



The cultural artifact that I focused on this week was Korean drinking culture. The reason being that South Korea has a huge drinking culture and is one of the biggest markets for alcohol in the world today. For reference as of 2017, Koreans spent around 683 US dollars per capita on alcohol. In addition, South Koreans drink on average 13.7 shots of alcohol every week according to Quartz.com website.

The reasons for these high rates actually have a number of reasons. Aside from being cheap and affordable there are many things tied to culture. For instance, drinking is seen as a bonding event, a part of corporate culture, the Korean drinking etiquette, long working hours, and the fact that

Korean is a totalitarian society. All these make up the reasons why alcohol is so prevalent in Korean culture and a big part of Korea today. Drinking is seen as a bonding activity because it is one of the fastest ways to break the ice and get closer/acquainted with someone. This is often the case for work relationships and often helps forge and even cement business and personal relationships. Drinking is also a part of working culture because many companies hold hoesik (회식) which means eating and drinking with colleagues. This is considered a serious event and as mentioned before are used to get closer with colleagues so it is unacceptable to bail and must be attended by all workers. In addition, if your boss offers you a drink you cannot say no and must drink because of the stringent drinking etiquette. It's considered impolite to refuse an invitation to go out for drinks after you've been invited. More rather, you should consider someone wanting to drink with you as a complement. Second, no one's glass should be empty when drinking. Third, you can never leave before your boss in a hoesik. Fourth, unless it's for religious or medical purposes, you should never refuse a beer. It's not a good idea to say no because that is not considered an excuse and seen as being impertinent. In addition, in Korea the average person works 39 hours a week which is the third highest in the world only behind Mexico and Costa Rica. Furthermore, the government attempted to reduce maximum working hours from 52-68 hours to lower numbers but because industries like transportation must work 24/7 this is always not possible which often leads to workers feeling overworked and turning to alcohol to wind down from their long days. Also, the culture in South Korea is totalitarian which is tied to Confucian roots. Individualism is not valued in their culture; instead, a collective mindset is valued. Drinking alone is frowned upon in bars and restaurants, which are built to appeal to groups. And people normally drink with friends or coworkers, and as we all know, peer pressure is one of the most powerful motivators to drink.

One common thing to see in Korean society is a huge red tent wherein people frequent for drinks, big life events, and even social gatherings. These are otherwise known as pojangmacha (포장 마차), or permanent fixtures where locals in Korea go for second drinks known as i-cha (이차) after drinking at restaurants or bars. Now I will break down the Korean drinking etiquette in more detail than before. To begin because of the high emphasis on seniority the first drink is always poured by the boss or the senior (eldest) in the group. Afterwards, the youngest person is expected to take over and refill the glasses of all at the table. Second, when pouring drinks, Koreans typically use one hand to hold the bottle and the other on their elbow or chest as a sign of respect. If the bottle is too large to be carried with one hand, you may simply use both hands. Third, the person getting their drink poured for them should hold the glass or cup with both hands unless you are the senior person which means you can use only one hand. Fourth, when clinking glasses, position yours a little lower on the rim than those of higher status. It is impolite to do otherwise so remember not to do it. Optional but a nice gesture is saying kawn-bae as cheers before the drink. Fifth, when you're drinking in Korea, it is customary not to face anyone older directly. You'll find that people drink with their left hands over their mouths and turn their heads to the right or away from the table. Sixth, on the first drink you must down it all in one go

but afterwards you can pace yourself and take smaller sips. Seventh, as mentioned before, Koreans place a high emphasis on good manners and reverence for elders. As a result, you should replenish empty glasses on the table as soon as possible, beginning with the most senior individual. Heavy drinkers may start refilling their own cups at some stage. When this occurs, immediately take the bottle from the individual and do the honorable job of pouring. This is standard procedure, so you don't have to be concerned about being rude. Eighth, while it should seem courteous to deliberately fill people's glasses, you should only do so when they are completely empty. Holding their glasses half-filled is a sign that they want to take it easy in Korean drinking culture. As a general rule, just offer to refill if there is an empty cup nearby. The first drink is soju or fermented wine which is a very popular drink and comes in green bottles. The second drink is makgeolli or wine made from fermented rice or wheat with a sweet taste. The third drink is beer or maekju and often comes in brown bottles or even cans. These tend to be lighter so they are perfect for eating with chicken and barbecued pork belly. Fourth is cheongju which is clear wine which tastes similar to Japanese Sake. Now that I mentioned the popular four alcoholic beverages you should be ready to go and drink in Korea with good etiquette! Kawn-bae!

References

<https://thesmartlocal.com/korea/korean-drinking-culture/#:~:text=Drinking%20in%20Korea%20is%20seen,after%20by%20taking%20small%20sips.>
<https://www.statista.com/topics/5348/alcoholic-beverages-in-south-korea/>
<https://qz.com/171191/south-koreans-drink-twice-as-much-liquor-as-russians-and-more-than-four-times-as-much-as-americans/>
<https://medium.com/@xreasons/8-reasons-why-south-koreans-drink-more-than-anyone-7267219fea1>