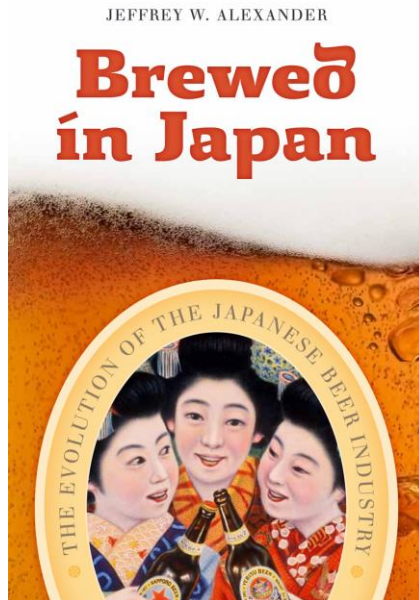


Jeffrey W. Alexander, *Brewed in Japan: The Evolution of the Japanese Beer Industry*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013, xii + 303. Reprint: University of Hawaii Press. ISBN: 978-0824839536



Jeffrey W. Alexander presents an exhaustive history of the Japanese beer industry in *Brewed in Japan*, a book especially appropriate for review in this journal because the author draws extensively from the company histories of the dominant players in Japan's beer market, namely Kirin, Sapporo, Asahi and Suntory. These companies are all known today for their eponymous brands, but they have complicated genealogies that date to the late nineteenth century, which company histories are well suited to reconstruct. Alexander uses the same sources to tell another tale, persuasively explaining how beer transformed over the course of the twentieth century from a conspicuously foreign product made for the elite into a native beverage brewed for the nation.

His first two chapters trace the history of the brewing industry before World War II, when Japanese beer making depended on foreign ingredients and manufacturing techniques; Japan's brewers touted their linkages to Europe; and they created a beer with a heavy flavor profile that catered to wealthy customers. Conditions during the Second World War, as described in Chapter 3, forced the use of domestic ingredients in lower quantities, which led to a lighter tasting product, geared toward a mass consumer audience. By 1959, beer surpassed sake in terms of market share and appropriated its own nostalgic tropes for advertising as Chapter 4 describes. Chapter 5 presents the history of brewing in postwar Okinawa with the launching of Orion Beer, a process that repeated many of the challenges and steps seen in the founding of the brewing industry on the main islands. The final chapter explores the diversification of the beer market since the early 1970s as the major brewers introduced new products and the government finally relaxed laws to allow for the opening of micro breweries, which have added greater variety to Japan's beer landscape.

There are similarities between sake making and beer brewing, but sake uses different ingredients (rice, water, and notably *kōji*, the mold that transforms starch in the rice into sugar needed for fermentation); and beer and sake have different fermentation processes. In sake brewing, starch becomes sugar and sugar becomes alcohol simultaneously, but these are separate steps in beer making, which relies on malted barley to transform starch into sugars and usually adds the bitter taste of hops to balance the sweetness. Beer's ingredients, wheat and barley, have been grown in Japan for two millennia, but hops arrived by the early nineteenth century, and the plant was not

cultivated domestically until 1877.¹ Thus, for beer making to take root required the introduction of new ingredients, skills, and technologies of brewing.

These innovations came together in the treaty port of Yokohama in the Meiji period (1868-1912) when Western residents and Japanese entrepreneurs sought to create a domestic version of a foreign import, as Alexander describes in Chapter 1. Of the 120 some breweries started in Japan before World War II, more than half began in the Meiji period (and Alexander provides a full list of all of these companies as an appendix). Kirin's history dates to 1869 or 1870, traced back to the brewing career of William Copeland (1834-1902), a Norwegian who moved to Yokohama in 1864. When Copeland's Spring Valley Brewing Company went bankrupt in 1886, the Japan Brewing Company, a firm sponsored by Mitsubishi, purchased the brewery but had to do so through a circuitous route. The Unequal Treaties prohibited Japanese from buying foreign-run businesses in the treaty ports, so Japan Brewing Company incorporated in Hong Kong as a British firm from which Japanese could purchase stock. The company hired German brewmasters to supervise production and Mitsubishi contracted with the retailer Meidi-ya in 1885 to distribute the product. By 1907, when the company took the name Kirin, it was one of four market leaders that also included Sapporo (founded in 1876), Nippon Beer Company (makers of Yebisu), and Osaka Beer Company, brewers of Asahi. Pivotal to the rise to dominance of these corporations was the institution of a beer tax in 1901 that brewers had to pay at time of bottling, which proved to be too much of an expense for smaller breweries to bear, thereby reducing competition.

Despite growth in Japan's brewing industry, German exports dominated the East Asian market through the first three decades of the twentieth century and Germany continued to influence the culture of brewing in Japan with Japanese companies employing German brewmasters even through the First World War. The period of 1906-1936 described in Chapter 2, saw three of the major players in the Japanese brewing business – Sapporo, Osaka, and Nippon -- create a conglomerate called Dai Nippon in 1906. Within a year, that firm controlled 72% of the market, leaving 20% to Kirin and the rest to the surviving smaller brewers. All firms had to contend with beer sellers who paid the breweries only after sales and would frequently cut prices to stimulate demand, which resulted in a loss of profit for the beer industry. Alexander describes how Kirin, seeking better control over distribution, ended its relationship with Meidi-ya; and the beer industry created a beer cartel in the 1930s to set production levels and prices. Appealing to consumers directly, brewers' agents drove bottle-shaped cars and even soared in hot air balloons, but they also relied on conventional newspapers ads and posters, especially those featuring beautiful Japanese women. Overseas expansion began in the first decades of the twentieth century. Dai Nippon purchased the Anglo-German Beer Company in Qingdao, China in 1916, renaming the brewery Tsingtao, and managing the factory with assistance from German POWs during World War I.

In the next chapter on World War II, Alexander extends his story of Japanese brewing abroad to include colonies in Manchuria, Korea, Taiwan, China, Indonesia, and the Philippines, but the story of the Japanization of beer occurred mostly on the home islands. Food scholar Katarzyna Cwiertka has pointed to the Japanese military as having an important role in homogenizing national tastes by popularizing Western-style dishes such as curry-rice, stew, and deep-fried foods.² Alexander describes how the wartime government made providing domestic beer to the troops a priority and measured morale on the home front by the availability of beer to consumers. Beer also earned the state significant wartime tax revenues from sales. Sake brewers could not compete, first facing restrictions due to rice shortages and then a complete prohibition against sake making in 1940. In contrast, "soldiers were served beer at the front until the closing phases of the war... and the sailors of the Imperial Japanese Navy enjoyed beer bottled and shipped directly to Japan's major naval bases through mid-1945" (p. 143). By 1943, individual brands had disappeared and "beer" was called by the generic "wheat alcohol" (*bakushu*), the product of shortages and the forced conglomeration of breweries now under complete government control. *Bakushu* was an entirely domestic product

¹ Adachi Iwao, *Nihon shokumotsu bunka no kigen* (Tokyo: Jiyū Kokuminsha, 1981), p. 343

² Katarzyna J. Cwiertka, *Modern Japanese Cuisine: Food, Power and National Identity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), pp. 79, 82.

from its barley to its hops, which were used more sparingly than they had been in the past to create a lighter taste. When the war ended, only economic recovery stood in the way of beer's place as a national beverage, but that revitalization process took until the late 1950s due to factors including the need to reconstruct factories and limits on the supply of ingredients.

Economic recovery also meant adjusting to a new business climate in which the occupying forces worked to dismantle large financial conglomerates (*zaibatsu*), and Alexander describes in Chapter Four how executives at Dai Nippon Brewery on their own initiative chose to break their firm into two companies: Asahi and Nippon (which later changed its name to Sapporo). Kirin lost its overseas holdings but remained intact. Thus, the major players in the brewing industry from before the war endured afterward, and they used advertising to recast their product from a foreign drink "thought of before the war as a beverage for getting drunk... [into] a clean, alcoholic soft drink," with a taste appealing to young people and women (p. 156). MITI helped the larger makers dominate the market by denying licenses to competitors; allowing the brewers to collude in setting prices; and establishing high tariffs to protect against imports.

Chapter 5 takes the reader to Okinawa where the author compares the launch of Orion Beer in the postwar period to the situation brewers in Japan faced in the late nineteenth century. Orion's founder, Gushiken Sōsei (1896-1979) was a local police chief who was briefly imprisoned after the war, but later became governor of the Miyako Island chain. Gushiken's success with a miso and soy sauce business he founded in Naha with his brother in 1950 encouraged him to enter the brewing business; and with funding from a public stock offering, the Bank of the Ryukyus, and the US government, he embarked on the largest and costliest private construction project hitherto seen in Okinawan history, bringing his beer to market in 1959. Like his predecessors, Gushiken faced problems with distributors and with local perceptions that foreign brands tasted better. Orion executives went door to door to introduce their product to entertainment establishments and nightspots. They also sought to encourage women to consume beer, and the campaigns paid off. Today Orion controls half of Okinawa's beer market.

Chapter 6 is the shortest in the volume, but helpful in understanding the contemporary beer scene in Japan. Asahi's "Super Dry," which debuted in 1987, helped the brewer overtake Kirin as the leading seller and introduced a beer with a sharper taste and cleaner finish, which Alexander indicates is better suited for Japanese cuisine (p. 228). In 1994 the government lowered the minimum required output levels for brewers thereby allowing smaller producers to make and sell beer, ushering in a boom in micro brewing with over 170 such establishments in operation today. Major brewers initiated their own run around government laws by launching beer-like beverages called *happoshu*, which use less than 67% malted barley by grist weight, the defining amount for beer as mandated in the sixteenth-century German purity laws used in Japan to designate and tax the beverage. When Suntory, which entered the beer market in 1963, introduced "Hop's Draft" in 1994, it sold a beer-like beverage made with 65% malted barley at a price 30% less than beer. Other brewers followed suit, and by 2003 these low malt beverages surpassed beer sales for home consumption. Alexander closes the chapter with the story of the German brewmaster Johannes Braun, owner of the brewpub Otaru Beer in Otaru, Hokkaido. Braun's insistence on using only European ingredients and methods shows how much brewing in Japan has changed in a little over a century in that the once standard modes of production and operation are now only indicative of craft brewing.

Alexander acknowledges the company histories sourced in his book as "promotional" in nature (p. 4), but he presents the accounts in these writings at face value, which works well for laying out the nitty-gritty details of the evolution of the beer industry, but results in a producer's view of these developments. On the positive side, the author has written a definitive history of the brewing history in Japan with fascinating asides about beer in popular and material culture and the history of technology – the advent of the bottle cap, for example, touches on all three of these areas. Yet, some data touted in company histories – such as the list of the parcels of land Dai Nippon acquired in the 1940s – could have been relegated to the notes. Moreover, many sources that appear to augment the company histories

in fact turn out to come from those same texts when one looks to Alexander's notes. For instance, a letter executives at Falstaff sent to Orion Beer in 1963 is from one of Orion's published company histories (pp. 216, 279). Consequently, some of Alexander's assertions, such as the fact that Orion Beer sparked a "sexual revolution" in Okinawa by hosting beer parties for women beginning in 1962, seems more like a marketer's claim than one that is substantiated from the materials presented (p. 216). Missing too is the voice of Japanese consumers. Alexander frequently cites English language publications such as *Stars and Stripes*, *Japan Yearbook*, the *Japan Times*, and even the recollections of the "historian" Donald Keene (p. 87), but the voices of ordinary Japanese beer drinkers are too few and far between. Because Alexander gives us a better picture of what goes into a bottle than the effects of what comes out, *Brewed in Japan* would be more ideal for assigning for a class on Japanese business history than it would for a class on food culture. Yet, *Brewed in Japan* will nonetheless quench the thirst of anyone seeking a detailed history of the Japanese beer industry. Alexander shows how brewers domesticated a foreign product, benefited from and coped with government regulations, and helped to shape modern consumer tastes. *Brewed in Japan* is an authoritative work sure to be read and referenced by scholars of Japanese business, consumerism, beverage culture, and foodways.

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