

Expo Milano 2015

'Sake on The Table' with Italian food

Expanding the reach of ancient Japanese brew through creative new taste pairings

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SPECIAL TO THE JAPAN TIMES

A related event to the Expo Milano 2015, "Milano Sake Week" is set to take place in Milan in July. Under the theme, "Arranging Tables Around the World with Japanese Sake," the event will showcase the taste, history and culture of sake and propose new richness to tables of Japan and beyond by adapting sake to the food cultures of different countries. During the event, a private sector project "Sake on The Table," which is aimed at creating lifestyles using sake and promoting the development of Japanese traditional culture, will organize a promotion of Japanese sake.

Sake stylist Makiko Tejima, who serves as the "Sake on The Table" bureau representative, as well as a Japan Pavilion expert, has run food consultancy Kashiokashi Co. since 1992 and has put forth ideas for creating a new cuisine environment through table coordination consultation and new ways of enjoying Japanese sake.

Tejima has been internationally active and highly motivated in spreading Japanese food culture, including sake. In 2001, Tejima participated in the first Slow Food Cheese Festival, hosted by Slow Food, an international organization advocating the continued diversity of foodstuffs, small scale production and organic sustainable agriculture. The biennial festival takes place in the northern Italian city of Bra, the birthplace of

the Slow Food movement. At the festival, she proposed a new combination of sake and cheese, which was well received, marking the first major introduction of Japanese sake in Italy. The following year, she coordinated the sake booth at the food festival Salone del Gusto in Turin. Based on these experiences, Tejima launched a society to enjoy Italian cuisine with sake in 2010.

In 2000, I had a chance to interview Carlo Ferrini, the founder of the International Slow Food movement. During our talk, he suddenly asked me: "You Japanese only come to gather information, but you don't bring anything delicious, do you?" I'm sure that you have something more delicious other than sushi and tempura in your country, don't you?" I was surprised and answered that we have miso (bean paste), soy sauce and sake," Tejima said. "My apart-of-the-moment answer was all fermented food, and Ferrini asked me to bring our specialties to the Cheese Festival."

In Italy at the time, the *washoku* (traditional Japanese cuisine) culture had not yet become widespread except for urban areas.

"Rather than miso or soy sauce, I thought it would be better to bring sake, which is brewed like wine, to the small city of Bra where the Slow Food movement originated, so that people may feel closer and understand our food culture," Tejima said.

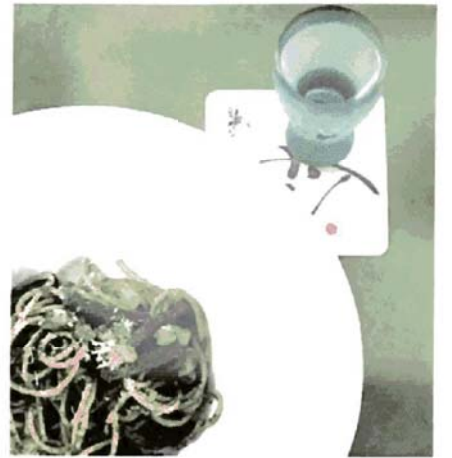
"There, I was asked 'Which sake should go well with *emmental* cheese?' making me realize that Italians have the



Japanese sake stylist Makiko Tejima poses during a recent interview with The Japan Times in her office in Tokyo. She speaks about localizing Japanese sake to Italy and beyond to contribute to enriching each country's traditional food culture.

mindset to adapt food from abroad to their domestic food," she said, looking back on that time.

Milano Sake Week is a project in collaboration with Peace Kitchen, an organization that aims to communicate to the world the attractiveness of *washoku* under the concept of "Peacebuilding Through Washoku." The project will take place at the community space Cascina Cuccagna, which has been reconstructed



from a 17th-century farmhouse and is about 10 minutes by subway from the Duomo in the center of Milan. Under the theme "Localization of Japanese Sake to Italy," a variety of events will be organized during the period in order to contribute to the world the diversity of Japanese food culture.

The scheduled programs include a meeting of the society to enjoy Italian cuisine with sake that Tejima has been engaged in for years, a tasting of 11 Japanese sake brands, a sake bar to enjoy sake pairing, and seminars on sake.

Among the highlights, is the production of the "Sakana" sake cocktail, which makes good use of the flavor of *wasabi* (Japanese horseradish). An original recipe of the Sake on The Table project, *Sakana* will be made using Hakutsuru Premium Junmai (Ginjo) as a base that is mixed with grated *hon-wasabi* (real washi) in tubes by Kameya Food and peach juice. The cocktail will be presented as an appetizer (appet) that is an important part of the Italian lifestyle. Not only suggesting a new way of tasting sake and *wasabi*, the promotion is aimed at creat-

ing a new era by providing a breath of fresh air on the tables of Italian people.

"In this country, where everybody believes 'manners make the man' should be the world's best, people are very conservative with regards to accepting cuisines from different countries. However, Italian people's interest in Japanese food culture is high," Tejima pointed out.

What is important for them is how different food cultures could contribute to enriching their own food culture. As part of this, I am thinking about how to pair sake with Italian cuisine, that is to say, how to localize sake to Italy, thus contributing to enriching Italian tables," Tejima said.

Sake is a fermented beverage brewed similarly to wine and beer. However, rice, its base ingredient, does not contain sugar, so it cannot be directly utilized as a source of energy for the yeast needed for fermentation. Therefore, the first step is to convert the starch of the rice into sugar by using *koji* (a kind of mold), and then the saccharified rice (*rice koji*) is fermented by yeast as the second step. These two steps of saccharification and fermentation occur in parallel in the same container.

This brewing process, called multiple-parallel fermentation, is a brewing method unique to sake, different from the fermentation of wine or beer. Synthesized by *koji* and yeast, which are invisible to the naked eye, the rice is fermented through a complex and sophisticated process.

Through her past activities, Tejima is keenly aware of the importance of explaining the process accurately and communicating it in an easy-to-understand manner with international audiences who are eager to understand the essence of the product.

"Localization of sake to Italy is not only about pairing sake and Italian cuisine. Ultimately, the identity of Japanese-fermented food, such as sake, soy sauce and miso, originates in microorganisms designated as national *himai*, including Japa-

nese *koji* or *Aspergillus oryzae* that are unique to Japan. I believe that the Japanese *koji* culture created in communication with microorganisms, which were mysterious invisible things for the people in ancient times, has much influence on Japanese spirits," Tejima explained.

"While introducing our table manners of *washoku waentaru* (exchanging cups of sake with each other), which is done with respect and feelings for others, I think Japanese should acknowledge again the value of Japanese *koji* culture and I would like to pass it along to future generations," Tejima said.

Moreover, the Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association and the National Research Institute of Brewing have released an interim report on their collaborative research about the compatibility between sake and food last November. According to the report, sake provides more aftertaste of cheese than white wine does. The fact that sake goes well with cheese, which Tejima has explored through her activities for years, has been thus scientifically verified.

The time has come for sake to be more deeply understood for its attractiveness in bringing out the characteristics of food while also conveying its own taste.

Amid the raising expectations for cultural exchanges and industrial development generated from Japan-Italy relations, the project "Sake on The Table" presented during the Expo Milano 2015 will bring the richness of the table with sake to the world and sake on the tables of different countries will add new richness to food cultures. Also, sake will accommodate the richness of different food cultures and these exchanges will contribute to weaving a new future on the traditional food cultures of each other.

It won't be long before people around the world are able to share a sake toast while loudly saying, *kanpai*, salute or cheers.

Additional translation by Choko Iuchi

Milano Sake Week unites sake and Italian food

Period: July 7-July 14

Venue: Cascina Cuccagna community space in Milan

Content:

- Let's enjoy Italian food with Japanese Sake (reservations, payment required)
- Sake Tasting Bar (free of charge)
- Sales of Japanese sake and *wasabi* (horseshall)
- Italian food and Japanese sake at a restaurant (reservations, payment required)
- Seminars on Japanese sake
- *Sakana* drink, a sake barrel opening ceremony

For more information, visit www.sakeonthetable.com.



The "Sakana" original sake cocktail features the fresh flavor of *wasabi* (horseradish) that is native to Japan. SAKE ON THE TABLE



During "Milano Sake Week," visitors will be able to sample 11 brands of Japanese sake paired with Italian specialties. SAKE ON THE TABLE

Sake helps spread Japanese culture globally

Japanese people have been sake drinkers since ancient times. Throughout the history of rice cultivation, sake production went through a number of trials and errors before evolving into what it is today.

However, the volume of sake produced in 2013 was 449,430 kl, which represents just 31 percent of its peak production in the 1970s.

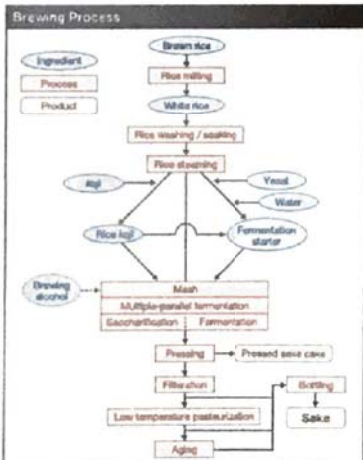
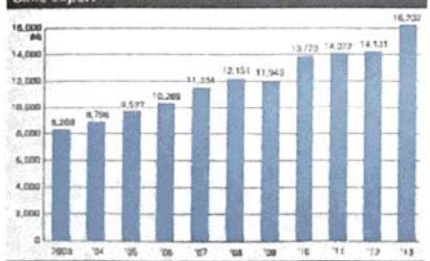
Meanwhile, sake exports are on the increase. According to annual trade statistics by Japan's Ministry of Finance, the export volume of sake has doubled in the past decade, reaching 16,702 kl in 2013. Although it accounts for only 3.6 percent of the total production, it is notable that sake exports are increasing while overall production has remained at approximately the same level in

recent years.

In monetary terms, exports exceeded ¥10 billion in 2013, which is 2.7 times of the value of 2003 exports, but it is still a much lower level compared to the export value of French wine or Scotch whisky. The three largest export destinations for sake are the U.S., Hong Kong and South Korea, while among European countries, only the U.K. (8th) ranks in the top 10 importers.

As a national beverage that symbolizes Japan, including its nature and climate, as well as people's politeness, politeness and delicacy, sake is expected to play a role in the export policies as a local resource and contribute to communicating to the world the attractiveness of Japanese culture.

Sake export



Sake is made by fermentation just like wine and beer, but it involves a more complex brewing process. Wine is naturally fermented by pressing grapes and adding yeast. Sake, however, is not fermented by adding yeast to rice, but through the use of *koji* (a kind of mold), which converts starch in the rice into sugar. The rice begins fermenting once yeast is added to this sugar. Because the saccharification and fermentation processes occur in parallel in the same container, the process is called multiple-parallel fermentation. JAPAN SAKE AND SHOCHU MAKERS ASSOCIATION

Japanese Artisanal Sake 梵 Born

Katsunobu Shanten
u.u.born.co.jp

This is a rice made in the U.S. by the famous U.S. farmer, the first U.S. farmer to plant rice in the U.S.