

## Shaoxing Wine Stories

The following three stories are a series of first-hand accounts about winemaking techniques, wine-related traditions, and wine consumption in 1930s Shaoxing (now a city in Zhejiang Province in eastern China). Wine has been cultivated in the Shaoxing region since ancient times, and has long been a source of both national fame and local pride.

The narrator is a centenarian named Liu Yuanzi, who currently is living in the United States, but grew up in China. Yuanzi came from a family of moderately wealthy and influential literati originally from Shaoxing. Her father, Liu Dabai, was a distinguished poet, literary critic and historian, as well as one of the pioneers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century New Culture Movement, which drastically changed the cultural and political landscape of China by rejecting traditional Confucian values and promoting Western concepts such as science and democracy. Liu also served as the Vice Minister of the Ministry of Education in 1928, and played an important role in reforming the Chinese education system by promoting vernacular literature.

The rich cultural environment in Shaoxing nurtured many forward-thinking intellectuals, including the now well-known feminist revolutionary Qiu Jin, and Liu Dabai's contemporary, the author and reformer Lu Xun. In fact, many of the specific cultural traditions Lu Xun describes in his short stories are characteristic of the Shaoxing region in which he grew up, including the rituals for celebrating the New Year in *New Year's Sacrifice* and the bar culture in *Kong Yiji*.

Here, Yuanzi gives us a more personal and nuanced look at Shaoxing wine culture as she nostalgically reflects on how Shaoxing locals made, drank and thought about wine in the 1930s:

## **Shaoxing Wine**

Story One: Making Shaoxing Wine

*Legend –The Origin of Shaoxing Wine*

Story Two: Daughter's Wine

*Legend –The Origin of Daughter's Wine*

Story Three: Drinking Shaoxing Wine

### **Story One: Making Shaoxing Wine**

My hometown of Shaoxing is the most famous wine-producing region in all of China. If you don't believe me, just ask Chinese from other parts of China what they know about Shaoxing. I bet that nine out of ten of them would mention Shaoxing wine.

Many years after I had retired and moved to the United States, I went from Hangzhou back to Shaoxing with my daughter and American son-in-law. As soon as we crossed into the Shaoxing district, the first sight that met my eyes was wine jars piled up like mountains along both sides of the road. Seeing those familiar jars, all the vivid memories of Shaoxing wine from when I was young floated up before my eyes.

Shaoxing wine is made from fermented rice. Good Shaoxing wine is the color of amber, and that's why it's also referred to as "yellow wine."<sup>1</sup> Unlike the strong distilled sorghum liquor of northern China, Shaoxing wine has a low alcohol content, similar to grape wine, and the quality of the water used determines the quality of the wine.

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<sup>1</sup> *Huangjiu* 黄酒.

Shaoxing's climate is characteristically warm and moist. The region, crisscrossed by many rivers, streams, and lakes, flourishes in rice production. Moreover, Shaoxing was favored by nature in that it was blessed with the superb water of Jian Lake, which is located on the southwest side of the old city.<sup>2</sup> The water in Jian Lake is collected from the springs of the Huiji Mountains.<sup>3</sup> The spring water trickles down from the mountains and is filtered by sand and stones. Any other impurities are absorbed by the peat layer at the bottom of the lake.

I remember when I was young the water in Jian Lake was so clear that it looked like a mirror.<sup>4</sup> Shaoxing wine is fermented from high-quality rice and fresh water, and has a naturally fragrant scent. An ancient Chinese poem attests to this: "The water fetched from Jian Lake/ just outside our front door/ makes Shaoxing wine so fragrant that people can smell it ten thousand miles away."<sup>5</sup> No wonder the rice wine made in Shaoxing is renowned for its exceptional taste and fragrance.

Shaoxing wine isn't only famous in China. It's reputed throughout the world. I remember my father once told me that in the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, which was held in San Francisco in 1915 to celebrate the opening of the Panama Canal, Shaoxing wine won a gold medal.

Probably because Shaoxing wine has such a long history, we Shaoxingers like to call our wine "old wine."<sup>6</sup> When I was little, I heard an interesting legend about the origin of Shaoxing wine from my elders:

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<sup>2</sup> *Jian Hu* 鑒湖.

<sup>3</sup> *Huiji Shan* 會稽山.

<sup>4</sup> *Jian* 鑒 literally means "mirror" in Classical Chinese.

<sup>5</sup> *Jiqu menqian Jianhu shui/ niang de Shaojiu wanli xiang* 汲取門前鑒湖水/ 釀得紹酒萬里香.

<sup>6</sup> *Laojiu* 老酒.

### **Legend –The Origin of Shaoxing Wine**

*In the Spring and Autumn Period (770 BC - 476 BC), there were two kingdoms south of the Yangzi River, Wu and Yue.<sup>7</sup> The two kingdoms continually fought and, in 494 BC, Wu conquered Yue and took its king, Goujian, hostage.<sup>8</sup> While imprisoned, King Goujian desperately wanted to get revenge. However, he hid his true feelings and acted as if he was completely defeated. After a while, the King of Wu, Fuchai, allowed Goujian to return home.<sup>9</sup>*

*A few years later, as a result of a severe drought, Yue had a very poor rice harvest, which caused widespread famine. King Goujian called his ministers together to seek their advice. One particularly clever minister, Wen Zhong, devised a strategy to help Yue recover from the famine and enable King Goujian to reclaim the land that Wu had taken. Minister Wen Zhong proposed asking King Fuchai to lend Yue rice to stave off the famine, with the condition that King Goujian would repay him in kind once the crisis had passed. Just as Minister Wen Zhong had predicted, King Fuchai willingly lent the rice, essentially revealing that he no longer considered Yue a threat. Following Minister Wen Zhong's advice, before returning the rice to King Fuchai, King Goujian instructed the farmers to dig hundreds of pits along the shores of the Jian Lake, place woks in the pits, and steam the rice. King Goujian then returned the steamed rice to King Fuchai. Because this rice looked exactly like excellent quality raw rice seeds, the Wu farmers planted it and eagerly awaited the results. But the next year, the farmers were unable to harvest a single grain of rice, which caused major unrest among the people. King Goujian was then able to take back his land from King Fuchai. To celebrate this victory, farmers in Yue used the woks and the water from Jian Lake to boil rice and make wine.*

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<sup>7</sup> The Spring and Autumn (春秋) period was the name given to the first part of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty, in which the nominally Zhou domain was divided into numerous decentralized states in competition with one another. Wu 吳 was located primarily in what is present-day Suzhou in Jiangsu Province. Yue 越 was located primarily in what is present-day Shaoxing in Zhejiang Province.

<sup>8</sup> The legend of King Goujian (勾踐) is famous not only in the Shaoxing region, but throughout all of China.

<sup>9</sup> Fuchai 夫差.

So, I am told, this was how the custom of making Shaoxing wine using water from Jian Lake began. In the old days in Shaoxing, wealthy families would make their own wine at least every two or three years if not every year. My father's cousin, who we called "Uncle Ren," belonged to such a family. In the 1930s, I attended Chunhui middle school in Shangyu County near Shaoxing.<sup>10</sup> Chunhui was a boarding school, so I mostly lived there. Since my parents had separated and my father subsequently had passed away, during breaks, I often stayed at Uncle Ren's place in the Shaoxing region. Uncle Ren had a plot of land in front of the house that was designated specifically for growing rice to make wine. Each year in the spring, a premium variety of sweet rice would be chosen and planted in this field. After the harvest, Uncle Ren would invite a master winemaker to come to his home to make the wine for the family. The winemaker's skills were passed down from generation to generation, as was his set of special winemaking tools.

The winemaker had to come to Uncle Ren's several times. As a curious teenager, I used to observe him with great interest. He first came in early winter to select a small amount of the best rice to rinse, soak, and steam. After the rice was cooled with cold water from the Jian Lake, he would add a yeast package based on a secret recipe that had been handed down for generations, to begin the first fermentation process. Then, the rice would be placed in a crock, and covered with heavy weights. The fermentation usually took a couple of weeks. After this first fermentation, the rice and liquid mixture, called *jiuniang*, would then be used as a starter for making the wine.<sup>11</sup>

The second time the winemaker came he would fetch the *jiuniang*. Then he would soak, drain, and steam a large quantity of premium, sweet rice that had been harvested from the plot in front of Uncle Ren's house. After the rice was cooked, he would spread the rice grains on bamboo trays to cool. Then he would combine the *jiuniang* and the rice. This mixture was transferred into a *gang*, and topped off with

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<sup>10</sup> *Chunhui zhongxue* 春暉中學; *shangyu xian* 上虞縣.

<sup>11</sup> *Jiuniang* 酒娘, literally "mother of wine" since it was used to begin the winemaking process.

water from the Jian Lake.<sup>12</sup> The *gang* would be covered with straws or a quilt, to allow the fermentation process to continue. I remember that all over Shaoxing, every household would have many different *gangs* of varying sizes in the kitchen. Some were used to collect rainwater or well water for drinking and washing; others were used for storing rice and other grains. During the winemaking season, some *gangs* were used to make wine. The sizes of the *gangs* varied from 5, 7, to 10 *shi*.<sup>13</sup> The size of the *gang* depended on how much rice was used to make the wine.

A few months later, the winemaker would come for the third time. He would pour the wine into a big cloth bag and place the bag on a specially designed straining bed, to separate the wine from the pulp. Then he would collect the extracted wine and heat it to stop the fermentation process. After the wine had cooled, it would be poured into *tanzi* of varying sizes (50, 70, or 100 *jin*).<sup>14</sup> All the *tanzi* would be sealed tightly by covering them with lotus leaves and then topped with a thick layer of clay. The final step would be to bury the *tanzi* underground to store them anywhere from a few years to a few decades.

## Story Two: Daughter's Wine

Shaoxing has an interesting custom that revolves around wine. Whenever a daughter was born into a wealthy family, the family would make wine. This wine wasn't just ordinary wine; it was made in anticipation of a daughter's future wedding banquet and was famously called "Daughter's Wine."<sup>15</sup> Once the Daughter's Wine had been made, it would be buried underground until her wedding day. In the past, a

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<sup>12</sup> A *gang* 缸 is a glazed stone vessel, similar to a crock. For photos, see the accompanying teaching materials.

<sup>13</sup> A *shi* 石, also pronounced *dan* and written as 擔 in the North, can be a unit of mass or volume. As a unit of mass, one *dan* is approximately equal to 120 *jin* 斤, 60 kg, or 132 lbs.

<sup>14</sup> A *tanzi* 罈子 also is a glazed stone vessel, but smaller than a *gang*. In this context, *jin* 斤 is a unit of volume used specifically for wine and is approximately equivalent to half a liter or 17 ounces. Thus a 50 *jin tanzi* is about 25 liters or 6.6 gallons, a 70 *jin tanzi* is about 35 liters or 9.2 gallons and a 100 *jin tanzi* is about 50 liters or 13.2 gallons. For photos, see the accompanying teaching materials.

<sup>15</sup> *Nüer jiu* 女兒酒.

girl usually got married at the age of 17 or 18, so the Daughter's Wine would have aged for 17 or 18 years. After the wine jars were unearthed in preparation for the wedding banquet, they would be cleaned of dirt and sand and decorated. I've heard that, early on, the technique for decorating the wine jars was very simple. The family would just paint the jars with a coat of red paint, which symbolized happiness. In fact, Daughter's Wine also was called "daughter's red."<sup>16</sup>

There's an interesting legend about the history of "daughter's wine" that I remember and chuckle about even today because of my own personal experience:

### ***Legend –The Origin of Daughter's Wine***

*Around 1,000 years ago, during the Song Dynasty, there lived in Shaoxing a hardworking and talented tailor. Once he got married, he eagerly anticipated being blessed with a son. It happened that just around the time of the fall harvest when he was working in his shop in town, he received the news that his wife was pregnant. The excited tailor hurried back to his home village and asked the master winemaker to make him several big jars of wine to be served for his son's one-month celebration.*

--Speaking of the one-month celebration, or *manyue*, it's a significant occasion in Chinese tradition and requires careful advance planning. Family and friends from all around the community come together to celebrate the addition of a new family

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<sup>16</sup> *Nüer hong* 女兒紅.

member.<sup>17</sup> Serving wine at this celebration is very important. The banquet, and by extension, the celebration itself, is called *manyue jiu*.<sup>18</sup>

Talking about *manyue jiu* always makes me laugh because I actually got drunk when we celebrated my daughter's *manyue jiu*. I hadn't had any alcohol for nine months while I was pregnant. At the banquet, every guest toasted me and made me drink so many glasses of wine!

*The following spring, counter to the tailor's expectations, his wife gave birth to a girl. The tailor, who believed like most people back then that sons were essential and daughters were of little value, was extremely upset. In his anger, he decided not to hold a party and instead took the jars of new wine and buried them all in his backyard under a sweet-scented osmanthus tree and forgot about them.*

*Time flew by, and before he knew it, his daughter was a teenager. Clever and quick-witted by nature, she was not only beautiful but also very talented - she learned all the sewing techniques from her father as well as embroidery, which caused the business to boom. The tailor came to realize that having a daughter wasn't so bad after all. He cleverly arranged to keep the business in the family. Instead of marrying off his daughter to another family, he planned to marry his daughter to his best apprentice on the condition that his apprentice would take the tailor's family name.*

*As this was an especially joyous occasion for the family, the tailor decided to hold a big wedding banquet. While everyone was celebrating, he discovered that he had*

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<sup>17</sup> *Manyue* 滿月, the celebration held for a newborn baby after he or she had reached the age of one month, remains an important occasion in many Chinese households. In the old days, many babies died prematurely shortly after birth. The first month was considered particularly dangerous, both for the child and the mother, who would generally be kept indoors during this time. After one month, a baby was considered to have overcome the greatest dangers and during the *manyue* celebration, many families would introduce the baby to relatives and close friends for the first time.

<sup>18</sup> 滿月酒.



*run out of wine. In desperation, the tailor remembered the wine he had buried under the osmanthus tree. Although he wasn't sure if the wine would be any good after nearly twenty years, fearing that his guests would judge him to be a poor host, he hurriedly dug up the jars. When he opened the first jar, a sweet fragrance immediately filled the banquet hall. After tasting it, all the guests concluded that this was the best Shaoxing wine they had ever tasted. Once this story got out, people from all over Shaoxing adopted the custom, believing that 18-year-old wine was much better tasting. Thus, "daughter's wine" was born.*

Actually, there was a kind of "son's" wine, too. When the national civil service examination system was firmly established in China, whenever a son was born, families would make and bury wine in hopes that this would bring the son good luck in taking the exam when he turned 18 years old. If he successfully passed the exam, especially if he received the top score and became the *zhuangyuan* -- the champion of the civil service exam -- the family would celebrate by drinking the 18-year-old wine. Thus, this wine was named "*zhuangyuan red*."<sup>19</sup>

When I was young, daughter's wine jars were much more elaborately decorated. Wealthy families of brides would hire the best artists in the area to paint the jars. Typical decorations would include flowers and plants and traditional decorative wedding expressions such as "Conjugal bliss!" and "Good luck to the dragon and phoenix!" According to Chinese tradition, the dragon usually represents the emperor and the phoenix represents the empress. On the daughter's wine jars, these animals represented the groom and the bride.

After the jars were painted, the family would choose an auspicious day for the wedding to take place. The bride's family usually would include the daughter's wine jars in the bride's dowry alongside suitcases full of bedding, silk clothes, and jewelry. The most important thing in the bride's dowry was a red lacquer, painted wooden toilet called the "sons and grandsons toilet," which carried with it the blessing of

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<sup>19</sup> *Zhuangyuan hong* 狀元紅.

having lots of children and grandchildren.<sup>20</sup> Even the poorest family in the village would include this “sons and grandsons toilet” in their daughter’s dowry. The bride’s family would then send the wine, the suitcases, the toilet, etc. to the groom’s home.

According to a Shaoxing custom, before sending the dowry to the groom’s home, the family was required to parade it around the entire village. The bride’s family would hire several strong young men to carry the dowry on their shoulders around the town to show it off; this was called “sending off the dowry.”<sup>21</sup> Wherever the procession went, everyone in the village, old and young, male and female, would come out “in full force” to watch.<sup>22</sup> Shaoxing is very much like Venice in that it is full of canals and rivers. Thus, if the groom’s family lived downstream, after the dowry was finished being shown off around the bride’s neighborhood, a boat unique to Shaoxing, called a “black tent boat” would carry it to the groom’s family’s home.<sup>23</sup> On the day of the wedding banquet, the groom’s family would open the wine and serve it to the guests. The jar was painted with lucky phrases and flowers, referred to as *huadiao*. So, Daughter’s Wine also came to be called *huadiao*.<sup>24</sup>

If the bride’s family was very wealthy, the amount of *huadiao* they sent to the groom’s home would be more than what was needed for the banquet. The groom’s family would rebury the jars they didn’t consume at the wedding banquet to save them for the next generation of marriages. The reburied wine, which would be close to 40 years old when it was finally opened at the granddaughter’s wedding, was called “grand” *diao*.<sup>25</sup>

When I was living in the countryside in Shaoxing, I had an opportunity to taste grand *diao* at a relative’s wedding banquet. Because the wine had fermented for 40 years, it was so thick and rich that it was literally undrinkable. It had to be diluted with at

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<sup>20</sup> Zisun tong 子孫桶.

<sup>21</sup> Chujia zhuang 出嫁妝.

<sup>22</sup> The phrase *qing chao chu dong* 傾巢出動 has a military connotation of soldiers gathering in full force.

<sup>23</sup> *Wupeng chuan* 烏篷船.

<sup>24</sup> *Huadiao jiu* 花雕酒.

<sup>25</sup> *Taidiao* 太雕.

least three-fourths part fresh wine before it could be served. Personally, I never liked the taste of grand *diao*. But I've heard that in today's very commercialized Chinese society, aged Shaoxing wine has become a hot commodity. According to one newspaper article, a 50-liter jar of Shaoxing wine aged since the end of the 20th century was sold for 330,000 Chinese yuan!<sup>26</sup> I wonder what our ancestors would think about that. The business-minded ones might regret that they didn't bury enough wine so that their descendants could have had a few jars of great-grand *diao* or great-great-grand *diao*.

### **Story Three: Drinking Shaoxing Wine<sup>27</sup>**

According to Shaoxing custom, wine should be warmed up before drinking. Since ancient times, Shaoxing also has flourished in pewterware production. Therefore, Shaoxingers developed a specially designed double-layered pewter wine pot to keep the wine warm. The outside of the pot doesn't look much different from a Western-style teapot with a handle and a spout. But, inside, it has two layers. The wine is poured into the inner layer, and hot water is filled between the outer and inner layers. The hot water heats the wine, which is in the inner layer, and keeps it warm for a long time.

When I was young, these wine pots were also part of the bride's dowry and would be used to serve wine at the wedding banquet. Usually, there were several of these pots on every table. If the bride's family was wealthy, they would need to bring many wine pots for the wedding. I've been told that since these pewter pots are hard to find now, if you happen to inherit even a few of them, you can sell them at an antique market for big money.

Growing up in the wine region, many Shaoxingers naturally like to drink wine. Even poor farmers who couldn't afford to make their own wine routinely consumed a bowl or two of wine at the end of the day. After a long day of hard labor, the farmers

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<sup>26</sup> Approximately 50,000 USD.

<sup>27</sup> *Chi laojiu* 吃老酒; the phrase in Chinese actually uses the word for "eat" rather than "drink."

would come back from the fields with hoes slung over their shoulders, and their first stop would be the taverns, where they would rest and have a bowl of wine. These taverns were very much like Lu Xun's Xianheng Tavern.<sup>28</sup> When the farmers entered, they would approach the counter, shaped like a carpenter's square, toss a few copper coins onto it, and ask the bartender for a bowl of wine, along with Kong Yiji's favorite aniseed-flavored fava beans.<sup>29</sup> When I was staying at Uncle Ren's village, I often would see these old farmers leaning against the bar, sipping wine and snacking on fava beans while chatting with one another, and letting the warm wine mix together with the glow of the setting sun to slowly wash away a day of toiling in the fields.<sup>30</sup>

In the old days, wealthy Shaoxing landowners often invited craftsmen, such as carpenters, roofers, and tailors, to do odd jobs in their large households. When these craftsmen came to work, the landowners would open a jar of wine as a way to treat them. If the family was very wealthy, those who lived and worked in the household would drink wine every day with lunch and supper.

My first experience tasting wine was at Uncle Ren's during my summer vacation when there were many craftsmen working in the house. Once a big jar of wine was opened, it had to be drunk, otherwise it would go sour in just one day. So, we children also were given the opportunity to drink wine. As I mentioned previously, Shaoxing wine has a relatively low alcohol content and is sweet and tangy. In the summertime, it is very refreshing. So, I had my very first drinking lesson over summer vacation in Shaoxing. Without even realizing it, my tolerance for alcohol

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<sup>28</sup> Xianheng Tavern 咸亨酒店 was the tavern frequented by the erudite beggar Kong Yiji 孔乙己 in a short story of the same name written by the famous author and Shaoxing native, Lu Xun 鲁迅.

<sup>29</sup> In the countryside, farmers use bowls rather than cups for drinking wine. See note 28 for information on Kong Yiji.

<sup>30</sup> The Chinese phrase here is very pretty: *rang wenre de laojiu banzhe xiyang de yuhui, manmande diqu yiri de xinlao* 讓溫熱的老酒拌著夕陽的餘輝，慢慢地滌去一日的辛勞。

rose.<sup>31</sup> At my best, I was able to drink two *jin* of good Shaoxing wine and my face wouldn't even change color.

Although I have a high tolerance for alcohol in the many years after I left Shaoxing, I rarely drank wine, except at obligatory social occasions. Now that I live abroad, it's very difficult to get really good Shaoxing wine. About twenty years ago, I was visiting old friends in Houston, Texas. My friend's son knew I was partial to Shaoxing wine. At the end of my visit, when he was seeing me off at the airport, he presented me with a jar of wine whose elaborate patterns had an authentic Shaoxing air to them, a *huadiao*, which he had made a special trip to Chinatown to buy. But when I arrived at my destination at National Airport in Washington, D.C., the wine jar that had traveled such a great distance from my hometown had broken. The only comfort I had was that the whole National Airport smelled like Shaoxing wine. I told my American son-in-law "Well, at least this was very cost-effective. A small jar of Shaoxing wine entertained several hundred people!"

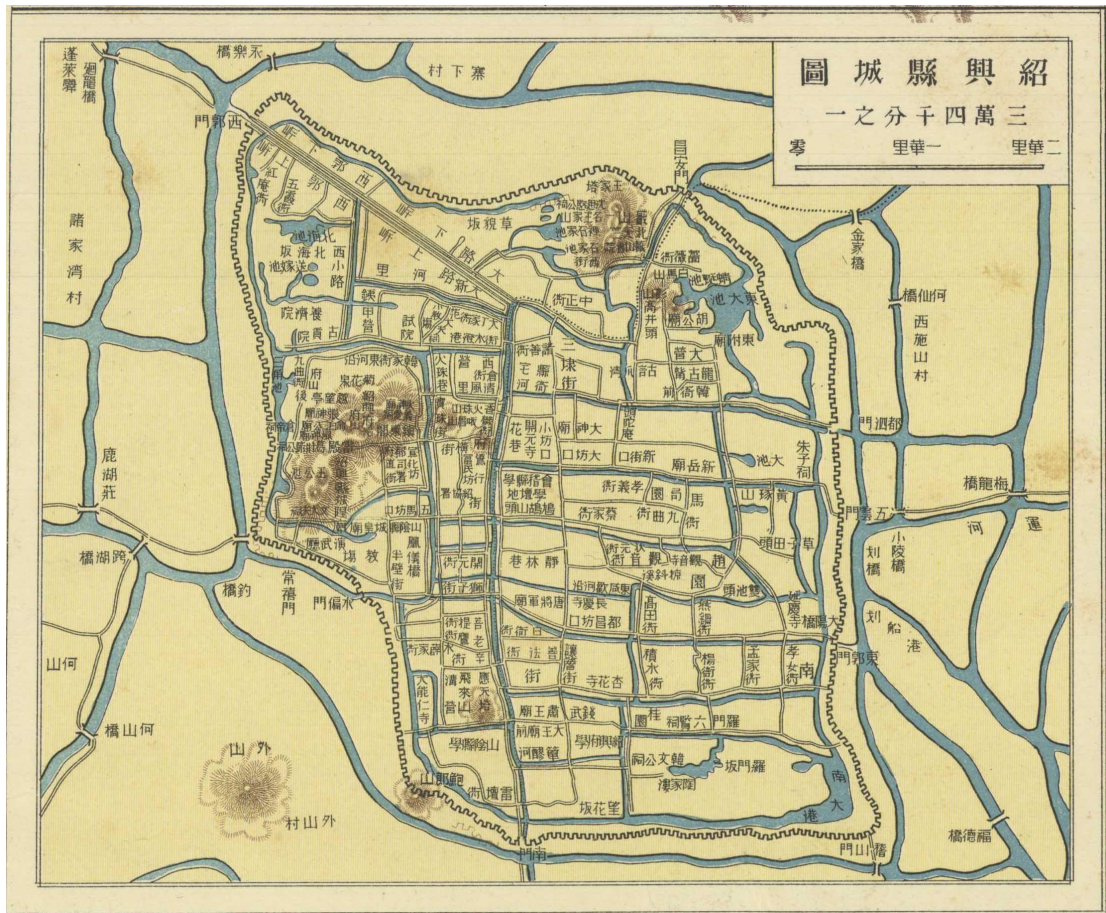
In my not-too-short life, I have tasted many wines, Chinese and Western, but Shaoxing wine is still my favorite. Whenever several cups of Shaoxing wine warm my belly, it brings back fond memories of the time I spent in the countryside in Shaoxing when I was young.

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<sup>31</sup> In Chinese, the term for having a high tolerance for alcohol is *hailiang* 海量, literally, "the capacity of the ocean."

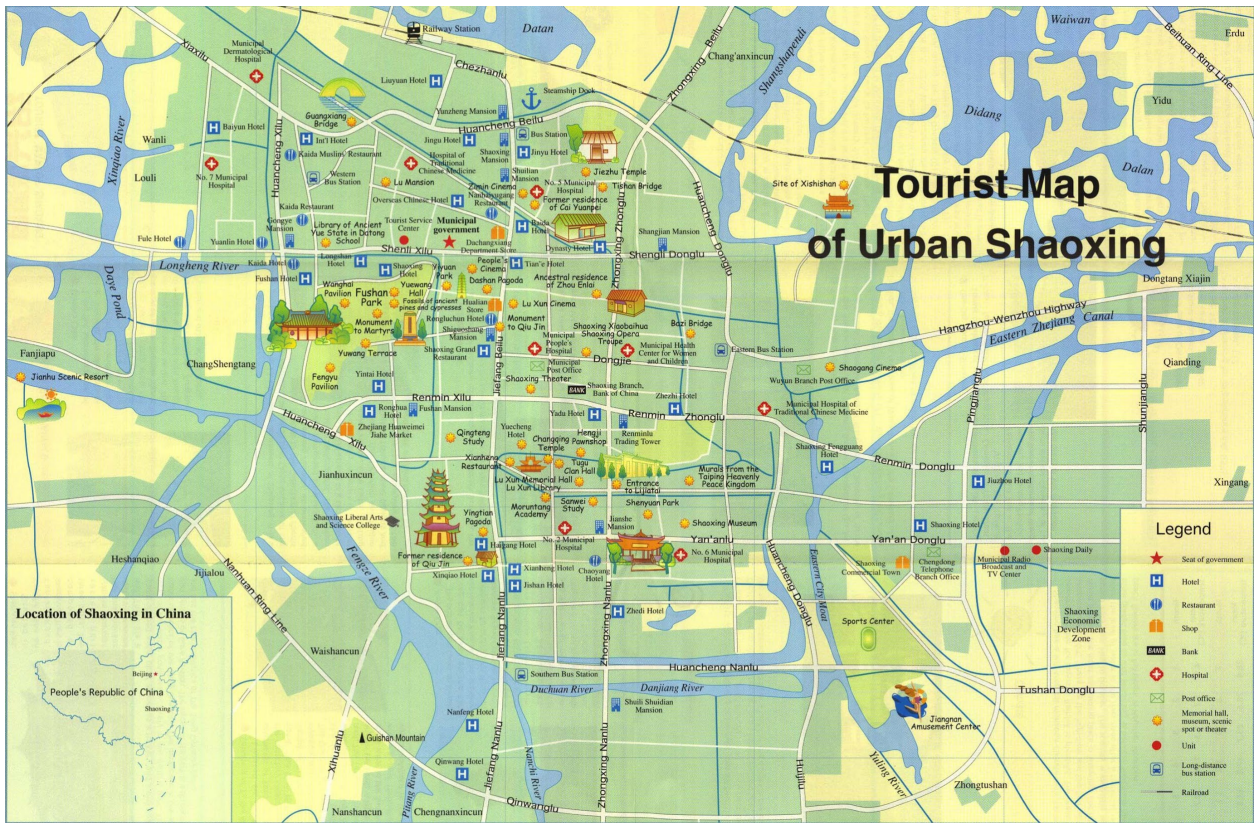
## Teaching materials for Shaoxing Stories

1. **Personal artifact evaluation:** Now that you have read the Shaoxing wine stories, choose an object, a book, a photograph, or some other personal item that has special significance for you. In no more than five double-spaced pages, explain how this personal item links your present to the past, why and how it matters to you, when it takes on special significance, and what it helps you understand about your place in time. You might also describe the meaning and uses of this item over time. [Note: In the Appendix (pp. 26-30) is an artifact essay by Amy Dang, a student majoring in Asian and Asian American Studies at Stony Brook University.]
2. **Maps of Shaoxing:** Examine the two maps below. How has Shaoxing changed since 1917? [Hint: Look at waterways, roads, walls, and the railway.]



“Zhejiang Sheng Mingxi Quantu” 浙江省明細全圖 [map]. 1:850,000. Shanghai: Shanghai Shangwu Yinshuguan 上海商務印書館, 1917.





Shaoxing, Contemporary Tourist Map  
[www.chinamaps.info/shaoxing/](http://www.chinamaps.info/shaoxing/)

On the tourist map above, what types of sites are labeled and what does this say about Shaoxing's identity today?

- Discussion and Reflection:** Read "Liberating Women," pages 279-282 in Patricia Ebrey, *Cambridge Illustrated History of China* (Cambridge University Press, 7th Printing, 2004). In the Shaoxing stories, in the section on Daughter's Wine, how are women's roles depicted? Compare this to the emerging ideas of women in early 20th Century China.

4. **Zhoushan winemaking equipment** – The following photographs are from a wine factory in Zhoushan, an island-city about 200km east of Shaoxing also in Zhejiang Province. The factory is owned by Heyuan Wine Industry. It was originally founded in the 1950s as a state-owned enterprise called Dinghai Wine Factory, but was privatized in 1998 as a result of the economic reforms instituted under Deng Xiaoping. You can visit the factory's website at <http://www.zs-hy.com/>. The winemakers at Heyuan pride themselves in using traditional equipment and techniques to produce extremely high quality *laojiu*. As shown below, the process is quite similar to the one Yuanzi describes in her memoirs about Shaoxing wine.



*“I took these photos in May of 2013. I asked my good friend, Gu Liuqi, whose parents both worked at the factory for three decades, whether the wine they produced was similar to Shaoxing wine. He told me that it was basically the same thing, and that he found it quite annoying that people everywhere only knew about Shaoxing wine when Zhoushan wine was just as good or better.” -Annetta Fotopoulos*



Lime, stored in these *gangs* 缸, is used to sterilize other *gangs* that are used for winemaking.





After the rice has been steamed and cooled, it is mixed with bricks of *jiuqu* 酒曲, a kind of fermentation starter grown from a combination of mold, yeast and bacteria. A small hole is left in the middle for the rice to “sweat” (part of the fermentation process whereby the rice releases liquid containing alcohol, water, and sugar).





The *gangs* are covered with hemp cloth, and stored at a temperature of between 30 to 35°C for about 30 hours. The resulting product after the initial fermentation is *jiuniang* 酒娘.





To the *jiuniang* is added liquid (water or something else depending on the type of wine to be made) and amylase, an enzyme that breaks down the excess starch into sugar and allows further fermentation, resulting in a higher alcohol content and richer flavor. A day later, more freshly steamed rice is gradually fed into the *gangs*.





After the mixture has been strained and heated to stop the fermentation process, it is poured into *tanzi* 罈子 and sealed with bamboo or lotus leaves (or nowadays a more cost-effective synthetic material as shown above). This is then covered in clay and left to age, the longer the better. In the photograph above, one of the jars has been opened for sampling.

**5. A one-act play from *Daughter's Wine* for students to perform**

**Characters:**

Narrator One  
Narrator Two  
Tailor  
Wife  
Customer  
Daughter  
Tailor's Assistant

***Narrator One:*** Folklore traces the custom of making “daughter’s wine” back to the Song Dynasty, when there lived in Shaoxing a hardworking and talented tailor.

***Narrator Two:*** Once the tailor had established his own shop in the town square, he decided to get married and buy a house in the countryside.

**Tailor’s Wife:** Dear husband, I am happy to tell you that we will be having a baby soon.

**Tailor:** My dear wife, thank you! How wonderful and lucky for us. I’m sure we will have a healthy boy. I must go right away back to my home village and ask the master winemaker to make several big jars of wine to serve at our son’s one-month celebration.

***Narrator One:*** That spring, the tailor’s wife gave birth to a very healthy baby – girl. The tailor, who believed like most people back then that sons were essential and daughters were of little value, was extremely upset. In his anger, he decided not to hold a party.

**Tailor:** Well, wife, there’s no sense in celebrating a girl! She can’t take over my business or do anything to help us.

**Tailor's Wife:** I'm sorry, dear husband. At least I can teach her to be a faithful daughter and eventually a good wife.

**Narrator Two:** *Instead, the tailor took the jars of new wine and buried them all in his backyard under a sweet-scented osmanthus tree and forgot about them.*

**Narrator One:** *Time flew by, and before he knew it, his daughter was a teenager. Clever and quick-witted by nature, she was not only beautiful but also very talented - she learned all the sewing techniques from her father as well as embroidery, which caused the business to boom.*

-- A customer enters the shop --

**Daughter:** I'm sure I can make the finest clothes you have ever had. Here, try on this jacket, which is my father's special design.

**Customer:** Wow, this fits beautifully.

**Daughter:** And, if you buy two, I could give you a special price.

**Customer:** Such a good deal! I must tell all my friends about the beautiful clothes, and the price.

**Tailor:** Daughter, your embroidery is almost as good as mine – and the customers love you. I guess having a daughter isn't so bad after all.

**Narrator Two:** *The tailor decided that he had to plan for the future and keep the business in the family.*

**Tailor:** Wife, instead of marrying our daughter off to some other family, why don't we arrange to have our daughter marry my best apprentice?

**Tailor's Wife:** I guess we *could* do that. Would he take our last name, too?

**Tailor:** Yes! It's a little unusual, but it would work. Let me talk this over with my best apprentice.

**Tailor's Wife:** Okay.

***Narrator One:*** *The two young people were engaged to be married and, as this was an especially joyous occasion for the family, the tailor decided to hold a big wedding banquet.*

***Narrator Two:*** *While everyone was celebrating, the tailor discovered that he had run out of wine.*

**Tailor:** Oh how embarrassing. We are out of wine. What am I going to do?

**Tailor's Wife:** Our guests will think that we are terrible hosts!

**Tailor:** I wonder...the wine I buried in the backyard...maybe it's still good.

**Tailor's Wife:** You better find out right away!

***Narrator One:*** *Although he wasn't sure that the wine would be any good after nearly twenty years, fearing that his guests would judge him to be a poor host, the tailor hurriedly dug up the jars. When he opened the first jar, a sweet fragrance immediately filled the banquet hall.*

**Tailor's Apprentice:** What is that wonderful smell? (*tasting the wine*) This is the best wine I have ever tasted!

**Daughter:** Father, you have really honored us with such a wonderful drink.



**Narrator Two:** *After tasting it, all the guests concluded that this was the best Shaoxing wine they had ever tasted. Once this story got out, people from all over Shaoxing adopted the custom believing that 18-year-old wine was much better tasting.*

**Tailor:** As you are my most treasured daughter, I think we should call this “daughter’s wine.”

**Tailor’s wife:** Ah, and we now have a new family business!

**Narrator One:** *So, the bride and groom not only were blessed with a happy marriage, and a new business, but also they eventually had a son and a daughter who carried on the family tradition of “daughter’s wine.”*

## 6. Supplementary Readings:

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## **APPENDIX**

### **My Artifact -- Durian**

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Durian is a fruit that has a prickly, thick outer casing that shelters fleshy, pungent yellow edible innards. The average weight of this fruit (casing and all) can range from two to ten pounds. Durian comes from Southeast Asia, and is mainly exported from Thailand. It has been dubbed the “King of Fruit” in many Southeast Asian countries for different reasons: The size of the fruit is large enough to kill someone, the smell is awfully pungent, and it is believed to be a super fruit rich in nutrients. The scent of this fruit is highly controversial. Those who are unfamiliar with the fruit often regard it in disgust, saying that it smells similar to sewage, rotting flesh, or cheese.

People who absolutely loathe the scent will often avoid eating or trying the fruit entirely. In certain countries around Asia, the fruit has been banned from entering hotels and public transportation simply because of its smell. Others have different opinions on the scent. Those who like it say that it is strangely reminiscent of a mix of custard and garlic in both smell and flavor.

My family remains divided on this fruit, and I stand in favor of it. I cannot recall the first time I tasted this unique fruit. I believe I was very young—maybe five or six years old. I can remember asking my father “what is that porcupine doing in our house?” He laughed and replied saying that it wasn’t an animal, it was a fruit. When it came time to open it, the skin of the fruit was so thick that it normally took a cleaver or, what my family normally used, a screwdriver, to pierce through it. A durian has about three to six or more “pockets” that contain the fleshy meats of the fruit, and a lot of energy is put into cutting open each pocket to retrieve the flesh.

I remember my father and the rest of my family watching and waiting for my reaction of the smell. One’s response to the smell usually determines whether they will like

eating the fruit. My reaction was neutral. I neither liked it nor disliked it. The rest of my father's side of the family absolutely adored the smell. The texture of the fruit is very yellow, mushy, and stringy, and normally each piece of flesh had a brown seed in it. The size of the seed varies depending on the size and proportion of the durian fruit to the size of the individual flesh. Sometimes it can be as small as a quarter, and other times it can be as large as a plump, ripe apricot.

Durian was the first food that introduced me to the concept of yin and yang. When I first ate durian, my dad called it a "hot" food and I shouldn't eat too much of it or else I'll have nosebleeds (the same thing happens when I ate too much chocolate, which was another "hot" food). When my dad called it a "hot" food, I was very confused. The fruit in front of me was clearly cold in temperature; it had just come out of the fridge! From that time onward, he continued to label different foods as "hot" and "cold" and I was just as confused as before. He called soup a "cold" food/beverage, even though it was clearly piping hot, and eventually I thought he was going crazy. It wasn't until my mom sat me down and tried to explain to me the Chinese way of eating a "balanced" meal that I started to slightly understand. When I took AAS221: Chinese Science and Civilization, I finally realized what my father meant when he talked about "hot and cold" foods. "Hot" foods were "yang" and "cold" foods were "yin." Since durians are considered to be a yang food, eating too much of it will cause hot temperament, and increased blood circulation, which is why my nose bled every time I ate too much durian. I realized my father was not entirely crazy after all.

The tradition of eating durian on my father's side of the family can be traced through generations. My grandparents moved from China to Vietnam before they settled down to have a family. For what reason did they move, my father never gained clarity on that and now it's a bit late to ask. My father and his twelve siblings started working at a very young age. Many of them worked in retail jobs at the age of ten or twelve years old. They would sell sweets and food goods like cookies, pastries, ice cream, different varieties of "bao" or Chinese bread, an assortment of dim sum goods, etc. One of my father's older brothers worked for a store (and eventually took over it) that specialized in durian desserts. The store was particularly well known for my uncle's durian ice cream. My family would recollect it as being the most fragrant

and creamiest ice cream they have ever eaten; American ice cream cannot compare to the luxuriousness of Vietnamese durian ice cream. Strangely enough, even though durian ice cream is sold in several grocery stores in Chinatown, my family refused to try it. I eventually learned the reason why. After I first fell in love with the durian flavor, I came across durian-flavored wafers at a Chinese supermarket in Chinatown and I asked my father to buy it for me. When I opened the package to try it, the cookies smelled horrific. Personally, it is normal to me for durians to smell differently than it tastes, but the taste was even worse than the smell! It was as if someone took the essence of a garbage dump and mixed it into the innocent cookies. Ever since that horrific experience, I never ventured off to try durian-flavored anything, I'd rather eat the fruit.

Every time my family made a trip to Chinatown in the summer, they would look and see if there were any good durians around. Often times, they would choose not to buy them, not because they were not available, but because they usually were too pricey to buy. Durian was a luxury treat for my family, and the cost of a fruit back when I was child was usually \$16-18 a fruit or \$2-3 per pound. Nowadays, prices have increased to \$25-35 a fruit or \$4-5 per pound (and sometimes the prices can be as high as \$8 per pound, making it a grand average total of \$56 for one fruit!). Looking for the perfect fruit is particularly hard with durian. Normally, if one were to look for a ripe durian in its native country, they would simply have to check the stalk of the fruit. If the end is jagged, it means that the fruit was ripe and plump enough to fall off the tree naturally. If the end has a clean cut, the fruit was hacked off prematurely. Since durian fruit is exported from Southeast Asia, they are usually cut prematurely and frozen and shipped across the globe. Hence, an alternative method is used to hunt down a good durian, but this method is also a gamble of luck. My family looks for large bulges on the durian, usually the bigger the better. However, appearances can be deceiving and sometimes durians may look bulky on the outside, but have thicker skins, meaning less flesh to eat. Meanwhile other times, the fruit may be fleshy but the flesh did not have enough time to develop its full flavor, making it tough and bland to eat. The optimal fruit would have a thin shell with many pods/casings, and each was filled with plump, soft, and fragrant flesh.

Durian has a weird way of connecting people to others. Because of its controversial smell, it can either bring people to you or deter people, to run away from you. Its scent is what caused a divide in my family—my father’s side absolutely loves everything about durian, from the way it smells to the way it tastes, but my mother’s side, on the other hand, absolutely hates it and wants nothing to do with it. I thought all hope was lost on my mother’s side until I went to China in 2012 to meet her family. My mother’s sister-in-law was the only family member I met in China who actually appreciated the taste of durian as much as I did. She was a stranger that I barely knew, but we quickly bonded over commensality, and it was all because of durian. She even introduced me to a few well-known durian dim sum dishes that I found to be exceptionally tasty. At the same time, I found out my sister hated the fruit based on the smell test—the same test my family performed on me years ago. At the dining room table, there was a distinct split. My mother and sister were trying to sit as far away as possible from me and my aunt because they could barely handle the smell, while my aunt and I were thoroughly enjoying the heavenly flesh of the fruit.

Fast forward to two years later when I transferred to Stony Brook University knowing no one on campus. Eventually I met a group of three Asian and Asian American Studies majors through a group project and durian became my conversation icebreaker. Surprisingly, they all knew about the fruit and they all loved it. One day, one of my group members was ambitious enough to bring the fruit on campus, and they opened the fruit in another fellow group member’s room. At the same time, there was an archery club holding their weekly meeting in the same room. The archery club’s president asked his club members to perform a dare that tested their bravery—they had to taste the fruit. Most of them rejected it once the smell hit their noses, but some brave souls did try it and very few liked the flavor. Unfortunately, the party was cut short when a few dorm-mates found the smell to be too repulsive and reported a gas leak. Police and campus security made a visit to see if any suspicious activity was happening in the room, but they were all surprised to find that the smell was originating from a small pile of yellow mush that we call “fruit.”

My family no longer buys durian from Chinatown because the price has become too expensive for them and carrying the fruit home has proved to be too hazardous with their age. However, every time I visit Chinatown, I always pay a visit to a specific stand on Mott Street because I can always trust the seller to have the best selection, and then I will bring home the ripest one to my family. In the future, I hope to someday travel to Thailand so that I can try what people call “the best durian in the world” and maybe continue the tradition of eating durian with my future husband and children. I hope that the fruit doesn’t fall too far from the tree, and they will enjoy it as much as I do.