



Switching to Junmai

In Response to Call for Genuine Sake

Increasing Rice Consumption to Ensure a Favorable Cycle

Consumption of sake is decreasing. Production in fiscal year 2014 was 447,000 kiloliters, or just 30% of 1973 when it peaked.

In spite of that, recent production of some types of sake has been increasing. Junmai process sake does not contain any distilled alcohol, and although total sake production has decreased by 11.7% over the single decade from 2004, that of Junmai or Junmai Ginjo increased by respectively 18.5% and 70.1%.

“There are two obvious trends with the demand for sake,” said Takayuki Inaoka (aged 44), the President of Fukunishiki Sake Brewing Co., Ltd. (Kasai City), he analyzed.



Takayuki Inaoka, President (left), and an employee moving out some steamed rice at Fukunishiki, in Mikuchi Town, Kasai City

In 1987, the company announced that it would specialize in producing Junmai. The major reason for that was to respond to “the voices of consumers demanding safe and authentic food ingredients and seasonings.”

The practice called “Aruten” started during or

after WWII when rice was scarce. Aruten involves adding distilled alcohol made from sugarcane dross etc. to increase the quantity of sake. By adding other ingredients like glucose or syrup, and frequently succinic acid and other additives, sake was tripled in volume to make Sanbai-zojo-shu, which gained popularity.

In the 1980s, in spite of a rice glut, many sake brewing companies still relied on Aruten because of the lower production cost. Even with this, the number of brewers that switched production to Junmai, like Fukunishiki, gradually increased. At that time “only at most 5% brewers” were producing Junmai but now that percentage has increased to about 24%. This reveals the two distinctive trends in the demand for sake mentioned above. “My assumption was that consumers whose preference was Junmai or sake packaged in paper boxes could be categorized into two totally different groups.”

According to President Inaoka, there is another trend he has sensed at various contests, through which Junmai brewing offers brewers the opportunity to both explore cutting-edge innovation and improve their brewing techniques.

“Breweries in Akita and Fukushima Prefectures are currently grabbing the spotlight. They are designing and creating new types of Junmai that taste different in terms of the acid or flavor. They are basically breaking new ground. Hyogo’s brewers should be careful not to be outdone by them.”

Shimomura Shuzouten, which is renowned for Okuharima (Himeji City), shifted its focus to Junmai production in 2008. “We were in the pursuit of good sake or we wouldn’t survive. We had adopted this scheme before we even realized,” stated Hiroaki Shimomura (aged 59), the owner and Toji sake master, with a smile.

After graduating a university he worked for a brewing company in Nada for about four

Hiroaki Shimomura, the owner/Toji sake master, checking the condition of prepared sake ingredients while referencing his daily log (Shimomura Shuzouten in Anji, Yasutomi Town, Himeji City).



years before returning home in December of 1983 to work with his family. "My family happened to not be a large-scale mass production facility. We had no other choice but to hand-make the sake."

They launched Okuharima, a new brand, in 1993 and made an attempt to enter the Tokyo market. At that time, however, light dry sake from Niigata was at the height of its prosperity. "Our sake had a strong rich taste that seemed to be bucking the trend."

Even so, he stuck to producing shokuchu-shu (sake for drinking during a meal) type Junmai in which the umami from the rice and the sake taste had been clarified with acid. The Junmai they made using only quality Hyogo produced rice, including Yamada Nishiki, was highly-regarded all over the nation, resulting in increased orders. The strategy of concentrating on producing Junmai had finally paid off 15 years after first launching the new brand.

During the process Shimomura grew increasingly aware of the necessity of building good relationships with farmers. In spite of decreasing consumption of sake, the amount of sake-brewing rice used by brewing companies in Japan has increased by about 6.7% over the last four years because of increased production of Junmai.

"There are no other prefectures blessed with the availability of sake-brewing rice like Hyogo. We are making the effort to produce good sake with the quality rice we have access to, in order to increase the number of sake lovers and eventually contribute to decreasing the number of farmers' reducing rice field acreage. The realization of such a cycle would improve Hyogo's sake even more."

(Kazuyoshi Tsujimoto)

*Head of The Kobe Shimbun Business News Desk



日々の記録を見ながら仕込み中の酒の状態をみる下村裕昭店主
氏 〓姫路市安富町安志、下村酒造店

消費低減が続く日本酒。2014年度の生産量は7千500トン、1973年比で約3割減。そんな中で、近年増え続けている酒がある。醸造アルコールを入れない純米造りの酒だ。清酒全体が04年からの10年間で11・7%減少したのとは逆に、純米酒は18・5%増え、純米吟醸酒も70・1%伸びた。

兵庫に乾杯 日本酒と酒米の聖地

8

純米という選択

「日本酒の需要は、サトウキビの搾りかたはつきり分かれてきて、すなわち原料とした醸造アルコールを添加する市」の稲岡敬之社長「アル添」は米不足(44)は分析する。の戦中戦後、酒の増量1987年、同社は、目的で始まった。ブド

本物求める声を受けて

全製品の純米酒宣言を、ウ糖や水あめも加えずした。「食料や調味料、本来の清酒の約3倍に、酒全体の5%もなかつた」といふ純米造りは、今約24%まで拡大した。それとともに明確になつてきたのが酒需要の二極化だ。「純米酒を飲む人といゆる紙パック酒を飲む人は全く別の層と思う」



蒸した米を運び出す稲岡敬之社長(左)ら 〓加西市三三町、寛久館

80年代、米余りの時代になつても安いアル添に頼る酒造会社が多数の中、寛久館のように純米酒に転換する蔵が徐々に増えていく。清酒全体の5%もなかつた」といふ純米造りは、今約24%まで拡大した。それとともに明確になつてきたのが酒需要の二極化だ。「純米酒を飲む人といゆる紙パック酒を飲む人は全く別の層と思う」

米消費拡大し好循環

稲岡社長は、品評会などに参加すると、もう一つの流れを感じるという。それは純米酒が酒造りの技術革新と進化を極める最先端の場となつてきていることだ。

「今、注がれている秋田や福島の酒造家は、純米酒をベースに酸や香を生かす新しい個性の酒をデザインし、日本酒の新たな境地を切り開いている。兵庫も負けられない」

純米化を進めながら下村さんがより感じるようになったのは、奥播磨で知られる下村酒造店(姫路市)が、純米酒の増加で全量純米化したのは08年の酒造会社(原料米使用量は4年間で約6・7%増えた)。

「兵庫ほど酒米に恵まれた県はない。その村裕昭店主(氏)59は、米でおいしい酒を造り、飲む人が増え、減反を減らす。そんな循環が生まれれば兵庫の酒はさらによくなる」

(辻本一好)