

# TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

## History of Chinese Medicinal Wine

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**ABSTRACT** Chinese medicinal wine is one type of a favorable food-drug product invented by Chinese ancestors for treating and preventing diseases, promoting people's health and corporeity, and enriching people's restorative culture. In the course of development of the millenary-old Chinese civilization, Chinese medicinal wine has made incessant progress and evolution. In different historical periods, Chinese medicinal wine presented different characteristics in basic wine medical applications, prescriptions, etc. There are many medical and Materia Medica monographs which have systemically and specifically reported on Chinese medicinal wine in past Chinese dynasties. By studying leading medical documents, this article made an outline review on the invention, development, and characteristics of Chinese medicinal wine.

**KEYWORDS** history, Chinese medicinal wine, medical documents, review

Chinese medicinal wine is famous and well-known in the world. As a traditional preparation of Chinese medicine for the treatment of diseases and health care, medicinal wine has a long history. From ancient China, just after the invention of vintage, wine was used for the treatment of diseases and for health care in Chinese medicine. Subsequently, it was said that "wine was ranked first of all drugs". There is a story originating from "Newly Revised Materia Medica" (《本草新编》) and is widely known in China. Once there were three people hurrying on a trip in the morning fog: one drinking, one eating fully, and one fasting. When they got to their destination, the one who was fasting died, the full one was ill, but the drinker was well.<sup>(1)</sup>

Chinese medicine used wine for treatment and prevention of diseases, and then created the combination of wine and drugs. In doing so, the Chinese ancestors established Chinese medicinal wine for human health care and treatment. There are records about wine and medicinal wine by oracles in the Shang dynasty and the Zhou dynasty (about 2500 B.C.). Using wine as a solvent not only for extracting the pharmacologically active ingredients from drugs but also for keeping these ingredients active longer, medicinal wine exhibited unique and excellent characteristics. Medicinal wine was applied not only orally, but also externally. An outline of the history of Chinese medicinal wine follows.

### Invention of Chinese Medicinal Wine

In ancient times, Chinese ancestors discovered cereals and cultivated them successfully. When they

cultivated a surplus, they preserved the extra in pots. Occasionally, rainwater dripped into the pots. As time passed, the cereals fermented and wine was produced. As recorded in "Jiu Gao" (《酒诰》) by JIANG Tong, "When there were rice remnants, they were discarded into mulberry tree holes. As time passed, the discarded remnants developed good taste and fragrance. The wine was produced in this way and not by any mysterious method<sup>(2)</sup>." From this we know that wine was produced by spontaneous fermentation and was acquainted to, accepted, and developed by human beings. There were two famous agricultural scientists named YI Di and DU Kang who invented new types of wine. However, the Chinese people consider that it was just YI Di and DU Kang who invented wine. Thus, many legends about Yi Di and Du Kang were invented to depict the creation of wine in Chinese folklore.

It was reported in "Newly Revised Materia Medica" that wine tastes bitter, sweet, and is pungent, with profuse heat and poison. Wine is potent and kills all pathogens. Varieties of wine include broomcorn, millet, leaven, honey, etc., but various wines have different concentrations of ethanol and only rice wine can make medicinal wine.<sup>(1)</sup>

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Since the advent of wine, Chinese people have gradually realized that wine can promote blood flow, invigorate the spleen, favor the stomach and intestine, moisten skin, dispel cold and dampness, and so on. People used wine to cure diseases and to promote health care. In ancient times, wine was a very costly drug, yet it lasted a very long time as the primary method of disease treatment.

Wine combats arthralgia syndrome, channels disorder, body aches, convulsions, chest numbness, chest aches, chest secret anguish, blood stasis, yin cold and inner fill, physical and spiritual exhaustion, etc. For damp-heat or damp phlegm accumulation, exsanguine disease, yin deficiency, or hemorrhoids, wine with high ethanol content is not suitable. For patients with psychosis, hypertension, hepatitis, hepatocirrhosis, and tuberculosis, etc., drinking wine is prohibited. In addition to the conditions listed above, drinking is avoided when the body is in limosis. Drinking a high quantity in a short time period leads to acute alcoholism; drinking frequently leads to chronic alcoholism, chronic gastritis, neuritis, and hepatocirrhosis, etc.

With the enrichment of medical knowledge, Chinese people have realized that not only could wine cure diseases, but it is also a wonderful solvent. Wine can co-mix with water, aldehyde, and ester, as well as dissolve many organic substances and bio-actives in plants (eg. alkaloid, indican, naphtha, resin, and pigment, etc). Wine also promotes good antiseptis function. From only using wine for curing diseases to using both wine and drugs for curing diseases, a new type of medicament was established: medicinal wine.

As time passed, along with the development of techniques for creating alcoholic liquors, the Chinese started to use distilled yeast to make alcoholic liquors through the process of distillation. This process provided new methods for making medicinal wines, because medicinal wine has advantages such as convenience in administration, curative effects, and easy preservation. Most medical scientists and the masses are likely to use medicinal wine, and medicinal wine has been improved and perfected. Traditional Chinese medicinal wine has developed from using one specific herb to using two herbs, eventually leading to the use of multiple herbs; their recipes have become more precise and rationalized. In Chinese medical

history, medicinal wines were applied to a wide range of fields, including internal medicine, surgery, gynecology, wounds, and so on. Also, wine has been proven useful for prolonging life, combating fatigue, enhancing sexual function, ameliorating osteoporosis, etc. The versatility of medicinal wines has contributed to the formation of distilled spirits, yellow wine, aquavit, barley-beer, beer, sake, champagne and so on.

### Medicinal Wines before the Han Dynasty

In the Shang dynasty, besides liquor (酒) and sweet wine (醴), there was also Chang (鬯). As one of the wines used for sacrifices and augury, Chang is the earliest medicinal wine recorded in Chinese history. It was produced by using black millet as vintage material and adding tulip (one sort of traditional Chinese drug), then fermenting the two together. Chang also possessed an antiseptic function. As recorded in "Chou Li" (《周礼》) (a famous book about Chinese ancient ceremonies) "when the kings died, Chang was used to bath their corpses for lengthy preservation".<sup>(3)</sup>

A prescription book entitled "The Prescriptions for Fifty-two Kinds of Disease" (《五十二病方》) was unearthed in 1979 from the No. 3 Han Tomb at Ma Wang Dui, Changsha, Hunan province. It was a monograph of prescriptions in traditional Chinese medicine and was further analyzed as a book copied by hand between the Qin and Han dynasties (around late 300 BC). In this book there were more than 35 prescriptions giving advice on the use of wine, and at least 5 prescriptions giving advice on medicinal wines for curing snake bites, carbuncles, itches, etc. Some of them were to be orally administered, with others to be administered externally.<sup>(4)</sup>

"Prescriptions for Regimen" (《养生方》) was a silk book unearthed from the West Han Tomb at Ma Wang Dui, Changsha, Hunan province. It records 6 kinds of fermentation methods for producing medicinal wines, but unfortunately most of the letters were deformed or incomplete. "Lao Li Zhong" (醪利中), the only intact prescription found in the book, included a total of 10 steps for fermentation.<sup>(5)</sup>

During ancient times, most medicinal wines were produced by adding traditional Chinese drugs to raw vintage materials and then fermenting them together, a procedure different from the dipping method which

would be invented later. Since the ingredients were fully dissolved once the wine was created, perhaps it was difficult to effectively preserve the wine. Simultaneously fermenting raw materials and drugs causes the drugs to fully dissolve because of a longer period of fermentation.

### Medicinal Wines from the Han Dynasty to the Pre-Tang Dynasty

At the beginning of the Han dynasty, dipping and decocting methods were used to produce medicinal wines. "Shennong's Herbal Classic" (《神农本草经》), the most famous book on traditional Chinese medicine compiled by medical masters in the Han dynasty, stated, "The drugs are different in nature, with some suited for pills, some suited for powder, some suited for decocting with water and some suited for dipping with wine."<sup>(6)</sup> Dipping the drugs in wine could not only increase the solubility of the pharmaceutical ingredients of these drugs, but could also potentially enhance their curative effect because the beneficial effects of wine are compounded with those of the drugs. There are many prescriptions for medicinal wines, with regards to dipping and decocting methods, in "Synopsis of Prescriptions of the Golden Chamber" (《金匱要略》), a famous book written by medical master ZHANG Zhong-jing in the Han dynasty. For example, there was one prescription named "Hong Lanhua wine" (红蓝花酒, Crocus wine), which was made by decocting Crocus with liquor, to be orally administered for catamenia disorder in women.<sup>(7)</sup>

TAO Hong-jing, the master of Bencaology who lived between the Qi and Liang periods during the Nan dynasty, summarized previous experiences on medicinal wines and established a regular protocol to produce medicinal wine by a cold dipping method in his "Variorum of Shen Nong's Herbal Classic" (《本草集经注》). It was recorded that "all the medicinal wines produced by cold dipping must use drugs cut thinly and enclosed in a crude silk bag; the bag should be placed into the liquor and the jar should be closed thickly, regulating its dipping time according to the weather and its potency for drinking. The residua of the drugs could be used for another dipping, or used for the other powder."<sup>(8)</sup> From this record we could infer that the ancient Chinese people had known the influence of the degree of a drug's comminution, dipping time, and dipping temperature on dipping

velocity and effect of medicinal wines. They brought forward the idea of having adequate dipping time after the time for extracting the active ingredients, because it could then make up for its own shortcoming in the incomplete lixiviation of active ingredients. From there we can conclude that at that time, the Chinese people had reached a high technical level in producing medicinal wine by the cold dipping method.

The earliest record on medicinal wine produced by the warm dipping method was approximately during the Northern Wei period. There was a piece of prescription named "Hujiao wine" (胡椒酒, Pepper wine) in "Principle of Cultivation" (《齐民要术》), a famous book related to Chinese agriculture compiled by JIA Si-xie in this period, which reported that "the dried ginger, together with pepper powder and the juice of guava was put into the liquor and heated to warm up."<sup>(9)</sup> Maybe it was not used to produce medicinal liquor indeed, but as a matter of fact, the warm dipping method subsequently became the main method for producing medicinal wine.

### Medicinal Wines in Tang and Song Dynasties

In the Tang and Song Dynasties, it was very popular to produce medicinal wines. A lot of prescriptions and methods for making medicinal wine for treatment and health care in medical magnum opuses were recorded, for example, "Thousand Gold Remedies for Emergencies" (《备急千金要方》), "A Supplement to the Essential Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Gold for Emergencies" (《千金翼方》), "The Medical Secrets of an Official" (《外台秘要》), "Peaceful Holy Benevolent Prescriptions" (《太平圣惠方》), "An Outline on Holy Help" (《圣济总录》), and so on. In "Thousand Gold Remedies for Emergencies", there were special chapters on "Liquor and Sweet Wine" in Volume 7 and "Medicinal Wine for Wind and Weak, plus Decoction" in Volume 12;<sup>(10)</sup> in "A Supplement to the Essential Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Gold for Emergencies", a special chapter on "Various wines" in Volume 16;<sup>(11)</sup> in "The Medical Secrets of an Official", special chapter of "Medicinal liquors of chrestomathy from ancient to modern" in Volume 31;<sup>(12)</sup> in "Peaceful Holy Benevolent Prescriptions", there were 6 special chapters about medicinal wines.<sup>(13)</sup> Besides these special chapters, there were many prescriptions for medicinal wines which were scattered out in the other chapters in these books.

In the Tang and Song dynasties, there was a notable characteristic wherein the proportion of the compound prescriptions having more herbs to compose one medicinal wine increased markedly. The number of "big prescriptions" was much more than the "small prescriptions". This phenomenon indicated that the whole level of medicinal wine production was advanced. In the Tang and Song dynasties, the methods of producing medicinal wines included the fermenting method, cold dipping method and warm dipping method, with the former two as the main methods. However, in "An Outline on Holy Help", there appeared some medicinal wines produced by using the warm dipping method, in which the jar filled with medicinal wine was put into water and the water was warmed up for active components dipping out from herbs into wine.

### Medicinal Wines in Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties

In the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties, Chinese medicine made new progress along with economic and cultural development. The medicinal wine also reached a higher level as a result of studying previous experiences, creating new prescriptions, and developing new manufacturing methods. In those dynasties, the Chinese had accumulated a great deal of medicinal literature, and the predecessors' golden experiences had been given general importance by the current time's medical masters, who published many new books by compiling these valuable experiences.

"Principle of Correct Diet" (《饮膳正要》) was the first monograph of Chinese dietetics compiled by HU Si-hui, a Mongolian nutritionist in the Yuan dynasty. When Hu held the post of Master Doctor (the head of the palace hospital), he studied the rare foods, soups, creams, herbs, paddy, meat, fruits, and vegetables in the everyday life of former palaces, and then selected their restoratives and health care materials for this nutrition monograph. In this book, there were many formulas for medicinal wines or tonics. The Yuan dynasty founded its capital in Beijing, one of the most flourishing cities in the world then. As the capital city, Beijing not only gathered the finest wines from all over China, but drinks from all over the world could be found here as well. For example, the "Gouqi wine" (枸杞酒, Medlar wine) and "Dihuang wine" (地黄酒, Rehmanniae wine) of

the Qiang ethnic minority, and the "Lujiao wine" (鹿角酒, Hartshorn wine) and the "Yanggao wine" (羊羔酒, Eanling wine) from the desert areas could all be seen in Beijing. There were many kinds of medicinal wines created by the plebs for their own drinks at their various festivals, such as the "Jiaobai wine" (椒柏酒, Pepper and Cypress wine) for the first moon of the lunar year, "Changpu wine" (菖蒲酒, Calamus wine) for the Dragon Boat Festival (Fifth May, the lunar calendar), "Guihua wine" (桂花酒, Osmanthus-Blossom wine) for the Mid-Autumn Festival, and the "Juhua wine" (菊花酒, Chrysanthemum wine) for the Double Ninth Festival (the ninth day of the ninth lunar month); some of them were just medicinal wines.<sup>(14)</sup>

In the Ming dynasty, the great pharmacognosist LI Shi-zhen completed his famous masterpiece "Compendium of Materia Medica" (《本草纲目》) in 1578, which included mostly materia medica and botany of the Ming dynasty and the former dynasties. There were many prescriptions for medicinal wines at his present time and before his time. The Volume 25 set up the medicinal wine item and embodied 69 sorts of prescriptions for medicinal wine.<sup>(15)</sup> Beyond that, there usually were attached prescriptions for medicinal wine in some single herb entries. It was reported that there were over 200 sorts of prescriptions for medicinal wine in "Compendium of Materia Medica", and most of these prescriptions possessed the characteristics of fewness of herbs (namely "small prescription") and convenience in administration.

"Eight Chapters for Healthcare" (《遵生八笺》) was a monograph on food therapy and nutrition written by GAO Lian, a nutritionist of the Ming dynasty. This book focused on guarding against illness and how to live a long life, and was divided into eight parts, respectively related to medication, Qigong (meditation), diet, food therapy, culture and art, etc. Its "Diet and Dress" (《饮饌服食笺》) part embodied seventeen items of vintages, among which "Bixiang wine" (碧香酒), "Dihuang wine", and "Yanggao wine" were famous medicinal wines since the Song dynasty. Besides these, its "Secret and Proved Medications" (《灵秘丹药笺》) part also embodied many types of medicinal wine, including "Yanling Jubao wine" (延龄聚宝酒).<sup>(16)</sup> In the Ming dynasty, there appeared many medical masterpieces including various prescriptions for medicinal wines compiled from the former dynasties. Examples included "Prescriptions

for Universal Relief" (《普济方》) by ZHU Cao, "Effective Prescriptions Act like a Charm" (《奇效良方》) by FANG Xian, and "Standards of Diagnosis and Treatment" (《证治准绳》) by WANG Ken-tang, etc.

"Cookbook for Everyday Life" (《随息居饮食谱》) was a masterpiece about food therapies edited by WANG Men-ying, a great medical scientist in the Qing dynasty. This book recorded 7 kinds of prescription with curative effect and preparation for medicinal wine in its "Spiritus" column.<sup>(17)</sup> These medicinal wines, which mostly used the spirit as solvent wine, were different from yellow wine (glutinous rice wine) in the Ming dynasty. Using spirit as the solvent wine could increase the dissolution of active components and so improve their efficacy.

There appeared a set of monographs of related formulas on Chinese medicine in the Ming and Qing dynasties. Examples included "Textual Research on Prescriptions" (《医方考》) written by WU Kun, and "Collection of Prescriptions with Notes" (《医方集解》) by WANG Ang etc. These authors focused on studying the rules of prescriptions by analyzing those famous recipes and theoretically expatiated on the principle of formulas of Chinese medicine. Most of these monographs were also related to the study of medicinal wines. For example, in "Textual Research on Prescriptions", WU Kun discussed the reason and efficacy of seven types of medicinal wines, including "Shi Guogong wine" (史国公酒), "Gouqi wine", "Honghua wine" (红花酒, Safflower wine), and "Zhugao wine" (猪膏酒), etc.<sup>(18)</sup> All these works improved the research in the formulary of medicinal wines and guided their correct usage.

In the Ming and Qing dynasties, new prescriptions for medicinal wine kept on being created by medical scientists and people in general. For example, WU Min's "Selected Prescriptions for Long Life" (《扶寿精方》), GONG Ting-xian's "Recovery from All Illness" (《万病回春》) and "Keep Vigor and Get Long Life" (《寿世保元》), SUN Wei's "Proved Prescriptions Collected by Professional Peers" (《良朋汇集经验神方》), TAO Cheng-xi's "Proved Prescriptions from Huizhi Tang" (《惠直堂经验方》), XIANG You-qing's "Records for Long Life" (《同寿录》), and WANG Meng-ying's "Cookbook for Everyday Life", etc., were all completed in this

period. All of these books embodied a lot of new prescriptions for producing medicinal wine and these new prescriptions took on two features as follows:

At first, the medicinal wines for tonics and nutrition had obviously increased. There were 9 kinds of prescriptions for producing medicinal wines in WU Min's "Selected Prescriptions for Long Life". Although the amount of prescriptions was not very large, all of them were selected very strictly. For example, the "Yanling Jubao wine" and "Shi Guogong wine" were famous tonic medicinal wines.<sup>(19)</sup> In both of the books "Keep Vigor and Get Long Life" and "Recovery from All Illness" there were nearly 40 kinds of medicinal wines recorded, and most of them were tonic and nourishing prescriptions. For instance, "Bazhen wine" (八珍酒), "Fushuai Xianfeng wine" (扶衰仙凤酒), "Changsheng Guben wine" (长生固本酒), "Yanshou wine" (延寿酒), Yanshou Wengtou Chun wine (延寿翁头春酒) "Changchun wine" (长春酒), "Hongyan wine" (红颜酒), etc., all of these were tonic and nourishing medicinal wines with excellent formulas.<sup>(20,21)</sup> The prescriptions compiled by WU Ming and GONG Ting-xian made great progress on tonic and nourishing medicinal wine in the Ming and Qing dynasties. There are also recorded many prescriptions for tonic and nourishing medicinal wines in SUN Wei's "Proved Prescriptions Collected by Professional Peers", TAO Cheng-xi's "Proved Prescriptions from Huizhi Tang", XIANG You-qing's "Records for Long Life", and WANG Meng-ying's "Cookbook for Everyday Life", including "Guiyuan Ju wine" (归园菊酒), "Yanshou Huosi wine" (延寿获嗣酒), "Shenrong wine" (参茸酒), "Yangshen wine" (养神酒), "Jianbu wine" (健步酒), etc. Compared with the former times, in the Ming and Qing dynasties tonic and nourishing medicinal wines flourished.

Secondly, it was in keeping with caution to use warm and hot drugs in nature for medicinal wine. In the Tang and Song dynasties, people usually used some warm and hot drugs in nature such as aconite, cinnamon, and dried ginger etc. to produce medicinal wines. If these warm and hot drugs were abused, the users would be injured on their yin-blood. In the Jin and Yuan dynasties, the Chinese medical kingdom experienced an active and free learning environment. The abuse of warm and hot drugs in medicinal wines was criticized by many famous medical scientists, which influenced the development of medicinal wine in

the later Ming and Qing dynasties. Thus, the medicinal wine in the Ming and Qing dynasties mostly adopted mild and gentle drugs in nature for kidney-supplement and nourish-yin to make up prescriptions. In this way the medicinal wines could be applied to different diseases and used in more far-ranging fields to guard and improve human health.

In the Ming and Qing dynasties, the prominent characteristic for making medicinal wine was to adopt the warm dipping method. Increasing the temperature of dipping could not only soften the tissues of botanical drugs and make them swell, improve the drugs' dissolution and diffusion, and promote the active components to enter solvent wine, but it could also destroy some enzymes of the herbs to improve the stability of the medicinal wine.

In the early years of Emperor Qianlong of the Qing dynasty, there appeared one type of medicinal wine drugstore which produced many kinds of medicinal wines by distilling the herbs with rack (hard drink). As these herbs were mostly flowers and fruits, this type of medicinal wine was named "Lu" (means dew), for example, "Meigui Lu" (玫瑰露, Rose wine), "Yinchen Lu" (茵陈露, Absinthin wine), "Shanzha Lu" (山楂露, Hawthorn wine), etc. Some of these medicinal wines had the "keeping vigor and getting a long life" efficacy, so many officials and scholars liked to drink them. The rack was introduced from Persian and Arabian areas into China in the Yuan dynasty or earlier times. It was named hard drink or firewater, and was used as medicinal wine step by step after the Ming dynasty. A great deal of medicinal wines which distilled the herbs using the rack appeared in the Qing dynasty, indicating that the techniques of using distilled spirits as the menstruum for medicinal wines had been popularized.

In the Qing dynasty, with the development of vintage technologies, some medicinal wines not only possessed health care and therapy merits, they also tasted good, had popular name brands, and even became palace drinks. There were some kinds of medicinal wines favored by palace patricians, for instance, "Ye Hezhi wine" (夜合枝酒), which was produced by the palace itself. In Chinese folklore there were many well-known stories about how to take good care of Emperor Qianlong's health and have a long life. Emperor Qianlong paid a lot of attention to

food tonics (restoratives), especially medicinal wines. He liked two kinds of medicinal wines, named "Guiling Ji wine" (龟龄集酒) and "Songling Taiping Chun wine" (松龄太平春酒), very much and drank them almost everyday. It was reported that Emperor Qianlong had even modified prescriptions of these two kinds of medicinal wines for better taste.<sup>(22)</sup>

### Medicinal Wines in Modern China

During the Republic of China time (1911-1949), the development of medicinal wines suffered much damage and little progress was made because of frequent wars.

After the foundation of the People's Republic of China, the Government attached great importance to the development of traditional Chinese medicine and the research and development of Chinese medicinal wines has since achieved more and more progress. Chinese medicinal wines not only succeed in traditional methods and experiences, but also assimilate modern science and technologies to standardize their manufacture and enhance their quality control. Now, Chinese medicinal wine has been recorded into the State Pharmacopoeia, and its research and manufacture have been subject to scientific and strict regulations to ascertain its reliability in ensuring people's health care and giving a clinically curative effect.

The development of Chinese medicinal wine not only meets the needs of the Chinese people but also enters the international market and earns the devotion of foreign friends. We believe that Chinese medicinal wine, with Chinese characteristics and a long history while being introduced to modern science and technology, is bound to make new contributions to the health care and longevity of mankind.

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