

Exhibit Room 1: What Is *Tatara* Ironmaking?

Exhibit Room 1 provides an overview of the *tatara* ironmaking process. It includes explanations of the production cycle, tools that were used at ironworks in the region, samples of the iron and steel produced there, and a full-scale model of a late nineteenth-century furnace.

The *tatara* method is unique to Japan and differs from other contemporary smelting methods in its use of iron sand and wood charcoal instead of iron ore and coal (or other non-renewable fuel sources). Although the tools and equipment have changed, the fundamental principles of the *tatara* method have remained the same since the late sixth century.

The ironmaking industry thrived in the mountainous Chūgoku region (Hiroshima, Okayama, Shimane, Tottori, and Yamaguchi Prefectures), where high-quality iron sand was readily available. As craftsmen developed more efficient smelting techniques, small, temporary ironmaking operations were replaced by large, permanent operations run by entire villages. By the early 1900s, this accumulated expertise had allowed the region to become the largest producer of iron and steel in the country, laying the foundations for the region's modern-day steel industry.