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Wine and wine drinking in ancient China

ABSTRACT: Wine comes from nature and is processed by human beings. It is closely linked with social life. Recalling the history of wine, it has exerted a negative effect and it contains a profound truth of effecting good administration and stability of a nation. In view of the historical lessons, rulers have adopted corresponding alcohol policies. The pros and cons of wine are not of its characteristics, but out of rational and irrational choices of human beings.

KEYWORDS: wine culture; administration and stability of a nation; prohibition; brewing techniques; wine style.

1. Origin of wine

China has the longest history of brewery. As to the origin of wine, there are several legends. The book “Intrigues of the Warring States” states that Yi Di, an official in Xia and Yu Eras, has made wine and he is worshiped as a wine ancestor. However, most consider Du Kang as a pioneer both in wine brewing and as a wine god. According to the legend, Du Kang put rice in a bamboo tube and left it in a hole of a tree. Later, fragrance came out. He tasted a bit of rice juice in the bamboo — sweet and delicious. He immediately realized the role of rice fermentation and the wine production method came into being. Du Kang becomes a synonym for wine.

According to the archaeological data and modern scientific knowledge, the earliest wine appeared during Longshan Culture period. A large number of wine sets are unearthed in the cultural relics of this period. Wine could not be invented by one person, similar to fire and farming. The most primitive wine is produced after the natural fermentation of the wild fruit under a certain temperature and humidity in the natural environment.

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In the primitive society of low productivity, the surplus food cannot be properly reserved, and a chemical reaction occurs under certain temperature and humidity, namely fermentation. The fermented food smells terrible. However, the primitive people still treat it as a food to eat owing to lack of food supplies. Gradually, people are accustomed to this kind of taste. They start to ferment food consciously, and slowly learn how to make wine.

2. Development of Wine

The origin of wine is complex and long, and its development is a comprehensive reflection of ancient Chinese science and technology, literature and art, and social customs. It is an important part of the splendid culture of ancient China.

2.1. The brewing techniques of dynasties

The brewery of Shang dynasty was quite developed. According to the analysis of the oracles, millet has been used as raw material, “Nie” and yeast for the saccharification agent for sweet wine. The use of yeast was later considered as an important creation in ancient China microbes and a turning point in wine history. Since then, China's wine production and wine yeast are inseparable.

In Zhou dynasty, many official positions in charge of wine business are set up, such as *jiu zheng*, *jiu ren*, *jiang ren* and so on. Clearly, the wine industry was already an independent production sector, and it needs a comprehensive institution to governance it, which was the beginning of later dynasties' special positions for wine. In the cities, brewing workshops and wine shops have appeared. Wine drinking has become a very common thing.

In Qin and Han dynasties, the filter techniques have been improved. Corn wine contains a large number of generic chamber and vinasse, and a good drink only comes after a good filtering. Then, people start using two short sticks to support a large pocket filter, a huge step forward than former baskets and thatches. After the Qin and Han dynasties, the yeast species increase and a variety of wines appeared. Wine industry thrived, and many famous wines come into being.

In Sui and Tang dynasties, the wine industry continues to develop. There has a more liberal policy, where private brewing was no longer strictly limited and wine can be freely traded. Tang dynasty introduced from the Western Gaochang grapes and new wines. Emperor Taizong personally supervised the manufacture of eight kinds of wine brewing. From Persia, the Dragon Cream Wine and three Le Pulp wine were also introduced. With the South's economic development, the glutinous rice has replaced millet as a major brewing raw material.

In the Ming and Qing dynasties, Chinese wine industry reached its peak. Neither wine tax nor alcohol ban was effected. Wine industry, like textile industry and sugar industry has emerged the bud of capitalism. Besides the traditional famous wines, health wine and medicinal liquor have quite a considerable scale. The varieties of wine and the demand for wine are much more than in the former generations. Many literary works have recorded the wine industry and the ecological wine culture.

2.2. Wine style of dynasties

With the development of brewing technology in Xia dynasty, drinking became even more popular. Alcohol has become the norm of society, which was both used in the feasts and in worship. Inscriptions on the oracle bone record that the ritual wine on the altar sometimes reach hundreds of wine containers. A large number of wine sets are unearthed in both the aristocratic tombs and civilian tombs. In 1969–1977 in the 939 tombs of Yin Ruins, 508 tombs have unearthed ceramic wine goblets and *jue* vessels, and another 67 tombs have unearthed copper or proto-aluminum *jue* vessels.

In Zhou dynasty, wine was essential for ritual worship and feasts, and was used as an incentive reward to officials. Wine culture becomes the ethics thought, thus reflecting close relationship between the wine and the etiquette. In drinking etiquette, “Chou” is a toast by the host to the guest. On the contrary, “Zuo” is the toast by the guest to the host. This custom continues until today. The drinking culture promotes the development of the wine trade. In Western dynasty, big cities like Xi’an have had stable wine-purchasing and drinking places.

During Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, the frequent wars and unrests made people feel that life is short. Pleasure and drinking became a major means of relaxation. Scholars immerse themselves in alcohol so as to sublimate life from wine. Cao Cao’s lines of “only Dukan wine can drive one out of melancholy” have become the consensus of many literati. The words and deeds of celebrities have great impact on the society. The emperors drink, so are the social underclass

In Sui and Tang dynasties, wine became an indispensable drink in people’s life. Tang people like to name wines with “Chun”, signifying the spring time and the charm of wine, eg, Jian Nan Chun. Social drinking was rampant, especially the literary geniuses. He Zhizhang, Li Bai, Zhang Xu and others are known as the “Eight wine Immortals.” Du Mu, Wang Wei and Bai Ju-yi are also alcoholics. Drinking wine was more of a scholar’s pride. Historical notes at the time record the funny anecdotes of these poets.

During Song and Yuan Dynasties, wine was divided into liquor, rice wine, fruit wine and medicinal wine. Celebrities and ordinary people

could produce wine at home. Emperors, nobles, merchants, men of letters and even ordinary people were drinking for fun. With the development of the wine industry, the perception of wine also changed. Drinking became more rational and mature. People emphasize drinking etiquette and moderate drinking, and they begin to feel that drinking can bring both the pleasure and harm to the body.

3. The negative effects of wine and Alcoholic Prohibition

3.1. The negative effects of wine

Wine has penetrated the whole society from its very beginning, and it has a close relationship with humans. Wine can stimulate emotion; wine can be used in a variety of rituals; wine can have a catalytic effect on art and literature, since many scholars tend to produce outstanding works after wine. Compared with the positive roles of wine, its negative effects are more thought-provoking.

Many emperors indulged in wine which led to fall of the dynasty. Xia Jie, the last emperor of Xia dynasty, drank all day with his mistress. Xia Jie ordered to build a wine pool, which was big enough for boating. Xia Jie once gathered three thousand people to drink wine there, and some people were drunk and drowned in the pool. Xia Jie took it as a kind of pleasure and he neglected his state. Therefore, Xia dynasty was taken over by Emperor Tang of Shang dynasty.

Indulgence of alcohol may cause premature death. With his talent, Cao Zhi, prince of Three Kingdoms, was favored by his father Cao Cao. However, he drank wine without restraint and lost a battle, which made Cao Cao disappointed. Thereafter, Cao Zhi's was very depressed. He indulged himself more in drinking and died at an early age of 40.

3.2. Alcoholic Prohibition

From early time, people have realized excessive drinking will injury the body, lose morality, neglect duty, result in bankruptcy and waste food. So the voice of prohibition could be traced quite early.

When Zhou rulers came to power, they particularly emphasized on the harmful effects of alcohol and formulated policies to limit alcohol. "Wine Order" was the earliest literature to limit wine. It claims that only in worship and other rituals can drinking be allowed. It warns that group drinking or loose law enforcement will be sentenced to death. After the unification of Qin dynasty, business suppression policy was enforced. The price of wine was extremely high, which limits the sale of alcohol to a certain degree. Alcoholic Prohibition was also implemented to ban brewing with surplus grain.

During early Han Dynasty, owing to social depression and frequent floods and droughts, food reserves were not sufficient. Wine consumed food thus affecting livelihood and national stability. For these reasons, Emperor Wen limited alcohol production and trade. Drinking was allowed only in big gatherings. Otherwise, group drinking of more than three people will be fined 4 Lian gold. This practice was similar to that of the Western Zhou Dynasty. Despite the general ban, the execution was not so strict. In fact, the banning restricts common people but not officials. It was banned in the open but not in private. The prohibition was almost useless.

In Ming Dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang banned alcohol, but the royal families produced wine for royal consumption. Despite the enactment of Prohibition in Qing Dynasty, the scale of production of wine was expanding. After the mid-Qing dynasty, the government no longer prohibited drinking.

4. Conclusion

Blind prohibition does not work. Wine is not a drug. There is no need to force prohibition. But we should also realize the hazard caused by inappropriate drinking. Wine not only wastes a lot of food, but also consumes manpower, material and financial resources. Even in modern society, excessive drinking brings incalculable damage to health, family harmony and social stability.

As the proverb goes: "Little drinking is good to health. Too much drinking will cause trouble or even accident". It reflects not only people's understanding of wine, but interprets also the significance of wine in one's life. Wine is a double-edged sword. Wine itself is neither good nor bad, but human beings have difficulty in overcoming its weaknesses. Human beings invent wine, benefit from wine, indulge in wine and tarry and waste in wine. Wine is both a smart and confusing human choice.

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