

# Where Life Revolves Around **Mealtime**

Schott has opened its first production facilities in China. With investments of some 11 million euros, the company has opened a plant for the processing of "Ceran" glass-ceramic cooktop panels and "Schott" flat glass near Shanghai.



Qin Wang, General Manager of Schott Home Tech in Suzhou, Dr. Karl-Heinz Sossenheimer, Vice President for Technology, Flat Glass, Wieze Yang, mayor of the city of Suzhou, Board Member Dr. Udo Ungeheuer and German Consul Kurt Leonberger at the official opening of the new production facility.

► If you greet a Chinese person with the words "Good day" or "How are you?" you'll probably see a somewhat puzzled expression. The Chinese make it immediately clear what is important in life. "Have you already eaten?" is the customary form of greeting an acquaintance.

Compared with Europe, eating clearly has a completely different significance in China, where most people have warm meals three times a day. They may begin their day, for example, with salty rice and vegetable soup

or a spicy noodle soup – either at home or at one of the many breakfast booths. Lined up along the busy streets, some of them are barely visible behind the thick cloud of steam produced by the red-hot charcoal fires.

The Chinese have cooked over open fires for hundreds of years, and they have used woks for an equally long time, but things are changing, and the changes in China are coming even faster than in other regions of the world. Take, for example, meals. The

Chinese are increasingly making use of modern technology in the preparation of their food. More and more kitchens are equipped with "Ceran" glass-ceramic cooktop panels. While this would have been virtually unimaginable just a decade ago, since extremely few households would have had enough electricity to operate this kind of a range, today it is a tangible sign of progress. Clearly an opportunity for Schott Glas, some 11.1 million euros have been invested in modern production facilities for "Ceran" glass-ceramic cooktop panels and "Schott" flat glass. The state-of-the-art plant was erected on a 13,000 square meter site in just nine months. Along the neighboring companies in the industrial park underline the importance of this market today: investors include Siemens, Motorola and Sony.

The new Schott plant is located 80 kilometers to the west of Shanghai in Suzhou, a city that was the capital of the kingdom of Wu more than 2,500 years ago. Today, Suzhou, which is known as the Venice of the Far East, is a popular tourist attraction. Numerous stone bridges span meandering canals. Small



The more the merrier: the Chinese love to share their meals with family and friends.

whitewashed houses and the meticulously groomed gardens, in which unusually shaped stones are surrounded by man-made landscapes, which remind visitors of ancient China. During the day, Suzhou is a bustling city that hosts many visitors, but in the evening silence descends on the historical city. It is the time the Chinese meet for their main meal. The entire family usually comes together, and those who can afford it invite friends to a restaurant. Unlike in western nations, the guest does not choose his or her own meal. Instead the host always orders the dinner with at least one dish more than people at the table: a spicy one, a mild one, a sweet one, a rich one – something for everyone's taste. Such traditions are reflected in all facets of daily life – including business life.

In western countries, it is difficult to imagine that two grown men dressing up in a brightly colored lion costume to celebrate the opening of a factory. However in China, the guest of honor brings the sleeping lion to life by touching its eyes, a custom as important as a signature on a contract. At the opening of the new plant in Suzhou, it



The new production facility of Schott Home Tech Co. Ltd. in Suzhou, China

was Schott's Board member Dr. Udo Ungeheuer who bravely faced the lilac-colored lion. In fact, as soon as the guest from distant Germany touched the glass eye of the animal, it began to romp spiritedly throughout the party tent, thus bringing luck to all the guests.

Luck, however, is just one part of what Schott needs for success in China. Other crucial factors are high quality and a profound knowledge of the market. After all, the needs of Asian customers significantly differ from those in Western countries. The experts at Schott are fully

### Schott in Asia

Schott has been active in Asia for 36 years. The company's first move was to open a sales office in Japan. Eight years later, the first production facilities were established in Malaysia. Today, Schott has its own subsidiaries in eight Asian countries. Some 2,000 people are employed at eight production organizations and seven sales offices. Total sales in this region amount to 200 million euros. Schott has sales offices in Hong Kong and Shanghai. There is also a cooperation with China's largest manufacturer of television glass, ACBC.



Schott's processed flat glass for gas cooktops decorated with panda bears is popular with Chinese customers.

In one Chinese ritual, a "sleeping lion" is awakened and delights guests with his dance.



The main beverage is tea, which is served free-of-charge in restaurants and helps bridge the time until the food is served. The second favorite drink is beer, which is still mostly brewed by German immigrants. Of course, there are also Chinese breweries, but as is so often the case, domestic products are not as popular as international brands. Wine ranks third, although its statistical popularity is easily explained, since every alcoholic beverage that is not beer is classified as wine.

A completely different beverage has more recently won the favor of young people in this market, thus continuing the success it has seen in western countries: Coca-Cola. It is still relatively expensive, but nowadays, there are enough wealthy Chinese in the urban areas of Shanghai and Beijing, or in the coastal area of Guangzhou, who can afford such luxuries.

It is no coincidence that Schott sees China as an important market of the future and plans to gain a foothold here with the help of domestic household appliance manufacturers. As emphasized by Dr. Ungeheuer at the dedication ceremony in Suzhou, "Doing business means more than manufacturing high-quality products; it is a question of trust and gaining new partners." This principle also holds true in China when it comes to eating. The high regard for a guest is illustrated by the simple gesture of placing the best morsels in his dish. ◀

aware that it takes more than decorating "Ceran" panels with cute panda bears or pretty rice grain motifs to be able to sell enough cooktops. The Chinese prefer to cook with gas, and it is therefore not surprising that the "Ceran" combination of two electric cooking zones and two gas burners is in high demand. Schott is also supplying "Schott" flat glass for microwave ovens, covers for freezers and glass hob tops for gas stoves.

On an average the Chinese spend about 60 percent of their income on food (in comparison, this figure is just 30 percent for Germans), and in China people prepare practically everything that can be digested. It is therefore no surprise to find chicken feet swimming in your soup or to be offered

mashed yams followed by pigeon meat with Huaqi ginseng. The latter dish is currently very popular because of its medicinal value. The Chinese often enrich classical dishes with medicinal herbs. As they say, it tastes good and does good.

However, in China it is not only important what is eaten, but also how it is eaten. For example, it is considered extremely embarrassing if someone refills his own beer glass, which, in any case, should only be emptied if requested to do so. So when the host toasts the round with the word, "Ganbei," it means that all those present should empty their glasses and place them on the table.

Nor would any self-respecting Chinese person empty his or her dinner dish, which is almost always made from porcelain. Such behavior would be insulting to the host, since it would imply that there was not enough food.

# C H I N A



## Size:

Measuring some 9.6 million square kilometers, China is the fourth largest country in the world after Russia, Canada and the United States.

## Population:

- 1.2 billion inhabitants
- A nation of many cultures with 56 different ethnic groups, the largest of which are the Han Chinese constituting 92% of the population
- The eastern coastal regions are the most densely populated; the western half of the country is only very sparsely settled

## Major cities:

- Beijing, the capital with 11 million inhabitants
- Shanghai, largest city with 14 million inhabitants
- Other large cities: Tianjin (8 million), Guangzhou (9 million.), Xi'an (6 million), Nanjing (4.5 million)

Source: Spiegel online



Not far from Suzhou is the town of Zhouzhang, which gives visitors an inkling of life in ancient Chinese. Below: a view of Shanghai's modern skyline.

