

CG Matsunaga's remarks at the opening of the Foreign Minister's Commendation conferment ceremony for Mr. Michael Tremblay on January 23, 2025

It is my great honour to have this most auspicious opportunity, as we gather here today, to pay respect to Mr. Michael Tremblay, who was bestowed the Japanese Foreign Minister's Commendation. The Foreign Minister's Commendations are awarded to individuals and groups with outstanding achievements in international fields, to acknowledge their contributions to the promotion of friendship between Japan and other countries.

The Commendations also aim to promote the understanding and support of the Japanese public for the activities of the recipients. Mr. Michael Tremblay was awarded the Minister's Commendation for his distinguished contributions to the promotion of mutual understanding and friendship between Japan and Canada.

Mr. Tremblay is a respected Sake Samurai, the proud beverage director of restaurant Ki Modern Japanese + Bar and an internationally sought-after Sommelier of Sake.

Since he became the beverage director of Ki Restaurant in 2006, he has discovered the depth and fascination of Japanese sake, an alcoholic beverage made from grains and water that is deeply rooted in Japanese culture with many breweries boast hundreds

of years' or even over a thousand years' history of commercial sake making. Mr. Tremblay was appointed as a Sake Samurai in 2017, was certified as a Sommelier of Sake in 2015, and founded the "Sake Scholar Course" in 2019. In addition to giving lectures on sake around the world, he has also spoken at various events and adjudicated in numerous competitions, contributing to the promotion of Japanese food culture through his activities to promote Japanese sake for many years.

The "Sake Scholar Course" he founded in 2019 is dedicated to advanced sommeliers looking for in-depth knowledge and appreciation of the history and attributes of each sake brewery and the region it calls home in Japan. He has created his own textbook that describes the topography, water quality, characteristics of the rice used as the raw material, and main sake breweries in each region of Japan, and uses it in his classes. The lectures have continued online even during the COVID-19 pandemic, and some of the participants have been dispatched as lecturers to Toronto, New York, Singapore, and Hong Kong to spread the appeal of sake in each region. He has also contributed to raising awareness of sake through his role as Sake Panel Chair judge at the International Wine Challenge and attending its competitions in the UK, Japan, and the US.

While the focus of Mr. Tremblay's work is enlightening wine and sake experts, his outlook is broader, reaching out to existing and potential sake fans. To promote the appeal of Japanese sake, which is viewed as a sacred gift from deities and indispensable in festivals, weddings, rites of passage and other social-cultural

occasions, Mr. Tremblay has participated as a presenter and lecturer in numerous events hosted by various entities including the Japan Sake Breweries Association and the Sake Institute of Ontario (SIO), the representatives of which are present here today, as well as this Consulate-General of Japan in Toronto and our Embassy in Ottawa. On these occasions, he not only teaches how to enjoy sake, but also shares his in-depth knowledge of the history of each type of sake brewing and how to pair it with food. For example, at one of the events we hosted here, Mr. Tremblay gave penetrating explanations about sake in general as well as each sake served and paired with the authentic Japanese cuisine prepared by this official residence's Chef Yuji Sugiyama.

One of his most recent endeavors to enlighten not only professionals but also laypersons alike was the publication of “Exploring the World of Japanese Craft Sake: Rice, Water, Earth” which Mr. Tremblay co-authored with Ms. Nancy Matsumoto, who is also present today. The book received James Beard Media Award in June 2023. The book is based on two years' research, with the co-authors personally undertaking the challenge of visiting thirty-five artisanal sake breweries in Japan, the US, and Canada to interview makers and document every stage of the sake brewing process, culminating in “an engaging and informative look at the world of sake.”

As UNESCO noted, sake-making requires many hands and strong teamwork, promoting social ties among the craftspeople, and uniting them with residents, including the farmers who

provide the ingredients, thus contributing to social cohesion. Mr Tremblay's work promoting the knowledge on, and appeal of sake extends this beautiful attribution of sake-making to the world, inviting sake lovers to delve into the realm of traditional knowledge and techniques of sake brewing using koji mold in Japan. His teaching connects brewery workers, kurabito, and head brewers, toji, sake sommeliers, distributors, bartenders, culinary professionals, general and event managers, and home cooks, as well as drink connoisseurs and other drinkers including sons of Bacchus or daughters of Li Bai.

Following its inscribing in 2013 of Washoku, traditional dietary culture of the Japanese, UNESCO last December inscribed traditional knowledge and skills of sake-making with koji mold in Japan on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. According to Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association, sake's export from Japan has nearly quadrupled in the last decade. The mastery of sake-making continues spreading and honed outside Japan too, including here in Toronto as we know well. In these regards, today's conferment of commendation is most opportune, highlighting the significance of Mr. Tremblay's works.

To conclude, Mr. Tremblay, it is my utmost pleasure to express our wholehearted sense of appreciation for your wonderful contributions as a distinguished promulgator, educator, and navigator of the beauty of sake, including the traditional knowledge and skills of sake-making. It is also our sincerest hope

that you continue playing an active role in communicating the appeal of sake to the community and to the world in the future.

Thank you.