

The History of Senjo Brewery



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THE HISTORY OF SENJO BREWERY

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Chapter 1

Early History of Daimatsu Sake Brewery

The Legacy of "Kurogochi"

Kurogochi is a local name in Hase Village, Ina City. The late Kurogochi Taniueemon, a physician in Shimosuwa Town, authored the book "Irinoya 800 Years - Biography of the Kurogochi Family" in 1970, investigating the genealogy of the Kurogochi family.

The first generation of the Kurogochi family was a samurai named Mikasa Shiro Mitsumi, born as the fourth son of Minamoto no Tamechika. While the book mentions a lineage of 27 generations at the time of publication, the exact connection with our company remains uncertain.

The Return of Samurai to Agriculture

After the Warring States period, larger feudal lords established control by either killing or expelling smaller lords, frequently changing land ownership. Land exchanges aimed to eliminate or dilute the influence of the former lords in that area. The vassals of small lords who were incorporated through these land exchanges had no choice but to either abandon their ancestral homeland, where they had lived for generations or choose to stay. Those who stayed had to give up their swords and take up hoes, as samurai and rural warriors returned to farming.

In the Edo period, these returning samurai, tired of the simple farmer's life of tilling fields, used their accumulated wisdom and wealth to venture into commerce and industry. They

amassed fortunes in newly established businesses and expanded their land holdings. They became village leaders and influential figures, shaping a new ruling class that drove the economy and industry. By the end of the Edo period, the power dynamics had shifted from "shi-nou-kou-shou" (samurai, farmers, artisans, merchants) to "kou-shou-nou-shi" (merchants, artisans, farmers, samurai). It was an era where productivity, not social status, held significance.

Edo Period Sake Brewing System

In 1657, the Tokugawa shogunate introduced the "sakekabu" (or sake stock) system, considered the beginning of the licensing system for brewing. The sakekabu was a wooden certificate shaped like a shogi piece, with the name and address of the sake brewer and the amount of sake production written on the front. The back featured the name of the office, "Gokanjoshō," that approved the sakekabu, along with a stamped seal. Limits were also set on the amount of rice that could be used at the sake brewery.

Sakekabu could be transferred or borrowed within the same prefecture, allowing for periods of cessation called "kyu-kabu" and lending sakakabu to others for sake brewing, known as "kashikabu."

According to the "History of Sake in Shinshu" compiled by the Nagano Sake Brewers Association, in 1697, there were 16 sake breweries in Takatō Castle town alone, with a total production of 878 koku (1 koku is approximately 180 liters). Some breweries produced as much as 240 koku. Takatō had the third-highest number of breweries in

Shinano, following Iida and Ueda, and the fifth-highest production volume. Records from 1715 even mention a waterwheel in the Fujisawa River at the entrance of Takatō Castle town, used to mill sake rice.



Waterwheel gears

Despite frequent changes in the sake tax system in modern times, at one point, sake tax accounted for half of the national revenue, indicating its significant impact on national finances.

Chūma and Transportation Business

One essential element that brings prosperity to the economy is the movement of goods. Products must be transported from the production site to the consumption site for economic activation. Trade is the epitome of this logistics system. Since Shinano and Kai were mountainous regions, unsuitable for shipping by boat, the development of "chūma," where goods were loaded on the backs of horses or cattle and transported along highways, steep slopes, mountain passes, and byways, became prominent. The chūma system was exclusive to Shinano and Kai.

During the Edo period, the relay horse system was established, requiring a change of horses

at each inn station and a transfer of goods at each stop, making it inefficient. Consequently, carriers emerged who transported goods from the departure point to the destination upon the shipper's request. This led to fierce opposition from relay horses and inn stations, resulting in conflicts erupting in various places.

In 1673 and 1693, inn station wholesalers appealed to the Tokugawa shogunate to ban chūma. However, the shogunate rejected the request, stating that there was no reason to regulate the practice of chūma. In 1764, the shogunate officially recognized chūma under certain conditions, such as specifying the number of chūma per village, the items they could transport, and their operating range. By the end of the Meiji period, freight transport by chūma had declined with the development of railways, automobiles, and improved roads.

The Era of the Founder - Matsujiro Kurogochi of Daimatsu Sake Brewery

1830-1916, Aged 85: Tenure as the Head, 1866-1916



Founder, Matsujiro, the Second Son of a Large Landowner

Matsujiro was born in 1830 as the second son of Kurogochi Seiuemon of Ootaya, a prominent landowner in NishiTakatō. Before branching out and becoming independent, Matsujiro assisted in the family business of land management, known as the landlord business. Upon reaching adulthood, he separated from the main Ootaya family.

Matsujiro engaged in various businesses, including warehouse and transportation, the sale of marine products and timber, the production of miso and soy sauce, the wholesale brokerage of silk, and the sale of medicines. It is said that he wholesale traded stomach and intestinal medicines such as "Shōni Kenpien" and "Kaitatsusan." There is a signboard bearing the inscription "Kankyō" suggesting that the sale was permitted by the government.



Permission to sell drugs

Selling Driftwood at a Bargain

An interesting anecdote is passed down regarding the sale of timber. The Mibu river, flowing through Takatō, merges into the Tenryu River and reaches Hamamatsu (the ocean). At that time, with no dams, it formed a splendid "river road." During storms and

heavy rains, floods occurred, causing driftwood to accumulate in large quantities along the riverbanks. Matsujiro obtained driftwood at a low cost, cleared the branches, assembled rafts, and transported them to Hamamatsu, using the river road, for sales.

In 1873, with the abolition of feudal domains in 1871 leading to the demolition of Takatō Castle, Matsujiro took on the task of handling the discarded materials, transported them down the river, and sold them in Hamamatsu, earning substantial profits. With the acquired funds, he purchased local marine products in Ina Valley for resale.

Venturing into Sake Brewing

As mentioned earlier, obtaining a sake brewing license, represented by "sakekabu," was essential for brewing in the late Edo period. In 1865, Matsujiro acquired a sakekabu from Hirose Jiroasaemon (who ran a major sake brewery in Takatō Castle town and also operated a silkworm dealership, producing sake named "Hakuto").

Hirose's family was known for distributing rice from their brewery to those suffering from famine in the castle town. They were known for their humanitarian efforts. It is possible that Hirose was seeking someone to inherit the sake brewing business due to financial difficulties.

Matsujiro started his brewing business the following year in 1866, inheriting the sakekabu. The location was 378 NishiTakatō, Takatō. The brewery's name, "Daimatsu Sake Brewery," was derived directly from the combination of the "Dai" from the main

Ootaya family and the "Matsu" from Matsujiro. Matsujiro was 35 years old at the time.

The sign in the photo reads "Daimatsu Warehouse and Transportation Department," indicating that sake brewing likely began in a corner of the warehouse used for the transportation department. The scale was not very large, as the 5th-generation president, Yasushi, recalls, "It was small enough that you could line up four barrels on each side with the sake barrels evenly placed."



Daimatsu Sake Brewery at the time of its founding

Relocation of the Sake Brewery

While Daimatsu Brewery was originally located at 378 NishiTakatō, it found itself too cramped, engaging in various businesses such as transportation and medicine sales. In 1875, the brewery relocated and was newly constructed at 1653 NishiTakatō Honmachi, the main street of Takatō shopping district. This is now known as the "Senjogura." The year of completion was marked on the pillars in the brewery's attic. This is the present "Senjogura."



Panoramic view of Senjo Brewery

Although it was considered the shopping district's main street, Taro, the fourth-generation president, writes in a contribution to "The Illusionary Wholesale Office", that "during the Taisho era, Honmachi Street was narrow, with rows of stone roofed townhouses lining the street. The road was occasionally covered with gravel, creating puddles in some places."

The old Senjo Brewery had a warehouse on the east side, originally used as a storage facility for miso and rice. During the Taisho to Showa eras, the first floor served as a dining hall, and the second floor was used as living quarters for the liquor store employees.

Matsujiro's Paddy Field Development Project

Matsujiro also embarked on paddy field development, likely with the dual purposes of flood control for the Mibu river, which scattered driftwood every time it flooded Takatō Castle town, and land development for farmers with limited land ownership. The Meiji government encouraged private individuals to cultivate new fields, and Matsujiro may have cooperated with this policy.

The location for paddy field development was the riverbed called "Daimatsu Kawara" on the right bank of the Mibu River, which now comprises a vast riverbed occupied by sports facilities, cultural and sports halls and a pool as part of the Takatō Sports Park.

Over the mid-Meiji period and beyond, Matsujiro invested private funds in waterlogged land reclamation and development. The first step was embankment construction along the river. There were challenges, such as floods causing the outflow of the developed embankments and economic difficulties due to insufficient funds. After completion, Matsujiro provided the land to people interested in owning and cultivating rice paddies, settling them as tenant farmers. In recognition of this project, Matsujiro later received a certificate of appreciation from the prefectural governor. In 1915, the second-generation head, Chiyotaro, erected a monument on-site to commemorate the development.

Eldest Daughter Tama's Branch and the Birth of "Ninben"

Matsujiro had a son, Chiyotaro, who inherited the family business, and a daughter named Tama. Chiyotaro continued the sake brewing business, while Tama and her husband, Ito Sakujiro - welcomed as an adoptive child, establishing a separate branch. Matsujiro entrusted Chiyotaro with sake brewing and assigned Miso and soy sauce production, which had been prepared as a business, to the couple.

This marked the birth of "Ninben." The "nin" in "Ninben" corresponds to the "hen" in



Daimatsu Riverbank



At that time, it was called Daimatsu Riverbank.
It is now Takato Sports Park.

"Sakujiro." From the second president, Ichitaro, to the third president, Akira, the miso and soy sauce manufacturing business expanded, but during the Greater East Asia War, a policy of corporate consolidation was implemented, and after the war, it was merged into Ina Shoyu Co., Ltd., and Marushin Miso Soy Sauce Co., Ltd. The business then became the retail liquor store "Shuho Ninben," playing a significant role within Takatō town.

Chapter 2

The Era of the Second Generation - Chiyotaro Kurogochi of Daimatsu Sake Brewery

1860-1931, Aged 71: Tenure as the Head, 1916-1931



Chiyotaro, born in 1860 was the eldest son of Matsujiro, the founder of Daimatsu Sake Brewery, who dedicated himself to the family's sake brewing business. Simultaneously, he inherited and expanded the various businesses established by the founder, such as transportation, timber sales, and silk trading.

Illuminating Takatō with Electric Lights

In 1907, the Ina Electric Railway Company was established, and by 1909, a railway connecting Tatsuno to Ina Matsushima (predecessor to JR Iida Line) was completed in the Ina Valley. Takatō, which deviated from this railway route, gradually declined. Sensing the crisis, influential figures in the town, including Chiyotaro Kurogochi and Toyoshima Jyohei, worked towards regional development. A significant symbol of this

effort was the establishment of Takatō Electric Light in October 1913. The first president of Takatō Electric Light was Toyoshima Jyohei, succeeded by Chiyotaro, and later by Yoshio, the third-generation president of Daimatsu Sake Brewery.

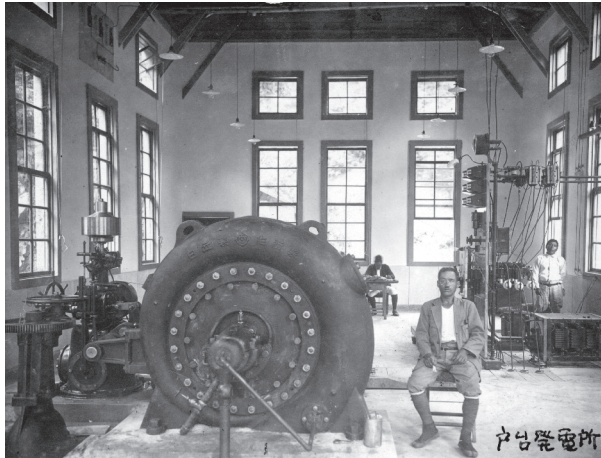
Construction of an In-House Power Plant

Following in Toyoshima's footsteps, Chiyotaro, now president of Takatō Electric Light, set a course towards constructing an in-house power plant. He built the "Ogurogawa Power Plant" on the Oguro River in Hase Village. Renamed the "Todai Power Plant" in 1938, it was later transferred to Chubu Electric Power. This power plant is still in operation today.

The elevation of the water intake level is 1,087 meters. Chiyotaro is said to have frequently visited the site on horseback. Due to the limited knowledge of electricity among the villagers, acquiring land proved challenging as they were apprehensive about laying power lines even in mountainous areas, considering electricity as something frightening. Additionally, transporting construction materials and equipment was a formidable task. Large machinery had to be disassembled, and during the winter when the Oguro River froze, it was transported by horse-drawn carts or manpower. The construction took two years to complete.

During the early Showa era's national policies promoting the consolidation of small-scale power companies, the third-generation president, Yoshio, merged Takatō Electric Light with Ina Electric Railway in December 1937. Subsequently, the electric power

business in Nagano Prefecture was absorbed by Chubu Electric Power.



Todai Power Plant

Revitalizing Takatō Town and Financial Infrastructure

In addition to the Takatō Electric Light project, Chiyotaro collaborated with Toyoshima Jyohei to purchase and develop the cliffs overlooking the confluence of the Mibu, and Fujisawa rivers, known as "Iseya Fields." They created an entertainment district called "Hanamachi," where restaurants, drinking establishments, and geisha establishments gathered. This area, known as Sakuramachi, became lively with the sound of shamisen during the evenings. The "Takatō Theater" was established near the cliff on the Fujisawa River's side, with Chiyotaro serving as a director, contributing to the cultural promotion of Takatō town.

Chiyotaro also ventured into finance, playing a role in the establishment of the Kami-ina Bank (later absorbed by Hachijuni Bank), operating from 1900 to 1943. He served as a director. The third-generation president, Yoshio, also served as a director of the same bank.

Construction of the Ookura at Daimatsu



Takatō Theater

Sake Brewery

Chiyotaro achieved significant success in the family's sake brewing business as well. In 1913, 38 years after the construction of the Senjo Brewery, a new sake brewing facility known as the "Ookura," located behind the Senjo Brewery, was built.

For 70 years, until its relocation to the new factory at 2432 Kamiyamada, Takatō Town, in 1982, this facility handled all aspects of sake brewing-related operations, from polishing rice to brewing, bottling, and sales.



The ridgepole-raising ceremony for the large warehouse built behind the old Senjo Brewery (Taisho 2)

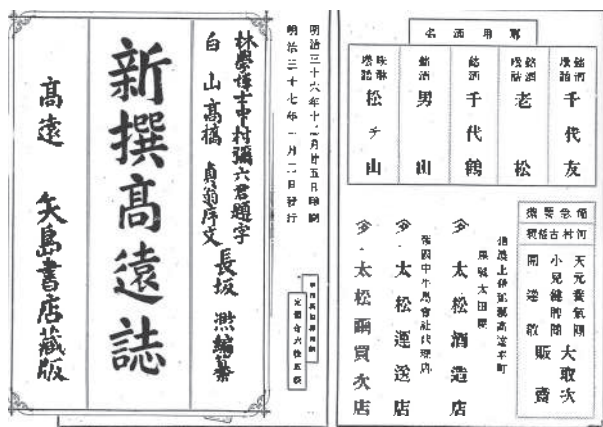
Diversification of Daimatsu Sake Brewery's Business Until the Late Meiji Era

It appears that the diversified management of Daimatsu Sake Brewery continued until the late Meiji era. An advertisement in the January 1904 issue of "Shinsen Takatō"

(Yajima Shoten version) features the Daimatsu Sake Brewery, with visible text for "Daimatsu Transport Store," "Daimatsu Silkworm Buying Store," and "Tengen Yokien, Shoni Kenpien, Kaitatsusan, Dai Toritsugi Hanbai" (Wholesale distribution of medicines). This indicates that businesses such as transportation, silk buying, and medicine sales continued until this period. In their main brewing business, brands like "Chiyotomo," "Oimatsu," "Chiyotsuru," and "Otokoyama" were listed as "special sake names." The name "Matsu Chi Yama" for bottled sweet cooking sake is also mentioned.



Merged with Sakai Shuzo and became
Takato Shuzo Co., Ltd.

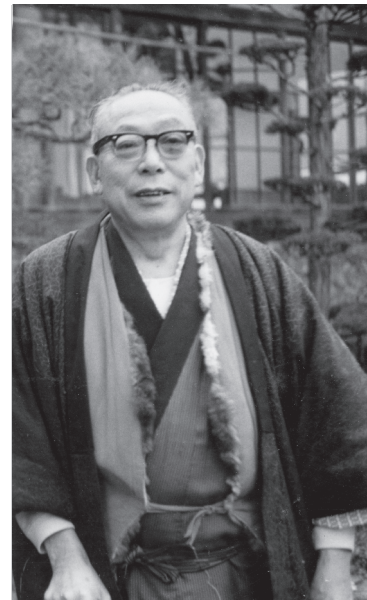


Advertisement of Daimatsu Sake Brewery
published in the New Selection Takato Magazine

Chapter 3

The Era of the Third Generation - Yoshio Kurogochi

1889-1971, Age
at Death: 82,
President's Term:
1931-1960

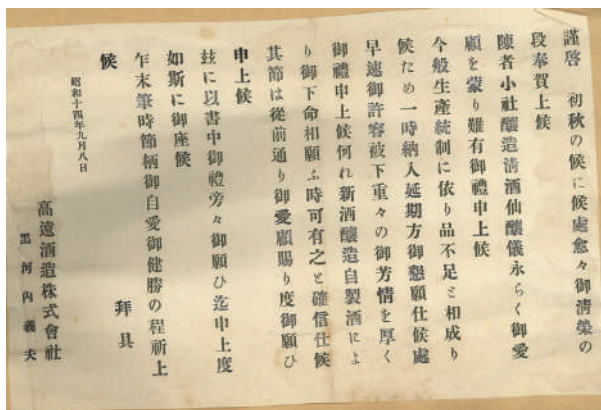


Yoshio was born in 1889 as the second son of Takeemon Komura, a mountain landowner in Sawasoko, Asahi Village (now Tatsuno Town). After graduating from Suwa Middle School (now Suwa Seiryō High School) and Waseda University's School of Commerce, he joined Tokyo Dainippon Beer (predecessor of Sapporo Beer and Asahi Beer), working at the Sapporo branch. However, in 1913, after two years, he resigned from Tokyo Dainippon Beer and joined Daimatsu Sake Brewery. He married Yoshie, the eldest daughter, became the adopted son-in-law of Chiyotaro, and took over the sake brewing business. The majority of Yoshio's life was spent in the first half of the Showa era, dominated by the turmoil of war. During wartime, he dedicated himself to, in his own words, "sustaining the sake brewery" and "ensuring that his three sons did not die in battle." His greatest achievement was the successful fulfillment of these dual efforts.

The Birth of the First University Graduate Brewery Owner and President

For Yoshio, the cosmopolitan city of Sapporo was a new world. Interacting with beer manufacturing technicians from Germany and experiencing a different cultural atmosphere undoubtedly stimulated his intellectual curiosity. Despite sitting as the successor to a rural sake brewery in Takatō, he must have felt a gap between his experiences in Sapporo and the traditional town of Takatō. Yoshio was the first university graduate to become the brewery owner and president at Daimatsu Sake Brewery.

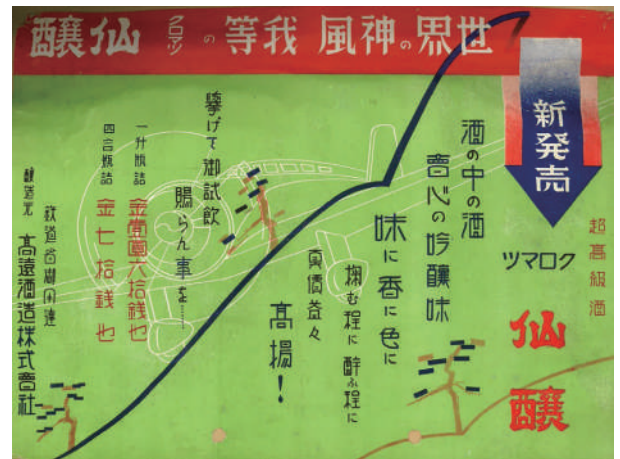
During World War II, including the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Pacific War, Japan suffered from a shortage of supplies. The shortage of metal was also serious, and even the temple bells were being offered for weapons and ammunition. On September 8, 1939 (Showa 14), there was a shortage of rice due to production controls, and Senjo (at that time, Takato Shuzo Co., Ltd.) was forced to temporarily stop selling "Kabuto Sakura". The letter, sent to each dealership in the name of Yoshio Kurokawachi, president of Takato Shuzo, is stored and remains at Senjo.



Flyer for the new release of Kuromatsu Senjo during wartime

The Birth of "Kuromatsu Senjo," the Main Brand of Senjo

The premium sake "Kuromatsu Senjo," later synonymous with Senjo, is believed to have been born during this era. The fourth-generation president, Taro, organized various materials, old records, labels, and flyers left at Senjo Brewery, creating a valuable collection. Among wartime flyers, the phrase "New Release of Kuromatsu Senjo" suggests that the sake brand "Kuromatsu Senjo" emerged around 1940 or later.



Flyer for the new release of Kuromatsu Senjo during wartime



Label for 'Kuromatsu Senjo' (list of grade labels and specification stamps from Showa 15 onwards) (top left)

First Elected Mayor after the War, Achieving the Prefecturalization of Takatō High School

After serving two terms as a Takatō Town Council member in the early Showa era, Yoshio was encouraged to run in the first unified local elections held in 1947. He was elected unopposed and became the first mayor. After serving one term of four years, he did not venture further into the political arena. He worked diligently on establishing administrative measures based on post-war autonomy laws and contributed to the recovery of the industrial economy, negotiating with the occupation forces.

Immediately after becoming mayor, he actively addressed the issue of transferring Takatō High School to prefectural control. Takatō High School, originally established in 1926 as a municipal Takatō Industrial Supplementary School, underwent negotiations with the Eastern 1 Town 6 Village and the Nagano Prefectural Board of Education. Overcoming local funding issues, he laid the foundation for constructing the school building on the site of the former Shintoku Hall of Takatō Castle. In 1984, Takatō High School relocated to Obara in Takatō Town.

Supporting Kigen Nakagawa, Bringing Him into the Public Eye

Breweries have traditionally welcomed intellectuals as guests. Yoshio allowed Kigen Nakagawa, an artist from Tatsuno Town, not yet established in the Japanese art scene, to stay in a room at the brewery, where he freely painted every day. Senjo has preserved numerous paintings, including works by Nakagawa. Nakagawa, also from Asahi Village

(now Tatsuno Town), was Yoshio's fellow townsman and a close friend, being three years junior at Suwa Middle School. During the period when Nakagawa returned to Shinshu (Nagano) due to air raids, he frequently stayed with the Kuroguchi family in Takatō. Yoshio requested Nakagawa to serve as a part-time art instructor at the Takatō High School he helped establish.



Kigen Nakagawa

The Tale of the Discovered Matsushita Youth

Regardless of the era, talent acquisition crucially influences a company's fate. Entrepreneurs often struggle to find and employ talented individuals. Yoshio stumbled upon Matsushita Morito, starting as a messenger boy, rising to manager, and eventually becoming executive director.

Yoshio, collecting payments, visited a liquor store in Oshika Village and, in casual conversation with the owner, inquired whether any suitable individuals were looking for employment. The name that came up at that time was Matsushita Morito. Yoshio promptly visited Matsushita's home and, impressed by the youth's intelligence, requested him to join the company.

In May 1924, Matsushita walked from Oshika Village to Takatō Town, carrying only a

bundle of clothes on his back. He was 16 years old. He lodged in an empty room at the brewery, beginning his apprenticeship in the sake brewery. Matsushita served two presidents (Third-generation President Yoshio and Fourth-generation President Taro) and essentially managed the sake brewery.

Overcoming the crisis of the sake brewery during the wartime and post-war periods, Matsushita, with unique business acumen, a solid personality, and a focus on personnel development, laid the foundation for the rapid growth that followed. The meticulous record of daily business is documented in the 1953 "Matsushita Diary." He is one of the major contributors who shaped the current form of Senjo.



Morito Matsushita

The Introduction of the New Naming - "Senjo"

Yoshio, aiming for a brand that resonates more widely, decided to move away from labels that hinted at the brewer's name, such as "Chiyotomo" or "Chiyotsuru." While contemplating a new sake brand, he thought of the name "Senjo," inspired by the famous peak in the Southern Alps, "Senjo-ga-take." The "Senjo" labeled sake was released around the time of the merger with a local brewery in the same town in 1929, which led to the formation of "Takato Shuzo."

In 1973, the company changed its name to "Senjo." Yoshio's strategy of unifying the product name and the company name, moving from "family business to enterprise," was achieved and evolved during Taro's era.



Early Senjo label

Chapter 4

The Era of the Fourth Generation - Taro Kurogochi

1914-1999, Age at Death: 85, President's Term: 1960-1987



Key Achievements of Taro

Taro was born in 1914 as the eldest son of Yoshio, the third-generation president. He attended the former Suwa Middle School (now Suwa Seiryō High School) and commuted from the villa Chiyotaro built by Lake Suwa. After graduating from Waseda University's

School of Political Economy in 1939, he joined Nakajima Aircraft. Shortly after, he was conscripted and served in the military. After passing the officer candidate exam, he entered the Army Financial School, studying accounting. After graduation, he served as the accounting supervisor at the Army Aviation Headquarters (Army Captain). Taro was not deployed to the battlefield until the end of the war. In September 1945, when the Ministry of Munitions returned to its original name, he moved to the Ministry of Commerce (now the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry) and handled post-war affairs. In 1950, after completing post-war affairs, Taro left his government job and joined Takatō Shuzo (later Senjo) to prepare for taking over the family business. He assumed the role of president in April 1960 at the age of 46.

The "Cultural Man" of the Fourth Generation

Taro's residence (the original location of Daimatsu Brewery) featured a private art museum converted from a brewery. This private museum displayed works of local artists such as Nakamura Fusetsu, Ikegami Shuho, Nakagawa Kigen, and Seto Danji, along with ancient maps of Takatō from the Genroku era and watercolor sketches and oil paintings created by Taro himself. He also designed the label for Kuromatsu Senjo, featuring the black pine. According to records from the Kurogochi family, this was the only label design Taro worked on. Taro contributed articles unraveling the region's history to the regular magazine "Inaji" of the Kami-Ina Regional Research Society and the annual magazine "Takatō" of the Takatō Regional Research Society.



The pine label of Kuromatsu Senjo, which is said to have been designed by Taro

Headquarters Relocation and Modernization of Sake Brewing

Upon assuming the role of the fourth-generation president in 1960, Taro initiated the modernization and facility reforms of Senjo Brewery from 1960 to 1964. This included the construction of a new rice polishing room, expansion of rice polishing machines, construction of brewing warehouses, koji production rooms, and pressing rooms with concrete warehouses, as well as the completion of a bottling factory and employee dormitories. The investment during these five years amounted to over 44 million yen. In the fiscal year 1964, the total sales recorded were just under 130 million yen, an increase of about 3% from the previous year. However, subsequent fiscal reports showed a 15% increase in sales. The overall profit margin also increased steadily. The effects of modernization and facility investment were evident in the numbers.

On October 1, 1973, "Takatō Shuzo Co., Ltd." changed its name to "Senjo Co., Ltd." In the following year, 1974, it undertook the

business of relocating its manufacturing and sales base from the cramped Senjo Brewery in NishiTakatō, Takatō Town, to 2432 Kamiyamada, Takato Town. As part of the first-phase construction, the sake storage and bottling facility, product warehouse, and sales office functions were initially moved. In 1982, as part of the second-phase construction, the rice polishing room and brewing warehouse were relocated, establishing a system where all operations took place in Kamiyamada. The transition and systematization of the brewing department on the soft side took longer than the relocation of hard aspects like facilities and buildings.

Trial and error, collecting data during actual sake brewing, analyzing it, and applying it to the next year's brewing were necessary. Ito Yoshimi, the factory manager, reminisces, "It took about ten years until we reached a satisfactory level."



Factory exterior (image captured by drone, in Kamiyamada)

Introducing "Science" into Sake Brewing with the Experience and Intuition of the Toji

The systematization of Senjo's sake brewing also involved an increase in production scale. Taro brought scientific methods and mechanical devices into sake brewing,

transforming the traditional brewing process, relying on the experience and intuition of the Toji. Ito Yoshimi, the factory manager, designed and supervised the system's completion. During this period, seasonal employment for brewery workers was discontinued, and a system of year-round employment for the Toji and employees was adopted. While facing numerous challenges in achieving the desired quality of sake, mechanization and systematization improved the harsh working conditions for brewery workers.



OS tank

Taro's Insight in "Buying Green Fields" with Ito

Taro believed that brewery management and brewing required different specialized skills, and the brewery owner should handle management while the Toji focused on sake brewing. He keenly felt the need for personnel with specialized knowledge from universities for the future of sake brewing.

Within Takatō Town was Takatō High School. Through connections, Taro interviewed Ito Yoshimi (formerly Kasuga Yoshimi), a second-year high school student, in the main office. The proposal was, "Go to university, study brewing and fermentation science, and

after graduation, join Senjo, utilizing that knowledge in sake brewing. Senjo will bear the tuition and living expenses during this period." Ito accepted this proposal. After graduating from Tokyo University of Agriculture, he joined the Nagano Brewing Research Institute as a trainee, and two years later, he joined Senjo. After joining, he worked on improving the field and mechanizing and systematizing sake brewing, taking overall command of the construction of the new factory.

Chapter 5

The Era of the Fifth Generation - Yasushi Kuroguchi

1944 –
President's Term:
1987-2009



Foreseeing the Collapse of the Soviet Union by Visiting Over 20 Communist Countries

The fifth-generation president, Yasushi Kuroguchi, was perceived as an unconventional business leader. Since his youth, he had shown interest in ideological matters, maintaining the appearance of a "philosopher" engaged in critical research of communism from an anti-communist conservative standpoint. After graduating from Suwa Seiryō High School and Keio

University's Faculty of Economics, he pursued a Master's program in the Faculty of Political Science at Keio University. He also personally studied under Professor Yano Toru, who was the director of the Southeast Asia Research Center at Kyoto University, delving into research on modern diplomatic history. Although he had the opportunity to pursue an academic career he joined the family's sake brewing business, where his academic interests might have contributed to the impression of being "unconventional."

During the Cold War era, Yasushi traveled solo to China, Russia, Eastern European countries, North Korea, Cuba, and more, conducting on-site inspections and investigations. Through these visits, Yasushi anticipated the eventual collapse of these communist countries. Around the time of the collapse of the Eastern Bloc in the late 20th century, lecture and article requests poured in. He served as a member of the Russian and Eastern European Studies Association and vice chairman of the Nagano Prefecture Defense Association.

His grandfather, Kuroguchi Yoshio (the third-generation president), who was the first post-war mayor of Takatō Town, had received an administrative order from the General Headquarters of the Allied Occupation Forces (GHQ): "Destroy the monuments of militarism." The citizens, along with Yoshio, dug a hole to bury the "Yasukuni Soul Monument," which consoled the spirits of those who died in war within Takatō Town. After the GHQ rule ended, Yoshio arranged for it to be unearthed and rebuilt it in Takatō Castle Park. Yasushi wrote articles that long

conveyed the patriotic spirit of his local predecessors. After becoming president, he actively employed Self-Defense Forces veterans as employees. As a sake brewer, he was a unique leader with an unconventional background.

Taking Over the Family Sake Brewery

Yasushi returned home in 1970 and joined Takatō Shuzo. While deeply immersed in researching modern diplomatic history, he also underwent "sake brewing training" at Kizakura Sake Brewing in Fushimi, Kyoto. Although not a regular employee, he was more enthusiastic about attending Yano's laboratory at the University of Kyoto than sake brewing training. This was Yasushi's "sake brewing training" at Kizakura Sake Brewing—a characteristic episode.

Management and Production: Yasushi and Ito's Partnership

The partnership between Yasushi, the manager, and Ito Yoshimi, the factory manager with expertise in sake brewing, began to flourish after Yasushi joined Senjo. Ito, who graduated from Tokyo University of Agriculture with a focus on brewing science, joined Senjo a couple of years earlier than Yasushi.

Ito was a talent whom the fourth-generation president, Taro, aimed to eventually put in charge of the sake brewing site and supported financially through graduation. Taro's "buying green fields for Ito" had a precedent. Takeya Miso in Suwa City hired excellent high school students as employees, provided financial support for their education, and dispatched them to the Tokyo University of Agriculture

for brewing studies. One of them later served as the factory manager. Yasushi once shared this story with Taro. Inspired by this, Taro may have realized Ito's "green field purchase."

Yasushi and Ito, both born in 1944, were of the same age, but due to Yasushi being born earlier in the year, he was a year ahead in school. Despite one being the manager and the other an employee, the two were colleagues and friends beyond their positions. Together they visited sake breweries and brewing facilities in Yamagata and Fukushima.

Oyama Sake Brewing in Tsuruoka City, Yamagata, had introduced a system where the brewing process and koji-making process were fully automated mechanically, with temperature control and other aspects managed by a computer. There was an aim to implement this in Senjo if it proved beneficial. They also visited Homare Sake Brewing in Kitakata City, Fukushima. During this inspection trip, while drinking sake, they discussed the future of sake brewing, and their aspirations aligned. This happened two years before Senjo built and relocated its sake brewing facility to Kamiyamada.



Yoshimi Ito

Assisting in the Grand Project of Sake Brewery Relocation

Senjo accomplished the modernization and

expansion of brewing facilities in the 1960s. This investment bore fruit, steadily increasing the sales volume of sake, and leading the company to grow smoothly. The growth rate reached 15%, sometimes exceeding 20%. At the peak of sales, revenue surpassed 1 billion yen. It is noteworthy that Ito Yoshimi, whom Taro had supported financially to study brewing science at the Tokyo University of Agriculture, joined Senjo four years later.

The relocation of the new factory to Kamiyamada began five years after this growth. On October 1, 1973, Takatō Shuzo changed its name to "Senjo," and in line with this change, Yasushi assumed the position of executive director. After joining the company, Yasushi spent three years as a sales representative, working on new developments in the Suwa region.

The relocation of Senjo Brewery (headquarters) from Nishi Takatō to 2432 Kamiyamada began in 1974, the year after Yasushi became executive director.

In 1983, Yasushi completed a manuscript titled "My Beliefs - Criticizing Retro Sake Ideology," published in the Japan Brewing Association magazine. This manuscript created ripples in the brewing industry. Its essence was that the nostalgic trend of local sake and the retro ideology of handcrafting would lead to the decline of sake as an industry. Yasushi argued that modern management and technological innovation were the ways to survive. In later years, Yasushi reflected on that time, saying, "Automated brewing may have been a success industrially, but commercially, I must deeply

reflect on it." Although the introduction of automated brewing systems achieved increased productivity and significant improvements in labor, the sales of sake declined after its implementation.

Considering the overall industry entering a phase of contraction, he might feel responsible for the decrease in sales.



KOS automatic koji-making machine

Chapter 6

The Era of the 6th Generation - Takashi Kurogochi

1976 – Presidents
Term: 2009 –



The youngest President in the History of the Company

Takashi Kurogochi assumed the role of the 6th-generation president on December 1, 2009, at the age of 33. He became the youngest president in the history of the Kurogochi family's six generations of presidents. Similar to his father, the 5th-generation president, Yasushi, Takashi graduated from Keio University, majoring in history in the Faculty of Literature. After graduation, he studied international relations history at the London School of Economics (LSE) in the United Kingdom. Returning to Japan in 2001 after completing his studies abroad, he joined Senjo Brewing, entering the path of the family business in sake brewing. Takashi joined during a challenging period for the sake industry, known as the "Sake Recession," marked by a continuous decline in the sales of regular sake. To overcome the management crisis, Senjo Brewing shifted its course towards producing specific-designation sake, such as Junmai Ginjo, diversified its product lineup to include amazake (sweet sake), doburoku (unpressed sake), liqueurs, and placed emphasis on expanding into overseas markets, leveraging Takashi's international experience.

End of the Era of Mass Consumption and Change of Direction

There was a time when sake was produced and consumed on a massive scale. Brewing facilities were updated and mechanized to meet the growing demand. Senjo Brewery set sail into a new era of sake brewing with its new factory. However, in the 1990s, the shipment volume of sake began to decline, and from then on, the decrease accelerated. According to statistics from the National Tax Agency, sake shipments, which peaked in

1973 at over 1.76 million kiloliters, dropped to 410,000 kiloliters in 2020. This was a reduction to less than a quarter of the peak volume. The decline in sake consumption had two aspects: changes in consumer preferences towards sake and the entry of major retail stores into the sake distribution industry due to regulatory relaxation. Takashi joined Senjo Brewery in 2001, a year that marked the beginning of the "Sake Recession," with the shipment volume at 950,000 kiloliters. When Taka assumed the position of the 6th-generation president in 2009, the shipment volume had decreased to 620,000 kiloliters. Reflecting on that time, Takashi remembers a bitter feeling, realizing that there seemed to be no way to deal with the decline in sake shipments.

While overall sake shipments continued to decrease, the shipment volume of specific-designation sake, such as junmai and junmai ginjo, gradually increased. In 2009, the shipment volume of junmai and junmai ginjo designated sake was 80,000 kiloliters, and in 2020, it increased to 98,000 kiloliters. Senjo Brewery also shifted its sake production focus to specific-designation sake brewing. However, the new factory housed large tanks and an automatic koji-making machine known as KOS. This facility could use 6,000 kilograms of rice in one brewing cycle, producing approximately 14,000 liters of sake. This scale was four to six times larger than the typical brewing scale. Even if Senjo Brewing wanted to produce sake expressing its unique characteristics, it needed more agile manufacturing facilities.

Success with Doburoku and Amazake

As Senjo Brewery began to emphasize specific-designation sake, it found itself with oversized brewing facilities. In 2011, Takashi decided to stop engaging in areas where the company couldn't leverage its strengths. While continuing the production of junmai sake for specialty liquor stores, Senjo Brewing started a new venture by challenging doburoku brewing. This endeavor would later become a breakthrough. Doburoku was first released in November 2012. While the sales of sake were on a downward trend, doburoku sales expanded steadily.

This success was followed by an amazake boom. Although amazake was introduced in 2005, its sales surged from 2016 onwards. The sales of doburoku and amazake improved the financial situation, leading to a turnaround into profitability.

From Sake to Fermented Rice Products

New products like amazake and doburoku were born from the accumulated brewing technology of Senjo Brewery's sake production. Moreover, the raw material for these products was the rice koji used in sake brewing. Sake, amazake, and doburoku are all fermented foods. Senjo Brewery didn't need to concentrate only on sake brewing.

Takashi concluded that "fermented foods are part of Japan's culture, and this fermentation culture should be passed on to future generations." This formed the fundamental principle of "Passing on the Culture of Fermented Rice to the Future."

In 2016, Takashi established this principle as the company's corporate philosophy. At the

same time, he set "Making the Most of What We Have Now" as the employees' guiding principle. "What we have now" includes not only tangible things like manufacturing facilities but also technology, wisdom, experience, networks, teamwork, trust from the local community and customers – everything that is not visible.



Doburoku

Revival of the Handmade Koji Room after 33 Years

The improved financial situation due to the success of doburoku and amazake allowed the revival of a facility suited for koji-making, corresponding to the size of small fermentation tanks. This led to the resurrection of the handmade koji room, 33 years after its closure in 1984. The revival took place in 2017. Since then, koji for sake like junmai and junmai daiginjo have been produced in this room, while koji for amazake and doburoku continue to be produced using



Scene of work in the koji production room, revived after 33 years

the KOS (automatic koji-making machine). Senjo Brewery gained two production lines, allowing them to engage in both "mass production" and "high-quality small-scale production."

Development of Spirits and the Production of Ethanol for Disinfection during the COVID-19 Pandemic

As the momentum of the amazake boom gradually diminished, Takashi, searching for the next opportunity, turned his attention to gin, which is widely consumed worldwide.

Gin is a drink where the diverse aromas of various botanicals rooted in the local climate are expressed. Although a global gin boom seemed to be arriving in Japan, Senjo Brewery, being a sake brewery in the cherry blossom hotspot of Takatō, had already decided to focus on cherry blossoms as the botanical for their gin.

Senjo Brewery has been manufacturing rice shochu, produced by fermenting rice and then distilling it, since 2004. Using this shochu as a base, they produced a gin in 2023 named "SENJO Craft Gin SAKURA", using juniper berries and leaves of Takatō Kohiganzakura, both essential for making gin.

This new gin received a gold award in the "Spirits" category at the 2023 Tokyo Whiskey & Spirits Competition.

This gin production also became the "parent" of high-concentration ethanol for disinfection. In 2020, during the global COVID-19 pandemic, there was a shortage of ethanol for disinfection, creating a situation where it

became difficult to obtain. At a time when the invisible and frightening infectious disease called COVID-19 was spreading worldwide, consumers started hoarding high-alcohol beverages like vodka as a substitute for disinfection ethanol.

The shortage of disinfection alcohol became severe, and tax offices even took special measures by introducing tax exemptions. Holding a license to manufacture spirits for making gin, Senjo Brewery began producing and selling high-concentration ethanol named "Arkas 77" for disinfection purposes. The product was sold in local liquor stores and donated to elementary and middle schools in the city.

Matsujiro had a history of selling pharmaceuticals at the time of the company's founding, a business inherited from the past that transcended generations. Reflecting on the sale of Arkas 77, Takashi recalled, "Initially, there was hesitation about a sake brewery selling disinfection alcohol. However, it felt like being pushed forward by the history of selling pharmaceuticals from the time of the company's founding."



Arkas 77

Growing Export of Japanese Sake

While the domestic shipment volume of Japanese sake continued to decline, the

export volume of Japanese sake has been breaking records in both value and quantity since 2010.

Senjo Brewery actively exhibited its products and conducted market research in countries such as France (known as the home of wine) and the United States. In 2017, Takashi participated in "VINEXPO" held in Bordeaux, France, engaging in activities such as exchanges with sommeliers in Paris and London and visiting wineries in the United States, particularly California.

Takashi leveraged the connections gained through his UK studies and qualifications obtained from the Wine & Spirit Education Trust (WSET), the world's largest wine education institution based in London, to expand efforts in overseas export routes. By the fiscal year ending in June 2023, the exports had increased to account for 10% of the sales amount.

The History of Senjo Brewery

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