

**Speech by His Excellency Mr KANO Takehiro
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Permanent Delegate of Japan to UNESCO
at the Kura Master Tasting Evening
(Friday 4 October 2024)**

Mr Xavier Thuizat, President of the Jury of the Kura Master Association

Mr Kenjiro Monji, Honorary President of the Kura Master Association, Former Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of Japan to UNESCO

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank you for being here this evening and welcome you to my Residence.

This evening, you'll have the opportunity to taste several varieties of sake and other traditional Japanese spirits such as *honkaku shochu*, *awamori* and *umeshu*, all of which won prizes during the eighth edition of the Kura Master competition.

The Kura Master competition is a traditional Japanese spirits competition aimed at the French public, which has been held annually since 2017. I invite you to listen to the members of the jury, who will be speaking after me, for more details on this subject. As far as I am concerned, I would like to talk about an element entitled "Traditional knowledge and skills of sake-making with koji mold in Japan", whose candidature has been submitted by Japan for inscription on the

Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. I will also highlight the charms of our traditional alcohol beverages such as Japanese sake.

The candidature will be examined during the next session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

This dossier covers not only Japanese sake, but also *honkaku shochu*, *awamori*, *mirin*, etc., all techniques used to produce spirits with a ferment called *koji*.

The inscription of this element would allow us to raise the profile of our culinary culture around the world and would complement *Washoku*, a Japanese culinary tradition that was inscribed on the same list in 2013.

Sake first appeared in the volumes of the *Kojiki*, literally translated as 'Records of Ancient Matters', dating back to the 8th century. The techniques for making sake as we know them today were established over 500 years ago.

These skills are characterized by the use of the *koji* ferment in the saccharification process (transformation of starches into sugar), which takes place in parallel and at the same time as the fermentation process.

While the use of the *koji* ferment is common to all these techniques, the fact remains that there is a great diversity of flavors and aromas, mainly due to regional and climatic differences.

Sake exports are booming, having increased fivefold over the past decade. Most of these exports currently go to the United States of America and China.

The growth in exports to foreign markets contrasts sharply with the decline in consumption in the Japanese market and the halving of the number of *Kuramoto*, or brewery owners, over the past decade.

The ageing of sake makers and production facilities raises real questions about the sustainability of the business, including how techniques are passed down from generation to generation.

This evening, you will have the opportunity to taste and learn more about these products. I should be grateful if you could share this experience with your friends and family, as I am convinced that this is the way to preserve the traditional brewing skills for these beverages.

Finally, please do not hesitate to take this opportunity to discuss with the *Kuramoto*, the Saké makers.

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