

Journey. One thousand years. The six ancient kilns.



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the intersection of fire and humanity,
soil and humanity, water and humanity

– First Issue:

“Getting to know The Six Ancient Kilns”

“Learning about The Six Ancient Kilns”

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The relationship between the Japanese and pottery dates back to the Jomon period (the earliest historical era of Japanese history coinciding with the Neolithic Period, from around 14500 BCE to around 300 BCE), when pottery was used for necessities such as preserving food, cooking, and rituals. Pottery not only helped build a civilization, it also exceeded conventional uses to enrich the culture of Japan in many ways.

Of all the ancient pottery sites of Japan, the “Six Ancient Kilns” (pronounced nihon rokkoyo in Japanese) refers collectively to the six representative production areas of Echizen, Seto, Tokoname, Shigaraki, Tamba, and Bizen, whose pottery production has continued from the medieval period (1185-1603) to the present day.

The term “Six Ancient Kiln” was coined by renowned ceramics scholar, Koyama Fujio around 1948 and the sites were certified as official Japanese Heritage sites in spring 2017.

To mark this occasion, the six cities created a Japanese Heritage Promotion Council whose objective was to revisit the technology and cultures that were born in each of these production areas over the last thousand years, and create an opportunity to delve into the wonders of the Six Ancient Kilns from a newfound perspective.

Spring 2018 marked the beginning of “Journey. One thousand years. The Six Ancient Kilns,” a project instated to re-examine the roots of creativity and making/producing through the lens of pottery, whilst exploring fundamental human behavior and the relationship between nature and humanity. The hope was to examine “the intersection of fire and humanity; earth and humanity; and water and humanity,” which



each of the six areas has cultivated over the last 1000 years, and to inspire a vision of the future 1000 years from today based on these findings.

* The 6 Pottery Production Areas

Echizen ware: Echizen, Fukui

Seto ware: Seto, Aichi

Tokoname ware: Tokoname, Aichi

Shigaraki ware: Koka, Shiga

Tamba ware: Tamba Sasayama, Hyogo

Bizen ware: Bizen, Okayama

adulthood and we interact with or challenge soil in different ways.
"Pottery enthusiasts have an instinctive admiration for soil" Okada

Pottery give life to soil

Okada: When I was young, I engaged in gardening and this led me to understand soil in a different light. I was able to tell whether the soil was good or whether my flowers would bloom. This intensified and got me into pottery. But when I was a boy, I saw a fragment of a Jomon Doki at an archaeological site. I clearly felt an affinity for soil. So, when the time came for me to find a living, I wanted to do something that was an extension of this affinity, or something akin to it, which led me to become an antiquities trader.

Okamoto: That intimacy, or rather, the sense of soil being alive, the beauty of it, is impressed upon us even before the soil is made into pottery or ceramics. The mark a finger leaves, and the deflections that happen in the kiln are not artificial – they make them much more human. Perhaps, this is what connects us to that feeling we had when we played with mud as children.

Okada: Definitely.

Okamoto: It would be nice to revisit the idea of pottery based on this kind of affinity. I detest the snobbishness of pottery connoisseurs who revel in their knowledge of how much their collection is worth. It even makes me want to reject pottery altogether. I wish it were something that can simply be enjoyed with a sense of familiarity that makes you feel like you want, and can, make it yourself. I want to avert my eyes from the pieces placed in glass cases enshrined in some museum. I truly oppose and dislike a system where value is decided based on a consensus, and then that value is used as a pedestal of some sort.

Okada: Yes, it's true that we don't seem to try to see with our own eyes, but to rely on someone else's valuation. The creators themselves and experts also feel a sense of assurance based on such values...

Okamoto: That's why there is discovery in things that are overlooked or ridiculed. It's strange for me to be the one to say this, but I am known for discovering the Jomon Doki (Jomon pottery). Jomon pottery had been around for hundreds of years, but no one chose to see them as beautiful objects. That's why they don't appear in pre-war art history.

Okada: They only saw it from an archaeological point of view.

Okamoto: Twenty years ago, I said there was nothing more beautiful than Jomon pottery, that it was the beauty that the Japanese had lost. My comment was received with surprise, but now, Jomon pottery holds an important place, much more than Yayoi Doki, in Japanese art history. This proves the paradox that the past is not the past, but it is the present. The takeaway should

be, new discoveries need not be made by intellectuals and experts. Actually, they shouldn't be made by intellectuals nor experts at all.

Okada: So, in other words, beauty should be discovered each in our own way and should not be imposed.

Okamoto: If we look at it as a question of the Japanese cultural constitution, there are many things that are good. However, this can work in the wrong way as well. When I was commissioned to work on the piece for the Expo mentioned earlier, they asked me to do something in a Japanese style as the Expo was going to be held in Japan. I said, absolutely not, I will never do it in a Japanese style. The reason was that I believe that the drive to break from tradition is, in fact, the true expression of Japanese tradition. In my opinion, doing the same thing again or modifying something from the past to suit modern tastes does not make it traditional, it makes it a traditional style. True tradition is the discovery of something that was not

there before. So before I made the Tower of the Sun, I thought that I would make something extraordinarily unorthodox. The Japanese are proficient, scrupulous, diligent, and intelligent. What they didn't have was the extraordinarily unorthodox.

Okada: That Tower of the Sun did have quite the reception. It later became the unofficial symbol of the Expo.

Okamoto: They actually had a symbolic tower elsewhere. However, the fact that it resonated with the masses meant that there was an element of discovery in that piece. Current pottery doesn't have an ounce of that extraordinarily unorthodox element. The level of skill may be great but it is rather confined.

Okada: There was much of that at the Expo.

"Pottery's own roots – it is the origin of living and the basis of life." Mr. Okamoto



Jomon Doki pottery and the pottery of the Six Ancient Kilns resonate with us

Okamoto: That's right. I have some general faith in the time leading up to the mid-Edo era. But during the late Edo era, I can only put my faith in items of lower monetary value like the woodblock paintings but nothing else. Items from mid-Edo to Meiji, Taisho, Showa era, all seem to be confined and made only to appeal to the connoisseur. I am an anti-connoisseur-ist.

Okada: Yes, it is as you say. Connoisseur-ism is prevalent.

Okamoto: The Jomon Doki are not confined at all. On the contrary, they are extraordinarily unorthodox. This is the true Japan and I fell in love with it.

Okada: I think the pieces from the Six Ancient Kilns really resonate with us when we look at post Jomon Doki pottery history. Much of the pieces have their origins in everyday human life. Things do change a bit when tea is introduced. The pieces from the Six Ancient Kilns demonstrate a primal representation of human life with no frills. There are no gimmicks, nor anything else of the sort. We must place our faith in, discover, and hold dear these things. The pieces from the Six Ancient Kilns are actually earth itself. The pieces were made to hold water and not for recognition or praise, nor any kind of commercial incentive. They were simply made, made in bulk and to be sturdy. That's all.

Okamoto: From that perspective, the pre-tea Six Ancient Kiln pieces are akin to Jomon Doki. It's really difficult for them to work without purpose. Like you said, the pieces were made not for praise nor to sell at a high price, they were made based on desires stemming from everyday life. The level of craftsmanship didn't matter, nor did comparing your work with others. Comparing leads to relative value. Just making your own, just making yourself, anything other than these absolutes don't hold any value.

Okada: So, we are revisiting the Jomon Doki and Six Ancient Kiln pieces, which both arose from everyday life, with renewed wonder....

Okamoto: For example, when we consider Tokoname, I think it has quite a bit of continental influences. The continental culture that landed in Kyushu, all things official made its way to the Kyoto, Nara, Kinai area. But those natural things which weren't, somehow crossed the sea and happened to make it to Tokoname. Tokoname was a very convenient seaport without strong influence from the ruling center, so anyone could come and do as they pleased. And the soil was good, so a kiln was established. This led to a bigger influence of the more easy-going, natural-living continental elements rather than the typically Japanese intricate artisanship. Hands down, I truly think that items crafted out of necessity are by far, more artistic and emotional than items made to win awards.

Not to get off topic but, I think that art has been distorted since the Renaissance. Art has become vain with professional artists trying so hard to paint better.

My work has been ostracized from the art community and I make things that don't sell.

Okada: Art that sells is what seems wrong.

Okamoto: Of course.

Okada: At the height of the Six Ancient Kilns, no one thought about sales. I may be repeating myself but, the beauty of the Six Ancient Kilns pieces is the beauty of the earth. When I categorize pottery, I visualize the life of the people who lived when the piece was made. They say "when you look at pottery, you can see the life at that time." I think that's true. Looking at pottery gives me a view of the life and societal background in which the people lived.

No one cared much about the Six Ancient Kilns when we were young. There was a long period when people appreciated items that were for tea ceremonies. Around the time I started in this profession, the Six Ancient Kilns were revisited. This was when people began to appreciate pieces that may not have been appropriate for a tea ceremony, but beautiful nonetheless.

Okamoto: I've always said we should not look at history in temporal terms. With the advent of scientism and priority on progress and development, our sense of value for beauty has gone awry. The idea that things from the recent past are closer to present and thus more developed, is dangerous and mostly incorrect. This is clear when you look at pottery from today and Jomon Doki.

Okada: Ceramicists owe their living to the popularization of tea. Learning tea is compulsory for many young women looking to get wed. That's quite a population.

Okamoto: If it weren't for the tea ceremony, pottery would not have such ridiculous prices. Pottery wasn't made for such things. It should be much more easy-going. The distortions in the kiln and falling ash can make for an interesting piece – such unintentional beauty has immeasurable appeal.

Okada: That would mean that pottery today is no longer art.

Okamoto: In any case, we must revisit the appeal of Jomon Doki, the beauty of the Six Ancient Kilns. Otherwise, this is the end of Japanese pottery.

Excerpted from:

Pages 147-150, "The Japanese and Pottery Culture," Bessatsu Rekishi Techo No 2: Special Edition/ History of Japanese Pottery (Meicho Publishing, 1974) edited by Koyama Fujio.

*A special thanks to Koyama Fujio's daughter, Sugahara Eri, the Okamoto Taro Foundation, and Meicho Publishing for allowing us to reprint these documents. We tried to contact Mr. Okada Soei through various organizations but were unable to contact him. For anyone who might have a lead as to how to contact Mr. Okada, please contact us.

Cultural Theory of The Japanese and Pottery, Glossary

Koyama Fujio (1900-1975)

Scholar of Japanese pottery and porcelain and Chinese ceramics, and potter of his own right. Born in Okayama Prefecture. After dropping out of the Tokyo University of Commerce (Hitotsubashi University), he proceeded down the road of pottery. He moved on to ceramics research in 1930, and joined the Toyo Ceramic Research Laboratory, and engaged in research on old kilns in Japan and China. His discovery of teiyokuyoushi, the remnants of the so-called "Phantom Kiln" from the Song dynasty (China, 960-1279) 1944, was of particularly great significance. After the war, he worked as a researcher at the Tokyo National Museum and at the Cultural Properties Protection Committee, investigating and designating cultural properties as well as working as a critic, and an editor for The Complete Works of Clay. In 1960, he was selected by the Ministry of Education's Arts Awards. Toyo kotoji (Oriental Ceramics) (1954) is one of his most notable publications amongst numerous other significant publications.

Tarō Okamoto (1911-1996)

Tarō Okamoto (1911-1996). Artist. Born in Kanagawa prefecture as the eldest son of cartoonist Ippei Okamoto and singer/writer Kanoko Okamoto. He lived in France between the ages of 18-29 to study folkloristics (formal study of folklore whilst actively participating in the surrealist and abstract art movements. From 1942 he entered the Chinese front and was demobilized in 1946. After the war, he formed the "Night Assembly" with the likes of Hanada Kiyoteru and developed the avant-garde art movement. While performing free artistic activities, he discovered the aesthetic values in Jomon pottery and turned his attention to Japanese traditions and customs. During the EXPO' 70 in 1970, he was appointed as the exhibition producer, where he created the Tower of the Sun. Other major works are Sad Arm and Myth of Tomorrow. His main works as an author include Japanese Rediscovery Nihon saihakken: Geijutsu fudoki (1958), Treatise on Okinawa Culture — Forgotten Japan (1961), The Magic Power of Beauty (1971).

Okada Soei (1909- 1987)

Born in Noda City, Chiba Prefecture. After graduating from Kaisei Junior & Senior High School, he studied haiku poetry under Ono Kenichiro (Ono Bushi) and poetry under Sato Sonosuke. After working as an editor/journalist for Chawan (Tea Bowl), he managed an antique art store called "Konaya." He serves as the director of the Public Interest Incorporated Association



Japan Ceramics Society and a succeeding member of the editorial committee of Tosetsu (Ceramics Theory). He became KK director of the antique art store "Miodou." Okada self-published Shi No Ie (Poetry House) and Noda Literature. His main publications include Koto midokoro kandokoro (Antique Pottery/Ceramics Highlights) (original and sequel), Koyo no yakimono (Pottery of the Old Kilns Sites), Chato midokoro kandokoro (Tea Bowl Highlights), all published by Kogei Shuppan.

EXPO' 70

The first World Exposition held in Japan and Asia in 1970. Held for 183 days from March 15th to September 20th 1970. The theme was "Progress and Harmony for Mankind." From overseas, 76 countries, four international organizations, one government office (Hong Kong), three American states, three Canadian provinces, three American cities, one German city, and two companies participated. From within Japan, 32 organizations and 32 exhibition halls (the Japanese government, the Preparatory Committee of the Local Governments' Pavilion for the Japan World Exposition, two public corporations, and 28 private enterprises) participated. The number of visitors exceeded 60 million. In addition to Taro Okamoto's Tower of the Sun, the moon rock (American Pavilion) brought back on Apollo 12 the previous year, was a popular highlight of the fair. The master plan of the venue was designed by Tange Kenzo, the theme exhibitions producer was Taro Okamoto, and the logo was designed by Otaka Takeshi.

Tower of the Sun

A sculpture by Taro Okamoto, placed as the centerpiece of the themed pavilions at the Expo' 70. It represented dignity and the

infinite development of mankind. It was produced alongside the Tower of Youth, and Tower of Mother and housed in a building known as Big Roof. The "Golden Mask," located at the top façade of the sculpture, represented the future. The "Face of the Sun" located in the mid-section, represented the present, and the "Black Sun," at the rear of the sculpture represented the past. There was an underground section with the "Sun of the Underworld," a face with four eyes, but its whereabouts are now unknown. Black tile pottery from Shigaraki was used for the Black Sun. The interior of this sculpture was accessible by an underground entrance, and lead to an upper "mid-air exhibition" section in the Big Roof. The underground section was themed, "Harmony," the middle section, "The Mystery of Life," and the uppermost section was themed as "Modern Energy." The interior catacomb contained the "Tree of Life," which stood at 41 meters tall. There were 292 models of various creatures attached to its trunk and branches, which followed the evolution of primordial life, all the way to humans. The interior has been made accessible to the general public again from March 2018.

City Hall Mural

A series of 11 clay board relief murals, including the Wall of the Moon and the Wall of the Sun, which were housed in the former Tokyo Metropolitan City Hall, built in 1956. The Wall of the Sun is now housed in Okamoto Taro Memorial Museum. Tange Kenzo, who designed the city hall, proposed the use of clay board reliefs to Okamoto due to his concerns about the strength of traditional mosaic tiles.

Chairs Refusing to Seat Anyone

Made in 1963. A cylindrical stool with a dome-shaped sitting surface. The sitting surface was decorated with large eyes and

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mouths, making the stool difficult to sit on. Okamoto stated that the chairs were designed to be spiritually and physically on par with humans and emphasized creativity and life whilst overcoming pragmatism and functionalism.

I am the one who discovered Jomon Doki (Jomon Pottery)

Okamoto was profoundly moved when he saw a Jomon Doki (Jomon pottery) for the first time in 1957 in Tokyo National Museum. In February the following year, he published the article “Dialogues with the fourth dimension – the theory of the Jomon pottery” in the art magazine Mizue. Until the article was published, Jomon pottery and clay figures were viewed as more of as crafts than art. Rather than looking at Jomon pottery through an archaeological lens, Okamoto sought to view Jomon pottery through a sociological and philosophical perspective, considering its beauty of form, and the spirit of the Jomon-jin (Jomon period humans).

The Symbol Tower

An observation tower that was constructed on a hill on the south side of the symbol zone of the Expo. It stood 120 meters tall (127.40, when counting up to the tip of the lighting rod placed on top), 13 levels above (39 floors) and 3 levels below ground (2 floors), covering a total area of 913 square meters. The cost of construction for the tower and its ancillary facilities was approximately 81.3 million yen. Designed by Kiyonori Kikutake, there was a two-layered observation deck on the upper section, which was also used as a radio relay station. Constructed on the 28th of February 1970 as the landmark tower for the Expo, it was open to the public until 9th February 1990. It has since been demolished.

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Six Themes That Unravel the Six Ancient Kilns

Since the medieval period, the Six Ancient Kilns has bridged the spirit of manufacturing to the modern day due to a variety of factors. This is apparent not only in the pottery but also in the landscape, the techniques of the potter, and daily lifestyles. In this section, we dig deeper into the common themes amongst each of the Six Ancient Kilns and examine the source of the creativity and imagination of the Six Ancient Kilns.

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1 "Soil" as an expression of the richness and aesthetics of the land

The most important factor for an old kiln to stand the test of time is that it has a source of soil that is suitable for making ceramics nearby. During the medieval period, as modern distribution systems did not exist, soil was collected from within close distance of dwelling areas for convenience, kilns were built, and people experimented with what could be achieved with the soil that was locally available.

Most clay used for pottery can be categorized into kibushi clay, gairome clay, and kaoline. All have plastic properties that allow them to maintain their shapes once they are formed. Mixing in non-plastic materials such as feldspar, quartz, and iron alleviates shrinkage during drying and firing, as these materials fill in microscopic gaps in the clay. They also change the color and texture, or what is often referred to as the keshiki, meaning "scenery," of the finished pieces. It is the exquisite blend and balance of materials contained in the soil that gives the pottery the individuality and uniqueness of its production area.

Sugishita Naoki

Director of Tokoname Tounomori

Tokoname is fit for large kilns. This spirit has been inherited and protected with great care and can be shown in the techniques of the artisans. To the artisans, the soil is what is valued the most. Soil can vary in "expression" quite a bit even if it is collected in a slightly different part of the same mountain. The artisans place their messages and creativity

六古窯をひもどく 六つのテーマ

1 土地に備わっている豊かさ、美意識の表れとしての「土」

2 「山麓・丘陵」

3 土を、火を生み出すための「木」

4 各時代の中心地と産地をつなぎ、暮らしの一部でもある「河川」

5 技術や文化を伝えるための媒介、やきものの象徴としての「人」

6 人びとやきものを進び、開かれた窓口としての「海」

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into the soil in pursuit of a unique piece that no other can imitate. This is why many that are still attracted by the charm and allure of Tokoname's soil still congregate here.

2 The "mountains and hills" that have continuously cultivated pottery practices since ancient times

All of the Six Ancient Kilns are located in hilly areas and this is partly due to the fact that hills were well suited for primitive kilns to be built on. Sue pottery, the roots of the Six Ancient Kilns, partly used cave kilns. More permanent ascending kilns, which used slopes to keep higher temperatures for longer durations, were slowly applied. As the hilly areas also provided the firewood and soil suitable for pottery, it was an ideal choice of environment for pottery.

Post 5th-century Sueki pottery was fired in grooves dug along a hill at an angle, which made it different from earthenwares fired

in open fire pits. It is said that there were approximately 2000 such kilns between Tohoku and Kyushu. All were in hilly areas facing a plain.

Murakami Yoshiki
Tamba Sasayama city office

The Tamba kiln is located on the western edge of the former Tamba country, where a branch of the Kako River and both banks of the Shitodani River meet. The medieval kiln sits on a hillside of the left bank, at the foot of Mount Kokuzou, at an altitude of about 200 meters, gently enshrined by a beautiful broad-leaf forest. It is distributed on the border with the former Settsu country, in the mountainous area around the Sanbon pass and near the alluvial area on the west side. On the other hand, it has been confirmed that the early modern kilns are distributed at the end of the hill near the settlements on the right bank, a location that is surrounded by mountains and hills. The surrounding mountains give people not only the clay and

firewood necessary for pottery but many other natural blessings. The locals therefore worship the mountains as Shinto guardians, and people continue to live and perform their activities in harmony with nature.

3 “Trees” used to kindle fires in order to transform soil to “pottery”

Firewood held just as much importance for the Six Ancient Kilns as did the soil. As the Six Ancient Kilns were located in hilly areas, they had access to abundant supply from surrounding forests, which allowed them to harvest firewood. Amongst the various trees available, it is said that pine, with its good balance of oil, was particularly suited to pottery. Firing methods change with the times and gas or electricity are predominant in modern-day pottery.

Controlling the fire was critical for cave and climbing kilns. Though the duration for which pieces are placed in a kiln differs depending on the area, the kilns are fired without rest over several days. The fire master who was in charge of controlling the fire had a central role in pottery as his performance would drastically affect the outcome.

Ishii Kei

Director of Bizen City Buried Cultural Property Management Center

Strolling through the town of Inbe and down into its alleys, at the corner of each potter, there are piles of neatly stacked pine firewood. Sometimes smoke can be seen leaving rhythmically from the chimneys made of fireproof brick. Over two-thirds of Bizen city is mountainous with rhyolite formations. It is easy for trees to grow and red pine grows across wide areas. Here, the earth made from rhyolite, and soil deposited in rice patties become clay. These combined with the flames of the firewood, the results in distinct, expressive pieces.

4 “Rivers,” an important part of daily life, and that which connected the center of each era with its production area

In the days before trains and automobiles, transportation of pottery heavily relied on transportation by rivers just as much as oceans. In the medieval period, pottery was transported by cart to the rivers. Even to this day, waterfronts play an important role in our lives.

Within the Six Ancient Kiln, Seto, Shigaraki, and Tamba have especially capitalized on the convenience of rivers. Tamba had access to the downstream area of the Shitodani river, Seto had its tributaries of the Shounai river as well as the Seto river and Yata river basin, and Shigaraki had the Daido river and Shigaraki river. The kilns were established along these rivers and used the waterways not only to transport their products but to harvest the quality clay from the rivers as well.

Otsuki Noriko

Curator of Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park

Shigaraki rests atop a stratum called the Paleo-Lake Biwa stratum, which was deposited during the process of the Paleo-Lake Biwa Formation moving to its current location over 400 thousand years from approximately 4 million years ago. The clay used for Shigaraki ware is hence a gift from the Paleo-Lake Biwa. With an abundance of organic compounds, the white clay forms a coarse texture when fired, which creates a unique scarlet or natural glaze with distinctive warmth.

5 “Human” as a symbol of pottery and as an intermediary conveying technology and culture

Pottery artisans and related craftsmen not only honed and maintained their skills but also mediated the transfer of the spiritual nature of pottery to various parts of Japan. Koyama Fujio, who coined the Six Ancient Kilns writes:

“The origins of Japanese pottery can be traced back to Kato Shirozaemon Kagemasa (Toshiro), the pioneer of pottery, the pioneer of pottery importing Chinese pottery techniques. [...] when Toshiro returned to Japan in 1227, he established a kiln in Seto and began making Chinese style pottery. This is said to be the origin of Japanese pottery.”

(An excerpt from Koyama Fujio Collection, Middle edition [The Asahi Shimbun, 1978] by Koyama Fujio)

As is mentioned in the book that neither the existence of Toshiro nor his expertise in pottery has been academically proven. However, when discussing the history of Japanese pottery it is important to note the existence of pottery masters or artisans who are the local area’s unifying force. In being able to express their respect and honor of such past potters, one can say that modern-day artisans were able to spin the spirit of creativity to the present day.

Hattori Fumitaka

Director of Seto City Art Museum

For over a thousand years, Seto has produced various types of pottery and porcelain to the extent that it is said “there is no pottery that can’t be made in Seto.” Together with the growth of pottery, people gathered and communities developed giving birth the phrase “where else would you go other than Seto?” To this day, many Tsukurite (artisans) hone their craft in this town.

6 The “sea” as a window to transporting and bringing people and pottery together

Tokoname, Bizen, and Echizen all face the sea, which provided the principal means to transport pottery. During the Kamakura to the Muromachi period, pottery was transported between the Tohoku region and

Kyushu regions via sea routes. Large pots and vases, which all originated from Tokoname can be found in various parts of the country, which face the Ise harbor. The ocean brought foreign influences as well. From time to time foreigners would arrive in Bizen, which faces the Sea of Japan, together with continental culture and techniques. The sea was not only a transportation route for goods but also proved to be a gateway to external cultures.

Hori Daisuke

Curator of Echizen town Ota Historical Materials Museum

Along the coast of the Sea of Japan, natural lagoons formed at the mouth of where large rivers flowed into the sea, naturally forming good ports since ancient times. The connecting networks among these lagoons formed the basis for the culture of the Sea of Japan and contributed to the wide distribution of Echizen Pottery. In Fukui, there are traditions involving foreign visitors, and artifacts originating from the Korean peninsula have been excavated. This suggests close interaction with the continent and that Fukui was the gateway to continental culture. These elements are what served as the underlying factor for the growth of pottery culture in the Sea of Japan.

Journey through the Six Ancient Kilns
- report from the kilns

Takahashi Koji
Product designer / Creative Director of the
Six Ancient Kilns Japan Heritage Utilization
Council

“It is important to re-examine the Six Ancient Kilns as well as to consider what the medieval period was like.” I kept repeating the words of Kanzaki Noritake, a renowned scholar of folklore studies, with deep knowledge of pottery, in the car on the way to a kiln in Bizen. During my travels to the Six Ancient Kilns since my appointment as the Creative Director of the Six Ancient Kilns Japan Heritage Utilization Council in June 1987, I discovered my newfound resolve in continuing to work with the Six Ancient Kilns. My role was to unravel the medieval period, to trace and to share the influences it had on modern-day pottery.

Bizen ware
- Bizen city, Okayama prefecture

This is my third visit to a firing at Bizen Ichiyougama. Twice a year in the spring and fall, they spend about two weeks filling the kiln. They then spend an astounding ten days (and nights) firing the kiln. The mood is almost festive as the flames are continuously fed with firewood. In fact, as if being drawn to the fire people from all over the country gather bearing gifts, and naturally, a party begins.

When I was first approached to join this project, I first consulted Kimura Hajime. I met Mr. Hajime about three years ago while I was reporting on the hidasaki technique, involving the wrapping of rice straw on pottery. Mr. Hajime is quite the chef and he treated us to home-cooked dishes served on pottery he had created. Apart from enjoying Mr. Hajime's superb cooking, it gave me an opportunity to consider the relationship between pottery and vessels.

When Mr. Hajime drinks wine, he always drinks from both a wine glass and a Bizen Yaki cup. He decides which cup to use based on its congeniality with the chosen wine. You might think, wine served in a Bizen yaki cup? But the concept is soundly grounded in history. Wine is said to have originated in Georgia, where grapes are fermented in buried clay pots called Qvareli. This wine was fermented and consumed in pottery, and this tradition still continues today. Mr. Hajime may also be influenced by a vintner, whom he regards very highly, and the black cup he uses so that the flavor of the wine is not affected by the color of the wine.

Mr. Hajime also created a mortar from Bizen ware only to respect Bizen ware, which was so strong it gave birth to the Edo-period phrase “throwing a Bizen won't break it,” when he was looking for a suitably strong vessel to make baby food. I was so enthralled by Mr. Hajime's approach and passion for his craft, which resulted in very many visits to Bizen.

六古窯紀行
— 窯場からのレポート —
高橋 浩司 (Takahashi Koji) の六古窯紀行レポート

「六古窯」の由来は、中世から近世にかけての間に、日本各地に点在していた窯場を指す言葉として使われてきた。その中でも、特に有名なのが、美濃の萩原窯、瀬戸の瀬戸窯、尾張の瀬戸窯、備前・備後の六古窯である。この六古窯は、それぞれ異なる歴史と文化を有している。今回は、その中でも、備前・備後の六古窯について、その歴史と文化を詳しく紹介する。



備前・備後の六古窯の風景。右側には大きな窯の跡地が見え、左側には田舎の風景が広がっている。

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高橋 浩司 (Takahashi Koji) の六古窯紀行レポート。背景には六古窯の風景が広がっている。

After eleven years of working as a product designer for Muji (Ryohin Keikaku Co., Ltd.), I resigned and relocated with my family to Tokoname in Aichi prefecture, two years ago. Using the experience from my previous job, and through product development, I am involved in a wide variety of activities, such as connecting artisans and users, the branding of Tokoname pottery, and the development of the next generation of artisans.

Seto ware
- Seto city, Aichi prefecture

Once I returned to Tokoname, I made my way to Seto, which is also located in Aichi prefecture. I had visited Seto before as they had made some Muji pottery, but my knowledge of Seto ware was limited. I first stopped by a shop that specialized in glazes. In the shop, I saw a hand-written poster saying “You can get everything you need for pottery in Seto.” Seto is self-sufficient in tools and materials, as Seto is where processes related to

pottery were specialized over a long period of time. In particular, the abundance of locally-sourced soil was important to maintain this tradition and speaks volumes as to the reason why such traditions were maintained for over one thousand years.

There are many soil mines located within Seto city. I visited one of them called Akatsuki. Spanning four acres, the Akatsuki mine is impressive, with 20 thousand tons per annum of white and rough clay production. The clay mined here is used in Seto as well as shipped across the country. The ground under our feet contains clay made from stone weathered over 5 million years ago. I am humbled by the abundant supply that has nourished Seto ware and the incredible amount of time it took for the clay to form. A member of the creative team traveling with me mutters, “traveling to the old kilns is a journey through time.”

Seto ware is characterized by its glaze. It was ahead of its time, with glazes being used from the medieval period and has been a production area for porcelain for many

years. Thereafter, during the Edo period porcelain manufacturing techniques, were transferred from Hizen in Kyushu, and Seto became a rare production area making both porcelain and pottery since. Here, they refer to pottery making as the “principle” business and porcelain making as the “new” business. At Setohongyogama, they still make pottery. Mizuno Hanjiro is the 7th to inherit this name from his master and is the owner of this kiln. He has spent much energy in preserving the Hora area, which is the central location of principle pottery. Mizuno Yusuke, who will be the 8th person to inherit the name Hanjiro, showed me around the Hora area. Though similar to Tokoname, in that pottery is very much a part of the scenery, there are some differences. In Tokoname, earthen pipes and bottles line the walls and floors as part of the architecture. In the Hora area, they use tools such as the tsuku (a beam used to pack firewood into the kiln) and ebuta (a lid to cover the kiln).

We visited the large multi-chambered climbing kilns as well. The ceilings are high enough to play a game of catch in the kiln, and the width of 8 meters illustrates the heyday of Seto’s production volume. Here, it seems they fired pottery for about 30 days, and I was amazed by the skills of the yakite, or “bakers,” craftsmen who specialized in kilns, whom I was able to see in action in the kiln-firing videos from those times. The yakite vigorously and precisely throws the firewood into a small kiln hole using an underhand throw, so that the firewood can reach the center of the kiln. It is said that during the war, in order to make a living, they fired the kiln and raised black smoke, despite the fear of airstrikes.

Backgrounds of various works of pottery

Many say the Six Ancient Kilns don’t follow a set of principles. Behind this popular belief is the history of each production area, which has worked with a wide range of pottery catering to the needs of the era, beginning from medieval Japan (1185 - 1603) leading up to the present day. In the Heian period (794 - 1185) and Kamakura period (1185 - 1333), the production of everyday objects and religious wares prospered, and in the Muromachi period (1336 - 1573), with the advent of the Japanese tea ceremony, tea bowls. After Japan opened its doors to the West, craftsmen produced ceramics for export, and during wartime, they responded to the demand for munitions by producing grenades, landmines, and vessels to store fuel for fighter jets. In the postwar period, along with the country’s rapid economic growth, there was a surge in the creation of daily necessities such as dishware, tiles used for buildings, and sanitary wares. Today, the sales of some production areas are led by ceramic parts for high precision machines called, fine ceramics (also known as “new ceramics”). This is the reason why it’s difficult to describe the defining characteristics of the Six Ancient Kilns in a single phrase.

Tamba ware - Tamba Sasayama city, Hyogo

On my second trip to Tamba Sasayama - with the introduction from a mutual acquaintance - I was guided by Kosuge Nobuyuki, the owner of archipelago, a variety store nearby JR Furuichi station repurposed from a grain warehouse.

We first visited the Toshihikogama. The kiln owner, Shimizu Toshihiko, belonging to the Tamba tachikui traditional craftsmen association, is the living witness to the Tamba ware. His long beard reminds one of a sage living in the mountains. Learning from a pupil of the potter Kawai Kanjiro, he continues to use local soil and employs ornaments and glaze unique to Tamba ware in the creation of pottery made for specific purposes.

We began the conversation around the fireplace. According to Shimizu, the origins of Tamba ware dates back to the late Heian period and the beginning of the Kamakura period. Craftsmen have depended on the anagama (cellar kiln) before the arrival of noborigama (chambered climbing kiln) in the early Edo period. With it, they focused on the production of tea utensils such as chaire (tea containers), mizusashi (fresh-water container), chawan (tea bowl), and towards the late Edo period, fostered healthy competition among skilled craftsmen within the Sasayama domain. Overall, they have a history of mainly producing objects for everyday use. Perhaps it is only natural for Tamba ware to receive attention from Yanagi Soetsu, the founder of the Mingei movement, considering its long history of creating pottery works for the people. Afterward, we visited the Taigagama, Old Tamba Pottery Museum, and Tansougama while Shimizu recounted tales of Tamba Sasayama and the surrounding area, Tamba ware’s 800 years of history, kerokuro (a pottery wheel operated by kicking) that spins the opposite direction, and more.

Our final stop was Imanishi Masahiko’s Miyanokitagama. In Tamba, it’s yet unknown where the old potters dug their soil from, troubling the current Tamba ware creators. Imanishi told us about the ongoing collaboration carried out by researchers and creators, both from and outside the production area, to toil away on the research. Stories of soil continued as we passed by the wattle and daub hut made by a plasterer using stories of soil continued as we passed by the wattle and daub hut called utekisei, made with a type of potter’s clay used for Tamba ware. Imanishi smiled as he told us that every time he comes across a construction site - with its layers stripped bare - he consults the people there if he can, and occasionally does bring some soil back with him. By firing the soil as is inside the kiln, he continues to investigate the possibilities of various types of soil. I got excited as I listened to Imanishi, whom we can all benignly call, a lover of soil. We left the Miyanokitagama after promising my next visit to learn more about his experimentations on various types of soil. Thanks to Kosuge, I was able to earn various

perspectives to help me better understand Tamba ware. The presence of someone, a good communicator, with a keen sense of understanding of the production area is very much needed by the people there as well. At archipelago, a store that has a careful selection of handcrafted products from all corners of the country on sale, they put utmost importance on taking time to converse with the creators. Two years have passed since they opened. Although they do not have works of Tamba ware in store yet, Kosuge is perhaps working on getting them in stock. By then the surroundings had darkened and the ridges of the Tamba mountains were out of sight.

Shigaraki ware - Koka city, Shiga prefecture

Shigaraki, similar to Seto and Tokoname, is a production area that handles both the production and wholesale of wares within the district. The area has produced various pottery works varying in size over the years and focused on fostering human resources relevant to the pottery industry. There is a residential facility set up at the Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park, where they annually invite approximately 50 potters from all around the world. The facility houses an atelier with equipment that allows for larger-scale works, which acts as a major appeal to the potters. I spotted several large-scale works dotted about the site. Many artists end up donating the works because of the inability to transport them back home due to their size or weight. I also came across a book that gave fame to the name “Shigaraki” abroad: Shigaraki, Potters’ Valley (1979), written by Louise Cort, an American researcher focusing on the history of ceramics. It was the first work that introduced Shigaraki ware overseas, and with it, the name Shigaraki started getting recognition all around the world as a pottery production area. She selected Japanese ceramics as the theme of her master’s thesis at the University of Oxford and visited Japan in 1967. Deeply impressed by a large-scale pot from the medieval period she’d encountered at a museum in Tokyo, Cort began to frequent Shigaraki and eventually put together her findings into her thesis. Its content is wide-ranging, dealing with topics from excavated ancient kilns to the history and culture of Shigaraki ware that molded the remarkable skills of potters. She continued to visit Shigaraki for the following 50 years, and according to a young creator that I’ve met here, they are currently preparing for Cort’s exhibition and event.

To document and pass on to the future

Traveling the Six Ancient Kilns, you come across traces left behind by foreigners who were drawn to Japanese pottery; another example is that of the Canadian film director Marty Gross. Filming production areas, collecting and digitally re-mastering archival films on Japanese

Journey. One thousand years. The six ancient kilns.

pottery, Gross has devoted himself to the production of video records to pass on to future generations. Despite being a small island country, there are countless pottery production areas other than the Six Ancient Kilns. The works of the two visitors from abroad have offered me many fresh insights into the world of pottery. Documentation is a vital act of conveying the work, history, and culture of each land to the future generation. This is why the project Journey. One thousand years. The Six Ancient Kilns also puts importance on documenting and publishing its contents via various mediums including paper, website, and video.

A craft that reflects the nature and its characteristics

Mass production and mass consumption became the mainstream of Japanese production trend in the postwar era. To manufacture a profuse amount of goods, Japan focused on the economically rational factors of easy to make, fast, and cheap. Due to such tendency, the “obvious” practice-passed down for generations-of using materials available within the surrounding region, started to lose meaning. The human craft of pottery making, which has long existed in close connection with the region’s natural characteristics began to crumble. Among the people I have come across at the six production areas, those whom I feel I could discuss this matter with all night long tend to be those who are born and raised in the land. Perhaps learning to live with the nature and climate of one’s birthplace is a sort of fate, but it’s heartening to see individuals who are genuinely enjoying and taking their time to learn a craft that is uniquely available in their region.

Echizen ware - Echizen town, Fukui prefecture

I visited Echizen town a week after the prefecture was hit by the heaviest snowfall in 37 years. Echizen ware is the smallest production area out of the Six Ancient Kilns. Clay freezes up often in snowy regions, making it difficult to operate kilns throughout the year. With the advancement of various technologies today, it became possible to create pottery regardless of the season or location. However, Echizen ware is an assemblage of artists’ kilns, which limits its production load. Echizen ware was born under the influence of the Tokoname ware techniques, which circulated to the area in the late Heian period. Focusing mainly on the production of pots, jars, and mortars, its products have been transported across the nation via land, rivers, and sea. Being the only production area out of the Six Ancient Kilns to border the Sea of Japan, it not only exported goods but also served as a point of access for the people and goods from the Korean peninsula. There are several ancient kiln ruins in the Ozowara area, the birthplace of Echizen

ware. I visited the studio-cum-house located in the area, inhabited by Domoto Michihiro and Kumiko. The studio reminded me of a cave, completely covered by the snow except for its entranceway. It was a very quiet studio: during my last visit in fall, I occasionally heard fallen tree berries rolling down the roof, but this time around I heard the melted snow falling. Mr. and Mrs. Domoto purchase their clay from the local tile shop and firewood-collected from the nearby mountain-from the local lumber store. Using three wood-fired kilns they had built with their own hands, the couple produces pottery as a team, including those made via the method of firing unglazed pottery at a very high temperature called, yakishime (literally, “firing to be sealed”). They continue to explore the possibilities of yakishime pottery, fascinated by the ever-varying expression of the resulting work. “I don’t feel that there’s something special about my approach to pottery making. I’m just doing the obvious.” Mr. Domoto said with warmth. It’s indeed surprising how their method, which follows after the traditional ways, appears to me as new. Much research or excavation on the old kilns in Echizen town remains to be done, but in a way, left untouched, possibilities continue to exist.

Tokoname ware - Tokoname city, Aichi prefecture

There is a tourist spot called the Pottery Footpath in Tokoname city. It is a renovated area that used to be the biggest source of Tokoname ware production in the modern era. This is where I live, in an old rented house within the area. The window next to the bath opens up to a wall of giant clay pipe piled onto each other. Defective clay pipes and shochu (Japanese liquor distilled from sweet potatoes, rice, etc.) jars have been put into use in public works projects. There is an abundance of clay pipes within the town, to the point they are seen used as grave posts. Despite being an urban area, due to the narrow, winding roads and many slopes within, the town has evaded major urban developments. This is the reason why it maintains an atmosphere of the past when craftsmen fired countless clay pipes. I came across clay pipes traveling around the Six Ancient Kilns as well. From what I hear, Tokoname craftsmen specializing in clay pipes made their living by visiting production areas that have suffered an economic downturn and teaching the people techniques of mass production. It is said the potters have traveled and operated kilns in various places since the medieval period, and the works of pottery that are believed to be influenced by the techniques of Tokoname are called, Tokoname-kei (Tokoname-style). When I began my position as the creative director, I felt eager to establish a connection among the Six Ancient Kilns, but the more I delve into the regions, the more I learn about the long-standing relationship among production areas.

A journey to trace craftsmanship back to its roots

It’s astonishing how people in the medieval period were able to shape and fire firm pots or jars the size of their bodies. There wasn’t as many equipment available today as well as means to transport goods to faraway locations. They simply found ways to use raw materials found within their land as tools and ingredients for their craft. They operated kilns and fire without a thermometer and proper clothing. Perhaps people depended solely on their instincts back then. It can be said, “Japanese pottery” has its roots in these simple and powerful works of pottery. The journey to explore one thousand years of the Six Ancient Kilns has just begun. It is a journey to discern the origins of craftsmanship, cultivated over a long time by the Japanese.

Takahashi Koji

[Product Designer/The Six Ancient Kilns Japan Heritage Creative Director]
Takahashi was born in Oita, in 1980. He graduated from Tama Art University in 2004 and designed lifestyle products for Muji at Ryohin Keikaku Co., Ltd. from 2005 to 2015. Currently, he is based in Tokoname city, involving himself in various projects centered around product design, while serving as the coordinator for the Tokoname City Ceramics Industry and Art Promotion Project, and from 2017, as the creative director for the Six Ancient Kilns Japan Heritage Utilization Council.

Medieval Pottery

Potters currently active in each production area introduce works that have been produced to cater to the lifestyle of the late Heian period and Kamakura period.

1 Big pot, tokonameyaki Heian period / Collection of Tokoname Tounomori

Selected by
Koie Akira (potter)

Pottery from the medieval period are objects of my admiration and what I strive for. A couple of decades ago, I had a stimulating experience of participating in the research excavation of Tokoname, where I was able to witness the traces of works and handprints left behind by the people of Tokoname approximately 1,000 years ago. The works were produced by way of a limited number of equipment and tools, unlike today. The techniques used were efficient, suitable for mass production and some were even fired in a specific way to cater to its usage. Behind their simplicity and sturdiness, one can see the high-level techniques and design used. They very much remain relevant and surpass that of the present day, and I can learn a lot by working at Tokoname, where such practices have been maintained for generations.

2 Large Jar Natural glaze, Tamba ware Kamakura period / Collection of Old Tamba Pottery Museum

Selected by
Imanishi Masahiko (Miyanokitagama)

I try to focus on the beauty of Tamba's old pottery spread inside me with conviction. The time I spend imagining and thinking about this beauty is a process of irreplaceable importance. It is a time that renews my approach towards pottery—a vital one for me to continue the act of “firing.” I spend my days thinking of these old wares, and instead of getting hung up on “what is correct,” I pay attention to the instinctual in trying to understand and feel the works. I notice a change occurring within me via my changing feelings towards beauty. Through the accumulation of this change, I would like to continue to deepen my understanding of the essential value of old Tamba pottery.

3 Bizen ware Tanetubo Mizusasi (Seed pot fresh-water container), Bizen ware Azuchi-momoyama period / Collection of Ichiyogama

Selected by
Kimura Hajime (Bizen ware potter, Ichiyogama)

Tanetubo are the most prominent Bizen ware pots of the medieval period. Despite their big size-requiring one to use both

中世のツボ

平安時代の末期から鎌倉時代、幕府時代、室町時代、徳川時代、戦国時代、江戸時代、明治時代、大正時代、昭和時代、平成時代、令和時代

hands to hold them they boast impressive shapes that are hard to forget. I couldn't comprehend why people used them to store seeds back when I was merely studying its shape. However, a few years back, after a conversation with an acquaintance who grows non-hybrid plants and reuses their seeds in Okayama, I was finally able to understand why. Seed preservation is a challenging process given the high humidity levels in Japan. Today, one starts by buying seeds or seedlings to grow plants, but in the past, people had to harvest seeds from the previous year's crops and store them for a couple of months before using again. To a certain degree, storing seeds inside unglazed yakishime pots, which have moisture-absorbent qualities, served a practical purpose. And one more thing, I think people believed in storing things of importance inside pots.

4 Shigaraki ware Otsubo Mei Shichiya Muromachi period (15th-16th century) / Private collection

Selected by
Furutani Kazuya (potter)

Shigaraki pots feature varying details throughout, making no two facets the same wherever one looks—each charming in its own right. I believe Shigaraki pots have unparalleled qualities in making one feel the nature, as well as warmth and strength. As a creator, I get great joys from simply imagining what kind of firing methods and kilns birthed the various surface attributes of the clay—its scarlet color, naturally occurring ash glaze and scorch marks. It wasn't easy to select a single work of Shigaraki pot for this occasion but the reason why I chose “Otsubo Mei Shichiya” is in its abundance of expression. I am currently trying to explore the possibilities of anagama (cellar kiln) with my works, and as one of my approaches, I attempt to bring

out various expressions from the resulting works. I am certain the people of Shigaraki in the medieval period were delighted to take out pots with rich expressions on them from the kilns. To feel those emotions, I continue to face clay and fire and create pottery.

With the cooperation of MIHO MUSEUM

5 Echizen Large Jar Nejitate Technique Muromachi period (16th century) / Collection of Fukui Prefectural Pottery Museum of Ceramics

Selected by
Domoto Michihiro (Makigama sakka (wood-fired kiln artist))

After a full tour around the Fukui Prefectural Pottery Museum, which has a vast collection of medieval Echizen ware, I always end up stopping at the big jar of the Muromachi period. It's a jar big enough to fit one person. As if to consider the act of firing a greater number of sturdy wares the mission of utmost importance, potters of the Muromachi period have developed bigger kilns and high-temperature firing methods over time. Due to the nature of my job, I have a habit of making observations on the clay used, its shortcomings, and imagining the molding or firing techniques. That is why I am enlivened at the straightforwardness of yakishime wares that have been fired in large batches, rendering my inquiries useless. A few years ago, I saw an impressive work of ikebana (flower arrangement) made in the big Muromachi Ogame. Its beauty made my heart flutter, which reminded me of the reinvigorating emotion I got from my first encounter. What I am looking at, however, is merely a single aspect of the work. These pots or jars don't serve a practical function in the present day, but I believe they continue to create links with the ceaselessly expanding world resulting Journey. One thousand years. The six ancient kilns.

from the increasing variety of perspectives of people. It is through pottery that I realize I am an existence on the journey to find oneself within this realm.

**6 Ash-glazed jar with four handles with stamped chrysanthemum design, Seto ware
Kamakura and Muromachi period (Late 13th century-early 14th century)**

Selected by

Mizuno Yusuke (potter, the Setohongyogama)

I chose this pot because it is the embodiment of techniques still in use at the Setohongyogama today, such as the use of inka (flower stamp) and kushigakimon (comb-marked decoration) for its decoration and tamabuchi-style (thickened mouth rim made by rolling up the lip) for its shape. An in-depth look at the history of Hongyogama will lead one to the Koseto (literally “old Seto”) style, which is considered the beginnings of Seto ware. In the medieval period, it was the only style out of the Six Ancient Kilns to use artificial glaze to fire pottery. After a long history of producing solely unglazed wares, by the 5th century, the methods of using pottery wheels and building anagama on slopes were introduced to the Japanese via naturalized potters from the Korean peninsula. Also, it is told that craftsmen who have traveled in search of natural features well-suited to pottery making settled at Mount Sanage and Seto, an area that has been accumulating good quality clay and resources for more than 3 million years. They learned from Chinese ceramics-celadon and white porcelain-to create unique Japanese ash-glazed wares. In other words, it was through this very pot I was able to learn about all these factors that led up to my work and Seto today.

The possibility of pottery persisting one thousand years

Not describing a beautiful thing beautiful

Kurata Takashi (philosopher)

“Not describing a beautiful thing beautiful - the essence of this culture lies in the restraint of expression.” An excerpt from *Forgotten Japan*.

Okamoto Taro, who stated the quote, discovered at the root of the Japanese lifestyle culture, “moving qualities of life” and activities rooted in an area out of necessity. Let’s examine one instance.

In the dialect of Hakusan city, the word *mutsumushi* is used to describe slash - and - burn fields and their size. Interestingly, the word also implies a timescale of 25 years in its definition, which has several meanings in itself. *Mutsumushi* is an area of land farmers can use for slash-and-burn agriculture for 25 years. To begin, 25 years signify the time they use the land as a “natural resource.” This doesn’t mean they cultivate the land for the entire duration. Slash-and-burn isn’t a single occasion of burning; farmers need to move over to new areas to burn. They create a field by burning forests or mountains and use the resulting ash as a fertilizer. No other fertilizer is used, resulting in the gradual depletion of nutrition in the field as years go by. They choose which crops to grow accommodating to this change, but by the fifth year, nothing will grow. That is when they move and burn the next area. You call an area of land where one can go about this cycle five times, “one *mutsumushi*.” Why five times - 25 years after the initial burn, the woodland will have been restored to its original state and can be used as a field again after burning. In other words, the 25 years of *mutsumushi* signify the time it takes for “nature” to recover. Not only that, *mutsumushi* refers to the number of years people engage in “labor.” 25 years is the length of time an adult male is entrusted with a land until his retirement. Why 25 years - by then the child of the man will have grown old enough to take over his task. The 25 years of *mutsumushi* also represents generational replacements, in which we see a layer of “life” incorporated in the word.

Resource, nature, labor, and life. The exquisite intersecting point of these different phases create the 25 years of *mutsumushi*. Perhaps this is the definition of being rooted in the land. A sense of inevitability is at the foundation of craft, which has a long history. This is the case for the Six Ancient Kilns as well. It is indeed in need of the reevaluation today - in a way where one wouldn’t describe a beautiful thing beautiful.

Kurata Takashi

Kurata is a philosopher. He was born in Hyogo, in 1970, and graduated from the Graduate School of Human and Environmental Studies, Kyoto University. Currently, he is an associate professor at the School of Science and Technology at Meiji University Press. Kurata specializes in philosophy and environmental



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sociology. He has written the book *Intimide de MINGEI - Designing the “Beloved”* (Meiji University Press, 2015) and made an appearance as a *Mingei* guide in *Syumidoki!* - *The Mingei I Like*, broadcasted on NHK Educational TV in 2018.

Tile, a material that awakens dormant feelings

Onishi Maki (architect)

It was through an unexpected encounter that I began to incorporate tiles into my architectural designs. Mr. Mizuno of MIZUNO SEITOEI in Tokoname, whom I’d met for the first time at the party I was at, took out a wide array of tiles in blue, yellow, white, and more from the bundle wrapped in cloth he was holding under his arm and laid them on the floor saying, “It’s pretty right? I thought you might like them.” He talked about the tiles the way I imagined a merchant from a medieval market would. Each tile was closer to a piece of dishware than an architectural material. I was drawn to its subtle variations in glaze and simplicity of clay as the material - I could tell each tile was made with care.

Through this experience, I realized that I’ve been drawn to tile all along. For instance, the tiles used in the bathroom of Le Corbusier’s Villa Savoye. One can lie down on the cool surface of the curving blue tiled-bed after taking a bath. And the tiles in the staircase of Gaudi’s residential building called Casa Batlló. It is a vertically long space reminiscent of a deep well with a skylight on its uppermost section. Starting with a deep blue color on the bottom and gradually shifting to a lighter hue towards the top, the space calls to mind an experience of looking upwards to a bright surface from a seabed. The tiles in the Portuguese architect Álvaro Siza’s design of Santa Maria Church in Marco de Canaveses were beautiful as well. The simple tiles of

white glaze on red clay were attached to the walls without joints. In all of these structures, something about their texture made me want to touch them. I was impressed by how the light made minute dispersions on tile surfaces, resulting in a unique space filled with soft light.

The interesting thing about tile is that, despite its industrial qualities, it reminds one of a living thing. It can stir up the onlooker’s mind like the scales of a fish and the armor of an armadillo. Looking up at a large-scale tiled building, I feel a sense of absurdity at the infinitely continuing rows of tiles, but at the same time, believe that the act of densely lining up small objects, one after the other, is one form of activity that gives pleasure to human beings. I feel a renewed possibility towards tiles as an architectural material, which awakens feelings dormant within people.

Onishi Maki

Onishi is the co-founder of *onishimaki+hyakudayuki architects / o+h* is a partnership led by Onishi Maki and Hyakuda Yuki. She is a guest associate professor at the Y-GSA (Yokohama Graduate School of Architecture), Yokohama National University. She engages in various projects centered around the field of architecture including social welfare facilities, community centers, private residences, urban planning, and more. Some of her most prominent works include the Double Helix House and Good Job! Center KASHIBA / STUDIO.

Imagining the future of pottery

Dominick Chen (researcher)

Our family is very fond of pottery. Every time we go to a store or an antique market, we spend a good amount of time observing various works of pottery. Participating in a beginner-

level pottery workshop where I painted cups or made imitations of Jomon pottery, I was amused at the unknown life space (the idea that one's behavior is manifested solely within the factors of the current "life space") expanding within my imagination. In Yanagi Soetsu's *The Beauty of Everyday Things*, he talks about examining the "spirit" of a plate. "A plate is an object but who can say that objects don't have a spirit? Endurance, soundness, honesty, or other virtues are the kind of spirit inherent in them." The true intention behind Soetsu's statement neither lies in a sort of animistic worship nor a vain attempt to personify a plate. Rather, it refers to the importance of an individual's autonomous act of forming a relationship with an object. Instead of depending on an external reference system - as it tends to be an established order in the art world - he suggests finding the value arising out of the relationship between one's soul and the object, which is what he refers to as an object's "spirit."

This way of thinking detaches the product's user from a passive state and instead, posits them in an active one. It changes the dichotomy between the creator and user into a circular relationship. According to this thought, the user experience (UX) of a piece of dishware isn't something that designers can control but one that is autonomously created by their users. As you can grasp from this short phrase by Soetsu, "A good artisan does not pursue things beyond the nature's intentions," he stresses the importance of "being one with nature," in other words, to turn to the "unintentional" when searching for an affordance (a feature of an object that show possible actions users may take with it) in an object as an active judge. In the act of creating and communicating, disregarding the intent or deliberateness is indeed possible for the ceaseless production of pottery for everyday use rather than for the cases of special tea utensils or one-of-a-kind artworks. I believe new production methods such as the 3D printer, which expands the possibilities of altering the shapes of ready-mades, will serve as an opportunity to give birth to a new "beauty of everyday things." From there, a new horizon comes into sight, one that transcends the dichotomy between analog and digital as well as one-of-a-kind and mass-produced items.

Dominick Chen
Chen earned a Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Information Studies. He is an associate professor at Faculty of Letters, Arts and Sciences, Waseda University, the director of NPO Commonsphere (Creative Commons Japan), and the co-founder of *dividual inc.* Ltd. He was certified as a Super Creator under the IPA Unexplored IT Human Resources Development Program in 2008 and served as both a juror and Focused Issue Director for Good Design Award in 2016 and 2017.

A wish to enjoy the products of today

Koike Kazuko (creative director)

Yakimono (pottery). Perhaps it was a commonplace term used in everyday life since the medieval period. After all, the Six Ancient Kilns have been up and running in their respective areas since the Muromachi period. I also want to mention the term, *nichijyo - sahanji* (everyday occurrence, or literally "daily tea and meal"). It symbolically expresses the quotidian time of human beings through everyone's decided daily occurrences of drinking tea and eating a meal.

I get a warm feeling when I imagine people of the medieval period depending on pottery for their daily tea and meal - I wonder what kind of dishware they used for their food, in what kind of residential spaces. The literature on pottery often lists pots, mortars, and jars as popular products. The countless number of people who have eaten - in other words, lived - every day of their lives, must have used some kind of dishware to serve their rice, vegetable, fish, and such before eating. Were they flat plates? Deep bowls? Postulation alone is very interesting to me.

Today we live surrounded by an overflowing number of objects. The category of plates alone comes in all kinds of shapes and materials. I think it is possible to zero in on the role of pottery in the present day and create both necessary and acceptable contemporary wares. Perhaps they will arise out of the products currently being produced at the Six Ancient Kilns. Contemporary creators need to use preexisting materials to shape and disseminate the new possibilities of pottery. Honest craftsmanship is maintained in the present day, but I cannot interest myself in pottery that arises out of newly acquired knowledge. I also believe it is important to have a variety of sources of pottery making whether it be workshops or studios and by an anonymous person or an artist.

The most important thing is how new forms of pottery can best cater to new and optimal forms of living. Finding the perfect material - while taking into consideration the limited resources available - to give birth to a pottery product that will appeal to those who live unadorned lifestyles. I believe the Six Ancient Kilns possess many years of accumulated knowledge needed to achieve this goal. In the end, whether objects created based on the sensibilities of each moment in time will have a long life depends on their users.

Koike Kazuko
Koike is the director of the Towada Art Center. Between 1983 and 2000, she founded and directed the first alternative space in Japan called *Sagacho Exhibit Space*. From 2011, she set out to examine and showcase works, activities, and archives revolving around Japanese contemporary art as the *Sagacho archives*. Her latest book is *WHERE DID ISSEY COME FROM? - The Work of Issey Miyake (HeHe, 2017)*. She is a professor emeritus at Musashino Art University.

century. In the 15th century, everyday items such as unglazed mortars, pots, and jugs were produced. In the Azuchi-Momoyama period (1573-1603) tea bowls were created, and in the 19th century, teapots and hibachi (a Japanese heating device using charcoal as fuel) were made. From the mid-1940s, a variety of products such as tiles and architectural materials were produced.

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Journey. One thousand years. The Six Ancient Kilns

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