Chinese tasters score a perfect 100

19 Mar 2012 by Jancis Robinson

Beware Oxbridge, Ivy League and Grandes Écoles! Two crack tasting teams from Asia have just been selected to compete against their peers chosen from universities and business schools in Europe and North America in the final of the Left Bank Bordeaux Cup to be held at Château Lafite on June 28.

Last week saw the Asian semi finals in Shanghai and Hong Kong and the winning team from mainland China, first-time participants the Antai College of Economics & Management at Shanghai's Jiao Tong university, managed 100% correct answers in the tasting part of the competition, a feat never achieved so far by aspiring teams from any country. Competition was tighter in the Hong Kong semi finals with impressive performances overall and HK City U finally triumphing in the last tasting tests.

After the contest, Leon Dai, leader of the winning team of three tasters from Shanghai (above, being feted by the Bordelais) commented, ‘We’re thrilled to be able to proceed to the final at our first time.The greatest joy of wine hasn’t been tasting it, but rather making so many great friends who share our enthusiasm. We look forward to meeting other contestants from other countries.’

The Jiao Tong team come from the ranks of MBA students at the same university where Purple Pager Marcus Ford (see the text and photograph at the end of Wine advances on China) has been running extremely popular wine classes for undergraduates. His waiting list is now 1,000-strong. But he is not the only one to notice how gifted motivated young Chinese wine tasters are. Edward Ragg wrote to me less than a fortnight ago: 'Yesterday I was just training the first Tsinghua team for the Left Bank Bordeaux Competition (Chinese rounds in Shanghai on the 14th). It is utterly remarkable how easy it is to teach Chinese kids how to taste.'

This annual tasting competition, now in its 11th year, is sponsored jointly by the CIVB and the Bontemps confrérie. Each team comprises three members plus a leader who may or may not be one of the competitors.

This year a total of 42 teams participated: 14 from Asia, 12 from North America, 15 from France and five from the rest of Europe (the Netherlands, Great Britain and Belgium).

The top prize is 24 bottles of - what else? - Château Lafite.