

Tokoname Ware

Tokoname's history and economic development are closely linked to its pottery (Tokoname *yaki*). The city is known as one of Japan's "Six Ancient Kilns," along with Echizen, Seto, Shigaraki, Tamba, and Bizen. These areas have pottery-making traditions dating back over 1,000 years.

Emerging Techniques

Tokoname ware originated in the early twelfth century in the Chita Peninsula (Aichi Prefecture) region. The area was well-suited for pottery production, having soft soil and gentle hills that made it easy to dig *anagama* (tunneled sloping kilns), a plentiful supply of high-quality clay, and access to the ocean for easy transportation of finished goods. By the fourteenth century, Tokoname's potters were producing large storage jars and cooking utensils using the *himozukuri* method, in which ropes of clay are coiled or stacked onto the base of an item.

Production capacity improved with the emergence of *ogama* (large kilns) in the late fifteenth century, and Tokoname's reputation for high-quality ceramics grew over the following centuries. Its jars served a range of practical purposes, including transporting liquor, and its small pots were used in Kyoto's refined culture of tea or *chanoyu*.

Techniques imported from China in the mid-nineteenth century led to the creation of one of Tokoname's signature items, *kyusu* (teapots) made from red clay. Tokoname's clay is rich in iron, has a distinctive red hue, and is recognized for its heat retention and porous qualities. These *kyusu* are highly prized to this day. Great care is taken to ensure a perfect fit between the body and lid. The inside of the pot is left unglazed, and it is said that the iron-rich Tokoname clay helps to soften the astringency of green tea leaves, resulting in tea with a pleasant, mellow taste. *Kyusu* tend to be smaller than Western teapots and often have a side handle placed at a 90-degree angle to the spout.

Adapting and Modernizing

The earliest *noborigama* (climbing kilns) were built in Tokoname around 1830, facilitating the mass production of pottery in an energy-efficient manner. In the 1850s, Tokoname expanded manufacturing to include ceramic toilets. When Japan started rapidly modernizing in the second half of the nineteenth century, roofing tiles and pipes for carrying water and sewage were also produced.

Artisans began making ceramic figurines in the late 1930s, and by 1950 the city was the top producer of *maneki neko* (lucky cat) figurines in Japan. Ceramic production peaked in the 1950s when there were hundreds of kilns. Subsequently, improved manufacturing technology and stricter environmental regulations led to a decline in large-scale production.

In recent decades, changing lifestyles and interest from abroad have led to further diversification of Tokoname ware. Artisans adapted to changing tastes, embracing both traditional techniques and modern innovation to ensure that the local pottery culture continued to flourish. Today, Tokoname's ceramic cats, red-clay *kyusu*, and bonsai pots are popular at home and abroad. Visitors can learn about Tokoname ware in greater detail at the Tokoname Tou no Mori Museum, which is on Course B of the Pottery Footpath.