

Arakawa Toyozō (1894–1985)

Tajimi-born potter Arakawa Toyozō is responsible for the rediscovery and revival of Mino ware techniques from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Despite seeing little financial success during his lifetime, he worked tirelessly to further ceramics as an art form.

Arakawa's interest in reviving old pottery techniques likely began in 1930, when he encountered an antique Shino tea bowl marked with a simple bamboo shoot crest. Arakawa noted that a small amount of red clay was stuck to the bowl's base. At that time, it was believed that the Shino style had originated in Seto rather than Mino. However, Arakawa knew that red clay was not found in Seto—but it could be found in Mino. Two days later, he located and began excavating the site of a kiln in Mutabora (now Kani), where he dug out a shard of Shino pottery with the same bamboo shoot crest. This discovery conclusively proved that Shino ware had been produced in Mino and launched a trend of excavating old kiln sites to retrace the origins of Shino, Seto-guro, Kizeto, and Oribe wares.

Arakawa established his own kiln near the Mutabora site in 1933, where he worked to recreate techniques used by the old Mino potters. This research led to his recognition in 1955 as one of the country's first Living National Treasures, a designation that indicates important contributions toward the preservation of intangible cultural assets. As of 2021, he is the only person in history to receive this designation for two separate styles of pottery: Shino ware and Seto-guro ware.

The rounded sides and pinkish coloration of the tea bowl below are typical of Arakawa's more personalized Shino ware pieces, in contrast to the cylindrical shapes and white coloration of traditional Shino ware.