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What Does “100 Exquisite and Well-Conserved Waters” Mean?



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ABSTRACT

In Japan, there are many lists of selected “top 100” items. Among such lists, the 100 exquisite and well-conserved waters is popular, and it has a high level of awareness. However, few members of the public have an accurate grasp of the selection criteria and who undertook the selection. In this paper, we focus on the 100 Exquisite and Well-Conserved Waters, and we examine the discrepancy between the selection criteria and their interpretation by the public. We also present our own thoughts about those criteria.



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INTRODUCTION

In Japan, there are many lists of selected “top 100” items. Such agents as regional governments, newspapers, private organizations and private individuals choose them. Accordingly, the reasons for selection differ. Among such lists, 100 exquisite and well-conserved waters is popular, and it has a high level of awareness (Table 1). Many tourists who visit places that appear on it use that list: they may actually draw some of the water in question and appreciate the scenery. However, few members of the public apparently have an accurate grasp of the selection criteria and who undertook the selection. In this paper, we examine the discrepancy between the selection criteria and their interpretation by the public. We also present our own thoughts about those criteria.

Types of 100 Selections

Table 2 presents some top 100 selections in Japan and the agents that created them. There are many different types of such lists in Japan, and so it is difficult to cover them all within the space of a table. In some cases, different organizations or individuals may use the same name for a list. The agent compiling the list could be a regional government, a private organization (such as a non-profit organization), a newspaper, or an expert in some particular field. In some cases, such lists may be produced through voting by the public or because of consultation among the delegates of a decision group. In other cases, a small number of people in a decision group may finalize candidate items for such a list; alternatively, the items may be selected following majority voting. The selection criteria are likewise diverse: sometimes, they may be the result of general public opinion and based on the recommendations of a small number of individuals in a decision group. There is also diversity in the selection criteria according to whether they apply at the local, prefectural, regional or national level in Japan.

100 Exquisite and Well-Conserved Waters

As noted above, one of those selected lists in Japan is 100 exquisite and Well-Conserved Waters. Some of the items on that list appear in Table 1. The public may believe that the listing was based on such criteria as the taste of the water, waters having therapeutic effects or the existence of spiritual or religious connections. However, the criteria were in fact as follows: (1) water clarity; (2) local appreciation of the value of the water; (3) the need to make the waters widely known in Japan; (4) deepening an awareness among the public of the need to conserve water quality; (5) promoting a good water environment and contributing to future water quality conservation.

To meet the above criteria it is necessary that the selected waters be in a good state of conservation. It is also necessary that local residents and other individuals or groups undertake conservation activities on a sustainable basis. Based on those criteria, clear waters and water environments were selected all around Japan¹. The actual taste of the water is not one of the criteria. Among the 100 exquisite and well-conserved waters, there are cases of waters that cannot actually be drunk or that need to be boiled before consumption. Spring water appears often on the list in addition to river water, groundwater, reservoirs, and fountain.

The selection of 100 exquisite and Well-Conserved Waters was made in March 1985 by a selection committee within the Ministry of the Environment (at the time, it operated as the Environment Agency). In June 2008, the Ministry of the Environment chose 100 Exquisite and Well-Conserved Waters of the Heisei Period (that period lasted from 1989 to 2019). To distinguished between the lists, that from 1985 was renamed 100 Exquisite and Well-Conserved Waters of the Showa Period (that period lasted from 1926 to 1989). Surprisingly, there were no overlaps in the items selected between the two lists. At least one

place was chosen from each of Japan's 47 prefectures in the 100 Exquisite and Well-Conserved Waters of the Showa Period. However, no such regional selection took place with the 100 exquisite and well-conserved waters of the Heisei Period (Fig. 1). One study found that with the list from the Heisei period, there was a greater emphasis on the relationship between local residents and the waters². With both lists, there was a conspicuous selection of spring water. However, rivers figure more prominently on the Heisei list (Fig. 2).

Many of the waters that figure in 100 Exquisite and Well-Conserved Waters appear on other lists (Table 2). For example, Yotei's Balloon Spring Water in Hokkaido appears among 100 Selected Water Spots (chosen by the National Land Agency in March 1996) as well as on 100 exquisite and well conserved waters of the Showa Period. The Rokugo Spring Group in Akita Prefecture also appears among both 100 Selected Water Spots and 100 Water Source Forests (chosen by the Forestry Agency in 1995).

Modifications of 100 Exquisite and Well-Conserved Waters

Recently, an attempt has been made to categorize the waters listed in 100 Exquisite and well-conserved waters³. Through public voting, the top five waters were chosen based on the following categories: excellence in terms of sightseeing; fine landscape; little-visited areas; and taste of the water. As an alternative to that listing, the Ministry of the Environment created the 100 Exquisite and Well-Conserved Waters Introduction Card⁴. To promote the listed waters, 48 types of such cards were produced and distributed to municipal offices around Japan in April 2017. Local governments in areas listed among the 100 Exquisite and Well-Conserved Waters could receive those cards at no charge from the ministry.

Definition of Good Water

The Ministry of the Environment defined “good water” as follows: “such sources as spring water, groundwater, and river water where good water quality and content have been maintained over a considerable period and become common property.” “Good-quality water” may be understood as signifying water that is used for such purposes as the tea ceremony, brewing sake, and producing rice; however, there are no clear standards in this area. It is not apparent to the present authors what “good” water actually means. If water is used for the tea ceremony and making sake, it should of course have good quality. However, that point does not fall within the definition of the Ministry of the Environment.

Regarding water quality, one organization in Japan is responsible for providing certification: the Water Certification Institute. That institute certifies water that meets certain standards of quality and where the environmental burden is small⁵.

One Japanese saying about water quality goes as follows: *Ichiryounibu* (“very expensive”) *no ochazuke* (a simple meal consisting of water, tea and rice). Before Japan’s modernization in the latter part of the nineteenth century, obtaining good-quality water and transporting it involved considerable labor, and so much water was an expensive commodity. The saying above indicates that at a high-class restaurant, a simple dish would be expensive because of the water.

Top 100 around the World

As well as Japan, there are lists of top 100 items in other parts of the world. Some examples appear in Table 3. Many of the items that appear on such lists were selected because of historical factors. However, in the case of, for example, lists of top 100 items in the United States, they may not be selected by US experts in various fields or decided by voting among

Americans. Non-American, e.g., travelers, may choose the items that appear on such lists; there are also cases of such lists being prepared for public relations or tourism purposes. Japanese agents have also been involved in the selection of items for such US lists.

Safe, Secure Drinking Water

It is necessary to exercise caution when drinking water outdoors: water that looks to be safe may not always be so. The water in an attractive sightseeing spot may not actually taste very good. A clear stream tends to offer a sense of security, and cold water emerging from a spring may be good to drink. However, a person drinking such water may not really be aware whether it contains harmful substances that are tasteless and odorless. That is unfortunately also the case with 100 Exquisite and Well-Conserved Waters: before drinking, visitors should ascertain beforehand whether the water is safe for drinking. With those spots, there may be no onsite indications regarding the portability of the water. Such sites are often under the management of local governments or volunteer organizations, and there are often no controls or regular checks concerning portability.

It seems that people in Japan who wish to drink water with guaranteed safety and security should drink tap water. Water-quality checks in Japan focus on 50 items for inspection, and tap water is confirmed as being safe. However, safe water may not always taste very good: odors may arise because of chlorine disinfection. Tap water does not taste as good as spring water in many cases.

Recommendations

We do not contend with the selection of items in lists about water quality. In the case of 100 exquisite and Well-Conserved Waters, identifying appropriate sites is the responsibility of local communities. Having such a site close to a community does, of course, confer benefits

on that community. Tourists making trips may naturally be drawn to visit such places. However, regarding the places chosen for 100 Exquisite and Well-Conserved Waters of the Showa Period, we believe that the selection process was unduly guided by the desire to provide equal regional representation.

Further, with the sites that appeared on 100 Exquisite and Well-Conserved Waters, it seems odd that there is no overlap between the identified Showa and Heisei locations. Environmental awareness is evident with the selection made for 100 Exquisite and Well-Conserved Waters of the Heisei Period, which were announced in July 2008 to coincide with the G8 Hokkaido Toyako Summit. In that light, it appears questionable whether the selection process really was an objective one. Among Japanese, such listings can lead to local revitalization if the sites in question are located in residential areas. The listings may also have an effect on the travel plans of overseas tourists in Japan. Accordingly, we believe it is necessary that such lists should be based on easily available, accurate information and that they should be supported by evidence.

We have observed, however, that recently in Japan, there has been something of a tendency for some agents to avoid appearing in such selected lists. With 100 Exquisite and Well-Conserved Waters, there may be no such problems because the list was created based on subjective individual choice, and the listing itself does not confer any advantages or disadvantages. Subjective ranking does not have a place in the case of sport competitions and academic qualifications. Even if such ranking were carried out, it would seem to be appropriate that the individuals in question were not informed about the actual results.

Making such a list public would have to acknowledge that social influences are involved. That would particularly be the case if it concerned national-level institutions. It would be desirable for the general people in Japan—and also non-Japanese—to be able to make

effective use of all information with respect to such areas as travel and hobbies.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we examined the selection process with lists of top 100 items in Japan, and we made a particular focus of 100 Exquisite and Well-Conserved Waters. As to the choice of the number 100, it may simply be because it is a big round number. We have expressed our personal opinions in this paper, and we have noted our surprise concerning the selection of items.

It would appear that the Japanese have a particular fondness for selected top 100 lists. We base this impression on information conveyed to us as well as on articles that appear on the Internet and in other places⁶⁾. One example is *Hyakunin-isshu* (100 poems by 100 poets), which is a collection of ancient poems written by 100 poets. It is our understanding that Japanese individuals are involved in the selection process with the top 100 lists in other parts of the world.

We believe that the selection process with many of the top 100 lists in Japan is based on objective reference points. However, it is necessary to consider selection bias on the part of the selecting agent.

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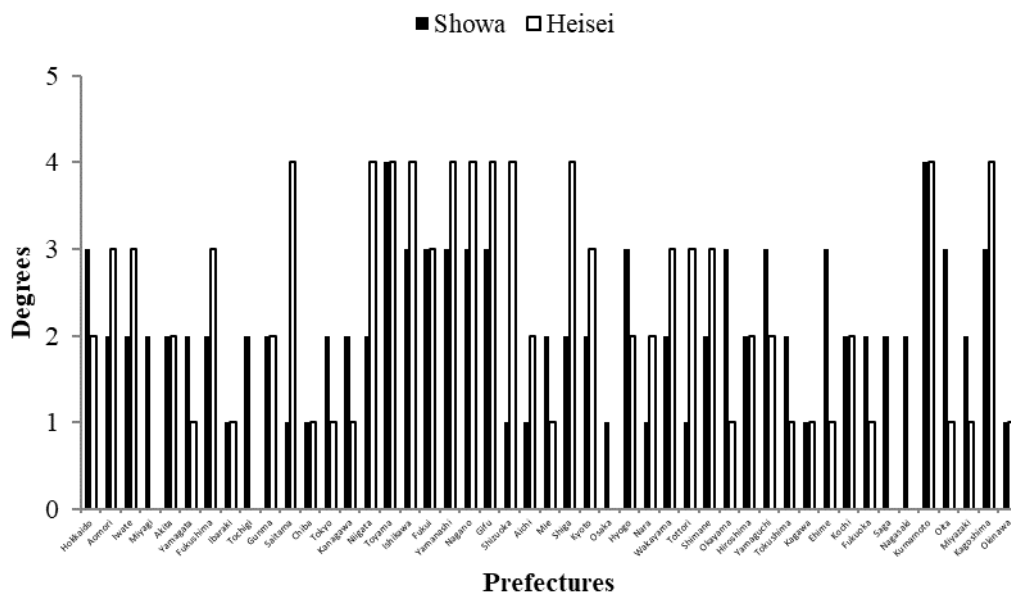


Fig. 1. Number of sites selected from each prefecture for the 100 Exquisite and Well-Conserved Waters

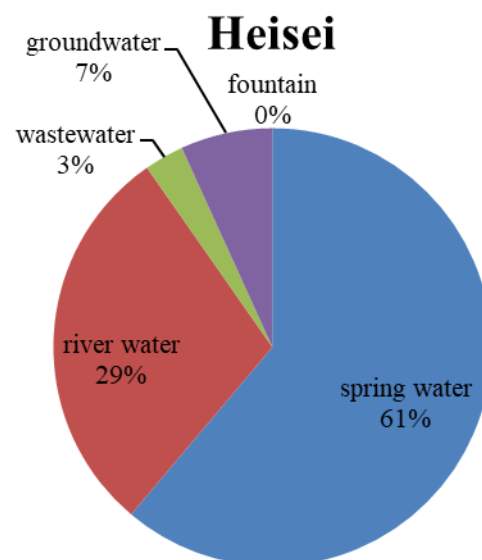
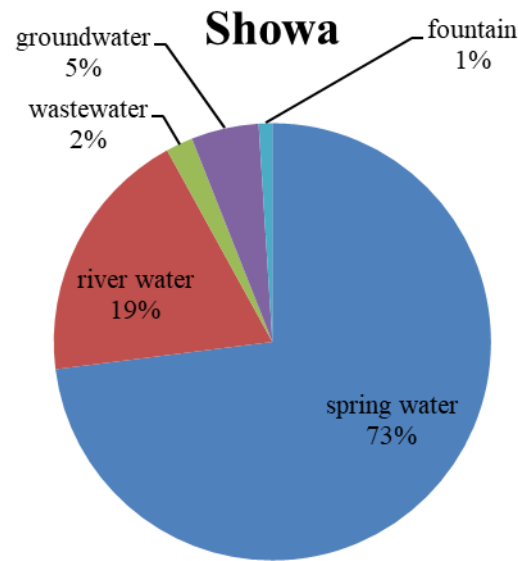


Fig.2. Types of water sources among the 100 Exquisite and Well-Conserved Waters

In the Heisei part of the figure, the total number of sites amounted to 103 owing to overlaps in the types of water sources.

Table 1. Examples of sites among the 100 Exquisite and Well-Conserved Waters

(Showa)

Name	Type	Prefecture	Note
Yotei's balloon spring water	Springwater	Hokkaido	Hokkaido heritage
Rokugo spring group	Springwater	Akita	100 Selected Water Spots, Top 100 Forests of the Water Source, and 100 Best Promenades for Walking
Ontake Gorge	River water	Tokyo	Chichibu Tama Kai National Park
Oshozu	Springwater	Fukui	Okuetsu Plateau Prefectural Natural Park, and 100 Selected Water Spots
Kiso River (middle watershed)	River water	Aichi	
Isoshimizu	Groundwater	Kyoto	Three scenic spots in Japan, and Tango Amanohashidate Oe Mountain Quasi-national Park
Tenkawa water	Springwater	Shimane	Oyama Oki National Park
Uchinuki	Fountain	Ehime	
Shimanto River	River water	Kochi	
Furousui (anti-aging water)	Groundwater	Fukuoka	
Kakinohana-Hijya	Springwater	Okinawa	

The selection meeting for the 100 Exquisite and Well-Conserved Waters survey consisted of academic experts and was established by the Water Quality Conservation Bureau. The meeting chose candidate sites based on reports received from all prefectures. From their results, the final selection was made by the Water Quality Conservation Bureau.

Table 2. Typical examples of top 100 selected lists in Japan

Types	Selector	Organizing and sponsoring groups
Japan's top 100 sunsets	* ¹	Japan's top 100 sunsets selection committee
Japan's top 100 sceneries	* ²	Organized by <i>Osaka Mainichi</i> Newspaper Company and <i>Tokyo Nichinichi</i> Newspaper; sponsored by Ministry of Railways (1927)
New Japan's top 100 sceneries	* ²	<i>Weekly Yomiuri</i> and others (another list exists)
Japan's top 100 mountains	Kyuya Fukada* ³	
New Japan's top 100 mountains	Motoo Iwasaki* ⁴	
Japan's top 100 waterfalls	* ¹	Japanese Forest, Waterfall, and Beach National Council (1990)
100 Exquisite and Well-Conserved Waters (Showa)	* ¹	Ministry of the Environment (1985)
100 Exquisite and Well-Conserved Waters of the Heisei Period	* ¹	Ministry of the Environment (2008)
Top 100 forests of the water source	* ¹	Forestry Agency (1994)
Top 100 ponds	* ¹	Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries (2009)
Top 100 forests for forest bathing	* ¹	Forestry Agency, Green Civilization Society, Global Environment Foundation (1986)
Japan's top 100 places famous for cherry blossoms	* ¹	Organized by Japan Cherry Blossom Foundation; sponsored by Ministry of Construction, Transportation Ministry, Environment Agency, Forestry Agency, National Governor's Association, Japan Flower Exposition Cooperation Association

*1: Selected by members of the right column group

*2: Based on the voting results among the general public

*3: A novelist (essayist) and a climber born in Daishouji (now Kaga), Ishikawa prefecture

*4: A mountaineer born in Tokyo

Table 3. Examples of top 100 lists around the world

Type	Selector or selection method
Top 100 world famous mountains* ¹	The selection committee of the Top 100 World Famous Mountains was based on the work of mountain photographer Yoshitsune Shirokawa and used the following six criteria: (1) majestic, grand and solemn; sharpness is also necessary, but higher quality than anything but a high mountain; (2) mountain with a distinctive character; (3) mountain with a particular spiritual importance (e.g., Mount Sinai); (4) mountain with religious importance (e.g., Machu Pichu); (5) mountain of a particular height; (6) mountain famous because of its climbing history
Top 100 world lighthouses	Items judged as having historical importance and proposed by the International Association of Marine Aids to Navigation and Lighthouse Authorities in 1998
Top 100 American movies	List of American movies chosen by the American Film Institute (AFI) in 1998 as part of the AFI American Film 100 Year Series
Top 100 European famous castles* ¹	Japan Castle Foundation announced the list in 2010 based on the following three criteria: (1) excellent cultural properties or historical sites; (2) having played a prominent role in history; (3) representative of an era or region
Greatest 100 Englishmen	This was presented in a BBC TV program in 2002. The list was created following voting by the British general public.

*1: Japanese individuals participated in the selection.