



The “Sake Category Competition at the International Wine Challenge (IWC),” the world’s largest sake competition, will be held in Kobe for the first time from 16th May 2016. Hyogo has been gleaming global attention as the host prefecture but the fact of the matter is that, while the prefecture has the nation’s largest share of production, as much as 30% of the entire nation’s sake and sake-brewing rice production, it is not very well known, even to locals. Nada Gogo has established one of most complicated sake brewing techniques in the world and Kitaharima farmers have continued to produce the highest-quality sake-brewing rice. Let us then first review the essence and current status of the traditions that have been maintained in Hyogo. (Kazuyoshi Tsujimoto)

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Disseminating Information on Traditional and Current Activities

Innovations Powered by Mother Nature

100% Made-in-Japan Sake that Makes the Most of Local Water and Agriculture

Dry but rich — in order to achieve this taste, Kiku-Masamune Sake Brewing Co., Ltd. (Higashinada Ward, Kobe) developed the new brand of “Hyakumoku,” which was released on the 11th of this month. The brewing company was founded more than 350 years ago and has thus survived a number of different eras and has now launched its first new brand for over 130 years.

Its policy has been to produce sake that enhances the taste of regional Kansai dishes which typically feature seafood, and hence Kiku-Masamune has traditionally produced dry tasting sake. However, times have changed and nowadays Japanese have grown fond of stronger tastes as they have also increasingly adopted Western-style food cultures. While meeting this trend in Japan, the sake brewer, via Hyakumoku, aims to produce sake that can be enjoyed itself.

“We have had to completely forget everything we have experienced and established and start again from scratch. And that is because we are determined to produce the best sake with all our resources currently available,” Hayato Kano (aged 41), the vice-president, stated. They utilize “Yamada Nishiki,” the top sake-brewing rice variety produced in Miki City, and “Miyamizu,” riverbed

water from Mount Rokko, which is considered to be best for brewing sake. “Junmai Daiginjo (high-quality sake with no added alcohol),” which is an excellent match for French or Italian style food, will be exhibited at the IWC Competition from the 16th of May.

The SAKE Category of the IWC will celebrate its 10th anniversary. The opportunity will be fully utilized by both local governments and the industry, for example, the Hyogo prefectural government and the various brewing associations, via cooperating in inviting the IWC to Kobe in order to disseminate information about Hyogo to the world as the top sake brewing prefecture in Japan. Kano considers the event to be an opportunity to remind locals of Hyogo’s sake culture while also providing the world with information about sake.



Hakutsuru Sake Brewing Co., Ltd. uses traditional sake brewing processes (taken in March, 2016 in Higashinada Ward, Kobe.)

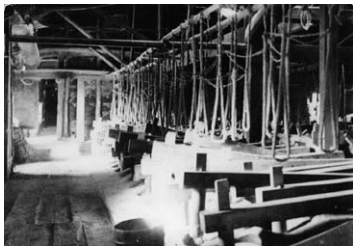
“Hyogo is one of the major sake producing prefectures, and locally based brewers have maintained traditional brewing techniques that require more complicated processes than those of local brand sake breweries. My hope is that people will reconsider what ‘Nada-no-sake’ exactly is.”

Nada Gogo is a sake production district spreading throughout Nada Ward in Kobe to the coastal area of Nishinomiya City. The area is blessed with favorable conditions that include Miyamizu, the cold Rokko Oroshi (wind from Mt. Rokko) and nearby sake-brewing rice production areas, which are the reasons why the sake brewing industry thrived during the late-Edo era.

A particular feature is the rice-polishing technology that utilized water wheels because of the advantage provided by the steep streams from Mt. Rokko, which resulted in the production of large amounts of high-quality sake. The use of water wheels basically drove rapid innovations within the industry. There is in fact a current movement to review the connection between the local culture and history by studying the rivers that have made the region so fertile.

“This area used to be one of Japan’s top eco-friendly industrial areas,” Masao Uchida (aged 67) stated with a smile. He is a business promotion committee member of the Sumiyoshi History Museum who studies the local history.

From the late-Edo era through to the Taisho era the rapid flowing Sumiyoshi River turned tens of water wheels that scattered alongside the canal network in the area before then flowing into the sea. “The region had created an industry that utilized water without polluting it. They were using a natural source of energy and an energy-saving system that long ago,” said Mr. Uchida.



Mills and pestles lined up in a water wheel house. This photo is considered to have been taken some time during the Taisho era through to the early-Showa era. (Courtesy of Hakutsuru Sake Brewing Co., Ltd., retained at the Sumiyoshi History Museum)

“Records reveal that there were 277 water wheel housings in an area that spread from the Shukugawa River in Nishinomiya through to the Ikuta River in Kobe. On average about 100 granite mills were lined up in each of the housings, thus revealing that there were as many as 28,000 mills in total,” Takashi Michitani (aged 51), who is the vice-resident of Himeji Dokkyo University and a specialist in the

Edo era explained.

The 24-hour-a-day rice polishing system developed at Nada Gogo overwhelmed producers in other areas who had to use human power alone to polish the rice. The abundant supply of polished sake-brewing rice enabled brewers in the Nada region to concentrate their resources on brewing sake during the cool and cold winter periods only. This then allowed them to develop better brewing techniques and improvements to the highest level, while also achieving mass production of sake, and eventually dominating the market during the Edo era. The techniques are still used by present breweries.

“It’s the right time to showcase Nada’s evolving techniques and spirit.” Japan’s largest brewer, Hakutsuru Sake Brewing Co., Ltd. (Higashinada Ward, Kobe), who made the venue for the IWC Competition available, will have on exhibit products in all the nine sub-categories, including Junmai Daiginjo and regular sake. President Kenji Kano (aged 44), who also acts as the chairman of the Nada Gogo Brewers Association stated that, “Sake production is an entirely domestic industry that only exists because of the locally available pure water and sake-brewing rice.” The brewers are not only proud of their techniques but also the spirit they have as top sake brewers. Kano continued, “Both domestic and foreign customers enjoying sake would activate the local agriculture and make the local economy thrive. This is the message I would also like to emphasize.”

IWC SAKE Category

The IWC (based in London) was established in 1984 by William Reed Limited, UK, and SAKE Category established in 2007. It is divided into nine sub-categories, including Junmai and Ginjo, and for which gold, silver, and bronze medals are awarded. Any sake which is awarded a gold medal, i.e. the top ranked sake product of each sub-category, is referred to as “Trophy Sake.” Of the nine Trophy Sake items selected in the nine sub-categories, one “Champion Sake” is then selected for the year. In 2015 a total of 300 breweries had on exhibit 876 types of sake at the competition. Highly ranked sake products are used by Japan’s diplomatic and consular offices in foreign countries.

IWC SAKES部門
IWC(国際酒造大会)とは、1984年英国のウィリアム・リード・リミテッドが設立した、世界の酒造業を表彰する国際大会です。日本酒の分野では、2007年に「SAKE CATEGORY」が創設され、日本の酒造業が国際的に認められるようになりました。

技術革新を育んだ自然
水、農業生かす純国産
「酒造り」の歴史は古く、自然の恵みを生かして、水と米を使い、酒を造る文化が根付いています。特に日本酒は、水と米の品質が、酒の味に大きく影響します。日本酒の歴史は、水と米の選別と、その育ち方を重視してきました。現在では、水と米の品質を向上させるための技術革新が進められています。例えば、水の浄化技術や、米の品種改良など、さまざまな取り組みが行われています。これにより、より高い品質の酒造りが可能となり、酒造りの文化も進化しています。

兵庫に乾杯 日本酒と酒米の聖地
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伝統と今を発信
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