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SAKE SOMMELIER

Japanese Sake for Americans by Way of Americans

アメリカ人によるアメリカ人のための日本酒

In last month's issue, I wrote about the branding (the importance of the name) of Japanese sake, and coincidentally I met a Japanese sake salesman who made a cold call sales visit. The brand name of his company's product was "Rock Sake." According to them, "One of the reasons that Japanese sake just does not sell is that the names cannot be remembered. By having a cool bottle design, and what is more, giving it a name that Americans can quickly become familiar with, in terms of the taste as well, one will not get tired of drinking it." At the beginning, speaking honestly my expectations were not very high, but when I tried tasting it, I found that in distinction to typical Japanese sake it had a bouquet related to herbs, with a dry, clean finish that gave me the feeling of a light gin tonic. It is a sake that can be drunk easily, even without the accompaniment of food. As might be expected, when I asked I found that Japanese personnel were not involved in its promotion. Supposing that a brewmaster from Japan or professionals who know nothing except sake were involved in the promotion, one can imagine that this taste would not have a good interpretation.

Rock Sake is being promoted by Seth Padell and Brad Paddock, who originally had a great love of Japanese sake and Japanese cuisine. While sipping their favorite

delicious Japanese sake at a sushi bar they wondered that it was strange; "Why don't many Americans know about this kind of delicious sake?" With that as the initial spur, they set out for Japan and just went all around drinking Japanese sake. During that time, they attended things like seminars in Japan regarding Japanese sake, thoroughly studying sake and the promotion of sake day and night.

I think that there are pros and cons that might be argued concerning the taste of this Japanese sake, but in regards to their branding and marketing techniques, I imagine that there are many points that Japanese breweries can learn from. First, the primary factor is a name that is easy to remember, and then, that bottle that fit in with their conception. The market that they are targeting is not only Japanese restaurants, but American bars and clubs, places where young people gather, trendy drinking establishments. Previously, in the decade of the 1980s sushi also experienced great prosperity in a way that Japanese people could not have imagined, at places where rock music was blaring, and in the same way, Japanese sake will probably also experience a breakthrough at places where it is enjoyed, and I am indeed greatly looking forward to that.

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先月号で日本酒のブランディング（名前の重要性）について書かせていただいたが、偶然にも飛び込み営業をしに来たアメリカ人の日本酒セールスマンと出合った。彼の会社のブランド名は『Rock Sake（岩酒）』というものだった。彼ら曰く、「日本酒がなかなか売れない一つの理由は、名前が覚えられないことにある。クールなボトルデザインでしかもアメリカ人にすぐ馴染める、覚えられる名前をつけ、味的にも飲み疲れしないものにした」と言う。はじめは正直言ってあまり期待はしていなかったのだが、試飲してみると日本酒というより、ハーブ系の香りがある、ドライで切れの良い薄いジントニックをも感じさせてくれる。食べ物がなくても気軽に飲める酒である。やはり聞くと開発には日本人が絡んでいなかった。もし、日本の社員や日本酒しか知らない専門家が開発に携わっていたなら、いい意味でこの味はでなかったはずである。

ロック酒を開発した Seth Padell 氏と Brad Paddock 氏は、元々日本酒と日本料理が大好き。スシ屋で自分の気に入った美味しい日本酒をすすり飲みながら、「なんでこんな美味しい酒があまりアメリカ人には認知されてないのだろうか」と不思議に思ったことをきっかけに、日本にへも足を運び、日本酒をただただ飲み続けた。その間、日本で日本酒のセミナーなどに参加し、徹底的に酒の勉強と酒の開発に明け暮れた。

この日本酒の味については賛否両論あると思うが、彼らのブランディングとマーケティングについては、日本の蔵も学ぶ点が多いはずだ。まず、第一に名前が覚えやすいこと、そしてボトルが彼らの思考に合っていることである。彼らがターゲットとするマーケットは、日本食レストランだけではなく、アメリカのバーやクラブといった若者が集まるトレンドな酒場だ。かつてスシも 80 年代に日本人が想像もつかない大音響のロックをかけた場所で大盛況をもたらした様に、日本酒も楽しむ場所からブレイクしていくのかもしれないし、また大いに期待したいものだ。

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