

Tbilisi 2022 Abstract Submission

Title

Regional branding strategies and wine grape varieties in winemaking regions of Japan

I want to submit an abstract for:

Conference Presentation

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Keywords

Regional branding, wine grape varieties, Japan Wine, geographical indications, industry-academia collaboration

Research Question

What kind of strategies have Japan's winemaking regions promoted for the regional branding of wines locally made from particular grape varieties?

Methods

I will analyze Japanese winemaking regions' strategies for the regional branding of wines locally made from particular grape varieties from historical, economic, and international comparative perspectives.

Results

I will show a practical overview of Japanese winemaking regions' strategies for the regional branding of wines locally made from particular grape varieties.

Abstract

As Japan's population ages and shrinks, annual alcohol consumption per capita shrank by more than 20% from 1992 to 2019. Under this circumstance, wine consumption in Japan has steadily increased in recent years. The current wine boom can be called the seventh wine boom as its first counted boom started in 1972.

One of the major factors behind the recent booming wine trend in Japan is the growing popularity of so-called "Japan Wine." Japan Wine is defined as wine made exclusively from grapes domestically grown in Japan. Japan Wine accounts for only 4.6 % of the domestic market in Japan, but its production has been on the increase in recent years. The number of wineries in Japan has also increased from 162 in 2005 to 331 in 2018, while the vast majority of them are small and regional-based. The growing popularity of Japan Wine has also brought about booming wine tourism in wine-producing regions of Japan. Japan Wine has now been regarded as the most important driving force for the wine industry in Japan.

At the same time, Japan Wine has faced fierce competition against imported wines in the domestic market and against a variety of fine foreign wines in the global market. In terms of the wine industry in Japan growing further, it is of crucial importance for local wine clusters engaging in the production of Japan Wine to grow further. One important key in this regard is to strengthen regional brand values of those wine clusters.

In Japan, the use of region of origin as a marketing tool has received much attention. Region of origin is

increasingly important for Japanese consumers in their wine buying decision-making process. Regional branding is especially a sound strategic option for small region-based wine producers whose individual brand power is weak and who cannot match the marketing power of the major product brands controlled by the larger producers that continue to gain market share with large retailers. At the same time, regional branding will also complement and add value to the efforts of large producers with diverse wine portfolios.

Importantly, many regional brand images in the world are inextricably linked to a single grape variety, or at most to say two varieties. This applies to Japan as well. An increasing number of winemaking regions in Japan are now trying to associate their regional brands to certain ideal grape varieties in terms of strengthening their regional brand values. Several winemaking regions in the country have already benefited by aligning their regional identities with particular grape varieties.

In my presentation, I will pick up and focus on several winemaking regions in Japan in association with particular grape varieties. Examples of the regions in this regard include the Yamanashi region with the indigenous grape variety called Koshu, the Nagano region with Merlot, the Hokkaido region with Pinot Noir, and several selected regions with American or *Vitis labrusca* varieties such as Niagara, Delaware, Concord and Campbell Early. I will analyze those selected cases from the following seven viewpoints and provide some perspectives on the current development and the future scenario with regard to strategies for the regional branding of wines locally made from the particular grape varieties in Japan.

<Viewpoint 1>

The first viewpoint is regarding the characteristics of the grape varieties concerned and the history and cultural background behind the development of the cultivation of those grape varieties in the selected regions of Japan. How “terroir” stories surrounding the making of wines from the varieties have been created and communicated to consumers as a matter of regional branding strategies will also be analyzed in this regard.

<Viewpoint 2>

The second viewpoint is regarding the role of publicly funded research institutes and large private wine corporations in identifying a signature grape variety that can match the natural conditions of a region, developing viticultural and oenological techniques for the selected variety, and sharing research results for the benefit of small local wineries and farmers.

<Viewpoint 3>

The third viewpoint is regarding the relationship between wineries and farmers in respect of conducting regional branding strategy with a particular grape variety in its core element. This is an important point of view because, in Japan, local wineries are heavily dependent on the supply of wine grapes from local grape farmers. Wineries and farmers are mutually dependent on each other for raising the quality and potentiality of their signature grape variety.

<Viewpoint 4>

The fourth viewpoint is regarding the legal schemes such as the GI (geographical indication) system and the creation of a hierarchy of regional wine brands based on the schemes in Japan. In the context of regional wine branding, wines are branded by their region of origin. Within the region, the branding can be described by the sub-region. The sub-region can be further delineated by reference to the specific estate or vineyard where the grapes are grown. Through these marketing and legal processes, a hierarchy of sub-regional brands with the Koshu grape variety in its core element has been established in the Yamanashi region. The same kind of hierarchical structure of sub-regional brands has been created in the Nagano region with Merlot as its signature variety as well.

<Viewpoint 5>

The fifth viewpoint is regarding how the negative attitude European people have formulated towards American or *Vitis labrusca* varieties such as Niagara, Delaware and Concord for winemaking has impacted the attitude Japanese people have formulated towards those varieties. I will analyze this point from an international comparative perspective as well as from the history of winemaking in Japan. The fact is that American varieties, including Niagara, Delaware, Concord and Campbell Early, have accounted for more than 30% of the entire production of wine grapes in Japan, and that the regional branding of wines produced from those American varieties has been of

vital importance for many winemaking regions of Japan.

<Viewpoint 6>

The sixth viewpoint is regarding the possibility of environmentally sustainable viticultural practices by utilizing disease-resistant grape varieties in winemaking regions of Japan.

<Viewpoint 7>

The seventh viewpoint is regarding how climate change has impacted the viticultural areas and practices in Japan. For example, viticulture in the Hokkaido regions had long been limited to growing grape varieties such as Zweigelt and Kerner that are suitable for cool conditions. However, as average temperatures in the region have arisen due to climate change, the region has now become a suitable place for Pinot Noir, and a growing number of winemakers have started to make Pinot Noir wines. On the other hand, the effect of climate change has negatively impacted the viticultural practices for wines from Koshu grapes in the Yamanashi area, and winemakers in that area have now tried to develop new grape-growing techniques that are sustainable under the effect of global warming.

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