

Rethinking the History of China's Grape Wine Culture

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IN SEARCH OF THE ORIGINS OF EURASIAN WINE CULTURE

During the past hundred years and especially within recent decades the research on the so-called "Silk Road" reveals more and more evidence about the significance of this giant Eurasian network for the material and immaterial exchange between prehistoric societies and ancient civilizations. Ideas and know-how have been transferred across large distances between an unparalleled complexity of ethnic groups, cultures, nations, religions and languages. In spite of intensified ongoing research in China and Central Asia within the past few years, it seems that plenty of spectacular discoveries and new insights are still waiting to be brought to light.

One of the areas hardly explored as yet is the development and history of fermentation technologies and production of alcoholic beverages since prehistoric times across the Eurasian continent. Having had the chance to meet leading representatives of the rapidly developing grape wine world in China and to visit several Chinese wine areas and companies during the past years, I first started to take a keen interest in Chinese wine culture under the aspect of the current awareness of wine and wine consumption as a new cultural phenomenon in China's modernizing and globalizing society. Subsequently, turning to the historical aspect, I started to research China's ancient wine culture, discovering that startling connections and parallels can be found between China and Central Asian and also Middle Eastern Cultures – not only two or three millennia ago, but even as early as the Neolithic period, i.e. dating back 10,000 years or more. On the other hand, it is a fascinating fact that in many ways the history of Chinese wine culture is unique and one of the oldest or most probably even the oldest in the world.

It is amazing that recent discoveries on wine production in the Neolithic period were made simultaneously on the two ends of the Silk Road, i.e. in the Caucasus and in Central China. During a research expedition along the Silk Road across 16 countries undertaken in 2008, I found interesting indica-

tions that in different periods and civilizations along this network – from today's Georgia, Armenia, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan to Western and Central China – grapes and grape wine acted as an incentive in using natural fermentation processes and in the production of alcoholic beverages for magical, religious and social purposes. In certain societies, as in Old Persian and Central Asian Zoroastrism and in China's Shang and Zhou Dynasties, grape wine and fermented beverages occupied a predominant position in religious and daily life. There are many analogies in wine production and consumption in the ancient societies living along this large belt between Eastern Europe and China. It seems very likely that there must have been connections and most probably an intensive exchange along this Eurasian network since at least as early as Neolithic times; thus it existed long before the Silk Road, and perhaps could be labelled *Ancient Wine Road*. Nevertheless, much research still has to be done, especially from an interdisciplinary perspective, combining evidence from archaeological, historical, anthropological, religious, linguistic and philological studies.

There are several examples which apparently need more investigation in the future:

Somehow puzzling is the rich variety of so-called rhyta, i.e. drinking horns, produced from different material, like horn, ceramic, glass, silver, gold, jade, glass, ivory, wood, bamboo etc., and in all kinds of artistic forms, mainly human and animal heads, often with vine tendril and grape ornaments. They have been found between Europe and China, and even as far as Korea, since the fourth or third millennium BC until the Middle Ages. The most elaborate rhyta were produced in Persia during the Achaemenid Empire (sixth to fourth centuries BC), from where they spread to the West to the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean Cultures and also to the East reaching their high-tide in China during the Tang Dynasty (seventh to tenth centuries) – the period of the busiest exchange with Central Asian empires. One of the richest collections of prehistoric and ancient rhyta and wine vessels can be seen in the National Museum in Teheran (Iran Bastan). We might conclude that in all ancient cultures where grape wine was prominent the use of rhyta became common, probably in most cases for libation purposes within quite different religious contexts – in Shamanistic, Zoroastrian, Greek-Bactrian, Roman, Christian, Manichaean as well as Buddhist cults. Though many articles have been published about single pieces and archaeological finds, never-

theless, cross-cultural and interdisciplinary approaches are still lacking, especially from the viewpoint of grape wine history.¹

The case is the same with wine vessels, goblets, bowls, jugs and jars which were found more or less in all wine cultures along the Silk Road, such as huge jars called *kvevri* in Georgia, *kara* in Armenia and *hum* in Central Asia. Also the wine goblets found in Mediterranean, Persian, Bactrian, Sogdian, Turkish, Gandharian-Indian and Chinese hemispheres show startling similarities, which will be a challenge for detailed comparative investigation. And ancient wines presses, too, usually carved in rocks or built with stones, have almost the same shape all along the Eurasian wine culture belt – from Eastern Europe, especially Georgia and Armenia, to Central Asia and Western China – and were operated in the same traditional manner of mashing the grapes by foot. Another universal feature can be found in the architecture of wine cellars, the so-called *Madustan* in Central Asia. Obviously, there is still much potential for future research to be done from this perspective.

Another interesting field is mythology, in which creators of wine and wine gods or goddesses play an important and even similar role in cross-cultural and cross-religious contexts, e.g. Noah in the biblical tradition, Dionysos in Greek, Bacchus in Roman and Osiris in Egyptian culture, Dukang 杜康 or Yidi 仪狄 in China and many others as well as their hybrid forms, sometimes symbolized in the ornaments of the rhyta.

Finally, it is well documented that the Iranian-speaking Sogdians who spread their influence mainly as tradesmen in the whole of Central Asia and China between the sixth century BC and the ninth century AD cultivated wine production and consumption mostly in connection with their religious Zoroastrian cults. Hardly any research has been done as yet concerning their crucial function in Eurasian wine history.

OLDEST WINE CULTURE IN CHINA?

New light on the history of grape wine production not only in China but also in human history in general was shed by spectacular discoveries of the renowned wine archaeologist and wine culture expert Patrick McGovern and his American-Chinese team at the end of 2004 and the beginning of 2005, revealing that traces of such production dating back to as early as 9,000 years ago could be confirmed in the central areas of the later Chinese em-

¹ See Jäger (2006).

pire. This discovery obviously revolutionizes the view of the development of viniculture in several ways.

His chemical and spectrum analysis of ceramic vessels from the Neolithic site of Jiahu (贾湖), 7000 to 5600 BC, in the central province of Henan brought to light humanity's oldest traces of alcoholic beverages (tartaric acid and tartrate), most probably produced mainly from grapes used as fermentation catalyst. This discovery dates almost 2,000 years earlier than the hitherto oldest wine residues found by McGovern himself in 1994 in Hajji Firuz Tepe (5400–5000 BC) in today's Northwest Iran and much older than the grape wine culture in Egypt and Mesopotamia (3500–3000 BC) and Crete (about 2200 BC).²

What is still more interesting, the Neolithic site of Jiahu proves to be the most evident and perhaps oldest paradigm of the entanglement of wine and fermentation culture with the emergence of human creativity and civilization. In Jiahu not only China's oldest residues of wine production and fermentation technology has been found, but also the first traces of the use of rice and recently most probably the oldest music instruments (bone flutes) as well as the earliest prototypes of Chinese writing on tortoise shell. The connection with shamanist and burial ceremonies is evident.³ From the technical point of view, the proof of grape wine residues like tartaric acid in an epoch when agriculture and more sophisticated fermentation methods were not yet developed shows that grapes had an important function in initiating fermentation processes and in the production of alcoholic beverages. Owing to increased archaeological activities and findings in China in the past few years, it does not seem impossible that new discoveries concerning the culture of fermented beverages, and especially of grape wine, will be made in the near future.

No doubt these discoveries made in China are going to shake the conventional *Noah Hypothesis*, which follows the legend of the Old Testament and former archaeological and historical evidence in supposing that the origin of wine culture lies in the Middle East, therefore excluding parallel developments in different parts of the world. The fact of the production and use of ceramic vessels for some kind of proto-wine almost 10,000 years ago in East

² See McGovern (2003), pp. 14–15; McGovern (2009), pp. 28–42, 74–76; McGovern et al. (1997), pp. 5–16; McGovern et al. (2004 and 2005); Bower (2004); CIIC (2004); ORF (2004), University of Pennsylvania (2004) and Zhongguo Kexueyuan (2005).

³ McGovern (2009), pp. 31–36.

Asia may as well lead to the conclusion that not only one of the first civilizations began to flourish in Central China, but also that Central China was the origin of fermented beverages, including grape wine. In light of this, the two alternative conclusions could be drawn, that (1) the history of the production of fermented beverages in China was an independent and isolated process, or more probable, (2) there must have been an exchange of products as well as know-how and technology across the Eurasian continent already in prehistoric times, i.e. some kind of prehistoric Silk Road, or better, "Wine Road".

A few thousand years later Chinese written resources convey the oldest evidence of grape wine production in the Western regions. Such passages can be found in the *Records of the Historians* (*Shiji* 史记) compiled around 100 BC and in the *History of the Han Dynasty* (*Hanshu* 汉书) compiled in the first century AD. For the first time in Chinese history, the Western Han Empire (206 BC to 23 AD) expanded its sphere of influence to as far as Central Asia and cultivated diplomatic and trade relations with the Western empires. In the latter source, it is recorded that General Zhang Qian (张骞, ?–114 BC) returned in the year 126 BC from one of his extensive expeditions on a mission started by the Han Emperor Wudi (汉武帝), which led him as far as the Central Asian empire *Dawan* (大宛) in the Ferghana Valley, the Persian Empire and the Caspian Sea, whence he brought back vine samples of a widespread kind of *Vitis vinifera* from which all modern species of cultivated vines in Western Asia and Europe are derived. In fact, the population of *Dawan* were the descendants of the Macedonian army under Alexander the Great two centuries before, and they had brought with them their Greek wine culture. One explanation of the name "Dawan", in another pronunciation "Dayuan", of which the first morpheme simply means "great", is that the second part of the name is derived from the "Ionians". The vine samples brought back by Zhang Qian and his men were planted and cultivated in the gardens of the imperial court in the capital of Chang'an 长安 (today's Xi'an 西安) and probably from there spread over the central empire.

The *Records of the Historians* testify that grape wine was produced on a large scale in *Dawan* and that large volumes of wine could be stored for ten years and more without deterioration. This recording supports the hypothesis suggested by the archaeological evidence that the professional and extensive production of grape wine had already developed to a rather high level in the

Western regions of China during the *Spring and Autumn Period* (春秋时代), i.e. around the middle of the first millennium BC.⁴

In Chinese literature and poetry, especially in the Pre-Tang and Tang period, i.e. around the third to the ninth centuries, thousands of examples of praising the enjoyment of alcoholic beverages (*jiu* 酒) and among them particularly referring to “grape wine” (*putao* 葡萄) can be found. Until today the most popular poem is “Song of Liangzhou” (*Liangzhou ci* 凉州词) from the eighth century:

葡萄美酒夜光杯
欲饮琵琶马上催
醉卧沙场君莫笑
古来征战几人回

Drinking the magnificent wine of grapes in the night shining cups with desire
But the lute rushes for departure on our horses
Comrades, don't laugh when we lie drunken in the sand
Since ancient times, how many did ever return from the battle fields⁵

Today Chinese people usually still recite the first one or two lines when drinking a glass of tasty grape wine. But, strangely enough, only few of them know more about the poem, for instance its title, its age, and its author Wang Han (王翰), who lived around 1300 years ago during the Tang Dynasty (618–907 AD), the “Golden Age” of Chinese literature. Neither do most Chinese realize the often forgotten tragic end of these verses describing soldiers preparing for a desperate battle far in the West and contrasting with the delightful beginning. The most interesting fact about this hymn glorifying the beauty of grape wine is that it reveals that rice wine, spirits and tea were not the only cultural beverages in ancient Chinese tradition and also refutes the widespread opinion in the West and in China itself that grape wine had no tradition in China itself and that later on it became just another import product from Europe. The place Liangzhou mentioned in the title of the poem was a strategically important point in the middle of the Gansu corridor where all the economic and cultural exchange between China and Central

⁴ See the contributions of Wei, Si “试论唐代以前葡萄种植及葡萄酒在我国西域地区的传播与兴起” / “Grape cultivation and winemaking in the Western Regions of China” and Su, Zhenxing “论古代中西交流中的葡萄和葡萄酒文化” / “On the exchange of ancient Chinese and Western grape and grape wine culture”, in: Kupfer (ed.) (2010), pp. 89–104 and pp. 163–174.

⁵ The translations from Chinese are by myself.

Asia up to Europe took place. Since more than two thousand years and until the present the Gansu valleys have offered favorable soil and climate conditions for viticulture.

Wang Han, like many other literati of his time who not only received inspiration from grape wine but also engaged personally in viniculture and wine production, was a native of Taiyuan 太原, the capital of today's Shanxi Province. According to several reports, the area around Taiyuan and central Shanxi was presumably the largest wine-cultivating region in the heart of the ancient Chinese Empire during the Middle Ages. Today no traces can be found of this formerly flourishing culture, which reached its peak during Tang times.⁶

I may present as another example probably the very first poem in Chinese history describing grape wine, entitled "The delight of wine drinking" (*Yin-jiule* 饮酒乐). It is one of the most magnificent poems describing wine in all its aesthetic and fascinating facets. But strangely enough, in spite of its beauty and unlike the first poem, it is not as well known among the Chinese. Also, hardly anyone is familiar with its age and its author. Its way of describing the delight of wine drinking together with friends in an exhilarating atmosphere bears a strong resemblance to the topics to be found in European and Persian poetry in later centuries:

葡萄四时芳醇，琉璃千种旧宾。
夜饮舞迟销烛，朝醒弦促催人。
春风秋月恒好，欢醉日月言新。

Fragrant grape wine through the four seasons
Thousand glittering goblets for familiar guests
Drinking the whole night, the dances slowing down, the candles extinguishing
Awakening in the morning with the shaking sound of the lute
Ever delicious wine in the spring breeze and under the autumn moon
Intoxicating happiness, never-ending new conversations

⁶ During my visit at the wine company "Grape Garden" in Qingxu, south of Taiyuan, I was told about centuries-old vines still to be found in remote parts of the province and about tools and equipment for wine production in farmers' houses, as well as about autochthonous vine varieties mentioned in local historical records.

The poet, Lu Ji (陆机, 261–303), was a government official in his late years, i.e. around 300 AD during the Western Jin Dynasty in the capital Luoyang.⁷ The motifs centered around the description of grape wine in this seventeen-centuries-old poem can be repeatedly found in later literary works: the extraordinary, transparent beauty and fragrance of grape wine which – unequalled by any other alcoholic beverage at that time – can be enjoyed through the whole year; the matching precious drinking vessels – perhaps resembling those common in Persia and Greece, the inspiring und communicative effects of grape wine and the easy, enjoyable awakening in the morning without a hangover. All these characteristics are often repeated in the literature of other cultures where grape wine plays a central role. And it is worth recalling the fact that this poem was written during the time when the Romans were exporting their wine culture to Central Europe.

Obviously, the Chinese word for “grape”, *putao* (葡萄), which also referred to “grape wine” and became popular since the beginning of the Han Dynasty, was borrowed from the Persian language (*bāde*). In the old records, different writing variants of this word can be found with the same pronunciation (蒲陶, 蒲萄, 蒲桃, 葡桃). In modern times the word for “grape wine” has been modified by adding the general term *jiu* (酒) for alcoholic drink, i.e. *putaojiu* (葡萄酒). Korea and Japan also adopted this word formation with the pronunciations *podoju* and *bodōshu*, respectively. The double meaning of *putao* in ancient times shows that the grapes being imported from the West were automatically associated with the product of grape wine.⁸

Experts proved that around 40 species of wild grapes have developed in China's temperate zones since the Tertiary period. This makes this part of the world, together with the Caucasian region, quite unique.⁹ Hence it could be assumed that the Paleolithic population in these latitudes should already have been able to produce a fermented drink simply by collecting and storing grapes long before engaging in agriculture and grain growing. This so-called *Paleolithic Hypothesis* mentioned in McGovern's books (2003, 2009) is supported by legends from Southwest China and other regions that even

⁷ See Zeng (1980), p. 100; Ying (1999), pp. 41–45. It is possible that only the first four lines are from Lu Ji, and that 300 years later a poet named Lu Qiong 陆琼 (537–586) added the last two lines. The sources give no definite answer to this question.

⁸ See Zeng (1980), p. 100; Fei (1987), p. 36; Löwenstein (1991), p. 16; Ying (1999), pp. 39–41.

⁹ See for instance Wan et al. (2008, 77): “China is one of the major gene centers of *Vitis* species origination. More than 35 *Vitis* species have their origin in China.”

monkeys are able to produce primordial variants of grape or fruit wine in this simple way for their nutrition and enjoyment.¹⁰

There are more than enough evidences that, parallel to Mesopotamia, the Caucasus, Asia Minor, Crete and Egypt, China had already developed sophisticated skills and techniques to produce alcoholic beverages by systematic fermentation in prehistoric times, and that these beverages played a prominent role in the religious and social life of primeval communities as well as during the Shang- and Western Zhou-Periods (sixteenth to eighth centuries BC). This fact is abundantly documented by archaeological findings, such as the highly developed variety of differently shaped and named vessels for ceremonial, festive or daily use, which were first manufactured as pottery and later on as bronze vessels and can be admired in any Chinese historical museum nowadays. Also, the ancient recordings, like the *Book of the Rites* (礼记), testify to the central status of alcoholic beverages at court and in different life situations.

The significance and symbolism of fermented beverages at the dawn of Chinese civilization is even reflected in the development of the Chinese writing system. Like the general term for “alcoholic”, *jiu* 酒, in the historical dictionaries at least 400 characters can be found which are composed with the component *you* 酉, originally representing a pictogram of a wine jar – which by the way resembles the Georgian *kvevri* or the Central Asian *hum* and is quite similar to symbols used in other ancient wine cultures. Nowadays, of course, most of these characters are neither used nor known any longer. But in their semantic complexity, they show how sophisticated the variety, production technology and consumption of alcoholic beverages was in ancient China. One can find plenty of different ideas condensed in individual characters for instance for technically and sometimes geographically distinguished kinds of fermented beverages – altogether more than 60 names being mostly obscure in their meaning today, or for vessels for storing, serving, sacrificing and drinking ceremonies, for official ceremonial posts at the emperor's court in ancient times, for special methods and techniques of pro-

¹⁰ For the *Paleolithic Hypothesis* see McGovern (2003), pp. 7–11 and (2009), pp. 11–13. Also compare Fang/Fang (1993), pp. 103–104, who presume three stages of the development of fermented beverages, produced from 1. fruits (Paleolithic), 2. milk (beginning of animal husbandry) and 3. grain (advanced agriculture). Estreicher (2006), p. 3, is also convinced that grape wine must have been produced before beer and other alcoholic beverages.

ducing alcoholic beverages, and for describing several activities connected with rituals and festivals. In modern Chinese writing one can still find several characters containing the alcohol component but having derived meanings which more or less convey some dim relation to the meaning of fermentation, for instance *suan* 酸 “sour”, *ku* 酷 “bitter; cruel; extreme” and, in recent years, also “cool” in youth slang, *chun* 醇 “pure, refined”, which in modern times is used as a chemical term for “alcohol”, *yi* 醫 “medicine; doctor; cure”, *jiang* 醬 “sauce, paste”, and words in everyday use which originally characterized the state after drinking: *han* 酣 “(drinking, sleeping) to one's content”, *zui* 醉 “drunk, tipsy; fascinated by something” and *xing* 醒 “sober up; wake up”.

This linguistic sideways glance might be sufficient to illustrate how deep-rooted the culture of alcoholic beverages was in China's prehistoric and ancient society at least 3000–4000 years ago – during the elaboration of the Chinese writing system. And as already mentioned above, the early historical and literary recordings also reveal the central function of intoxicating drinks in worshipping ceremonies as a spiritual link to the gods and ancestors, as well as at courtly banquets and in daily life.

Recent findings in tombs in Central China confirm the central role of alcoholic beverages in funerary rituals and as burial objects. The oldest brewage of mankind was unearthed in the year 1980 near Anyang in Henan Province at the historic center of the Shang-Dynasty – and not very far from the archaeological site of Jiahu: a more than 3000-year-old bronze vessel with a fermented and filtered liquid made of rice and millet improved with different spices and preservatives, such as herbs, flowers and resin – a remarkable mixture which is amazingly reminiscent of the techniques used to prepare the oldest wines in the Middle East, Egypt and Greece (where today the only remaining resinous wine in the world, *retsina*, is still very common). Another fermented drink from the Western Han Dynasty (second century BC), 26 liters in total, was found in 2003 in a prince's tomb near Xi'an, perfectly preserved in a hermetically closed bronze vessel. It is said that the liquid is of greenish color and still has a fragrant smell, containing about 10 percent alcohol which obviously had not evaporated after more than two thousand years.¹¹

¹¹ See McGovern (2009), pp. 47–49, and the Internet article “26 gongjin lao jiu ...” and the newspaper publications in *Renmin Ribao* (*Haiwaiban*), June 21, 2003, July 31, 2003 and August 1, 2003.

For any visitor of China's historical museums, like the excellent one in Shanghai, it is apparently still a mystery what the contents were of all those differently shaped ceramic and bronze vessels exhibited in the departments of the prehistoric period, the Shang and Zhou dynasties. Simply labeled “wine vessel”, it might be thought that 70–80 percent of them were used for storing, serving and consuming alcoholic beverages, especially those with narrow necks. After their first experiences with fermenting grapes, the hunter-gatherers of the Paleolithic age might have learnt to make use of the product for their enjoyment, but also for magic and religious purposes. During the so-called *Neolithic Revolution* and parallel with the emergence of agriculture, the first human settlements and the production of earthenware, they started to initiate and control fermentation processes in a systematic and large-scale way, gradually developing better techniques for brewing beverages made out of grain or rice and the production of a large variety of sophisticated vessels.

SOME GENERAL THOUGHTS ABOUT WINE AND THE RISE OF CIVILIZATION

The findings indicated above and other recent research results from the different fields of archaeology and historical, cultural, social, literary and linguistic studies in China in comparison with Central and Western Eurasia lend credence to the following assumptions in connection with the *Paleolithic Hypothesis*:

1. In general, the discovery and use of fermentation by prehistoric man can be assessed as quantum leap in the history of evolution and civilization, similar to the discovery of fire.
2. The mastery of fermentation processes promoted almost all of the achievements of civilization in a more or less direct way. This concerned the whole range of material transformations in the course of the Neolithic Revolution, from the society of hunter-gatherers to solid settlements with agricultural production collectives developing to primal state communities with social diversification and classification, refined techniques of food production and cooking, as well as basic approaches to industrial and artistic technology. The findings in Jiahu provide excellent evidence in this regard.
3. There seems to be a universal connection between the ritual use of fermented beverages and the creation of writing systems – an area which needs still much more research of course. A prime example for this corre-

lation is the formation of Chinese civilization together with earliest inscriptions.

4. In primeval societies living in temperate zones the natural fermentation of grapes seems to have set off the production of more complex alcoholic beverages and, later on, with the development of granoculture, also of prototypes of beer. The similarity of the developments in the East and the West are somehow striking, as for instance the simultaneous cultivation of barley about 4000 years ago – most probably exclusively for this purpose – in the Middle East and in China in connection with the production of beer-like beverages.
5. In addition to socio-economic progress, spirituous beverages evoked experience of enhanced consciousness by specially assigned persons who had the ability to transcend their individual consciousness in favor of a higher community consciousness, adopting key functions for the self-determination and identification of the group. Consequently, the emergence of magic and religious cultic rituals together with constitutive symbols as well as the demand for the preservation of narrative language and written recordings appeared. There has been perhaps no highly developed culture on earth in which rituals of trance and meditation combined with the consumption of intoxicants, especially alcoholic beverages, did not play an important role. This can also be clearly observed in the case of China.
6. With the further development of the cultic system, the organization and performance of these rituals became an exclusive privilege of certain persons with special abilities who finally constituted the elite class of magicians or priests on the side or even above the political rulers. Their main function was to communicate with deceased ancestors and the metaphysical world and to foretell the life and fate of their community.

It is well documented that ancient Chinese society installed a highly distinctive ancestral worship system together with a pantheon of deities, nature spirits, mythical emperors and heroes. Already in pre- and proto-historic times, there must have been a vastly elaborated complex of rituals and ceremonies for cultivating contacts with ancestors and deities, and we also know that this duty was executed by professional shamans, the so-called *wu(shi)* 巫(師), who exercised their services on the basis of intoxicating beverages consumed before or during the rituals. This cumulated in the formation of a superstructure of mythological, religious and ideological concepts and doctrines which furthermore produced social and linguistic differences and vari-

eties as well as power and authority systems. The requirement to describe the transcendental and virtual trance experiences to others and to transmit them over long distances of time and space – and this can be recognized clearly at the beginning of Chinese culture – led to the evolution of language from a mere means of communication to an instrument of documentation and narrative fixation, archiving and transmission of magic-religious content, and later, during the constitution of the imperial system, also of political and economic, ideological and literary contents, thus inspiring the invention of scripture and the art of writing as well as the official institutionalization of the historians and archives at court. The hitherto oldest known Chinese texts, the inscriptions on blade bones and tortoise shells (*jiaguwen* 甲骨文) from at least the Shang Dynasty between the sixteenth and eleventh centuries BC, is evident proof of this evolutionary process. It seems that there was a similar development in ancient Egyptian civilization, where a closed interdependence can be seen between wine culture and material progress, the emergence of a religious cosmos and the simultaneous expansion of the function of language together with the creation of a pictorial writing system. The more one approaches China's *jiu* 酒 and wine culture, while focusing on certain related periods and areas, such as technical-material culture, economic and social developments, mythology, religion, language, literature and art from this perspective, the more it can be gradually revealed how deeply Chinese society and civilization has been stamped by the symbolism of *jiu* throughout its long continuous history.

WINE AND ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES AS INTEGRAL PART OF CHINESE CULTURE

As still observable in present-day Chinese society, it can be presumed that the increasingly sophisticated production, ritualization as well as socially conventionalized consumption of alcoholic beverages has strongly influenced the creative achievements in all domains of China's cultural development. The most prominent example of this influence in China's rich history of literature is poetry. From the almost 3000 years old poems in the *Book of Songs* 诗经 to the sophisticated lyrical tradition of the Han Dynasty (second century BC to the second century AD), the nature and hermit poetry of the period of the Six Dynasties 六朝 (third to sixth centuries) as represented by such prominent poets as Lu Ji, the Seven Wise Men of the Bamboo Grove 竹林七贤 and especially Tao Yuanming 陶渊明 (365–427), and reaching the climax in the Golden Age of Chinese lyric poetry during the Tang Dyn-

asty (seventh to tenth centuries), which has left the unique heritage of more than 50,000 poems from more than 2,500 writers, one can find uncountable traces of the influence of *jiu* and wine culture through the millennia.

Especially saturated with the motif of wine are Tang lyrics, and they most probably would not have attained such an outstanding culmination of creativity without it. Besides immortal icons like Li Bai 李白 (701–762) and Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770), whose hundreds of poems are steeped in the spirit of *jiu*, one could cite dozens of highly proliferating poets of this three centuries' period similarly influenced by this subject, among them Liu Yuxi 刘禹锡 (772–842), Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846), Wang Han 王翰 (seventh to eighth century), Wang Bo 王勃 (ca. 650–676), Wang Zhihuan 王之涣 (688–742), Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819), Wang Wei 王维 (?–761), Wang Ya 王涯 (?–835) and many others. It is unimaginable that they could have displayed such a life full of creativity and rich with anecdotes without the general inspiration of *putaojiu* and *jiu*. It is even recorded that some of these poets cultivated and produced wine themselves.

To a further extent during the subsequent dynasties of Song (tenth to thirteenth centuries), Yuan (thirteenth to fourteenth centuries) and Ming (fourteenth to seventeenth centuries), wine and *jiu* showed their prominent influence not only in lyrics, but particularly in novels, folk tales and dramas. There is enormous research potential here still waiting to be exploited. To start with, the works of the famous Northern Song scholar and poet, Su Shi 苏轼, better known as Su Dongpo 苏东坡 (1037–1101), and even his whole existence are inextricably bound up with the inspiration of intoxicating beverages, especially grape wine.¹²

Little cross-cultural research has been done yet on the artefacts of bronze mirrors which carry ornaments of vine branches and grapes. In China they were very common especially before and during the Tang Dynasty. The bronze mirror was a kind of handicraft distributed not only along the whole Silk Road, but also in largely dispersed ancient cultures like the Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Etruscan, Greek, Roman, Korean and Japanese ones.

Wine culture has spread its great influence on calligraphy and painting since the Tang period. Repeatedly, the genre of the “drunken ink” (*zuimo* 醉墨) has been transmitted as a special genre in the art of brush writing pen-

¹² For more details about the inseparable connection between Chinese literature and (*putao-*) *jiu* culture, see Kupfer (2007), pp. 600–613, also Cai (1993) and Lin (1993) and the voluminous collection of sources in Hu (1987), which by far is not complete yet.

etrated by the spirit of *jiu*. Its perhaps most prominent protagonist was the eccentric monk and calligrapher Huaisu 怀素 (737 – ca. 798), also known as the “drunken monk” (*zuiseng* 醉僧). During the thirteenth century, another monk and artist, Wen Riguan 温日观, was nicknamed and revered as “Wine Wen” (*putao-Wen* 葡萄温) because of his ink paintings of grapes. He was called the “crazy monk” (*kuangseng* 狂僧) because of his extraordinary painting technique, which has been described as follows: after drinking much wine, he dipped his long hair into the ink with a loud scream, using his head as brush for the creation of his masterpieces.¹³ Cases like these show that Buddhist spiritual life did, indeed, not always mean abstinence from alcohol in China. The obvious connection between the increasing viniculture and wine production even in Central China and the ascent of Buddhism at about the same time is an interesting, but not yet sufficiently researched fact. Together with the large spread of Buddhist monasteries and monks throughout the whole empire, Buddhist monks also seem to have contributed to the expansion of vineyards. During this same period, popular religious movements within Daoism probably inspired the production and consumption of wine in connection with Daoist life-extending and dietary practices.¹⁴

These few examples might suffice to give an idea of the creative effect of *putaojiu* in Chinese history within the whole context of *jiu* culture, spanning China's most creative millennium. And it is no coincidence that grape wine culture reached its peak of prosperity in the Tang period, when China was the world's largest and most flourishing empire, uniting many different nationalities and cultures, establishing trade routes and manifold contacts and exchanges with Europe, the Middle East, Central and South Asia, as well as with Korea, Japan and Southeast Asia. Grape wine was esteemed highly at that time in China. This was also due to the vivid influences from Persian, Greek-Bactrian and Sogdian cultures, and especially due to its direct promotion by the imperial court. During the Tang period tea had just started under the influence of Buddhism to develop into a common beverage; distilled spirits (*zhengliujiu* 蒸馏酒 or *baijiu* 白酒) became popular only much later,

¹³ See Ying (1999), pp. 107, 156. The same story is told about the Tang calligrapher Zhang Xu 张旭. More about Chinese calligraphy, its great masters since Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (307–365) and their addiction to (*putao-*) *jiu* is described in Zhang (1993).

¹⁴ Bauer (1989, 229) holds the traditional opinion that wine was the beverage of Daoism and tea that of Buddhism. For the relationship between Daoism and *jiu*, see Hao (1993).

i.e. in the Northern Song Dynasty (tenth to twelfth centuries).¹⁵ Therefore, grape wine was esteemed highly during this time and met the requirements of an aesthetical, precious, enjoyable and inspiring beverage for religious-philosophical as well as social purposes.

In the Yuan Dynasty (thirteenth to fourteenth centuries), during which China became a part of the Mongolian world empire, winegrowing reached a record level in acreage and production quantity.¹⁶ Historical recordings, including Marco Polo's reports, describe the existence of huge vineyards in different parts of the country, where a variety of grapes were harvested on a large scale by state-owned enterprises. At least the first Yuan emperor, Kublai Khan, an enthusiastic promoter of wine, installed a wine cellar at his court for state receptions and banquets.

The question has not been satisfactorily answered as to why grape wine lost its status in Chinese society in later times, i.e. in the Ming and Qing Dynasties (fourteenth to nineteenth centuries), and why it has been given the common status – still applicable today – of a “foreign culture product”. There may be a number of economic, fiscal, social and cultural reasons for the decline of wine culture in China. Other factors have played an important role as well hitherto: the old and unique tradition of highly sophisticated *qu*-fermentation used in the production of “yellow wine” (*huangjiu* 黄酒) – *qu* (曲, 麴, 麴) is a fermentation substance produced from grain and soya –¹⁷ and of course the increasing popularity of distilled beverages.

China's wine culture started its revival within globalizing contexts only after the end of the nineteenth century. In 1892 the Changyu Wine Company (张裕葡萄酒酿酒公司) was founded by Zhang Bishi 张弼士, a businessman returning to China from Batavia (Jakarta) to the town of Chefoo 芝罘

¹⁵ Among experts, there is no consensus yet on when in Chinese history distillation techniques were used to produce alcoholic beverages, and not just only for medical purposes. The early terms *shaojiu* 烧酒 (“boiled *jiu*”) und *baijiu* 白酒 (“white *jiu*”) used in the Tang period are no proof of distilled spirits, they rather indicate the habit of warming up fermented beverages. The oldest clearly identified distillation equipment was used in the Jin Empire in the 12th Century (see Zeng 1980, p. 7; Ying 1999, p. 67).

¹⁶ For wine history in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties see Ying (1999), pp. 91–127, and Liu Yingsheng, “蒙元时代葡萄酒文化及其生产与贸易/Wine culture, production and trade in Mongol-Yuan China”, in: Kupfer (2010), pp. 105–127.

¹⁷ About *qu*-fermentation tradition see Chen, Guangsheng, “从酒麴看中国利用微生物的成就”/“*Jiuqu* fermentation techniques and achievements in using microorganisms in China”, in: Kupfer (2010), pp. 79–86.

(Zhifu), today's Yantai 烟台, on the Northern coast of Shandong. He planted vines imported from Austria all around the pleasant Mediterranean landscape along the shores of the Yellow Sea. In modern times, Changyu became China's biggest wine producer, with its red and white wines enjoying an increasing reputation on the national and international markets.

Since the beginning of modernization in the 1980s and especially since the turn of the millennium, an unprecedented boom of the production and consumption of grape wine can be observed in China – with double digit growth rates per year as well as continuous progress in quality production. Lately, a German journalist has characterized this phenomenon as “Cultural Revolution”.¹⁸ The Chinese wine-growing area – with around 600 wineries in ten main wine-growing regions spanning 4000 kilometres from east to west – has reached 600,000 ha already which is six times of that of Germany. Although most of the grapes are sold on the market as fresh grapes, China meanwhile produces more than 12 million hectolitres of wine, and surpassed Germany's production of 10 million hectolitres, now ranking in top position in the world. Especially among the fast growing urban middle class grape, wine has captured a new market, and since the 1990s high-proof alcoholic drinks like *Maotai* were officially banished from state and institutional banquets and almost everywhere in the country replaced by mostly red wine from the domestic market. Accordingly, China's grape wine consumption has increased at an almost incredible rate within the past decade, reaching one billion bottles per year, which is equal to about 8 million hectolitres (compared with Germany's 20 million hectolitres). But in fact, the per-capita consumption is still very low in China: just one litre per person a year (compared with Germany: 20 litres, France: 50 litres).¹⁹ So there is still plenty of potential.

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¹⁸ Bader (2006).

¹⁹ Zhai (2005), (Zhang, Junke (2007), p. 22, and Hoffmann, “China on its way into global wine world”/“进军全球化葡萄酒世界道路上的中国”, in: Kupfer (2010), pp. 255–268.

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