

Traditional Crafts

Kyoto people have a special eye for quality and artistic excellence in even daily use tools. They make the heart of people pleasant. Craftsmen have pursued the beauty in their works and even improve their skills. Kyoto's traditional works and techniques fascinate people all over the world.



■ Nishijin Weaving and Kyo Yuzen Dyeing

The history of Kyoto Nishijin weaving is longer than the history of Kyoto herself. Before the capital was moved to Kyoto, Hata Family brought the silk cultivation to Yamashiro area (south of Kyoto). It is used the technique of sakizome that they die silk first and weave the textile with them. Nishijin textiles are known for their stunning and sophisticated designs, their subtle and brilliant colors. Nishijin textile is often used for noh costumes to represents the gorgeous atmosphere. Another excellent Kyoto textile industry is Kyo yuzen. It dyes the textile separating the colors by glue called itome nori. It was started by Miyazaki Yuzensai who was a painter in Kyoto in the Edo period. It requires extraordinary skills to create fine patterns. It is said that Kyo yuzen is the best dyeing technique in the world.



■ Fans

The origin of Japanese fan dates back to the Heian period. The first fan looked very different what it looks today. The one side of thin pieces of woods were connected by thread. It was popular with women in the court. It was brought to China by monks and the form was changed into present day style there that apply the paper between the wood pieces. In the Muromachi period, those new fans came back to Japan as Chinese fan. It gradually became popular with common people in the Edo period. Fans are essential tools in noh and kyogen theatre today.

■ Kiyomizu and Kyoto Pottery

Kiyomizu and Kyoto pottery are the general terms for ceramics made in Kyoto. They used to be different, but today they are similar. The pottery industry in Kyoto started in the late Azuchi Momoyama period and its sophisticated design and technique have continued since the Edo period. Though the level of technique is improved and design is sophisticated, the careful hand making process has never changed. There are over 300 kilns in Kyoto. Because all processes are done by hand, it takes time to complete one work. However the value of Kiyomizu and Kyoto pottery is at the highest rank of Japanese pottery with its beauty and warmth of craftsmen. That obsession makes Kiyomizu and Kyoto pottery especially valuable is continued by the hand of pottery company, kilns and craftsmen.



■ Damascene

Kyoto damascene is originated in the Damascus, Syria in western Asia. It is an ancient art form in which metal patterns are imbedded in a base metal surface. It came to Japan in Nara period from China through Silk Road. It became popular in the Edo period in Kyoto. However when the government banned to possess swords in the Meiji period, the damascene industry had little demand as it was often used to decorate weapons. The damascene craftsmen, then, started to make them for accessories and fittings instead and the technique was fortunately succeeded. There are three types of damascenes depend on the material: metal, wood and pottery. The exceptional example is to be seen on the swords in Shoso-in in Nara, on the palm of the goddess statue in Yakushi-ji Temple in Nara and on the door catch of the Phoenix Hall at Byodo-in Temple in Uji.

■ Kyoto Dolls

The doll made in Kyoto and dressed kimono is called Kyo ningyo (Kyoto dolls). To complete one doll, the whole process is divided by many craftsmen: head, hairstyle, arm and leg, fittings, dressing, etc. What makes Kyoto dolls famous in the world is those sophisticated shared works. The origin of Japanese dolls dates back to the haniwa clay images and even earlier to the dogu figures which were used as talismans to ward off calamity in later periods. The gradual development of these primitive figures eventually resulted in the guardian type figures identified with Japanese dolls today girls play with them. During the Heian Period, playing house with dolls became a popular past time among the children of the nobility. This identification of dolls with children can be seen to be the origin of the Kyo-ningyo, which eventually came to be a national archetype for the Japanese dolls.



■ Woodblock Prints

The origin of woodblock printing was introduced to Japan from Korea in the mid 6th century. Traditional woodblock printing is completed by three craftsmen: painter, carver and printer. The technique, the oldest in the world, was brought from China in the Nara period. Woodblock printing of Kyoto has developed from the book publishing culture. Modern-style publishing began to flourish as an industry in the Edo Period, and woodblock printing played a big part in the new publishing world. Woodblock print started to be used for many pictures in the book. Notably, Ihara Saikaku's now legendary work, "The Life of an Amorous Man," was published. Later in the Meiji period, the technique was developed and it was applied to printing on the surface of fans. Kyoto's woodblock print can show very fine, thin lines and those delicate works attract people.