

## Kuramoto (breweries) and toji (brewmasters)

### Learning outcomes

- Knowledge of sake-brewing seasons
- Knowledge of history and activities of kuramoto
- Knowledge of work of toji and brewery workers

### 9.1 Sake brewing and seasons

The availability of cooling equipment and refrigerated storage of rice means it is now possible to produce sake throughout the year, but still much sake production starts after the autumn rice harvest, with the mixing of the steamed rice, water and koji carried out during winter, when temperatures are low. Shipment of sake also tends to occur in the period from late autumn through spring.

### 9.2 Kuramoto (breweries)

There are around 1,300 kuramoto brewing sake in Japan, from Hokkaido in the north to Okinawa in the south. Many kuramoto have been producing sake for more than 200 years, with the oldest having a history dating back 850 years. These kuramoto have played a role in preserving the local environment by supporting local rice production and protecting the water. They also function as cultural leaders in their areas, sponsoring concerts, art exhibitions and other cultural events.

You can still find many sake brewhouses with traditional architectural features, such as earthen walls and tiled roofs. Most kuramoto welcome visitors so we recommend you to pay a visit when you are traveling in Japan.

### 9.3 Toji (brewmaster)

The kuramoto is the brewery or the brewery owner, but those who actually produce the sake are skilled brewers led by a toji, or brewmaster. Traditionally, the kuramoto commissioned the toji to hire brewery workers to produce the sake. Many toji and brewery workers are farmers who grow rice during the summer. During the winter, when there is little farm work, they leave their homes and provide their services as live-in workers at the breweries. The brewery workers are assigned different tasks, such as washing and steaming the rice, making koji, making shubo, and filtering the moromi. The toji oversees all of these activities and has responsibility for controlling the sake quality and producing it in accordance with the wishes of the kuramoto. There is a national accreditation system for sake-brewing skills, but merely passing the examination does not entitle one to be called a toji. The toji is required to have sufficient management skill to oversee the brewery workers and must demonstrate an ability to produce sake of recognized quality. There are many associations of toji and brewery workers throughout Japan (Fig. 9.2). It is through these associations, that the skills of sake brewing have been passed down over time.



Figure 9.1  
Sake brewhouse (Fushimi, Kyoto)