

Searching for Patents of Japanese Corkscrews

by

Dick Clark



There seems to be interest in collecting corkscrews patented in Japan. Several Addicts have contacted me for assistance in trying to locate Japanese patents for one of their corkscrews. Unless you can read Japanese (I cannot), the search can be challenging. Here is a primer to help you with the search.

Many corkscrews manufactured in Japan were often made for the English or US markets. Thus, markings on the packaging or the corkscrew may be in English.

Or, the markings may be in Japanese. The translation and pronunciation of “corkscrew” in Japanese is “*Koruku Sen Nuki*” 栓抜き. There are actually 3 writing systems in Japan: kanji (as written in the previous sentence), hiragana, and katakana. Often, the three systems are mixed in Japan so you may see the word “corkscrew” also written as:

コークスクリュー or 口抜き.

Kanji is based on Chinese characters so some collectors erroneously assume the corkscrew is Chinese. This is another reason to search for Japanese patents or Japanese patent applications as part of an effort to confirm the origin of the piece.

A great start for your search is Donald Bull’s 2004 book “*Corkscrew Patents of Japan.*” Don’s book has illustrations of almost 500 corkscrews and bottle openers taken from published patents or patent applications in Japan. Don’s book describes how to search Japanese patents using categories and classifications; see Pages 5 - 7, “*Corkscrew Patents of Japan.*” This article does not address a search by category.

Often, the corkscrew or the packaging reflects a patent number for the piece. If no number is found on the corkscrew or the packaging, you can compare the design of your corkscrew to the illustrations set forth in Don’s book. Don included a number and date at the top of each illustration. If you find your corkscrew in Don’s book, you will have a patent number and date.

This primer describes how you can use the number from the corkscrew, the packaging or Don's book to search for a published patent or patent application in the **free** online search service of the Japan Patent Office.

At the outset, I acknowledge and thank my friend, Nobuhisa Yoda Esq., a patent attorney in the Denver office of Faegre Drinker Biddle & Death LLP, a national law firm with more than 1200 lawyers. His expertise and information were crucial to this article.

Also, I thank Yoko Watanabe, the Japan Outreach Initiative Coordinator, who ably assisted me with translations. She is currently assigned by the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership to the Japan America Society of Colorado (Denver) for about 2 years.

To help clarify the following steps to find the Japanese patents or patent applications, based on a number, I will use two examples.

Below is a photo of packaging for a corkscrew and bottle stopper which may be Japanese because the **inside** of the top of the packaging contains Japanese kanji (See Fig 2.). The outside top of the box states in English "Patent No 43810 Improved Bottle Cap Extractor & Bottle Stopper." Since the packaging is in English, this piece was probably intended in part for the UK or US markets.



Figures 1 & 2

The top of the piece which is a bottle cap extractor is marked "PATENT." That extractor serves as the handle for a corkscrew. Note the description on the outside of the top of the box does not mention "corkscrew." The worm of the corkscrew screws into a sheath which fits into the bottle stopper to protect the rubber from being perforated by the worm. To insert the stopper into the bottle you merely push on the cap extractor/handle of the corkscrew. It is quite an ingenious design.



Fig. 3

Since the packaging seems to indicate a Japanese bottle stop with extractor and corkscrew, one place to start is Don's Book. The packaging also indicates "Patent No 43810." On Page 50, you find "No. 43810 (1917)." The illustration in Don's book reflects the same design.

Now you can search for the Patent using the free on-line service of the Japan Patent Office.

Step 1: Go to <https://www.j-platpat.inpit.go.jp/> and select "English" in the upper right corner.

Step 2. You will see 4 categories:

All law categories, Patents/Utility Models, Designs or Trademarks

Unless you know the exact category of your corkscrew, select "**All law categories.**"

Step 3. On that same page, you will see a blank space at the bottom of the section "Simple Search". You will enter the number into the space. **Using the correct number for the search can be a bit complicated...**

To search for our example, type the year first and the number second "1917 43810."

A few links will appear from the search. You should click on each link to open the document and compare the illustration in the document to your corkscrew. Sometimes the illustration is near the end of the document. You can look at all pages of each document by clicking "Next Page." For the 1917 example, the published patent is found at the link JP 43810 Z. Click on that link and there you will find the two-page patent. See Fig 4.

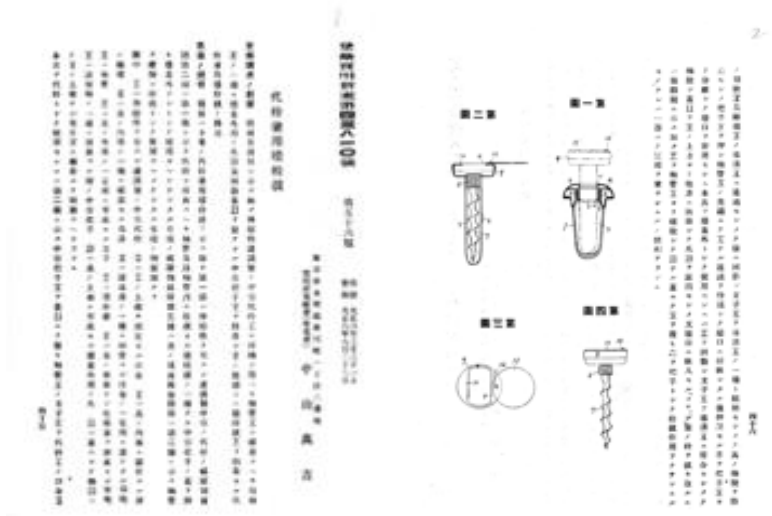


Fig. 4

Above is a typical Japanese published patent. Documents could be more than 2 pages.

With translation by a native Japanese speaker, we learn that the applicant in 1917 and inventor of this corkscrew, bottle stopper and cap extractor was Mankichi Nakayama, who lived at 1-2 Kikukawa-cho, Honjo-ku, Tokyo-City. Note the **inside** top of the packaging states “NAKAYAMA SEIZO.” See Fig 2. In Japanese “Seizo” means “manufacture, production or fabrication.” Thus, we can conclude the inventor Nakayama-san also manufactured and sold his invention.

Nakayama-san’s address is in Honjo (本所) which was the name of a neighborhood in Sumida, Tokyo. It was a former ward (本所区 *Honjo-ku*) in the now-defunct Tokyo-City. Honjo, east of the Sumida River, was designated as one of Tokyo’s industrial wards during the Meiji period (1905-1912). Honjo was the center of factories in Tokyo-City which was called the Honjo Factory Zone (“Fukagama” in Japanese).

Step 4. If the forgoing search using the date and number (eg. 1917 43810) does not produce the patent or patent application for your corkscrew, it could be necessary to use the Japanese imperial year to search. This is especially true for patents and patent applications filed in 1922 and up to the present. The numbering system in Don’s book changes in about 1922 to reflect the Japanese imperial year.

The imperial years are:

Meiji (M) 38-45: 1905-1912; Taisho (T) 1-15: 1912-1926, Showa (S) 1-64: 1926-1989; Heisei (H) 1-31: 1989-2019; Reiwa (R) 1: 2019-present.

You need the date of patent to be able to determine the correct imperial year.

For example, “11-003003 (1922).” The “11” is a Japanese imperial year, specifically Taisho (T) 11 which is the year 1922. You can enter “T11-003003” in the blank space at the bottom of the section “Simple Search.” Or, you can simply enter “1922 003003” which obtains the same search results.

You may see a letter such as “A”, “B”, “U”, “Y” or “S.” “A” denotes a publication, “B” denotes an issued patent, “U” denotes a publication of utility, “Y” denotes an issued utility - (Jitsuyou), and “S” for design.

Step 5. When links to patents and applications appear from a search, click on the link to open and review it. It will be in Japanese, so a native Japanese speaker in your community may be a good resource. The illustration in the published patent is usually one of the last pages of the document.

If you are still having difficulties with a search, you can access the help page offered by the Japan Patent Office:

<https://www.j-platpat.inpit.go.jp/help/en/>

The fact a corkscrew or its packaging has a number does not mean a patent was actually issued in Japan. Indeed, Don’s book contains several corkscrews which were the subject of an application for a patent in Japan but no patent was issued. They were “wannabes.”

Here is one example of a “wannabe” from the 1970s.



In Fig 5 is packaging for a waiter’s corkscrew which appears to be written in Japanese. You can see the Japanese characters indicating “corkscrew.”

Fig 5

The translation of the Japanese to English on the box is as follows:

テコン コルク抜き

Tecon Corkscrew

栓抜き・こじあけ付き

with bottle opener

One of the interesting advertising approaches is the statement at the top:

テコの応用で奥様にもらくらく抜ける

“Your wife can open a bottle easily applying the principle of leverage.”

Clearly this piece was intended for the Japanese market. In Japan, women drink more wine than men. Often the wife is the family member who buys the wine and serves it. From my many visits to Japan...more than 20...I know most Japanese men enjoy beer, sake, shochu and Japanese whiskey, but less wine. Although expensive, Japanese whiskey - tastes like scotch - rivals some of the best scotch I have purchased from Scotland.



Fig 6



Fig 7

Now, you can try to find the waiter's corkscrew from the illustrations in Don's book. As you look through those illustrations, clearly the design looks recent. On page 95, you will find a waiter's corkscrew which has the number 50-024548 (1975). It appears exactly like the corkscrew in the above left photo. Fig 5

You have a possible patent number (50-024548 from 1975).

You can search for the Patent using the **free** on-line service of the Japan Patent Office.

Step 1: Go to <https://www.j-platpat.inpit.go.jp/> and select “English” in the upper right corner.

Step 2. You will see 4 categories:

All law categories, Patents/Utility Models, Designs or Trademarks

Unless you know the exact category of your corkscrew, select “**All law categories**”

Step 3. On that same page, you will see a blank space at the bottom of the section “Simple Search”. The starting number is 50 024548 (1975) from Don's book. The search term needs to be either "S50-02548" (S as in Showa) or "1975-02548."

The result of the search indicates multiple possibilities because the same numbering may apply to Application and Publication numbers across Patent/Utility Models, Designs, and Trademark. Here are the results of the search.

No.	Application number	Publication number	Publication number of examined application	Registration number	Appeal or trial number	Other	Options
1	JP.1975-002548	JP.S1-084113.U(1975)	-	-	-	-	Details OPD URL
2	JP.1975-002548	JP.S1-076728.A(1975)	JP.S4-016262.B(1978)	JP.0983750.B	-	-	Details OPD URL
3	JP.1970-116295	-	JP.S0-002548.B(1973)	JP.0788564.B	-	-	Details OPD URL
4	JP.1969-034887	-	JP.S0-002548.Y(1973)	JP.1103346.Y	-	-	Details OPD URL
5	JP.1973-059541	JP.S0-002548.U(1973)	-	-	-	-	Details OPD URL
6	JP.1973-050869	JP.S0-002548.A(1973)	-	-	-	-	Details OPD URL

Fig 8

Step 4. You will need to open each of the search results to find one with a design that may match the corkscrew. The 4th link JP-024548.U1(1975) is the publication of application JP.1973-07098. The last page has a design which matches the waiter corkscrew. However, no patent was ever issued.

What appears at Fig 9 is a four-page utility model application. This format is typical of an application filed in Japan, not an issued patent.

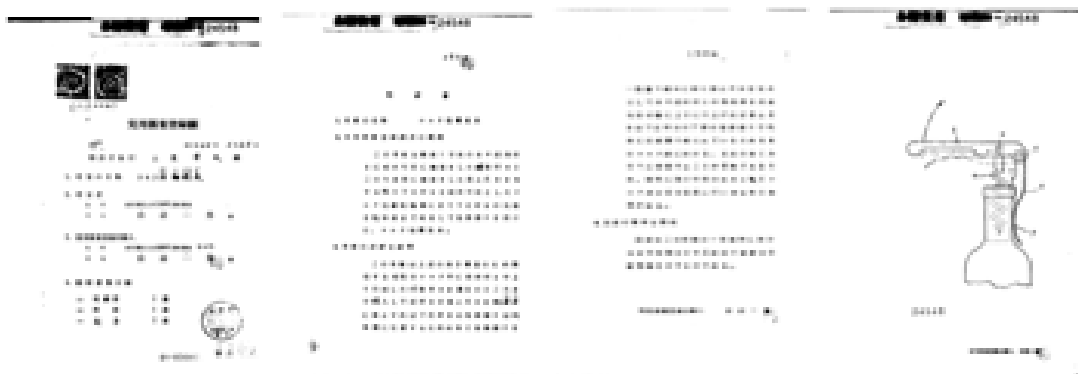


Fig 9

This application, filed on June 28, 1973, indicates the inventor/applicant is Kazuo Tanuma, 236 Kouya-machi, Adachi-ku, Tokyo. The application number was S48-076098 with a publication number of S50-024548. The decision of the Japan Patent Office was a refusal to issue a patent. On December 16, 1974, the inventor filed a request for examination. On April 4, 1978, JPO issued a notice of reasons for refusal and the final “no patent” decision was issued on September 5, 1978.

Tanuma-san continued to market this corkscrew, despite there was no patent. He correctly informed the public in Japan that no patent had been obtained. Look at the face of the box in Fig 5 above and the corkscrew itself in Fig. 7 above. You will see the box and the corkscrew are marked “Patent A” which means patent application filed. It does not mean a patent has been issued.

Hope the foregoing is helpful.

*Why Japanese corkscrews: I have included several Japanese corkscrews in my collection because I respect the culture and have many friends in and from Japan. My law practice focused in part on international legal issues involving Japan. I served as one of the legal counsel in the Western US for the Japanese Foreign Ministry for almost two decades. In 1994 June and I were one of a few co-host couples for the visit of Their Majesties Japanese Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko to Colorado. In 2017, the Emperor awarded me the **Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Rosette**, the highest award in Japan which can be awarded to a non-Japanese citizen.*