

The Home of Okinawan Pottery

In 1682, the Ryukyu Kingdom moved three major kilns, merging them at a location near Shuri Castle today known as Tsuboya. This was to become the principal pottery-producing area of Okinawa. Potters made tiles, as well as a wide range of items such as bowls, cups, drinking vessels, and storage jars, including some for awamori. These storage jars are called *tsubo* and gave the area its name, Tsuboya.

During the reign of the Ryukyu Kingdom, Tsuboya mainly produced pottery for everyday use, while wealthier people probably purchased imported Chinese ceramics. After 1879, when the Ryukyu Kingdom was annexed by Japan, exports of awamori to the mainland rose sharply, and Tsuboya prospered. In the years around 1900, 30 new kilns were constructed in Tsuboya, each of them capable of baking about 1,000 awamori storage jars at a time.

Tsuboya pottery is divided into two main types. *Arayachi* pottery is unglazed or coated in a mud or manganese glaze. These are usually large items, such as jars to store water, awamori, soy sauce, or *miso* bean paste. *Joyachi* pottery is glazed, and includes everyday crockery such as bowls and teapots, and ornate vessels and cups for carrying, serving, and drinking awamori.

Tsuboya was one of the very few areas of Naha to avoid complete destruction during World War II. Its potters were interned with other Naha residents after the war ended, but their products were deemed essential for everyday life, and they were the first group allowed to return home and start working. Tsuboya's wood-fired kilns remained active until the 1970s, when new pollution regulations were passed. Since then, some potters have switched to gas kilns or moved to other parts of Okinawa. Tsuboya remains a popular destination for tourists, shoppers, and fans of Okinawan pottery.