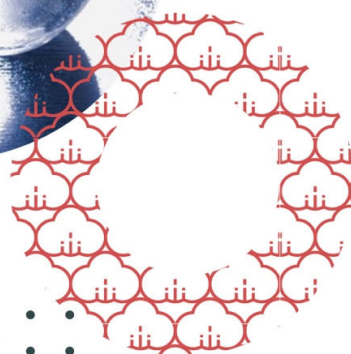


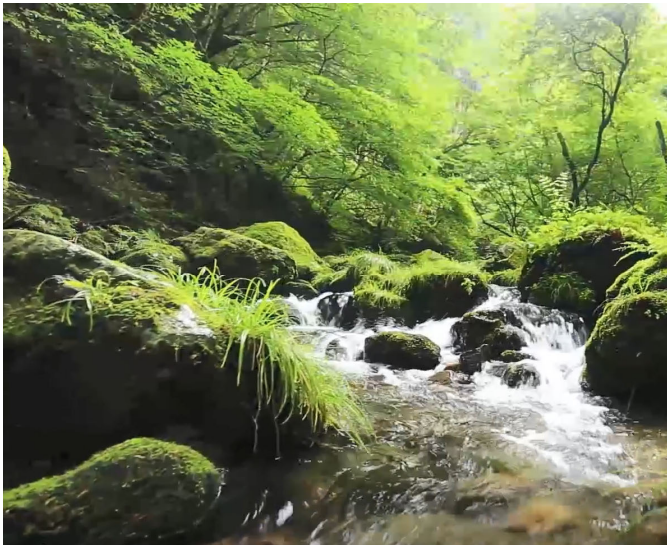
Inscribed on the Representative List of
the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

Traditional knowledge and skills of *sake*-making with *koji* mold in Japan



Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan

About "Traditional knowledge and skills of *sake*-making with *koji* mold in Japan"



Sake, a Japanese alcoholic beverage made from grains and quality water, is deeply rooted in Japanese culture.

The skills of *sake*-making whose original forms were established more than 500 years ago share the characteristic of using *koji* mold (*). But they have developed differently depending on the climate and land of various parts of Japan, being handed down to produce *nihon-shu* (brewed liquor), *shochu* or *awamori* (distilled liquors), and *mirin* (sweet *sake* used for seasoning).

* *Koji* mold (a type of mold) is grown on steamed grains such as rice or barley. The mold converts the starch in the main ingredient into sugar.

"Traditional knowledge and skills of *sake*-making," refers to the skills of *toji* (chief *sake* makers) and *kurabito* (*sake* brewery workers), who traditionally use *koji* mold to make *sake* and is Japanese representative culture established with delicate sensibility and refined skill over a long history.

They have been developed depending on the climates and environment of various regions in Japan.



Related videos



About the traditional knowledge and skills of *sake*-making with *koji* mold in Japan

The Agency for Cultural Affairs YouTube channel
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3lSnml7OmE>



Shin Nihonshu Story 2024

The Agency for Cultural Affairs YouTube channel
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7CMR_Ib9zoM



The skills used in "Traditional knowledge and skills of *sake*-making with *koji* mold in Japan"



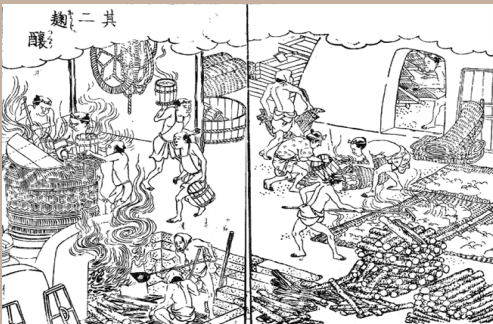
I The skills to process the raw materials

By adjusting the water content and steaming the ingredients, the brewers prepare the raw materials for the perfect condition to make *sake*.



II The skills to make *koji*

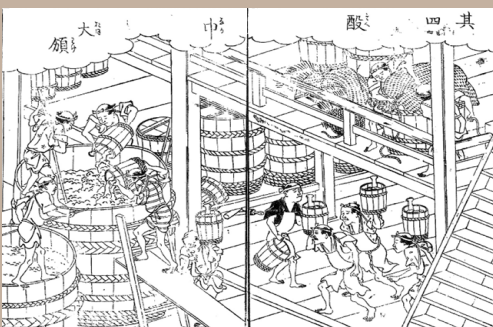
Making the *koji* is an important aspect that decides the quality of the *sake*. Brewers observe the state of the *koji* and control the mold's growth using their hands.



III The skills to control fermentation

Brewers carefully observe the state of the mash and use a distinct method called multiple parallel fermentation (*) to express the flavor or aroma of the *sake* they aim for without adding anything other than water.

* A fermentation method in which saccharification and fermentation occur simultaneously. This allows for a higher alcohol content (approximately 20%) than other brewed alcoholic beverages such as wine or beer.



About *nihon-shu*



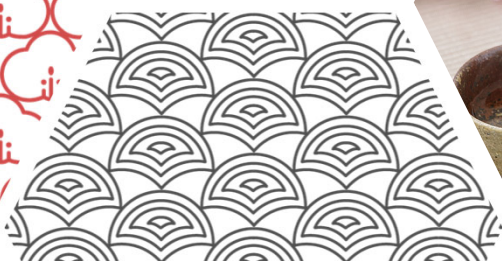
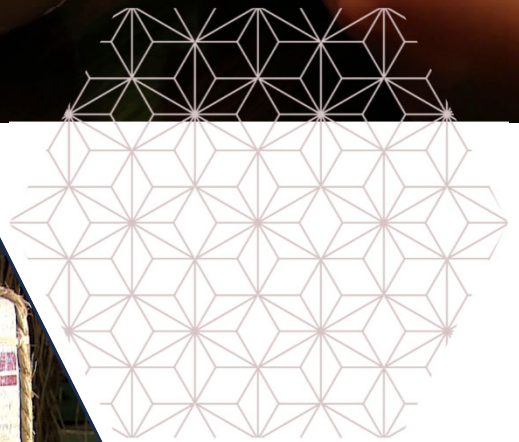
Nishon-shu is a brewed alcoholic beverage mainly made with rice.

The first reference to *sake*-making using the *koji* and rice mixture that can be called the original form of modern *nihon-shu* is from the early 8th century. It is believed that *sake*-making using *koji* was widely known from around this time.

In the latter half of the 15th century, techniques that can be considered the original forms of modern *sake*-making were developed: *dan-jikomi*, where ingredients are added in stages, and *hiire* (pasteurization), where the ingredients are sterilized to make the *nihon-shu* last longer.



Modern *nihon-shu* is becoming more diverse. Some brewers sell different qualities of *nihon-shu* based on production method, such as *ginjo-shu*, *junmai-shu*, and *honjousho-shu*, but there are also *nama-zake* (non-pasteurized sake), *nigori-zake* (cloudy sake), sparkling sake, and aged sake. Both warming the *nihon-shu* and chilling it are popular ways to drink *nihon-shu*.



How *nihon-shu* is made



Nihon-shu is made through a painstaking process that takes about 60 days.

Polishing the rice

Washing the rice

The rice is washed carefully, then steeped so it can absorb water.

To enhance the flavor of the *nihon-shu*, the proteins and fats are polished off the outer layers.



Steaming

Steaming the rice makes it easier for the *koji* mold to grow and for the mix to dissolve in the *moromi* (fermentation mash).



Making the *koji*

Koji mold is sprinkled onto steamed rice so the mold can grow.



Making the *moto*
(starter culture)

The *moto* is created by mixing the *koji*, steamed rice, water, and yeast.



Making *moromi*
(fermentation mash)

More *koji*, steamed rice, and water are added to the *moto* to create the *moromi* and ferment it.



Pressing

Sake cake

Filtering and
pasteurizing

Storing
and bottling

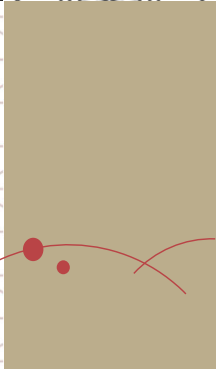
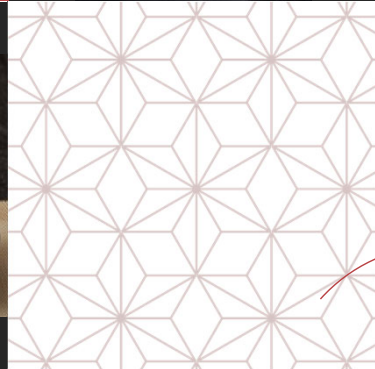
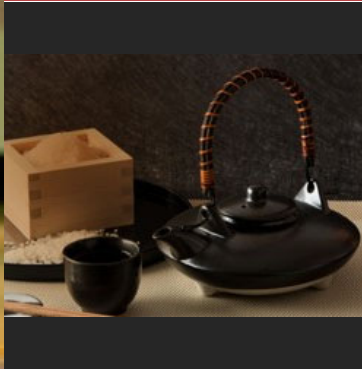
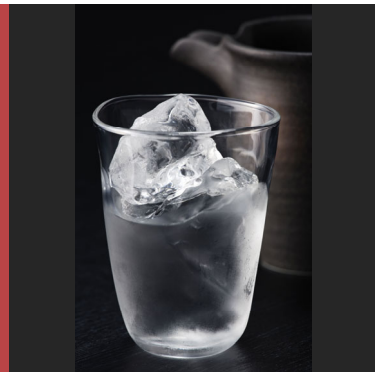
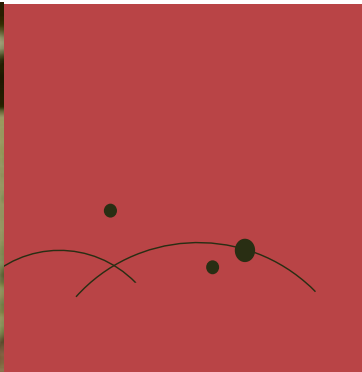


About *shochu* and *awamori*

Shochu and *awamori* are distilled alcoholic beverages that include a distillation process in addition to making *koji* and making *moromi*.

The technique of distillation is said to have been introduced to Okinawa Prefecture around the 15th century. Modern *shochu* is separated into types depending on the distillation equipment used: the traditional pot distillation *shochu* or the continuous distillation *shochu*, which was developed in the 19th century.

Many pot distillation *shochu* use *koji* like *nihon-shu* does, but most use black or white *koji* mold rather than yellow *koji* mold.

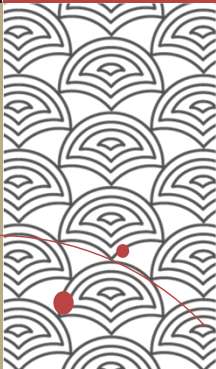
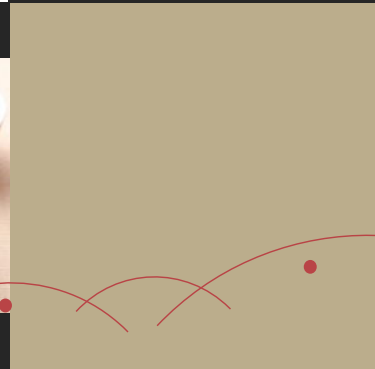
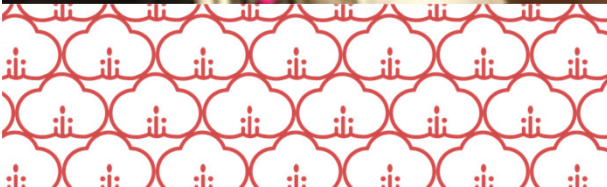
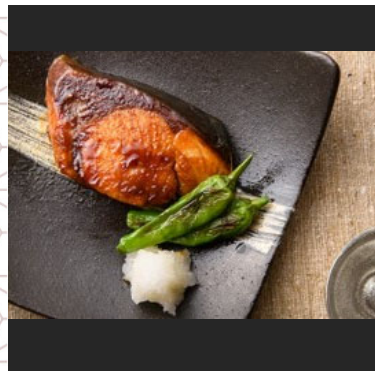


About *mirin*

Mirin is a mixed alcoholic beverage mainly made with glutinous rice, *koji*, and *shochu*.

Although there are several theories on how *mirin* was first created, it was enjoyed by the wealthy as a rare sweet alcoholic beverage by the end of the 16th century.

Literature that included using *mirin* for cooking became more common after the middle of the 17th century.



How pot distillation *shochu* and *awamori* are made



To make *shochu*, a first *moromi* (starter culture) is created by mixing water, *koji*, and yeast. Then, steamed sweet potatoes, barley, rice, or buckwheat are added with water for the main *moromi* (fermentation mash), which is then fermented and distilled. *Awamori*, on the other hand, is made by distilling the first *moromi*.

Making
the first *moromi*
(starter culture)



Water



Koji



Yeast

Making the main *moromi*
(fermentation mash)



Water



Main raw materials

Sweet potatoes, barley, rice, buckwheat, etc.

Distilling

Shochu

Distilling

Awamori



How *mirin* is made



Like *nihon-shu*, the main ingredients are steamed rice and *koji*, but *mirin* is made with *shochu*, without yeast. There is no fermentation, and the *koji* breaks down the starch and proteins into sugar and amino acid, creating a sweet flavor.

Making *moromi* (mash)



Koji



Steamed
glutinous rice



Shochu

Pressing

Aging

Bottling



The *sake* made with the traditional knowledge and skills of *sake*-making play an essential role in Japanese social and cultural events, such as rituals or celebrations.

Certain customs have been observed since ancient times. For example, couples drink *sake* during the *sansankudo* ritual at weddings, and *sake* is offered to the deities at ground-breaking ceremonies.

Sake has been rooted in Japanese society as something essential during various events that mark important milestones in Japanese people's lives.

Traditional knowledge and skills of *sake*-making activities that contribute to achieving the SDGs

- Protecting the environment to secure clean water and the ability to produce grains necessary for *sake*-making (food security, environmental sustainability)
- There is no gender restrictions for bearers such as *toji* and *kurabito* (gender equality)
- Many local residents including the farmers who provide the raw materials participate. This creates social cohesion in the communities (peace and social cohesion).
- By-products produced in the process of *sake*-making (such as the *sake cake*) are reused for secondary products such as *mirin*, so resources are used effectively (responsible consumption and production)

Safeguarding and transmitting the traditional knowledge and skills of *sake*-making

To hand down the traditional knowledge and skills of *sake*-making properly, each group in the community, including the Preservation Society of Japanese *Koji*-based *Sake* Making Craftsmanship, is holding seminars to train successors or promotional activities.

The inscription on the UNESCO Representative List brought hope that it will be an opportunity for more people within Japan and abroad to learn of the richness of the history and culture of the traditional knowledge and skills of *sake*-making and for more dialogue and exchanges with other cultures.



(Some photographs provided by Shirakawa Village)