

# ASIAN WINE – THE SILK ROUTE

2nd Forum and Tasting

YINCHUAN – NINGXIA AUTONOMOUS REGION



POST EVENT REPORT

vinopres



北京国际酒类交易所  
BEIJING INTERNATIONAL WINE & SPIRIT EXCHANGE





# Replicating the cultural interactions promoted by the world's historic trade routes

## The BRWSC strikes gold with its second event, hosted by Ningxia

After a first successful edition in the burgeoning Fangshan region of Beijing in 2016, Vinopres and the Beijing International Wine & Spirit Exchange teamed up this year with representatives from one of China's most prominent, and talked-about wine regions – Ningxia – to host the 2018 Belt & Road Wine and Spirit Competition along with a series of conferences, tastings and winery visits. A delegation of journalists, producers, educators, marketers, sommeliers and other industry members from around the world got a unique opportunity to view this pioneering wine region “from the inside”, whilst Ningxia's wine industry was given a chance to showcase its up-and-coming wine proposition. The following pages share some of the insight presented during the conferences, visits and tastings.

## Introduction

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Asian wine Forum-Tasting



Baudouin Havaux  
Vinopres S.A Chairman - CMB

One of China's most exciting new wine regions lies in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region in northwest China. Two thousand years ago, Yinchuan lay on the Silk Road, along which goods and ideas travelled between China and Europe: silk went west, and wool, gold, and silver came east. In more recent history, Ningxia was a poverty-stricken coal region whose dusty scrubland was in danger of desertification. But, in the nineteen-nineties, the government began to invest seriously in its infrastructure, irrigating immense tracts of desert between the Yellow River and the Helan Mountains.

Recently, local officials received a directive to build a “wine route” through the region, similar to Bordeaux's Route des Vins.

European winegrowers, hired by the government as consultants, had identified Ningxia's continental climate with dry summers, and plentiful sunlight as ideal for vineyards. However, the region also experiences harsh, freezing winters, making it necessary for winemakers to bury their vines until spring to protect them from the cold.

With a strong sense of flair and self-confidence, in less than 20 years, Ningxia has become the heart of Chinese wine production, with over 100 registered wineries in production.

It is a great pleasure to organize the second edition of the Asian Wine forum and competition – The Silk Route in the city of Yinchuan.

Let's discover the purple dream of Yinchuan.



# ASIAN WINE – THE SILK ROUTE

## 2nd Symposium and Tasting

The following pages share some of the insight presented during the two-day series of conferences and activities.



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## Where West meets East Opening ceremony

2018 is a special year for Ningxia on two counts: the province celebrated its 60th anniversary and also welcomed the Belt & Road Wine and Spirit Competition for the first time. Hosting the competition and the series of conferences, winery visits and free-pour tastings that accompanied it is a mark of the scope, maturity and prestige that Ningxia has now secured as a wine region. "Strong promotion by local governments has strengthened the wine industry", said Zhigang Jiang, deputy secretary of the Party Committee of the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and secretary of the Yinchuan Municipal Party Committee at the event's opening ceremony. This support has allowed Ningxia to build up a 100,000-tonne wine industry with a combined value in excess of 20 billion yuan, stressed Zhigang Jiang: "This is the largest concentrated production area of wine grapes in China".

The region is encouraged in its endeavours by China's President Xi Jinping who emphasised the need to continue and accelerate the development of the wine industry on a visit to Ningxia in 2016. Zhigang Jiang and other local officials are well aware of the need for outside input if the region is to achieve these objectives and "encourages exchanges and co-operation at home and abroad". Hence the decision to host this year's Belt & Road Wine and Spirit

Competition which welcomed 50 wine experts with over 30 countries and regions represented. "Our aim is to build a bridge between Helan Shandong and the world's major wine regions to drive our wine industry", said Zhigang Jiang. For Baudouin Havaux, chairman of Vinopres and co-organiser of the event, the 2018 Belt & Road Wine and Spirit Competition symbolised the point where "West meets East". Praising the country for its "investment in certified and designated areas", he also underscored the present-day prominence of China as one of the world's leading wine markets.



For Ningxia, in particular, Baudouin Havaux claimed the event was "a landmark moment in its development as a wine region". For journalist and panel representative Anne Serres, the Belt & Road Wine and Spirit Competition epitomises the spirit of the Silk Road, which "facilitated not just trade but also the exchange of ideas, art and science between Asia, Europe and Africa". The event itself, she said, "truly connects and facilitates the trade relations and the exchange of ideas between booming producers of the wine and spirits sector", whilst also rekindling "the historic Old World connections". By inviting members of the media and the wine industry from around the world, she hoped they would be able to "contribute and shape new ways of producing, tasting and selling wines and spirits together".





# OPEN TASTING



A free-pour tasting throughout the event allowed guests to discover around 800 Asian wines at their leisure



## A practical, leisurely introduction to Asian wines

Throughout the three-day event, visitors were given a unique opportunity to taste an incredible 800 wines, and a handful of spirits, in the free-pour tasting area. Of these, 450 were Chinese wines, the vast majority of which are not available in export markets. Attendees were therefore given unique insight into the different styles and quality of wines produced across the country. Encapsulating its role as a promoter of the historic trade routes running between China and the Western world, the event also showcased an unprecedented array of wines from across Asia, with countries such as Georgia, Moldova, Lebanon, Israel, Turkey, Ukraine, Armenia, Russia and Japan well represented alongside more unexpected origins such as Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan.





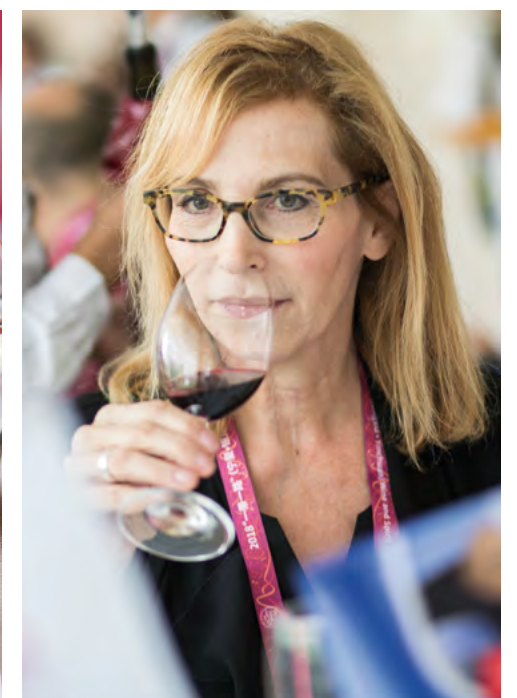


# COMPETITION

**Going for gold**  
The competition attracts  
over 800 entries



Medals are a highly acclaimed endorsement for wines in China and Asia in general and the 2018 Belt & Road Wine and Spirit Competition attracted a significant number of entries for one of the world's burgeoning producer regions. Over 800 wines took part this year, many of them from China, but also from more exotic producer countries such as Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. The vast majority of the wines were red, reflecting Chinese wine production, but there were also whites, rosés and sparkling wines. The judging panel came from an extremely varied background, both in terms of geographical origin and profession – it included specialist wine writers, winemakers, importers/distributors, brand ambassadors, WSET educators and Masters of Wine. Three types of medals were awarded: Grand Gold, Gold and Silver. A total of 115 wines won awards: 18 Grand Gold, 60 Gold and 37 silver medals. Due to its large number of entries, China won 108 medals, with Ningxia at the top of the awards list with 65 medals. The most awarded Chinese wines were made from international varieties: Cabernet-Sauvignon (48 medals), Chardonnay (17 medals), Marselan (9 medals) and Merlot (7 medals).





# Conferences



## High-level conferences provide plenty of food for thought

Linhai Hao - President of the International Federation of Vine and Wine of Helan Mountain's East Foothills

As a preamble to the two-day series of conferences hosted as part of the 2018 Belt & Road Wine and Spirit Competition, Linhai Hao, president of the International Federation of Vine and Wine of Helan Mountain's East Foothills, reminded attendees of the quantum leap in scale and quality achieved by the region since its inception. "Production started from scratch and has now reached a scale that is of interest to an international audience", he marvelled, emphasising the importance of such events for exchanging ideas and experience. Ningxia enjoys natural conditions which are conducive to growing wine grapes and producing premium wines, he said, "and the wine industry will make best use of this". Since the region was first developed for wine growing, the effects of soil and climate on the wines are now much better understood and Ningxia has moved towards a new phase in its development. "Twenty years ago we realised that the most outstanding feature of wine culture was differentiation. We want individualisation and a diversified culture – this is what the Chinese people want too". His viewpoint was echoed by Hua Li, professor and doctoral supervisor of Viticulture and Oenology at the College of Oenology, Northwest A&F University. He highlighted how

"all production areas have their own characteristics", and insisted on the importance of "every region finding out which varieties best suit their own terroir, that combination of people, soils and climate". These concepts cannot be disconnected from the marketplace, however, and development of the wine industry involves taking into consideration consumer expectations: "The market must also dictate the style of wine we produce", said Professor Li. Similarly, consumer confidence stems from accurate and truthful classifications and Linhai Hao stressed "the need to carefully define wine production areas. We have tried our best to classify our wines and standardise promotion, particularly for the classification", he said, adding "Ningxia will seek to capture the spirit of this". Thirteen speakers addressing such varied topics as terroir effect on wines, the emergence of quality wine regions, pairing wines and Chinese cuisine, successful promotion strategies and even the effects of wine on health – a major driver of wine consumption in China – will most certainly have given attendees, many of them Chinese, food for thought.

# Conference N°1



主讲人  
彼得鲁·陶乐思 MW  
IWC Merchant Awards主席

Speaker  
Pedro Ballesteros Torres MW  
President of the IWC Merchant Awards

## Securing recognition for Ningxia as a high quality wine region

After several decades of growth, Ningxia has reached a turning point and needs to develop its own USP in order to sustain continued growth and ensure its wines can be sold at a premium thereby generating higher revenues for its producers. Master of Wine Pedro Ballesteros Torres offered advice on how to build a high quality wine region.

In the wine world, uniqueness hinges on terroir but is terroir a precondition or the result of a high quality wine region? A glance back over the history of wine growing worldwide offers some clues. Originally a luxury, drunk only by the select few including the pharaohs of Egypt, high quality wine as we know it is therefore a relatively recent phenomenon.

Over the centuries, numerous examples have demonstrated that just as wine regions can rise to the pinnacle of success, so can they fall victim to a combination of factors, and decline. Citing regions such as the Canary Islands, after which an entire wharf was named in London such was the prestige of the wines being unloaded there; Falerno – the preferred tipple of Antiquity – and the vineyards grown along the sandy soils of the Nile itself, Pedro Ballesteros pointed out the pivotal role played by people in the ebb and flow of a wine region's reputation, stressing "the terroir is still the same".

To emphasise his point further, he offered examples from history of entirely 'man-made' wine regions: "The Médoc

was originally marshlands, dried by the Dutch – this is very different to the perception of natural conditions conducive to wine growing". The same is true of the terraced vineyards of the Douro – brought to life by the use of dynamite – and regions such as Rioja, Barolo and Brunello di Montalcino which would not have existed were it not for pioneers such as the Marques de Riscal and Biondi Santi.

### Six essential conditions

Modern-day equivalents, such as Virginia in the United States and the Greek island of Santorini, reveal that the same drivers are still very much at work, heralding a potentially bright future for Ningxia, provided some key requirements are met. "A quality wine region is closely associated to economic and political power", claimed Ballesteros, adding: "It never develops naturally; there is always a leader like Penfolds in Australia or the Marquis of Pombal in the Douro". Another prerequisite is clarity in land and property rules, guaranteeing long-term security for investments. Infrastructure, too, needs to be able to promote the development of trade and thereby the





sustainability of a wine region. Again, Ballesteros supported his assertion with examples from the past – the train in Rioja and Bordeaux with its port. Stressing the need for research and innovation – “tradition heralds the death of a wine region” – his final condition for a successful high quality wine region was recognition from abroad: the US needed the Judgment of Paris, Champagne the Russians and the Rheingau the UK, he said. “When all these conditions are united, it leads to the ability to know the terroir. Terroir is the result of these conditions”.

## Interview

*Q1: Being an authority on the Spanish wine industry, do you see any similarities or differences between Spain, one of the most important wine-producing countries and certainly the largest grape growing country in the world, and China, a nascent but fast developing “New World” of wines?*

**PB:** I see many similarities and as many differences as well. What is most similar is the quest, both in China and in Spain, for high quality wines that represent their respective landscapes, peoples and history. The differences are then huge: different climates, different soils, different market approaches and structures, different governances....But the main similarity is much more relevant than any difference: indeed, what is common to all real wine lovers is the active defence of diversity.

*Q2: Can you please identify some of the areas that Chinese wineries and the industry in general need to improve on? (such as selection of grape varieties, wine promotion and marketing, wine education and etc)*

**PB:** Grape varieties are definitely a key point for China. I think that China needs a relevant effort to research existing and new grape varieties that are really adapted to Chinese climates. Only by having the adequate genetic material, which by definition cannot be French or international, would China get in the league of top fine wine countries.

Education is also an important point, but I’m quite sceptical about following Western education models

only. China needs to define and develop their own wine culture, provided it is a real culture. Wine can be enjoyed in myriad ways, many more than those pursued by the western world.

*Q3: Many “New World” wine countries such as Australia and America versus “Old World” wine countries such as France have rather different appellation of origin systems. While Burgundy is famously known for its countless climats, American wine regions are conveniently indicated by both political as well as geographical boundaries via AVAs. Why do you think there are such differences and how this may affect regional performances in markets?*

**BP:** Differences between New World and Old World indications of origin are due to political and historical reasons, not to genuine quality factors. It is up to each country to apply their own strategies, provided they respect the others’ and they do not allow fraud. Then it is up to customers to reward one system or the other. Having said this, I think it is definitely a better option to protect the names of origin in all countries; this is something genuinely associated with territories. As soon as a country gets decent wines, it becomes interested in protecting its names. Only those with mediocre quality use fake names. The New World got intensely active in creating indications of origin as soon as the quality of their wines improved. This is the tendency also in China, where Ningxia and other prestigious names are fiercely protected now.

## Conference N°2



### How can Ningxia reap the benefits of the future golden era for wine consumption in China?

As the world’s most populous country, where the standard of living is constantly rising concurrently with a taste for Western products and lifestyle, China offers the greatest potential in the world for wine consumption. But how will the local wine industry fit into this scenario? Will it be able to reap the benefits of the surge in wine drinking? Senior researcher **Shihua Zhao** analysed the challenges currently faced by the domestic wine sector with a particular focus on Ningxia.

As the world’s most populous country, where the standard of living is constantly rising concurrently with a taste for Western products and lifestyle, China offers the greatest potential in the world for wine consumption. But how will the local wine industry fit into this scenario? Will it be able to reap the benefits of the surge in wine drinking? Senior researcher Shihua Zhao analysed the challenges currently faced by the domestic wine sector with a particular focus on Ningxia.

“In the next ten years, there will be a golden era for the consumption and production of wine in China”, predicts Shihua Zhao. “Consumption is now spreading from the first and second-tier cities to others and wines are flooding

into China”. Like any developing market, greater market penetration for wine is also fuelling increased competition and domestic producers are struggling to align their prices with those of imported wines, and the disposable income of consumer segments beyond the elite. Hence, over the past five years, Chinese wine production has decreased. Admittedly, part of the explanation for this can be found in the country’s still-nascent wine culture – bestowing greater aura on imported wines than on home-grown products – but Zhao also identified a lack of market knowledge amongst Chinese producers.

“Varietals and the promotion of Chinese wine are still emerging”, he said, “and they require a lot of attention by the Chinese”.



# Conference N°3



## The need to channel a large potential production base

Boasting an already-strong production base – that has risen significantly in recent years to around 30,000 hectares – Ningxia has reached a crossroads in its development. There is still an abundant supply of land in the eastern foothills of the Helan Mountains that can potentially be developed – some speak of 200,000 hectares, which is more extensive than the vineyards of Australia or South Africa.

But this potential has to be managed properly, claims Zhao. Ningxia is still undergoing a foundation period for technology; its climate and soils are very different to other parts of China so they require a specific rather than a blanket approach, along with nationwide standards; and the most appropriate areas for planting vines need to be ascertained. The restrictive nature of the varietal range should also be addressed – 60% of the vines are Cabernet-Sauvignon and apeing the Bordeaux proposition is not necessarily the best way forward for the region. Stressing that Ningxia needs top-flight wines for the global market, Zhao outlined the prerequisites for achieving this.

“Strict supervision is needed, without which the region’s status cannot be established at global level. Education on how to promote and market wines, as they do in France, Australia and Italy for example, is required, and so too is consumer education geared to local consumers”. Innovative entrepreneurs are also pivotal to ensuring the region enters the global wine scene, and ideas from other parts of China and the world need to be taken on board. “Exchanging ideas is essential for growth”, was the message hammered home by Zhao and judging by the many Chinese conference attendees and openness displayed by industry members, his advice is already being heeded.



## How Ningxia’s unique natural attributes can create sense of place in its wines

As part of the drive to elevate Ningxia’s status to that of a world-class wine region, greater understanding of the terroir and best combination of grape variety and soil is an absolute necessity. **Professor Demei Li** hosted a tasting of four wines to illustrate the terroir in Ningxia and outlined the characteristics that make the region unique.

The most obvious feature of the landscape, and one that has a fundamental impact on Ningxia’s ability to grow vines, is the Helan mountain range. “The mountains block out the cold air”, he explained. Unlike other mountain foothills, however, Ningxia does not benefit from significant rainfall or water from snowmelt. It does, though, have a plentiful nearby source of water for irrigation - the Yellow River.

Another advantage is that it is geo-concentrated – which can help promote wine tourism for example – and is also situated in close proximity to a large city, Yinchuan with a population of around 2 million and efficient transport links. In terms of climate, the region is arid, with just 216 mm of average rainfall a year; it enjoys plentiful sunshine – 2,983 hours – and significant diurnal temperature variation of 12.6°C; and it also has 203 frost-free days. Over the year, however, there are major variations in temperature, peaking at 25°C in July. When bud-break occurs in April,

the average temperature is 10.6°C and the same level is recorded in October during the growing season. In May, at the flowering stage, temperatures rise to 16°C, but they fall to 8.4°C on average, at the end of October when the vines need to be prepared for burying. “After August and September, there is a rapid decline in temperature”, pointed out Demei Li, indicating that some varieties struggle to ripen because of this. Sunshine, however, is generous, with 750 hours from August to October and many sun-filled days in May, prompting professor Li to point out that “sunshine in Ningxia during the growing season is higher than in Bordeaux”.

### Emerging signs of terroir effect

Is climate change, though, about to put paid to this weather pattern? “This year, there has been a lot of rain, which has caused many issues for wine growers. There is an obvious change in the temperature with global warming”, conceded



# Conference N°4



Li. Irrespective of climate change, dryness early in the season makes irrigation unavoidable, and high humidity in the air requires pre-control disease treatment. The soils, which have a high pH level of over 8, are also relatively poor and need managed fertilisation. "Low organic matter, a high pH and high salinity are all characteristics of Ningxia's soils", said Li.

Despite these common features, however, different locations across the region have different soil profiles, with alluvial sand/gravel close to the mountain and clay on the flatlands for instance. These variations obviously require further study to ascertain the most appropriate grape varieties, but are conducive to 'terroir effect'. The four wines presented by Li – HeLan Hong, Lux Regis, Helan QingXue and Li Lan from four different sites but a similar backbone of Cabernet-Sauvignon – revealed not only emerging signs of this, but also illustrated that Ningxia is capable of producing world-class wines with affordable price tags, ranging from 98 to 128 yuan a bottle. "Ningxia can produce competitively-priced wines suitable for exports", concluded the globally-renowned expert.



## Translating terroir into wine

«Terroir» is considered to be the primary aspect differentiating quality wine from mass-produced bottlings. But what does it imply and how can Ningxia learn from the experience of world-class wine regions around the world? Bernard Burtschy offered his definitions of terroir.

"Terroir is everywhere, it is in vogue", he exclaimed as a preamble to his interpretation of the often elusive characteristics that separate the wheat from the chaff of the wine world. Seeking to dispel dismissals of the concept by the likes of economic professors Gergaud and Ginsburg, he did, though, define the boundaries of terroir as being beyond natural attributes. "Joseph Krug said that healthy grapes, good barrels, a good cellar and a good cellar guy are what make a great Champagne", he quipped, adding that "for a long time, Petrus was unknown, only Madame Loubat discovered how to make it". As knowledge and techniques have evolved down the centuries, the ability to make good wine is now within the grasp of many regions around the world, and allows producers to tap into 97% of the market. The capacity to access the realms of the great wines, however, involves adapting the vine to the soil; use of massal selection and native yeast but not irrigation or wine correction methods; a curb on yields, and biodynamic farming. "Yeast is the translation of terroir, so it needs to be native", he claimed, adding how biodynamics have a proven ability to enhance sense of place, as witnessed at such iconic estates as Burgundy's Domaine de la Romanée Conti. The choice of varieties, too, plays a pivotal role, as some cultivars such as Riesling, Pinot noir and Syrah, are strong terroir translators, whilst others are not.

### A mystery to be solved

These assertions have been ascertained over time – "as

Baron de Rothschild once said, making a great wine is not a problem, only the first 300 years are difficult!" But terroir expression remains shrouded in mystery. "Saint-Emilion with its limestone is a terroir for white grapes, so why does it produce elegant reds?" questioned the celebrated French wine critic. Part of the answer is to be found in the actual make-up of the soils. "PH or soil acidity is essential, it changes the flavour profile of the wines and is the first thing that needs to be understood about the soils in China". Soils produce a reverse reaction in the wines: acid soils make wines that are less acidic – hence the need to acidify wines in Ningxia – whilst neutral or alkaline soils yield wines that are intensely acidic. And soil acidity also modifies the way nutrients are assimilated, which is of paramount importance in the case of poor soils. Over time, regions have learnt to overcome certain stumbling blocks through choice of varieties and winemaking techniques: "Bordeaux has very homogenous soils, so it achieves differentiation through its varietal combinations and blending, whereas Burgundy has very different soils, and can achieve differentiation with the same grapes". Climate change – both past and present – can alter parameters and human trial and error can produce unexpected results. "If you listened to the recommendations of Davis University in California, Burgundy wouldn't exist!" These encouraging words will certainly not have fallen on deaf ears amongst Ningxia's wine industry representatives...



# Conference N°5



## Research starts providing some of the answers to Ningxia's vineyard management issues

Development of the Ningxia wine industry implies overcoming several obstacles and gaining a better understanding of the most suitable grape varieties and vineyard management techniques for the region. Junxiang Zhang outlined the current challenges, possible remedies and the outcome of recent research.

In the eastern foothills of the Helan mountains, a number of major issues currently face local wine growers. "The nutrients in the soil are low; thin soil layers hinder the development of the root system; the weather is cold and dry; the vines have to be buried in the winter; there is low standardisation; costs are high and it is difficult to achieve large-scale planting", enumerated Junxiang Zhang. Two key techniques for overcoming some of these issues are pruning vines uniformly for easier buried shapes and implementing sustainable soil management methods. The main trellising system used in Ningxia is the single cane with several spurs, but it has several disadvantages, explained Zhang. "It makes burying the vines in winter and

introducing mechanisation difficult; there is high shoot density; and berries ripen at different times". In a country where the rising standard of living is pushing labour costs up, mechanisation is increasingly being viewed as an impending necessity. Sustainable soil management, too, has repercussions on all-important overheads: "Poor management leads to short-lived vineyards and hence extra costs", said Zhang.

**Soil and climate suitability are key aspects for the future**  
All of these aspects of wine growing are currently being studied in Ningxia and several avenues are being explored. Experiments on naturally grown weeds have shown that



they reduce reflection of the sunshine and therefore extend the ripening period. They also enhance organic matter in the soil, improve the microbial environment and protect the micro-ecological system. Leaving vineyards fallow so that the soils can recover is another lead that is being followed, for similar reasons. Research is also focusing on the physical and chemical indexes of grapes such as pH, sugar and juice levels and phenols. Choosing the grape varieties best suited to the local soils and climate will be pivotal to the region's success, though consumer expectations also have to be factored into the equation. Because deeply coloured wines are highly sought-after in the domestic market, a varietal such as Marselan is deemed to have great market potential by Zhang. "It has high total anthocyanins and very good aroma", commented Ningxia's chief expert on wines and grapes. Cabernet-Sauvignon is favoured by producers

for similar reasons, whilst Cabernet Franc is used by many wineries to improve smoothness on the palate and enhance aroma. Syrah, which has the advantage of yielding deeply coloured wines with a strong structure and full body, showed some of its limitations in 2018 due to the wet weather. Conversely, German staple Dornfelder produces the kind of smooth mouthfeel young Chinese consumers in particular enjoy, and also offers high juice yields. Bordeaux varietal Petit Verdot is one of the latest ripening grapes – around October 5-12 – but it is suitable for blending with low acidity wines. And Italy's similarly late-ripening Sangiovese – of which a small amount is planted in Ningxia – has shown itself capable of producing fruity dry reds or rosés with medium to high yields. With so many variables, it is likely that it will be several years before Ningxia finds the solutions to many of these issues.





# Conference N°6



## How China's varietal range has been shaped by history and climate

Development of the Ningxia wine industry implies overcoming several obstacles and gaining a better understanding of the most suitable grape varieties and vineyard management techniques for the region. Junxiang Zhang outlined the current challenges, possible remedies and the outcome of recent research.

The first quality grape varieties were introduced into China in 1892, but prior to international grapes dominating the Chinese wine arena as they do today, there would be several phases of development. These are marked as much by adaptation to natural conditions in the country as they are by politics. Both lecturer and president of the College of Enology, Northwest A&F University, Yulin Fang outlined the changing faces of Chinese wine growing, starting with the historic 'Dragon Eye' grape which has long been grown in Chinese vineyards. It was followed by Muscat Hamburg, then Beichun, a cross between Muscat Hamburg and Amurensis produced by Chinese researchers to survive the cold winters. The Soviet era would also leave its mark

on the country's vinous history, introducing varieties such as Tchervien Muscat and Rkatsiteli. More vine varieties would be introduced from abroad in the 1970s followed by a period of French influence during the 1990s when France's viticultural experts travelled to China to share their knowledge with local viticulturalists. The present-day make-up of the country's wine grape varietal range reflects international input, with 60% of the vines Cabernet-Sauvignon.

### A more rational distribution of vineyards

In 2016, China had 847,000 hectares under vine, but just 12% of this is actually dedicated to wine grapes; most of

the vines are for table grapes with a small balance for raisins. The 100,000 hectares or so planted to wine grapes offer an unusual mixture of varieties, revealing how growers have sought to ramp up the percentage of quality international cultivars, whilst promoting varieties that have adapted or been adapted to suit local growing conditions, particularly the cold, but also different soil types. After Cabernet-Sauvignon (80,623 ha) comes Merlot (16,694 ha) then Cabernet-Gernischt (11,240 ha), Chardonnay (6,118 ha), Yan 73 (4,778 ha), Riesling (1,581 ha), BeiBingHong (1,573 ha), Ugni blanc (1,504 ha), Syrah (987 ha), Cabernet Franc (625 ha) and Pinot noir (433 ha). On a much smaller scale, varieties such as Vidal, Riesling, Italian Riesling, Cinsault, Grenache, Gamay, Chenin Blanc, Pinot Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon and Gewurztraminer can also be found.



Strangely enough, no mention is made of Marselan, despite the seeming significance of the variety in some regions such as Ningxia. In terms of geographical distribution, China's wine grape vineyards are concentrated in several major regions: the North-East, where Vitis amurensis Rupr is often found due to temperatures which can plummet to -30/40°C in the winter; the North-West, which is arid; the Yellow Plateau, home to regions such as Ningxia; the South-West; the South; the mid and lower reaches of the Yellow River; and the Bohai Straits.

"The geographical distribution of wine regions has become more rational", said Yulin Fang, attributing the rationalisation process to the strong development of wine production over the past three decades. Though much more concentrated than vineyards for producing table grapes, which span the country, more than half of China's provinces now make wine. Each of them has developed its own varietal range and specific canopy management techniques, including the use of pergola systems. Differentiation, however, will likely only come when China's reliance on Cabernet-Sauvignon gives way to a less standardised varietal range.





# Conference N°7



## How Ningxia can learn from success stories, and failures, in its choice of varietal range

With any wine industry in the early stages of development, the choice of varietal range is vital, not only for obtaining convincing results in the vineyard, but also from a marketing perspective. Master of Wine Sarah Jane Evans looked at possible options open to Ningxia, and outlined the pitfalls and advantages of choosing one option over another.

"There are three options: the classical option; local varieties and creating something new", claimed Sarah Jane Evans. There are examples of all three worldwide, some highly successful, others less so. In the first category, Australia's Coonawarra, America's Napa Valley, Chile's Aconcagua, Alto Maipo and Alto Cachapoal and Italy's Tuscany have been successful in going down the classic Bordeaux route. South Africa, New Zealand, South America in general, Spain and China have chosen a similar tack, but have yet to achieve the same level of recognition – "it is still a work in progress". Pinot noir has also been adopted successfully in regions like Oregon, Sonoma, Martinborough and Central Otago, whereas in Leyda and San Antonio in Chile,

Germany, South Africa and cool climate Australia, the process is still ongoing. In fact, the world of wine is littered with examples of success and failure stemming from the right, or wrong, choice of varieties. "Originality does not always pave the way for success", commented Evans, citing South Africa with Pinotage. "It was one of South Africa's earliest signature varieties but it has been marred by major problems: it has not been universally popular in terms of style and has caused winemaking issues".

### Numerous aspects to consider

Other examples of misguided choices include Rioja neighbour Navarra, where a long history and rich heritage

linked to Garnacha was sacrificed on the altar of international varieties in the 1970s. Still struggling to find its identity, Navarra's future according to Evans is Garnacha supported by terroir. Carménère in Chile, which seemed like the ultimate flagship varietal, "has never lived up to expectations", unlike New Zealand and Sauvignon blanc, the "textbook signature varietal". The example of Argentina and Malbec shows how wine producers can evolve, in this case to lighter, fresher and lower alcohol offerings, to become the go-to wine in, say, the United Kingdom, with increased focus on terroir issues.

"These producers are not standing still but constantly moving forward", pointed out Evans, who also identified problems such as bottlenecks in the market caused by producers over-enthusiastically embracing certain wine styles, like English sparkling wines. "Certain regions have been slow to identify the right grape varieties", noted Evans, whilst others, like Armenia, have realised that their future lies not only in their chosen varietal range but also in promotion of ancient winemaking techniques and aids like amphorae. Of all the examples available to Ningxia wine producers, perhaps Marselan has the best potential to become the region's flagship grape. "It offers very different profiles worldwide, but as a little known grape variety it requires a clear message – is it a crossing or a hybrid, for instance". Whilst believing that "there is an opportunity to take ownership of this grape variety", Evans also advocates diversity: "Different Chinese culinary styles are recognised abroad. Why could this not be replicated for wine?" It's certainly food for thought.



## Interview

*Q1 : Wines and tourism in many regions are inseparable, places such as La Rioja, Napa and Barrosa Valley are not only known as successful wine producing regions but also regarded as must-visit destinations for wine aficionados and regular tourists alike. However, wine tourism still needs much development in China for multiple reasons such as lack of collaboration among wineries. What is your advice for promoting wine culture and regional economies through wine tourism in China?*

**SJ E:** I speak from my experience of wine tourism in Europe, and in north and south America, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa. Wine tourism at its best can obviously make a very positive contribution to the winery, but also to the local economy. Visitors will be encouraged to visit the region, and they will have a reason to spend longer there. Each winery needs to develop its own offer and to tell a different story. One winery may have a very good programme for children, another may offer food and wine matching at its restaurant, another may have a strong commitment to education about vine growing and wine making, yet another may become known for musical events. Thus, by working together in a single regional promotion, the different wineries

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## Interview

make a very attractive, diverse offer to visitors and can teach them about the safe and sensible enjoyment of wine. Local tourism needs to be involved to ensure that there are adequate hotels and places to stay. Wineries are one part of a regional tourism package that may include leisure activities in the countryside, or visiting historical sites. In a number of countries 'Wine Routes' linking local wineries have proved successful, and can be used in international marketing.

Finally, every winery must be committed to a programme that educates visitors about drinking alcohol in moderation, and the safe consumption of alcohol.

*Q2: Many wineries are producing biodynamic wines and some question if biodynamically growing grapes and wines thereafter are better reflections of terroir. What is your opinion on this phenomenon and do you think this value will be adopted by winegrowers in China?*

**SJ E:** Biodynamics is the practice of working introduced by Rudolf Steiner. Whether it reflects the terroir better is debated, and there are many who are very strongly in favour. What is certain is that a producer working with biodynamics, or growing grapes organically, has to pay a great deal of attention to the vineyard. Rather than simply applying chemical treatments to the vine according to a calendar, this way of working requires the producer to be more focused on the health of the individual plant. It does not work in every environment. It's particularly difficult in places of high humidity and high rainfall, for instance.

Every producer needs to think about the health of the people working in the vineyard. A biodynamically managed vineyard may be better for the health of the vineyard workers. Furthermore, it's important for producers to look ahead. As consumers become more interested in their health, and the environment, and sustainability, then there may be an increasing demand for wines from biodynamically or organically grown grapes. Producers who are working this way already will have an advantage.

*Q3: Some believe that the current grape varieties being grown in China are highly homogeneous and lack diversity. In your opinion, are there any lesser-known grape varieties which you believe might perform well in China, particularly in the areas of Ningxia and Shandong regions?*

**SJ E:** I am not yet familiar with the soils and climate, the terroir, of Ningxia and Shandong so cannot comment on this. What I would say is that these regions should focus on producing the best wines they can from their soils. This will inevitably involve continued experimentation over time. There is no requirement to use famous international varieties. The best wines may come from something lesser-known that is better adapted to the environment. It will be an opportunity for Ningxia and Shandong to show that they have something different to offer.

## Conference N°8



### The complex, yet vital task of defining aroma profiles in Chinese wines

Ascertaining predominant aroma profiles in wines is complicated as it involves numerous factors. However, greater understanding of these profiles is a major step towards characterising hallmark regional styles and creating points of difference in a highly competitive market place. Changqing Duan highlighted the emerging differences in wines from across China.

As a professor, national senior winemaker and director of the centre for viticulture and oenology at the China Agricultural University, Changqing Duan knows all too well how challenging it can be to define particular wine profiles and link them to one region. "A wine region is a complicated entity – it is a very large area with no standardised references". There can be myriad wine styles within a single region, depending on terroir, climate, sunlight, temperature, water, varietal and vineyard management, the humanities and history, he pointed out. Individual choices made by winemakers add to the complexities. Despite this, greater knowledge of the way different cultivars perform in the various sub-regions of Ningxia and a more mature wine industry have provided

indicators as to the differing profiles displayed by the same grape variety in different vineyards. "We have already seen that Cabernet-Sauvignon expresses itself differently from West to East", explained Duan, who drew an imaginary line from the North-East to the South-West of the country with differing profiles on either side. "It is full-bodied in the West and medium-bodied in the East". The varietal also displays differing hues: "In the West it is purple-red when young, whereas it is a less intense ruby-red in the East. And in the West, it displays more abundant and characteristic aromas of red and black berries, fruit jam, cut hay, stone fruit, green pepper and mint". The tannins too, are finer in the East.





# Conference N°9



## Ensuring sustainable growth for the Chinese wine industry

Before 2012, the Chinese wine industry grew rapidly – surging by 442% in eleven years. Since then, wine production has slowed and even decreased despite the continued growth of wine consumption in China. Shaohua Li analysed the reasons for the slowdown and outlined strategies for fuelling renewed growth.

Figures borrowed from other wine regions around the world underscore the advantages of having a strong domestic wine industry: “In France, wine represents 15% of total agricultural output for just 3% of area”, said Shaohua Li. “Napa brings in 1.4 billion USD in tourism and Bordeaux is the fifth most popular tourist destination in France with 5 million visitors in 2013, up 34% on 2010”. Having reached a critical period of product and market restructuring and rapid change, domestic wine production has shown no signs of rapid recovery after “reaching the bottom”, despite the huge potential offered by China’s wine market, now equating to 7.2% of the world’s total. The growth has served as a magnet for producer countries

across the globe and consequently, the rapid development of imported wines – which surged from 58,000 tons in 1997 to 746,000 tons in 2017, including 181,000 tons of bulk wine – is posing a serious threat to the Chinese wine industry. Some of the country’s major producers have now transitioned to traders and other, more worrying, long-term issues are at stake: “Many areas do not have a clear understanding of quality and the advantages of their wines, they try to replicate Bordeaux in China. Also, imported bottled and bulk wines are being marketed as Chinese wines and this is undermining development of the local wine industry”, noted Li.

## Striving for regional diversity

Other stumbling blocks include high labour demand and costs; an ageing farming population; and lack of varietal diversity. “There are over 200 grapes in France whilst in China, 60% of acreage is planted to Cabernet-Sauvignon”, said Li. He also stressed the quality implications of regular late frosts on vineyard age: “There have been five or six years of frost in Ningxia causing frost bite despite burying, so it is extremely rare to find vines aged over 15 years old”. As a pillar industry in Ningxia, though, wine has been made the subject of a development strategy and solutions are being found to overcome these handicaps. The Institute of Botany, for instance, has developed five winter-resistant varieties including Bei Hong and Bei Mei, which are performing very well in Ningxia and could pave the way for a more competitive industry if they remove the need to bury the vines. Used to make dry red, rosé, medium dry and ice wines, Bei Hong and Bei Mei have won multiple awards at international level and were presented during the conference. Other solutions, applied to many cool-climate wine regions, involve protecting vines from late frosts using a number of techniques including heaters or candles, wind machines and water sprays.

Greater mechanisation of green canopy management and harvesting is under scrutiny, as are wine production catalogues specific to the eastern foothills of the Helan mountains, and use of high-resistance rootstock for grafting. The overriding aim of the research is to determine the highest compatibility of varietal to terroir in order to promote regional diversity in China: “Can the wines be identified from amongst fifty others, that is the key question, and can they offer ageability and therefore better pricing”, said Li. Only when these questions have been answered positively will Ningxia truly enter the realms of the world’s fine wine regions.





# Conference N°10



## When world wines meet Chinese cuisines

**Chinese cuisine is incredibly regionalised and complex, making wine pairing a tall order. Hang Li outlined the pitfalls of trying to marry wines and foods in China, and offered some advice on how to succeed.**

Chinese cuisine is widely acknowledged worldwide for its quality and diversity. It differs significantly from Western gastronomy, not only in the choice of raw ingredients, but also in the cooking techniques used and resultant textures and flavours. "Chinese cooking methods are extremely varied and the different textures they create should be taken into account when trying to pair food and wines", said Hang Li. As the chairman of the China Sommelier Academy, he is constantly confronted with the issues which, as he points out, stem from lack of experience: "Our parents didn't teach us how to pair wine and food, it's a new topic". Not only have the Chinese yet to properly develop an interest in the subject, the myriad possibilities make it a thorny

issue. "In Chinese cuisine, sauces can totally change the way a food tastes", he pointed out. "Different, opposing flavours such as sweet and sour can also combine, unlike in Western food where there is usually a dominant flavour profile". Another vital difference that needs to be factored into the equation is the way dishes are presented, usually on a round, swivelling table designed for sharing, "whereas in the West, food is more of an individual experience. For the Chinese, the atmosphere is more important than the wine".

## All-important balance

Despite all these major differences, some common pairing recommendations can be transposed to China, and a set of basic rules can easily be taken on board. "Balance and harmony between wine and food are key", said Li. Hence, as elsewhere in the world, a Napa vintage Cabernet-Sauvignon would sit well alongside a juicy, full-bodied pepper steak, whereas the obvious choice for vegetables would be a lighter Merlot. "Light foods and seafood require wines low in tannins, whereas barbecued foods and bitter foods should be paired with wines high in tannins". A counterpoint should be found to the dominant flavour profile in the food: "Sweetness balances with salt in dishes, salty flavours lighten the tannins and acidity should be slightly higher in the wine than in the food, it reduces saltiness". Perhaps more China-specific is the recommendation that "texture and weight are more important than aroma", mirroring the effect of cooking techniques on food textures. Li also warned against taking for granted the accepted protocol in other parts of the world, where red wine pairs with red meat and white wine with white meat – "this does not necessarily work because of different ways of cooking meat".



Education and greater maturity in the Chinese wine market are most certainly prerequisites if the Chinese are to embrace food and wine pairings more whole-heartedly. It isn't difficult to understand why local restaurants have yet to encourage them to do so as wine is still a low percentage of restaurant earnings, although Li stressed that "the maturity of the western restaurant market in China is very high". Aside from letting the Chinese heed their own personal preferences – and thereby avoid intimidating them with strict pairing rules – Li's final piece of advice was to create an experience, and in that respect, the Chinese probably aren't very different to other food and wine enthusiasts around the world.





# Conference N°11



## Selecting the most relevant strategies for marketing wine in Asia

Perhaps an easy mistake to make when contemplating the Asian wine market from the West is just that, to consider that there is one Asian market. **Debra Meiburg MW** outlined the major differences from one market to the next and got specific about winning strategies in China.

Market structure varies widely from one Asian country to the next, as do distribution channels, hence the need to approach each one with a specific strategy. Award-winning author, TV personality, international speaker and educator Debra Meiburg MW pointed out that the mid-market is huge in Beijing and Hong Kong but less so in Shanghai, Singapore and Taiwan; in the latter two, the luxury segment is more significant than elsewhere. Similarly, specialist retailers hold a more sizeable chunk of the market in Hong Kong and Taiwan than in Singapore (19%, 18% and 3% respectively), with Beijing and Shanghai in the middle

[14% and 11%]. From a promotion and media perspective, one common misconception is to assume that the western model, based on the specialist press, can be transposed to China. Stressing that the media for wine is more lifestyle than specialist, Meiburg explained: "Wine magazines are only read by people who love wine so advertising must target this audience on a pay to play policy". Adding, "It has never been so hard to get into the media", she also said the wine world needed to have "more realistic expectations of the media in Asia", due to the small number of titles. In terms of distribution, there is a similar bottleneck, with

fast-growing e-commerce outlets hinging significantly on the two giants that are JD.com and Tmall and sales revolving around a number of money-spinning festivals throughout the year. "The two most prominent festivals are on June 18 and November 11." The timing of an offer is therefore critical to maximising the opportunities afforded by these festivals, with Valentine's Day another vital date to remember.



### Social media, but not as we know it in the West

Reaching out to consumers via social media is absolutely essential, particularly given the massive following the KOLs or Key Opinion Leaders have racked up. "Some of them have up to 43 million followers", said Meiburg, "they have transformed the medium into an art form and drive 5% of e-commerce sales, although consumers are now becoming sceptical as they know they're getting paid for pushing products". This isn't social media as we know it in the West, however. Names such as Douyin, China's YouTube, will be unfamiliar and the scope of platforms such as WeChat, which have become one-stop shops, bear no resemblance to their western counterparts: "The ability and the pace to buy quickly on these platforms are not seen in other markets". Meiburg also explained that WeChat offers "a stable, cost-effective way of advertising", and that the spend on Weibo, China's version of Twitter, has also become important. Another essential way of reaching out to Chinese consumers is through education: "China offers a phenomenal market for education.



## Interview

*Q1 : As the data shows, China consumes mainly red wines with only a very small portion of the market share dedicated to whites, let alone fortified, sweet, and sparkling wines. Given this situation, what are your suggestions for wine professionals who wish to promote and sell non-red wines to Chinese consumers ?*

**DM:** China is historically a red-dominated wine market. This has much to do with tradition – as a colour, red and has come to represent sophisticated and aspirational lifestyle. Plus, China's long history of tea consumption with meals can cause resistance to drinking a chilled beverage (like sparkling or white wine) while dining. However, in the past 2 to 3 years particularly, we are certainly seeing a shift in interest from key opinion leaders, wine experts and emerging millennial wine drinkers towards white wine and sparkling wine.

To address the colour issues when considering whether it is possible to "change" China's mentality towards white wine, think of the example of white wedding dresses in China. 10 years ago, it was almost unheard of to see a Chinese bride in white – white was for funerals! Today it is normal for brides to wear at least and one white, Western-style wedding gown, as well as a traditional red qipao.

To address the temperature concerns – look at Coke, which sells more than 140 million serves a day in China – it is a sweet, cold and bubbly beverage. Also to note, China is the largest beer market in the world, with an annual consumption of 45.7 billion litres (75% of the total amount of alcohol consumption in terms of volume), double the US market. A yellow, cold, non-sweet, bubbly beverage – one can certainly draw comparisons with white wine and sparkling wine.

I like to note these factors, as it shows wine professionals that these issues on colour and temperature – what are

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The Chinese value education and are exceptional, hard-working students". Experience marketing – seminars, competitions, tastings, exhibitions and creative events – should also be a vital component of any promotional thrust. One unlikely country to illustrate the benefits of a multi-pronged strategy in China is Georgia. Since 2014, Georgian wine sales have increased more than five-fold, through a combination of video content, WeChat, Facebook, trips to Georgia, tastings, festivals and education. Perhaps burgeoning wine region Ningxia could take a leaf out of Georgia's book...



## Interview

...

seen as traditionally barriers to success – are in fact, not so relevant after all.

One of the keys to changing the drinking habits within a new market is to not necessarily bombard consumers with the technicalities and tasting notes, but to present them wines for different occasions. For example, research shows Chinese consumers readily associate sparkling wine, particularly Champagne, with celebrations, festivities and parties, as well as with romance, luxury, elegance and happiness – this opens a world of possibilities, when thinking about the potential consumption occasions. So, while China currently represents around 1% of the global market for sparkling wine, the potential for growth is immense. It is also important to consider the "entry point" for new consumers. While Champagne is the most widely recognised sparkling wine in China, its increasing dryness and characters of minerality and yeast can be too intense for new consumers. Riper styles of Champagne, or global sparkling wines with a little more sweetness – like Prosecco – offer a great entry point. And given the lower price point, offer most consumers the ability to try and experiment more, to find the flavour and style they most enjoy.

White wines offer tremendous food pairing opportunities. In the Cathay Pacific Hong Kong International Wine & Spirit Competition's Chinese food and wine pairing award categories, judged by all Asian judges, white wines consistently win trophies. Their versatility with both delicate southern Chinese dishes, as well as their ability to stand up to and offset the spice of many northern Chinese dishes makes them a wonderful choice for the banquet table. And, as we know, China is a food first, drink second market, so identifying a range of white wines to pair with common Chinese dishes is a great approach.

Finally, we must remember that wine is a social beverage – it brings people together, offers the chance to connect with friends and family, so the approach – whether red, white, sweet or sparkling, should remain fun and enjoyable, rather than serious and too academic for the average consumer.

*Q2 : Being a highly respected female role model in the global wine industry, what are some of the challenges and/or advantages you see that being a woman may have in this industry ? Do you have any words of wisdom to China's young female professionals who wish to break into this industry?*

**DM:** Chi-Zin Gwai-Po. As a western woman, I can get away with a lot (foreign devil or ghost lady). But as Mao famously said, "Women Hold up Half the Sky"!

Most important – be a woman – don't be afraid to embrace your femininity. And "say yes!" more often. Seems men only need to be 60% confident to say yes, whereas women err on the side of caution, which can leave them behind. Another piece of advice – support other women as well.

To succeed in the wine industry in China, whether you are male or female, if you have meaningful content, people will listen. Speak on topics that relevant and that you know better or as well as anyone else. Make it structured, engaging and fun and – perhaps one of my greatest strengths -- simplify.

You do have to listen and you do have to respect experience – and in my part of the world we're highly respectful to age. Wine is classic, but also culture. And culture changes. Food styles change, what consumers enjoy drinking changes you have to understand that and when something is changing in the wrong direction, you have to speak out.

# Conference N°12



## How to respond to the needs of the on-trade in Singapore

Touted as a 1-billion-USD wine market by 2021, with an economy still in growth mode, high disposable incomes and a penchant for premium wines, Singapore is a magnet for many wine exporters. Annette Scarfe MW described the best strategies for entering the country's on-trade.

As a word of warning, consultant and educator Annette Scarfe MW advised exporters to choose their importer well: "Suppliers have a specialism, it is unusual for them to be good at the off-trade and the on-trade, so choosing the right distribution channel beforehand is essential for supporting your business model. Also, there are lots of importers in Singapore because it is easy to get a licence, but many don't have the right infrastructure". In the case of the on-trade, infrastructure is vital because restaurateurs have a number of challenging requirements: "The orders are small and frequent, daily or weekly, a 24-hour turnaround is expected as well as a small minimum drop (12 or 24 bottles)", she explained. The size of the order is often dictated by lack of space and makes mixed cases essential. The climate, where the temperature is 35°C by day and by night, also

puts a strain on storage conditions. Product differentiation between distribution channels means that, apart from the well-known Champagne or still wine brands, products must be different in the on-trade. "A KPI, or known product item, needs a specific pricing policy", she pointed out. The average mark-up for wine in the Singapore on-trade is four times the ex-cellar price: "If you sell a wine for 200 RMB ex-cellars, it will be approximately 800 RMB on the wine list. Wine is expected to generate the same gross profit as food". Successful exporters are those who take a holistic approach to the wine list and offer the right pricing mix – lower down and higher up the price ladder – to make their proposition appealing to restaurateurs: "They need a mix of small and high margins, not every wine offers the same gross profit".





#### “Millenials are driven by values and not value”

So how do restaurants choose wines? Most of the key drivers are not specific to Singapore: buyers and sommeliers choose wines they have already tasted, at competitions for example, in other restaurants, at trade fairs and tutored tastings. Magazine articles and competition scores are important, but are not key drivers of choice according to Scarfe. The preferences of the sommelier in terms of regions or grape varieties enter into the equation, but food pairings are less relevant than elsewhere. Service and the ability to respond to a number of expectations by Singaporean restaurateurs - guaranteed and constant supplies and a dedicated sales representative capable of developing a relationship of trust - can be deal clinchers. Other expectations include training and collaboration on wine dinners. From a consumer perspective, one audience that is willing to pay more and is open to discovering new wines is the Millennial generation, provided suppliers can tell a story. “A Drink Different category on a wine list appeals because then they feel that the wines are not mass market but different and unique. They will pay more for this because they are driven by values and not value”, stressed Scarfe. For an emerging wine region like Ningxia, this implies steering away from Bordeaux lookalikes and telling a story revolving around unique production methods and climate. “Ningxia has something unique, not all regions do, so use it!”



## Conference N°13



### How alcohol can be a double-edged sword, for Asians and the global population

The Asian population is renowned for its intolerance to alcohol and its distinctive ‘flush syndrome’. But are all Asians equal when it comes to drinking alcohol? **Michael Apstein MD** explained the unique genetic make-up at work and also detailed some of the health benefits wine offers to moderate drinkers worldwide.

Alcohol is metabolised by alcohol dehydrogenase (ADH) turning it into acetaldehyde which is then transformed into acetic acid by acetaldehyde dehydrogenase or ALDH. ADH is present in the lining of the stomach and liver, and is also oestrogen-sensitive which is why women have higher blood alcohol levels after similar alcohol intake to men. Its presence in the stomach also explains the differences between the alcohol derived from wine and that contained in spirits, as wine is drunk usually with food and therefore absorbed more slowly. In 50% of Asians, alcohol is not converted into acetic acid because of an aldehyde dehydrogenase deficiency (ALDH2). The deficiency, due to the unique genetic make-up of Asians, is not identical though across the region: whilst 53% of the

Japanese, 39% of the Chinese and 33% of Koreans have it, only 10% of Thais, 4% of Indians and just 1% of Filipinos are affected. ALDH2 deficiency can have positive and negative effects on consumers. On the positive side, it is correlated to lower rates of alcoholism because of the immediate effects of alcohol, among others; it increases the efficacy of sublingual nitroglycerin, used to relieve angina; and may protect against ischemia. On the negative side, there is an increased risk of squamous cell esophageal cancer and possibly other cancers, along with histamine release, bronchoconstriction, asthma and ‘Asian Flush’ syndrome due to mast cell degranulation.





### Positive effects on heart disease

More generally speaking, whilst alcohol has been shown to lead to a decrease in death from heart disease, it is also linked to increased prevalence of diseases of the liver such as cirrhosis, the nervous system, the pancreas, the stomach, the heart and the blood, not to mention its adverse social effects. Research has yet to ascertain its actual effects during pregnancy and with regard to cancer. The French Paradox, the term coined after a study published by St Leger in the Lancet in 1979 showed that despite their high alcohol consumption, the French have a much lower incidence of heart disease than countries drinking much less, is still relevant today, said Dr Apstein. In 1991, Dr Arthur Klatsky showed that at moderate levels – 1 to 2 drinks a day – death from heart disease

was lower than for non-drinkers, creating a J-shaped curve. One of the explanations for the health benefits of moderate drinking could reside in alcohol's possible effect on good (HDL) and bad (LDL) cholesterol, whereby alcohol increases HDL cholesterol. The secretion of gastric acid may also hold answers. Many beverages stimulate gastric acid secretion but the levels are higher with red and white wine. Concurrently with this, red wine has been shown to increase polyphenols and reduce LDL-oxidation, revealing that wine has more beneficial effects than simple ethanol. All of these benefits, though, are tied to moderate drinking which Dr Apstein described as 40g a day for men and half for women, with a bottle of 12% wine containing 72g. Outside these limits, alcohol becomes a double-edged sword.



## Special interview: Joao Pires, MS

*Q1: Food and wine pairing is a relatively new concept to most Chinese wine consumers, some believe that it is partially because of a plethora of Chinese food types and tastes being often shared among dinner tables, which makes it impossible to find a "one fits all" solution. What are your suggestions to restaurateurs, sommeliers, and wine trade professionals on wine pairing for Chinese cuisines?*

**JP:** The first thing that comes to my mind is, does Chinese food need wine or can Chinese food be paired with wine anyway? There is no such thing as a "one fits all" recipe as there is no such thing as Chinese food. There are various cuisines such as Cantonese, Sichuan, Jiangsu, Hunan, Shandong and many others. Most importantly, the Chinese approach to the preparation and serving of food is very different to what Westerners are familiar with. For instance, the idea of sharing that I love - an example being the main course, where several different dishes are all served at once, with everyone helping themselves from the same dish - makes food pairing quite a challenge to say the least. A regular Chinese guest of mine once explained to me that he likes to start with the most complex, perhaps more expensive wine, at the beginning of a meal then pour the less interesting ones at the end. This is truly the opposite of our Western culture but his argument in support of this makes a lot of sense, as he added that drinking the best wines at the end of the meal when you are possibly already drunk is not worth the investment. I have organized various wine dinners in our Chinese Michelin starred restaurants at Melco with authentic Chinese food but of course it was served course by course and various elements such as spice, sweet and sour and oily tastes as well as the richness and complexity of sauces were played around with and managed. A real challenge is desserts because the Chinese normally prefer fresh fruit. When they do indulge in something special, instead of being loaded with sugar, the desserts are frequently filled with sweet and savory ingredients, from taro to sweet red bean paste. Our mindset needs to be reset to be able to understand why sweet wines do not sell quite so well in this part of the world. Even in our Western world of sugar, I tend to avoid sweet wines with very sweet desserts as they will taste so boring, so nauseating, so disgusting. Instead, the key here is the involvement of acidity, not only for the

wine pairing balance but for the absolute need to lift and cleanse your palate.

*Q2: Professional sommelier service is an essential part of the wine culture, and China has a unique wine culture or lack thereof. How do you think being a sommelier in China, one should keep the balance between respecting the local dining cultures and observing the standard practices of a sommelier?*

**JP:** The standards for a sommelier are not related to geography and different cultures. The main purpose of a sommelier is guest satisfaction. This means not only product knowledge, management and financial skills but most importantly the ability "to read", respect and ideally to anticipate the guest's expectations. That being said, one needs to bear in mind that the approach in London is different to the approach in Paris, New York, Tokyo or Shanghai. Operating in an environment such as London where I lived for 10 years, where most guests have a satisfactory wine knowledge background, are very open-minded and price sensitive, is totally different to a sommelier working for instance in Macau, a market driven by casinos. The one who survives it is not necessarily the strongest, the most skilled and the most knowledgeable, but on the contrary, the one who adapts the best. Wine is not part of Chinese culture and definitely the sommelier is quite a recently created profession. Money develops the ability to attract fashions and trends whose distance and time is shortened by our modern, high-tech, fast-moving world. The speed of development is sometimes faster than the foundations, that only time can fix. I arrived in China three and a half years ago and I can tell you this is quite a different world. I have been studying, reading as much as I can, travelling and experiencing a culture dating back 5,000 years, and this is so, so serious and powerful. To inject our relatively young culture into a very old one is not always a smooth transition. I honestly must confess that sommelier proficiency and credibility in China is a long term commitment but I have absolutely no doubt about its success in the future. Our Western vision will change for sure and that is not a bad thing at all. As Dr. Wayne Dyer, an American philosopher and spiritual thinker once said: "When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change".



## Ho-Lan Soul Winery

### On a mission

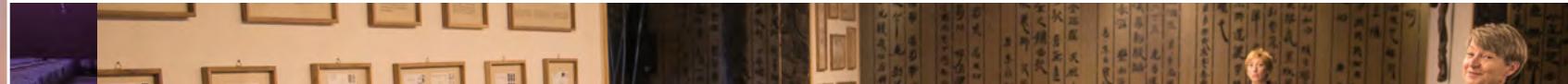


The scale of the vineyards at Ho-Lan Soul – which has 2,000 hectares planted to vines – is a measure of the company's ambitions. Established in 2007 by Chen Qi, who bought thousands of hectares of boulder-strewn land near the mountain with a view to developing a wine theme park, it plays a pivotal role in the development of the Helan mountain wine region. After importing its first vines from Italy, it has since then established its own nursery, which is quite understandable given the rate of planting – around 500 hectares a year – and goal of scaling up to a total 5,000 hectares of vines. Wine production leans heavily towards red wines, from a range of varieties including the Cabernets – Sauvignon, Franc and Gernischt – Malbec, Marselan and Syrah, though also includes a small percentage of white wines from grapes such as Chardonnay and Italian Riesling and even some rosés. A large share of the vineyards – 650 hectares – are farmed organically, which was certainly a challenge in 2018 considering that rainfall levels were three times their normal level. Nevertheless, organic most certainly aligns with Chinese concerns about health and the steep learning curve is being taken on board. Inside the winery, the scale is as impressive as in the vineyards: the two barrel cellars can house up to 2,000 barrels where reserve wines are matured for 18 months. Ho-Lan Soul has factored environmental and cost issues into the

construction of its winery and uses underground water sources to control humidity and temperature levels rather than traditional air-conditioning, considered too energy-consuming. But Ho-Lan Soul is about much more than a single winery – its Hong-Kong-based owner aims to build between 30 to 50 chateaux appealing to uber-rich Chinese investors, whose wines would be made by Ho-Lan Soul. The project will also feature an international exhibition centre, a five-star hotel and a golf course, with a view to attracting much-needed tourism to Ningxia. For the moment though, the focus is very much on planting vineyards – “which is much more expensive than building chateaux!” commented a company representative – and continuing to hone its wine styles. To do this, it recruited the help of Bordeaux wine consultants Oenoteam three years ago and strides are being made in understanding that “80% of a wine is made in the vineyard”, said consultant winemaker Régis Lansade, who has also had to take the scale of winemaking here in his stride. “During harvesting, there are 300 people in the vineyards bringing in 80 tons of grapes a day”. Yields, though, are kept to a very reasonable 50-60 hectolitres per hectare and the winery is starting to successfully produce wines with no added sulphur. “The desire for progress is obvious”, concluded Régis Lansade.

## Zhihui Yuanshi Winery

### Catering to Chinese tastes and culture



Unlike many other Chinese wineries, Zhihui Yuanshi is designed to sit harmoniously amidst its surroundings, with an elegant Chinese-style garden fitting snugly into the natural landform of the Helan mountains. Built a decade ago from stone excavated from the disused quarry that became home to the vineyards, it is the brainchild of two brothers who have given it a distinctly local, Chinese feel. They have also sought to make it as visitor-friendly as possible: in addition to the gardens complete with gazebo overlooking the tranquil ponds, and furniture made from wine barrels, the building itself houses a large, rustic yet minimalist-style restaurant, boutique and tasting area with subdued lighting beneath which stretches an extensive wooden table. The vineyards cover over 100 hectares and produce around 200,000 bottles of wine a year. The wines are made by French-trained winemaker Yang Weiming whose goal is to make wines that are not only suited to the local palate but also to the vineyard's location. Despite the elevation, acidity is undermined by the pH levels in the soils and freshness is therefore a primary concern for Yang Weiming. One way he overcomes this is by avoiding malolactic fermentation in the Chardonnay to retain freshness. Oak is also an aid that he feels should be used sparingly, for the same reason and because the Chinese palate is not fond of woody aromas.



## Xixia King

The showcase and pioneer



The oldest winery in Ningxia, Xixia King now has 85 fellow wineries across the 38,000 hectares planted in the region. It was founded in 1984 as a wholly state-owned enterprise of Ningxia Farms and Land Reclamation Group. The company has built three different wineries, including Chateau Yuquan, and planted more than 6,000 hectares of vines, which is the largest area of all the region's vineyards. It plays a pivotal role in the development of the Helan mountain wine region - recognised as a protected vineyard area in 2002 - and will continue to do so in the future. As a state-backed entity, it has drafted a 30-year blueprint for future development and is aiming to extend its vineyard area to 20,000 hectares in 30 years' time. Its wines are sold in fifty cities across the country, through online and offline channels, and its facilities are also designed to welcome tourists. Chateau Yuquan welcomes around 20,000 visitors a year, a number which has grown from just 6,000 in 2013. Visitors, most of them from other provinces partly due to the fact that Ningxia has the smallest population in China, pay 40 RMB to visit Chateau Yuquan. Facilities include a wine gallery and even an area where consumers can blend their own wines, underscoring the significance of education for Xixia King. Its Chateau Yuquan winery, built in 2012, produces 260,000 bottles of wine a year and grows grapes for the group's two other wineries. Though

the varietal range is extensive, Chateau Yuquan's Baitian Hua believes that Cabernet Gernischt and Marselan have the best potential in the region, with Cabernet Gernischt in particular showing the most typical character. "The most important aspect for us now, is understanding the terroir. Equipment is the easy part. Some of it, like stainless steel tanks, is made locally and we can import the rest from Italy", said Hua. The group intends to make competitively priced wines that can compete with imported wines, "whose price on entry into China is multiplied by three at retail level", pointed out Hua. With an ancient warrior who became king as its emblem, there is no doubting the fighting spirit that prevails at Xixia King.



## Chateau Bacchus

A home for the god of wine in China



Its foundation in 1999, by Sanwei Wang and his former ballet dancer wife Yanhui Wang, makes Chateau Bacchus one of Ningxia's pioneering wineries. Another distinguishing feature is its boutique scale compared to many of the region's extensive estates. Its current area under vine is 33 hectares and it only makes wines from estate-grown grapes which include classics such as Cabernet-Sauvignon, Merlot and Marselan, all picked by hand. Sanwei and Yanhui Wang have invested over 20 million yuan in their project, part of which was spent in 2006 and 2007 on a chateau reminiscent of European-style architecture. The winery epitomises the owners' values of showing deference to nature, health and humanity, yet at the same time houses world-class facilities. These are surrounded by trees and grass, not only to highlight the owners' values but also to pay homage to the winery's namesake god, Bacchus.





## Chateau Mihope

From French renaissance to Chinese emergence



With spectacular views out over the jagged peaks of the Helan mountains, Chateau Mihope stands majestically at 1,100 metres above sea level surrounded by its 110-hectare vineyard. Its Italian-designed, 10,000 m2 chateau unexpectedly houses a state-of-the-art winery which produced its first wines in 2015. The project, which was launched in 2011 and became fully operational in 2016, is the brainchild of Midea Holding, which comprises two groups, one specialising in air-conditioning and electrical appliances, the other in real estate. Chateau Mihope belongs to the latter group. It has been the object of substantial investment – totalling 200 million yuan between 2011 and 2018 – which underscores the ambitions of its owners. To support their quality-driven strategy, they have recruited the expert help of Australia's Dr Richard Smart and China's Dr Wang Zheuping in the vineyards, and France's Marc Dworkin in the winery. Their input is evidenced by the ongoing experimentations conducted at the chateau, including the range of nine barrel types, both oak and acacia wood. Soil surveys are similarly being carried out to determine whether a further 150 hectares of vines will be planted. Also in the offing is construction of another chateau in order to develop wine tourism – the existing chateau's five guest rooms are reserved for top clients. The wines are not sold on site but at the company's headquarters in the province of Guangdong and were originally available only for company employees. As of October 2018, they have been released to the general public in China.



## Château Leirenszhou

Appealing to Chinese tastes



Established in 2002 by former clothes designer Feng Qing, Château Leirenszhou has since then become a well-known brand thanks to input by prominent Chinese consultant professor Demei Li and use of cutting-edge technology. The varietal range spans the major international grapes that are Chardonnay, Cabernet-Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinot noir and Syrah as well as Cabernet Gernischt, but experimentation is ongoing to define the varieties most suited to the local climate and soils. The estate extends over 300 hectares in the core of the East Helan mountain region. The vineyards cover around 20% of its needs, with grapes bought from local growers making up the balance. A wine enthusiast and lover of good food, Feng Qing chose to set up a winery

in Ningxia because the region was already well-established as a producer of fine wine and was developing a genuine wine culture. His ambition is not to expand but rather to focus on quality, and his efforts have already been rewarded with numerous accolades, including a gold medal for his 2014 Cabernet-Sauvignon LRS Impression Vintage label in the Belt & Road Wine and Spirits competition in 2018. The winery has a strong following across China through online and offline channels, partly due to its range of wines geared to local Chinese tastes – its rosé, for instance, is a Chardonnay-based wine fermented with wolfberries that are renowned in China for their health benefits.



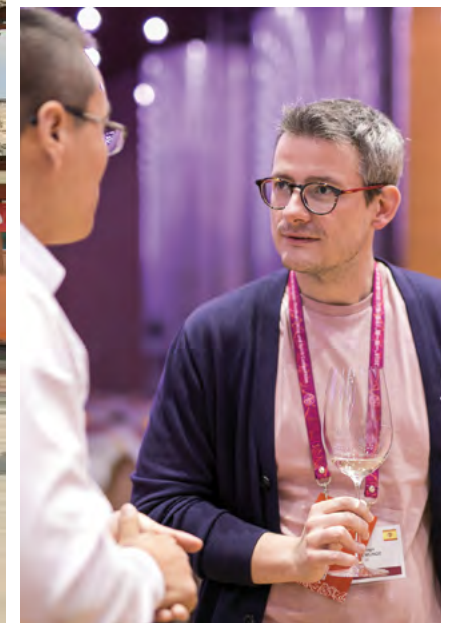


## Lilan Winery

An uncompromising approach to wine



Lilan Winery, which was established in 2010, is based on a unique principle where eco-farmed land owned collectively by Min Ning residents was turned into vineyards, then became a source of income in kind for the residents. The 160-hectare vineyard planted mainly to Cabernet-Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah, Chardonnay and Marselan also provides employment opportunities for local residents. It remains true to its original eco-friendly principles and is farmed organically, with all the fruit for the winery sourced on site. Support from the local government has allowed the winery to install strict selection procedures for its grapes and a drip irrigation system in its vineyards for efficient water use. Similarly, Lilan Winery has used the natural lie of the land to install gravity-fed systems. In the winery, it uses whole cluster fermentation to extract colour and soft fruity characters, with the overriding ambition of producing “simply fresh” wines. Revealing sense of place in the wines is also a prerequisite and Lilan Winery aims to bring out the best of what the Helan Mountain has to offer. This does not preclude the use of oak and the wines are usually aged in French oak barrels for 12-18 months. Once the wines leave the winery, they continue to be traceable through an online tracking system.





## The fantastic night



## CMB Gold and Grand Gold award-winning wines showcased

International competitions are an excellent benchmark for both emerging and well-established wine regions, allowing them to gauge the quality of their wines compared with rival producers. The ability of the Concours Mondial de Bruxelles' panel to select the finest wines from thousands of entries was showcased at the 'Fantastic Night' on September 14. Master of Wine Pedro Ballesteros curated this presentation of award-winning wines from well-established regions such as France's Bordeaux, Italy's Tuscany and Portugal's Tejo, alongside offerings from China's Ningxia\*. All of them had been awarded either Gold or Grand Gold medals in previous Concours Mondial de Bruxelles competitions, attesting to their ability to impress judges renowned for their highly discriminating palate. The presentation also revealed how both international and Chinese wines can be successfully paired with food.

### The award-winning wines from Ningxia presented during the tasting were:

Lanxuan 2014 Chardonnay; Zongqing 2014 Oak-Aged Cabernet-Sauvignon; Yuanrun 2016 Reserve Cabernet-Sauvignon; Ho-Lan Soul 2014 Reserve Organic Syrah; Pushang 2016 Marselan.

### The award-winning wines from other parts of the world were:

2017 Colombelle L'Original Blanc (Gascony, France); Dourthe 2017 La Grande Cuvée (Bordeaux, France); 2013 Maria Costanza Riserva (Sicily, Italy); Quinta da Lapa 2015 Syrah Reserva (Tejo, Portugal); La Togata 2012 Riserva (Tuscany, Italy).



## Closing ceremony

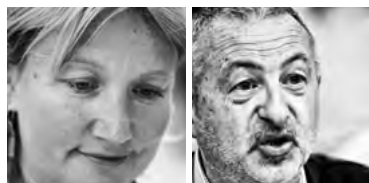


## Laying solid foundations for the future

Three days of high-level conferences, free-pour tastings and insightful winery visits came to a spectacular climax during the closing ceremony attended by several hundred local and international guests. As one of the high points of the event, the results of the 2018 Belt & Road Wine and Spirits Competition were eagerly awaited by the producers of the 800 or so entries. But as Baudouin Havaux, chairman of Vinopres, pointed out, the event also "successfully brought together the media, producers, researchers and other stakeholders", fulfilling its original aim. For Wang Yong, vice-mayor of Yinchuan, it laid "solid foundations for future cooperation".







# Acknowledgements and Thanks



**The Asian Wine & Spirits Silk Route Competition and Conferences would not have been possible without the support of the following representatives of local authorities and institutions.**

- Jiang ZhiGang – Deputy Secretary of the Party Committee of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region
- Yang YuJing – Mayor of Yinchuan Municipal Government
- Wang WenYu – Director of the Agriculture and Animal Husbandry Department of the Autonomous Region
- Su ZhiMin – Chairman of Yiqing Holding Group
- Zhu Lee – General Manager of Beijing International Wine & Spirit Exchange
- Cao KaiLong – Director of the Grape Industry Development Bureau of the Autonomous Region
- Hao LinHai – President of the Federation of Vine and Wine of Helan Mountain's East Foothill
- Lian YongQi – Director of the Yinchuan Wine Industry Development Bureau

**We would also like to thank the following people for welcoming visitors to Ningxia wineries.**

- Yan HuiWang – Château Bacchus
- Jin WanXiang – Xixia King Winery
- Feng Qing – Château Leirenszhou
- Xi Qiang – Château Mihope
- Lei Yan – Ningxia Château Lanny Co., Ltd
- Jiao HongWei – Château Changyu Moser XV Co., Ltd. Ningxia
- Rong Jian – Helan Qingxue Vineyard
- Yuan Yuan – Yuanshi Winery
- Chen DeQi – Ho-Lan Soul Winery
- Shao QingSong – Lilan Winery
- Zhang YanLi – Château Jade Copower
- Li ZeFu – COFCO Greatwall Château Tianfu

**We are most grateful to the following speakers who contributed their invaluable insight to the conferences.**

- Hua Li – Honorary Dean of the School of Wine, Northwest A&F University
- Demei Li – Associate professor of wine tasting and oenology at the Beijing Agricultural College
- Shihua Zhao – Senior Researcher of the Enology Development Bureau of Ningxia
- Bernard Burtschy – Wine Journalist and Permanent member of the Great European Jury
- Yulin Fang – Dean of the Wine College, Northwest A&F University
- Junxiang Zhang – Vice President of the Wine School of Ningxia University and of the Ningxia Grape and Wine Research Institute
- Sarah Jane Evans – Master of Wine
- Changqing Duan – Director of the Center for Viticulture & Enology at the China Agricultural University
- Shaohua Li – Researcher, Institute of Plant Science, Chinese Academy of Sciences
- Hang Li – President of the China Sommelier Academy
- Debra Meiburg – Master of Wine
- Annette Scarfe – Master of Wine
- Pedro Ballesteros Torres – Master of Wine
- Michael Apstein – Assistant Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School, Wine Columnist

**AWS Silk Route would also like to thank the following guests for taking part.**

- Subhash Arora - President, Indian Wine Academy, Delhi Wine Club - Journalist: Editor-delWine.
- K. Kim Andrew - Chairman of the Greater China Area, DWM Germany; President of the Korean international Sommelier Association
- Charlie Arturaola - Wine communicator
- Isabelle Bachelard - Wine Journalist
- Romain Batya - Wine Journalist
- Gurvinder Bhatia - Quench Magazine wine editor; Global TV wine columnist
- Vicky Burt - Product Development Manager for Wine Qualifications at the WSET
- Zhang Chunya - National Senior Winemaker and Senior Wine Taster
- Guillermo Cruz - Head Sommelier at Mugaritz Restaurant. Advanced Sommelier Court of Master Sommeliers
- Andrea Gabbrielli - Journalist and writer for «Tre Bicchieri», «Spirito di Vino»
- William Blake Gray - Freelance Wine Writer, SF Chronicle and Wine Spectator
- Xia Guangli - Former Chief Winemaker of Qingdao Huadong Winery and Winemaker of Domaine Chandon
- Louise Hurren - Wine marketing communications and media relations consultant
- Marina Karakonova - Wine Regular author
- Yair Koren Kornblum - Senior news editor as well as a wine & spirits journalist, writer and broadcaster
- Julia Kostadinova - Editor-in-chief of DiVino.bg, wine taster
- Zhan Jicheng - Professor of the College of Food Science and Nutritional Engineering at the China Agricultural University
- Natasja Mallory - Wine Journalist
- Salvador Manjon Estela - Director - La Semana Vitivinicola
- Toshio Matsuura - Representative WANDS Publishing Ltd (Japan) Wines & Spirits « La revue japonaise des vins et spiritueux »
- Sharon Nagel - Freelance journalist and translator
- Agnès Nemeth - Editor in chief of VinCE Magazin for 12 years, organiser of VinCE Budapest Wine Show
- Megumi Nishida - Freelance wine journalist & wine consultant
- Alessandra Piubello - Director of Queen International
- Santiago Rivas Munoz - Spanish wine critic, Colectivo Decantado Leader
- Maria Cristina Rodriguez Alcala - Wine Journalist and Consultant on wine marketing and communication
- Li Ruyi - Lecturer at the School of Enology at the Ningxia University
- Dirk-Antoon Samyn - Wine consultant and President of the Association of East and West-Flanders winegrowers
- Luzia Schrampf - Journalist - freelance for der Standard, wein.pur, Slow Magazin Österreich et al. ...
- Anne Serres - Free lance Journalist Terre de Vins V&S News Meininger's WBI
- Hyeon Tae Choi - Journalist for the daily Newspaper "The Segye times", with articles on wine, spirits and food
- Pierre Thomas - Wine Journalist
- Liliane Turmes - Journalist - Tageblatt, Business Review. Directrice du web magazine VINALU
- Elise Vandenberg - Sommelier & Wine Sales Representative
- Jean-Charles Viens - Wine Educator, Former Managing Editor of Spirito di Vino Asia
- Bonnie Villacampa - Founder & President of the Texas International Wine competition – Austin
- Dominique Van de Velde - Wereld-Wijnmeester of the Flemish Wine Institute, wine educator
- Paul White - Wine Journalist
- Liu Yanlin - Professor & Doctoral Supervisor of Viticulture and Enology at the Northwest A&F University
- Ma Zhao - Wine Executive Director and the Head of Education Department of Joy and Cheer

**And our special thanks to Sharon Nagel, who contributed to this report, the Bjiwse and Vinopres teams for their special involvement in setting up the event.**

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