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BEER AND BREWING IN SHANGHAI, 1850-1952

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The Harbin brewery, in the city of the same name in north-east China, is sometimes claimed to be the first Western brewery in the country, having been founded in 1900 as the Ulubulevskij brewery by a Russian of Polish origin.[1]

By then, however, brewing had been taking place in the Chinese port city of Shanghai for several decades. During the First Opium War, 1839-1842, British forces occupied Shanghai, and, under the Treaty of Nanking, it became one of five 'treaty ports' for international trade between China and the rest of the world. Britain, and, subsequently, the United States established enclaves outside the walls of the city that merged in 1863 to form the Shanghai International Settlement, where Britain and the United States enjoyed extraterritorial rights.

The first Western brewery in China was the suitably named Empire brewery, which looks to have been started in or very shortly before 1866 alongside the Union Bakery by an Englishman named Henry Evans in the Shanghai district of Hongkew (today Hongkou), part of the International Concession in the city. 'Evan's' [sic] bread and beer from the Empire brewery, 50 tael cents a gallon, are mentioned in June 1866.[2]

Evans had come out to Hong Kong in 1853, and moved to Shanghai in 1855, where he made a fortune and returned to Britain in the early 1860s, but 'suffered reverses, and came out again, determined to retrieve himself, which he did by his bakery, and the Empire Brewery, of which he was the founder'.[3] His firm, Evans & Co., Ship Chandlers, Bakers and Soda Water Manufacturers, is listed in a directory of 1864, with Henry Evans himself given as 'absent', but four other Westerners named as clerks, including his son, Henry junior.[4]

Evans's competition for the beer market in Shanghai would have come from imports from the United Kingdom, either directly or via Hong Kong. It was presumably via Hong Kong that the settlement was supplied with porter, with the drink on sale at the godowns of Wolcott, Bate & Co in 'Shanghae' (sic) in October 1850.[5] It was also available at a meeting at the Shanghai racecourse in April 1851,[6] while Whitbread's London porter, specifically, was on sale at the godowns of a Shanghai importer called Smith, King & Co. in 1853.[7]

Bottled stout was sent out in straw envelopes, which were then packed eight dozen at a time into wooden casks. In October 1895, eight merchant seamen from the S.S. Glengarry were put on trial in Shanghai for the theft of eight dozen bottles of porter and six bottles of port, part of the cargo of their ship, during its thousand-mile, three-day journey from Hong Kong. The court was told that the cask of porter bottles was whole when the ship left Hong Kong, but was found smashed open when it reached Shanghai, and the men had been seen drunk during the voyage. However, the judge dismissed the case, saying the evidence was not strong enough to convict.[8]

Porter continued to be available in Shanghai: when the local British business community decided to entertain sailors from the British fleet then lying at Wusong in June 1904 it was arranged to give them 'dinner of the old fashioned English kind,' that is, roast joints 'supported by ale and porter'.[9]

Anyone brewing in Shanghai suffered the tribulations that accompany trying to make ale and beer in a hot climate without refrigeration: it was reported that in 1867 Evans 'was unlucky in commencing to brew too soon, and a long spell of hot weather spoiled nearly the whole of the first batch of beer.' However, in 1868 'he deferred operations till later in the season and has succeeded in turning out a very pleasant fresh ale'.[10] A directory entry for that year lists Evans as the proprietor of the Empire Brewery, G.C. Eyles as manager and Samuel Mason, presumably the assistant. Evans was still listed as a ships' chandler, and baker.

The business was operating in 1879 as the Empire Steam Brewery and Aerated Waters Manufactory on Ming Hong



Figure 1. A tray from the Ewo brewery.

Road, Hongkew, H. Evans, proprietor.[11] His assistants at the brewery included William Papps, and J. Chinghae, which looks to be a Chinese name.

Evans's only son, Henry junior, had died in Shanghai in October 1867, aged 21, of typhoid fever and pleurisy.[12] Evans's wife died in 1885, and in December that year, when he was 63, he sold the business, including the bakery, to a Shanghai trading firm, Hall and Holtz Co-operative Company, returning to Britain the following April.[13] (He died at Herschell Park, Slough, Buckinghamshire in July 1890, aged 68.)[14] Hall and Holtz raised 50,000 taels, equal to about £16,000, today perhaps £1.8 million, to pay for the purchase of the brewery and 'provide funds for further enlargement of the Brewing plant (such as coppers, coolers, vats, refrigerators, &c.), the present Brewery capacity being found inadequate to meet the demand for Empire ales'.[15]

Three years after purchasing the brewery, in the autumn of 1888, Hall and Holtz bought the Chinese Glass Works on the Yangstsze-Poo Road (Yangtsze-Poo, or Yangshupu, today Yangpu, is the name of a creek to the east of Hongkou district) with the intention of converting the site into a brewery.[16] Hall and Holtz told the annual meeting of shareholders in June 1890 that 'commodious cellarage' had been made at the new brewery premises on the Yangtsze-Poo and 'new machinery has been imported, which will be in use during the next season, when the output will be increased'.[17]

In 1892 it was announced that the Empire brewery had suffered a loss by the spoiling of one of the brews of beer and another of stout 'owing to some confusion in the management,' and the services of the late manager had been 'dispensed with,' and Henry Dowell Patch, the brewer, was now in sole charge. Soon after, Hall and Holtz went into liquidation, and Patch bought the brewery from the liquidator. Patch then erected another brewery in Markham Road, Shanghai, moving from Yangshupu.[18]

By 1899 Patch appears to have been struggling financially, and James William Gande, the London-born head of a firm of Shanghai wine and spirits merchants, had stepped in and was trying to help him manage the business. In July that year, however, apparently overwhelmed by his financial difficulties, Patch gassed himself in his bedroom.[19] A large slice of Patch's debts were owed to another British-born

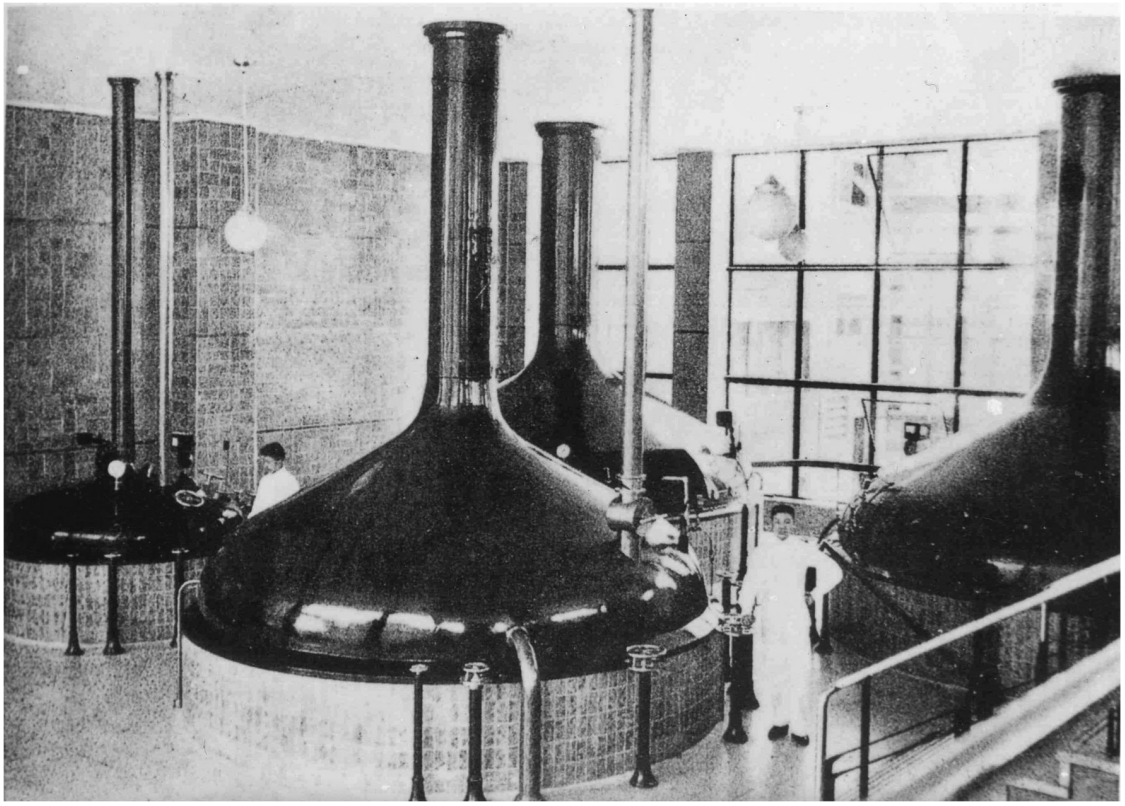


Figure 2. The interior of the Shanghai brewery circa 1939.

Shanghai businessman, Algernon Montford Adams Evans (no known relation of Henry Evans), and Algernon Evans went into a 70/30 partnership with Gande to run the brewery and try to recoup at least some of the money he was owed.[20]

The *Brewers' Journal* reported in 1904 that Mr H.L. Harvey, formerly of Watson Brothers' brewery in Wembley, North London, was on his way to Shanghai to be brewer at the Shanghai brewery.[21] In 1905 it was the Shanghai Brewery Co., Markham Road, J.W. Gande & Co., general managers, 'Brewers of ale and stout by the Bass-Burton system,' 'contracts made on special terms with naval and military canteens, Hotels etc etc,' with illustrations in a local trade directory clearly showing Burton Union-style sets of casks feeding yeast through swan-neck pipes into troughs overhead.[22] The beers included Pyramid brand India Pale Ale, and they were on sale in quart and pint bottles, and casks from firkins (nine gallons) to hogsheads (54 gallons). The pictures appear to show perhaps ten to a dozen Chinese workers, and three or four men dressed in European clothes.

The *North-China Herald* newspaper in January declared the brewery's beer and stout 'as good … as the most fastidious devotee of Gambrinus could desire,' and said it was the only establishment in China brewing purely English beer.[23] The local consul for the Austria-Hungarian Empire was much less impressed, writing back to Vienna in a report on the Chinese brewing industry in 1904 that the output of the Shanghai Brewery was 'very inferior'.[24] Directory entries show it was fighting against imports of lager from rivals including the Japan Brewery Company of Yokohama and its Kirin brand. Gande and Evans fell out violently over the brewery's finances,[25] and some time around the start of 1906 the brewery looks to have closed.

There was still one beer brewer running in the city, the Victoria Brewery, which was acquired by the Anglo-German Brewery Company Ltd. in 1905.[26] The Anglo-German Brewery Company, founded in 1903,[27] was actually headquartered in Shanghai, although it had opened what was to become one of the most famous breweries in the Far East in the German-held Chinese city of Tsingtao (today Qindao), the Germania brewery, in 1904,[28] with the first beer going on sale on 23 December that year.[29] However, within a couple of years the Victoria brewery had closed at a loss of 12,201 (trade) dollars, 'owing to the high cost of cold stor-



Figure 3. Pictures of the Shanghai brewery from a directory of 1904.

age, coupled with the fact that the plant was a very primitive one,' which meant that the business 'has been far from a success'.[30]

Six years later, in 1912, the Union brewery,[31] a three-story brick-and-concrete affair on Gordon Road, Shanghai built from plans sent out from Germany, was opened by a German company, F. Schwartzkopf & Co., based in the German enclave of Tsingtao (today Qingdao). It brewed with hops and malt from Moravia, and made, initially, Pilsner and Munich-style lagers.[32] The original owners of the brewery went into liquidation as a result of the First World War, and in 1919 the brewery was bought by a group of Norwegian investors led by Frithjof Hoehnke under the name Aktieselskabet Union Bryggerie A.S/Scandinavian Brewery Co. Ltd.[33] The brewery was sold to a British company, Union Brewery Ltd., in March 1931, with investors including the wine & spirits merchants Caldbeck, MacGregor & Co. and the trading company Sassoon Group, though Hoehnke continued as managing director.[34]

A new brewery was built in the mid-1930s on Yichang Road, alongside the Suzhou Creek, to a modernist 'Suntrap' design by the Slovak-Hungarian architect László (or Ladislav) Hudek, born 1893, who had opened an architectural practice in Shanghai in 1925, seven years after escaping from Siberia, where he was being held as a prisoner of war, having been captured by the Russians while serving with the Austro-Hungarian army. The new brewery, nine storeys tall, was in operation by the end of 1935,[35] when it was China's biggest beer producer, though to begin with the only beers remained light and dark lager. In November 1937 – days before Shanghai outside the international settlements finally fell to the invading Japanese after a three-month battle – Union Brewery announced the launch of a new beer, U. B. Stout, saying that 'many months of patient experiment have resulted in the production of a rich mature stout of pleasing taste and high nutritive value'.[36] (The brewery did not escape the effects of the fighting: in October 1937 Japanese bombs aimed at Chinese positions across the Suzhou Creek missed and landed near the Union Brewery, smashing hundreds of windows and covering the creek bank with splintered glass.)[37]

U.B. Stout was still being advertised in January 1941,[38] just a few months before the attack on Pearl Harbor and the annexation by Japan of the International Concession, the last slice of Shanghai it did not already control. The brewery was running in 1946, after the end of the Second World War, though there is no evidence that it was still making stout.

After the Communist takeover of China in 1949, the premises became the state-owned Shanghai Brewery. Its Special Swan Brand lager is said to have been served as the official beer at Chinese Communist Party conferences.[39]

The Shanghai Brewery was bought by the Tsingtao brewery in 1999. The next year Tsingtao acquired the brewery that the Danish brewer Carlsberg had built in Shanghai in 1998 for US$30 million, and closed László Hudec's 1930s brewery. Hudec's buildings were almost demolished in 2002, but an outcry by Shanghai fans of his architecture meant the brewhouse, bottling hall and offices were saved, and turned into an exhibition centre, restaurant and offices.[40]

In the 1930s the Union brewery had had two new rivals. The first was the National Brewery Shanghai, or NBS, opened in 1933 in the French section of the International Settlement by a company originally set up as a silk merchants, J. Azadian Societe Anonyme.[41] The founder, Jacques Azadian, had died in 1929, and the firm was being run by N.J. Sbath. Why Sbath moved into brewing is unknown, but he hired a German brewmaster, Carl Krüger, and with Krüger as his business partner he set up a brewery first at 471 Avenue Joffre, and later on at 120 Great Western Road. Krüger had been born in 1887 in what was then the German spa town of Stolpmünde in Pomerania (today Ustka, Poland) and studied brewing at Weihenstephan in Bavaria from 1911 to 1912. He worked as a brewmaster in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from 1913 to 1926, and then for breweries in Medellin, Bogota and Cali in Colombia until 1931, before taking up the post of brewmaster and co-owner at the National Brewery in 1933.[42]

The first brand Krüger produced was called Clover Beer, advertised in Chinese as having a 'Completely German flavour'. That failed to take off, and the brewery followed it with a brand simply called NBS, with the slogan 'None Better Served', launched at the 1935 Better Homes Exhibition in Shanghai, where NBS built a mock Bavarian beer garden complete with 'Bavarian' waitress in traditional attire.

In 1937 NBS was sued by the Union Brewery in the French Consular Court after UB discovered that its rival had been selling beer in UB's beer bottles. UB claimed that it had lost $5,000 (in trade dollars) because NBS had taken its bottles: NBS insisted that it had paid for them, and thus committed no fraud.[43] The court ordered National Brewery to pay $300 damages, and withdraw all UB bottles from the market within three months.[44]

The National Brewery was struggling against its rivals, and fell out with its distributor, Racine et Cie, in 1939, but it managed to survive the occupation of Shanghai by the Japanese, as did Carl Krüger, who was, astonishingly, still working at the brewery in 1945, aged 58, when he finally left. (He died in Nova Petropolis, Brazil in 1974, just short of his 87th birthday.) By 1947 the brewery was under the control of the Ministry of Economics,[45] and it looks to disappear within the next few years.

A more long-lasting competitor was started in 1936 by another big Far East trading company, Jardine Matheson, perhaps spurred by its rivals the Sassoons becoming involved in the Union Brewery. Jardine Matheson started to construct an 11-storey building on Tinghai Road, in the eastern edges of the International Settlement in 1935, naming it the Ewo brewery, after the Cantonese pronunciation of the firm's name.[46]

The first beer was distributed from the brewery on 23 September 1936.[47] The following year, 1937, after hostilities between China and Japan resumed in the Second Sino-Japanese War, the brewery was temporarily seized by the Japanese army. Production of pilsner and Munich-style light and dark lagers restarted after a brief halt, and the brewery became a limited company in 1940, with Chinese investors buying three quarters of the shares (though the board of directors remained entirely British). Two years later, after Japan had marched into the International Settlement, the brewery was grabbed and handed over to a Japanese brewing company to run.

At the end of the Second World War the Ewo brewery was given back to its owners. However, in May 1949 Shanghai fell to the Communist People's Liberation Army.[48] After the Communist Party took power, higher taxes and forced price reductions meant the business was losing millions every year. Income was too small to pay the wage increases imposed on the company by the Communist government, and sales were falling: in the winter of 1951/2 the brewery sold only 2,500 cases, against 16,000 cases in the same period a year earlier (in a city of six million people). The head of Jardine's in Shanghai, Robert Gordon, did not have the spare cash to pay the 240 brewery staff their February wages, and was taken before a People's Court. The judge told Gordon: 'You have no sincerity,' to which Gordon replied: 'I have no money'.[49]

Gordon was briefly jailed, but released after a week, and soon after Jardines declared the brewery bankrupt and sold it to the Communist government at what it claimed was a 'considerable' loss.[50] (It appears that the Chinese shareholders in the brewery received nothing.) The Ewo brand disappeared. Instead the business became the government-owned Huaguang (Light of China) brewery, making Shanghai and Guangming brand beers. Ironically, three months after the

takeover, wages at the brewery were cut and working hours lengthened.[51]

The Huaguang brewery was acquired by the Australian brewing group Foster's in 1993, and sold to the Japanese brewer and drinks company Suntory in 2006. Suntory then sold the brewery to Tsingtao in 2015, so that the company originally founded in Shanghai 112 years earlier had consolidated all of Shanghai's old-established brewing industry into its own hands.

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