



JAPAN INFORMATION  
AND CULTURE CENTER  
在米国日本大使館広報文化センター

# TEACHING TUESDAY

## SAKE

The production of sake in Japan outdates the use of written language, going back over 2000 years. Although the actual origins of sake are from China in 4,000 BCE, it was Japan that popularized and mass produced the drink for consumption. It first came to Japan around 300 BCE, when wet rice cultivation was introduced.

The process of making sake is quiet simple in theory, but actually rather complicated. It begins with the milling of the rice, which are then cooked in clean water and made into a mash. In olden times, the milling was done by mouth – that is, each person would chew rice and nuts and then spit the mixture into a communal tub. This type of sake was called 口噛みの酒 (kuchikami no sake, mouth-chewed sake). While it may sound gross, the enzymes found in human saliva were actually crucial for the fermenting process. It was discontinued when it was discovered that koji (a mold enzyme) and yeast could begin the fermentation process instead. Canvas bags were then used to extract the alcohol from the rice mash, which was then stored in wooden barrels.

Sake was originally for private consumption, usually for richer families, with a center of production close to the present-day city of Kobe. It also has many uses in Shinto, such as for offerings, temple purifications, weddings and more.

Mass production began in the 1300s, and presses replaced the bags and pure alcohol and glucose were added. Now, sake is a popular drink worldwide, and is used to toast the most important bonds in life. It is believed that you should not pour your own cup of sake, but it must be poured by a friend or loved one. After all, sake is a drink that is to be shared and enjoyed with the people that you love and revere.