

Maekake Musashino



Maekake is the traditional apron of the sake brewer, and each brewery has its own. Always blue in color, it is a five century tradition. Here is the one of Asahara Shuzo brewery, in the locality of Saitama.

The classic Maekake Asahara Shuzo sake brewery

The history of the Maekake

The Maekake is an apron, traditionally indigo and made of thick cotton, that you will no doubt have seen in Japan (for the lucky ones) or in France, in an izakaya restaurant or food shop. Yet this innocuous accessory has a 500-year history. It dates back to the Muromachi period (14th-16th century), when it was sold in rice, soy sauce and sake shops. At the time, it was known as "homaekake" - "ho" for canvas, "mahe" for front and "kake" for hanging. It was used exclusively by merchants, and became their emblem. Originally longer, it was often worn thrown over one shoulder from the hips to protect the upper body when carrying barrels or the famous "taru". It was later shortened with the advent of glass bottle packaging. The wooden or plastic crates in which these are placed are carried at arm's length rather than on the shoulders.

The maekake not only protects your clothes from dirt, it also protects your back, thanks to a strong strap worn tightly around your hips. It blocks the lumbar vertebrae and acts as a strength belt. The colour is 'kohaku', red (or almost orange) and white, a combination that brings good luck in business. But it is also, and above all, a promotional element. The maekake bears the emblem of the brewery that offers them to its best customers, sakaya or restaurants.

One final detail: the end of the fabric is not finished with a seam, the fringes are left loose. This tradition of doing as little as possible to the fabric is a form of respect that goes back to the days when cotton was scarce compared with hemp cloth.