

Sake Culture & History

	News Topics Related to Sake	Sake Occasions	Serving and Packaging Sake	Sake Qualities	Sake Production
300BC	Know-how of rice and sake comes to Japan from East Asia via Korea.			Sake produced at this time is a pasty mixture most comparable today with roughly filtered nigori sake. Sake of this type is common until the 17th century when rice milling, brewing, and filtering techniques are advanced.	The use of <i>koji</i> (a malt like substance made from steamed rice inoculated with <i>Aspergillus oryzae</i> mold) to make fermented beverages comes to Imperial Court of Japan.
200s		Sake is imbibed mainly at religious events.	Chopsticks are sometimes used to "eat" the thick, pasty sake.		Sake is produced by two main methods. One way is to make "mouth chewing sake" in which rice is chewed and spit into an earthenware vat and left to ferment with the yeast naturally present in the air. The other way is to make "molded sake" in which dried steamed rice is sprinkled with water and left to mold and ferment. Both sakes are thick and cloudy.
700s	The Japanese government decides to make official sake for their own consumption and for ceremonial purposes. Up until this time, sake was made mainly in shrines and private households.	Sake is enjoyed by the Imperial Court and by samurai at seasonal events. In particular, sake is enjoyed in the spring during the plum and cherry blossom time (<i>hanami</i>), in the fall for moon viewings (<i>tsukimi</i>), and in the winter when the snowfall was especially beautiful (<i>yukimi</i>).	Sake is drunk in unglazed earthenware vessels at room temperature.		The production of koji rice is advanced which allows sake to be produced more effectively. The production of sake with koji becomes the most common way to produce sake.
900s		Sake is taken at New Years to wish for health in the next year. The nobility add spices and herbs to this sake (<i>toso</i>). Sake is imbibed sprinkled with chrysanthemum petals as news of its medicinal effects comes to Japan from China.	Warming vessels made from copper and iron are developed and popularize <i>kanzake</i> (heated sake). The nobility class use elaborate laquerware drinking utensils. Other high ranking officials and samurai drink sake in disposable earthenware vessels. At shrines, specialized cups are designed for votive offerings and ceremonies. Both sake and rice are measured in masu, a square wooden box based on the Japanese standard of measurement.	Buddhist temples in Nara (capital of Japan from 710 to 794) begin to make a premium sake made completely with milled rice. This sake, <i>morohaku</i> , becomes famous for its relative clearness. Knowledge of this brewing method spreads to other temples but clear sake, <i>seishu</i> will not be popularized for centuries later.	Most sake is produced in Buddhist temples. At this time, temples are relatively wealthy and independent. Buddhist monks perfect the art of brewing and raise the level of the quality of sake throughout Japan.

1100s	The production of sake flourishes under samurai rule among Buddhist temples and merchants. The sake produced by temples is particularly valued for its exceptional quality by both royal and common people alike.	Samurai symbolically imbibe sake before battle. If the battle is successful, sake is drunk in celebration.	Sake is stored and transported in earthenware pots of various sizes.	<i>Koshu</i> (aged sake) comes to be regarded as the premium sake.	Sake is brewed in earthenware pots. The size of the pots are typically 2-3 koku (360-540L) based on the traditional Japanese measuring system. Sake is stored in large earthenware pots sunken in the ground to control temperature.
1200s	Sake, like rice, becomes a form of currency.	Sake first begins to become available to common people and is enjoyed occasionally at casual occasions.		Farmers make unfiltered sake for sale.	Pasteurization and filtration by charcoal techniques are developed.
1300s		The popularity and availability of sake further increases. Family and close friends meet at festivals at celebrations and enjoy sharing sake together.	Sake is filled in cedar barrels and made available for sale from an increasing number of traditional Japanese liquor shops (<i>sakaya</i>). Some <i>sakaya</i> sell only what they brew themselves but other specialize only in retail sales.	Cedar casks " <i>taru</i> " begin to be used to store sake and <i>taruzake</i> (sake with a cedar fragrance) is born. Cedar is found to be appropriate for its ready availability throughout Japan, low frequency of knots, and pleasant fragrance. Matured sake with the fragrance of cedar becomes to be highly regarded.	Know-how of wooden barrel making comes to Japan. Cedar barrels (72L) fastened with rings of bamboo are developed based on traditional Japanese measurement standards.
1500s	The ruling samurai of each province decide to control all sake production and terminate the brewing of sake at key temples around Japan. The local ruling samurai transfer the rights of sake brewing to local private brewers in all of the Japanese provinces. From this action, the concept of <i>jizake</i> (regional <i>junmai</i> sake) is born.		Sake as a merchant trade develops and sake is sold in earthenware <i>tokkuri</i> (pitchers) of various sizes. <i>Tokkuri</i> vessels are loaned to the customer and recycled. The customer brings back the <i>tokkuri</i> to the sake merchant when buying sake.	Technical advances are made in agriculture and the harvest rate of rice improves throughout Japan. Sake brewing flourishes and distinct local sake varieties <i>jizake</i> are developed.	Large wooden fermentation tanks are developed. It is now possible to ferment as much as 1800 liter batches of sake.
1600s	The Shogun decides to control sake brewing. Although rice is no longer considered a form of currency at this point, it is still regarded as a valued commodity. As such, the Shogun decides to regulate sake brewing based on the year's rice harvest results. In years of good harvest, sake brewing is freely permitted but in years of poor harvest, sake production is limited.	Due to the <i>sankinkotai</i> system the Tokugawa Shogun enforces, the local provincial rulers (<i>daimyo</i>) must come to Edo (modern day Tokyo) to serve the Shogun. This gives a dramatic rise to the development of new restaurants, taverns and <i>ryokan</i> (traditional Japanese inns) all over Japan where sake may now be enjoyed. Sake becomes a gift item and is often given away at celebratory events, when visiting people, and during the semi-annual gift giving seasons in the summer and winter.	The tea cup shaped " <i>choko</i> " cup is developed. Unlike the delicate, wide mouthed <i>sakazuki</i> cup, the <i>choko</i> typically holds more sake and can be easily used when pouring sake from larger <i>tokkuri</i> pitchers. The production of porcelain such as <i>Imariyaki</i> and <i>Kutaniyaki</i> is perfected and sake may now be enjoyed in colorful, elaborately designed cups.	Due to advances made in sake brewing, filtered sake resembling modern day <i>junmai</i> sake, becomes popular.	The <i>sandanshikomi</i> brewing technique is developed in which steamed rice is added to the brewing mixture at three different stages of the fermentation. This brewing technique continues to be used even in modern times.

1667	Sake production is limited to the winter months only due to a series of poor rice harvests.				Due to the shortage of rice, sake brewing is restricted to only the winter months. Farmers who have no work in the winter months but experience in sake brewing form sake brewmeister (<i>toji</i>) groups to effectively produce sake.
1700s	Due to improvement in rice cultivation techniques and a reprieve from natural calamities, the production of sake is liberalized. Sake may now be brewed not only in the winter months but at other times of the year as well. Poor rice harvests causes chaos in related rice markets including sake brewing.	The pilgrimage to the Imperial Ise Shrine in Mie Prefecture becomes widely popular and the number of taverns and inns along the way that serve sake increases. Approximately 1 in 9 people in Japan make this pilgrimage. The pilgrims to Ise purchase various interesting jizake (local sake) and bring back home as souvenirs.			
1800s	Good rice harvests encourage increased sake brewing. The new Imperial government further liberalizes the production of sake and over 30,000 brewers come into existence around Japan. The Imperial government raises the sake tax. The number of sake brewers decreases to approximately 16,000. Approximately 30 percent of the federal tax revenue is made up of sake-related taxes. The Imperial government decides to control all brewing and forbids brewing without license. Home brewing becomes illegal.		The technique for creating cut glass in Japan, <i>kiriko</i> , is developed. Cut glass, which has been imported into Japan from Europe via Kyushu since the 8th century, is a prized commodity by the elite classes. New kiriko sake cups are designed to enjoy sake in a Western fashion.		
1806					The supply of rice improves and home brewing is allowed by the government. Many households produce sake for their own use with steamed rice and koji. This sake, known as <i>doburoku</i> is cloudy, lumpy sake with a slightly sweet taste and takes about 3 weeks to make.
1880s					Production of specialized sake rice (<i>sakamai</i>) begins.

1899					Doburoku home brewing becomes illegal and continues to be prohibited today.
1900s					More and more sake breweries change from wooden fermentation tanks to metallic enamel-lined tanks. These tanks are not only are more sanitary but are also more cost effective.
1901		Sake becomes available for sale in glass bottles making it easier for people to enjoy good sake more often. Sake becomes a popular accompaniment to meals at home.	The 1800ml "isshobin" bottle based on the traditional Japanese measuring system is produced in large quantities and becomes the standard size for selling sake in retail shops (<i>sakaya</i>).		
1920s	Interest in making new kinds of premium ginjo sake with modern technology begins to build momentum.			Studies are made to develop new yeast varieties for making a new premium style sake, <i>ginjo</i> .	Rice polishing machines are developed to mill at higher percentages to prepare rice for making new premium <i>ginjo</i> sakes.
1930s				Premium ginjo sake is developed using the highest standards in rice variety, milling percentage and yeast strain. However, due to the shortage of rice, ginjo sake production is not allowed.	
1938	Because of the short supply of rice, the production of ginjo sake is prohibited. The government exercises the right to determine the retail price of sake. This right is continued by the government until 1960. Due to the shortage of rice during wartime, the addition of distilled alcohol to make sake is permitted.	Due to the continued shortage of rice, sake remains to be in short supply.	Due to the continued shortage of rice, sake remains to be in short supply.	The Japanese government controls both the standards as well as prices of sake in order to control and regulate brewing advances.	
1940s	A classification system for sake is determined by the National Tax Agency of Japan.			<i>Futsushu</i> (sake made with brewer's alcohol and other ingredients) becomes popular due to the shortage of rice.	The production of futsushu with added brewer's alcohol and other ingredients becomes common due to the shortage of rice.

1950s	Rice research advances are made and specialized rice varieties for brewing (<i>sakamai</i>) are further developed.	As general economic conditions improve in Japan, sake consumption at restaurants and home increases.	Sake begins to be widely produced again in 1800ml glass <i>isshobin</i> bottles.		
1960s	The National Tax Agency of Japan allows the liberation of sake pricing. Pricing may now be determined by producers, distributors and retailers. Rice consumption begins to decrease in Japan due to increased consumption of bread and other western foods. National tax revenue from alcoholic products drops to approximately 12%.				Large sake producers continue to modernize and expand sake production as sake consumption in Japan begins to reach a peak.
1970s		Izakaya (casual Japanese pubs) and Japanese fast food restaurants serving sake are becoming popular due to the boom of traditional Japanese foods like oden, yakitori, edamame, etc.	Sake becomes available in paper cartons. These products are favored by consumers for their ease of use and storage.	<i>Honjozo</i> (sake with a small amount of brewer's alcohol to enhance taste) becomes popular.	Interest in local sake <i>jizake</i> begins to grow as consumers look for products of higher quality.
1971	McDonald's opens its first shop in Ginza, Tokyo. Japanese eating trends begin to change even more. The use of preservatives in sake brewing is prohibited by national law.				
1980s	The Japanese cuisine (particularly sushi) boom begins in North America due to the increasing popularity for healthy food and success of the Shogun TV series. The consumption of sake outside of Japan begins to increase significantly.	New types of sake developed to go with healthy and simple Japanese foods are becoming popular in casual restaurants.		The <i>ginjo</i> sake and <i>daiginjo</i> sake boom begins as consumers' tastes become more discriminatory. The overall quality of the sake category improves to include new premium brews. In particular, light and dry sakes become popular. New style <i>namazake</i> and <i>namachozo</i> "fresh" sakes become popular.	Advanced filtration techniques make new draft sake types <i>namazake</i> and <i>namachozo</i> possible.

1990s	The interest for premium and super-premium sakes (<i>ginjo</i> and <i>daiginjo</i>) begins abroad.			Sake becomes popular outside of Japan on the wave of new interest in healthy Japanese cuisine. As the interest in sake increases, the varieties of sake abroad also increase in range.	<i>Jizake</i> continues to increase in popularity as more information is made available to an ever growing number of discriminating consumers. <i>Jizake</i> brewers begin to focus on the development of premium <i>junmai ginjo</i> and <i>junmai daiginjo</i> varieties.
1996				Tochigisake 14, specialized sake rice (<i>sakamai</i>) is developed. This rice is used for making <i>junmai jisake</i> in Tochigi.	
2000s	Retail licensing legislation changes in Japan and the number of retailers carrying sake increases dramatically.	<i>Jizake</i> is enjoyed at new styled Japanese restaurants that mix traditional and modern Japanese design with an individual, often local touch.	Specialized wine glasses are designed to enjoy <i>ginjo</i> and <i>daiginjo</i> sakes.	Renewed interest for "traditional" Japanese sake types (<i>nigori</i> , <i>taruzake</i> , etc.) begins.	New yeast strains continue to be researched to produce new <i>ginjo</i> and <i>daiginjo</i> sakes.