

Words are powerful: How are they used to describe wine in China?

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The latest on the University of South Australia's Chinese Lexicon Project which is aimed at helping wineries decide on the words they should use to describe their products in the Chinese wine market.

INTRODUCTION

In the November/December 2013 issue of *Wine & Viticulture Journal*, we wrote about Stage 1 of the Chinese Lexicon Project which has been generously supported by the Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation (GWRDC), now the Australian Grape and Wine Authority (AGWA). This project is not simply translating the English (Western) terms Chinese consumers use to describe a wine into Mandarin. A translator could fulfil this task.

The main objectives of this research are to:

- quantify the usage of general and specific wine taste descriptors among everyday Chinese wine drinkers
- understand the preferences wine drinkers in China have for using standard Western terms versus hypothesised, but never scientifically validated Chinese equivalent fruits, vegetables, plants, spices and foods common in China and more relatable to the Chinese culture and diet
- validate what lexical equivalences exist in order to provide Australian wineries with a competitive advantage in sensory communications with Chinese wine drinkers by providing the necessary insights to develop Chinese-centric collateral.

METHOD

The project comprised three stages. Stage 1 of the research included 12 focus groups across three Chinese cities: Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Chengdu. The research identified 18 generic descriptors (e.g. astringent, mellow, etc), 14 Chinese-specific descriptors for red wines and fortified (e.g. yangmei, wolfberry, etc), and 20 Chinese-specific descriptors for white wines, sparkling and dessert (e.g. guava, ginkgo nut, etc).

Stage 2 involved a sensory characterisation of 25 wines by our colleagues at the Australian Wine Research Institute (AWRI), Ian Leigh Francis and Patricia Williamson. This permitted the selection of 14 wines (five red wines, four white wines, three sparkling wines, and two dessert wines) most representative of the main styles of wines Australia exports to China.

Stage 3 enacted a central location hedonic liking test that was carried out in the same three cities as Stage 1, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Chengdu. A total of 263 respondents completed the study. The majority of respondents were male (58%), 30-39 years old (49%), with a degree from a university (55%), had a personal income of less than RMB7000 per month (47%), and were equally distributed across the three cities.

Among other tasks participants were given, each respondent evaluated all of the 14 wines by ticking all the generic and specific wine descriptors they could perceive when tasting the wine. This technique is generally referred to as 'check-all-that-apply' (CATA). The terms were listed on the survey instrument according to the Chinese Pinyin system, which is the

official phonetic system for translating the sounds of Chinese characters into the Latin alphabet. The generic descriptors were identical for all wines, with the exception of the word 'spicy', which was only present for the description of red wines and the South Australia tawny (NV). The specific descriptors varied according to the wine style evaluated.

The respondents were randomly allocated into two groups. The groups varied with respect to the specific descriptors applied – Western or Chinese. It is important to note that the generic terms were identical across all wines and groups which permitted testing for the equivalences between Chinese and Western terms. If the generic descriptors cluster around the same wines across sub-samples, it can be concluded that the data is suitable for further testing to determine if there are lexical equivalence between Chinese and Western specific taste descriptors.

For brevity, in this article we simply report the results relative to the frequency count of the generic and specific terms used by the respondents to describe a wine. In addition, a summary of the equivalences between Western and Chinese descriptors tested via a qualitative evaluation of the correspondence analyses run on the frequency counts recorded for different wine types across the two sub-samples is provided. However, the project was broader than this. Interested readers can access a full explanation of the project, research protocol and the results via the AGWA website <http://research.agwa.net.au>.

RESULTS

The results in Table 1 demonstrate that the generic terms are used on average three times more often than specific terms. The difference in usage of generic and specific terms between groups is not significant nor the use of specific terms between wine styles. This indicates that at this stage the China wine market is perhaps better suited to be communicated through general rather than specific wine descriptors.

Table 1. Frequency count (%) - Generic and specific terms.

| | Overall Sample | Chinese | Western |
|--|----------------|-----------|-----------|
| Generic terms | 22 | 21 | 23 |
| Specific terms Red wines, and South Australia tawny (NV) | 7 | 7 | 8 |
| Specific terms White wines, sparkling wines and 2012 King Valley Moscato | 6 | 5 | 7 |

Table 2 shows that the terms astringent (34%), sour (34%), mellow (31%), and lingering (30%) are the most selected terms

Table 2. Frequency count (%) – Generic descriptors.

| Term | Overall Sample | Chinese | Western | SIG |
|--------------|----------------|---------|---------|-----|
| Astringent | 34 | 31 | 38 | Y |
| Sour | 34 | 33 | 35 | N |
| Mellow | 31 | 31 | 31 | N |
| Lingering | 30 | 28 | 31 | N |
| Fruity | 29 | 23 | 36 | Y |
| Smooth | 28 | 25 | 30 | Y |
| Intense | 25 | 23 | 26 | Y |
| Refreshing | 23 | 21 | 25 | Y |
| Sweet | 22 | 22 | 21 | N |
| Pure | 20 | 20 | 19 | N |
| Full bodied | 19 | 18 | 19 | N |
| Bitter | 18 | 18 | 18 | N |
| High alcohol | 17 | 17 | 17 | N |
| Light | 15 | 15 | 16 | N |
| Balanced | 15 | 14 | 16 | N |
| Oaky | 14 | 12 | 17 | Y |
| Pungent | 12 | 11 | 13 | N |
| Spicy | 9 | 11 | 10 | N |

to describe the taste of wine. Also, with the exception of the terms sweet and pure, the Western sub-sample tended to select more items than the Chinese sub-group. For most of the terms, the difference is not statistically significant, for the terms astringent, fruity, smooth, intense, refreshing, and oaky it is. These findings could be explained by the concomitant presence of Western descriptors with generic terms, but this requires further investigation.

In relation to specific terms (see Table 3), the results for the red wines and the South Australia tawny (NV) show that terms such as yangmei, dried Chinese hawthorn, dried wolfberry, and fresh wolfberry are used significantly more often than their Western equivalents (see elements highlighted in blue). Conversely, other terms such as dark cherries, red plum, cooked game, vanilla, bacon, and green bell peppers are significantly more used than their Chinese equivalents.

The results for the white wines, sparkling wines, and the 2012 King Valley Moscato, show that only the terms Asian pear and pandan leaf are used significantly more often in the

Table 3. Frequency count (%) – Specific descriptors for the red wines and the South Australia tawny (NV).

| Chinese | % | Western | % |
|--------------------------|----|----------------------|----|
| Yangmei | 15 | Strawberry | 4 |
| Dried Chinese hawthorn | 13 | Blackberry preserves | 8 |
| Dried wolfberry | 12 | Strawberry preserves | 4 |
| Dried Chinese red dates | 10 | Plum | 10 |
| Fresh Chinese red dates | 10 | Blackcurrant | 9 |
| Fresh wolfberry | 7 | Raspberry | 4 |
| Clove | 6 | Clove | 6 |
| Star anise | 5 | Star anise | 5 |
| Chinese black tea leaves | 4 | Dark cherries | 14 |
| Persimmons | 4 | Red plum | 15 |
| Chinese sausage | 2 | Cooked game | 12 |
| Pine nut | 2 | Vanilla | 7 |
| Chinese salted pork | 1 | Bacon | 3 |
| Chinese green peppers | 1 | Green bell peppers | 4 |

Chinese version (see elements highlighted in blue). Other terms, such as lemon, grapefruit, citrus fruit, peach, lychee, gooseberry, grass, flowers, apple, and figs are significantly used more than their Chinese equivalents (see Table 4, page 68).

Let's now focus on the equivalences between Chinese and Western descriptors. The results for the red wines and the South Australia tawny (NV) show that both groups of respondents evaluated the wines in a similar way, associating most of the generic (16 out of 18) and specific (eight out of 14) descriptors around the same wines. In particular, for the specific descriptors the validated equivalences are provided in Table 5 (see page 68).

The results relative to the descriptors used for the white wines, the sparkling wines, and the 2012 King Valley Moscato are in line with the results relative to the red wines and the South Australian tawny (NV). All the generic descriptors match perfectly. Eleven out of 20 specific descriptors are proven to be equivalent and presented in Table 6.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of the Chinese Lexicon Project can help build an approach to wine description that is geared towards the level of consumer experience of the market wines are exported to. Knowing what terms are used more often when consumers

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Table 4. Frequency count (%) – Specific descriptors for the white wines, the sparkling wines, and the 2012 King Valley Moscato.

| Chinese | % | Western | % |
|-------------------------|----|----------------|----|
| Kaffir lime | 13 | Lemon | 17 |
| Jackfruit | 9 | Pineapple | 11 |
| Guava | 6 | Passion fruit | 6 |
| Pomelo | 8 | Grapefruit | 15 |
| Asian pear | 8 | Apricots | 4 |
| Star fruit | 6 | Citrus fruit | 10 |
| Ginkgo nut | 5 | Toast | 2 |
| Cantaloupe | 3 | Melon | 4 |
| Jasmine | 2 | Flowers | 9 |
| Mango | 2 | Mango | 3 |
| Young Asian coconut | 5 | Vanilla | 7 |
| Saturn peach | 5 | Peach | 8 |
| Pandan Leaf | 4 | Asparagus | 2 |
| Dried chrysanthemum | 4 | Dried apricots | 5 |
| Rambutan | 4 | Butter | 1 |
| Mangosteen | 3 | Lychee | 10 |
| Longan | 3 | Gooseberry | 6 |
| Lemongrass | 2 | Grass | 11 |
| Dragon fruit | 2 | Apple | 10 |
| Yellow lotus seed paste | 1 | Figs | 3 |

taste wines helps wineries deciding on the words they should use to describe their products across all the marketing collateral for the Chinese market.

However, familiarity with an object, in this case wine descriptors, leads to consumers selecting that object more often than when confronted with unfamiliar items. This research shows that, despite the inexperience the participants of this study had with wine, the fact that Western descriptors have been predominantly used thus far in China to describe wines might have led to consumers having more associations with Western descriptors rather than Chinese descriptors. The predominance of Chinese descriptors over Western ones in relation to fruits suggests that Chinese consumers might find it easier to utilise terms associated with food items they regularly consume. Further studies should investigate how the preferences for Chinese or Western terms change, as wine becomes more popular in China and the usage of Chinese terms becomes more prevalent. There is scope for Australia to lead in this.

These results support the intuition of some industry practitioners who have created a dictionary to 'translate' the terms commonly used to describe a wine into, not just Chinese, but in a Chinese context. However, this research has proven that neither this strategy nor specific wine descriptors prevalent in the Chinese wine vocabulary are well accepted as this stage. Understanding how to describe wines to the consumers of a big, yet relatively inexperienced wine consuming country like China is a task to be scientifically approached. The results of this study show that only some of the hypothesised equivalences hold true; others are not perceived as equivalent. This suggests a need to continue this research to identify what Chinese specific descriptors do actually match these yet to be scientifically matched Western descriptors.

Table 5. Summary of equivalences between Chinese and Western specific wine descriptors for the red wines and the South Australia tawny (NV).

| Red Wines + South Australia Tawny (NV) | | |
|--|----------------------|----------------------|
| Chinese | Western | Equivalence Verified |
| Yangmei | Strawberry | ✓ |
| Dried Chinese hawthorn | Blackberry preserves | ✓ |
| Dried wolfberry | Strawberry preserves | ✓ |
| Dried Chinese red dates | Plum | x |
| Fresh Chinese red dates | Blackcurrant | x |
| Fresh wolfberry | Raspberry | x |
| Clove | Clove | x |
| Star anise | Star anise | ✓ |
| Chinese black tea leaves | Dark cherries | x |
| Persimmons | Red plum | ✓ |
| Chinese sausage | Cooked game | ✓ |
| Pine nut | Vanilla | ✓ |
| Chinese salted pork | Bacon | ✓ |
| Chinese green peppers | Green bell peppers | x |

Table 6. Summary of equivalences between Chinese and Western specific wine descriptors for the white wines, the sparkling wines and the 2012 King Valley Moscato.

| White Wines + Sparkling Wines + 2012 King Valley Moscato | | |
|--|----------------|----------------------|
| Chinese | Western | Equivalence Verified |
| Kaffir lime | Lemon | x |
| Jackfruit | Pineapple | ✓ |
| Guava | Passion fruit | ✓ |
| Pomelo | Grapefruit | ✓ |
| Asian pear | Apricots | x |
| Star fruit | Citrus fruit | ✓ |
| Ginkgo nut | Toast | ✓ |
| Cantaloupe | Melon | x |
| Jasmine | Flowers | ✓ |
| Mango | Mango | ✓ |
| Young Asian coconut | Vanilla | x |
| Saturn peach | Peach | x |
| Pandan Leaf | Asparagus | x |
| Dried chrysanthemum | Dried apricots | x |
| Rambutan | Butter | ✓ |
| Mangosteen | Lychee | x |
| Longan | Gooseberry | ✓ |
| Lemongrass | Grass | ✓ |
| Dragon fruit | Apple | x |
| Yellow lotus seed paste | Figs | ✓ |

Please look to the next issue of *Wine & Viticulture Journal* for a more applied article that discusses how the insight presented here can be used by Australian wineries in China.

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