



## Keio Business School

### **Dassai: the Globalization of Japanese Sake** <sup>[1]</sup>

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Neighboring the vast Ginza shopping district, not far from Tokyo Station, is the Kyobashi area. A modern office building called Tokyo Square Garden was erected there in 2013. Near the entrance to the building, through which large numbers of business people enter and exit hurriedly, stands a store with a stylish, modern Japanese appearance. A large sign captures the attention: on it is written “Dassai.” This is Dassai Bar23, a Japanese sake bar operated by Asahi Shuzo, a sake brewery based in Yamaguchi Prefecture that is enjoying rapid growth in the Japanese sake market.

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Japanese sake used to be dominated by negative associations: “it’s a sweet alcoholic drink that makes you sick,” or “it’s an alcoholic beverage drunk by boisterous middle-aged men who speak in loud voices” were some of the more typical images associated with the beverage. However, Dassai Bar23 is possessed of a starkly contrasting atmosphere. It is filled not just with male but also with many female customers, and its clientele drink their glasses of Japanese sake a sip at a time. The bar appears to be the embodiment of Asahi Shuzo’s corporate mission: “We brew sake for sipping, not sake for drinking, nor sake for selling.”

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It is no mean feat to tear down and rebuild established associations. Yet, by ensuring it is not constrained by the stereotypes of the Japanese sake industry, Asahi Shuzo has succeeded in creating a new style of sake. And, far from resting on its laurels, the company is embarking on its next challenge: to create overseas markets for sake.

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When products and services are rolled out overseas, consumers make certain assumptions about them according to their provenance, and this has the potential to influence purchasing behavior. This is

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