

## Preface

The Chinese do not see wine as one of the necessities of life, but the culture of wine has made, and continues to make, an impact on the way the Chinese live. Chinese alcoholic drinks are made chiefly from grain. Throughout China's long history, with its large population and long-term reliance on agriculture, fluctuations in the wine trade have been closely related to political, economic and social conditions. Indeed, successive ruling dynasties either issued or relaxed restrictions on wine production according to the quality of grain harvests in order to make sure that people had enough to eat. In some areas the flourishing of the wine business was not just the outcome of general prosperity in good years, but also encouraged and invigorated the social life of the region. Traditionally, wine had three important uses: to perform rituals, to dispel one's worries and to heal.

Chinese wine making can be traced back as far as c. 4000 BC, to the early period of the Neolithic Yangshao Culture. During its long development, Chinese wine has developed distinctive characteristics. Chinese wine is traditionally based on grains, with only a few wines being made from fruit, while in recent years beer has been introduced to China. Currently the annual beer production of China ranks second in the world. In

### Yangshao Culture

The Yangshao Culture was an important Neolithic culture on the middle reaches of the Yellow River. The Yangshao village site after which it is named is in Mianchi County, Sanmenxia City in Henan Province, and was discovered in 1921. The culture existed from about 5000–3000 BC.



CHINESE WINE

China alcoholic beverages are divided into three main categories: fermented alcoholic beverages, distilled spirits and integrated alcoholic beverages. The fermented beverages are divided into the five subcategories of beer, grape wines, fruit wines, Chinese rice wine and miscellaneous others. Distilled spirits include Chinese spirits and spirits such as brandy and whisky.

Archaeological evidence suggests that the period between the early Yangshao culture and the beginning of the Xia Dynasty (2070–1600 BC) were the formative years of Chinese wine making. Inspired by the natural fermentation of fruit, people began to steep fermented grain to make alcoholic beverages, gradually standardizing the fermentation method. From the Xia to the Zhou Dynasty (1046–256 BC) wine-making techniques in China advanced by leaps and bounds, and government officials set up a special bureau to manage wine production.

There are no written records of early wine making available for our scrutiny. But in 1979 in Shandong Province, archaeologists excavated a grave of the Dawenkou culture and found a set of wine-making vessels from 5,000 years ago, including vessels for



Jiaxing Ancient Town in Zhejiang (Fangxin/CFP)



boiling the ingredients, for fermentation, and for straining and storing the product. There were also several different kinds of cups for consumption of wine, suggesting that wine-making techniques at that time were already fairly advanced.

With the steady development of wine-making techniques, the consumption of wine slowly became more popular. This is confirmed by the large number of bronze wine vessels which have been unearthed. During the Shang Dynasty (1600–1046 BC), reveling and carousing were fashionable among the aristocracy. According to a record dating from this time, the *Basic Annals of Yin*, in the last years of the dynasty the ruler, King Zhou, who was much given to drinking and sensual pleasures, had a pool of wine made in which naked men and women were encouraged to chase each other. It is thought that this decadence, and heavy all-night drinking, may have contributed to the fall of the dynasty. Learning a lesson from this fall, the first ruler of the Western Zhou (1046–771 BC) promulgated an abstinence order in the Wei Kingdom, the place of origin of the Shang, thus issuing the first anti-wine regulation in Chinese history. At the same time the authorities appointed a set of officers to implement strict control over the production and consumption of wine. Under the Western Zhou wine was divided into three categories. One was wine specially prepared for ritual offerings, which was fermented for a comparatively short time and then used immediately. The second was wine which had been kept to mature. The third was wine which had been strained.

An old Chinese saying states that “the ferment is the backbone of the wine.” Long before the Qin unification of China in 221 BC, the early Chinese invented the technique of using a ferment to make wine, a definite advance in wine-making methods. The ancient classic *The Book of Rites*, which describes the ritual ceremonies of that period, records six important things to watch for when making wine: the grain used must be ripe, the ferment must be added at the right time, while steeping and boiling





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## PREFACE

everything must be clean, the water must be good, the containers must be ceramic and selected for their quality, and the heating time and temperature must be right. A notable feature of the way in which the culture of wine had developed in the pre-Qin period is the links which often appeared between wine and political and military affairs. Indeed, one saying explicitly connected wine with politics: “The wine of Lu is scanty and Handan is besieged.” In the Spring and Autumn Period (770–476 BC), after the state of Chu had claimed hegemony over the south, its ruler, King Xuan, ordered various feudal rulers to come to his court bearing wine. Duke Gong of Lu was late and did not bring very much wine. King Xuan was extremely angry and berated him publically. Duke Gong did not take kindly to being insulted in this way, replying: “I am the descendant of Duke Zhou and a distinguished servant of the royal house; for me to bring you wine was already demeaning and a violation of ritual, and yet you go on to reproach me and say that the wine I prepared was inadequate. You should know when to stop.” He then departed without taking his leave, prompting King Xuan to attack his lands. Consequently, King Hui of Liang, who had long wanted to invade the state of Zhao but had feared that Chu would come to their aid, seized his opportunity and sent a force to besiege the Zhao capital Handan. So it was that when the wine of Lu was scanty the Zhao city of Handan was besieged.

During the Han Dynasty (206–220 AD), progress in agriculture led to an increase in grain production, facilitating a boom in the wine industry. Because of developments in ferment making, different areas used different grains to make ferments, and the range of alcohols available increased. There was inexpensive “ordinary wine,” there was “sweet wine” which used a small amount of ferment for a lot of grain and was ready overnight; there was a pale wine called *han*, a red one called *li* or *zaoxia*, and a clear one also called *li* pronounced in a different tone. The people of the Han Dynasty called wine “heaven’s bounty,” a gift given to men from heaven above. It could delight the palate, encourage

< At the Dragon Boat Festival in 2007, Nanjing residents celebrated the festival in the traditional way by the Xuanwu Lake. Pictured here is the Master of Ceremony sprinkling Xionghuang Liquor to pray for blessings. (Focus/China News)



## CHINESE WINE

conviviality and be used to drown one's sorrows. From the Warring States Period to the time of the Han Dynasty many drank with great abandon, enjoying the wonderful uninhibited feelings that wine could produce. In a Han period wall painting discovered in Shandong province, there is a panoramic scene of wine making. A kneeling figure is breaking up ferment with a pestle, one is lighting a fire, one is splitting firewood, one stands next to a steamer stirring rice, while one strains a ferment solution into cooked rice; elsewhere another two have the job of filtering the wine, while another figure uses a ladle to transfer wine into an amphora.

At the end of the Eastern Han period (25–220), the Counselor-in-Chief Cao Cao (155–220) made a gift to Liu Xie, Emperor Xian of the Han, of some “nine-stage spring wine” produced in his birthplace, Bozhou in Anhui. Along with this gift he presented a memorial explaining how the wine was made, which relates that during the fermentation period the ingredients were not put in all at once, but were added in many different stages. First the ferment was immersed, then one dan of rice was added, and then one further dan was added every three days until this had been done nine times. Cao Cao claimed that wine made by this method was particularly rich, mellow and fragrant, and worthy as a tribute to his emperor.

In the following period (220–589), when the Wei Dynasty gave way to the Jin and then a succession of different dynasties ruled north and south, peasants from the north fled south in large numbers to escape disaster, bringing advanced production methods and increasing the labor force in the south. As a result, agriculture in the south of China saw an overall improvement, and economic development provided the basis for rapid improvements in wine making. The transfer of northerners to the south caused the wine cultures of north and south to merge, and a number of famous wines emerged in consequence. Jia Sixie, a famous ancient Chinese agriculturalist who lived under the Northern Wei, wrote a famous treatise on agricultural and other rural technologies,





*Essential Techniques for the Peasantry*, which has extensive sections on techniques for making wine. He sets out eight ways of making ferment and more than forty methods for making wine, a comprehensive summary of the techniques used since Han times.

Under the Sui (581–618) and the Tang (618–907) Dynasties, wine continued to develop. Sui policies on making wine were fairly relaxed; they no longer limited private production of wine and they abolished the wine monopoly, so that ordinary people could make and sell wine freely. In the earlier period of the Tang Dynasty, Sui policies were continued: no wine monopoly was established, and there was no tax on wine. However, in the middle and late Tang, because the national treasury's coffers were empty, a monopoly on wine was reinstituted to increase the revenues of the central government.

By the time of the Song Dynasty (960–1276) wine-making techniques had come to constitute a complete theoretical system. In particular, production equipment for Chinese rice wine had taken a settled form. From the Southern Song (1127–1276) there is a book called the *Record of Famous Wines* which describes in full a hundred or more famous wines from all over the country. Some of these wines were made in the imperial palace, some in the households of great ministers, some in wine shops, and some in the homes of ordinary people.

In the Yuan (1276–1368), the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) Dynasties, Chinese wine making reached its peak, and the theory of wine making came close to maturity. The Ming scientist Song Yingxing (1587–1663) in his work *The Exploitation of the Works of Nature* describes how a red ferment is made and includes illustrations of the process, a precious contribution to our knowledge. The ancient Chinese medical encyclopedia, *Compendium of Materia Medica*, makes repeated mention of wine and divides it into three main categories: wine made from grain, distilled spirits and grape wine. The work also collects together a great number of recipes for medicinal wines.



## CHINESE WINE



The Qing Dynasty painter Su Liupeng (1791–1862) painted the poet *Li Bai Getting Drunk*, representing the story of how Li Bai (701–762) got drunk in a reception hall of the Tang Imperial Palace but was still able to compose an answer to a letter from a barbarian kingdom.





The Ming Dynasty was a significant period in the history of China's urbanization, when the development of industry and commerce brought a great increase in the urban population. Demand for wine grew steadily, and wine making gradually ceased to be a part of agriculture and became an independent craft industry. During the Ming Dynasty this industry spread all over China, and it is recorded that in Hengyang of Hunan Province alone there were as many as 10,000 small workshops making wine. The existence of this multiplicity of small producers caused the industry to develop as never before, and distilling techniques also matured. The Ming period not only abounded in famous wines, but was also set apart from earlier periods by a notable characteristic: the variety and scale of production of wines for health and healing.

The Qing Dynasty surpassed previous dynasties in the demand for wine and the number of varieties available, and the industry reached new heights, while continuing the eating and drinking habits of the Ming. In a synthesis of China's ancient food preparation techniques compiled under the Qing Dynasty, *The Harmonious Cauldron*, there are more than 100 entries on wine, including a comprehensive description of the techniques for making rice wine. In addition, many miscellaneous sources also record the culture of wine consumption in that period.

In the Ming and Qing Dynasties came developments in ideas about drinking wine. While emphasizing the virtues of wine and moderate drinking, the Chinese were well aware of the great harm that alcohol could do to one's health. In addition, in the late Qing period, China's traditional wine-making arts began to merge with newly introduced techniques for making "foreign wine." The result was the profusion of varieties and flavors that can be found in Chinese white spirits, beers and grape wines today. Yet despite all these advances, China's alcoholic beverage manufacturing industry remained largely a cottage industry, characterized by rudimentary equipment, low productivity, a small operating scale and unstable product quality. Production was largely manual, and there was



## CHINESE WINE

no laboratory, no large-scale mechanical equipment, and even no electricity or running water. The complex production techniques were passed down by word of mouth, and there were no industrial standards. In 1949, China produced around 100,000 kiloliters of spirits, 25,000 kiloliters of yellow wine, 7,000 kiloliters of beer and less than 200 kiloliters of wine.

Following the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the central government increased its support for the alcoholic beverage industry. As a result, a number of state-owned distilleries, including the Beijing General Distillery Plant, were built; many traditional enterprises and brands were placed under government protection and received investments, and great strides were made in the technology of the alcoholic beverage manufacturing industry. The traditional cottage industry gradually switched to mechanized,



Detail from the Qing Dynasty painting *Evening Banquet with Pupils* by Ding Guanpeng.

