

# Japanese Ceramics

## The Origin of Japanese Pottery

Earthenware for ritual or everyday use has been made in Japan since ancient times, but it was during the Nara period that artistic and colorful pottery was produced in earnest using the technique of 'Uwagusuri'. Uwagusuri, which was introduced from China, means glaze: the glassy layer on the surface makes pottery more beautiful and prevents leaking.

In the Kamakura period, pottery was fired in kilns in eastern Japan. Among the many locations of kilns, Seto (in Aichi Prefecture) was a major production area, which is why pottery is referred to as Setomono in Japan.

## Pottery and Tea Ceremony

Due to the rise of the practice of tea ceremony, pottery attracted the attention of high-ranking Samurai warriors as a higher level of art during the Azuchi-Momoyama period. As each item of pottery is unique in shape, texture, and color, its artistic quality was well suited to the aesthetics of the way of tea. Some tea ceremony experts such as Sen no Rikyu were given important positions as masters of the tea ceremony by feudal lords, which further enhanced the value of pottery.



About this time in Kyoto, a new style, Rakuyaki, was launched, and its technique has been handed down through generations. Tea bowls made by the Rakuyaki technique are very simple, but they are considered the most prestigious pottery in the tea ceremony.

## The Birth of Japanese Porcelain

The number of kilns in western Japan, especially in Kyushu, increased in the 17th century after the feudal lords who attacked Korea with Toyotomi Hideyoshi returned with many Korean potters and opened their own kilns in their own towns. In many kilns, porcelain was fired for the first time in Arita when Ri Sanpei from Korea found porcelain stone there. Compared to pottery, which is made of clay and has a rough texture, (Tsuchimono, e.g., Bizenyaki, Hagi-yaki, etc.), porcelain is made from the powder of porcelain stone and has a smooth white,



waterproof surface.

In the middle of 17th century, Aritayaki began to be exported to Europe by the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Aritayaki was called Imari as it was shipped from the port of Imari. Dishes or vases with Kinrande, a gorgeous pattern of painted gold and red became popular among the aristocrats of Europe.

Production technique has improved dramatically since the Meiji era and there has been a ceramic boom in recent years. These days, various kinds of pottery and porcelain from traditional to avant-garde are made in many parts of the country.