

With his nine best Korean recipes, the best being homemade Korean Miso, Yang Joung shows you why it may be better than Japanese Miso. He also features the good, bad, and the best in Korean food.

Rise of the Korean Miso: Good, Bad, and the Best in Korean Food
V#1

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Rise of the Korean Miso:

**Good, Bad, and the
Best of Korean Food**

Volume #1

Yang Joung

Rise of the Korean Miso

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Chapter 9: Soju and More

For many Koreans, soju is like a cola or a soda. Just like the American burger combo which includes a hamburger, fries, and cola (or any other soda), the Korean combo includes a Korean BBQ meat, side dishes, and soju.

In 2008, Merriam Webster added "soju" in their dictionary as "Korean vodka distilled from rice." Wikipedia defines it as the "distilled beverage native to Korea." I like the second definition better because it's more accurate. Many of the current Korean soju does not contain rice, so it's not really distilled from rice. The second definition also adds that soju's alcohol content varies from 20% to about 45% alcohol by volume (ABV). In California and New York, soju is sold under "beer and wine" category. In this way, it is easier to sell soju since this license is easier to obtain than getting a hard liquor license (for alcohol over 25% ABV). When I went to Houston, TX on August 1, 2009, we had to buy sake at a Korean restaurant instead of soju.

Korean soju manufacturers have been decreasing the ABV content to capture more market for women and men

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who prefer milder alcoholic drinks. Those customers might love it, but I, for one, hate it. You get less for your money and you miss out on the memories created by a higher ABV content.

I miss the old soju days, when soju's ABV was set at 24%. It's getting lower and lower these days, even as low as 16.9%. I know the Korean alcohol companies want to increase their sales, but they should stop lowering the ABV. If they keep lowering it, then let's just not call it soju anymore. Or, we'll switch to the Japanese brand, which is mostly at 24%. But this threat won't work because the Japanese soju brand does not have the Korean soju taste and it's more expensive.

When Korean soju was at 24%, you knew you drank too much when you got a headache in the morning. Now there's no headache with these smoother tasting Korean sojus. I guess it's the need to match the want of the masses.

I believe when you drink too much you should have a headache. This way you can remember not to drink so much and it'll also give you a more vivid memory of that event. Good or bad, that memory is engraved in your

head, so that event is magnified. I still remember the days, when I drank about two bottles of soju and had massive headaches in the morning. Now that I look back on them, I remember those days more clearly. But now, even if I drink two bottles, there is no headache, no strong memories to look back on.

I have been blessed with a good liver, so I drink better than the average person, even a Korean. (Only a few guys I know can potentially out drink me). For example, during my prime (mid 20's), I could drink a whole bottle of Crown Royal whiskey (750 ml) and still be able walk a straight line. After over 20 years, in June of 2009, I got my first challenge from a guy 14 years younger and 5 pounds heavier than I.

(Don't try this at home unless you have a good liver)
Here's what happened. One evening my consultant friend and his friend (class of 2010) from UCLA and I had dinner. Hearing that I was the best drinker, he thought that it would be fun to challenge me. My consultant friend set the odds at 4:1, in favor of me, because he had seen me and him drink before, at separate occasions. So one evening, we battled it out with Chamisul Fresh Soju.

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Here were the rules:

- 1) Drink the first bottle of soju (375 ml) in 21 minutes.
- 2) Walk a 15 foot line. (3 attempts or 1 minute limit)
- 3) Drink the second bottle in 30 minutes.
- 4) Walk a 15 foot line. (3 attempts or 1 minute limit)
- 5) After the second bottle, drink a shot of soju every 5 minutes. Then walk the 15 foot line every 5 minutes.

Our battle didn't last too long. I felt fine after the first bottle, but my challenger wasn't doing so well. He thought the soju tasted bitter, but for me, it was like water. Anyway, we walked the line with ease.

With the second bottle, I could taste a little bitterness in the soju, but it was alright because I had already finished the bottle with 6 minutes remaining. On the other hand, my challenger still had a quarter bottle to go. He saw that my eyes were fine. Then he tapped out. I respected this decision because if he had continued, I believe he would have lost his balance after about 2 1/2 bottles. I ended the night with an additional 5 shots of Crown Whiskey.

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The next day, I had no headache. I just needed some soup, an order of Vietnamese pho combo noodles at Pho 2000. After a week, my friend called me from San Francisco regarding a possible challenge from one of his Chinese friends. However, this time it would be cognac. I don't know why but the Chinese's favorite liquor seems to be cognac; there are so many different brands of cognac ranging from \$20 – \$5,000 at several big Chinese markets in the Los Angeles area. I was going to get ready for the “cognac challenge” when he texted me to not to bother; he couldn't compete. He had to at least be able to drink a half bottle of cognac (750 ml) in about an hour to challenge me. Well, maybe next time. I was looking forward to the Chinese drinking etiquette of filling the glass when not full. The Korean drinking etiquette has the person filling your glass once it is empty. However, the Chinese and also the Japanese have the person fill the glass when it is not full. So, every time you take a sip or shot, it is supposed to be filled.

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In summary, here's what I think of the changing soju:

The GOOD: It's cheap. In Los Angeles, most Korean sojus at the market are \$3.99, many times they are on sale for \$2.99. At some Korean restaurants, it sells for \$5.99 or less. No more headaches after 2 bottles.

The BAD: Alcohol content is going down. No more headaches after 2 bottles.

The BEST: For me, it was the GREEN Soju. You can't find at Korean bars anymore. I saw it on a menu at Soju Town Bar on Wilshire Blvd in Koreatown LA. However, it wasn't in stock and they probably won't carry it in the future. (Some Korean markets have them in 750 ML bottles.)

With the popularity of soju, different companies are trying to market soju, such as Han Soju. They get the soju from Korea, then ship to Taiwan to bottle it (nice, clear bottle) and then ship it to the US.

If there is a next book, I like to discuss the growth of the Korean rice wines (makoli) along with a recipe.

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