

## A Comparison of Differences between Chinese and Western Alcoholic Beverage Culture

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This paper is funded by project (YG2016082) The Study on Situation of Lack in Chinese Culture in College English

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**Abstract:** Alcoholic beverage, as a traditional and unique drink, has been liked by people all over the world. Alcoholic beverage has become an essential item at a banquet. At the same time, alcoholic beverage, as a communicating tool, occupies an important position in public relations. This paper elaborates on the functions of alcoholic beverage culture between China and the west. The different features between Chinese and western alcoholic beverage culture are described. Through the differences between preference and culture including types, materials, drinking vessels, objectives, it reflects the different value and worldview between two countries. Because of the different geographical environment, thinking pattern and religion, people have the different taste preference and culture of alcoholic beverage.

**Key words:** alcoholic beverage culture; differences; reasons

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Date of Submission: 03-02-2019

Date of acceptance: 19-02-2019

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### I. INTRODUCTION

During the long history of human culture, alcoholic beverage, as the core content of alcoholic beverage culture, roots deeply in both material and spiritual lives of human being. A great number of cultures are closely related to alcoholic beverage, especially music and poem. Alcoholic beverage as a sort of charming drink began in China five thousand years ago in the late primitive society, and had its peculiar color, fragrant odor, changeable texture. By contrast, it is very hard to speak out a relatively specific time of the beginning of western alcoholic beverage. As a western scholar said that alcoholic beverage is the bridge connecting one country to another. Alcoholic beverage is integrated into people's society life, occurs on various occasions like public interactions and festivals both in Chinese and western. Sometimes, alcoholic beverage is the direct way for human being to express their happiness and pains. People's first alcoholic beverage drinking usually associates with celebrations within the family context during meals. By observing the color, smelling the odor and taking a sip, people will judge the quality of alcoholic beverage. Culture is a unique form to improve mankind's viewpoint of value. Alcoholic beverage culture is the intelligence crystallization significant to human being. Comparing Chinese and western alcoholic beverage culture, Chinese people have more customs for drinking alcoholic beverage. Actually, there are many other cultural differences between Chinese and western. Under the different backgrounds of society and culture, people's thinking pattern, different geographical environment, customs and religion forms different alcoholic beverage culture. Different alcoholic beverage cultures reflect the differences between two countries' human beings in life style and life attitudes. As we all know, different characteristics make western people focus more on the alcoholic beverage itself, while Chinese people pay more attention to the companion with whom he is drinking. Alcoholic beverage is a substance created by human beings, in the meanwhile, it serves people's social and cultural construction. Since the accelerating pace of the economy, the increase of personal income level may gradually improve people's life standard, which will stimulate the high demanding of good quality of alcoholic beverage. It will undoubtedly become an opportunity to explore the new trends of the alcoholic beverage culture.

### II. THE DIFFERENT FEATURES BETWEEN CHINESE AND WESTERN ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE CULTURE

Alcoholic beverage can not only create a relaxed atmosphere but also relieve one's painful feeling both the same in China and west. But there still exists many differences between Chinese and western alcoholic beverage culture. It can be divided into two main features.

#### 2.1 Preference differences of Chinese and western alcoholic beverage

The preference differences between Chinese and western alcoholic beverage is actually the differences between sense of value and tradition concept.

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China is an alcoholic beverage kingdom having such many different kinds of alcoholic beverage. No matter people live in north or south, male or female, old or young, their affection to alcoholic beverage won't be changed as time goes by. The Chinese people focus more on the atmosphere and the person with whom you drink.

However, the preference of western alcoholic beverage tends to appreciate alcoholic beverage itself. It seems as a pleasure observing the peculiar color, smelling the fragrant odor, tasting the changeable texture, and enjoying the great feeling in your mouth by using your each sense organ.

The particular preference differences between Chinese and western alcoholic beverage are as follows.

### **2.1.1 Type**

There exist various types of alcoholic beverage between China and the west.

Chinese alcoholic beverage has a long history that can be traced back in thousand years ago, the alcoholic beverage made from millet has the longest history in China. The most two common and popular alcoholic beverage types in China are Chinese white liquor and yellow rice wine. Chinese white liquor which ranks first among world's distilled liquor is more representative, whether in formal or informal situations, you can see people drink white liquor. Alcoholic beverage equals the Chinese word 'Jiu' which represents all types of alcoholic beverage, such as white liquor, yellow rice wine, wine beer and so on. In China, the common method to classify alcoholic beverage is according to the alcoholic degree. If the alcoholic degree is more than 40 degree, it can be called high degree alcoholic beverage.

While the main types of western alcoholic beverage can generally be divided into whiskey, wine, cocktail and beer. Cocktail is the most representative between these four types because it represents the nation spirit of America-diversification. America as a big melting pot has many different kinds of immigrants from each places. Cocktail became popular in the middle of 19th century due to the massive production and marketing of the refrigerator.

### **2.1.2 Literature and art**

Most literature and art are created after drinking alcoholic beverage. All of these works reflect the real emotions underlying author's heart.

Alcoholic beverage is considered as one of the best inspiration of literature and art in China. From ancient times, many famous Chinese scholars and poets wrote great works and poems to express their feelings whether good or bad. A famous poet, Su Dongpo, wrote a poem to ask questions to the blue sky with the drinking vessel in his hand. Moreover, Wang Xizhi, one of the best calligraphers in China, wrote one of the most famous works 'the Foreword of Orchid Pavilion' after drinking. And almost all of the literature and art was related to the inheritance of Confucianism.

Compared with western literature and art, western literature and art pay more attention to religion and individualism. The works from western great person Shakespeare is the best examples filling in race, religion and individualism.

### **2.1.3 Entertainment**

Entertainment activities play an indispensable role of drinking alcoholic beverage. It reflects one nation's creativity. Chinese alcoholic beverage entertainment focuses more on literature and art. People are usually asked to improvise a poem or several sentences to present his talent in literary. However, the western entertainment games are more various, such as figure-guessing, a little bee, word game, number-guessing and so on. These games enhance the interest during drinking alcoholic beverage.

## **2.2 Culture differences of Chinese and western alcoholic beverage**

Culture differences of Chinese and western alcoholic beverage is actually the differences of thinking pattern, geographical environment and religion. It involves material, drinking vessel, drinking custom and objective.

### **2.2.1 Material**

Different alcoholic beverage types have their own unique raw materials.

For thousands of years, most of Chinese traditional alcoholic beverages are made from grain, starchy roots and sweet potato which are the most health brewing method. As we all know, Chinese white liquor and yellow rice wine are the most two popular alcoholic beverage in China, both of these two kinds of alcoholic beverage are made from grains too. China, as a big agricultural country in the world, is rich in grains. Brewing alcoholic beverage by using food crops, starchy roots and sweet potato and grains can not only promote the development of agriculture but also satisfy people's longing for alcoholic beverage. The yellow rice wine is the most representative alcoholic beverage to present the color of Chinese soil.

However, the raw materials of western alcoholic beverage can be divided into four main types

including whiskey, wine, cocktail and beer. They are more diversified, mainly made from grain including corn, barley rye and so on and fruits especially grapes. Because of the geographical environment and different climates, the soil in western country is not as fertile as it in China. So grains and food crops are not adequate to feed people and brew alcoholic beverage at the same time. However, grapes are very suitable for western soil, geographical environment and climate. So grapes are one of the main materials in western brewing method and wine is the main alcoholic beverage in the west.

### **2.2.2 Drinking vessel**

Drinking vessel is very essential for drinking alcoholic beverage. There are various drinking vessels both in China and the west. Drinking vessel is as important as alcoholic beverage itself. If people don't have drinking vessels, people can't drink alcoholic beverage freely.

In the early stage, the Chinese people use some natural materials to make a drinking vessel such as gourds. With the improvement of technology, many new kinds of drinking vessels made of different materials appear, such as, making of bronze, ceramic and jade. In addition to, drinking vessels are made into different shapes such as animals shape, human shape and other shapes. Drinking vessel plays an important role in drinking alcoholic beverage. People can not only use it to drink alcoholic beverage but also appreciate the beautiful design of the drinking vessels.

Different from Chinese drinking vessels, the western people treat drinking vessels more strict. People use different drinking vessels while drinking different types of alcoholic beverage and emerging in different occasions. Corresponding vessels are used to drink wine, brandy and whisky. Most western drinking vessels are made of crystal and glass, because these two kinds of drinking vessels are convenient for people to observe the color of alcoholic beverage.

### **2.2.3 Drinking custom**

The customs of drinking reflect one nation's characters from different aspects.

Chinese alcoholic beverage has a long traditional custom showing respect for the important people. Although it isn't as strict as the ancient, the drinking customs in China also include a series of rules. There will be a fixed seat and a fixed toasting order during a banquet. At a banquet, Chinese people are fond of toasting. Host must be the first person to toast others. The first toast must be started from the most honored person. At the same time, your glass must be full that will express your sincere respect for the person to whom you toast. The younger generation will toast to the elder at first, also the lower to the higher position. The person who first drinks up the alcoholic beverage is completely expressing his sincere respect.

Unlike Chinese drinking custom, the western people show their respect for alcoholic beverage itself. They have a good unique custom that involving three steps during drinking alcoholic beverage. The first step is to look, looking at the color whether it's good or bad. Then, the second step is to smell: using your ring figure and middle figure to grasp the cup feet, smelling it under your nose. Remember to smell it after fermenting. The last step is to taste. Just taking a sip, the changeable flavor in your mouth is enough to enjoy. All these three steps show their sincere respect and love for alcoholic beverage itself.

### **2.2.4 Objective**

The objective of drinking alcoholic beverage is not just drinking itself. It has some other different meanings between two countries. Drinking at different places has different objectives too.

For China, there are various objectives. For family, it's a symbol of reunion. If someone goes out to a different place to work or study, people will drink alcoholic beverage both before he leaving and after he coming. It's a good way to express the strong feeling of missing. For society, it's a tool of communication. It can promote the relationship between each other.

For the west, the objective is closely related to alcoholic beverage itself. There's no doubt that alcoholic beverage is also seemed as a communication tool in the west. But enjoying the taste after drinking is more important for them. Enjoying the flavor of alcoholic beverage can help them to get happiness and get rid of pains.

## **III. THE ANALYSIS OF THE REASONS BETWEEN CHINESE AND WESTERN ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE CULTURE**

The pursuit of good quality of alcoholic beverage never seems to the end. The analysis of the differences between Chinese and western alcoholic beverage culture contribute for people all-around to appreciate the good quality of alcoholic beverage. Through this way, we can get access to the foundation of different cultures and make our life better.

### **3.1 Religion**

The development of culture is closely connected with civilization. Religion is an indispensable part of civilization, just as a famous saying said that 'Religion is a human universal'. Not only because it's regarded as a guidance for human to explain and view the world, but also it works as sanction for human behavior. Furthermore, different religion attitudes between two countries reflect different understanding about the relationship between human being and the world. Both China and the west transit their primitive belief to their citizens through religion.

China is a humanity orientation country. The first religion turning point happened in Zhou Dynasty. At this time, people became to emphasize their attention on the importance of humanism from divine worship. Before Zhou Dynasty, people were deeply convinced of a set of ghosts and gods. Owing to the core culture in Zhou Dynasty-ceremony, people's social behavior and humanity become to finalize. So, while drinking alcoholic beverage, Chinese people care more about the person with whom they drink.

Western country oriented of god. Western people think wine is the blood of Jesus. People commemorate Jesus' s sacrifice and perform the contract with Jesus through drinking. In ancient time, the function of religion is to ensure the security of community and individual. From this time, the western people were used to appreciate the art of individual including drinking alcoholic beverage. The western people prefer to show respect for the alcoholic beverage itself. Due to their limited territory and natural resource, western people decided to seek for a transcendence of limit. And they started to choose different gods for their goodwill.

### **3.2 Geographical environment**

There is no denying that geographical environment plays a crucial role between Chinese alcoholic beverage and the west's. It's fixed and we can't change it by ourselves.

China has vast territory and diverse climate that located in the East Asia. With the superior natural environment, various landforms, principal river and good drainage, China is a good place to plant many different kinds of grains and food crops. And that's why China is a big country that is famous for its various alcoholic beverages, such as Chinese white liquor, yellow rice wine, medical liquor. Almost of these are made from food crops and grains. The superior geographical environment promotes the agriculture in China.

Because of the surrounding of the seas, the western natural resources are not as fertile as China. Although western country is almost as large as China, much longer coastlines make them limited. Therefore, commerce is the first to promote western's economy, then, the agriculture. The western culture is established on the basis of economy and environment. Fortunately, the west is suitable to grow grapes. So wine is the most common and popular alcoholic beverage in west. The commerce of wine helps western country to become rich. Besides, the western people are good at exploiting ocean benefit from the longer coastlines.

### **3.3 Thinking pattern**

Every great idea comes from a long thinking. People from different countries have different thinking patterns. There are various reasons caused different thinking patterns, including the different cultures, naturals, environment, sense of values, beliefs and so on. As a result, different thinking patterns also influence the behavior culture.

As for alcoholic beverage culture, the Chinese people lay great emphasis on the integral whole beauty involved in materials, drinking customs and vessels, objectives, drinkers, drinking games and so on, not just the alcoholic beverage itself. According to ancient document, Chinese ancestors considered that all the things on earth had the same origin. Then, the first worldview of Chinese took sharp the connection between humanity and heaven. At the same time, the unity of the integration of Taoism and Confucianism boosted thinking pattern. The essence of Taoism was about the harmony concern between humanity and heaven, while the Confucianism was attached harmony between man and society.

From the point of view of the western people, they tended to master and control of everything because of the living environment exploring on the ocean needs more courage. They put man and nature, mind and body and subject and object in an opposition place. The western people evaluated the world by logical reason than thinking out a scientific method. In western people's eyes, they prefer to measure things from the whole to separated parts. That is to say, individualism is the core of their thinking patterns. Consequently, they pay more attention on the alcoholic beverage itself. Using their logical thinking pattern has a command of the uniqueness of alcoholic beverage including varying different kinds of alcoholic beverage types, drinking vessels and so on.

## **IV. CONCLUSION**

Culture can be memorized, alcoholic beverage culture as a special form of Chinese and western culture has been spread in all ages. People love alcoholic beverage no matter from alcoholic beverage itself or alcoholic beverage culture. In addition, it's a good choice to know more about the roots and values of different cultures. Alcoholic beverage culture is a bridge between Chinese culture and western culture. Every differences whether between ancient and modern or China and the west should not be ignored. Every detail may be the key to have a

better understanding of alcoholic beverage.

By comparing the Chinese and western alcoholic beverage culture, we can find that the differences between Chinese and western is actually the differences of religion, geographical environment and thinking pattern. Chinese alcoholic beverage culture shows that people treat alcoholic beverage as a tool in communicating. People use alcoholic beverage to pursue an ulterior development. While western alcoholic beverage culture shows that people only respect and appreciate of alcoholic beverage itself. People drink it just because that's the drink they like. Because of the different geographical environment, people have the different culture of alcoholic beverage. No matter in China and west, people have their own customs of drinking. It helps people to shape their values, worldwide and thinking pattern which help them get access to the basis of different culture. There is no doubt that both Chinese and western people have the special way to express the love of alcoholic beverage.

As we all know, the longer alcoholic beverage stored, the more tasty it will be. Just as our exploring of alcoholic beverage culture, the more we analyze, the better understanding we will have to adapt different cultures.

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