

## Chinese wine follow- up

15 Oct 2003 by JR

I have had a particularly voluble response to my report last Saturday on wine in China (which will be supplemented by a more colourful, less businessy piece in a few weeks' time). It was mostly along the lines of 'well, I never'. I don't usually print correspondence from anyone except in the purple pages forum but thought you might all be amused by the following.

From Teh Peijing / P J Teh / fatmonky

Hope this email finds you well? This is the fatmonky who took part in the Geoffrey Roberts essay thingy three years ago when he was in the midst of National Service in Singapore, and when German Riesling was the only drink that restored his sanity (it still is).

I just wanted to say that I found your article about wine in China to be absolutely fascinating. China seems like the wild wild East of the Wine world right now. It seems like all the wines you tasted were imported varieties. Did you taste any interesting wines made from indigenous varieties (I recall you mentioned a few in your book 'Vines, Grapes and Wines')? Also, is Riesling (my favourite grape) common and/ or popular in China? If those blokes go to the extreme of adding coke to their Cabernet and Sprite to their Chardonnay, they might as well just drink a German Riesling, pure and unadulterated...

Given that, as you say, China has winters far colder than in Europe, and that the reds that come out resemble those from the Loire than from Bor(e)deaux, I'm guessing that China might actually be prime Riesling- growing country.

The timing of your article was propitious, since I have been harbouring the fantasy of being a biodynamic Riesling winemaker in China (labour is cheap too). You just need someone crazy enough to make good wine, and I'm pretty sure I'm insane... I just need money...

Undoubtedly my parents are going to be upset that I might deviate from my plans to be a chemist. I have assured them before, though, that the madness isn't congenital in anyway...

Sincere regards, P J Teh

Firstly of course fatmonky needs to learn the difference between a variety (noun) and varietal (adjective) but his heart is clearly in the right place.

To answer your question about grape varieties, best estimate of the proportions of various varieties grown in China is as follows.

- Cabernet Sauvignon 48.2%
- Others 17.6%
- Merlot 10.6%
- Italian Riesling 6.0%
- Chardonnay 5.0%
- Proper Riesling 3.1%
- Pinot Noir 1.9%
- Syrah 0.8%

(plus about 7% of various others)

So you can see that indigenous varieties do not feature large. They were rather overlooked in the first rush to plant white international varieties and also in the following rush to plant red international varieties.

There's the big-berried Longyan (Dragon's Eye) and Baiyu (White Feather) which was imported from Russia but neither is great, I think. Some think the most promising indigenous grape may be Cabernet Gernischt which produces wines more like the aromatic Cabernet Franc than the supposedly deep-flavoured Cabernet Sauvignon.

I tasted a Dragon Seal real Riesling 2002 which was rather good - and nice and dry.

Good luck!