

The Early Development of Suzu Ware

(QR Code Room 1)

Suzu ware was produced from the mid-twelfth to late fifteenth centuries when Suzu was part of Wakayamaso, the largest landholding on the Noto Peninsula. It is thought that the landowners played a role in establishing Suzu as a pottery production area as a means of bolstering their income.

The iron-rich clay in Suzu was ideal for making Sue ware, unglazed ceramics that first came to Japan from the Korean Peninsula in the fifth century. Vessels were formed from coils of clay, then beaten with a large paddle to shape and smooth the clay before firing at high heat (over 1,200°C). The resulting pieces were strong, with a natural dark glaze—the result of iron oxides being drawn to the surface of the clay and interacting with wood ash during firing.

The potters of Suzu specialized in cookware and large vessels for storing soy sauce and miso, preserving food, and brewing sake. Demand for such vessels, called *kame*, grew significantly as agricultural production increased along the Sea of Japan coast in the twelfth century. Suzu ware could be transported easily along the coastal shipping route between Fukui and Hokkaido.

The shapes and decorative details seen in Suzu ware were influenced by the dominant pottery areas of the time, particularly Seto and Tokoname in modern-day Aichi Prefecture. Decorative techniques included incising delicate botanical designs, combing parallel lines, or stamping patterns into the clay. Shapes followed the designs of the Seto kilns, but there are examples of unique features developed in Suzu, such as fluted rims.