



Popularizing Wine Consumption in Korean Market
Bok Rae Kum, Andong National University
Re33a@chol.com

The Korean wine industry was born in 1965 when the Grain Management Act was enacted. The government at that time encouraged grain growers to plant wine grapes which could grow well on Korea's less arable land. In 1973 Oriental Beer (Dongyang) Co. began to plant 40 000 Riesling vines in Kyongsang province. In 1974, Haitai company released 'Noble Wine', the first Korean wine. In 1977 Doosan group launched its 'Majuang' label. Until 1987 Majuang was the most commonly available type of wine, accounting for around 90% of sales. Around the time of the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games, foreign wines began to be imported and Majuang's share of the market dropped to around 15%. Majuang wines are not 100% domestic; they contain wines imported from Europe and Chile mixed with local ingredients.

With the liberalization of wine imports, Korean wine culture - closely linked with high-end consumers - has progressively spread in hotels and upscale restaurants. This year, the Korean wine market celebrates its 22nd anniversary and shows continuous growth. The total Korean wine market is estimated to be worth 300 billion won. In 2005 the total import volume of wine amounted to about \$27 million dollars, showing 20% year-on-year growth. Thank to French paradox and domestic health trends, many Koreans are switching from hard liquor to wine.

The increase of wine consumption in Korea is not only related to the variegating tastes among young and trendy people, but to reflections on Korean traditional drinking habits. In Korea, drinking is social: for building, solidifying or improving group relationships. 'Drinking together' is an identity-forming rite of passage. Another element of Korean drinking culture is that senior members of a group may compel junior ones to drink to excess. This 'exchanging of cups' has been criticized as an antiquated authoritarian cultural idea that rejects individual preferences.¹ This criticism has led to the birth of a new drinking culture which is now common among Korean upper classes. Wine drinkers are usually classified as not only upper-class, but also apart (or perhaps 'above') traditional Korean drinking customs.

Thus, consumption of wine has developed apace with this class's strong preference for high-end brand goods. Wine drinkers in Korea are thought to endorse equality, cleanliness, mutual respect, a sense of liberation, and the esthetics of slowness. These are often presented as symbolic images in Korean wine consumption culture.

This paper aims to analyze some tasks promoting the popularization of wine consumption in Korea in comparison to that of Japan, which already has a very mature wine market. Asia is the 'wine market of tomorrow'—this is particularly important when the world wine industry is currently experiencing over-production. A Korean case study on wine consumption patterns and projections will be of use not only to Korean but also foreign stakeholders in the Korean wine market.

¹ When one has emptied his cup, he may give it to the other person and then pour a drink into it for him to drink. Exchanging cups like this affirms friendship and trust.