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Sommelier's Rise to the Top of the French Wine World

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**DELIGHTFULLY SAUCED:  
WINE MANGA AND THE JAPANESE SOMMELIER'S RISE  
TO THE TOP OF THE FRENCH WINE WORLD**

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**Introduction**

The French restaurant scene in Itami's Jūzō's *Tampopo* (1985) stands as one of the film's most memorable. It depicts the three-tiered stratification of Japanese salarymen. The first tier—the old guard—retains the most power, but ironically has the least knowledge within the realm of French wine and cuisine. In the middle are the salarymen who have memorized just enough of the food menu to be able to order so that the completely uninitiated old guard can follow suit and save face. They nonetheless lack the cultural sophistication to know that when the waiter asks what they would like to drink as an accompaniment, beer is the wrong answer. The lowest-ranking salaryman, however ignorant of how the pecking order should inform his choices (or lack thereof) is both culturally and linguistically competent, able to read the menu and discern where in France the chef trained based solely on how the food was prepared. As his *coup de grâce*, the young salaryman gains the ultimate respect of the waiter by eschewing beer, and instead choosing a wine that perfectly pairs with his dinner selection. The scene is remarkable not simply for its comedic effect, but also because it illustrates the rising importance of French wine and knowledge thereof across generations.

Japan remains home to a nascent wine culture, the central object of that has become a common item within the lexicon of Japan's consumers. Critical to the popularization of wine has been the firm rooting of the sommelier as the character through which it is introduced. The image of the sommelier has proliferated across media genres, including film, television shows, anime, and video games. This paper examines the work of writer Joh Araki and his series of manga, belonging to what we shall henceforth refer to as "wine manga." The paper posits that the sommelier in Joh Araki's works functions as a cultural steward whose development parallels the popularization of wine in Japan, and as an illustrated representation of the trajectory by which wine has come to be accepted in Japan as part of the everyday nomenclature. It also examines how the narrative of the genius sommelier fits within preexisting national narratives.

That wine would eventually become the subject of manga was inevitable. As Brigitte Koyama-Richard states in her study on manga: “Subjects such as cuisine or wine tasting have a peculiar attraction for the Japanese, who pride themselves on their gourmet tastes. Culinary specialties from round the globe are served in many restaurants along with world-famous wines; these establishments vie with each other to satisfy ever more demanding customers. It is a phenomenon the manga was unlikely to ignore” (Koyama-Richard 2007: 172).

“Wine” and “sommelier” do not readily recall “Japan” in a Western schematic that sees it primarily as a sake producer and more recently as a beer producer. This should come as no surprise. Fujita Mariko, in her chapter titled “Sake in Japanese Art and Culture,” states that “there are about twenty-six hundred sake breweries producing about four thousand brands throughout Japan” (Fujita 2003: 345). Penelope Francks writes about sake and beer, that “the brewing of [sake] represented a major industry through to the interwar period at least, and beer, [was] the drink that was eventually to overtake it as the everyday accompaniment to Japanese social life” (2009: 137). Thus sake and beer have earned a place as permanent fixtures within the genealogy of the Japanese diet.

One might, however, be remiss to completely disregard wine consumption, as Japan has become home to a wine culture still in its infancy.<sup>1</sup> In her compendium of 148 wineries across Japan, Ishimoto Motoko notes that within the five years separating the first edition of her *Wainari ni ikō* series and the 2011 edition, wine had become an everyday item in Japan (Ishimoto 2011: 212). In his *Saikyō Nihon wain gaido*, Fukuda Katsuhiro provides a detailed synopsis of wineries by region, from Hokkaido to Kyushu, illustrating how the practice of winemaking has spread across Japan (Fukuda 2011). As early as 1975, Inoue Munekazu had composed a history of grape cultivation, winemaking, and the selling of wine in Japan, together with concise histories of Japanese wineries in his text, *Nihon no wain*. Ogino Hanna (1997), in her text *Nihon no Wain Romanchikku Kaidō*, introduces not only wineries across Japan, but also answers questions related to wine etiquette, paying special attention to the

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<sup>1</sup> One might compare this to Japan's coffee culture, which has been described as “one of the most refined in the world,” despite the unlikelihood of this being everyday knowledge outside Japan. See James Freeman et al., *The Blue Bottle Craft of Coffee* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2012), p. 133.

relationship between women and wine. In 1999 and 2008 respectively, Suga Sekiji and Aoki Fumiko wrote guides introducing wines based on the films in which they made their appearance. In *Shigoto ga dekiru hito wa naze wain ni hamaru no ka*, Inose Hijiri (2012) attempts to connect wine consumption with professional ability and upward mobility. Hayama Kōtarō has written on both wine and champagne in his series of wine quiz books (2008) and *Chanpan no oshie* (1997). The growing body of Japanese literature on wine points to the increasing solidification of wine as a staple at the dinner table. Along with that position of increased prominence have come more representations of wine and wine culture within Japan's popular media. This, however, has not been reflected in Western studies on Japan.

### Overlooking Wine Manga

Perhaps one reason that Japan's nascent proclivity toward wine has gone largely unacknowledged outside of Japan is that it has thus far lacked visibility in Western research on Japanese popular culture, being absent from discussions on manga, television shows, and video games. This is despite television adaptations of Joh Araki's manga series *Sommelier* and Agi Tadashi's series *Kami no Shizuku* in addition to video games such as *Wain no hajimekata* (2007) and *Sommelier DS* (2007), both for the Nintendo DS. Genre designations work to obscure visibility of the subject by relegating it to the "food manga" genre, thus denying wine manga access to an important vehicle for the exportation of Japanese "soft power."

The food manga genre is not new. It has been well-established since the 1970s. In "Oishinbo's Adventures in Eating: Food, Communication, and Culture in Japanese Comics," Lorie Brau calls attention to the prevalence of what are commonly referred to as "gourmet comics" or "gurume manga" (2010: 110) illustrating the significance of the genre through an analysis of Kariya Tetsu and Hanasaki Akira's seminal work, *Oishinbo*. Amongst the numerous volumes of gurume manga—*Hōchōnin Ajihei*, *Hōchō Mushuku*, *Tetsunabe no Jan*, *Shōta no Sushi*, *Za Shefu*, *Ajiichimonme*, *Ramen Hakkenden*, *Misutā Ajikko*, *Kukkingu Papa*, and *Chūka Ichiban* to name a few—*Oishinbo* reserves a special place within gurume manga if not due only to the sheer vitality of the series, which began publication in 1983 and remained in publication through 2013.

*Oishinbo* exemplifies one successful narrative pattern within the gurume manga genre. The series defines the genre's didacticism, developing characters that eat not for eating's sake, but to illustrate points that permeate the core of why we eat the way we eat. It also posits moral or

political arguments for or against our food choices. *Oishinbo* unites its audience through the commonplace subject matter of food, but gains its depth through asking and answering questions of a cultural and political nature, such as what makes certain foods and methods of preparation quintessentially Japanese.<sup>2</sup>

While mastication has proven itself a popular theme as indicated, for example, by *Oishinbo*'s having received its own genre designation, one must not overlook deglutition, which has been subsumed under the *gurume* manga genre and, as a result, largely ignored, particularly outside Japan. Perhaps one reason that such manga has not garnered attention is that naming conventions are problematic. How do we refer to manga in which narrative progression is based on the consumption of alcoholic beverages? Could any negative associations be made from attempting to create international genre designations that connote alcohol consumption? How might the conflation of "manga" with "comics" and the association of "comics" with "children" affect the feasibility of wine manga developing an audience outside Japan?

The role of the central character in such "drinking manga" becomes all the more important specifically because of this dilemma. There is therefore an established tendency for manga on drink and drinking to refer to the protagonist or the protagonist's work or workplace, thus providing the central character with a platform to legitimize and rationalize discussions on alcohol. The lead characters need not be food industry gourmards whose consumption of cuisine stops short of gluttony. Though the title *Oishinbo* is a play on words combining the Japanese *oishii* [delicious] with *kuishinbo* [a person who enjoys eating], neither carries a negative connotation. The "gurume manga" designation, therefore, does not necessarily require an intermediary who serves in the industry of his passion, a fact which lowers the barrier to the creation and consumption of the genre. Such a luxury evades manga on drink, in which the central characters serve as intermediaries between patrons experiencing some sort of crisis and the drinks that they taste, decant, brew, ferment, shake, and muddle. The drinks lack meaning without interpretation and application by the protagonist. Joh Araki's *Sommelier*, *La Sommelière*, *Shin Sommelier*,

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that *Oishii* and *Kuishinbo* are words common within the active vocabulary of Japanese speakers. The series is aimed at the masses, not necessarily the gourmand subset.

*Bartender*, and *Bartender à Paris* for instance all eponymously refer to their respective central characters and their professions. The work of Oze Akira is named after either the character or the character's work, as in *Natsuko no Sake*, *Natsu no Kura*, and *Kurōto*. The English and French translations, *Drops of God* and *Les Gouttes de Dieu*, of Tadashi Agi's *Kami no Shizuku* both fail to accommodate for the double entendre that lends the Japanese title its appeal: Shizuku refers to drops of wine, but also to the name of the protagonist, Kanzaki Shizuku.

Central characters who serve as sommeliers, professional bartenders, winemakers, and sake producers allow for manga on drinking to establish and maintain a didacticism that lends to the legitimacy of the theme. These are not graphic novels extolling perceived benefits of drinking for drinking's sake. Instead, they establish the consumption of alcoholic beverages as an endeavor the full enjoyment of which is based in cultural and even linguistic fluency. Both of these fluencies are requisite to the proper contextualization and interpretation of experience and an ability to adequately express and relay that experience to the customer. The professional is the teacher, while the customer plays the role of the student onto which knowledge is bequeathed. This, in turn, results in a revelation greatly influencing the customer's life. Such is the narrative arc of wine manga. The sommelier is the perfect embodiment of the Japanese expression "*unchiku wo katamukeru*," in reference to the display of a profound knowledge of the given subject matter. Similar to the character Richard Pratt in Roald Dahl's short story, "Taste," the sommelier takes a "grave, restrained pleasure in displaying his knowledge" (Dahl 1983: 53–54).<sup>3</sup> It is through almost acrobatic displays of linguistic prowess, experience, education, and cultural knowledge and sensitivity that the sommelier empowers himself, surviving the hardships of the wine trade.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> It should be added that while the wine enthusiast in Dahl's story is nothing short of a charlatan, our Japanese sommeliers are upstanding citizens.

<sup>4</sup> Sewn between individual episodes in *Sommelier* volume 4 (1997) onward are introductions to various wines, vineyards, and wine terminology, written by Hori Kenichi, the Japan Representative at the Wine Institute of California. The sommeliers in Joh Araki's works thereby impart their knowledge onto readers, creating the possibility for two spheres of consumption. The first is the intangible consumption of knowledge; the second is the tangible consumption of wine. The inclusion of Hori's wine

Making this feat all the more impressive is the wine world's particularly stringent requirement of lexical sophistication as a prerequisite for meaningful participation in any advanced discussion on wine. In his timeless treatise on wine snobbery, Leonard Bernstein discusses the intricacies of pontificating on wine, stating, that wine "has its own vocabulary, and this is invaluable to the wine snob. Just as tennis fanatics talk of topspin lobs and compare Adidas to Nike, so must the wine snob cultivate his own exclusivity" (1982: 32). Such exclusivity includes knowledge of what *not* to say. "A good rule might be: If the descriptive word can be used for food it cannot be used for wine. You might refer to roast beef as delicious, and that should signal you to stay away from 'delicious' when the wine is served" (Ibid.: 33). The ability to wield proper descriptions of wine is an integral part of the sommelier's cultural cachet.

Perhaps Japan's most well-known sommelier, Tasaki Shinya, has expounded upon the importance of words in his profession, describing them as tools of absolute necessity within the trade (Tasaki 2010: 3). He explains, "In one year, I taste over 10,000 different wines. The way I commit to memory the qualities of each wine begins from putting all five senses—sight, olfactory, taste, touch, and sound—into overdrive and substituting with words what I have felt" (Ibid.: 3).<sup>5</sup> What follows in the first section of Tasaki's book is a list of expressions that the author describes as "stock" utterances that fail to relay any sense as to the quality of the wine. The next section lists expressions that many think relay "deliciousness," but which succeed only because of the utterer's preconceived notions, while the final section in the first chapter criticizes expressions that result from a brand of "minus thinking" that Tasaki states is specific to Japan and the Japanese language. The sommelier is responsible for using words to form a personalized connection between the wine and its consumer, and this occurs only if the sommelier possesses the appropriate lexical repertoire. This, in turn, has the potential to elevate wine from a mere object of consumption to a representation of cultural knowledge and sophistication. It is thus through a focus on knowledge and its ostensible display at an appropriate venue by

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primers in the *Sommelier* series predates the publication of a collected volume of almost identical writings by the same author. See Hori Kenichi, *Wain no jiyū* (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Author's translation.

a preapproved cultural steward, that manga on alcoholic beverages transcend any negative notions associated with alcohol.

Another possible reason that manga on beverage consumption has thus far been overlooked has to do with its incorporation into other genres, which has the effect of reducing its visibility, lending the impression that manga on beverage consumption is undeserving of its own genre or sub-genre designation. In “An Overview of Manga Genres,” Bryce and Davis allude to the difficulties of developing a comprehensive list of manga genres. The article provides us with a framework of nine manga genres, including fantasy and the surreal, historical representations, horror and the supernatural, humor, politics and representations of the political, religion and spirituality, science fiction, romance, and sports. As the authors tell us, however, the listings “reflect both the filtering of manga through the availability of English translations as well as the accretion of attention that particular genres have garnered through English-language scholarship” (Bryce, Mio and Davis 2010: 34). Despite its popularity in Japan as exemplified through its sheer availability, *gurume* manga does not make this list, nor does manga on drinking. Within the given framework, *gurume* and drinking manga instead stretch across various genres within the *seinen* category, including humor, politics, and even romance, without the central enabling element of food and drink ever being recognized.

Considering the quantity of works available, it can be argued that manga on drinking deserves special attention separate from *gurume* manga in order to highlight its existence and significance as we examine how such works reflect the culture and era into which they were born. The designations provided by Bryce and Davis only lightly touch upon the sheer variety of manga actually available in Japan, amongst which one would most certainly include *gurume* manga, and perhaps even manga on drinking. In *Kono manga ga sugoi*, a manga guidebook published in 1996 which bills itself as the first comprehensive guidebook on the subject, a total of 83 genre designations are given, *gurume* manga included amongst them (Kondō and Toyama). Within this list of nine works, *Natsuko no Sake* sets the standard that manga on drinking be listed with *gurume* manga. *Natsuko no Sake* has been followed by a host of other manga on drinking: *Natsu no Kura*, *Kurōdo*, *Sake no Hosomichi*, *Horoyoi Shubō*, *BAR Lemon Heart*, *Kasumi Tanabiku*, *Miki no kura*, *Sakaba Mimoza*, *Iokura Saketen Monogatari*, *Hayako Sakemichi wo Iku*, *Heart Cocktail*, *Towa no Hajime: Aizu Sakagura Monogatari*, *Kami no Shizuku*, *Sommelier*, *La Sommière*, *Shin Sommier*, *Bartender*, and *Bartender à Paris*. Borrowing from John

Frow's framework for the analysis of genre structural dimensions, it can be said that manga on wine share a set of formal features, a thematic structure, a situation of address (the manga writers and artists assuming authority), a structure of implication, and a rhetorical function (Frow 2005: 9). These are the makings of what may at least be referred to as a sub-genre. In light of this, within the scope of this paper, manga on wine shall henceforth be referred to as "wine manga."

The narrative structure of gurume manga represented by but not limited to *Oishinbo* can be recognized as the roux for wine manga. If we are to say that there exists a formula for such manga, it preexists *Oishinbo*, having been exemplified by *Hochonin Ajihei* ten years earlier. The protagonists in these tales overcome obstacles of prodigious heights to attain the foremost position in their fields. As stated by Schodt (2010), "More often than not, the heroes are young men from disadvantaged backgrounds who enter a profession and become 'the best in Japan'" (106). Wine manga borrows this narrative structure. The protagonists have all become sommeliers through a life of insecurity and toil. However, also apparent is a method of narrative delivery specific to wine manga. Within this elucidation, wine becomes the fulcrum of political commentary and an expression of Japanese parity within a wine world that has hitherto been seen as the providence of Europe, and in particular, France. Japan's becoming an equal in terms of possessing a discerning wine taste mimics the heightened role that wine would attain within Japanese society throughout all of its five wine booms occurring between 1960 and 1995, with the development of wine manga occurring during the fifth boom.<sup>6</sup>

### Japan's Wine Booms

While the wine booms deserve to be discussed in their own right, here we will discuss them only briefly so as to better illustrate the cultural landscape informing wine manga's development. The first boom occurred as the result of advancements made from the late 1960s into the early 1970s. The culmination of the Tokyo Olympics, Osaka Banpaku, and extensive economic growth resulted in a Japanese populace with not only a

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<sup>6</sup> In an article using statistics from Japan's National Tax Agency (Kokuzeichō), Tatsuya Noguchi and Wakita Maya calculate that there have been seven wine booms in Japan, the latest occurring in 2010 and brought about by the availability of reasonably-priced, high-quality wines.

renewed interest in the world outside Japan in terms of its cultural stock, but also with an increasing financial capacity to gain access to it through both overseas travel and importation. The first wine boom was further assisted by a relaxation of the laws governing the importation of foreign wine in 1970. Even within the midst of the first wine boom wine consumption in Japan remained only 1/20 of wine consumption in 2008 (Hayama 2008: 164). However, we can see in this boom the seeds being sown for what would become the next wine boom.

The second wine boom occurred around 1978 after Japan's economic expansion had brought dramatic change to the consumer landscape and expanded the possibilities of consumption. By the late 1970s, Japan's economy had overcome the 1973 oil shock, opening up a period of economic development that would end with the bursting of the bubble in the early 1990s. These economic conditions as well as a dramatic lowering of the price barrier allowed wine to be purchased for household consumption. Suntory Wine Reserve, for instance, could be had for a mere ¥1000, a price that Suntory would let its audience know on its commercial advertisements.

The third wine boom was welcomed in 1981 with the popularity of "isshōbin wine." Common knowledge has it that the design of a wine bottle differs according to the region in which the wine was produced and the kind of wine being bottled. Japan's third wine boom introduced wine bottled in containers traditionally reserved for sake, topping off at one shō in accordance with Japan's old measurement system or 1.8 liters by current standards. The use of *isshōbin* came with a number of advantages, the most obvious being that the amount of wine that one could purchase for the price greatly increased over wines bottled in the typical 720ml containers, even if the quality of the wine would have left something to be desired.

Japan's fourth wine boom occurred around 1987 while Japan was still enjoying the excesses to which access was gained in the midst of its bubble economy. It is during this boom that wine, or at least a particular varietal, would permanently etch itself into the conscience of the mass consumer, reserving a spot for wine in the Japanese household—Beaujolais Nouveau. The Japanese popularity of this varietal remains evident even within Western wine literature. For instance, in her exhaustive treatment on wine, Karen MacNeil writes about Beaujolais wines, "The sad misconception about the wine Beaujolais is that it's solely a once a year wine experience, drunk around the end of November when signs in restaurants and wine shops from Paris to Tokyo scream *Le Beaujolais Est*

Arrivé!” (2001: 219). The popularity of Beaujolais Nouveau in Japan, even two-and-a-half decades after its inception, cannot be disputed. Fifty percent of French Beaujolais Nouveau exports are consumed in Japan (Hayama 2008: 24). Perhaps another factor in the popularity of Beaujolais Nouveau is that because of the rules and regulations regarding the commencing of sales and how that relates to international time zones, Beaujolais Nouveau always becomes available in Japan first. This lends an auspiciousness to the occasion that advertising alone would have trouble reproducing.

Japan’s fifth wine boom—and the one with which we are most concerned here—occurred several years after researchers in the United States began making inferences concerning what came to be known as the “French Paradox” in reference to the fact that despite the French and Americans sharing a diet high in fat, heart disease is less prevalent in France than in the United States.<sup>7</sup> According to R. Curtis Ellison, “The public, however, remained largely unaware of this association until the early 1990s, when publicity began to appear regarding the so-called ‘French Paradox’, the lower rates of CHD [coronary heart disease] in France despite high levels of the usual cardiovascular risk factors. A presentation on this topic on the American television program *60 Minutes* in 1991 spurred a marked increase in sales of wine in the US, an increase internationally in epidemiologic studies relating wine and alcohol to health, and the expansion of basic scientific experiments into potential mechanisms of such effects. This broadcast was the first time that a reliable major news source had even suggested that there may be beneficial, rather than just harmful, effects of a beverage containing alcohol” (Ellison 2011: 105–106). Japan would inherit this “wine kenkōhō” [healthy living through wine]<sup>8</sup> as its fifth wine boom. Thus, while wine has had limited success in terms of market size, its cultural penetration betrays a much greater success. The fifth wine boom held particular resonance, as it is within the midst of this boom in 1995 that Shinya Tasaki became not only the first Japanese sommelier, but

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<sup>7</sup> The term was not new. According to Alun Evans, in “1981, three Frenchmen, Ducimetière, Cambien and Richard, coined the term The French Paradox, after having compared levels of heart disease with fat intake data provided by The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.” See Alun Evans, “The French Paradox and Other Ecological Fallacies,” *International Journal of Epidemiology* 40 (2011), p. 1486.

<sup>8</sup> Author’s translation.

the first non-European sommelier to win the Association de la Sommellerie Internationale sommelier contest, which was held in Tokyo that year, representing Japan's official entry into French wine culture.<sup>9</sup> Tasaki's victory had significant cultural resonance. He made possible the idea of an internationally recognized Japanese sommelier, becoming a prototype for the characters we would soon see develop within wine manga.<sup>10</sup>

### **Satake Joh and the Wine Manga Sommelier**

The sommelier in wine manga has at least two functions: to dispel notions of superiority and inferiority based solely on nationality and to further embed wine culture into Japan, thus further accomplishing the first aim. The wine manga sommelier finds his roots in wine. Wine serves as the resin that gives the character's life meaning in a world that deprived him of the basic sense of grounding that may have otherwise been provided within the familial unit and through Japanese terroir. Satake Joh in *Sommelier* is indeed Japanese if we are to define nationality solely through the accident of birth; but in terms of linguistic and cultural fluency, he is equally French. Joh has all but disowned his father, whom he faults for driving away his foreign stepmother, removing another element of grounding. Lacking the foundation that might be provided through family or place, Joh remains driven by an urge based in childhood nostalgia linking him to a past in which he and his mother shared what has heretofore been Joh's closest human relationship. Consecrating the mother-son bond with a glass of wine given to a young Joh signifies the preamble to his mother's departure. If wine symbolizes blood, the wine that Joh drank as a child at the behest of his mother represents the blood connection between mother and child. Wine

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<sup>9</sup> The 1995 contest marked only the second time for its being held outside Europe. As of this writing, Tasaki remains the only non-European to have won the contest. A list of winners can be viewed at [http://www.sommellerie-internationale.com/en/asi\\_winners/](http://www.sommellerie-internationale.com/en/asi_winners/).

<sup>10</sup> For more on Japan's wine booms, see Fukuda (2011), Hayama (2008), and Terauchi Mitsuhiro, "Wain shōhi buumu to chiiki sangyō: Yamanashiken Katsunuma-chō wo jurei ni," *The Japan Society of Household Economics* 18 (2003), pp. 166–167. For more on the passing of alcohol-related laws, also see Mizukawa Susumu, *Nihon no biiru sangyō: Hatten to sangyō soshiki ron* (Tokyo: Senshū Daigaku Shuppankyoku, 2002); Joh Araki, *Sommelier* 6 (1998), p. 61.

forms the unbreakable bond between the two, also bringing into question ideas of maternity, family, and bloodlines. Joh's wish to find this wine has led him on an adventure that demands the consumption of wine, and it is through those demands that Joh's palate has been relentlessly trained.

By contrast, in Joh Araki's second wine manga series *Shun no Wain*, we meet the protagonist, Kitamura Shun, in the throes of his own existential crisis, where the severity is displayed by his pouring into, what is presumed to be Hong Kong Bay, a bottle of Château Margaux. Château Margaux is one of the renowned Bordeaux wine makers, along with Latour, Lafite Rothschild, Haut-Brion, and Mouton Rothschild. Shun's soon-to-be partner, sous-chef Nagase Natsumi, who witnesses Shun's extravagance at the river later scolds him in an alcohol-induced bout of truth-telling: "Do you have any idea how many days' sous-chef salary one bottle of Château Margaux costs?"<sup>11</sup> Pouring out a bottle produced from a good year's grape harvest could be a four-digit US dollar gesture. The story's beginning in Hong Kong points to Shun's being an international wanderer as much as it does China's own wine boom, which began at the turn of the century (Noguchi and Wakita 2012: 124), when *Shun no Wain* began serial publication. We later learn that Shun also lived and studied in France through the auspices of his best friend Kuze Shinji's father, Shun having lost both of his parents when he was still a boy.<sup>12</sup>

Itsuki Kana's tale, *Sommelière*—marking Joh Araki's third and longest-running wine manga series—begins in the orphanage in which she was raised, the inhabitants of which have been deprived of their parents due to war and starvation.<sup>13</sup> Kana lost both of her parents in a car accident, after which a mysterious stranger named John Smith becomes her patron. Having never met John Smith, Kana begins her journey knowing nothing about him beyond his having served as the economic backbone to her being raised in France from early childhood and his having orchestrated and financed her education in winemaking at a French university. Kana, in her rare moments of weakness, meanders between wanting to know more about her father and desperately trying to guess the true identity of her long-time patron.

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<sup>11</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations of *Sommelier*, *Shun no Wain*, and *Sommelière* are the author's.

<sup>12</sup> Joh Araki, *Shin Somurie Shun no Wain* 1 (2000), p. 175; Araki, *Shin Somurie Shun no Wain* 2 (2000), p. 134.

<sup>13</sup> Araki, *La Sommelière* 1 (2007), p. 16.

While *Sommelier*, *Shun no Wain*, and *Sommelière* all share the same author and thus one might expect similar themes, *Kami no Shizuku* by Agi Tadashi also features a conflicted protagonist. Kanzaki Shizuku rebels against his father, internationally-known wine expert Kanzaki Yutaka, by becoming a “salaryman” at a beer company—the slight rests in the attitude that beer is the drink of the proletariat. It is the anti-wine stance that threatens the family line and embodies the deep-seated resentment Shizuku holds toward his father.

Shizuku’s goal is to permanently sever wine from the Kanzaki name, a name of such renown that Yutaka’s succumbing to pancreatic cancer was an event worthy of television news. Visiting his father’s estate, Shizuku learns that Yutaka has left behind but not bequeathed to him a collection of wines valued at ¥2,000,000,000. What would appear to be the father’s ultimate castigation of a son who refused to follow in his footsteps becomes the arena for the display of an array of skills stealthily ingrained in Shizuku from childhood, in the manner of Pat Morita and Ralph Maccio in *The Karate Kid*.<sup>14</sup>

All of our characters have therefore been deprived of their childhoods. This utter lack of “traditional” grounding forms the mechanism upon which the narrative structure relies. The characters are allowed the complete freedom to travel and possess an insatiable intellectual curiosity that provides structure to an otherwise restricted or underprivileged life. They have overcome adverse circumstances to reach the sommelier echelon, the caveat being that they find it difficult to connect to others sans wine. This toil has a very specific function within the wine manga narrative. It represents not only the possibility to rise from the bottom, but also to whittle down barriers to entry within wine culture, hard work and an international existence being equalizing forces. Having been tempered under such circumstances has prepared the characters for a life in which they must endure yet more toil to become sommeliers, and still more after they have attained their almost heavenly-ordained vocation. This toil takes the form of a series of political discourses locked into “-isms” that embody impediments to Japan’s acceptance as a wine-consuming culture, and thus a culture to be held in equal esteem to the West. They include racism,

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<sup>14</sup> For example, Yutaka made Shizuku lick materials such as metals and leather so that he would become the embodiment of the wine aroma wheel—the “wax-on, wax-off” of the wine world.

fascism, and ageism, and follow the sommelier across the world, failing to cease even in Japan.

### **The Political Implications of the Japanese Sommelier**

Food and drink are political. This politicization can lead to an opaque line of demarcation between an “us” and “them” as the result of an ensuing battle to determine cultural superiority. Our sommelier heroes face a host of unsavory characters who posit, for instance, that French gastronomy and viticulture are beyond the palate of the Japanese not simply because the sommeliers are not French, but specifically because they are Japanese.

Ironically, Japan has been on the other side of the political debate about what we put into our bodies and its link to nationality. For example, in the case of rice, Brau writes, “[It] remains a central, sacred symbol for ‘we Japanese’ as opposed to ‘you foreigners’” (120). This intimate, intricate, and delicate connection of rice with the politics of Japanese identity occurs in the *Oishinbo* episode, “Gohan no Takikata Daironsō,” when protagonist Shirō Yamaoka attempts to explain—through food, of course—to a US congressperson that the superiority of Japanese rice over Californian rice is not merely a belief rooted in mystification by the Japanese populace, but based partly on the logical argument that the more organic methods employed by Japanese rice farmers lead to healthier rice and that this healthier rice is then used to produce other foods and drinks, all of which may be said to be staples of Japan. The episode reflects historical, real-life concerns over a staple that in the 1990s took on renewed importance for a Japan that was forced early in the decade to import US rice due to severe production shortfalls (Cramer, Hansen, and Wailes 1999: 1150). Tarrification has been used as one tool to protect its home rice industry, as indicated by Cramer et al.: “The [April 1999] import tariff announced by Japan is prohibitive, consistent with its policy to protect its domestic rice market because of the strong domestic, political, economic, and social sensitivity of rice” (Ibid.: 1149). At stake is a Japanese identity as shown through Japanese food culture. The purpose of the debate as given in *Oishinbo* is to sow seeds of doubt within the mind of the congressperson. After all, who could know more about rice than the Japanese?

Wine manga turns the tables. We are instead faced with the question, “Who could possibly know wine better than the French? And the Italians? And the Germans?” Potshots suggesting national or even racial superiority are, after all, not uncommon within the competitive world of

alcoholic beverages. The 1936 French text *Mon docteur le vin*, states: “The long-time use of wine has certainly contributed to the formation and development of fundamental qualities of the [French] race: cordiality, frankness, gaiety, which differentiate them so profoundly from people who drink beer.”<sup>15</sup> The condition of being “civilized” is therefore intimately connected with being French. Beer drinkers are not innocent in this, as for every insult that is volleyed, another is returned. In *The Brewer’s Art*, Meredith Brown writes: “Beer, then, is predominantly the drink of those branches of the white races of mankind which inhabit Northern and Western Europe (i.e. North of the wine-producing areas) or who have spread thence to the Western hemisphere—the energetic, and progressive and colonizing people who for the last five hundred years have been the social, industrial and political leaders of civilization as we know it today” (Edwards 2000: 20). Such thoughts would have presumably done little to abate any hostilities between the French and the British in the debate on cultural superiority. But both Derys’ and Brown’s texts clearly implicate national borders as having a significant role in politicizing what is drunk “here” and “over there.” Crossing these national borders to usurp the drink of the other has even been performed as the ultimate act of aggression. In *Wine and War*, the Kladrups remind us that battles small and large, seen and unseen have been fought over wine—a national treasure to be protected from foreign occupation at all costs. It should thus serve as no surprise that nationalism becomes the political front that seeks to deny entry to our Japanese sommeliers. The politics of the Japanese sommelier and wine’s entry into Japan are most visible in the earliest work of wine manga, *Sommelier*.

Satake Joh, the protagonist of *Sommelier*, begins his journey in France, where he endures a daily regimen of slights brought on by French natives who view wine as cultural territory onto which the Japanese—or likely anyone—should not tread. The French form the peak of the wine world hierarchy, and therefore have a right to protect one of its prominent cultural treasures. This belief constructs a barrier to Joh’s becoming a sommelier, the side-effect of which is the placement of an obstacle between Joh and memories of his mother. In a chapter titled “Ougon no Awa” [Golden Bubbles], Mylene, an inexperienced reporter eager to prove herself decides to write a newspaper column on Joh, the anomaly of the sommelier

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<sup>15</sup> Henri Babinski, as quoted in Derys 1936: Chapter 11, N.P.

scene in France.<sup>16</sup> To the chagrin of everyone involved, Mylene publishes an inflammatory story in a French newspaper without having consulted anyone—including Joh—in advance.

It should be kept in consideration that there is precedent for newspaper commentary bringing the hasty end of the commentator. Botany Professor Lucien Daniel commissioned by France's Ministry of Agriculture in 1901 to conduct a survey into the possible qualitative differences between wines made from grapes grown on traditional French vines and those grown on post-*phylloxera* vines stands as one classic example.<sup>17</sup> The professor unequivocally stated in London's *The Times* that new French wine was inferior to old French wine, much to the consternation of all those who had toiled to save French wine. As Campbell states, "Professor Daniel was either very foolish or very brave. To say over a few agreeable bottles that things were not as good as they used to be might be considered reasonable. To say so about French wine in a foreign newspaper was an act of treason" (Campbell 2006: 237). The professor was subsequently dispossessed of his Légion d'Honneur for his comments.

Joh's statement, therefore, carries serious implications. Moreover, his being Japanese becomes the barbed insult upon which hangs the denial of his legitimacy. Joh's comments invite vitriol not only because they run counter to the narrative of French wine superiority, but also because his nationality precludes any right to pass judgment. Mylene's article, "The Japanese Sommelier Who Disliked French Wine," touches a nerve with the French public.<sup>18</sup> Joh's entire *raison d'être* as we later discover, is to find a certain wine, the name of which he cannot remember, but the taste of which has become embedded in his very being, it having been the wine he drank with his mother before she left the Satake home. Joh simply wishes to find this wine and thus at least symbolically be reunited with the woman who gave his life meaning. This backstory, however, remains completely ignored by Mylene when she writes her article, which discusses in detail Joh's victory in a French contest that bestows upon the winner the

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<sup>16</sup> Araki, *Sommelier* 1 (1996), p. 73

<sup>17</sup> *Phylloxera vastatrix* is the name given to the vine-killing disease caused by aphids "breeding and living on the vine roots... sucking the life out of the vines." See Thomas Pellechia, *Wine: The 8,000-Year-Old Story of the Wine Trade* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2006), p. 150.

<sup>18</sup> Araki, *Sommelier* 1, p. 73.

prestigious honor of being called France's top sommelier. His refusal of this honor and the accompanying statement that, "The wine I'm searching for cannot be found here," become problematic as does publication of this article that can at best be interpreted as insensitive, at worst categorized as sensationalist and inflammatory, and in either case has at its epicenter what will undoubtedly be perceived as the rejection of a symbol of French culture. The political nature of wine has it that the resulting question is not one that ponders the *étiquette de vin* sought by Joh, but rather winces at the very idea that a Japanese "sommelier" could have the gall to imply that French wine might in any way be insufficient. This indignation over something that never happened—Joh in no way stated that French wine was lacking—over the perceived instead of the real, has the purpose of reassuring the status quo of French superiority.

When Diane de Preuses, Chairperson of the French company "Goutte d'Or S.A." and proprietor of a major estate in Champagne—Madame Le Cru—comes across the article, she reacts by threatening to close her company's advertising coffers to the newspaper in protest. She is omnipresent within the champagne world, Joh even referring to her as the Barbe Nicole Clicquot of the twentieth century, an actual historical figure described by Tilar Mazzeo as hardheaded, diminutive, competitively ambitious, engrossed in all aspects of the business, relentless, meddling, unrepentantly perfectionist, judicious, pragmatic, and determined. Diane de Preuses is thus not to be taken lightly, and Mylene together with her superiors are expected to apologize for their transgression at Diane de Preuses' birthday celebration, in front of the bankers and high-level politicians one might expect to be in attendance at an auspicious occasion for a wine magnate. The politics of wine, champagne, advertising, and the money afforded by successful business combine to strong-arm into in consequence any right to speak ill about them.

The Japanese sommelier cannot, however, stand by idly. His purpose, after all, is to upstage and prove preposterous the idea that nationality has anything to do with one's capacity to become a world-class sommelier. It is Joh's mission to engage in political upheaval. He attends de Preuses' birthday *fête* uninvited and proceeds to put on a display of technical proficiency by employing *sabrage*—the feat of opening a champagne bottle with a saber—in an act of technical prowess serving as an homage to that premature act of celebration performed by French troops during the Napoleonic Wars, who took delight in getting sauced on champagne but could not be bothered to dismount their horses or put down

their sabers to do it (Mazzeo 2008: 104). As Joh approaches the wheelchair-bound madame wielding a saber in one hand and a champagne bottle in the other—the latter detail completely missed by the attendees, consumed by their own paranoia, prejudice, and ignorance—an onlooker yells for someone to notify the police, as what he imagines is soon to transpire is a very public assassination attempt by a Japanese sommelier. Rather than enjoying sabrage as the spectacle and tribute intended, the company president snorts that Joh of all people should not be the one performing it. Joh is denied legitimacy despite the display to which he has treated the party's guests.

Joh's act of sabrage would appear to the onlooker as “peacockery.” Behind his every action, however, rests a world of knowledge that does not lend itself to display. For the Japanese sommelier, this is the site where legitimacy is established. It is where the sommelier forces those around him to recognize his cultural fluency. This perhaps stands as one of the most salient points of Joh Araki's wine manga: knowledge is the currency that affords entry into wine's cultural realm, and provides the means through which to discredit the nationalism, fascism, and racism engendered by fear of “loss of status” and ignorance toward what is seen as “the other,” all embedded within a political dance that desperately seeks to establish who indeed has the lead.

Joh's employment of sabrage is a segue to his unraveling of a sinister plot. Every bottle of champagne at de Preuses' birthday celebration is purported to be a Madame le Cru from 1985, a year that produced an extraordinary grape yield that went for an extraordinary price of 5000 Francs or 100,000 yen per bottle.<sup>19</sup> An extraordinary yield deserves an extraordinary display. Joh's real purpose is to create a juxtaposition as he brings to light what his refined palate discerns as the elephant in the room—that the champagne being served to the party dignitaries is actually from the 1983 yield, a year so inferior and catastrophic for grapes in Champagne that de Preuses ordered her estate to dispose of it, being incapable of associating her name with a bottle of mediocrity.

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<sup>19</sup> According to at least one wine vintage chart, 1985 indeed produced an outstanding yield in Champagne. De Preuses account is thus historically accurate. See Robert Parker's *Wine Advocate*, vintage guide, (<https://www.erobertparker.com/info/VintageChart.pdf>, accessed February 24, 2014).

The stakes are high. Joh's allegation is one of fraud and deception, not only as a moral issue, but as a cultural one, the politics of which will decide the fate of the Japanese sommelier and possibly dispel the notion that French heritage and French blood are categorically inseparable. After tasting the champagne, de Preuses confidently affirms its 1985 vintage, and the label—which had until this point been hidden by a napkin—attests to this. Thus the status quo of French cultural superiority is reestablished and Satake Joh has been locked out, the Japanese palate having been confirmed as inferior to that of the French—at least when it comes to wine and champagne. The Madame castigates Joh: “As to be expected, you, a Japanese person, are incapable of judging champagne.”<sup>20</sup> The statement explicitly finds causation of Joh's being “incapable of judging champagne” in his being Japanese. The Madame's conclusion that Joh's “Japaneseness” constitutes the primary obstacle to his comprehension of wine is only strengthened through her use of “yahari” in Japanese, to connote a natural, expected outcome. The President of Goutte d'Or S.A., already contemptuous of Joh because of what has been perceived as a refutation of French wine, proclaims, “As if some young Japanese could possibly know anything about champagne!” This slight comes across as particularly nefarious considering his earlier actions. Caught in a picture taken by Mylene, he surreptitiously hands to the waiter a bottle of champagne made with the 1985 yield to pour for de Preuses in an attempt to disguise a host of inappropriate behavior, including serving champagne made from the 1983 grape yield, not discarding the entire yield as ordered by de Preuses, and insulting the intelligence of champagne buyers and dignitaries by—albeit correctly—insinuating that they would be unable to discern an inferior product from a superior one. In spite of his complicity and duplicity, the President finds fault in—of all things—Joh's Japaneseness, though Joh is the only one in the room who sees through the spectacle.<sup>21</sup>

The entire episode is constructed so as to make this conclusion predictable. First, Joh's Japaneseness is positioned as the element that allows us to cast doubt upon his knowledge and credibility. The newspaper article featuring Joh is problematic due to a juxtaposition of France and Japan which sees French knowledge of wine as the unquestionable status

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<sup>20</sup> Araki, *Sommelier* 1 (1996), p. 89.

<sup>21</sup> The same wine vintage guide states that the 1983 grape yield has not been consumed in sufficient enough quantities to warrant a rating.

quo, and Japanese knowledge of wine as the highly questionable anomaly. Joh's ability to "saber" a bottle of champagne is misconstrued, again because the common knowledge of Japanese wine ignorance has been established. Finally, Joh's ignorance is proved as he cannot distinguish between a bottle of champagne produced in 1983—a year of unquestionably poor yield quality—and a 1985 bottle, due to the expected inferiority of Joh's wine-tasting capacity, and the impossibility of him achieving anything comparable to French knowledge. This knowledge, in turn, is portrayed as being the patrimonial right of the French by virtue of the tautological construct that the French are French. The construct sets the bar of entry to the champagne world at the insurmountable height of a birthright, thus immediately precluding any possible legitimacy to Joh and turning "Japanese sommelier" into an oxymoron.

The historical precedent to this "Japan Fear" is well-documented. The 1980s were marked by the fear of a Japanese corporate and cultural takeover, evidenced in the growing number of publications discussing Japanese management styles and cemented in Hollywood imagery as the destroyer of the American automobile industry through such films as *Mr. Mom* and *Gung Ho*. Japan was also displaying its economic prowess through investment in French châteaux. Suntory, one of Japan's premier makers of beer and spirits had already been working for more than a decade to popularize wine in Japan. Its famous wine campaign "*Kinyōbi wa wain wo kau hi*" [Friday is wine day] of the 1970s created its own wine boom (Fukuda 2011: 121). In 1983, the company bought Château Lagrange in St-Julien (Brook 2007: 196). In the midst of the economic bubble in 1989, Suntory bought a 40% stake of Château Beychevelle (Ibid.: 189). In 1987, a Japanese real estate company called Touko Haus bought and renovated Château Citran, though it soon resold the property (Coates 2004: 85). Mercian, well known for its series of shōchū, ume liqueur, and wines, acquired Château Reysson in 1988 (Brook 2007: 124). There was thus an influx of Japanese activity in an area that remained not simply economic, but also deeply cultural. Japan became the object of political scorn in 1998, when Takashimaya—one of Japan's most well-known department stores—sought to purchase an estimated 33% stake in Societe Leroy, the wine distributor with exclusive rights to sell the highly-venerated Romanee-Conti. Henri Nallet, then France's Minister of Agriculture viewed the company's bid as a threat against a pillar of French culture, stating, "Romanee-Conti is like a cathedral. There is no question of letting a part of France's cultural patrimony get away" (Greenhouse 1988: 21N, 27L). Such

is the cultural backdrop before which *Sommelier* is built. It should be no wonder that its sommelier endures trials and tribulations to show that he *deserves* to be a sommelier and that Japan belongs to the wine class not because of mere financial possibility, but cultural fluency.

Book 2 of the *Sommelier* series, released in 1997, serves as a presage for the cultural reaction to Takashimaya's 1998 bid. No episode better displays the political volatility of wine during this period than Joh's experience with an actual politician. Morris Roche, a distinguished member of French parliament, at every opportunity pillories Japan's activity in what he sees as the French cultural sphere: "Imitations of French products are egregious in Asia. It is estimated that the resulting damage to the French economy runs in the hundreds of millions of Francs. And Japan is the worst of them. Japanese people come to France for one or two years and then go back to Japan and open French restaurants as if they understand anything about French food."<sup>22</sup> The parliamentarian, relentless in his nationalistic bent has gone so far as to bring to the occasion a bottle of Champagne made from grapes grown on one of the few purely French grape vines left, the majority of France's vines having withered due to the vine-decimating phylloxera outbreak between the 1860s and 1890s.

Phylloxera and its cure became the cause for serious reconsideration of what made French wine French, thus informing the plight of our hero. It is as existential a crisis as our hero's search for an identity. As Campbell states about the grafted vines that replaced the old ones, "The traditionalists hated them" (2006: 230). The new vines were more labor-intensive than those destroyed by phylloxera. Then, Campbell continues, "The phylloxera had not gone away. Chemical defense still held the line where the value of the wines (and the disdainful elitism of proprietors) allowed it" (Ibid.). The battle with phylloxera thus raises questions of both a political and philosophical nature: Does France replace the rootstock of its traditional vines with that of foreign origin? Or does France fight to keep its traditional vines at all costs? It is a question of identity as well as economics, mirroring the policies and politics of being or becoming a French citizen. For Roche, then, possession of this purely French champagne represents the sentiment of cultural purity, the cultural superiority of France proven by the vitality of the champagne rootstock. We are immediately aware that Roche's nationalism will become a considerable

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<sup>22</sup> Araki, *Sommelier 2* (1997), p. 87.

issue for Joh, who quickly becomes the target of Roche's ire. Roche proceeds to utter a series of almost farcical insults during an exchange with Joh:

Roche: Oh, were you the sommelier? All this time I've been sitting here wondering why the Oriental dishwasher is standing there. What are you, Chinese?

Joh: Japanese.

Roche: Japanese!? Haha... A Japanese sommelier!? I'll bet in your country you uncork wine with chopsticks, don't you?

Joh: You seem to have quite a disliking for Japan.

Roche: Wine is the essence of French culture... How could a Japanese possibly know anything about wine?<sup>23</sup>

The parliamentarian snatches the bottle of champagne from Joh's hand, having deemed him unfit to open this symbol of French cultural purity. When Joh accuses the parliamentarian of promoting fascism, Roche responds by reasserting his position of authority, threatening Joh with expulsion from France. Joh is again placed in a position in which his being Japanese must be excused as a prerequisite to his capacity as a sommelier being lent credence. This is addressed through the final quip made before the exit of the parliamentarian: "The nationality of a sommelier is of no relevance."<sup>24</sup>

The fear of a Japan with a voracious appetite for consumption remains an obvious point of contention throughout Joh's travels in Europe. Joh assuages these trepidations while trying to gain legitimacy as a sommelier as he continues his quest for one cathartic bottle of wine. For example, in an episode titled, "Vineyard," Joh travels to Germany, where the people he encounters cannot come to terms with the fact that he is a sommelier. When Joh interrupts an unproductive business talk between the stubborn owner of a German wine bottler and the Japanese representative of a wine reseller in Japan, the bottler, his product having received the praise of the representative and Joh, interjects that their praise is worth little. When Joh reminds the bottler that he is indeed a sommelier, the bottler all

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>24</sup> Araki, *Sommelier 2* (1997), p. 101.

but confirms the idea that Joh's being Japanese runs contradictory to his being a sommelier by pondering, "A Japanese sommelier..."<sup>25</sup> The German bottler then accuses Joh of being just like the Japanese wine buyer, whose interest in wine ceases at the issue of price.<sup>26</sup> This wine buyer further implicates Japan as being ignorant as a whole, stating that Japanese people select wine based on price, which eliminates the necessity of any other knowledge. As is certain throughout the *Sommelier* series, there may be a tint of reality in this depiction. During the years of rapid economic expansion, for instance, extravagance was the order of the day—on the company expense account. "Pin-don-kon" became a familiar go-to amongst those with money to burn. A concoction that involved pouring rosé Dom Pérignon (a "pink" Dom Pérignon, thus "pin-don") and Cognac ("kon") into an ice pail at a 50/50 ratio and the patrons sipping it directly from the pail through straws—the hostess also partaking in the witch's brew—constituted a 300,000-yen display of extravagance likely to render speechless anyone from Champagne or Cognac (Tsuzuki 2006: 23-24).

Afterwards, the Japanese wine buyer in *Sommelier* simply seeks to make a profit on the Japanese consumer's price fixation. The Japanese consumer will be none the wiser that he has purchased an inferior product due to this price fixation. Joh's dramatic reaction to the reduction of wine to a simple commodity is to slap the Japanese wine buyer in the face, proclaiming, "It's because of people like you that people say, 'Japanese don't know anything about wine.'"<sup>27</sup>

Joh, therefore, represents a dramatic shift in Japanese wine knowledge and consumption. He represents a future in which it is no longer acceptable for wine in Japan to be consumed based on the vulgarities of price or social pressure. Joh's importance as a symbol of growing sophistication within Japanese wine culture is exemplified through his period of apprenticeship in France, a story told in an episode titled, "Towa no Inochi" [Everlasting Life]. Joh recalls his experiences of 10 years prior, when his first employer bluntly states that becoming a sommelier would be impossible for a Japanese person.<sup>28</sup> Upon that employer's death, he lauds Joh as the first serious Japanese sommelier, a statement that praises the

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<sup>25</sup> Araki, *Sommelier* 1 (1996), p. 149.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>28</sup> Araki, *Sommelier* 2 (1997), p. 9.

individual by separating him as an anomaly, while implicating the whole. By any other measure, this would be a thinly-veiled insult. It does, however, indicate that Joh is only the first. Joh's youth, therefore, represents not a lack of experience as it might otherwise connote within a wine world in which age comes at a premium, but a new beginning for Japan's own young, budding wine culture.

By Book 6, Joh has moved back to Japan to begin his tenure at "La Mer," a promising French restaurant at which Joh chooses wine for the restaurant's long list of eccentric, Francophilic guests. In his dealings with a world-famous symphony orchestra conductor from France, we discover that Joh's reputation has followed him. In what is meant to be effusive praise, the conductor tells Joh, "I'd gotten word about an exceptional Japanese sommelier who lived in Paris, but you're even better than I'd expected."<sup>29</sup> Just as terms such as "josei-kisha" (woman-reporter), "josei-tōshu" (woman-pitcher), and "gaikokujin-senshu" (foreign athlete) can connote rarity or an exception to the rule, Joh is referred to as "nihonjin-sommelier" (Japanese Sommelier), illustrating that he fails to fit into the established paradigm, but is the prototype for what awaits.

When renowned French chef Joël Roche, a name that would perhaps bring to mind world-famous French restaurateur Joël Robuchon, visits Japan at the request of Japanese restaurateurs courting him to lend his name to a new local restaurant, Roche openly scoffs at the idea, offering the comment, "I can't find any good chefs in France, let alone Japan."<sup>30</sup> Roche's sentiment toward French cuisine echoes those of the oenophiles who find risible the idea of a Japanese sommelier. We are again treated to a member of the French upper class expressing doubt over Japan's ability to produce something that is seen as quintessentially French. The burden is on the Japanese to overcome the difficulties introduced thereby. Roche continues, "I've been to ten restaurants in the past three days and not once have I been impressed by the level of French cuisine."<sup>31</sup> Roche continues to make disparaging comments, claiming that the great service he received at a restaurant one day prior was due to the wait staff's having recognized him. According to Roche, "That's how Japanese people are. They bow down to

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<sup>29</sup> Araki, *Sommelier* 6 (1998), p. 175.

<sup>30</sup> Araki, *Sommelier* 7 (1998), p. 82.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

authority and status.”<sup>32</sup> After Joh puts on an impressive show as sommelier, however, Roche invites him to work at his restaurant in France, claiming that although Joh is a fantastic sommelier, French food of Roche’s caliber cannot possibly be made in Japan, his logic being that the ingredients used in real French food must come from French soil. Roche’s handmade butter must be made with the milk from select Jersey cattle. His vegetables must inherit the nutrients particular to the French terroir. To Roche, French cuisine is a landlocked union between French culture and French horticulture. The obvious result of this logic is that Japan becomes ontologically precluded from parity.

Roche leaves La Mer convinced that French cuisine worthy of the name does not exist in Japan. Reminding Joh of his offer of employment in France, Roche makes the departing remarks, “Think carefully whether remaining in Japan is in your best interests.”<sup>33</sup> The implications are significant. Joh’s remaining at La Mer represents Japan’s ability to retain its talent and rise on the international stage. It symbolizes Japan’s capacity to import the foreign to such a high proficiency that it promotes a reevaluation of Japan’s position amongst other states. Joh’s soul-searching leads to his remaining at La Mer. The world’s best sommelier is not only Japanese, but shuns an opportunity to work with one of France’s top chefs, choosing instead to lend his talent to a thriving, yet unproven restaurant in Japan. In response, Roche opens his own restaurant in Japan to compete with La Mer. Miraculously, the French are forced to leave French terroir and compete with Japan on its own turf. Japan thus escapes its position of inferiority and becomes a peer, marking a point of empowerment of the Japanese sommelier and the lending of legitimacy to a budding world of wine and French cuisine in Japan.

Joh eventually discovers the wine that he spent years looking. It was also not found in France, but in Japan, on the grounds of Satake Ryūzō’s estate. The last surviving vine that could produce grapes with the potential to yield wine (given to Joh by his step-mother) was in Joh’s own backyard the entire time. The catharsis experienced by Joh and his father—who knew about it all along—occurred one month before Ryūzō’s death. Meanwhile, in Joh’s absence and largely the result of Joh’s lasting influence, La Mer comes of age. However, its budding sommeliers no longer depend on Joh to

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<sup>32</sup> Araki, *Sommelier* 7 (1998), p. 87.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

perform their work. This is Joh's greatest gift and further represents the growing independence and acquisition of knowhow on the part of new sommelier in Japan.

The Japan to which Joh Araki's second and third sommelier characters return is a different one. As the author writes in the first volume of the *Sommelier* follow-up, *Shun no Wain*, wine has already established a common presence at the Japanese dinner table. Satake Joh's emergence coincided with Tasaki Shinya's winning the leading French sommelier competition thus signaling Japan's maturation, not only in terms of the country's ability to consume wine as a product but also as a cultural endeavor. Kitamura Shun and Itsuki Kana of *Shun no Wain* and *La Sommelière*, respectively, come to us at a time in which wine has already become a permanent fixture. Whereas *Sommelier* sought to place Japan on equal footing with those countries with historically ingrained wine cultures, *Shun no Wain* and *La Sommelière* are certain of Japan's footing. Although neither the sommeliers nor the sommelière can completely escape friction—their serving as a cultural liaison precluding the complete elimination of friction, as they work to loosen stubbornly fixed beliefs held by and about Japan that hinder its ascendancy in the wine world—the friction seen by Shun and Kana is of a demonstrably less haughty nature than that endured by their precursor.

### **Conclusion**

Donald Richie, in his treatise on Japanese film, borrows a phrase from Komatsu Hiroshi and Frances Loden on the role of the benshi—an in-theater lecturer and commentator, as described by Richie—in the development of cinema in Japan: “The benshi filled in gaps of knowledge Western viewers had acquired long before. They were ‘a reassuring native presence with a presumed acquaintance of the foreign object,’ a necessity which might even now ‘explain the Japanese affection for teachers, tour guides, sommeliers and other conduits for the acquisition of new experience’” (Richie 2001: 19). Just as the benshi played the educational role of on-site lecturer and commentator to film audiences seeking to better understand a relatively new medium and the novel kinds of storytelling it engendered, the sommelier plays a significant role as arbiter of culture. It

should come as no surprise that the sommelier—and sommelière<sup>34</sup>—have become a vessel for the importation of wine and wine culture, preparing Japan for their mass consumption. Satake Joh represents only the first step toward the recognition of a Japan for which wine is no longer the aberration, but the expected.

Perhaps the greatest significance in Joh Araki's work rests in the fact that the Japanese sommelier gains the recognition he seeks. Whereas *Oishimbo* attempts to convince us, for example, that the rice produced in Japan trumps that made in California for any variety of reasons and that it is thus “special,” wine manga would function to deny validity of a similar argument toward wine and French cuisine—that there is nothing inherently special about them that would bar their becoming a legitimate part of the Japanese experience. The “isms” used to argue for the uniqueness of Japanese rice are the same ones used as ammunition against the argument that viticulture, wine culture, and an understanding of them are bound by geographical and political lines. If the “Japanese have long perceived themselves to be on the ‘periphery’ in relation to the ‘central’ civilizations where the ‘universal’ norm has been supposed to exist” (Yoshino 1992: 11), then wine manga stands as an extension to this perception, but one fighting for parity within the “universal” western wine world. Stated differently, perhaps wine manga and its narrative of the Japanese sommelier's rise

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<sup>34</sup> In an interview I conducted with Joh Araki in Tokyo, the author stated about Itsuki Kana and the *La Sommelière* series that their creation was much more representative of the simple wish to take the series in an interesting direction rather than a pure focus on gender. It should also be noted, however, that perhaps beginning with the development of “jet babies” and implementation of “Yamato Nadeshiko” programs by Pan Am stemming from the company's Japanization Program beginning in 1960, cabin attendants would have been in a prime position to become acquainted with wine on international flights. In 1996, when the original *Sommelier* was released, there were approximately 1778 wine stewards in Japan, of which 588 were sommelière. Half of them worked for JAL. For more on the history of Pan Am's development in Japan, see Hoashi Kōji, *Pan Amerikan Kōkū Monogatari* (Tokyo: Ikarosu Shuppan, 2010). For more on JAL's wine stewards, see Yamada Hiroko, Yōko Murakoshi, Chika Nii, eds., *JAL Sora tobu somurie no wain wo dōzo* (Tokyo: Kyōhan Bukkusu, 1996). My interview of Joh Araki took place on September 4, 2012 in Tokyo.

exhibit characteristics of that brand of nationalism defined by Peter Dale in that what is attributed to being the cultural heritage of Japan (certain Japanese staples such as rice) is denied to outsiders, while the validity of the same argument toward what is ascribed to others (French wine and cuisine) is rejected (Dale 1986: 39). In this sense, though the wine manga covered here goes through great lengths to educate the reader on matters of French wine culture via the sommelier, when read within a larger context, we can argue that wine manga has at least as much to tell us about Japan and how the transnational narratives serving as the scaffolding for the popular consumption of wine and wine culture fit within the framework of preexisting national narratives.

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