WSET - vivent les femmes!

22 Jan 2013 by Jancis Robinson

Last night I had the great pleasure of handing out hundreds of certificates to the most successful of this year's Wine & Spirit Education Trust Diploma graduates and of congratulating scores of WSET award winners in London's historic Guildhall. This was in my capacity as honorary president of the organisation.

The top award of all, the Vintners' Cup, went to Mei Hong (pictured), an ex-banker born in China and educated in the US who has worked in New York, Hong Kong and Paris. Looking at the 2013 yearbook afterwards, I couldn't help noticing that the great majority of people who have won this top honour among Diploma graduates in recent years have been what my friend from Perth would call females rather than males.

Not a single woman won it until 1976, when the late Penelope Mansell Jones MW won what was then called the Rouyer Guillet cup. Two years later it went to a certain Jancis Robinson. And from 1976 more than two-thirds of the 37 recipients have been women, including seven who went on to become Masters of Wine and wine writer Sarah Ahmed.

Notable male winners have been, from most recent back into the mists of time, Neil Beckett of *The World of Fine Wine,* Chris Foss of Plumpton College, wine educator and author Michael Schuster, Anthony Hanson MW and wine writer Gerald Asher, as well as many other well-known MWs and/or wine merchants.

Mei Hong is the first Chinese winner but could be a sign of things to come. The number of WSET students in China is expected to overtake the number of students in the UK later this year.

Last year a total of 43,254 people took WSET courses in 60 countries, via 1,000 approved education providers. In the Guildhall last night were students of 32 nationalities, including the student who arrived an hour late, his journey from Philadelphia having taken three days, thanks to the unusually severe winter weather here in London.

Very many congratulations from me to those who persist with and conquer their wine education goals.