Traditional liquors and wines of Korea

Takju
Takju is, along with yakhju, the representative folk drink of Korea and possesses a long history in the nation’s culinary culture. In ages past when it was common for people to brew their own drink at home, every household had its own unique method and no two households produced liquor of the same flavor. Takju is thick and unrefined, opa que, with low alcohol content. Most of it is called makgelli which means “recently filtered.”

Yakju
When takju is nearly mature, a beautiful layer of clear liquid will form at the top of the liquor jug where it has been sitting; it is called yakju and may be poured off, and includes varieties such as baeksukju and beojuju.

Soju
Soju was devised to overcome the problem with takju and yakju, inability to be stored long. Before the Joseon era when yakju was distilled it was called yaksuju and used mainly for tinctures(yak means medicine). Later soju came to be consumed plain.

Traditional wines by region

Gyeonggi-do: Baekseju and Munbaeju

Baekseju is a highly regarded drink created from ingredients prized as medicinal plants such as the fruit of Chinese matrimony vine. The drink protects the kidney and liver and is believed to stave off the effects of aging. Many Koreans drink it. Munbaeju is deceptively termed, because it does not contain alcohol. It is brewed from grains such as rice, millet, and wheat, and is similar to Chinese maotai, but with a cleaner, yeast-free flavor. Munbaeju has earned exceptional praise from liquor enthusiasts.

Gyeongsang-do: Andong Soju and Gukhwaju

Andong soju is distilled liquor made in traditional fashion using the pure waters of Andong and the fine rice cultivated from the rich soil of the area. It has a subtle but appealing flavor, and is said not to leave a hangover despite its high alcohol content.Andong soju is 45 proof).

Gukhwaju is brewed from chrysanthemums, Chinese matrimony vine, and glutinous rice. The renowned drink is said help cure headaches, improve sight and hearing and loosen the joints, and has other medicinal uses as well.

Korea’s traditional alcoholic beverages can largely be classified by production stage into takju and soju. The most basic form is takju, fermented and cloudy. When the solid particles settle out it becomes yakju, which distilled becomes soju, the final product.

Jeju-do: Gosorisu & Omegisu

Gosorisu, otherwise known as Jeju soju, is one of the three finest soju liquors in Korea’s brewing history, along with the special soju from Andong and from Gaeseong. It is traditional liquor made from all-natural grains and instilled with the lives and souls of kindly inhabitants of Jeju Island. Omegisu was brewed with hulled glutinous German millet ground under the giant stone of a beast-worked mill(now a rare sight).

Traditional drinking houses in Seoul

Baesangmyeonjuga

Soft urban lighting, traditional Korean props, and a meticulous décor set the mood in this attention-seizing alehouse. Baesangmyeonjuga is known for its wide selection of traditional Korean drinks along with a respectable offering of flavorful side dishes, as is traditional Korean when drinking.

Regular house drinks are heungmiju made from black rice, which distilled becomes hwarin18 pum(made from 18 different kinds of medicinal plants), Cheondenhonju, and Sansachun. Nine seasonal drinks are also served to fit the mood. Okususul made from corn in spring, Nokchaju from green tea and plum Maesilju in summer, and so on. If sampling a variety of traditional drinks and side dishes is your desideratum, the jangsam menu is for you. Side dishes march out of the kitchen one after another, and you can drink your fill of alcohol-free limits. Drink as much or as little as you like. The only limitation on this offer is that it only applies for groups of three or more. Take your friends!

>>Location: B1, Seoul Finance Building, Taegyeongno 1-ga, Jun-gu

When Daddy Was Young

A pebbled railroad track lit up with a traffic signal is the atypical and interest-piquing entrance to When Daddy Was Young. The interior is said to resemble relics reminiscent of the 60s and 70s, including old school uniforms, movie posters, award certificates, barber chairs, fumaces, even a telephone pole. The menu is made from old Korean textbooks, reminding of days past. It is located in Insa-dong.

>>Inquiries: Tel: 82-2-723-3126

>>Open house: 11:30-24:00(Open 365 days a year)

Teul-araechoe

Teul-araechoe is at Seoul’s Daehangno Street, providing the traditional favors of Korea at affordable prices. The building is fashioned after a traditional Korean home, provides meals as well as drinks. Most items are under 10,000 won. The best dish to try at Teul-araechoe may be the pork or chicken barbecueed over hot coals.

>>Location: Seoul Subway Line 4, Hyehwa Station, near Exit 4

>>Inquiries: Tel: 82-2-742-3992

>>Open hours: 14:00-02:00(Open 365 days a year)

Gamateau

The Gamateau is a cozy space to enjoy traditional Korean drink. Popular items are potato pancakes and the country-style pancakes with hot pepper paste, which, used to be, could only be found in traditional marketplace. Gamateau is also popular with Japanese tourists wanting to taste traditional Korean drinks, and they often opt for dongsongju or soju. Located in the U2 Zone ally in Myeongdong. Stop at Esquire (shoe shop) before U2 Zone, and walk about ten meters into the alleyway.

>>Inquiries: Tel: 82-2-777-0424

>>Open hours: 15:00-02:00(Open 365 days a year)

Donghak

Donghak greets you with straw mats lining its floors, emulating the atmosphere of a farm house way out in the countryside. They serve dongsudongju, Seonunsan bokbunjasul, and Jirisan gukhwaju and other fruit drinks, with tofu with kimchi, acorn jelly and grilled doraji bellflower roots on the side at all meals. The stars f the menu, though, are the fresh-made kimchi and seasoned cucumbers served as a basic side dish. Walk in the direction of Yorei University from Changsan Elementary School, and make a left at the Green Mart. Walk 50 meters to Donghak.

>>Inquiries: Tel: 82-2-322-1766

>>Open hours: 15:00-04:00