“Tradition” as a Solution to the Crisis of Japanese Sake Industry

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1. Introduction

Throughout the last twenty years or so, the Japanese sake industry has faced a serious crisis due to the declining domestic consumption of sake. This declining trend has accelerated during the past ten years. It has been estimated that about 500 of the original 2200 sake manufacturers in Japan are now no longer actually making the product. According to the National Tax Administration Agency, in 1975, when sake production was at its peak for the post-war era, 1.7 million kilolitres of sake was produced in Japan. Yet in 2001, only 0.94 million kilolitres was made. In 2003, this declined even further to some 0.87 million kilolitres (Mainichi Shinbun 2004, January 7th). It seems that Japanese consumers are forsaking sake, in spite of its strong association with the Japanese history and culture.

This crisis, however, has also provided an opportunity for many ambitious small and local sake (jizake) manufacturers to come to the fore of an industry, which has been dominated for centuries by the nationally renowned large-scale manufacturers in Nada, situated in the Hyogo prefecture near Osaka, and Fushimi in the southern Kyoto prefecture.

2. A brief history of modern sake

In the following, the long history of sake will be reviewed in brief (see Kato 1987). It was in the late Muromachi era (1392-1573), that the basic methods for modern sake production were developed, primarily by monks in the Buddhist temples of Nara, Kyoto and Osaka. The Shoryakuji temple in Nara is particularly recognized as being the historic innovator of the methods used to improve the quality of sake and to make it transparent for the first time. Formerly, sake was grey in colour, and known as nigorizake, unrefined sake. The Shoryakuji temple is now recognized as being the birthplace of sumizake or morohaku, nowadays known

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under the name of seishu, e.g. refined, pure-coloured sake (See Kato 1989: 3, Kato 1999: 192, 208, 222). Seishu thus became the general name for Japanese sake, which is used in Japan today, while in Japanese the term 'sake' has acquired the meaning of a generic term for an alcoholic drink.

The significance of sumizake was not just the colour of sake, but, more importantly, the production of sumizake was one of the greatest technical innovations in the history of sake production (Kato 1989: 66). Sumizake was, therefore, reputed to be the best quality sake in those days and thus formed a very important source of income for the temple (Kato 1989: 67, Kato 1999: 174).

It was also during this era that pasteurization was first employed to preserve the sake for longer. A number of Japanese books on sake observe that Japanese brewers of sake used the pasteurization process for more than 300 years before Frenchman Louis Pasteur ‘discovered’ the method in the nineteenth century.

Although the methods developed by the Buddhist monks in the ancient capitals of Nara and Kyoto gradually spread to the rest of Japan, it was the sake production centres in Itami, Ikeda, Nada, and Fushimi areas, all of which were located near and around the Osaka metropolitan area, which developed as the Mecca for sake from around the eighteenth century onwards. Those manufacturers not only improved the methods that had been developed earlier in order to make better quality sake, but also they established a factory system of manual industry, in which the owner ran the business, while the master brewer, known as toji, and his men made the sake itself. In this way, that mass production was made possible. This division of responsibility and labour has perpetuated up until the present day in almost all sake production plants throughout Japan.

The major market for the Mecca of sake was the city of Edo (now Tokyo), which then had a population of over one million. The sake sent by sea was highly reputed in Edo and known as the so-called kudarizake, literally meaning the ‘sake that came down’, because Kyoto and Osaka areas were at that time called kamigata, or the ‘higher place’ where the Japanese Emperor resided. The kudarizake was famed for being outstanding in terms of quality and taste, whereas, many other local sakes, especially those made and distributed near and around Edo, were called jimawarizake, jizake, or inakazake (country sake), and were associated with poor quality and cheapness (see Kato 1987: 119-120). A dual structure in terms of reputation was thus established and perpetuated until comparatively recently, although the general quality of sake made by small local manufacturers had improved dramatically since that period.

As Japan entered a modern era, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, Western scientific knowledge and techniques were introduced to sake production in order to avoid the chances of failure in making sake and to reduce hard labour, even though the basic procedures remained intact. As sake was a most important source of tax revenue for the government, local sake manufacturers all over Japan were afforded wider opportunities to learn how to make good sake. As a consequence, those new production centres of good sake, such as Niigata and Hiroshima, arose.

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1) See Fujiwara 1999 for a rich account of a history of sake industry from the mid nineteenth to the early twentieth century.
The post-war era has borne witness too much instability in the sake industry. As soon as the Second World War was over, the demand for sake skyrocketed. The government also relied heavily on the revenue from the sake tax, above all from large manufacturers in the Nada and Fushimi areas. To meet fast growing demand, and also in view of an increasing shortage of labour, Japan’s industrial recovery led to the absorption of young workers from rural areas, which had once been major providers of labour for sake production, into the factories and offices of a wide variety of new corporations situated in urban areas. This forced the large-scale sake manufacturers in Nada and Fushimi to heavily mechanize their production process. In addition to this, to increase the amount of the end product, a variety of new methods were adopted at the expense of quality. For example, the so-called sanzoshu, (literally meaning ‘three times increased’) method was developed in 1949. According to this method, additives, such as alcohol, sugar, and chemical seasonings, were added to produce three times more sake than usual. On top of this, in order to use rice more efficiently, the polishing rate was kept low, i.e. more or less 80%, so that both the taste and colour were not as good as with the higher polishing rate. In order to improve the taste and colour, active carbon was used to filtrate the sake (see Hozumi 1995: 351 and Shonoda 2001: 23-25).

As the consequence of these measures, inexpensive sake was made available in large quantities at the expense of the quality. The period 1965-1975 was the heyday for the sake industry, especially for the large-scale manufacturers in Nada and Fushimi. All such major manufacturers broadcast their television advertisement campaigns nationwide, thus securing their supremacy as, the so-called ‘nashonaru burando’ (national brand).

However, such primacy of quantity over quality in sake production resulted in the loss of the unique taste that was formerly inherent to each sake. The taste of mechanically mass-produced sake turned out to be more or less the same, and it was not possible to really distinguish one from the other. As Japan’s economy increasingly developed, Japanese consumers turned to beer, expensive wine, and whisky to enjoy wider variety of drinks. Even after the economic bubble burst in the early 1990s, they did not return to drinking sake. It is roughly estimated that among all alcohol drinkers in Japan today, less than 10% choose sake as their most favourite alcoholic drink, and the majority of them are over 55 years old. As they get older and older, it is likely that the consumption of sake will continue to fall.

3. The rise of the jizake manufacturers

In spite of the general decline of sake industry, some ambitious small manufacturers, which had not previously been known within the national market, came to the fore under the name of the ‘jizake boom’.

Although the term jizake, which literally means ‘local sake’, is now widely known in Japan, it is hard to trace the origins of the term. Nevertheless, jizake is understood as being the opposite of the sake that is mass-produced by the large sake factories in Nada and Fushimi, which are known nationwide. First of all, jizake refers to the kinds of sake that are made by small manufacturers
and were originally only distributed locally. Secondly, *jizake* refers to the kinds of *sake* that are made manually according to conventional methods by people with great experience. Made in such old-fashioned ways, each *jizake* is believed to have a delicately distinctive taste from another, which gives the aficionados of *jizake* the pleasure of discovering their own favourite taste. It also signifies rarity, and is therefore expensive as compared to *futsushu*, common mass-produced *sake*. Although large-scale manufacturers in Nada also make some expensive *sake* using the old methods, their *sake* is not known as *jizake*, because they are not perceived as *jizake* makers.

Formerly, *jizake* was available only locally close to the source of production, but nowadays, liquor shops and even supermarkets offer a wide selection of *jizake* from different regions. Many Japanese restaurants, and especially the so-called *izakaya* taverns, feature a rich selection of *jizake* from all over Japan. Some large *izakaya* in Tokyo boast that they offer over 400 different kinds of *jizake* from northern Hokkaido to the southern island of Kyushu. All generations of people, though especially the younger generation, patronize such restaurants. Moreover, it is quite common for a popular *jizake* producer to have its own fan club, many members of which are young working women who can afford to buy expensive *jizake*. Although none of these small *jizake* manufacturers use television advertising, high-class magazines often feature *jizake* and its manufacturers. Further to this, *jizake* has now gone beyond the confines of Japanese food; some Japanese connoisseurs of French food have found that *jizake* and Western food go well together. As is illustrated below, not only Japanese restaurateurs, but also American and French ones serve *jizake* as well as wine in their restaurants in New York and Paris.

When the large-scale manufacturers in Nada and Fushimi were at their high point around the 1960s, some local small manufacturers sold their own *sake* to them for they were in need of *sake* to meet increasing consumer demand. Other small-scale manufacturers either mimicked their larger competitors by mechanizing production process to some extent, or kept the old methods of making *sake* by hand. With a limited local market, they did not have to become involved in harsh price competition like the large manufacturers. They could afford to improve their techniques for making *sake*. They could also use the expensive rice that is most appropriate for making *sake*. Moreover, even though they were unknown in the wider market, they could afford to make luxury quality *sake* for local consumption only. In the 1960s, for example, Yaegaki Shuzo, a medium-size *jizake* producer in Hyogo prefecture, abandoned all the machinery it had once introduced in order to make better *sake* by hand. This was at a time when many local manufacturers were considering whether or not they should copy the large-scale manufacturers.

Roughly speaking, high-class *sake*, as opposed to *futsushu*, or common *sake*, is categorized into several classes based on the rice polishing rate and whether alcohol has been added. All high-class *sake* must involve less than the 70% rice polishing rate, i.e. 30% of the surface of each grain of rice is polished off. If the polishing rate is less than 60%, the *sake* is then called *ginjoshu*, and if less than 50%, *dai ginjoshu*. If no alcohol is added, the *sake* is known as *junmaishu*, pure rice *sake*, whereas, if alcohol is added (but only up to 10%), the *sake* is allowed to be called *hon jozoshu*. Thus, these two criteria combined, high-class *sake* is called such as *junmai dai ginjoshu*,
or junmai ginjoshu, and so on. Generally speaking, the higher the polishing rate, the more expensive the sake will be; junmaishu also tends to be more expensive than hon jozoshu. Leaving all these classifications aside, high-class sake is hand-made by a group of brewers led by a master brewer known as a toji, although machinery is now also used to a limited extent. As opposed to the various categories of high-class sake mentioned above, futsushu does not suffer from such limitations, since it is produced in a completely mechanical fashion. Cheap rice, which has only been polished a little, is used for futsushu.

Mr. Hiroshi Iida, the owner of a well-established wholesale food and drink company in Tokyo, is recognized as being the initiator of the ‘jizake boom’. In the early 1970s, when large-scale manufacturers dominated the market, he travelled to visit small manufacturers all over Japan and organized a voluntary association of jizake manufacturers, which is known as Nihon Meimonshu Kai, Japan Prestige Sake Association. Today, over 100 jizake manufacturers and about 2000 liqueur shops all over Japan belong to this association. The association made it possible for jizake to be distributed, first in big cities, and later more widely throughout Japan, and now even overseas (Imai 2000: 114-142, Sumihara et al 2001: 147-149).

It is safe to say that throughout the last 20 years or so, there has been a sharp turnaround in terms of status in the Japanese sake industry. Although the large-scale manufacturers in Nada and Fushimi still dominate the domestic market in terms of volume, small-scale manufacturers, which were formerly low-key and played a behind the scenes role in the national market, rose as new brands, i.e. jizake manufacturers. Considering that this term was a derogatory term in the past, this is indeed a huge turnaround.

4. Jizake in offshore markets

The rise of jizake can not only be seen in Japan, but also in overseas market, such as the USA, Europe and China. Large-scale manufacturers had already begun to operate abroad in the 1970s, when increasingly more Japanese business people started to take up residence abroad, especially in the USA. During the late 1990s, the export volume of sake quadrupled. Taiwan and the USA in particular have become the two major overseas markets (Oe 1998: 106-107). Jizake was also exported during the 1980s to a limited extent, but a major increase could be observed from the mid 1990s along with the rise of the sushi boom in the USA and Europe. Sake, like wine, is a kind of a drink that is best consumed with food rather than drunk independently, and goes very well with sushi - now recognized in America as well as in Europe as a low-calorie and healthy food, increasingly popular among non-Japanese customers. A Japanese sales manager of a jizake manufacturer whom I interviewed said that in order to familiarize American customers in a Japanese restaurant with sake, he asked the restaurant to serve his company’s sake by the glass.

2) Neither ginjoshu nor dai ginjoshu circulated in general market in the past, because they were created specifically for the purpose of entering the brewers’ contests, given that the manufacture of these two types of sake requires a high level of technology and experience. Ginjoshu, which was invented by a small manufacturer in Hiroshima nearly a century ago, entered the mass market only in the 1970s, and its popularity have continuously increased ever since (See Ikeda 2001 and Shinoda 1992, 1997).
rather than by the bottle, and if the customer found it tasty, he tended to ask and memorize the brand name of the sake. The sales manager said that that was a small, but highly effective way of letting Americans know about his sake.

The Japan Prestige Sake Association has also succeeded in developing close relationship with high-class French and so-called ‘fusion’ restaurants in big cities such as New York, Los Angeles, and Paris. I conducted research in Paris in 2000, New York in 2002 and Los Angeles in 2003. Although the number of such non-Japanese restaurants where sake, especially jizake, is served alongside wine, was small, almost all customers I saw drinking sake in such high-class restaurants were non-Japanese, some of whom claimed to be ‘fans’ of jizake.

American sommeliers in French restaurants in New York also have studied extensively on the topic of Japanese sake. Above all, Mr. Roger Dagon, the master sommelier at Chanterrell in Manhattan was a lover of sake himself. He is also one of a few American sake tasters. He travels to Japan and visits jizake manufacturers. Sommeliers like Dagon suggest their customers to try sake, even if the customers do not intend to drink sake when they enter their restaurants. In this way, local clientele is taught that good sake goes well with Western food. Moreover, a representative of Japan Prestige Sake Association also stated that good sake, above all such high-class sake as ginjoshu, which are characterized by a thick flavour, cancels out the smell of raw fish with its own aroma. He also maintained that today, due to health-consciousness, more and more uncooked, raw food tends to be served in French restaurants, and much more in ‘fusion’ food restaurants, and thus good sake could provide a good accompaniment.

With this growing success of jizake in the foreign markets, two other voluntary associations, akin to the Japan Prestige Sake Association, were established in the late 1990s. One of these was Nihonsan Seishu Yushutsu Kiko, or the Japan Sake Exporting Board, which was founded in 1996 by the members of 16 jizake manufacturers from all over Japan. The other one, Nihonshu Yushutsu Kyokai, or the Sake Exporting Association, emerged in October, 1997 with 22 jizake manufacturers becoming members. Both of their headquarters, like the Japan Prestige Sake Association, are located in Tokyo. These three associations are the major promoters and dealers of jizake in overseas markets. They hold promotional events in the USA, Europe and Asia, but the largest market for them all is the USA. However, as said a representative of Japan Sake Exporting Board, ‘a success in the foreign market was not automatic’. ‘In the first three years’ - he continued – ‘only three or four bottles were sold in America, during which we built relationship with Japanese and non-Japanese restaurants. Now we are doing business with about 1000 restaurants all over the USA.’

Despite this success, the overseas market is not so large for jizake manufacturers, i.e. it constitutes at most between 1% and 30% of their total business. However, the psychological impact on both manufacturers and brewers is probably greater than these figures may imply. The manufacturers are proud to discover that their hand-made sake appeals to foreign as well as domestic markets, and much more, it is a source of pride that they have made no technical adjustments to have their product accepted by foreign cultures. Although they have changed the design of the bottles into more colourful and attractive one from their former dark-brown, low-
key designs, these changes are not exclusively for the foreign market, but for domestic market also. The *jizake* manufacturers have thus reconfirmed the importance of preserving old ways, or the ‘traditional’ methods of *sake* production.

5. New problems and challenges

During the past few decades, however, *jizake* manufacturers have felt that as increasingly more kinds of *jizake* circulate in the national market, the taste of different *jizake* tend to be similar. This is because, in the past, small manufacturers were only concerned with local market, but as their products reached broader markets, they have had to be aware of the tastes of general consumers. Moreover, as winning the first prize at the annual national contest for new *sake*, named Zenkoku Shinshu Kanpyokai, is a very important source of pride and prestige for the manufacturers, master brewers try to learn from prize-winning *sake*, such as what kind of rice should be used, up to what percentage rice should be polished, what kind of yeast should be used for fermentation, and so on. For example, the so-called ‘YK35’ is widely known among brewers. This is believed to be the best combination of a particular kind of rice, yeast, and polishing rate: ‘Y’ stands for Yamadanishiki, the most popular brand of rice for high-class *sake*, ‘K’ represents a kind of yeast, which was initially found in the Kumamoto prefecture, and was cultured by a government research centre given that the yeast proved to be good for *sake*, and ‘35’ signifies the polishing percentage, i.e. the rice ought to be polished up to 35%. As increasingly more information has been shared by all brewers and manufacturers, it is said that over 90% of different kinds of *ginjoshu* all over Japan are made by using one of only five different kinds of yeast cultured by government research centres, despite the fact that there is an infinite number of different kinds of yeast available in Japan.

This unifying trend of *jizake* is a growing source of concern for *jizake* manufacturers, because uniqueness and local differences have always been the charm of *jizake*. Therefore, new attempts for re-differentiation are now being made by a number of *jizake* manufacturers.

Some manufacturers, for instance, have recreated ancient *nigorizake*, or gray-colored *sake*, which had been abandoned centuries ago after better quality *sumizake*, transparent *sake*, was invented and spread over Japan. The manufacturers now succeeded in producing good quality *nigorizake*, which has a distinct taste compared to transparent *sake*.

There are also some manufacturers that experiment with their local varieties of yeast. In the late 1990s, for example, brewers from some 14 small-scale manufacturers in Nara prefecture got together at the Shoryakuji temple and for the first time in centuries made a fermentation starter by using the yeast living in and around the temple premises. The product, used as a ‘starter’ for the production of a new batch, was called Bodai-Moto, named after the *sake* from the temple widely known in the past, as well as the place where the temple is located. Since this time, the brewers have made this ‘starter’ in the temple every year, and each of them takes it to their factory and makes their own respective *sake* based on it. A small producer in Yamanashi prefecture, west of Tokyo, does likewise - the master brewer is currently searching for...
appropriate native yeast in the woods and the rivers near his workplace.

There are also a growing number of small-scale manufacturers that have tried to recreate *koshu*, literally meaning ‘old sake’- a kind of sake that must mature. Unlike wine, *sake* is generally a drink that is supposed to be consumed within a year or so after being made, because the taste normally deteriorates after long maturation. *Koshu*, which is an exception to this rule, used to be made from *sake* centuries ago in the Edo period (1600-1867), but it died out. Some manufacturers - for example, Oigame in Hiroshima prefecture - attempted to recreate *koshu* some 30 years ago, but the owner said that it was a question of trial and error, because there were no written documents in existence from which the methods could be learned precisely. The producer is now experimenting with 5 year old and 10 year old *koshu*, which taste rather different from normal *sake*. However, the distinctive taste is expected to create a new market, given that it should go well with kinds of food that do not suit normal *sake*. I myself drank a 15-year old *koshu*, made by a *sake* manufacturer named Narutotai from Tokushima prefecture, at Chanterrell, a New York French restaurant mentioned earlier. The *Koshu* was served with heavy, oily meat, which I found to be a surprisingly good and natural combination.

As increasingly more Japanese drinkers become health conscious, there are a good number of *jizake* manufacturers that also make *sake* with lower alcohol content. Compared to beer, which is about five percent alcohol, and wine, nine percent or so, *sake* is a drink that contains relatively much alcohol - over 15 percent. The opposite attempts are also made. For instance, some years ago, the company Narutotai mentioned above succeeded in making exceedingly alcoholic *sake*, named Kirizukuri Nama, with 25% alcohol content. As *sake* goes, this was *sake* with an unusually high percentage of alcohol made with a specific technique, which surprised the whole industry, although whether the product is selling well is another issue.

Yet another example of recent innovations by *jizake* manufacturers is the return of Okubiwako in Shiga prefecture to the old methods of filtration that had once been abandoned. Almost all manufacturers, small and large, use modern filtration machines. Okubiwako also used such machinery until recently. However, the master brewer felt that the taste of the end product was milder if the old style filtration equipment was used, and decided to return to the old method, regardless the fact that it required a lot more human labour.

Some manufacturers have sought to create a unique kind of *sake* by using a specific kind of rice. An excellent example is a *sake* named Kamenoo made by Kusumi Shuzo, a small-scale producer in Niigata prefecture. From the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, a type of rice named Kameno-o 3) was widely grown in Niigata and Tohoku districts, because the rice not only tasted good but also was highly appropriate for making *sake*. However, the rice plant was so tall that it was extremely vulnerable to strong winds, especially typhoons. Farmers found it too risky to depend on this rice. As new types of rice were bred with developing technology, Kameno-o rice was completely abandoned. Some decades later, an influential master brewer of *sake* in Niigata prefecture tried using this variety of rice again and said that the *sake* made from

3) Kamenoo is the name of sake meaning ‘the old man of the turtle’ and the Kameno-o is the name of a brand of rice meaning ‘the tale of the turtle’.
Kameno-o was exceptional. The owners of Kusumi Shuzo were then determined to recreate a sake made with Kameno-o. However, it turned out that not a single germ of Kameno-o rice had been planted anywhere since the 1970s. Nevertheless, they finally found the only remaining 1,350 Kameno-o germs in a government agricultural research centre and planted them. Some years later, they finally had enough to make sake. This story was dramatized in a series of popular comic books in the late 1980s and later even in a TV series (see Hozumi 1995: 262-263). Following suit, some other jizake manufacturers also started to use the rice in the Akita and Nara prefectures.

More organizational attempts to retain the unique character of jizake can be found in the regulations of the Japan Sake Origin Control Association (JSOCA). It was established in 1995 by the parent body of the aforementioned Japan Sake Exporting Board and functions like the French ‘Appellation Controlee System’. The association acknowledges a sake as being a ‘true’ jizake in the strict sense of the term based upon criteria such as the rice and water being 100% local, 100% of new rice being used, the use of a correct polishing rate and so on. If the sake meets all of these criteria, a jizake label may be placed on the bottle. In the past, rice and water, which are the main materials for making sake, were found locally in the proximity of each producer, but now increasingly more jizake manufacturers have to track down good rice and water located at considerable distances from the production site. In this way, the uniqueness and individuality of each sake tends to be rendered indistinct. The establishment of the JSOCA system was also intended, according to a representative of Japan Sake Exporting Board, to encourage local farmers to grow good rice with the limited use of chemical fertilizers and also make the local community environmentally aware of the need to keep good natural water, as rice and water are beyond control of a single sake producer.

From a far-reaching and broader perspective, Japan’s first system of acknowledging locality was also aimed at clearly labelling sake that had actually been made in Japan, as well as recognizing each sake as being jizake in the true sense of the term. Over the last 20 years, especially during the 1990s, even small-scale manufacturers have built local sake factories in the USA, Asia and Australia (Ishida 2002). Therefore, efforts were necessary to retain the unique identity and market supremacy of sake made in Japan, just as it is the case with French wine.

Thus, the attempts to ensure that jizake remained authentic and succeeded in both domestic and overseas markets, led jizake manufacturers and dealers to preserve or even recreate old traditions in new contexts, as they seem to believe that ‘traditional’ ways are not only the source of good sake production but also help to establish sake as a unique product. This does not, however, necessarily mean that jizake manufacturers and brewers have abandoned machines and modern technology altogether. They are rather practical in that they have introduced machinery and modern devices in certain areas of production process, such as rice polishing, temperature control during fermentation, yeast culturing, and so on, so that labour may be reduced and potential human error avoided.

The jizake manufacturers’ great concern for ‘tradition’ is reflected in their criticism of the ‘modern innovations’ made by large-scale manufacturers. For example, a large-scale
manufacturer in Fushimi invented a new, the so-called *ekikajikomi* method for the saccharification of rice - normally the most difficult and delicate process controlled by master brewer. The new method drastically simplified the procedure, making human involvement unnecessary. According to the traditional method, steamed rice was saccharified with *kojikin*, the *Aspergillus oryzae* mold that grows on steamed rice. In contrast, according to the *ekikajikomi* method, rice is boiled into starch, and the starch is saccharified with liquefactive enzyme, a protein.

*Ekikajikomi* was invented because it was an efficient way of using rice, but it greatly affects the quality of *sake*. Thus, it has never been used in the production of any of the high-class *sake* that the *jizake* manufacturers make. They claim that innovations like this represent the ultimate destruction of the *sake*-making tradition, that gives the final products its delicate flavour and taste.

### 6. Concluding remarks

As domestic consumption of *sake* has declined each year, the feeling of crisis is shared by both large-scale manufactures and *jizake* producers alike. However, for successful *jizake* manufacturers, this crisis has also been seen as a chance to assert themselves as the guardians and practitioners of not only local, but also national culture and the tradition of ‘true’ *sake*. They claim that they are the keepers of traditional technique of *sake* production in general, and the nature and culture of their home country. *Jizake* is, therefore, the antithesis of what the major manufacturers have offered by mass-producing uncharacteristic, inexpensive *sake* during the post-war era. In this scheme of things, large-scale manufacturers in Nada and Fushimi are depicted as distorting, if not a destroying the traditions of *sake*, whereas, *jizake* manufacturers are portrayed as being the true heirs of the tradition. This new situation is a historic reversal of the status structure, which was established in the Edo period.

On the other hand, since *jizake* boom has flourished, tastes of different *jizake* tend to be similar, because *jizake* manufacturers try to meet consumers’ favourite tastes in a market that is now wider than it has ever been before. Moreover, they also pay heed to national *sake* contests in which they try to learn from award-winning *sake*. To avoid this dilemma, *jizake* manufacturers have sought to achieve a delicate balance between popularity and uniqueness. In search of uniqueness, *jizake* manufacturers now rely on ‘old ways’ and local assets. Whether applying a traditional method or using a local yeast, for instance, makes a ‘better’ *sake* or makes it uniquely different from other *sake* remains the question, but it seems true that such ‘old ways’ and local assets are two major sources in which *jizake* manufacturers believe they can find the means of making their product ‘unique,’ and hopefully, creating a specific brand.
References