



# Analysis of the Diverse and Prosperous Liquor Culture in the Northwest

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## Abstract

The liquor culture in the Northwest region of China evolved uniquely from the Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China. During this period, the local industry and ethnic diversity made drinking an integral part of social life. Each of the many ethnic groups in the region, from the Uygur to the Kazakh, showcased their own rich drinking customs, which held symbolic significance in various social events. As mainstream culture began to integrate, it further diversified the drinking practices of the region. Banquets hosted by officials and nobles became important social occasions where liquor often took center stage. Moreover, liquor played a significant role in the poetry of literati and scholars, representing not only culture but also emotion. The drinking culture of the Northwest during this period fostered a vibrant social life and stimulated the local economy, particularly the liquor industry, which experienced significant development during this time.

## Keywords

The Northwest; liquor culture; liquor industry

The liquor industry in the Northwest developed rapidly from the Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China, and drinking became an essential part of local residents' lives. Known for its unique spicy taste, the Northwest baijiu helped people keep out the cold in winter. Drinking around the stove to resist the cold, served as both a way to keep warm and relax. As mainland culture influenced the Northwest, liquor consumption increased in banquets and daily life, becoming a social symbol. This change in consumption habits promoted the liquor industry's prosperity in the Northwest.

## 1. Liquor customs in traditional festivals

With the closer relationship between the mainland and the Northwest, some traditional festivals, customs, culture, art, and music in the mainland have also begun to spread in the Northwest. In particular, the traditional festival customs of the Han nationality, such as the Spring Festival, Lantern Festival, Land Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, and Mid-Autumn Festival, with their rich and colorful contents, add a different style to the festival culture of various ethnic groups in the Northwest. In addition, in addition to the festival customs, Urumqi, as the political and military center of the Northwest, the south of the city is full of the sound of music, creating a strong cultural atmosphere. "Restaurant restaurants, daily drama, count money to buy a seat, slightly like the capital" (Ji Xiaolan & Hao Jun, 1991).

New Year's Day, known as the first day of the first lunar month, is the oldest and grand traditional festival of the Han nationality. Celebrations are equally grand in the Northwest, with people performing worship of gods to show respect to ancestors and gods. Local officials gather in the Longevity Palace and kneel to congratulate the emperor. Ordinary people set up incense cases and worship to show piety. After completing the ceremonies, people visit relatives and friends to celebrate. For instance, during the Spring Festival in Manas, local officials and scholars came to celebrate, but Lin Zexu was unable to attend due to illness and only sent people to congratulate them. According to

etiquette, hosts asked guests to congratulate to express gratitude. The New Year's Day festival is also recorded as a time when men and women visited each other to celebrate, with the rich hosting banquets and treating each other. Mutual drinking was an important part of the custom (Zhong Fang, 1937).

In the Northwest, especially in regions where the Han people reside, the traditional Mid-Autumn custom is not the only form of celebration observed during this period. Rather, they also hold lively evening festivities to mark the occasion, much like their counterparts on the mainland. This is corroborated by historical records which detail a notable instance of an official hosting a refugee banquet, a gathering that was described as being just as lively and spirited as those typically held on the mainland. Meanwhile, the Mongolian people, who also celebrate the New Year with a drink, have a uniquely their own ceremony involving liquor. To begin with, they spray curtains with soju, a liquor made from rice, which is a customary drink during the New Year in Korea. Moreover, they sprinkle liquor on the open window of their ancestral hall, a ritual believed to symbolically wash away evil spirits and impurities. To top it off, they dip their chopsticks into the liquor and use them to smear the mouths of their idols or icons, praying for peace and cleanliness in the New Year. Through these rituals, they believe they can secure good fortune and happiness for their community. These different customs, each with their own set of beliefs and rituals, serve as vivid examples of the diverse cultures and belief systems that coexist within the different ethnic groups, even during festivals.

Mainland festivals and customs, as well as art, music, and culture, have spread to the Northwest enriching its festival culture. New Year's Day and Mid-Autumn Festival are celebrated with liquor, a new element in the Northwest culture, and promoting cultural exchange between the two places.

## 2. Drinking activity was prevalent among the nobles

In the Northwest there was a group of Qing Dynasty nobles and royalty who held significant influence. One notable member was Zilan, an imperial clan official exiled to Urumqi, who lived a privileged and luxurious life comparable to Beijing.

As a member of the imperial family, his special status and luxurious lifestyle influenced local government officials in the Northwest. For example, Pan Xiaosu, promoted to governor of the Northwest in 1902, was even more attached to Zilan and advocated for officials to "eat the nursing meeting," or take turns dining. This influenced the frequent official banquets, almost daily and accompanied by opera performances. Zilan and other former nobles maintained a capital-like lifestyle in the Northwest, making recreational activities like banquets, drinking, and opera popular. However, this extravagant life changed in 1905 with the appointment of a new governor, who reduced his allowance and advised him to follow the law. This move restrained him but did not change his love of drinking activities. For example, in 1907, "Zilan drank countless cups of green Chinese spirits like poison," vividly showing his deep drinking habit. In 1911, Yuan Dahua succeeded him as governor of the Northwest grateful to the Qing Dynasty and indulgent to Zilan. Therefore, Zilan continued to live a good life in the Northwest holding big banquets and drinking. However, with the 1911 Revolution outbreak and situation change, Zilan finally left the Northwest [(Finland) Madahan (Carl Gustaf Mannerheim), 2004].

During the Qing Dynasty, there were obvious differences between the royal nobles and officials relegated to the Northwest between the groups represented by Zilan and another group of local Han officials. As a representative of the local Han officials, Lin Zexu in the late Qing Dynasty often drank to relieve his sorrows in his daily life, and this phenomenon is quite common.

Lin Zexu, exiled in the Northwest expressed his homesickness and anguish through poetry during his time there. These poems offer a glimpse into both his personal emotions and the social state of the Northwest in the Qing Dynasty. In his Northwest poems, Lin Zexu described his helplessness and used reading and drinking to cope with his sorrows. One poem, written when he was in his 60s and suffering from illness, expresses his boredom and desire for alcohol." (Liu Changming & Zhou Xuan, 2006). He borrowed his pawn of spring clothes to express his determination to buy liquor. Even after several years of exile in the Northwest, Lin Zexu still could not forget his hometown, but he also gradually adapted to life in the Northwest, so he wrote a poem "Snow moon Tianshan bright night light, side sound used to listen to sing yi cool. Lonely village liquor sorrow rogue, across the courtyard red skirt Le not Yang" (Liu Changming and Zhou Xuan, 2006), meaning that the bright moon shines on the Tianshan Mountains, and the snow shines together. Here, I have been used to hearing the sound of music and dance in the Northwest When bored, drink off your sorrows. In general, Lin Zexu, as a representative of local Han officials, used his sorrows to relieve his depression and homesickness during his exile in the Northwest. His poems truly reflect his state of mind and life

during this period.

It can be seen that in the Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China, there were a special group of officials in the Northwest including royal relatives and demoted officials, whose drinking activities were very frequent. As a prominent assistant official of the state, Zilan lived a privileged and luxurious life in the Northwest which had a profound influence on local officials. However, the demoted Han officials, represented by Lin Zexu, used alcohol to relieve their sorrows and their inner depression and homesickness.

### 3. Drinking activities in the diary of modern scholars visiting the Northwest

Xie Bin's description of Huiyuan City in his Travel Notes focuses on the city: "Wen liquor is romantic, flourishing, with the eyes of 'little Beijing'. And Huifang Garden, Tianfuju two restaurants, then one after another, the scale of the macro open, several wins wu Xiangqu Garden, big auspicious, TaiYu." This indicates that drinking had already become a prevalent trend in major cities of The Northwestern region of China. Later, Xie Bin investigated Shule by local officials' banquet, "Near the lunch scattered, returned to the office, on the Mattai luncheon. Horse drinking and fishing color, foul smell carried the way, Yu Xiaoxiao than for the plain gentleman. Some will be more meaningful, laugh as to spray, cause the fence overlooking, no shame of the horsewomen, laugh at each other, noisy Chen full room, move when the beginning to rest. After drinking, take a picture as a memorial, travel is home." He attended another dinner party and drank alcohol, "Wang (step duan) is also at the table, sex hao in liquor, and good singing, from the liquor, more than 100 kinds. Its liquor romantic, the only see also." After a few days, Xie Bin lived in the city for days drinking. From the diary of these contents can be found, Xie Bin then as a central official in the northwest, met him was the local officials in the northwest, Xie Bin everywhere is almost day of banquets drinking, which shows that the northwest officials' drinking activity is very frequent, the wind of drinking between officials has been very popular (Xie Bin, 2013).

In the Japanese Nomura's, he not only visited local officials in the Northwest, such as the local magistrate when staying in the ancient city, "two people went to the magistrate in the afternoon. Serve with Chinese food. Yesterday, Yang county magistrate visited words and liquor capacity, I said could drink two liters, and Yang laughed and said can drink six dou. So today I advise myself to drink. You must be very careful on the journey, so I will only drink a few cups. 3:30 leave to return to the apartment. "He also met with the local literati in the Northwest and drank fun," geography teacher Cao Zijie all came. Sit around and drink, eat chicken hot pot, talk and sing, to 11 o'clock. "Also received a poem" You go to the horse as fly, line safe. He met again, yingisland with a period. One hundred thousand military blood, Hu herding back. Fairy Xu Fu house, gravel Li Lingtai. North lu worry party big, the central Plains matter sadder. Send you a cup of liquor, lips and teeth read Penglai." In addition, the author also recorded the drinking activities of civilians in the Northwest at that time. "At night, three or four men and women in the inn got together to drink, clapping and playing the piano, singing, and dancing. It was the emperor's funeral period, and the border people were indifferent." And compose a poem: "Far away home country value sad autumn, hotel cold lamp provoke guest sorrow. Late time alone pour half a bottle of liquor, ambition flying snow mountain head. Border fortress cold snow and ice deep, dare to stand up to the bosom friend. Wake up at night feeling infinite, thousands of miles leaning on the door loving mother heart" (Raburo Nomur, 2013).

In the diary of Russian Nivi Bogorov Lensky's study, which compares the drinking addiction of various ethnic groups in the Northwest "Han people always drink hot liquor. Generally speaking, the Han people are temperate people. They only drink on the holidays and drink in moderation. There is no Han drunkard in the street. Even if friends gather, they drink more than usual, it is more restrained and polite." The heavy drinkers were the Mongols and the Manchus, who were not yet completely Chinese. There are some very typical alcoholic people in the Mongols. Usually very gentle Mongols, after getting drunk, will become violent and terrible. This shows that although people in the Northwest at that time, people liked to drink, the degree of alcohol addiction was very different. It can be seen that at that time, not only ordinary people in the Northwest often drank alcohol, but also local officials and literati in the Northwest (Ni Wei Bogoaf Lensky, 1980).

In conclusion, the comprehensive diaries of modern scholars on the Northwest provide an insightful glimpse into the vibrant and widespread drinking culture that characterized various segments of society during that era. These primary sources illustrate dynamic scenes of people from all walks of life—regardless of their ethnic, social, or economic backgrounds—engaging wholeheartedly in drinking activities. Such vivid portrayals offer compelling evidence of the prevailing popularization of drinking culture throughout the Northwest region. Delving deeper into these narratives, the author's meticulous study compared the drinking habits of different ethnic groups, a research approach

that added a rich layer of understanding to the subject. The findings of this study were revealing: it was noted that the Han people, one of the major ethnic groups, exhibited relatively moderate drinking habits. On the other hand, the Mongolian and Manchu people were found to be more predisposed to alcohol, exhibiting higher levels of addiction. Such nuanced findings offer a precious and invaluable perspective for anyone seeking to understand the complex tapestry of drinking culture in the Northwest. Further, the long-term impact of this culture and habit on the local society and economy cannot be understated.

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