soju enterprise.[146]

Fig. 8: Note the stark contrast between the Bohae ad (left) and the Lotte ad (right). Courtesy of Bohae, Lotte.

The softer, lighter image of soju (*Chomchorom* means "like the first time" and merchandising often focuses on its supposed *pudŭrŏun* ("soft") qualities) is perhaps a result of the growing participation of women in the rituals of soju drinking. But Harkness argues that "women are a catalyst for a change in soju, rather than soju being a catalyst for a change in women." In other words, rather than soju contributing to a "hardening" of South Korean femininity, the market demands of an increasingly female consumer base led to a "softening" of soju.[147] Quantitatively, we have alluded several times to soju as a high ABV liquor. However, whereas the original distilled soju clocks in at about 45% ABV, from the 1960s to the present day

[146] Nicholas Harkness, "Softer Soju in South Korea," *Anthropological Theory* 13, no. 1/2 (2013): 12–30.
[147] Nicholas Harkness, "Softer Soju in South Korea," *Anthropological Theory* 13, no. 1/2 (2013): 18.

the ABV of diluted soju has decreased from 30%, to 25% (for over 25 years), to 20%, to the almost sacrilegious 16.9% ABV soju on offer today as "Chamisul 16.9." It is telling, then, that the Chamisul Original that we began this chapter with, which clocks in at 20.1% ABV, boasts not only a more "authentic" taste but also a more masculine drink. Women are never the participants in Chamisul Original ad campaigns, which is perhaps telling of the gendered boundaries of soju that last to the present day. Could this be, then, an institutionalization of difference in the modern consumer market?

The Invented National Liquor, Part 1

Soju's masculine connotations propelled it to be consumed among males on all levels of society. This fit nicely with the government's vested interest in soju's "national liquorhood." After the end of World War II, the governments of newly independent countries in Africa and long-colonized countries such as Ireland alike devoted large sums of money and resources into folklore field research. One could call this a desire to take charge of the soul-searching of the era. As peoples across the world interrogated notions of "legitimacy," both national and not, the often newly established governments decided that it would be in their best interests to rummage through history to make claims that buttressed their own legitimacy. The authoritarian governments that took hold in South Korea's early years were no exception. As the Park Chung Hee junta had seized power through a coup d'état, they had to constantly contend with competing claims of legitimacy not only within the nation but also from the north. North Korea, after all,

was conducting its own concurrent historical legitimation project to buttress its claims as the sole legitimate government on the peninsula.[148]

Scholars such as Eric Hobsbawm, Terence Ranger, and Liah Greenfeld have demonstrated how nationalists often articulate the nation by drawing from a pool of culture and memory, often revitalizing or even re-inventing traditions in the process.[149] But as Namhee Lee points out, the Park administration had to also contend with their own project of modernization. Paradoxically the Park regime looked to the past and promoted a resurgence of folk culture as part of its own often didactic modernizing efforts, thereby positioning itself as the principal agent of modernization. This was not without its own share of contradictions. The Park regime sometimes showed no qualms about reinventing tradition while simultaneously displacing it on its own terms. For example, Park Chung Hee could denounce entrenched Confucianism for supposedly promoting nepotism and delaying economic and scientific development, while simultaneously appropriating Confucian hierarchical ideals for his envisioned labor schemes and recruiting Confucianist scholars to study the past.[150]

All this came to a head when Seoul hosted the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Summer Olympics. South Korea had just concluded a period of economic growth at breakneck speed, with nominal GDP per capita rising from a mere $103.88 in 1962 to $5,438.24 in 1989, even eventually breaking the $20,000 mark in 2006.[151] Analysts would later dub this economic growth

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[148] Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson, eds., *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, 1st ed., vol. 184 (Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 4.
[149] Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 1992). Stephen Vlastos, *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan*, 1st edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
[150] Lee, *Making of Minjung*, 190.
[151] "Countries Compared by Economy > GDP > Per Capita." NationMaster. Accessed March 20, 2018. http://www.nationmaster.com/country-info/stats/Economy/GDP/Per-capita#1989.

the "Miracle on the Han River,[152]" and the Games would be a coming-out party for the Miracle much as the 1964 Tokyo Olympics was a celebration of Japanese post-war economic growth. According to Bruce Cumings, the South Korean government under Park's successors Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo sought to fashion the Games as one of the first showcases of Korea to the world on its own terms.[153] But to the state's dismay, according to Yi Sŏngu, the "excessive interference with and regulation of the liquor industry had resulted in the unfortunate loss of the native liquor tradition."[154] The South Korean government seems to have been uneasy about a massive influx of foreign visitors coming to Korea and leaving with only the cheap metallic after-taste of diluted soju. However, the government was forced to reckon with the fact that the rice restrictions and taxation schemes of the past had contributed to the near-eradication of the traditional liquors that it once had to offer. In many ways, the government faced the same problem articulated by Brandon Hill of Tokki Soju in our interview:

> Right now, in New York City, the Korean food scene is booming. And just as Japanese sake and sushi are household names here, I don't think it's long before Korean barbecue and soju are also household names. Looking back, I just didn't want people thinking that soju was just a low-end thing. Because it is done really well, and it can be done really well.[155]

This profound anxiety over the lack of a traditional liquor tradition continues in the present day. In 2009, the South Korean Ministry of Food, Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries, in conjunction with the Finance Ministry and the Presidential Council on National Competitiveness, promised a 133 billion KRW ($106.7 million) subsidy to the traditional liquor industry. This subsidy was

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[152] The Han River (*Hangang*) is a major river that runs through Seoul, the capital of South Korea.
[153] Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 750.
[154] Original text: "이렇듯 술 政策에 국가가 지나치게 관여하고 통제함으로써 우리 고유의 土酒는 자취를 감추게 된 것에 아쉬움을 뒤늦게나마 깨닫게 되고 1986/1988年의 국제대회를 대비하여 우리 정부에서 一道一民俗酒開發의 노력을 전개하게 되었다." Yi Sŏngu, *Han'guk Shikp'um Sahoesa*, 297.
[155] Brandon Hill (of Tokki Soju) in discussion with the author, February 2018.

intended to both improve the quality of the traditional liquors and to resurrect about 50 traditional liquors that had since gone extinct, with the goal of developing a "flagship drink" to represent Korea. But in a statement from the Ministry, our favorite diluted soju was passed over as such a "flagship drink" (the examples cited were wine for France, beer for Germany, and (perhaps controversially) sake for Japan) apparently because its imported ingredients excluded it from "traditional" status.[156]

Fig. 9: An ad campaign for Pak Chaeso Andong Soju dating from the 1990s. According to my host, the grandson of the founder Pak Chaeso, some "traditional" soju brands tried to compete with the "sexy" imagery used by diluted soju manufacturers at the time by playing by the new rules of the game. A fascinating example of traditional soju recalibrating its product into a new diluted soju commercial landscape. Courtesy of the Pak Chaeso Andong Soju Factory Archives.

[156] Moon Gwanglip, "State Support for Traditional Korean Liquor," *Korea JoongAng Daily*, August 27, 2009, http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=2909296.

It seems the South Korean government wanted to showcase that it had a well-established liquor tradition of its own. In response, the South Korean government unveiled the "One Province One Traditional Liquor Initiative"[157] in the lead-up to the Games. According to Yi, the logic behind the Initiative was that a showcase of that which was the most traditional (he uses the word *koyu*[158]) would have the most universal appeal. One beneficiary of this Initiative was none other than Cho Okhwa, introduced in the Introduction as the curator of Queen Elizabeth II's Andong birthday feast in 1999. In my interview with Cho Okhwa's son and Andong Soju Museum head Kim Yŏnpak, Kim informed me that his mother was honored as an "Intangible Cultural Property" in 1987, a year before the Olympics of 1988. Kim used the term *palgurhaetta*, which means "to excavate," to describe the government's efforts to revitalize the liquor tradition in the lead-up to the Olympics. Thanks to this "Intangible Cultural Property" designation, Cho Okhwa was able to begin commercially distributing her "traditionally produced" Andong Soju along with her son and daughter-in-law in 1990, eventually even being honored with *shikp'um myŏngin* ("food artisan") status in 2000.[159]

The special designations of Intangible Cultural Properties (*Muhyŏngmunhwajae)* and Human Cultural Treasures (*In'ganmunhwajae*) have their origins in a Cultural Property Protection Act[160] of 1962 that was modelled on a similar Japanese law[161] passed in 1950.[162] For some, this government-ordained legitimacy has been the source of great commercial success.

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[157] 一道一民俗酒開發
[158] 固有
[159] Kim Yŏnpak (of Andong Soju) in conversation with the author, January 2018.
[160] 문화재보호법, *Munhwajae bohobŏp*
[161] The 1950 Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties, 文化財保護法 *Bunkazai hogohō*
[162] "The Act for Cultural Property Preservation" (The Bureau of Cultural Property Preservation, The Ministry of Education, 1962), UNESCO Cultural Heritage Laws Database, http://www.unesco.org/culture/natlaws/media/pdf/republicofkorea/corea_act961_10_01_1962_eng_orof.pdf.

Cho Okhwa and her son Kim Yŏnpak have even established an Andong Soju Museum on the premises of their distillery, so that visitors can enjoy the Cho-Kim renderings of the history of a centuries-old tradition. But one problem with the cultural policies such as these above is that, in institutionalizing and preserving these "traditions" as a nation-legitimating reminder of a "Korean" past, these practices instead contributed to a "museumization" and a "staticization" of traditional culture.[163] Human Cultural Treasures such as Cho Okhwa were bound to government mandates on the teaching and performance of their craft, thereby preventing it from naturally evolving into contemporarily relevant and meaningful forms.[164] In addition, we may wonder whether Brandon Hill of Tokki Soju will ever receive such a designation, despite the fact that there is little in the way of tradition to distinguish his production process or final product from that of Cho and Kim's Andong Soju.

To wrap up this conversation, Yi's earlier use of the Korean word *koyu* presupposes the existence of things that are the most "traditional" or the most "innately Korean."[165] The word *koyu* can be variously translated as "inherent," "innate," or "indigenous." In fact, many historians of the Korean liquor industry have chosen to refer to the liquor tradition with such terms, thereby suggesting that there was an innate Korean tradition that had existed since the beginning of time. But the notion of a primordial innate Korean tradition requires the existence of a primordial Korean nation, which these historians seem to presuppose, intentionally or not. After all, writing variously *koyuŭi* ("of *koyu*") or even *koyuhada* ("_____ is *koyu*") not only indicates that the

[163] Jongsung Yang, *Madangguk: The Rejuvenation of Mask Dance Drama Festivals as Sources of Social Criticism* (Indiana University, 1988), 39.
[164] Lee, *Making of Minjung*, 190.
[165] 固有

object, tangible or otherwise, is inherently Korean, but also that those objects outside the confines of this label are of an unsteady historical tradition and of a suspect "Koreanness."

The Invented National Liquor, Part 2

The invention of tradition has always been contested, especially from below. Just as student and labor demonstrations had toppled Syngman Rhee in the April Revolution of 1960, so, too, did these groups mobilize to protest against the authoritarian rule and eventual Yushin system[166] of Park Chung Hee (r. 1963 - 1979) and that of his acolyte and successor Chun Doo Hwan (r. 1980 - 1988). During the democratization movements of the 1970s and 1980s, the word *minjung* emerged as a discursive category that literally meant "the masses" or "the people" but came to take on the more specific connotation of being politically oppressed, economically exploited, or socially marginalized.

This new class of student-activists that emerged out of these *minjung* democratization movements conceived themselves in a specific sense in relation to the nation. Namhee Lee brought our attention to the emergence of a counter-public sphere within this movement, which was her conception of the *undongkwŏn*, a term that literally meant the "movement sphere" but was taken to refer to both individual activists and the minjung movement as a whole. Lee argues that the students that comprised the undongkwŏn constructed an independent and oppositional identity to the dominant sphere, often through what she terms a "discourse of moral privilege" that served as a mark of the "distinction" articulated by Pierre Bourdieu. Despite their best

[166] "Yushin" (유신 維新) means "rejuvenation" or "restoration" and is the Korean pronunciation of the Japanese word *issin* propounded by the Meiji leaders of Japan in 1868 (see Meiji Restoration). The word is taken to refer to the Yushin constitution announced by Park Chung Hee in 1972 that removed all limits on his presidential tenure and vested him with expansive dictatorial powers to suspend constitutional freedoms.
Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 358.

efforts to position themselves as minjung-oriented and oppositional, these undongkwŏn activists could not escape the elitism vested in them by their status as intellectuals. In a manner evocative of the student activists of the 1960s New Left in Europe and the United States, the undongkwŏn as a whole ultimately embraced their claims to be the "moral voice and conscience" of this presupposed nation. Central to this endeavor was the production of a new minjung history that strove towards a more "authentic" representation of the fraught Korean histories that they perceived to be distorted by nationalist and colonial narratives. The undongkwŏn would invoke patriotism and nationhood when exhorting their fellow students to join their ranks, reinvesting new emancipatory meanings to discursive categories such as *minjok* ("nation" or "people") that had been heretofore dictated and monopolized by the state. In such a way, despite their enchantment with Marxism-Leninism well into the 1980s, Lee argues that the minjung movement never disavowed the modern notion of the nation-state and indeed did not push their "emancipatory imaginary" beyond its confines.[167]

The culture surrounding the undongkwŏn of the 1970s-80s was not only predominantly masculine but also known for its "puritanical asceticism." The consumption of beer, according to Lee, was "too bourgeois and Western." Instead, soju was an ideal choice for the asceticism of the undongkwŏn, as it fit right in with their repudiation of wearing colorful clothes or going to discos. In addition, despite the elite backgrounds of some undongkwŏn, they would often attempt to mimic the consumption patterns of the working classes in line with their efforts to appear minjung-oriented. According to one interview with a female undongkwŏn named Han Chisu, the group "elevated the poor to the purest symbol of highest morality."[168] Yi Sŏngu notes that by the

[167] Lee, *Making of Minjung*, 8, 152-155, 296.
[168] Lee, *Making of Minjung*, 185-186.

1970s-80s, liquor consumption was divided along class lines, with the upper classes showing a strong preference for Western beers and spirits whereas the common peoples (the minjung) gravitated towards soju.[169] Given this historical context, many undongkwŏn would seek out dilapidated taverns in college towns that specialized in chicken feet and soju, so as not to appear too bourgeois. Han Chisu noted that the undongkwŏn prized above all "frugality and simplicity" with an active repudiation of culinary and material comforts, a goal almost prescriptive of the cheap bitter taste of soju.[170]

But finally, what also distinguished the undongkwŏn was their interest in carving out an "alternative democratic space" by reinventing and reworking traditional folk culture. Namhee Lee draws attention to this as a point of tension between the state and the undongkwŏn in their approaches to the invention of tradition. In response, the undongkwŏn would reappropriate and reinvent some of these very same government narratives to create what Namhee Lee terms a "counternarrative of Korean modernity and capitalist development." This was a task with greater urgency in the wake of a post-colonial period of rapid industrialization and modernization, in which the identity of the nation was put in flux. Rituals that had heretofore been seen as premodern and déclassé such as the *madang-gˇuk* (folk mask-dance drama), *p'ansori* (folk musical drama) and *kut* (shamanistic ritual) began appearing on university campuses throughout the 1960s - 1980s. The irony of their effort was that university education in this era was not only seen as Western-oriented, but also what Lee terms the "root of the hegemony of nationalism." University students had to constantly negotiate their distinctly Westernized privilege and their desire to revive and seek out that which belonged to the domain of the distinctly

[169] Yi Sŏngu 이성우, *Han'guk Shikp'um Sahoesa*, 297.
[170] Lee, *Making of Minjung*, 185.

non-Westernized, unprivileged *minjung*. This negotiation took various forms. Undongkwŏn would even carefully choose the cigarettes they smoked, only smoking Korean brands such as *Eunhasu* and *Hansando*.[171] Nothing was outside the scope of scrutiny, not even the choice of cigarette brands. But the fact that diluted soju was still frequently consumed by the undongkwŏn, in the midst of this resurgence of interest in folk traditions and this active repudiation of things that were suspected of being too bourgeois or too Western, is telling in terms of how these historical agents constructed and conceived of soju.

It must be noted that the undongkwŏn, while a major presence on university campuses of the era, were nevertheless a minority in terms of absolute numbers. But the soju consumption practices seem to have been shared by the majority of the population. When Yonsei University student Sim Chuyong conducted interviews with professors about the bygone university drinking culture, he found that the vast majority articulated the notion that during the 1970s-1980s, both undongkwŏn students and politically indifferent students alike were in the minority. Instead, the vast majority were those who were critically engaged with the political turmoil, but nevertheless shied away from actively expressing their opinions. These *sulchip* (Korean pubs), as related to Sim, were places where "those neutral students and the undongkwŏn students could actively engage with one another."[172] The Yonsei then-Dean of General Affairs Chŏng Kyuyŏn would later reminisce, "while we drank all day and seemed to be drunk non-stop, these *sulchari* (drinking gatherings) didn't strike us then as particularly wasteful."[173] While the *sulchari* of

[171] Lee, *Making of Minjung*, 185-186, 191, 193.
[172] Original text: "그 당시에는 운동권 학생, 정치에 아예 무관심한 학생은 소수였고, 대부분이 비판의식은 있으나 표현을 적극적으로 하지는 않는 중립적인 입장을 취하고 있었다. 술은 운동권 학생과 중립적인 학생의 교류를 활발하게 해줌으로써, 중립적 입장의 학생들이 숨겨두었던 자신의 생각을 표출할 수 있는 계기를 마련해 주었다."
[173] Original text: "비록 하루 종일 술을 마시고, 줄곧 취해 있긴 했지만, 그 때의 술자리가 그렇게 소모적인 공간만은 아니었던 것 같다."

today are frequented by both men and women and often feature drinking games, the *sulchari* of them were often political spaces that were overwhelmingly masculine and free from the censorship of the Yushin era. Because Western wines and beers were a luxury for these students, they often paired *tchigae* (stew) with either soju or *makkŏlli*, bought often on credit with the owners of the *sulchip*.[174] This demographic would retain these tastes as they grew older, although not always: in 2005, the disgraced South Korean former Police Commissioner Hŏ Chunyŏng wrote an autobiography criticizing then-President Roh Moo-hyun's "386 advisors," many of whom were of undongkwŏn backgrounds.[175] Hŏ would write,

> at the beginning of the presidency, these 386 advisors would pair their meals with soju so often that it seemed like one would get beat up for even mentioning Western spirits. But only a couple months in, I would see these very same 386 advisors would start drinking Western spirits and would dine at luxury hotels where a single course would cost over 100,000 KRW.[176][177]

Even in the 21st century, then, soju remained an important class marker and a point of distinction for these former undongkwŏn, although this may have ended up biting them in the back.

Concluding Remarks

Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, diluted soju was codified as a liquor for the masses with widespread appeal. But this codification was not without its fair share of

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[174] Sim Chuyong, "술문화로 본 그 때 그 시절," *The Yonsei Chunchu*, October 31, 2009, http://chunchu.yonsei.ac.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=14352.

[175] "386 Generation" is a term that was coined in the 1990s in South Korea to refer to those that were 30 years old at the time (3), were very politically active in the democratization movements of the 1980s (8), and had been born in the 1960s (6). The "386 Generation" was a power base for Roh Moo-hyun's presidency (2003 - 2008), as it was marked by left-leaning politics that advocated for a more conciliatory stance towards North Korea, leading to accusations of anti-Americanism. The "386 advisors" was a term coined by Hŏ to refer to those advisors of this generation that, as he notes, had all been jailed at some point for their democratization activities.

[176] $93.62 at the time of writing.

[177] Pak Ranhŭi, "'소주먹던 청와대 386, 곧 양주 찾아 …,'" *The Chosun Ilbo*, November 22, 2007, http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2007/11/22/2007112200085.html.

contestation. Different groups within Korean society from above and below sought to codify the liquor and the spaces surrounding it on their own terms. A liquor that was shared by all was contested by all. But some groups such as women, which had previously been excluded from this "all," ended up eking out a space for themselves in a dramatic fashion. As Harkness demonstrates, the increasingly female consumer base is responsible for soju's current, "softer" iteration.[178] Therefore the soju of today has passed through "filters" such as industrialization, student activism, and the inclusion of women to attain its current iteration.

Yet we began in 1924 without fully interrogating 1924. An investigation of soju being codified in a certain way presupposes far too many things. It presupposes the existence of a soju and the existence of a modern nation-state. It turns out that neither of the two had an easy road to 1948, when the Republic of Korea was formally established and where our chapter effectively begins. Perhaps more troubling is that our chapter presupposed a shared understanding of what it meant to be not only "traditional" but also "Korean." Several historians have chosen to uncritically use the word *koyu*, the word that suggests the existence of something that is not only "inherent" but also "innate," shared by all Koreans by default of being Korean. But if traditions can and have been reinvented, is it not true that conceptions of Korea can and have been reinvented as well? Put more concretely, the technologies and material conditions of soju have dramatically changed, but we still call it soju. If we were to apply this to South Korea, how far back can we trace this Koreanness? This question warrants a far further dive into Korean history.

[178] Nicholas Harkness, "Softer Soju in South Korea," *Anthropological Theory* 13, no. 1/2 (2013): 18.

Chapter 2: The Pre-Colonial

A Thriving Liquor Tradition

That alcohol has a storied past in Korea should come as no surprise. While it is difficult to trace the exact point at which alcoholic beverages were first introduced to the Korean peninsula, many historians posit that a tradition of alcohol consumption existed long before the Three Kingdoms Period (57 BC to 668 AD). Although there is a distinct lack of extant Korean written records of alcoholic beverage practices from this era, Chinese sources have thankfully provided a wealth of information on Korean liquor customs and traditions.[179] We can draw upon historical accounts that include histories, legends, folktales, and poems to infer that Koreans have been producing and consuming alcoholic beverages since ancient times. According to the Chinese *Records of the Three Kingdoms*[180] of the third century, the ancient kingdom of Puyŏ[181] held an annual New Year's festival called *Yŏnggo*[182] that featured unbridled eating, drinking, singing, and carousing after the necessary ancestral rites were held.[183] Two later historical accounts, the *Chibong yusŏl*[184] of 1614 and the *Haedong yeogsa*[185] of 1823 both reference the following lines from a poem by the Chinese poet Li Shangyin (李商隱) (c. 813-858): "I am

[179] Yi Sŏngu, *Han'guk Shikp'um Sahoesa 韓國食品社會史 [A Social History of Korean Foods]* (Seoul: Kyomunsa 敎文社, 1984), 198.
[180] 三國志
[181] Puyŏ or Buyeo (부여) was an ancient kingdom in what is today North Korea and the northern reaches of China. Puyŏ existed from approximately the 2nd century BC to 494 AD, at which point it was subsumed by the Korean kingdom of Goguryeo. Two of the Three Kingdoms of Korea, Goguryeo and Baekje, claimed to be the rightful successors of the Puyŏ kingdom.
[182] 迎鼓
[183] Yi Sanghŭi, *Sul: Han'gugŭi Sul Munhwa 술: 한국의 술 문화 (Liquor: Korea's Liquor Culture)* (Seoul: Sun Publishing, 2009), 61.
[184] 芝峰類說, widely regarded as the first Korean encyclopedia. Hyunhee Park translates this as the "Topical Discourses of Chibong" (176)
[185] 海東繹史, Hyunhee Park translates this as "Unraveling the History of Korea" (176)

afraid that the aroma of a glass of Silla wine will go away with the wind at dawn."[186] This poem suggests that the alcoholic beverages of Silla (57 BC - 935 AD), one of the Korean Three Kingdoms, were at least on par with those found on the Chinese mainland.

A greater wealth of historical sources dates from the Koryŏ dynasty (918 - 1392). One especially enlightening source is the *Xuanhe fengshi Gaoli tujing*[187] or the "Illustrated Account of an Official Mission to Koryŏ during the Xuanhe Reign," which was a report of a diplomatic mission to Koryŏ Korea by the Song China envoy Xu Jing (1091 - 1153). Xu seems to have attempted to write a comprehensive account of his time at the Koryŏ court, as he covered not only the administrative and communications structures of the Koryŏ court, but also his observations on Koryŏ culture, customs, and habits. He observed that, "because the people of Koryŏ loved their liquors, they drank many cups, and even went to several drinking parties a night." Hyunhee Park notes that in contrast to his Tang predecessor Li Shangyin, Xu emphasized his distaste for Koryŏ wines several times in his narrative.[188] Xu believed that Korean alcoholic beverages were not on par with their Chinese counterparts because Koreans used non-glutinous rice and malt for their brewing, in contrast to the Chinese use of sticky rice.[189] Park infers from Xu's writings that the alcoholic beverages most commonly consumed at the time were grain-based, and that brewing was the method of choice for alcohol production.[190]

While we have mostly discussed grain-based fermented wines, there is evidence that Koreans during the Koryŏ period enjoyed other alcoholic beverages as well. A look at the

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[186] Hyunhee Park, "The Rise of Soju: The Transfer of Distillation Technology from 'China' to Korea during the Mongol Period (1206–1368)," *Crossroads – Studies on the History of Exchange Relations in the East Asian World* 14 (October 2016), 176-177.
[187] 宣和奉使高麗圖經
[188] Park, "The Rise of Soju," 177.
[189] Yi Sŏngu, *Han'guk Shikp'um Sahoesa*, 210.
[190] Park, "The Rise of Soju," 177.

writings of one low-ranking Koryŏ official named Yi Kyubo (1168 - 1241) indicates the vastness of the range of alcoholic beverages in this era. Yi Kyubo was said to have loved drinking so much that he failed the civil service examinations three times before finally barely passing on his fourth attempt. His love for drinking may only have been exceeded by his skill in poetry, as he left the historical record with an estimated 1,500 - 2,000 total self-composed poems. Yi was said to have never composed a poem without a bottle in hand, and his poems were said to have been renowned even in China.[191] The modern historian Yi Sŏngu combed through Yi Kyubo's poetry and lists a mere selection of the alcoholic beverages referenced by Yi Kyubo, presented in their translated form by Hyunhee Park below:

> These include *ihwaju* 梨花酒 (pear-blossom liquor), *jaju* 煮酒 (boiled liquor), *hwaju* 花酒 (flower liquor), *ch'ohwaju* 椒花酒 (Sichuan pepper liquor), *p'ap'aju* 波把 酒 (wave liquor), *baegju* 白酒 (white liquor), *bangmunju* 方文酒 (liquor brewed according to recipe), *chunju* 春酒 (spring liquor), *cheonil ju* 千日酒 (thousand-day liquor), *cheongeumju* 千金酒 (liquor [brewed using the bark of a] cheongeum [tree]), and *nogpaju* 綠波酒 (green wave-like clear liquor).[192]

Yi Sŏngu notes that Yi Kyubo makes reference to several other liquors as well, numbering over 25 liquors commonly consumed during the early Koryŏ period. Yi Sŏngu continues that many of these liquors continued to be consumed during the succeeding Chosŏn period (1392 - 1897). The evidence indicates that the liquors consumed by Koreans during this time were not all grain-fermented, and that a thriving liquor tradition existed long before distillation burst onto the scene.[193]

[191] Yi Sŏngu, *Han'guk Shikp'um Sahoesa*, 220.
[192] Park, "The Rise of Soju," 179.
[193] Yi Sŏngu, *Han'guk Shikp'um Sahoesa*, 220.

The Introduction of Soju

For all of Yi Kyubo's comprehensive knowledge of alcoholic beverages, distilled liquors remain a curious omission from his list. This omission is especially stark given that the evidence indicates that distilled liquors were widely consumed during the late Koryŏ period, and became even more prominent during the Chosŏn period. This had led many historians to surmise that the advent of distillation technology can be traced to around or shortly after the 13th century in which Yi Kyubo lived. Not long after, we see our first explicit references to one distilled liquor in particular, soju.

It turns out that the introduction of distillation technology to the Korean peninsula is a matter of some historiographical debate. Although the technology in itself can be traced back to before the Common Era, historians have found archaeological evidence suggesting that it originated in the ancient Indian subcontinent, in China during the Eastern Han dynasty, or in Roman Egypt.[194][195] Nevertheless it is generally agreed that the medieval Arabs were the first to apply this distillation technology to alcohol. The Muslim polymath Al-Kindi (c. 801 - 873) was among the first to explicitly mention the application of distillation technology to wine in his Book of the Alchemy of Perfume and Distillations, or the *Kitāb al-Taraffuq fi al-'Itr*. Despite the Islamic ban on alcohol consumption, the medieval Arabs gifted history with alchemical and military treatises that make several mentions of distilled alcohol. This technology is thought to have later spread to Europe via the Crusades and to East Asia via the Mongol Empire, as the first "Western" reference to distilled liquor is in a Latin manuscript dating to the 12th century.[196]

[194] Irfan Habib, *Economic History of Medieval India, 1200-1500* (Pearson Education India, 2011), 55.
[195] Stephen G Haw, *Marco Polo's China: A Venetian in the Realm of Khubilai Khan* (Routledge, 2006), 148.
[196] A. Y. Al-Hassan, *Science and Technology in Islam: Technology and Applied Sciences* (UNESCO, 2001), 68.

Throughout history, liquors have been imbued with forms of regional or cultural identity. Today there are a handful of liquors that we call "national liquors," with many being of the opinion that a national liquor must by definition be distilled. The Wikipedia article on national liquors provides a list that is subjective but illuminating: Tennessee whiskey (United States), gin (England), Schnaps (Germany), vodka (Poland and Russia), tequila (Mexico), and, of course, their cousin soju (South Korea). In particular, the Arabic word *araq* (عرق) seems to have been the progenitor of the names of several national liquors. The Wikipedia article alone lists the following national liquors as having a name that derives from the Arabic *araq*: arak (Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria), raki (Turkey), rakia/rakija[197] (Central and Eastern Europe), arrack (Indonesia), and aragh (Iran).[198]

The contemporary Arabic word *araq* عرق means "sweat" or "perspiration" and is frequently used in reference to the aforementioned distilled liquors. Scholars suggest that it originated as a reference to the vapors that condense during the distillation process. While it is unclear whether it has always had this connotation, there are some Arabic alchemical treatises that do make use of this term in this context such as Jabir ibn Hayyan's *Kitab Al-Jumal al-`ishrin.* And while historians have yet to unearth references to sweat in the etymology of Korean distilled liquors, Korean scholars have often made use of another form of condensation imagery: dew. The scholar Yi Saek (1328 - 1396) waxes eloquent about a distilled liquor called *aralgil* liquor in one of his poems:

(...) forming like autumn dewdrops,

[197] A collective term for fruit brandies throughout the region, anglicized as rakija in Greece. There are minor differences in spelling in the following countries: Bulgaria (ракия), Croatia (rakija), Bosnia and Herzegovina (ракија/rakija), Albania (rakia), Macedonia (ракија), Serbia (ракија/rakija), Montenegro (ракија/rakija). From "Rakia." Wikipedia, February 5, 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Rakia&oldid=824181769.
[198] "List of National Liquors." *Wikipedia*, February 7, 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=List_of_national_liquors&oldid=824496183.

and dripping down at night…
after drinking half a cup of the liquor,
a warm feeling spread to the bone.[199]

Hyunhee Park argues that this liquor was clearly one with a high ABV that was made via a distilling process. It is no wonder, then, that people in the Chosŏn dynasty sometimes referred to soju as *noju* 露酒, which literally means "dewdrop wine."[200] Michael J. Pettid suggests that *soju* came to be called *noju* as a reference to its distillation, in which droplets of alcohol that resembled dewdrops condensed.[201] This is not an antiquated word by any means. After all, Jinro Chamisul makes explicit reference to this popular moniker for soju. The Sino-Chinese rendering of Jinro is Jin (眞), which means "true," and Ro (露), which means "dew." Chang Hakyŏp's decision to name his soju distillery Jinro in 1924 even had a more modern iteration. Jinro revamped their diluted soju offering in 1998 under the new name Chamisul, a name that is simply a Korean rendering of Jinro, with Cham (참) meaning "true" and Isul (이슬) meaning "dew."

It is no accident that the *aralgil* liquor referenced by the Korean scholar Yi Saek in the fourteenth century bears such a resemblance in name to the Arabic word *araq*. Yi Sanghŭi posits that the path of this word to Korea was through Turkey, reaching Uyghur and Mongol dialects as *araki* (亞剌吉), and then reaching some Manchurian dialects as *arki* (亞兒吉). By the time it got to the Korean peninsula, the word had undergone several filters that resulted in multiple different manifestations. The terms are usually distinguished by region and are sometimes quite a mouthful: *arangju* in some southern regions (such as Hadong, Mokpo, and Jeju), *araegi* in other southern regions (such as Busan, Yeosu, and Ulsan), *arangjwi* in South Hamgyeong Province,

[199] Park, "The Rise of Soju," 183.
[200] Park, "The Rise of Soju," 183.
[201] Michael J. Pettid, *Korean Cuisine: An Illustrated History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 118.

araei in North Jeolla Province, and *ŏrŭgoei*, in North P'yŏngan Province. According to anthropological research, in the Kaesŏng region in what is today North Korea, *arakchu* is still used to denote distilled liquors, which literally translates to "arak liquor."[202]

These are terms that have been passed down through the ages and have interestingly dotted the historical record on soju. Li Shizhen's (1518 - 1593) *Bencao gangmu* equated *shaojiu* with *alaji jiu* 阿剌吉酒,[203] which was the Uyghur pronunciation of *aralgil* liquor. Yi Saek (1328 - 1396) preceded Li by two hundred years but nevertheless also referred to *aralgil* liquor in the aforementioned poem. Finally, in a seventeenth century account by the Dutch sailor Hendrick Hamel, he recounts being given a "cup of arrack" upon being shipwrecked on Jeju Island. Sometimes the two words have been used interchangeably: soju was often used for medicinal purposes, and this gave rise to the phrase "*araengi* excuses" to denote malingering in the North P'yŏngan Province.[204] Given that many pre-modern scholars used the language of *aralgil* liquor to refer to and even define "soju," it is likely that the introduction of *aralgil* liquor to the peninsula preceded that of soju.[205]

Given the aforementioned historical record on soju, the dominant historical opinion is that it was introduced to the peninsula during the Mongol Invasions of Korea. Sharp on the heels of the rapid growth of the Mongol Empire under the leadership of Genghis Khan, the Mongols conducted a series of seven major campaigns from 1231 to 1270 that ultimately resulted in the devastation of the Korean peninsula.[206] Koryŏ Korea eventually capitulated to the Mongols as a

[202] Yi Sanghŭi, *Sul,* 151.
[203] I.e., "araji wine."
[204] Yi Sanghŭi, *Sul,* 152.
[205] Park, "The Rise of Soju," 187.
[206] David Morgan, *The Mongols*, 2 edition (Malden, MA ; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), 5.

semi-autonomous vassal state of their power base in Yuan China for about eighty years.[207] While in the grand scheme of things this was only a short period of time, the Mongol Occupation of Korea left a considerable political legacy.[208] As the Mongol Empire gradually disintegrated and the Yuan dynasty was eclipsed by the Ming, the resultant factional fighting between pro-Yuan and pro-Ming factions in the Koryŏ royal court eventually led to the fall of the Koryŏ dynasty in favor of the Chosŏn dynasty under Yi Sŏngkye in 1392. Assessing the Mongol Occupation, it is irrefutable that the protracted invasions of Koryŏ Korea resulted in massive devastation and upheaval, most notably with the loss of the first *Tripitaka Koreana* in 1232. However, imperial rule is historically accompanied by an unprecedented level of social, cultural, and economic exchange. Koryŏ Korea under *Pax Mongolica* was no exception. Could the Mongols have been the ones to bridge West Asia and Korea with distillation technology?

Many Chosŏn dynasty scholars state explicitly that soju was introduced to the peninsula during the Chinese Yuan dynasty. After all, it was none other than Hŏ Chun (1539–1615), a Chosŏn court physician who authored the *Tongŭi pogam*[209] and whose medicinal achievements are almost legendary in Korea today, who gives us the first extant written account of the origins of soju. Hŏ's expert but pithy diagnosis?:

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[207] Notably, the Mongols prepared and launched their two famous invasions of Japan in 1274 and 1281 from the Korean peninsula, effectively rendering it a Mongol military base. While Koryŏ Korea supplied hundreds of ships and thousands of infantry for these massive invasions, both invasions ultimately failed. The critical role that a typhoon played in the destruction of the Mongol navy in 1271 led to the widespread use of the term kamikaze, or "divine wind."

[208] While the ruling line of the Koryŏ dynasty remained on the throne during this period, members of the Koryŏ royal family were sent to Beijing and "married into" the Yuan imperial household, beginning with the marriage of King Ch'ungnyŏl to a daughter of Kublai Khan. Source: Zhao, George Qingzhi. "Marriage as political strategy and cultural expression, Mongolian royal marriages from World Empire to Yuan dynasty." PhD diss., National Library of Canada= Bibliothèque nationale du Canada, 2001: 176.

[209] 東醫寶鑑, literally the "Mirror of Eastern Medicine." Hyunhee Park translates it as "a precious mirror on the medicines of eastern [countries]."

> Soju appeared beginning in the Yuan period. Its taste is extremely intense. Immoderate drinking will ruin your health.[210]

Michael J. Pettid provides us with another translation of Hŏ's thoughts on the matter:

> Soju is a liquor that arose from the time of the Yuan dynasty. As it was only taken as a medicine, it was not used haphazardly. Due to this, it became a custom that small cups were called soju cups. In the present day, however, those of upper status drink great amounts, to their heart's content; in the summer they drink much soju from large cups. Drinking their fill and becoming drunk like this has caused many a person to suddenly die.[211]

Hŏ's account offers a wealth of material. We can infer, among other things, that soju was a liquor with high alcohol content, and that it was medicinally used at its inception which warranted the small cups that are still used in the present day. But more importantly, we can trace the "Yuan-period origins" dominant historical opinion to Hŏ's account given that many later Chosŏn scholars basically assert the same things, which Hyunhee Park suggests is due to Hŏ's influence.

So where did Hŏ develop this theory? Given that Hŏ wrote the *Tongŭi pogam* by first reviewing available East Asian medical literature, Hyunhee Park identified Li Shizhen's *Bencao gangmu*,[212] or the *Compendium of Materia Medica*, as a possible source of inspiration for Hŏ's assertion that soju was introduced during the Yuan dynasty. Li Shizhen was a Chinese physician and pharmacologist who has been called the "uncrowned king of Chinese naturalists," and the *Bencao gangmu* features several references to soju as 燒酒, pronounced *shaojiu* according to the Hanyu Pinyin romanization.[213] Li Shizhen's equating of *shaojiu* with *alaji jiu*[214] as we noted earlier would have profound implications for the Chosŏn understanding of the origins of soju.

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[210] Park, "The Rise of Soju," 183, 185.
[211] Pettid, *Korean Cuisine*, 185.
[212] 本草綱目
[213] Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China: Volume 5, Chemistry and Chemical Technology, Part 3, Spagyrical Discovery and Invention: Historical Survey from Cinnabar Elixirs to Synthetic Insulin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 216.
[214] 阿剌吉酒 i.e., "araji wine."

Given that anthropological research has shown that variants of the word *aralgil* can still be found in Korean dialects, in addition to the fact that many Chosŏn scholars would define soju by equating it with *alaji jiu* as Li Shizhen did, we can surmise that it was in this form that soju and distillation were introduced to the Korean peninsula. As Yi Sanghŭi posits earlier, an introduction via an overland route from West Asia to Seoul is consistent with both linguistic studies and historical understandings of trade in the Mongol Empire.

But one major scholar, Yi Kyukyŏng (1788 - 1856), challenges the dominant historical opinion that soju was introduced via overland routes by the Mongols. Instead, according to Hyunhee Park, Yi Kyukyŏng posits that soju was introduced before the Yuan period by "foreigners of the maritime southeast" likely during the Chinese Tang period. What buttresses Yi Kyukyŏng's argument is the general historical consensus that distillation technology developed in China independently of the Mongols. In addition, we know that maritime trade along the Chinese and Southeast Asian coastline had flourished long before the Mongol period as well. As Park notes, under Yi Kyukyŏng's framework we can suggest that the distillation of liquors originated in West Asia and was transferred via maritime trade through India and Southeast Asia before alighting on China and Korea.[215] If this was during the Tang dynasty as Yi Kyukyŏng suggests, then distillation technology may indeed have existed in Silla, one of the Three Kingdoms, which Brandon Hill of Tokki Soju made reference to when he said that he distills in a similar fashion as the methods of the Silla dynasty.[216] While Hyunhee Park does not dismiss this theory outright given the lack of conclusive archaeological evidence on either side, she does note that it was not until the Yuan period and the Mongols that distilled liquors such as variants of

[215] Park, "The Rise of Soju," 189-194.
[216] Brandon Hill (of Tokki Soju) in conversation with the author, February 2018.

aralgil wine and soju began to spread rapidly and be consumed widely in China, Mongolia, and the Korean peninsula.[217] What historians and pre-modern scholars can agree on, however, is that distillation technology was not developed independently in Korea and was introduced in some way, shape, or form from outside the Korean peninsula. It follows, then, that soju is both a relatively recent introduction and a relatively "foreign" one in the grand scheme of things. But would "transnational" be a more apt description?

Given that documentary evidence supports the notion that soju rapidly spread around the time of the Mongol Occupation, how exactly did it spread within Korea? One theory lies with the fact that there is much evidence of cultural exchange between the Korean inhabitants and their Mongol military occupiers. As noted earlier, Korea became an important military base in advance of the Mongol invasions of Japan, and a vast Mongol military presence was established not long after Korea became a semi-autonomous vassal state. Yi Sŏngu takes this and asserts that, given that the Mongol authorities demanded the provision of troops, ships, and rations for the stationed military, it is likely that soju began to spread through encounters between military and the Koryŏ civilians. As evidence, he cites the fact that in the present day, the former Mongol garrison base of Jeju Island, the former Mongol logistics base of Andong, and the former Koryŏ capital Kaeseong are all known for their established soju traditions.[218] Historians writing after Yi Sŏngu's 1984 account have all rather uncritically accepted his theory, with Yi Chihyŏng adding that the Mongols used the southern island of Jindo Island as a garrison base as well, which spawned the famous soju *Jindo Hongju* (in addition to the famous *Jeju Soju*, *Andong Soju*, and *Kaeseong Soju*).[219]

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[217] Park, "The Rise of Soju," 194.
[218] Yi Sŏngu, *Han'guk Shikp'um Sahoesa*, 216.
[219] Yi Chihyŏng, *Soju Iyagi*, 95.

While the four regions are indeed known for their soju, Hyunhee Park notes that there is no concrete evidence in support of this theory, citing Pae Kyŭng-Hwa's MA thesis on Andong Soju. But Park does suggest that exchanges between Mongol soldiers and their Koryŏ counterparts were likely. She argues that the Mongols consumed fermented alcoholic beverages made from mare's milk called *kumiss* during their Eurasian conquests, and that distillation was necessary for the preservation of *kumiss* during their long stay in Korea.[220] It follows that the distillation methods were likely passed on to their Koryŏ counterparts. In addition, Park notes that the Mongols were known to relocate (forcibly or not) peoples to various parts of their vast empire. These relocated peoples were often the vanguard for cultural exchange. It is not hard to see what would have happened if craftsmen with knowledge of distillation were relocated to Koryŏ Korea. Finally, as Park notes, the establishment of a Mongol presence in China led to a massive migration of peoples in both directions. Some Koryŏ subjects were unwillingly sent as tribute to Yuan China, others went for official or scholarly exchanges. In turn, many foreign merchants, some from as far off as West Asia, made their way to Koryŏ Korea as well. While there is no evidence that any of these groups brought distilled alcohols, it cannot be ruled out.[221]

One interesting Mongol influence on the Koryŏ diet, as Kim Janggoo points out, is the Mongol introduction of meat consumption. Koryŏ Korea had heretofore been a primarily vegetarian society, partly because Buddhism was the state ideology of the dynasty. However, after the Mongols came to Korea they began promoting meat eating to the Korean inhabitants. Kim Janggoo suggests that as Koreans began consuming more meat, they also began pairing

[220] Kumiss (also spelled kumis or koumiss or kumys) is still consumed today as a low ABV fermented alcoholic beverage by the inhabitants of the Central Asian steppes, a group that includes the peoples of Huno-Bulgar, Turkic and Mongol origin. Kumiss can also be distilled to raise the ABV. Take a wild guess at what this distilled spirit is called (Answer: *araka* or *arkhi*). Distillation truly spans the globe.
[221] Park, "The Rise of Soju," 196-197.

these meat dishes with stronger distilled wines with a higher ABV. Although the other cultural factors that precipitated the rise of soju in the late Koryŏ period are the subject of ongoing study, Hyunhee Park promises to devote an entire chapter to this topic in an upcoming monograph.[222] But while soju did spread rapidly upon the introduction of distillation techniques, it is nevertheless the case that other alcoholic beverages were widely consumed by the inhabitants of the Korean peninsula long before the introduction of soju. Indeed, until recent times, soju was not even consumed on all levels of society, as we will see in the next section.

The Localization of Soju

It is far easier to describe cultural practices than to pinpoint their origins. While the origins of soju have not been decisively proven, we do have record of how soju was consumed. Koreans had been consuming a traditional strained rice wine, *ch'ŏngju*, for centuries. But after the discovery that the distillation of *ch'ŏngju* could raise the ABV from 6-8% to over 20%, people began widely distilling *ch'ŏngju* and interchangeably calling this new grain-based distilled liquor soju or *arakhi*. Park notes that soju was distilled using stills, and while no still has survived from the period she notes that we can rely on documentary and archaeological evidence to reconstruct Chosŏn-era stills and extrapolate these findings to the late Koryŏ period as well. These stills were called *soju kori*.[223] Park describes these stills as follows:

> This type of still brought distilled extracts to a collector outside the stills through pipes. Most of the models for stills exhibited in museums in Korea are of this type. Once-strained wine was placed in the bottom pot and then another smaller pot was positioned upside-down to cover the bottom pot. The upper pot has a lid for cooling water. In order to produce soju, first one heats the pot; and then, one should pour cold water onto the lid so that the evaporated alcohol inside the pot

[222] Park, "The Rise of Soju," 197.
[223] 燒酒古里. *Kori* is used to denote a ring or a circular object, which is likely a reference to

condenses and collects on the lid, and from there gradually trickles down into the waiting pot.[224]

Park notes later that Koreans used stills made of all kinds of materials, including wood, earthenware, and brass. These stills are not too different in form or function from those concurrently developed in China and Mongolia, further linking the inhabitants of this region in this transnational story.[225]

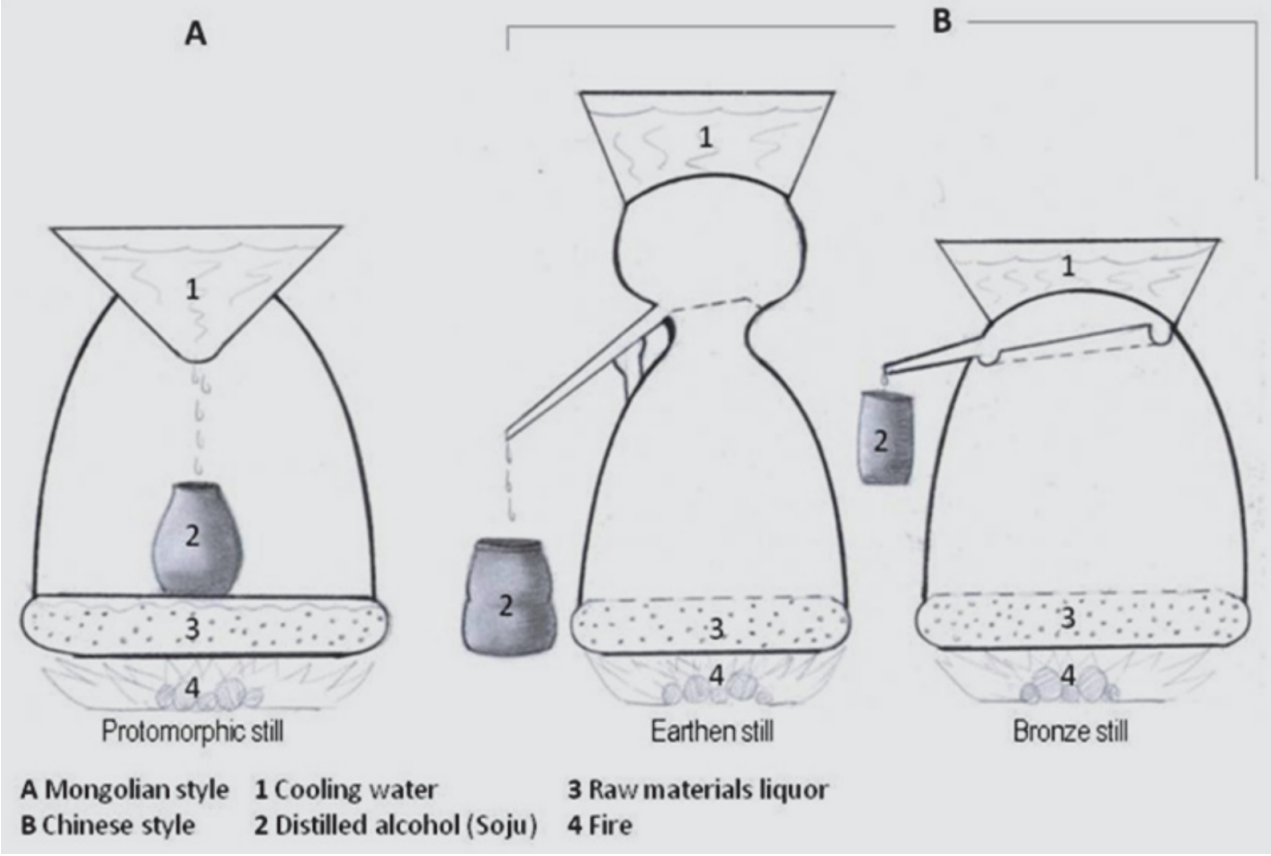

Fig. 10: Types of stills. Courtesy of Hyunhee Park.

About a hundred years after the fall of Koryŏ, King Sejong the Great (r. 1418 - 1450) of the succeeding Chosŏn dynasty commissioned an official history of the Koryŏ that is the

[224] Park, "The Rise of Soju," 199.
[225] Park, "The Rise of Soju," 199-200.

principal surviving history of the dynasty today. Published in 1454 under the name *Koryŏsa*,[226] or the History of Koryŏ, this history follows the pattern of a typical Chinese history, leading the modern historian F. Richard Stephenson to esteem is as the "only true dynastic history" of any Korean dynasty.[227] Among the biographies featured in the *Koryŏsa* is an account of one general named Kim Chin who served under the command of the Koryŏ general and statesman Ch'oe Yŏng (1316–1388). Kim Chin had been distinguished for defending the present-day city of Sinŭiju[228] against invading Chinese Red Turban rebels.[229] However, after rising in the ranks to the position of head of Kyŏngsang province in 1376, the *Koryŏsa* details his fall from grace as a result of an excessive love of soju, as follows:

> Before this event, when Kim Chin was the head of Kyŏngsang province, he drank wines and played day and night along with officers under his command calling in many famous *kisaeng*.[230] Because Kim Chin enjoyed drinking *soju*, people in the army called him and his men the "*soju* group." And because he assaulted and insulted his soldiers and assistants if they displeased him, they all possessed resentments and grudges against him. When Japanese enemies burned and looted the barracks in Happo, soldiers said: "Did the *soju* group defeat the enemy. How can we fight?" They then retreated and made no effort to go and fight. Yet Kim Chin fled alone on horseback, and the army was defeated in the end. Then he (Ch'oe Yŏng) degraded Kim Chin to a commoner and condemned him to exile to Ch'angnyŏng County, and then moved him to the island of Kadŏk. Then he executed Yi Tongpu and Kim Wŏnkok of the Mongol regiment in Happo.[231]

That Kim Chin loved soju so much that his faction became known as the "soju group" leads us to infer that soju was not only a trendy liquor but also one that was well-known among the late-Koryŏ citizenry.

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[226] 高麗史
[227] F. Richard Stephenson, "Eclipse Records in Early Korean History: The Koryo-Sa," in *History of Oriental Astronomy*, Astrophysics and Space Science Library (Springer, Dordrecht, 2002), 237.
[228] A major city on the North Korean-Chinese border.
[229] Yi Sangsŏn, "김진(金縝)," *Encyclopedia of Korean Culture*, 1995, http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/Contents/Index?contents_id=E0010631.
[230] Female artists who also worked as courtesans.
[231] Translated from the *Koryŏsa* 113.1451 (biography no. 26). Park, "The Rise of Soju," 182.

The *Koryŏsa* features another indication that soju was very popular. In 1375, the reigning King U (r. 1374 - 1388) of Koryŏ issued the following edict:

> The people know nothing of austerity, but squander their fortunes on soju and silk and dishes of gold and jade, so henceforth these things shall be strictly forbidden.[232]

It seems that there was such an excessive indulgence in soju in the late Koryŏ period that the King felt compelled to enact a prohibition. While we cannot say with certainty that the soju referenced in the above two examples from the *Koryŏsa* is a direct predecessor of the object of our present study, we can at least hypothesize that the soju referenced was a distilled liquor. This is because soju is denoted with the Sino-Korean rendering 燒 (burnt) and 酒 (liquor), which is likely a reference to the process of distillation. After all, distilled liquors from all over the world have historically had connotations to fire or burning in their monikers, with brandy being one example (derived from the Dutch word for "burnt wine," *brandewijin*).[233]

But who are the "people" in question in King U's prohibition? After all, soju must have been a luxury item if it is to be grouped with silk, gold, and jade, and it does not seem like the ordinary Koryŏ citizen could have afforded these items. Robert Koehler does note that soju was localized to the "upper crust of Goryeo (Koryŏ) society," given that it was produced from grain which was a precious commodity.[234] In addition, distillation was not only a new technology but also a relatively complicated process compared to that of brewed alcoholic beverages. Yes, the nobility (most notably Kim Chin) seemed to excessively indulge in soju, and soju may indeed

[232] Koehler, *Korean Wines & Spirits*, 45.
[233] Michael D. Shin and Organization of Korean Historians Staff, *Everyday Life in Joseon-Era Korea: Economy and Society* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2014), 237.
[234] Koehler, *Korean Wines & Spirits*, 44.

have spread through society through contacts with the Mongols. But the evidence indicates that this was not shared by all levels of society.

This class differentiation is nothing new. After all, the previously mentioned Song China envoy Xu Jing (1091 - 1153) also observed the consumption of alcoholic beverages along sharp class lines in Koryŏ Korea. The *Koryŏsa* speaks of the establishment of the Yangonsŏ[235] during the reign of King Munjong (r. 1046 - 1083) as a government office that produced the high-quality alcoholic beverages required in state ceremonies.[236] Xu reflected that while the kings and nobles consumed *ch'ŏngju*[237] and *pŏpchu*[238] officially brewed by the Yangonsŏ, the commoners did not have the means to produce or access such refined alcoholic beverages and resorted instead to thickly-colored and turbid alcoholic beverages. Here Xu was likely referring to *t'akchu*,[239] an unstrained, turbid, low ABV liquor that was relatively simpler to brew. Koryŏ poetry features several references to *t'akchu*, variously referred to as *pakchu*[240] or *paekchu*,[241] indicating that these wines were common wines that were consumed during festivities, out in the fields, and by commoners and travelers alike.[242] While there is no mention of soju being distilled by the Yangonsŏ, given that it required a complicated process and that it was consumed by a wealthier segment of the population, it is not unlikely.

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[235] 良醞署
[236] Park, "The Rise of Soju," 178.
[237] 淸酒, literally "clear wine." Yi Sŏngu writes that the Koryŏ *ch'ŏngju* had an alcohol content of about 12-18%. Yi Sŏngu, *Han'guk Shikp'um Sahoesa*, 211.
[238] 法酒, literally "law wine" or "recipe wine," a kind of *ch'ŏngju.* Hyunhee Park writes that Koryŏ *pŏpchu* was brewed using a "rich base composed of certain proportions of raw ingredients," which is perhaps why it was called a "recipe wine." Park, "The Rise of Soju," 178.
[239] 濁酒, literally "turbid wine."
[240] 薄酒, literally "light wine."
[241] 白酒, literally "white wine."
[242] Yi Sŏngu, *Han'guk Shikp'um Sahoesa*, 210-212.

Entering into the Chosŏn dynasty (1392 - 1897), we find more indications that soju was a drink restricted to the nobility. To remind the reader, Hŏ Chun mentioned in the *Tongŭi pogam* that soju had a primarily medicinal usage at its inception in the Yuan period and was not used haphazardly, but that in his present day (the 15th century), "those of upper status drink great amounts, to their heart's content; in the summer they drink much soju from large cups."[243] In

Fig. 11: A photograph dated sometime between 1900 and 1920 depicting a *yangban* male drinking soju. Soju consumption was highly gendered in this era. Courtesy of the Andong Soju Museum Archives.

addition, the previously mentioned *Chibong yusŏl* (芝峰類說) of 1614 noted that soju was both so expensive and so strong that it was common practice to drink it in small cups called *sojujan* that were roughly equivalent to shot glasses.[244] Finally, the French missionary Claude-Charles

[243] Pettid, *Korean Cuisine*, 185.
[244] Shin, *Everyday Life in Joseon-Era Korea*, 238.

Dallet (1829 - 1878) in his 1874 *Histoire de l'Église de Corée* (The History of the Church of Korea) noted that in the summer months, soju with a sprig of honey water was the beverage of choice for *yangban* officials. The higher alcohol content of soju made it a more attractive option than other liquors, as it allowed these wealthy officials to better withstand the scorching heat of the Korean summer.[245] It is therefore clear that soju was localized to a wealthy segment of the population, and that even as late as the end of the 19th century, it was considered a drink of nobility. How, then, did soju achieve the mass appeal that it has today? There seems to be a discontinuity between the end of the 19th century and the present day.

Kayangju: The Home-Brewing Tradition

We established earlier that people throughout the Koryŏ dynasty consumed a wide range of alcoholic beverages. Entering into the Chosŏn dynasty, we see this range only widen. Our understanding of Chosŏn dietary practices is far more comprehensive than that of any preceding Korean era due to the wealth of written sources on the ingredients and recipes of various foodstuffs. Yi Sanghŭi lists a total of 12 works published throughout the dynasty that feature the types and recipes of various alcoholic beverages, such as the *Kosa ch'waryo* (1554) and the *Tongguk sesigi* (1849). These works feature references to over 700 different liquors, a number that still exceeds 300 even after excluding multiple references to the same beverage. While people in the Chosŏn dynasty continued to consume what Yi Sanghŭi calls the three major alcoholic beverages (*soju, t'akchu, ch'ŏngju*), a major shift occurred in which people began

[245] Yi Sanghŭi, *Sul*, 73.

adding medicinal drugs, vegetables, sweeteners, and fragrances to their beverages. But what explains the wide range?

The answer to why the number of traditional alcoholic beverages throughout Korean history may number in the hundreds or even thousands lies in home-brewing. Brewing and distilling methods were often passed down in each household, generation by generation. A diversity of ingredients, proportions, and methods yielded a diversity of alcoholic beverages that are altogether categorized as *kayangju*,[246] or "home-brewed liquors." *Kayangju* have been historically produced using base ingredients such as rice, sticky rice, barley, wheat, sorghum, corn, sweet potato, potato and buckwheat. During the Chosŏn dynasty, other ingredients were later added during the brewing process to create unique tastes; these ingredients included *juk* (rice porridge), *mulssongp'yŏn* (water rice cake), and *injŏlmi* (rice cake coated with bean flour). In order to estimate how widespread home-brewing was in this era, we can refer to some Japanese Occupation statistics. During the Japanese Occupation, the colonial authorities began distributing "personal licenses for non-commercial brewing" in 1916, but by 1918 the number of such licenses numbered 370,000. Judging from this figure, the practice of brewing and consuming alcoholic beverages at home seems to have been so widespread that about one in seven homes brewed *kayangju*.[247] These home-brewed liquors were more than just alcoholic beverages - they often influenced the very character of the village and the very way of life of its inhabitants.

Yi Sanghŭi points to a poem by Pak Mokwŏl (1916-1978) as evidence of *kayangju* taking on a local character on this era. The poem, entitled *Nagŭne* (The Wayfarer) is reproduced below:

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[246] 家釀酒
[247] Yi Sanghŭi, *Sul*, 85-86, 88.

강나루 건너서 (*Over the river*)
밀밭 길을 (*by a path through the wheat*)

구름에 달 가듯이 (*like the moon through the clouds*)
가는 나그네 (*the wayfarer goes.*)

길은 외줄기 (*The road stretches*)
남도(南道) 삼백 리 (*three hundred li to the southern provinces*)

술 익는 마을마다 (*the sunset burns bright*)
타는 저녁 놀 (*in every wine-mellowing village*)

구름에 달 가듯이 (*as the wayfarer goes*)
가는 나그네 (*like the moon through the clouds*)

Yi Sanghŭi believes that Pak Mokwŏl uses the "wine-mellowing villages" to "depict our hometowns as if in a painting."[248] These are not just any hometowns. Yi uses the Korean word *kohyang* which strictly speaking does refer to one's "hometown" or "home village" but is often especially used to denote a rural place of origin. Indeed, Yi speaks of "*uriŭi hyangt'ojŏk chŏngsŏ*" ("our shared local/indigenous/rural sentiment") that one can see portrayed in the sensory imagery of the various "wine-mellowing villages" that dotted the road stretching south for three hundred li.[249] But keep in mind that Pak Mokwŏl's poem *Nagŭne* was not published in the pre-modern era but in 1946, a year after the Japanese Occupation ended. This has led some to criticize the poem for being insensitive to the time period in which it was written. After all, by 1946 the *kayangju* tradition had all but been eradicated, as we will see in the next chapter. In addition, as the literary critic Ku Chungsŏ notes, by the end of the Japanese Occupation "if we didn't even have enough food to eat, where even are these wine-mellowing villages?"[250] If its veracity is questioned, then, we can perhaps interpret this poem as a textbook example of

[248] Original text: "그는 이 시에서 '술 익는 마을마다 타는 저녁 놀'이라고 하여 우리 고향의 모습을 한 폭의 그림처럼 읊고 있다."
[249] Yi Sanghŭi, *Sul*, 88.
[250] No Chaeyŏl, *1980 : 노재열 장편소설* (Seoul: Sanjini, 2011),

nostalgia for a pre-industrial, pre-modern and somewhat more "culturally authentic" past. But above all else, this nostalgia may also be directed to the pre-colonial as well, as we will see in the next chapter.

But when pre-modern poets or literati were portraying soju or other alcoholic beverages, very few would have deployed the language of a shared "our" or "we" that included the entire Korean peninsula. They were much more likely to refer to their own home or their own village if they were to define themselves or define their *kayangju* - we do not see the language of soju being a "national liquor" in this era. But the case of nationhood in primordial or pre-modern Korea is an interesting one that presents several challenges. Scholars of nationalism usually rely on the concepts of race and ethnicity, with race generally defined as "a collectivity defined by innate and immutable phenotypic and genotypic characteristics" whereas ethnicity is generally defined as a "cultural phenomenon based on a common language and history." But the Korean case is confounding because the two are usually confounded and used as a justification for nationhood. This is to the extent that the Korean word *minjok* can be used for "nation," "ethnie," and "race" alike.[251]

Gi-Wook Shin largely groups scholars of Korean nationalism into three camps. Members of the first "ethnicist or primordialist" camp largely viewed the Korean ethnic nation as a "natural product" of those who shared the same bloodline, with some tracing unitary nationhood and ethnic homogeneity back some five thousand years to the mythical progenitor of the Korean race, Tan'gun. The Korean *minjok*, then, existed even if the recently codified concepts of *minjok*hood did not. Members of the second "modernist" camp argue that instead, the Korean

[251] Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, And Legacy*, 1st ed. (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2006), 4.

nation is simply a fundamentally modern construction that arose with the advent of modernity at the beginning of the twentieth century. Prior to this point, these scholars argue that Korean society, despite being a central bureaucratic state, was more a "status society with a clearly defined vertical hierarchy" than one of "horizontal" relations among people that regarded themselves as members of the same national community. Finally, members of the third camp do not regard the Korean nation as a natural and assumed phenomenon, but seek to distinguish the Korean case from Western conceptions of nation-states. One identifying feature of the arguments of this third camp is that of the "remarkable stability of territorial boundaries and the endurance of the Korean bureaucratic state" since ancient times. Gi-Wook Shin ties the three with his own pronouncement that while ethnicity may indeed be a basis for nationhood in the Korean case, pre-modern Koreans held multiple forms of identity that vied for supremacy as a form of collective identity.[252]

What is unambiguous is that when foreign observers regarded liquors that originated from the Korean peninsula they often identified these liquors by their national origin, to an extent permissible given that nationhood is indeed a modern, Western phenomenon. After all, the reader will be reminded of Chinese poet Li Shangyin's lines, "I am afraid that the aroma of a glass of Silla wine will go away with the wind at dawn."[253] This wine was not just any wine, it was a wine associated with and representative of the kingdom of Silla (57 BC - 935 AD). But as Gi-Wook Shin argues, it is unclear that Koreans saw themselves primarily on the basis of nationhood and it may indeed be possible that certain forms of identity, such as social class, may have been far more salient. Carter J. Eckert adds that the pre-colonial Korean elite may have seen

[252] Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea*, 5-7.
[253] Park, "The Rise of Soju," 176-177.

nationalism as not only strange but also uncivilized, given his belief that "far more meaningful at the time, in addition to a sense of loyalty to the king, were the attachments of Koreans to their village or region, and above all to their clan, lineage, and immediate and extended family."[254] Soju may not have been a Korean drink but a noble's drink, much as the *t'akchu* referenced earlier may not have been a Korean drink but a commoner's drink, at least at this point in time.[255] In the transition into the modern period, a fundamental shift in how people regarded their liquors occurs.[256]

Commercialization, or Lack Thereof

While we have seen some evidence in China of an awareness of Korean liquors that included soju, we also have record of Korean distilled liquors being exported through Tsushima Island to Japan. Tsushima Island became an international trade center in this era, given its location roughly fifty kilometers from the Korean peninsula and one-hundred and forty-seven kilometers from what is today Fukuoka in Japan. This cultural exchange was not one-sided. After the Portuguese exported chili peppers to Japan in 1542, these peppers eventually made their way to Korea during the Japanese Invasions of 1592-98, and there is record that for some time it was common to add a sprig of *koch'utkaru* (chili powder) to soju, much as *koch'utkaru* took its hold in the rest of the Korean culinary tradition.[257]

The soju trade was not well-established in this era. For one, international trade was not well-established in early Chosŏn Korea and was restricted mostly to tributary trade with China.

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[254] Eckert, *Offspring of Empire*, 227.
[255] Myŏng Uk, "태초에 있었던 술… 막걸리와 탁주, 동동주 뭐가 다르지?," *Chosun Ilbo*, July 4, 2013, http://food.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2013/07/03/2013070302516.html.
[256] Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea*, 7.
[257] Yi Sanghŭi, *Sul*, 72.

According to Carter Eckert, there is no evidence of a large-scale and expansive market in Chosŏn Korea that was even comparable to that which existed in contemporary Tokugawa Japan. In Japan, a gradual urbanization began in the 16th century that contributed to a strong commercial tradition centered around the merchant houses of Edo, which by the eighteenth century boasted a population of one million people. In contrast, the aristocracy of Chosŏn Korea often disdained commercial trade and retained their close ties to land ownership, a marker of elite status that has ramifications to the present day.[258] As we noted in the introduction, some nationalist narratives do argue that the Japanese and Manchu invasions of the Chosŏn dynasty paved the path for the rise of a market-oriented entrepreneurial merchant class, further arguing under a Marxist lens that Korea was marching on its way towards a form of capitalism. However, the scholarly consensus is that it was only after the Treaty of Ganghwa Island in 1876 that Chosŏn Korea began developing both internal and external market opportunities, thereby suggesting that the aforementioned soju trade may only have amounted to a "well-organized form of smuggling" with little in common with the capitalist world economy that emerged by the end of the nineteenth century.[259] Of course, given that there was no established trade in soju, it also follows that there is no evidence that soju was mass-produced during this period. The evidence indicates that the vast majority of soju was produced in the home, at least until the Japanese Occupation.

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[258] According to a 1980 joint study by the Harvard Institute for International Development and the Korea Development Bank, 47% of the 300 South Korean businessman sampled were the sons of "large-to-medium landowners." Land ownership was often hereditary, indicating that many of the active players of the capitalist economy of the 20th century had their origins in an old landed elite and came from a tradition of wealth, of which land ownership was an important marker.
Source: Leroy P. Jones and Il Sakong, *Government, Business, and Entrepreneurship in Economic Development: The Korean Case*, 1st ed., vol. 91 (Harvard University Asia Center, 1980), 228.
[259] Eckert, *Offspring of Empire*, 8.

Therefore, there was a distinct lack of specialization and industrialization of liquor production in pre-colonial Korea. Gerard Sasges demonstrates that in pre-colonial Vietnam, ethnic Chinese inhabitants owned and operated a vast network of distilleries along the Vietnamese coast. One Saigon distillery in the 1880s owned 20 stills capable of producing over 600 liters of liquor per day. In the northern regions, the industry was concentrated in "distilling villages" that brought together multiple families. Each village was usually responsible for a part of the production process. As Sasges writes, "one village might specialize in growing sticky rice, while a neighboring village - often with poor rice fields - transformed the rice into alcohol." While an embryonic transportation infrastructure, a partially monetized economy, and the use of primitive technologies limited the penetration of the commercial alcohol market, it was nevertheless in the eyes of the French a relatively well developed system.[260]

In contrast, while small-scale brewing and distilling was by far the norm in Korean liquor production as well, it was not commercialized to the extent found in pre-colonial Vietnam. Like the Vietnamese, brewing and distillation was usually a secondary occupation for Korean families and was often seen as a means to use up surplus rice. In addition, liquor production was physically undemanding, as "children, the elderly, and above all women could tend a still while seeing to other household tasks such as preparing meals."[261] But while the surplus liquor may indeed have been sold to merchants or in a market of some sort in pre-colonial Korea, it was not profitable enough to warrant facilities of specialized liquor production that went beyond the equivalents of roadside inns and taverns. What did arise, however, was the gendering of liquor production given that it was seen as a secondary, small-scale, physically undemanding task.

[260] Sasges, *Drunken Poets and New Women*, 11-12.
[261] Sasges, *Drunken Poets and New Women*, 12.

Women and Alcohol in Pre-Colonial Korea

While the *kayangju* are portrayed nostalgically by most historians as a bygone tradition, Yi Sanghŭi and Yi Sŏngu overlook the fact that its production was localized to the women of the household. Many may be inclined to believe that the fight for women's rights in Korea has followed a linear progression since ancient times. However, the dominant historical opinion is that the Chosŏn dynasty represented a regression of sorts for women in terms of their status and visibility in the public sphere. Historians largely ascribe this to a matter of state religion. Theodore Jun Yoo argues that the state-sanctioned Buddhism of the Koryŏ dynasty empowered women with familial privileges such as the right to remarry or inherit property. Women during the Koryŏ dynasty were not beholden to the institution of marriage and could choose to live alone or even to have multiple husbands, although Yoo admits that the latter was not common. It may perhaps shock the modern reader that it was then rather customary for parents in their old age to reside with daughters rather than sons, which Yoo ascribes to a matter of preference and convenience.[262]

The Chosŏn dynasty marked a shift in the state religion from Buddhism to neo-Confucianism, which prescribed a well-ordered, hierarchical family as the basis for a well-ordered society. For the Chosŏn leaders, a strict family hierarchy in which the male patriarch was charged with greater prerogatives was essential to the stability of the kingdom. Yoo notes that women's subservience was ensured through the *samjong chido*, or the three obediences: to their fathers, husbands, and even sons. Women were essentially socially and

[262] Theodore Jun Yoo, ed., "Women in Chosŏn Korea," in *The Politics of Gender in Colonial Korea*, 1st ed., Education, Labor, and Health, 1910–1945 (University of California Press, 2008), 19.

legally disenfranchised during this period, and customs such as the rights of primogeniture and the maintenance of family genealogies called *chokpo* still continue in some forms today.[263] Gerald Sasges writes of the Confucian norms regarding alcohol consumption in pre-colonial Vietnam in the following manner:

> Confucian feminine ideals that stressed modesty and propriety provided little space for the consumption of alcohol. Yet, particularly in the countryside, where elite culture confronted everyday practices, ideals and reality did not always conform. Early proponents of the colonial alcohol monopoly highlighted the way alcohol was consumed by everyone, men and women, young and old alike. Nevertheless, on the whole gender norms acted to limit how, when, and where women might drink, and to ensure that the public consumption of alcohol remained a largely male activity.[264]

Given that many features of alcohol consumption, such as small-scale home-brewing, were common to both pre-colonial Korea and pre-colonial Vietnam, we can use this commentary on another context to shed some light on the situation of women in this era.

Specific to the Korean case was that the Confucian ideal of veneration for ancestors led to ancestral memorial ceremonies called *jesa*[265] to become common practice during this period. These ceremonies often called for the offering of *jeju*,[266] or sacred liquor.[267] As Jung Eun Sophia Park notes in her study of food rituals in Korean religiosity, food and by extension liquor performs the important function of reifying the connection between the living and the dead in a form of corporeal communion.[268]These *kayangju* liquors were usually brewed at home according to recipes that had been passed down and matched to the individual tastes of family members.

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[263] Yoo, "Women in Chosŏn Korea," 20.
[264] Sasges, *Drunken Poets and New Women*, 15.
[265] 祭祀
[266] 祭酒
[267] Yi Sanghŭi, *Sul*, 89.
[268] Jung Eun Sophia Park, "The Eating Ritual in Korean Religiosity: Young San Jae for the Dead and for the Living," in *Dying to Eat*, Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Food, Death, and the Afterlife (University Press of Kentucky, 2018), 37.

They were so important that there was a saying that "with great households come great liquors."[269] As women were expected to marry into a household at the marriageable ages of fourteen to twenty, it is not hard to see how learning and adapting to the customs of her new home could be both a physical and an emotional burden.[270]

This is not to say that the Chosŏn women idly stood by while their social position radically deteriorated. As the Chosŏn dynasty progressed the kingdom found itself plagued by partisan infighting and a disrupted class system through the emergence of a nouveau-riche merchant class. The displaced and disaffected intellectuals sought concrete solutions to this disruption and banded together under the banner of *sirhak*, or practical learning. Many *sirhak* scholars perceived female labor and skills to be underutilized in the existing neo-Confucian order and argued in favor of a more expansive role for women. Yi Pinghŏkak (1759 - 1824) was one such figure. When Yi wrote an encyclopedic guide for her daughters entitled the *Kyuhap ch'ongsŏ*,[271] she took care to include liquor distillation among the duties expected of women, alongside meal preparation, sewing, weaving, raising domestic livestock, and flower gardening. Yoo points out that Yi's writings feature "records of virtuous women" intended for her daughters to emulate, with biographies of Korean and Chinese women "ranging from female warriors to Taoist hermits."[272] Yi's writings indicate that by the end of the Chosŏn dynasty, the repressive order had begun to show its cracks.

[269] 名家名酒
[270] Yoo, "Women in Chosŏn Korea," 22.
[271] 閨閤叢書
[272] Yoo, "Women in Chosŏn Korea," 35.

Fig. 12: The Andong Soju Museum features dioramas that depict the gendered dimensions of this *kayangju* tradition. The placard on the left reads "Receiving Guests." Courtesy of the Andong Soju Museum.

Women often had an acknowledged preeminence in the private sphere. The duties prescribed to women included household management, education for children, and preparation for ancestral rites, and especially in the case of *yangban* (the "scholar-official" gentry) households husbands were not allowed to meddle in these affairs. As one's station in the social hierarchy decreased the division between men's and women's spheres grew far more fluid. As lower-class women were more likely to perform manual labor or work in the public sphere, they enjoyed degrees of personal freedom not enjoyed by *yangban* women, who were often confined to the home.[273] But it is unclear whether at the end of the day Chosŏn women of any class were able to escape the societal onus of fulfilling the "women's chores" outlined in the previous chapter, no matter how expansive their capabilities were in the public sphere. Therefore, when we highlight the thriving *kayangju* tradition we must consider whether the responsibility of distilling liquors could have been an undue burden on the women of the household. It is no accident that those such as Cho Okhwa in the present day married into a home with a supposed storied liquor tradition, but eventually became the one responsible for preserving and passing on

[273] Yoo, "Women in Chosŏn Korea," 27.

the methods of liquor production learned from her new mother-in-law.[274] Had more women written histories of Korean liquor, we are left to wonder whether the tradition would have been portrayed so nostalgically.

Concluding Remarks

Tracing (or chasing) traditions is not an easy task. Many of the findings presented in this chapter are the result of a great deal of conjecturing and speculating based on available archaeological and anthropological evidence. We have also seen that that which is presented as fact is often based on little evidence. Many of the historians referenced in this chapter, including Yi Sanghŭi and Yi Sŏngu, are indeed quite nationalist and often fall prey to a presupposing of Korean nationhood since ancient times, which leads them to portray the pre-modern past (especially the traditions of *kayangju*) as not only "culturally authentic" but also the subject of nostalgia for a simpler, less industrial, less modern time. But while many modern historians may deride them or suspect their findings because of this nationalist bias, the reader would do well to remember the collective purpose of the Colonial Modernity framework explicitly set out by Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson. Shin and Robinson spoke of a more nuanced understanding of the colonial period and the post-colonial state through "writing around, beneath, and beyond the nationalist approaches," thereby regarding nationalism as a fluid category and the subject of constant renegotiation.[275] Our analysis will answer this call and attempt to glean from these nationalist approaches an understanding of pre-colonial liquor traditions in order to better understand the nature of the colonial period.

[274] Kim Yŏnpak (of Andong Soju) in conversation with the author, January 2018.
[275] Shin and Robinson, *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, 2-3.

Summing up our findings, the introduction of soju is the subject of some historiographical debate but there is nevertheless a general consensus that the distillation technology that cannot be separated from soju is of foreign import. A thriving liquor tradition preceded the introduction of soju, which is why we may question why soju is sometimes included in modern day pronouncements of the "traditional" and is almost always included in modern day pronouncements of the "Korean."[276] But the politics of nationhood aside, even after soju became rooted in Korean society, it is unlikely that anyone ever understood soju in "national" terms in the pre-modern era, as they did in the modern era. Although a period of about 40 years separates the two chapters, the discontinuity between is starkly apparent. Now that we have covered the post-colonial and dived into the pre-colonial, the time has come to delve into the colonial.

[276] As a reminder, diluted soju was excluded from the 2009 government subsidy to the traditional liquor industry in the hopes of developing a "flagship drink" comparable to wine in France or beer in Germany. But traditional soju was not similarly excluded. In addition, both traditional soju and diluted soju alike are often uncritically cited as "Korean." Moon Gwanglip, "State Support for Traditional Korean Liquor," *Korea JoongAng Daily*, August 27, 2009, http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=2909296.

Chapter 3: The Colonial

The National Institute of the Korean Language uses the Sino-Korean characters 燒酒 as the default *Hanja* for soju.[277][278] This spelling is also used in China to represent *shāojiǔ*, an 80-120 proof Chinese liquor. However, many Korean soju brands feature an alternate set of *Hanja*, 燒酎. This is often a source of confusion to many Koreans who are used to the symbol 酒 to denote liquor, and 燒酒 to denote soju in particular. Both feature the same first character, 燒, which means "to burn," and the 酒 character has historically been used in Korea to refer to an alcoholic beverage. In addition, we can search for both spellings in the Annals of the Chosŏn dynasty, or the *Chosŏn wangjo shillok*.[279] The original 燒酒 spelling has a total of 176 references, whereas the unfamiliar 燒酎 spelling has a total of 0 references. Indeed, in every single reference that we have studied in the previous chapter, the 燒 character was invariably paired with the 酒 character. Therefore we are left to suppose that the 燒酎 spelling is relatively new.

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[277] Linguists generally classify the Korean language as a language isolate. The linguistic academe has largely rejected hypotheses that link Korean to the Japanese language, or more controversially to an Altaic language family that includes the Turkic, Mongolic, and Tungusic languages. However, academics studying the history of the Korean language are confounded by the fact that the Korean alphabet, *Han'gŭl*, was only introduced in the 15th century under King Sejong the Great (r. 1418 - 1450) during the Chosŏn dynasty. A system of classical Chinese characters preceded *Han'gŭl* by over a millennium called *Hanja*. Although cumbersome at times, *Hanja* coexisted with *Han'gŭl* as a writing system for several centuries, a linguistic history somewhat analogous to the massive influx and eventual coexistence of Chinese loanwords to the "native Korean" language. Many Korean and Sino-Korean words continue to be used in parallel today, with one notable example being the dual numbering system. North Korea has conducted and continues to conduct a language purification campaign that sought to maximize the usage of *Han'gŭl* and minimize the amount of loanwords, which range from Sino-Korean to Japanese to English in origin. Because South Korea did not undertake a campaign of a similar magnitude, this has resulted in a stark linguistic divide across the artificial border that continues to separate the two nations. The required mastery of the words appropriate to specific contexts are what render the Korean and Japanese languages so difficult to the English-speaking learner. To these learners, take heart - explaining why we eat "beef" or "pork" and not "cow" or "pig" to an ESL student is the first step to reckoning with the massive influx of loanwords in our own language.
William J. Frawley, "Korean," *International Encyclopedia of Linguistics: AAVE - Esperanto* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 367.

[278] A database of the "official" spellings of Korean words is available online at stdweb2.korean.go.kr/

[279] The *Joseon Wangjo Sillok* are available online in their entirety at sillok.history.go.kr/ in digitized form. They are available in both the original Classical Chinese text and in a Modern Korean translation in *Hangul* (the Korean alphabet). An English translation is projected to be completed by 2033.

The answer lies in the Japanese Occupation of Korea, from 1910 to 1945. During the Occupation, the colonial authorities introduced a series of ordinances and technologies that popularized a diluted variant of the "traditional" soju. The 酎 character was a Japanese rendition of the Chinese character 酒, often taken to mean "to make liquor" or "to raise the alcohol content by distilling multiple times." As diluted soju was developed when Korea was under Japanese rule, this new diluted variant took on the 酎 character, making the Korean spelling of *soju* equivalent to the Japanese spelling of *shōchū*, a 50 proof Japanese liquor that is commonly confused with the Korean soju.[280] Thus, the semantic debate over soju is an illuminating example of a Japanese influence on its modern incarnation.

One cautionary note before entering our analysis is that the Occupation itself was not one singular, constant entity. Historians largely divide the Occupation into three distinct phases: the military rule phase, the cultural rule phase, and the *Naisen Itai* phase. The military rule phase was the initial period of Japanese rule, in which the colonial government deployed force to deliberately curtail Korean freedom and autonomy. This all changed with the cultural rule phase of the 1920s, in which limited cultural and social freedoms began to be tolerated after the violent suppression of the March 1st Movement of 1919. This was, however, reversed in the last phase, in which the Japan Empire began mobilizing the Korean population for its war effort in the Asia-Pacific region and announced a forced assimilation policy known as *Naisen Itai*, roughly translated as "Japan and Korea as one." There is scholarly consensus that the Japanese colonial authorities actively sought to eradicate Korea's ethnic and cultural identity during this period, most notoriously in a series of ordinances known as the *Ch'angssi kaemyŏng* (Korean) or

[280] Yi Sanghŭi, *Sul*, 150.

Sōshi-kaimei (Japanese) (創氏改名) in 1939 and 1940 that pressured Koreans to adopt Japanese names.[281] This phase also saw human rights abuses in the form of sex slavery by the Imperial Japanese Army. Euphemistically referred to as "Comfort Women," some 100,000 to 200,000 Korean women were mobilized along with thousands of women from the other reaches of the Japanese Empire. All this and more was justified under the banner of *kokutai*, a term that roughly meant "national essence" and was used to denote an all-encompassing Japanese collective in this last phase.[282] Given the stark difference among the three phases of the Japanese Occupation, any meaningful study of the period must either take care to identify the phase in question or note the continuity and change throughout the whole.

The Modernization of Power

The Treaty of Ganghwa Island of 1876 may have been the beginning of the end for old Korea. This was the first modern international treaty for the Koreans and the first exercise in the art of Western imperialism for the Japanese, given that the treaty was occasioned by a Japanese show of gunboat diplomacy à la Commodore Perry. The treaty gave extraterritorial legal rights to Japanese nationals on Korean soil and opened several Korean ports to international trade, effectively conferring upon the Japanese the same privileges that the Western powers had secured in their own colonies.[283] In short order, Chosŏn Korea was launched from a Sino-Korean tributary system of "inconsequential hierarchy and real independence, if not equality" into a Western system characterized by "fictive equality and real subordination."[284]

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[281] Lee, *Colonial Rule and Social Change in Korea,* 6.
[282] Cumings 181
[283] Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 86, 101.
[284] Cumings, 95.

Japan fought wars over control of Korea with competing powers and achieved victories in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894 - 1895) and later in the Russo-Japanese War (1904 - 1905). With the other Great Powers largely turning a blind eye, Japan was free to establish a protectorate in Korea in 1905. The Japan-Korea Treaty of 1905 reduced the Korean armed forces from 20,000 to 1,000 and ceded governing authority to a Japanese police force, effectively bringing Korea under Japanese control. Signing the Annexation papers in 1910 and forcing the last ruler of the Chosŏn dynasty to step down was by then merely a formalization of what had already become a reality.

After assuming control, Japanese colonial authorities proceeded to embark on a policy of what Bruce Cumings terms "substitution": the substitution of Japanese government officials, a Japanese government structure in coordination with the metropole, a Japanese modern education system, Japanese technology and capital, and even eventually the Japanese language for the Korean equivalents.[285] These were all introduced under the guise of modernization. Highlighting the ways in which the country has benefited from the "modernization" of the colonial period risks diminishing the painful reverberations of the era that last to this day, making the study of this history a contentious and violent enterprise. The colonial legacy is filled with what Carter J. Eckert calls "Faustian ironies": "if one finds in it enlightenment and progress, one also finds national subjugation, shame, and betrayal, political authoritarianism and violence, and profound human suffering."[286]

One of the ways in which this modernization occurred had to do with the new colonial legal-governmental apparatus. The Introduction highlights Chulwoo Lee's essay on the

[285] Cumings, 141.
[286] Eckert, Carter J. *Offspring of Empire: The Koch'ang Kims and the Colonial Origins of Korean Capitalism, 1876-1945*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991: xii.

"modernization of power," in which he argues that the Japanese colonial authorities conceived of the legal-governmental apparatus as a new way to "extend its power and control to minute details of life untouched by the traditional Korean state." One of the ways in which power was reconstituted by the Japanese, according to Lee, is the emergence of *savoir-pouvoir* as a governing policy. The highly bureaucratic governing structure and literate tradition of pre-colonial Korea made Koreans no strangers to the government maintenance of information for administrative purposes, but according to Lee the scope and magnitude was no match for that which was achieved by the Japanese colonial government.[287]

Hyman Kublin's term "excessive attention" was indeed a unique characteristic of Japanese colonialism, and many colonial policies were indeed governed by the notion that the collection and storage of information could then be used to engineer society to both preserve order and achieve material progress. Governmental pressure on officials to "improve" levels reported by statistical data would have transferred to the populace, thereby bringing greater intrusion and closer observation.[288] By positioning themselves as the agents of this preservation and progress, the Japanese could both control the direction of this progress and assume responsibility for its success and for its citizens. Therefore, when postwar Western scholars and Japanese apologists alike credit Japanese rule for the material and institutional progress on the Korean peninsula under the sway of modernization, they had an extensive paper trail to account for these claims.[289]

But the value of Lee's framework for our analysis is his deploying of the term "modernization" to the legal-governmental apparatus and the incumbent laws, census collections,

[287] Lee, "Modernity, Legality, and Power in Korea Under Japanese Rule," 23-24, 38-39.
[288] Kublin, "The Evolution of Japanese Colonialism," 80.
[289] Lee, "Modernity, Legality, and Power in Korea Under Japanese Rule," 21.

and taxations that followed. The introduction of my thesis waxes eloquent about the problematic and fraught nature of the terms "modernity" and "modernization," but the equating of the legal-governmental apparatus and the "modernization of power" demonstrates the difficulty of understanding the developments of this era in binary terms of right and wrong. Yes, the legal-governmental apparatus enabled much of the "progress" of this era, but as Lee demonstrates, the intentions did not always have the best interests of the Korean colonial subjects in mind.

The Origins of Liquor Taxation

Lee's framework enables us with a more nuanced understanding of the liquor licensing and liquor taxation of the Japanese Occupation, two policies that are bound up with one another. One primary source that gives clarity and organization to our narrative is a 2007 Korean translation of a 1935 publication called the *History of Chosŏnju/Chōsenshu Production*,[290] variously romanized as the *Chosŏnju josa* (Korean) or the *Chōsenshu zōshi* (Japanese). Published by the Chōsen Sōtoku or the Government-General of Chōsen, this volume was an official government history of the liquor industry of Korea from 1907 to 1935, featuring information on liquor classification, production, and commercial distribution. Published in part to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Annexation, the work is comprehensive in its scope and even contains a number of expert opinions on the state of the liquor industry, written by Japanese and Korean authors alike.[291] It was published in 1935, during the middle of the *Naisen Itai* phase in which Korea was aggressively assimilated into the Japanese Empire, hastened in

[290] 朝鮮酒造史
[291] Pae Sangmyŏn (trans.), *Chosŏnjujosa 朝鮮酒造史 [History of Chosŏnju/Chōsenshu Production]* (Seoul: Ugok Publishing, 2007), 348.

part by the road to World War II. Given that this was an account published and distributed by the colonial authorities we are left to wonder about the narratives that are not featured in this history. While we will intersperse our own narrative with as much context as possible, it is unfortunately likely that many perspectives, particularly the subaltern ones, fell through the cracks.

The *Chosŏnju josa* presents an official government position on the development and current state of the Korean liquor industry in 1935, as follows:

> After the introduction of modern scientific production methods, Korean liquor production rapidly developed from its primitive origins to today occupy the manufacturing industry's foremost position. Liquor production accounted for 30% of the tax collection of 1934 (9th year of Shōwa), providing a bedrock for the national finance. The liquor industry is well-positioned to be the king of the industry of Chosŏn, an achievement that can be ascribed to the strict regulation of the colonial government.[292]

The *Chosŏnju josa* unambiguously states that the trajectory of the development of Korean liquor production is bound to the trajectory of corresponding Japanese government initiatives. As indicated in the previous chapter, while there is evidence of a thriving liquor tradition in the Korean peninsula, liquor production was neither commercialized nor industrialized. The colonial legal-governmental apparatus assumed responsibility for the introduction of modern scientific methods to the liquor industry, thereby "saving" the industry from its "primitive origins" at the beginning of the colonial encounter. What would eventually occur was a remarkable confluence of state and industrial power, showing how colonial modernity, capitalist exploitation, and state repression were linked in the Korean case.

Indeed, the authors of the *Chosŏnju josa* verify many of our claims from the previous chapter. The authors write that liquor production was often a side-job and not a trade for most

[292] Pae Sangmyŏn, *Chosŏnjujosa*, 39.

Koreans. Therefore Korean alcohol culture was characterized by production and consumption within the home, i.e. the well-established *kayangju* tradition explicated in the previous chapter. The authors also argue that the extreme Government Officials Over People (官尊民卑) customs that were prevalent during the Chosŏn dynasty led to the conception of industrial labor as a dishonorable calling, causing the production of liquor to be scorned as the role of women. Thus, government restructuring of the liquor industry was construed, in some ways, as a way to liberate Korea from its older, outdated (and repressive) Confucian norms. To put their money where their mouths were, the colonial authorities eventually established a government brewing laboratory in 1910 outside the Kyŏngsŏng city walls in Ahyŏn-ri,[293] in what is today Seodaemun-gu, Seoul.[294]

Even outside the introduction of modern scientific methods, which we will explore further later, was a form of "legal taming." According to Lee, Japanese colonialists, like their European counterparts identified law with civilization, and therefore viewed the "legal taming" of primitive peoples in a state of "untamed nature" as a mission of colonialism. However, according to a customs survey circulated from 1906 to 1910, Korea already had pre-existing legal customs that were not found to differ greatly from the institutions of Japanese civil law. Nevertheless, the colonial government ascribed many of what they perceived to be the negative features of Korean society to a lack of order and discipline, and intensified their control over the daily lives of citizens through an established colonial police force.[295]

One of the ways in which this "legal taming" would occur was through taxation. Many historical accounts incorrectly state that liquor was first taxed during the Japanese Occupation. In reality, the first liquor tax was passed in February 1909 during the Korean Empire era (1897 -

[293] 阿峴里
[294] Pae Sangmyŏn, *Chosŏnjujosa*, 39.
[295] Lee, "Modernity, Legality, and Power in Korea Under Japanese Rule," 28, 31, 32

1910). Some modern observers may distance the Japanese legal-governmental apparatus from liquor taxation by citing the fact that the first liquor tax was passed when Korea had still retained its colonial autonomy. But as Chulwoo Lee notes, Korea's internal administration came under Japanese sway even prior to the Occupation, as the Treaty of 1905 stipulated the placement of Japanese financial and foreign-affairs advisors within the Korean government. The liquor tax was very likely a Japanese colonial invention given that internal administration had been effectively ceded to Japan by that time.[296]

But even if it was not, the colonial authorities were willing to take credit for its introduction. Miki Kiyoshi (三木清一) of the Chosŏn Trust Company[297] wrote in an essay entitled "The Liquor Production of Grace"[298] that the taxation of liquor was part of the far-reaching reforms of the financial and monetary banking systems. In addition, according to Miki, the first liquor tax was simplistic and almost analogous in form to the Japanese tax system established in 1872.[299] Liquor taxation was so highly esteemed by the colonial authorities that the authors of the *Chosŏnju josa* organized the chronology of their work into four parts, running up to the publication date. These four periods were: the Protectorate era[300] (before 1910), the Post-Annexation Liquor Taxation Enforcement era[301] (1910 - 1916), the Post-Liquor Taxation Ordinance Promulgation Taisho era[302] (1916 - 1926) and the Shōwa era[303] (1927 - 1935).

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[296] Yi Sanghŭi 이상희, *Sul: Han'gugŭi Sul Munhwa 술: 한국의 술 문화 (Liquor: Korea's Liquor Culture)* (Seoul: Sun Publishing, 2009), 76.
[297] 朝鮮信託株式會社
[298] "恩寵의 주조업."
[299] Pae Sangmyŏn, *Chosŏnjujosa*, 410.
[300] 統監府時代
[301] 併合後酒稅法施行時代
[302] 酒稅令發布後 大正時代
[303] 昭和時代

While the liquor tax did not dominate government revenue in its early years, it was certainly nothing to sniff at. The *Chosŏnju josa* notes that in its first year in 1909, liquor tax collection numbered 202,000 won, amounting to roughly 13% of the total tax collection of the year. At about the time of the first liquor tax, Yi Sanghŭi estimates that given that most liquors were privately produced in homes, the amount of breweries and distilleries in Korea numbered about 155,832.[304] Miki Kiyoshi confirms this when he estimates that the amount of production centers numbered about 155,000.[305]

The tax did not distinguish between commercial and personal liquors and did not prescribe a limit: producers were only required to report by December to the appropriate tax authority the amount of liquor expected to be produced in the following year. The Liquor Tax Law (酒稅法), as it was called, required all producers to be licensed, and prescribed tax collections during May and December of each year. Licensure was a way to involve the government in the liquor production process, a clear departure from existing norms that viewed liquor production as in the home and outside the purview of the state. Given how many production facilities and liquor types existed during this period, the law made three rough categories of liquor: *yangsŏngju* ("cultivated liquors" such as *ch'ŏngju* and *yakchu*), *chŭngnyuju* ("distilled liquors" such as soju), and *honsŏngju* ("mixed liquors"). Although the currency of the Korean Empire was *won*, this law listed the currency as *hwan*; as both are readings of the character 圓 we will treat the difference as negligible. One *sŏk* (石), also known as the Korean

[304] Yi Sanghŭi, *Sul*, 76.
[305] Pae Sangmyŏn, *Chosŏnjujosa*, 410.

Picul, is the equivalent of about 180 L today.[306] The rates are found below, presented in table format using data compiled from the National Archives of Korea:

	Yangsŏngju (圓)	*Chŭngnyuju* (圓)	*Honsŏngju* (圓)
0 - 1 石	1	1	6
1 - 2 石	1	2	6
2 - 5 石	1	5	15
5 - 10 石	2	10	30
10 - 20 石	4	20	60
20 - 50 石	10	50 + 30圓 for every 30石	150 + 90圓 for every 30石
50 - 100 石	20 + 10圓 for every 50石		

Fig. 12: The first liquor taxation scheme. Courtesy of the National Archives of Korea.

This law was overseen by the *T'akchibu*,[307] which was the Korean Empire equivalent of the Department of the Treasury. If *T'akchibu* inspectors found unlicensed producers of liquor they administered a fine of not less than 2 *hwan* and not more than 200 *hwan.* The penalty for tax evasion was quite steep: offenders were required to pay double the prescribed amount.[308] Given the *sŏk* units, we can infer that liquor was not mass-produced at the levels that we see today. While soju production certainly did not reach the levels that Jinro Chamisul reached in 2011 (61.38 million cases of soju), the government statistics on data state that 63,000 *sŏk* (石) of soju

[306] United Nations. *World Weights and Measures; Handbook for Statisticians, Prepared by the Statistical Office of the United Nations in Collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.* Statistical Papers. Series M ;no. 21. New York, 1955. https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001478405. III-59.
[307] 度支部
[308] Kim Chuhwan, "주세법," Policy (National Archives of Korea), National Archives of Korea, accessed February 20, 2018, http://www.archives.go.kr/next/search/listSubjectDescription.do?id=005352.

were produced in 1913, a figure that rose to 71,000 *sŏk* (石) of soju in 1916. The rising figures accounted for a staggering doubling of liquor tax revenue from 1909 to 1916.[309]

The April 24, 1910 issue of the *Hwangsŏng shinmun* (on the eve of the Annexation of August 22, 1910) features a letter entitled "A Plea Against the Increase of the Cigarette and Liquor Tax (酒草稅)."[310] This letter was written by a representative of the soju merchants of Kongdŏk-ri (a district of Seoul), a region that was particularly known for its soju producers. According to one 1907 survey published in the *History of Chosŏnju/Chōsenshu Production* (朝鮮酒造史), in Kongdŏk-ri alone there were about 100 soju producers that collectively produced 540 - 10,800 L of soju annually.[311] The letter from the Kongdŏk-ri merchants indicates that the tax was perceived by residents of the capital of Seoul as both excessive and strictly enforced. This does not seem to have been the case nationwide. According to Chu Yŏngha, the tax was not as strictly enforced in the provinces, which suggests that the Korean Empire did not have much administrative reach.[312]

Liquor Taxation & Liquor Licensing

However, some time after the Annexation of 1910 the liquor tax system fundamentally changed. In 1916, the Chōsen Sōtoku or the Government-General of Chōsen revised the existing liquor tax by enacting the Liquor Tax Ordinance.[313] The Liquor Tax Ordinance continued the licensing system for all liquor producers, making no distinction between home, bar, or brewery/distillery as before. However, the Ordinance made a clear departure from the previous

[309] Pae Sangmyŏn, *Chosŏnjujosa*, 40.
[310] My translation of the original title, "酒草稅 增收에 관한 辯論."
[311] Yi Sanghŭi, *Sul*, 156.
[312] Chu Yŏngha, *식탁 위의 한국사: 메뉴로 본 20세기 한국 음식문화사* (Seoul: 휴머니스트, 2013).
[313] 酒稅令

tax law by discouraging the production of liquor for personal use, ostensibly under the pretense of cracking down on bootlegging. While in the past licensed producers that paid the appropriate taxes could produce as much "personal liquor" as they wished, from 1916 onwards they faced limitations on the amount produced for such a purpose. Simultaneously, the Ordinance levied higher tax rates for "personal liquor" than "commercial liquor," thereby protecting soju tradesmen. Finally, personal liquor producers were restricted from sharing or selling their liquor with others, and interestingly their direct descendents were restricted from acquiring such a license themselves. Commercial liquor producers, by contrast, did not have such a restriction.[314]

While this Liquor Tax Ordinance was revised on five occasions (in 1919, 1920, 1922, 1927, and 1934), the provisions intended to restrict the production of liquor for personal consumption grew consistently more severe until home-brewing was outright banned in 1934.[315] According to Yi Sanghŭi, the number of personal licenses numbered 370,000 in 1918.[316] However, this number fell to only one in 1932, before even that one license was taken away in 1934.[317] The reasons for the taxation on liquor were varied, but the Liquor Tax Ordinances did lead to a dramatic increase in liquor tax revenue: the colonial government collected twelve times more in revenue in 1918 than when the first liquor tax was passed in 1909, and by 1933 this revenue accounted for about 33% of all Korean tax revenue. The ordinances led to a gradual shift in the Korean liquor industry away from personal home-brewing and towards an industrialized model that was often organized around Japanese capital.[318] Under what Yi Sanghŭi called the

[314] Yi Sanghŭi, *Sul*, 88.
[315] Koehler, *Korean Wines & Spirits*, 46.
[316] Yi Sanghŭi, *Sul*, 88.
[317] Chu Yŏngha. *식탁 위의 한국사: 메뉴로 본 20세기 한국 음식문화사*. 휴머니스트, 2013.
[318] Koehler, *Korean Wines & Spirits*, 46.

Japanese Empire's exploitation scheme,[319] industrialization brought about the introduction of mass-produced liquors that were standardized as they were commercialized. This resulted in the loss of a rich tradition of *kayangju* outlined in the previous chapter that gave rise to an unknown diversity of different liquors inaccessible in the modern era.[320]

The authors of the *Chosŏnju josa* portrayed the developments in a different fashion. The authors write that after the 1916 Liquor Tax Ordinance, the government appointed liquor production experts in seven provinces for the purpose of leading the reformation of liquor production. Interestingly, it seems that the number of personal licenses actually increased from 366,700 in 1916 to 375,700 in 1918, despite the initial restrictions. The government authorities seem to have viewed this development with concern, as they had previously characterized most of the personal license-holders as uneducated producers that could neither hold ledgers of their production nor produce large amounts. They responded to this by encouraging these "insignificant breweries" to form joint enterprises with "educated persons" at the helms. This was a move consistent with the "legal taming" previously outlined that sought to "train" the Korean subjects in the art of modernity. According to the authors, the leadership of the Government-General of Chōsen achieved "dazzling improvement" in sectors as far-reaching as industry and education. The colonial authorities credited these initiatives for the shift in public perception of liquor production from that of menial labor to that of an artisanal occupation.[321]

[319] He uses the phrase "수탈 작업" here.
[320] Yi Sanghŭi, *Sul*, 76.
[321] Pae Sangmyŏn, *Chosŏnjujosa*, 41.

Industrialization and Diluted Soju

It was during the Japanese Occupation that soju truly became a commodity. After all, claims such as the liquor industry being the "king of industry" and liquor taxation accounting for 30% of the tax collection of 1934 are indisputably ways in which people talked about commodities, not livelihoods or mere items. One major form in which soju as a commodity emerged was as a newly introduced diluted variant of soju. On June 15, 1919, the Chosŏn Soju Factory was founded in Pyongyang. This was the first soju factory on the Korean peninsula, and as was common practice it was run by a Japanese man named Saito Kutaro. This factory made headlines in 1922 for being penalized for tax evasion of the amount of 1300 *sŏk*, which was about a third of the total revenue of the year.[322] But what was perhaps most significant about this factory was that it was not traditional distilled soju (燒酒) that was produced here but a new diluted soju (燒酎). The *Chosŏnju josa* authors referred to diluted soju by the name "essence style soju,"[323] a reference to the diluted soju making process that continued to be used by historians such as Yi Sŏngu. Diluted soju was made using specialized machinery to repeatedly distill the base until it became 95% ethanol, which they called the "essence" (酒精). This essence was then diluted with water, deodorized then sweetened until it produced the final product as desired. If one had access to this specialized machinery, the final product could be mass-produced in a very cost-efficient manner.[324]

Apart from the different process, another difference between the traditional distilled soju and the new diluted variant lay in the fermentation starters. The *Chosŏnju josa* disparagingly

[322] Kim Tŏkhan, "[대한민국 제1호] 소주 회사," *Chosun Ilbo*, January 11, 2011, http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2011/01/11/2011011102433.html.
[323] 酒精式 燒酎
[324] Pae Sangmyŏn, *Chosŏnjujosa*, 42.

states that prior to the Occupation, it was common practice in Korea to use fermentation starters produced by "stomping on flour doughed with water before either storing the mix in a greenhouse to preserve heat or hanging it up and neglecting the mix altogether." It is likely that they were referring to *nuruk*, a cake of grains such as wheat, rice, or barley used as a fermentation starter. The word *nuruk* is said to have come from the Korean word for "to press." The authors are of the opinion that given the unsanitary and unproductive nature of the process, the poor quality of the final product was inevitable. They state that before the Occupation soju was produced by using this nuruk made of cereals and rough grains to brew *makkŏlli*, before distilling it in a device called a *kori*[325] to produce soju. While this may have been a generalization, as we have seen that soju was made via various means prior to the colonial period, it is true that the process did not have the same degree of professionalism given that liquor production was often a secondary job. The study disparages the soju made from this method as having not only poor yield but also being of sub-par quality.[326]

Nuruk is commonly known in the West by the word koji, a catch-all term for all the grain-based saccharifying fermentations that saccharify East Asian alcoholic beverages using the filamentous fungus *Aspergillus oryzae*, or the original Japanese kōji (麹子).[327] Kōji is variously typified as *kokcha*[328] or *kukcha*[329] in Korean. The enzymes produced from koji convert starches from grains into sugar, which are then consumed by yeast to produce alcohol. But this name may actually be a misnomer. According to Hye-Ryun Kim et al., koji is artificially inoculated,

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[325] 古里
[326] Pae Sangmyŏn, *Chosŏnjujosa*, 39.
[327] Josh Evans, "Koji – History and Process," Nordic Food Lab, accessed March 9, 2018, http://nordicfoodlab.org/blog/2013/8/koji-history-and-process.
[328] 麴子
[329] 麴子

whereas nuruk "combines both a saccharification and starter by yeast, and so is used to fabricate the liquor without pre-fermentation."[330] But despite this slight difference, the name koji for nuruk seems to have stuck partly because of the Japanese Occupation, and the authors of the *Chosŏnju josa* refer to the traditional distilled soju as *kōji shochu*[331] to indicate the use of nuruk.

Fig. 13: (Left) Nuruk and various traditional soju-making apparatuses on display at the Pak Chaesŏ Andong Soju Factory. While these apparatuses are on display, the actual product is made using a "modern" production process using jacketed fermenters, a portion of which is shown on the right. The soju is still advertised and marketed as a "traditional" Andong soju. Courtesy of Joon Kim.

After the establishment of the Chosŏn Soju Factory in Pyongyang in 1919, other diluted soju factories began springing up in Incheon and around the nation. As diluted soju began to hit the markets, the producers of distilled soju could not compete with the low costs of the diluted soju and eventually began to replace their nuruk with the recently introduced *hŭkkuk*,[332] or black koji, to survive. Black koji (*Aspergillus awamori*) was not only cheaper to produce than nuruk but also far more reliable, as nuruk was extremely sensitive to temperature. Whereas nuruk was often in cake form, black koji was produced in powder form. The reliable production process and cheap cost of black koji enabled an enterprising Andong resident named Kwŏn T'aeyŏn to mass

[330] Hye-Ryun Kim et al., "Identification and Characterization of Useful Fungi with α-Amylase Activity from the Korean Traditional Nuruk," *Mycobiology* 39, no. 4 (December 2011): 278. https://doi.org/10.5941/MYCO.2011.39.4.278.
[331] 麴子燒酎
[332] 黑麴

produce in 1920 a black koji-based Andong Soju, the first mass-produced distilled soju of its kind. Called *Chebiwŏn Soju,* it seems that this product was even exported to Manchuria and Japan.[333] Therefore, while the diluted variant of soju was indeed introduced during the Japanese Occupation, it would be incorrect to state that this completely eradicated the production of traditional distilled soju. Distilled soju adapted to the times in its own way, using a Japanese black koji to mass-produce and commercialize Andong soju.

Black koji caught on like wildfire. Whereas black koji soju and nuruk soju had the production proportions of 1:99 in 1923, by 1932 the proportion had completely reversed to 95:5. This practice has continued in some form to the present day, as some soju producers continue to cultivate koji by the Japanese method despite the fact that Korean scientists have since patented a cheap domestic koji. Some soju producers even go without *nuruk* altogether, choosing instead a cheaper Japanese-style fermentation method that uses black koji and other commercially available yeasts.[334] This is what Brandon Hill refers to when he states that he only uses koji cultivated according to traditional Korean methods rather than using the more reliable Japanese method. Unfortunately there are not a lot of producers in Korea using koji in the same way that Brandon Hill does today.[335]

Commercialism and an Emerging National Identity

How, exactly, was soju commercialized? While the introduction of modern technology that enabled the mass production of diluted and distilled soju was certainly a major factor, we are left to wonder who the actors were in this modernization of the production process. We

[333] Sŏng Sŏkche, 소풍 (Seoul: Changbi Publishers, 2006), 267.
[334] Schenkann, "What Is 'Traditional' Soju?"
[335] Brandon Hill (of Tokki Soju) in conversation with the author, February 2018.

mentioned earlier that the first modern soju factory in the Korean peninsula, the Chosŏn Soju Factory, was founded by a Japanese man named Saito Kutaro in 1919. But we also mentioned that there was a Korean not a year later named Kwŏn T'aeyŏn who was the first to mass-produce distilled Andong soju, called *Chebiwŏn Soju*, to some commercial success. This certainly contradicts many nationalist narratives that would argue that the Japanese Occupation was a time of exploitation. While the liquor taxation and liquor licensure system ensured that the Japanese legal-governmental apparatus was at the center of soju production, there still seemed to be some enterprising Koreans that fell through the cracks. The origins of this can be traced not to the beginning of the Occupation but to a point ten years later, in 1920.

Fig. 14: Surviving bottles of Jinro soju from what is believed to be the 1960s. Note the absence of the distinctive green bottle that diluted soju is known for today. Courtesy of the Pak Chaesŏ Andong Soju Factory Archives.

The colonial government that took hold in 1910 conceived of the Korean economy as little more than a source of cheap agricultural raw materials to be propagated throughout the Japanese Empire. The industrialization projects and economic development from 1910 to 1919,

therefore, was correspondingly and somewhat deliberately minimal, both because of the cost of development and because Korea was envisioned as a steady market for Japanese manufactured goods. Therefore, a Company Ordinance[336] was enacted in 1910 that decreed that anyone interested in establishing a company in Korea must obtain the authorization of the Government-General, a move consistent with the tightening of control over all aspects of society typical of the aforementioned "modernization of power." Much like liquor production and liquor licensure, the Company Ordinance had the effect of hindering indigenous Korean economic development.[337]

Carter J. Eckert identifies the surge of demand for Japanese industrial goods and the wealth of surplus industrial capital in need of an outlet after the first World War as an impetus for the repeal of the Company Ordinance in 1920. Its repeal sparked a wave of not only Korean entrepreneurship but also Korean investment in small-scale factories. As Eckert demonstrates through his analysis of colonial business magazines and directories, the Korean landlords and wealthy merchants began investing in this period in small-scale factories specializing in, among other things, alcoholic beverages. By 1937, the number of Korean-owned factories numbered over 2,300, and in lists of shareholders of Korean and Japanese businesses alike Korean names can be found. Therefore the repeal of the Company Ordinance was significant not only for those such as Chang Hakyŏp who founded the brewing company in 1924 that would later become Jinro, but also for an emergent class of Korean industrial bourgeoisie who invested in these new businesses. The repeal of the Company Ordinance was so significant that Eckert identifies it as a starting point for Korean capitalism.[338]

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[336] 會社令
[337] Eckert, *Offspring of Empire*, 40.
[338] Eckert, *Offspring of Empire*, 42, 55-56.

As a result, while there was a massive influx of Japanese products in this period, the period between 1923 and 1932 saw the emergence of the *Mulsan jangnyŏ undong* (物産奬勵運動), which Se-Mi Oh translated as the "Korean Product Promotion Movement." Oh argued that this economic and social movement was deeply anchored in the emerging capitalist economy in Korea and advocated for both the development of Korean industry and the consumption of native Korean products. But as Se-Mi Oh argues, this required the creation of national consumers as a precondition for this development. The leaders of this Movement highlighted consumption as a stimulant for production, and inculcated a drive towards the commoditization of goods. It was, in many ways, Korea's first entry into a capitalist system that was somewhat on Korean terms.[339]

What united the new diluted soju and the older distilled soju was that they were quickly becoming commodities produced by and responsive to the demands of a commercial industry. Simply put, the financial exigencies of this new system were motivating soju production in a more meaningful way than the older methods of soju production. The print advertisements of soju that began to emerge in this era can show how producers sought to appeal to the customers of Japanese-occupied Korea. For example, one advertisement for Kaesŏng Soju features the following: "the greatest history, the newest facilities, and the highest quality!" "an economic beverage fit for the times!" and "a regular glass of our soju will guarantee a long life!"[340] Another advertisement for Hanho Soju begins with the claim that they are a "famed product of Pyongyang," continuing with "as a pure 'Chosŏn-style' 'original liquor' (本酒), we boast a sweet, flowery scent and a superior quality. As the largest producer in all of Chosŏn, we are the

[339] Se-Mi Oh, "Consuming the Modern: The Everyday in Colonial Seoul, 1915–1937" (Columbia University, 2008), 137-

[340] My translation of "최고의 역사, 최신의 설비, 최상의 품질 등 3대 특징을 구비하고 있다!" "시대에 적합한 경제적 음료!" "조석으로 한 잔을 마시면 만수무강"

kings of the soju industry."[341] As the reader can see, both producers take care to establish that they derived their authority from a long lineage of some kind.[342]

But what perhaps unites these advertisements with those that we analyzed in Chapter 1 is their emphasis on extolling the virtues of a certain type of "modernity" even while maintaining claims to an authenticity of tradition. Was it not paradoxical for a commodified Kaesŏng Soju to simultaneously extol their "greatest history" and their "newest facilities"? What were the responses of the early Korean consumers to these new forms of commoditized goods and services? While we outlined the ways in which Koreans drew upon indigenous sources to reconstruct a modern tradition in the post-colonial period, other historians have shown that these processes began in the colonial period. Specifically, Shin and Robinson argue that colonial rule provoked a search for Korean indigenous sources from which to reformulate a Korean national identity.[343] But the irony of Korean colonial modernity was that in their articulation of a national identity, Korean nationalists were often forced to borrow the logic and languages of the colonizers that they tried to repudiate, an inherent contradiction articulated by Partha Chatterjee.[344] Hanho Soju claims to be a "pure Chosŏn-style original liquor," but how "pure," "Chosŏn-style," and "original" could a liquor be if it nevertheless relied on mass production and commercialization first introduced during the Japanese Occupation?

The reader may be surprised by the fact that both the advertisements and the colonial pronouncements make casual references to a unified Korean imagined community, even if it was

[341] My translation of "평양 명산" and "순 조선식 본주 (本酒)로서 품질이 우량하고 감미와 방향(芳香)이 있으며 제조량이 전 조선 1위로서 소주계의 대장"
[342] Yi Sanghŭi, *Sul*, 157-158.
[343] Shin and Robinson, *Colonial Modernity*, 16-17.
[344] Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1993).

a community subsumed by the Japanese Empire. After all, casual references of this sort were quite common in Chapter 1 but are conspicuously absent in Chapter 2. While Shin and Robinson stop short of arguing that nationhood began during the Occupation and thereby dismissing the nationalist paradigm, they do maintain the notion that despite the long history of a unified political community, Korean nationhood was not an "immutable given" but one that was "contested, negotiated, reformulated, and reconstructed" both during the colonial period and in its aftermath.[345]

But what does emerge during this period, according to Clark Sorensen, is the imbuing of the *nongmin* class (the peasantry) with the "essence of the Korean nation." Sorensen argues that the discursive practice of privileging the term *nongmin* which had existed for centuries as a distinct new social class was a response to but not a direct response of Japanese colonialism. He argues that the loss of Korean sovereignty and the intrusive assimilation and modernization efforts were disproportionately felt by Korea's urban population. This led urbanites and intellectuals to look to the rural areas for what they perceived to be a preserved essence of a pre-industrial, pre-colonial and thereby more "authentic" Koreanness. Rural culture became, then, a "repository of Korean civilization," with the rural Koreans (the *nongmin*) becoming in the Korean colonial imagination the keepers of these cultural artifacts.[346]

But the *undongkwŏn* reconstruction of rural folk traditions in the 1970s and 1980s and the South Korean government's "One Province One Traditional Liquor Initiative" in the lead-up to the 1988 Olympics were themselves results of anxieties over the loss of an authentic Korean identity during the rapid industrialization and modernization beginning in the 1960s. These

[345] Shin and Robinson, *Colonial Modernity*, 15.
[346] Clark Sorensen, "National Identity and the Creation of the Category 'Peasant' in Colonial Korea," in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, 1st ed., vol. 184 (Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 288–310.

modern processes which had so many implications for our understanding of diluted soju and national identity may themselves be part of something greater that encompasses the colonial period.

Concluding Remarks

While the near-eradication of the *kayangju* tradition was certainly unfortunate, it did arguably contribute to two things: the rise in consumption of distilled liquor and the popularization of soju. As we indicated in the previous chapter, the complexity of the distillation process meant that soju was often only reserved for a wealthier segment of the population. However, as liquor was increasingly produced in special factories and not in homes, the producers had access to specialized machinery that made it cheaper to produce and distribute soju. A point that was not touched upon in this chapter due to a lack of evidence was that women were likely to have been freed from the demands of liquor production enforced by the established tradition of *kayangju*. While the spaces of liquor consumption would remain highly gendered as we showed in Chapter 1, this was an interesting development in the sphere of women's liberation that always complicates any study of any colonial period.

To sum it all up, it was in the colonial era that Koreans became *nongmin*, Koreans became consumers, and Koreans became participants in a industrialized, capitalist, "modern" system. But as Chulwoo Lee showed in his essay, the Japanese legal-governmental apparatus prioritized above all a "modernization of power" in which all operations that had heretofore been excluded from government regulation were suddenly thrust into such a sphere. Notably, state power and industrial power were conflated as the government regulated the emerging liquor

industry of the era. This would have powerful reverberations in the post-colonial era, as we demonstrated in the section on “Capitalist Modernity” in the Introduction.

Concluding Remarks

Many artisanal soju brands, especially those based outside of South Korea, make claims to authenticity based on their authentic Korean methods. For example, the Netherlands-based Wihayo Soju's claim to faim is that it is "made with an authentic Korean recipe yet distilled in the Netherlands."[347] In addition, while Brandon Hill of Tokki Soju does not use the word "authenticity" until prompted, he does interchangeably use the word "traditional" instead to describe his use of traditional methods. But while Tokki Soju and Wihayo Soju may have their fair share of detractors, there is little reason to doubt their claims to authenticity or tradition by methodology alone.

But as this thesis suggests, some may not be comfortable with deploying the language of authenticity when describing these new artisanal brands because soju is far more than its ingredients, its production equipment, or even its methodology. Yes, these things have been contested and been in flux throughout history. As we have seen, the various conduits through which soju was introduced, royal prohibitions during the Koryŏ dynasty, the fact that soju was distilled in wealthy homes, liquor licensing, liquor taxation, government rice restrictions, and the processes of industrialization and commercialization have all influenced the material conditions of soju in its modern incarnation.

But this thesis asserts and hopes to show that authenticity and tradition, at least in the ways in which we understand them, are modern phenomena. The focus of this thesis is not how soju has changed, but how people have responded to the changes that have inevitably come by reconstructing and revitalizing their conceptions of "traditional" and "authentic." This thesis has

[347] Dylan Griffith, "WIHAYO Soju Brand Film," Smörgåsbord, accessed April 7, 2018, http://www.smorgasbordstudio.com/projects/wihayo-soju-brand-film/.

therefore been an exploration of how the modern features of soju were codified and reified in the twentieth century, rendering the backdrop of the pre-colonial period as elements just waiting to be changed. Because modern conceptions of these terms are bound up in the colonial period, special attention must be given to colonial modernity and its reverberations in modern Korea.

Colonial modernity, as we have demonstrated, played a large role in how Koreans constructed and conceived of themselves in the twentieth century, both on an individual and on a national level. The colonial period took a liquor that was highly localized to the upper-class and identified along local but not national lines, and churned out a liquor that was consumed by the masses and identified along national in addition to local lines. The Korean case presents unique challenges in that colonialism, industrialization, commercialization, and modernity were all simultaneously developed, and extricating these processes from one another has proven to be extremely difficult. But the confluence of the four has led to nostalgia for a lack thereof: a nostalgia for a pre-colonial, pre-industrial, pre-commercial, and pre-modern past. While we have relied on the term "pre-colonial" because the term itself is likely the least fraught, in the Korean imagination the four terms are interchangeably often seen as a common pool from which to draw a modern identity. Modern constructions and conceptions of soju, therefore, rely on modern reconstructions and revitalizations of the "four pre-" past.

But borrowing the words of Stephen Vlastos, the aim of any historical study should be more heuristic than theoretical. Therefore I would like to end my thesis with a set of questions that were both unanswered and beg to be answered. Given that this thesis followed an unconventional chronological structure, would the findings of this thesis have been different had the colonial period not been placed at the end? After all, the colonial period is certainly not the

end-all, be-all of contemporary Korean society, despite what many colonial historians may lead the reader to believe. What, then, would have been the findings of this thesis had it been structured thematically? In addition, one Korean alcoholic beverage, *makkŏlli*, has interspersed our narrative at various points. *Makkŏlli* has enjoyed far less scrutiny in terms of its "Korean origins," given that it was not only consumed by the lower classes throughout history but also because its origins can be traced further back than soju. Is *makkŏlli* subject to the same dynamics of the reinvention and revitalization of tradition? Finally, a dimension unexplored in this thesis was that of globalization and market dynamics in the modern era. How are domestic soju producers responding to international threats in the form of artisanal soju, if at all? How would an awareness of the modern reinvention and revitalization of soju affect market strategy, if at all? Finally, where will soju and its incumbent traditions go from here?

While there is no way to predict the future, it seems likely that the past will play a part. But that may very well be simply the bias of a historian.

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