DE GRUYTER
DOI 10.1515/cj-2014-0002 — Contemporary Japan 2014; 26(1): 29–48

Aaron Kingsbury

Constructed heritage and co-produced meaning: the re-branding of wines from the Koshu grape

Abstract: The last decade has seen large-scale cultural changes in the table grape and wine production industries of the Kōfu Basin in Yamanashi Prefecture. From the perspective of wineries, the recent rise in popularity of wines produced from the Koshu grape (*Vitis vinifera* var. *orientalis*) has secured their industrial recovery in the short term. This paper explores these changes, thereby contributing to the literature on the invention of traditions for economic profit and rural revitalization. Conclusions are drawn from archival research, interviews with stakeholders in the table grape and wine industries, and over one and one-half years as a grape farmer in the Kōfu Basin. Rather than significant improvements in educational or technical advancement in growing Koshu for wine or even wine production, the rise in popularity of wines produced from Koshu is argued to be more linked to the cultural re-branding of the grape based on co-produced and glocalized perceptions of simulacra in which the historical and local consumption of Koshu wine is equated with Japanese cuisine and culture. By connecting Koshu with Japanese identity and "Japaneseness," branded wines now provide new opportunities for conspicuous consumption and "connoisseurship" for consumers.

Keywords: Koshu wine, invented traditions, conspicuous consumption, economic revitalization, Japan Brand

Aaron Kingsbury: Mayville State University, e-mail: aaron.kingsbury@mayvillestate.edu

1 Introduction

Since the eighth century, viticulture has played an integral part in the local table grape and later wine production economies of the Kōfu Basin in Yamanashi Prefecture of Japan. Of particular importance to this long tradition is the Koshu grape cultivar (*Vitis vinifera* var. *orientalis*). Although relegated to near obscurity by the late twentieth century, its resurgence as a prominent grape to local winemakers and consumers of domestically produced wines over the last decade is pronounced.

On the back of increased popularity of wines produced from the Koshu grape, many authors argue that Japanese wine is undergoing a "renaissance," with new boutique wineries said to be handcrafting wines on a small scale and providing new business opportunities for local farmers and investors (e.g., Campbell-Drane 2001; Gastin 2004; Campbell 2006). Even Japan Airlines began serving Japanese wines in business class (*JCN Newswire* 2007).

Not only is the industry argued to be cooperating to improve quality, but also the national and multinational producers are said to have made high profile commitments to production based on premium quality, locally grown and artisanal style wines (Gastin 2004; Aoki 2007).

This article provides a more comprehensive examination of the rise in prominence of wines from Koshu, now taken by most as the flagship of production in the Kōfu Basin. It examines the sociocultural and economic history of the grape in this region, recent innovations in expanding flavor profiles in Koshu wines, and the new forms of value, identity, and meaning that have been created and then reproduced. Rather than an overall upgrading in quality in the vineyards or wineries of most firms, this article argues that the rise in popularity of wine from Koshu is little more than the result of government-assisted cultural re-branding and the construction of new, highly marketable Japanese cultural forms based in historical inaccuracy. Theoretically, this article exemplifies how cultural traditions can be invented and then embedded with specific meanings for economic profit and rural revitalization.

Data were collected using three inter-connected methods as part of a more overarching research project focusing on the origin and contemporary dynamics of production in the table grape and wine industries of Yamanashi Prefecture (see Kingsbury 2012). First, the author formally interviewed more than 145 respondents across various stakeholders. Second, the author conducted extensive archival research on the history of agriculture and wine production in the region. In addition, many respondents were shown past and present aerial photographs, topographic, physical and road maps of various areas within the Kōfu Basin to trace cropping histories, diffusion patterns of grape varieties, and changes in location of the wine industry over time. Finally, the author worked as a grape farmer in the role of a participant observer in the Kōfu Basin for more than one and one-half years.

2 Connecting place with quality

Over the previous two decades a wealth of research from a number of academic disciplines has been conducted on the social-spatial construction of quality

within and across markets around the world. Much of this has centered on social and economic transitions away from intensively industrial productivist systems to those arguably post-productivist (Takahashi 2001; Evans et al. 2002; Watts et al. 2005). While precise definitions remain the subject of debate, post-productivist systems are often symbolized by changes in policy to stimulate endogenous development, and forged by social and/or political motivations to advance organic or ecological farming, link farmers and consumers, counter urbanization, and promote the consumption of the countryside and the diversification of farm activities.

Indeed, within this framework, research has shown that an established and marketed place of production, linked to a specific "localness," not only formulates trust, but also evokes perceptions of quality to consumers (Murdoch et al. 2000; Archer et al. 2003; Youngs 2003; Hinrichs et al. 2004; Watts et al. 2005; Koganezawa 2007; Takayanagi 2007; Iga 2007). "Localness," through a place association and possibly linked to sociocultural constructions of place, may be directly employed to market products (e.g., Suryanata 2000). On the other hand, and here using examples from the Japanese context, this "localness" may also be linked to reactionary politics and banal forms of nationalist sentiment (Yamamoto 2007; Takeda 2008). Importantly to this article, there are perhaps few products more intensely linked to their locality across the world than premium wines (especially in relation to the origin of the grapes used to produce them).

From the perspective of many traditional producers, quality wine is identified first by its location (assuming a lack of technical faults), making it relatively unique as an intensely geographical product. Traditional French wine manufacturers see little disconnect between the various stages of wine production, an idea embodied in the concept of *terroir*. *Terroir* refers to all the physical attributes of a vineyard, including the vine, subsoil, drainage, macro-, meso- and microclimates, as well as cultural elements such as local history, joys, sweat from the laborers, etc. (Haynes 1999; Wilson 2001; Barham 2003). When these elements are combined into a local *terroir*, they provide a particular grape variety with the general characteristics (e.g., smell, taste, color, body, texture) of the wine produced from that region. The winemaker's "signature" or the process of vinification does not alter, but rather enhances the local *terroir* of the wine (Haynes 1999; Wilson 2001; Barham 2003). Following this argument, wine, rather than grapes, is grown, resulting in an underlying social, historical, and environmental determination of the product and region (Moran 1993). Stated otherwise, a distinct region is a distinct wine. Although the validity of the concept of *terroir* is heavily debated both in the literature and in the industry, the fact remains that wine as a product is rooted to a particular region and

regional identity. Hence, as their product will be characterized by their location, firms within wine-producing regions have a strong collective interest in defining and linking to "place."

3 Food, drink, wine, and identity

Research exploring the consumption of food and drink as a marker and/or constructor of identity has greatly expanded the literature of the past few decades. While the foods we eat are used to create our actual physical body, they are also used to express elements of our identity as social beings. Indeed, humans infuse flexible meanings to food and drink, and the patterns and places of consumption. These meanings are constantly re-negotiated and vary across time and space.

As we consume a food or drink, being internal, it is argued to be closer to us than many other objects and links directly to the creation of our own identity. This results in food and drink constructing social worlds, and with that constructed identity expressed in gender, nationality, ethnicity, class, religion, or other types of membership (e.g., Bak 1997; Counihan and Van Esterik 1997; Counihan 1999; Walraven 2001; Hall 2005; Yano 2007).

In the Japanese context, Aoki (2001) uses food (i.e., ramen noodles) as a means to explore a pervasive trend in Japanese culture. That is, something foreign is imported (in this case, Chinese noodles), adapted to local tastes, conceptually understood as being Japanese and then is no longer influenced by the culture of its origin. Ohnuki-Tierney (1993) writes of rice as a metaphor for the expression of the Japanese self, Noguchi (1994) on the cultural contexts of train station lunch boxes, Allison (1997) on the sundry of ideological meanings attributed with the nursery school lunch box, Ohnuki-Tierney (1997) on the embedding of McDonald's into Japanese culture, White (2001) on younger middle-class women in new food cultures, and Francks (2009) on the integration of sake and beer into modern Japanese life (see also Ashkenazi 2004). Each of these sources explores the construction of Japanese identity/-ies through different aspects of cuisine. Food and its places and manners of preparation and/or consumption are used as a lens or mirror to see and explore culture.

The consumption and style of production of wine have also been linked to national and regional identity construction in the literature. Guy (2003) finds wine and champagne used to construct notions of "Frenchness" and French identity. Likewise, the nation of Hungary refers to its famous wine, Tokaji, in its national anthem. Oliveira (2012) finds Portuguese consumers distrustful of

Portuguese wine possibly produced from grapes of Spanish origin. Particular varieties of grapes used in wine have also been identified as constructing wine identities linked to particular places (e.g., Sullivan 2003; Kliman 2010).

This study focuses on the negotiated identities attributed with/to the production, consumption, and marketing of wine, and uses them as a lens to explore greater notions of Japanese identity, "Japaneseness," and finally the creation of Japanese culture. It is within this last context that the incorporation of Baudrillard's (1994) concept of the simulacra becomes vital. Seeking to explain relationships between society, its constructed symbols and reality, Baudrillard argues that as humanity has replaced reality with a sundry of symbols, our experience is lived through masks of created simulacra that render reality irrelevant to contemporary existence. The case of Koshu wine illustrates an interesting example of capital dislocating the physical and historical realities of "locality," "place," and "*terroir*," imbuing new cultural meanings to particular spaces and then constructing a market niche and consumer demand for these perceptions of simulacra.

4 Viticulture in the Kōfu Basin

Yamanashi Prefecture is located about 90 minutes by express train west of Tokyo (see Figure 1). It lies to the north of Japan's highest mountain, Mt. Fuji, which is often visible from the vineyards. Its prefectural capital, Kōfu City, is situated at 35.5° north.

Although largely unknown internationally, both a table grape and wine industry of around 80 wineries are located in Yamanashi Prefecture, the majority of which are in the Kōfu Basin (see Figure 1). Within the Kōfu Basin, the most important locations to the grape and wine industries in terms of production are the geographically adjacent Katsunuma Town, Enzan City, and Ichinomiya Town. As part of a larger government restructuring process during the mid- to late 2000s, Katsunuma Town and Enzan City were amalgamated into Kōshū City and Ichinomiya Town merged into Fuefuki City. These changes are mapped visually in the inset on Figure 1. Overall, the Kōfu Basin represents the center of fresh table grape production and winemaking from domestically grown grapes in the country.

Koshu is considered a two-way grape in that it can be sold fresh or fermented into wine. It is well adapted to the local growing conditions including the high temperatures, humidity, and precipitation. Its berries are pink tinged and size is often three times larger than other typical *V. vinifera* (e.g., Chardon-

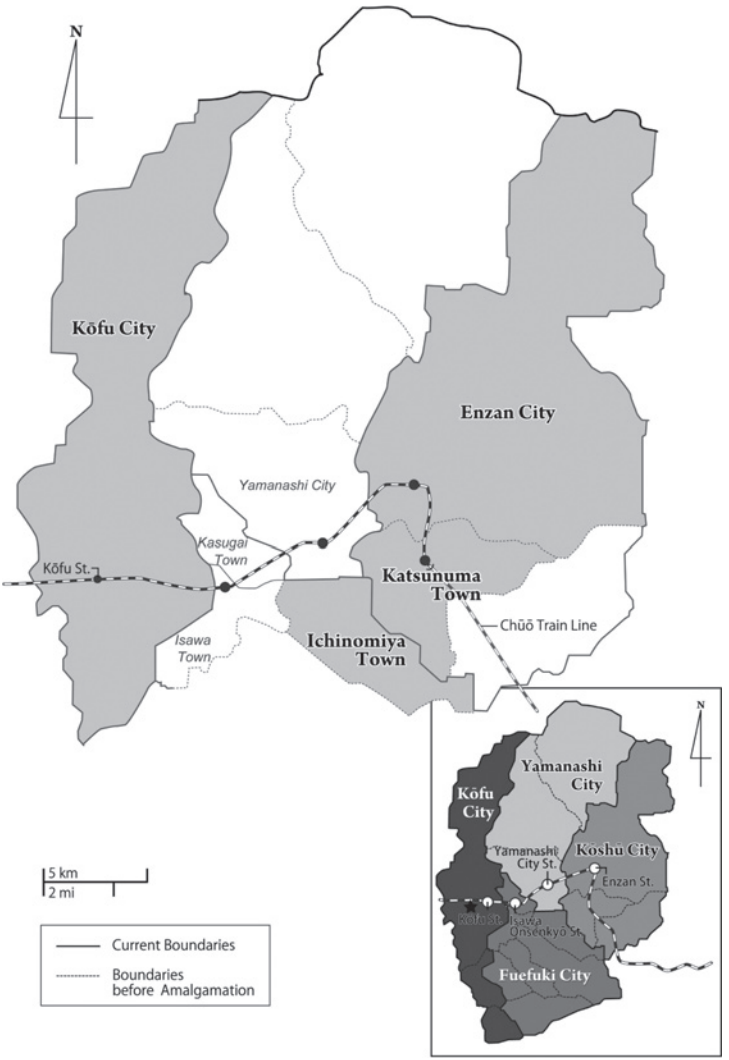

Figure 1: The Kōfu Basin. *Source:* Aaron Kingsbury and Muto Emiko.

nay or Cabernet Sauvignon). For generations farmers have grown Koshu as table grapes in pergola.[1] Figure 2 shows Koshu grapes waiting processing at

1 Pergola refers to a style of trellising in which an overhead canopy of grapes is supported by posts and cross beams/wires. Most grapes grown for wine across the world are not grown in this manner.

Figure 2: Harvested Koshu grapes. *Source:* Kingsbury (2012).

the house of a farmer. They will be hand cleaned and packed for the table grape market.

Mirroring the poor state of agriculture across much of Japan, farming in Yamanashi Prefecture has been in decline for a number of years. The total number of farm families in the area of present day Kōshū City, the leading municipality for viticulture and winemaking in Japan, dropped from 16,794 to 10,226 between 1990 and 2005 (Nakata and Ishihara 2010). One of the biggest problems facing farmers is labor effectiveness and efficiency. Small vineyards dictate that growing cannot be mechanized or assisted by larger machines. Routine yet labor intensive practices such as applying gibberellins,[2] harvesting, and pruning are completed by hand. Additionally, while the slope lands may be the better locations for growing grapes for wine, access to and working them is much more difficult and time consuming. As a result, when farmers age they tend to prefer work on the flatlands rather than the slopes. The harder to reach vineyards are the first to be left abandoned, and as a result the higher elevated areas on most mountains in the Kōfu Basin are circled with overgrown vineyards. Most fields on slopes are only accessible with a mini-truck, while some offer no vehicle access at all. Likewise, most farmers farm numerous small

2 Gibberellins are plant hormones that regulate and/or influence various processes in plant development. In this case, they are applied to grapes to make them seedless.

vineyards in geographically disparate locations. A day with a typical farmer is largely spent driving considerable distances between small vineyards.

Alcohol production from Koshu grapes originates from the eras of fermentation in earthenware containers and later collective wineries owned by grape farmers who purchased used Japanese sake tanks for fermentation. The end product is most commonly referred to in Japanese as *budōshu* (literally 'grape alcohol'). It is often translated into English as 'wine', although in actuality it is a different type of beverage. While such semantic subtleties may not exist on a national level, local respondents typically made a distinction between the local term *budōshu* and the English loanword *wain* ('wine'). Respondents often explained the differences as such:

> It depends on your purpose. The style. Wine is sauce for your cuisine. *Budōshu* is for getting drunk. Or your nightcap. Wine is Western culture. The meal is the main thing. *Budōshu* is more oriental culture. The act of drinking is main.

Budōshu is distributed in 1.8 liter bottles (*isshōbin*). Its main function has been to provide farmers with a use for an unmarketable crop (i.e., typically the misshapen, damaged, or diseased grapes unsuitable for the table grape market) and an inexpensive source of alcohol to become inebriated. Even today, some farmers mix Koshu wine with *shōchū* to produce *būchū*, a beverage locally consumed when one wants stronger drinks. Variations on the following comment were typical of farmer opinion throughout the region:

> My grandfather always said, "I want to drink Japanese sake. But we are poor, so I drink this terrible *budōshu*." And at New Years and big events he would say loudly "Let's drink the real stuff, Japanese sake." But on a more common day it was the 1.8 liter bottle and a teacup. It was sour and oxidized and good for nothing but getting totally hammered.

Most grapes fermented are grown identical to table grapes, but with less fertilizer, agro-chemicals, and care. Stated otherwise, from the perspective of most farmers, Koshu grown for wine is simply a low-priced commodity rather than the foundation for wine in a more noble or romanticized sense; a side job for a little extra cash or a job for the unskilled farmer rather than a passion. The wine industry thus developed as an offshoot of the table grape industry, and path dependent to it.

Under more liberalized trade regimes from the 1970s, wineries in the Kōfu Basin began to suffer economically as foreign wines began appearing in ever-greater quantities in the Japanese marketplace. Successive wine consumption booms of imported wines, too, increased both demands for and competition between wines. However, rather than attempting to control/produce large quantities of their own supply of grapes, it made more economic sense for

Japanese firms simply to purchase imported raw materials. The sources for the raw materials used in fermentation and the bulk wines used for blending were each dependent on foreign imports as they were not only cheaper to those grown locally,[3] but also provided the classical *V. vinifera* demanded by Japanese consumers and that the local table grape industry would/could not supply.

As a result, while contemporary wineries of the Kōfu Basin typically have control over a few small trophy vineyards, most are predominantly *négociants*. That is, they assemble the grapes, bulk juice, and/or grape concentrate of other farmers and sell the resulting wine under their own name. Most also blend imported bulk wines with their own production or simply blend inexpensive imported bulk wines to bottle under their own label and then sell for higher prices.

With the shift to imported raw materials, the wine industry continued to concentrate the majority of its resources on developing production standards inside the winery and obsessing with technical methods at this final stage of production. Herculean attempts to back-engineer famous foreign *terroir* and imported wines were the norm. In many ways, rather than developing its own marketable identity or styles, it sought to emulate Western wines. Winery names, the language of labels and branding more generally often intentionally avoided Japanese characters or motifs. Rather, many wineries fermented imported classical *V. vinifera* juice in large factories under the name of "château," and labeled their production in English or French in attempts to attract domestic customers to what was largely understood to be a "foreign" or un-Japanese product. The bottom lines of most wineries continued to decline until very recently, and as a result little capital was available to most of the industry for upgrades in fermentation infrastructure.

While the total amount of wine from Koshu remains minor at around 1% in terms of total Japanese production (National Tax Agency Annual Statistics 2009), the ability of the wine industry to greatly expand on its output in the near future proves troublesome. In Yamanashi Prefecture in 1999, 7,300 tons of Koshu were grown for the fresh table grape and wine industry. This dropped to 2,460 tons by 2008. Although fluctuating, the average price for one kilogram of table grape quality Koshu has been just above US$ 3 since the 1980s, about

3 Also known as table wine, bulk wine is typically at the lowest end of the wine quality spectrum. The origin and variety of the grapes used in fermentation is often vague. Bulk wines are inexpensive and consumers benefit from low prices due to economy-of-scale production methods.

one-fourth the value of other table grapes. Koshu sold to wineries rarely commands over US$ 2 a kilogram, typically far less. As a result, farmers have progressively stopped growing it.

5 The Koshu Wine Project: innovation and segmentation

The recent rise in popularity of Koshu wine can be linked to a number of factors. Perhaps most important initially is the efforts of the Koshu Wine Project, operated by entrepreneur and long-time American expatriate Ernest Singer. Due to various restraints resulting from the low quality of Koshu available for fermentation (for details, see Kingsbury 2012), the Koshu Wine Project decided to produce small test batches of a lower alcohol (i.e., 10–11%) wine in 2004. This wine was then given to the highly influential wine critic Robert Parker to score,[4] the first ever from Asia. Parker scored an incredible 88 out of 100,[5] and both Japan and the world began to look at Japanese wine in any meaningful way for the first time (*Kyodo News International* 2005; Hughes 2008). Parker's score served as the industry's first successful branding mechanism and before any production changes occurred within industry, sales of wines from Koshu skyrocketed in Japan.

In effect, the wines from the Koshu Wine Project had great potential to actually change large segments of the wine industry in the Kōfu Basin. The group uncovered innovations that encouraged changes away from many long-held production practices. The wines scored by Parker were produced using these new methods, something that is not true of most Koshu wines produced today.

From the perspective of a winemaker, Koshu is a chameleon grape, relatively neutral and without a great deal of character. Unlike many other grapes, the winemaker therefore has greater control over the styles and influence on the final product. In recent years, two different styles have begun to dominate production in those wineries with the fermentation infrastructure and technical

4 Robert Parker is the most well-known wine critic in the world. His opinions have considerable influence over how wine is produced globally.

5 Both the legitimacy and integrity of this score have been challenged (Hori 2009).

capacity to make changes: *Koshu Fermented sur lie*,[6] and *Koshu Fermented Kiiroka*.[7]

The effects of these new technologies were almost immediate. This was the first time that many wineries realized Koshu had any pronounced aromas, bringing new interest from wineries in the grape. Some of those who were able invested capital in new stainless-steel tanks and advanced temperature-controlled storage systems and production in this new style dramatically increased. On the other hand, the actual dispersion of these technologies has been limited. This has resulted in increased segmentation within the wine industry.

At the lower end of the spectrum, a number of small- and medium-sized wineries, particularly those with strong and maintained roots to their collective winery histories, have long existed simply to serve the demands of the now aging farmers looking to drink inexpensive wines from their own grapes. In effect, these wineries in their grape sourcing, production methods, and final wine styles represent the traditional local producers of the Kōfu Basin. Inexpensive grapes form the base for lower quality production, fermented by winemakers not formally trained and then sold to undemanding consumers in systems not completely based in the maximization of profits. As a result, there has never been an impetus or arguably available capital to upgrade equipment or skill sets. Such wineries have changed little since the 1960s, and most still ferment oxidized wines in outdated, dirty, second-hand Japanese sake tanks. They are ill equipped to handle tourists, as they are often filthy, with no tasting room, signs, or even posted hours of operation. Largely family operated, they typically also have minimal staff and no salespeople or Internet presence. As a consequence, they have been unable to take advantage of the rise in consumer demand for Koshu among more urban Japanese consumers. Likewise, as other choices of alcohol are now widely available and the number of local farmers who participate continues to decline, the economic future of this kind of winery appears bleak. One winery owner explained a sentiment expressed by many others:

> We cannot change. We have no money. I would love to change the tanks, but it is impossible. We have very dirty and old tanks and it is impossible to keep them airtight.

6 *Sur lie* means to mature or age a wine on the lees (i.e., basically excess proteins and dead yeast). Keeping wines on the lees for additional periods of time can result in wines that are fresher and have more intense flavors.

7 Wines fermented in this style express components of passion fruit, grapefruit, lime, and/or white peach. *Kiiroka* wines became available from around 2005 (for details, see Tominaga 2003; Campbell 2006; Kingsbury 2012).

Others often expressed a sense of pride in their production and its history:

> We have no interest in international wines or comparisons. This is farmers' wine made for local farmers from their grapes.

More generally, while recent advances in fermentation methods of the larger and a few key entrepreneurial wineries are shifting to produce new styles of Koshu wines, few of these methods have been incorporated by the majority of the industry. In effect, most Koshu wines now being sold are completely different styles of wines made with completely different techniques and technologies. In reality, the cost of upgrading the fermentation infrastructure required to produce these new styles has resulted in their diffusion to only a very small segment of the wine industry. A larger portion of the industry has enjoyed slight increases in sales by riding on their coat tails to enjoy the resulting increased attention and new markets that have been created. The Koshu wine famously scored by Robert Parker, those of a few higher end wineries, and the average Koshu produced in the Kōfu Basin today have been lumped together and are successfully being marketed to a largely ignorant public. One important factor in this has been the government-funded establishment of the Koshu of Japan brand.

6 Government funding: Koshu of Japan (KOJ)

Following a series of food safety and labeling scandals in the 1990s and 2000s, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (MAFF) began to promote a more consumer-focused approach to food safety to restore confidence. This has included an encouragement of "local eating" and efforts to link locally produced Japanese food to "authentic," "slow food," "healthiness," and "Japaneseness" to add value to domestic production (Moen 1997, 2000; Cwiertka 2006; Miyachi 2007; Takeda 2008; MAFF 2010).

Of considerable importance to these campaigns has been the promotional program of the national government operated though the small and medium enterprise agency entitled "Japan Brand." Since its introduction in 2004, Japan Brand has provided support to businesses that use traditional craftsmanship and materials in new ways that express "Japaneseness." Funding is specifically aimed to help such industries develop clear brand concepts and conduct market research in Japan and abroad. In the late 2000s, the wineries of Yamanashi Prefecture became number 303 in the Japan Brand program. This effectively linked them to US$ 180,000 from the national government, US$ 45,000 from

the prefecture, and additional funds from local cities and chambers of commerce totaling around US$ 270,000. Under the arm of the Yamanashi Prefecture Wine Manufacturers' Association, the industry used this financial support to establish Koshu of Japan (KOJ) in July of 2009.

KOJ has three officially stated main purposes: to bring Koshu wine to a world standard and to the world; raise the level of awareness of Koshu wines and the region; and link Koshu wines with Yamanashi in the mindset of consumers. Japan Brand's English Web site described Koshu Wine as follows:

> A classy item that has the connotation of being elegant, refined and high quality. Koshu Wine born through the accumulation of careful, detailed work from grape-growing to wine-making, reflects the character of the Japanese well: not flamboyant, yet classy with a reserved finesse. It is a delicate, high-quality wine representing the terrain and character of Japan and the Japanese. Low in alcohol content, it goes well with fine food including Japanese cuisine and healthy fish dishes. (Japan Brand 2010)

A little more than six months after being awarded funding, in January of 2010, KOJ held a series of promotional events in London. British consultants were hired, famed wine writers were funded by KOJ to come to London (and also later to Yamanashi, at US$ 80 a seat seminars). These events were all held at very Japan-friendly venues such as the Japanese Embassy for members of the Japan Society.

Many members of KOJ feel that the rise in popularity of "Japanese cuisine" abroad provides a perfect point of entry for Koshu via Japanese restaurants. This connection of Koshu wines to "Japanese cuisine" is linked not only to a marketed gustatory and olfactory relationship, but also to salubriousness. As explained previously, some styles of Koshu are produced with a lower degree of alcohol than most wines. As such, some with the wine industry are encouraging domestic and international consumers to "have healthy Japanese food with healthy Koshu wines" (KOJ respondent). As one participant noted:

> We are using Japanese cuisine as it is easy to back the wines. It is easy to enter the markets through Japanese restaurants. But we don't want to stop with Japanese restaurants, we are trying to get places in wine shops. We want people abroad to say "Today, let's drink Koshu." Not just Japanese food. Healthy food with this healthy Koshu wine. "Japanese wine matches Japanese food" is our motto.

When the industry entered the London market to begin its promotions, it made national news in Japan. It was a level of positive press arguably never before experienced by the wine industry. Most of the Japanese press was positive, almost nationalistic in its support. Japanese television showed numerous interviews and images of famous wine critics (although paid) and foreigners enjoy-

ing sushi and sashimi paired with Koshu wines. Being seen abroad pouring their wines with apparent aplomb began to give creditability to the struggling wine industry of the Kōfu Basin with many urban Japanese consumers. Conversely, an argument could be made that those foreigners associated with the Japan Society seen enjoying Koshu were actually more interested in establishing their own forms of conspicuous consumption and "connoisseurship" linked to variations on "Cool Japan."

7 New identity – or just old wine in new bottles?

Despite the significant drop in demand by wineries for Koshu grapes during the 1980s, many within the industry now seek to reinvent themselves by (re-) centering this cultivar as their heritage. In this new milieu, the same wineries that rejected the grape only a few decades before now publicly speak fondly of its role as the "identity" of Japanese wine and Japan.

It doesn't seem to matter that the early drinking culture in the Kōfu Basin made no attempt whatsoever to pair local cuisine with local production in a Western sense. *Budōshu*, as it was called then, simply provided a means for farmers to get drunk in an era when Japanese sake, beer, or *shōchū* were either unavailable or out of the price range for the agricultural classes.

Despite this history (or because of it), many within the industry now regularly advertise that Koshu wines match (and have always been matched by local people) with Japanese cuisine (i.e., usually seafood, something ironic considering the geographic location of the wine region). It is also the oft-repeated mantra of local and prefectural governments. Especially when marketed abroad, this claim is extended to include Japanese society more generally, who are portrayed as often consuming Japanese cuisine with Koshu wines. The following privately expressed view by this winery owner speaks to these revisions:

> A lot of false things are being said about the history here. We need a pair of scissors to clear this stuff away. The making of real wine is only recent here. Before it was *budōshu*.

Nonetheless, this narrative of Koshu matching "Japanese cuisine," which together is linked to "locally grown" and then intertwined with "healthiness," mirrors similar patterns of adding value to food in contemporary Japan.

Much of the current rise in Japanese consumer demand for the production of Koshu wines thus can be partially linked to the growing interest in "locally"

produced food and drink. It is just in this niche that Koshu is being re-branded as "Japanese heritage," "local Japanese," and being the "Japanese *V. vinifera*."[8] In the case of wine in the Kōfu Basin, producers have begun to "place" themselves into the market. In effect, they have begun to co-produce meaning and value in their production. Part of this newer platform attempts to connect wines fermented from Koshu to historical, local, regional, and even national identities to increase market share both domestically and abroad.

The traditional product of the Kōfu Basin, *budōshu*, is something not heavily demanded now either on the urban-domestic or the international market.[9] While grapes fermented into *budōshu* represent the true, possibly even indigenous, heritage of winemaking and consumption, it is just this image and product line that is being replaced. The new wines from Koshu are entirely designed to be international in their flavor profiles and even their manner of consumption, yet distinctly "Japanese" in essence.

The new styles of production of Koshu, and the associated higher costs per bottle, also now provide new opportunities for conspicuous consumption or "connoisseurship" for urban-domestic consumers. That is, the expanded selections and opportunities for wine consumption have facilitated new mediums for the creation of cultural capital among Japanese consumers. These styles are also more likely to match the increasingly sophisticated pallets of the urban Japanese consumers now well versed in typical "international" wine flavors, yet seeking something "Japanese." Some wineries are also seeking to expand on this marketing by linking directly with "Japaneseness," including labels with Japanese motifs on traditional paper and with brands written in the Japanese language (ironically until recently relatively uncommon). While this partial fabrication of the role of Koshu in Japanese wine production and consumption history may be distasteful to some, it has provided new exposure and is changing the image of domestic production with consumers outside the Kōfu Basin.

---

8 There are also a considerable number of hushed concerns as to whether Koshu is actually a *V. vinifera* (See Kingsbury 2012). If it were not, the export of Koshu wines would be virtually impossible.

9 Interestingly, respondents of the Koshu City convivium of the Japanese branch of Slow Food linked the traditional taste of the local wine to its *budōshu* history, but then declared that history and flavor profile "backwards, country bumpkin-esce, unsophisticated and un-cool." In short, this convivium argues for styles of Koshu that meet globalized standards of production and flavor profiles common in the international wine trade. They seek to lend support to "the cool, smaller wineries," so that these places "can export, do good business and compete in a globalized world."

It can be argued that urban Japanese consumers are slowly linking their own identities to the re-branded grape and being and/or expressing their "Japaneseness" by drinking wines produced from Koshu. In effect, wines from Koshu now serve as a new medium to both invent and embody a national culture, phenomena typically associated with Japanese sake. This development also follows the trends of beer and whisky as examples of products of Western modernity being domesticated (Tanaka 1993; Smith 1992; Francks 2009). It represents another example of an industry using the global to produce and enhance the "local," even allowing for the potential cultivation of consumers by permitting them to engage in and then support that "local."

This possibly also links into a growing nationalist sentiment around food and conceptualizations of "homeland" during the contemporary period of economic hardship, or, at the very least, pride in locally produced food and drink. In effect, it provides a competitive advantage to the wineries for a segment of consumers in a tight market. It also speaks to the production of new forms of culture and consumption by the wine industry. Finally, the invented traditions of Koshu are leading some to economic profit, including those entrepreneurs seizing new wine tourism opportunities. In turn, this has led to the economic revival of some segments in the rural Kōfu Basin. Benefits however are not equally distributed across wineries and poignantly little has filtered to the struggling table grape industry. In other words, while some within the wine industry claim that they are saving Koshu from extinction by fermenting it, in actuality, the re-branded wines, the identity they are helping to create, and the increases in income from varietal sales are contributing to the economic development of only some within the wine industry.

In some ways this permutation of the wine industry could have been predicted or is at least unsurprising. In previous years when the physical components of the local *terroir* proved unsuitable, many within the wine industry shifted to source from abroad. Now that they are forced to source locally to be competitive within globally defined quality standards, preliminary success in connecting their production to "place" has occurred through constructing an appropriated, faux, yet highly marketable, cultural *terroir*. Hiding the fact that this new cultural *terroir* is being constructed on the sourcing of the least valued table grapes from perhaps the last generation of local table grape farmers only adds to the fabrication.

8 Conclusions

This article has explored mechanisms for the creation of new forms of Japanese culture for economic profit and rural revitalization. It has shown how a local

industry linked to and then employed global reference systems of value to fabricate historical senses of place, identity, and consumption, allowing for the construction of new meanings and identities for its producers and consumers. These were then linked to "quality," further raising perceptions of the industry and its products with consumers. Assisted in part by government-funded programs such as Koshu of Japan, for possibly the first time in its history many Japanese consumers now consider the domestic production of wine not something foreign, but with the Koshu grape something uniquely Japanese. In effect, the reinvention of Koshu represents a new form of cultural construction, even if largely rooted in the capitalist marketing of perceptions of glocalized simulacra. While government intervention in the form of subsidies has helped to assure the short-term survival of many within the wine industry and by inference revitalize the surrounding rural areas, the longer-term, more severe difficulties faced by traditional *budōshu* producers and those diseconomies resulting from the largely broken supply chain for fermentable Koshu grapes remain.

References

Allison, Anne. 1997. Japanese mothers and *obentōs*: The lunch-boxes as ideological state apparatus. In Carole Counihan & Penny Van Esterik (eds), *Food and culture: A reader*, 221–239. New York: Routledge.

Aoki, Sumio. 2007. Japan wine report 2006. USA-FAS GAIN Report.

Aoki, Tamotsu. 2001. The domestication of Chinese foodways in contemporary Japan: Ramen and Peking duck. In David Wu & Tan Chee-beng (eds), *Changing Chinese foodways in Asia*, 219–236. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press.

Archer, G., Judit Sanchez, Gianpaolo Vignali & Aurelie Chaillot. 2003. Latent consumers' attitude to farmers' markets in North West England. *British Food Journal* 105(8). 487–497.

Ashkenazi, Michael. 2004. Food, play, business, and the image of Japan in Itami Juzo's *Tampopo*. In Anne Bower (ed.), *Reel food: Essays on food and film*, 27–40. New York: Routledge.

Bak, Sangmee. 1997. McDonald's in Seoul: Food choices, identity, and nationalism. In James Watson (ed.), *Golden arches east: McDonalds in East Asia*, 136–160. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Barham, Elizabeth. 2003. Translating *terroir*: The global challenge of French AOC labeling. *Journal of Rural Studies* 19(1). 127–138.

Baudrillard, Jean. 1994. *Simulacra and simulation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Campbell, William. 2006. Koshu: Japan's great white hope. *Japan Times*. 8 December. http://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2006/12/08/food/koshu-japans-great-white-hope/ (accessed 5 October 2013).

Campbell-Drane, Melanie. 2001. There are wine souvenirs, and then there are wines. *Japan Times*. 26 August. http://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2001/08/26/food/there-are-wine-souvenirs-and-then-there-are-wines-2/ (accessed 5 October 2013).

Counihan, Carole. 1999. *The anthropology of food and body: Gender, meaning and power*. New York: Routledge.
Counihan, Carole & Penny Van Esterik 1997. *Food and culture: A reader*. New York: Routledge.
Cwiertka, Katarzyna. 2006. *Modern Japanese cuisine: Food, power and national identity*. London: Reakton Books.
Evans, Nick, Carol Morris & Michael Winter. 2002. Conceptualizing agriculture: A critique of post-productivism as the new orthodoxy. *Progress in Human Geography* 26(3). 313–332.
Francks, Penelope. 2009. Inconspicuous consumption: Sake, beer, and the birth of the consumer in Japan. *The Journal of Asian Studies* 68(1). 135–164.
Gastin, Denis. 2004. Japanese wine industry: A renaissance. *The Australian and New Zealand Grapefarmer and Winemaker* 489. 114–115.
Guy, Kolleen. 2003. *When Champagne became French: Wine and the making of a national identity*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
Hall, Timothy. 2005. Pivo at the heart of Europe: Beer drinking and Czech identities. In Thomas Wilson (ed.), *Drinking cultures: Alcohol and identity*, 65–86. New York: Berg.
Haynes, S. 1999. Geology and wine 1: Concept of *terroir* and the role of geology. *GeoScience Canada* 26(4). 190–194.
Hinrichs, Clare, Gilbert Gillespie & Gail Feenstra. 2004. Social learning and innovation at retail farmers' markets. *Rural Sociology* 69(1). 31–58.
Hori, K. 2009. Wain hihyōsha no rinri ni tsuite [Concerning the ethics of wine critics]. *WANDS* 7/8. 4–5.
Hughes, F. 2008. Koshu stands out as sip of summer. *Japan Times Online*. 13 June. http://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2008/06/13/food/koshu-stands-out-as-sip-of-summer/#.Uk9sM4a-2So (accessed 5 October 2013).
Iga, Masaya. 2007. Miso kyōkyū nettowāku ni okeru genryō nōsanbutsu no shitsu no kōchiku [Constructions of raw materials: Quality in miso supply networks]. *Chirigaku Hyōron* 80(6). 361–381.
Japan Brand. 2010. Japan brand. http://www.japanbrand.net/english/index.html (accessed 20 January 2011).
JCN Newswire. 2007. JAL introduces wine from Japan to business class: Top Japanese wines added to first class wine list. *Japan Corporate News Network*. 15 February. http://press.jal.co.jp/en/release/200702/000644.html (accessed 5 October 2013).
Kingsbury, Aaron. 2012. *Re-localizing Japanese wine: The grape and wine clusters of Yamanashi Prefecture, Japan*. Manoa: University of Hawaii, Department of Geography doctoral dissertation.
Kliman, Todd. 2010. *The wild vine: A forgotten grape and the untold story of American wine*. New York: Clarkson Potter.
Koganezawa, Takaaki. 2007. Chiiki nōgyō shinkō to shokubunka [Development for agriculture in the region through food culture]. *Keizai Chirigaku Nenpō* 53(1). 98–118.
Kyodo News International. 2005. Koshu wine showing signs of boom. *Kyodo News International*. 3 February.
MAFF (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries). 2010. FY 2009 annual report on food, agriculture and rural areas in Japan. http://www.maff.go.jp/e/annual_report/2009/pdf/e_index.pdf (accessed 5 October 2013).

Miyachi, Tadayuki. 2007. Nihon ni okeru yūki nōgyō tenkai chiiki nōgyō shinkō [Regional deployment of organic agriculture in Japan and regional agriculture promotion]. *Keizai Chirigaku Nenpō* 53(1). 41–60.

Moen, Darrell. 1997. The Japanese organic farming movement: Consumers and farmers united. *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 29(4). 14–22.

Moen, Darrell. 2000. Grassroots-based organic food distributors, retailers and consumer cooperatives in Japan: Broadening the organic farming movement. *Hitotsubashi Journal of Social Sciences* 32. 55–76.

Moran, Warren. 1993. The wine appellation as territory in France and California. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 23(4). 696–717.

Murdoch, Jonathan, Terry Marsden & Jo Banks. 2000. Quality, nature and embeddedness: Some theoretical considerations in the context of the food sector. *Economic Geography* 76(2). 107–125.

Nakata, Michihiro & Hisanobu Ishihara. 2010. Dai 4 kai wain gyōseiron [4th government wine discussion]. Report presented at Yamanashi Gakuin Wain Kōza, 29 January 2009.

National Tax Agency Annual Statistics. 2009. The 135th National Tax Agency Annual Statistics Report. http://www.nta.go.jp/kohyo/tokei/kokuzeicho/h21/h21.pdf (accessed 5 October 2013).

Noguchi, Paul. 1994. Savor slowly: Ekiben – The fast food of high-speed Japan. *Ethnology* 33(4). 317–330.

Ohnuki-Tierney, Emiko. 1993. *Rice as self: Japanese identities through time*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Ohnuki-Tierney, Emiko. 1997. McDonald's in Japan: Changing manners and etiquette. In James Watson (ed.), *Golden arches east: McDonald's in East Asia*, 161–182. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Oliveira, Pedro. 2012. Ethnography and co-creation in a Portuguese consultancy: Wine branding research as an example. *Journal of Business Anthropology* 1(2). 197–217.

Smith, Stephen. 1992. Drinking etiquette in a changing beverage market. In Joseph Tobin (ed.), *Re-made in Japan: Everyday life and consumer taste in a changing society*. 143–158. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Sullivan, Charles. 2003. *Zinfandel: A history of a grape and its wine*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Suryanata, Krisnawati. 2000. Products from paradise: The social construction of Hawaii crops. *Agriculture and Human Values* 17(2). 181–189.

Takahashi, Makoto. 2001. Changing ruralities and the post-productivist countryside of Japan: Policy changes of the central government in the 1990s. In K. Kim, I. Bowler & C. Bryant (eds), *Developing sustainable rural systems*, 163–174. Pusan: Pusan National University Press.

Takayanagi, Nagatada. 2007. Shokuhin no rōkarusei to sanchi shinkō: Kyokō toshite no gyūniku no chiiki burando [Fabricating local embeddedness of foods: Branded beef and revitalization of the rural economy]. *Keizai Chirigaku Nenpō* 53(1). 61–77.

Takeda, Hiroko. 2008. Delicious food in a beautiful country: Nationhood and nationalism in discourses on food in contemporary Japan. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 8(1). 5–30.

Tanaka, Hiroshi. 1993. Branding in Japan. In David Aaker (ed.), *Brand equity & advertising: Advertising's role in building strong brands*, 51–63. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Tominaga, Takatoshi. 2003. *Kiiro no kaori* [The smell of yellow]. Tokyo: Fragrance Journal.

Walraven, Boudewijn. 2001. Bardot soup and Confucians' meat: Food and Korean identity in a global context. In Katarzyna Cwiertka & Boudewijn Walraven (eds), *Asian food: The global and the local*, 95–115. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Watts, D., B. Ilbery & D. Maye. 2005. Making reconnections in agro-food geography: Alternative systems of food provision. *Progress in Human Geography* 29(1). 22–40.

White, Merry. 2001. Ladies who lunch: Young women and the domestic fallacy in Japan. In Katarzyna Cwiertka & Boudewijn Walraven (eds), *Asian food: The global and the local*, 63–75. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Wilson, James. 2001. Geology and wine 4: The origin and odyssey of *terroir*. *GeoScience Canada* 28(3). 139–141.

Yamamoto, Britt. 2007. *A quality alternative? Quality conventions, alternative food and the politics of soybeans in Japan*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington, Department of Geography doctoral dissertation.

Yano, Christine. 2007. Side dish kitchens: Japanese American delicatessens and the culture of nostalgia. In David Beriss & David Sutton (eds), *The restaurants book: Ethnographies of where we eat*, 47–63. New York: Berg.

Youngs, Julie. 2003. A study of farm outlets in North-West England. *British Food Journal* 105(8). 531–541.