

The History of Kyoto's Traditional Industries

京都の伝統産業の歴史

Kyoto's traditional industries have supported Japanese culture. Goods for daily use such as Kyo-yaki and Kiyomizu-yaki ceramics or Kyo-shikki lacquerware have enhanced the traditional food cultures of Kyoto cuisine and tea. Kyo-sashimono woodcraft chests of drawers, Kyo-takekogeï bamboo crafts, Kyo-sensu folding fans, Kyo-uchiwa round fans, Kyo-hamono knives and Karakami paper have all brought utility and beauty to everyday life. There are also craft works related to the religions of Buddhism and Shintoism such as Kyo-ningyo dolls of Buddhist statues and sculptures of deities, Kyo-hyogu mountings for Buddhist scriptures, Kyo-but sudan Buddhist altars and Kyo-but sugu Buddhist paraphernalia, juzu beads and Shinto costumes and furnishings. In the area of garments and ornaments, there are Nishijin-ori woven textiles, Kyo-yuzen and Kyo-komon dyed textiles, Kyo-kuromontsukizome black dyeing and Kyo-kumihimo braided cords. Landscape gardening and Kyoto stone crafts are industries connected to residential environments.

The origin of these traditional industries is said to have begun with silk raising and weaving, introduced by the Hata clan from China. In each period of history, influential figures have been their biggest users within Japan; emperors and court nobles since the Heian period, samurai families from the Kamakura to the Edo period, and shrines and temples who gathered followers of their faiths.

In the Heian period (794–1185), government-managed craft workshops used to produce a variety of goods including textile fabrics, folding screens, folding fans, lacquerware, metalwork and paper used for religious texts. In order to maintain the buildings and costumes of the imperial court, shrines and temples, a diverse and large number of craftsmen were required, leading to the specialization of their skills and the division of their labor. It was during this time that craft skills developed for events at Toji Temple, Byodo-in Temple and Kitano Tenmangu Shrine; for the Aoi and Gion Festivals; and for costumes and tools used in the performing arts. With the disturbances of war and the weakening of the imperial court by the end of the Heian period, craftsmen made the move from government to private workshops or to the provinces, where their skills began to spread. From the Kamakura (1185–1333) to the Muromachi period (1336–1573), the establishment of Nanzenji Temple and Tenryuji Temple led to the development of craft skills related to the work of Buddhist image artisans, such as cutting tools, mountings, Buddhist religious objects, landscape gardening and stone lanterns. A wealthy merchant class grew with the rise of the traditional industries. It enjoyed considerable economic power, but damages from war, typhoons and earthquakes meant having to rebuild each time. In the Momoyama period (1573–1603), Kodaïji Temple's decorative lacquerware became popular due to being favored by military leader, Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Juko-in Temple, a sub-temple of the Zen Buddhist Daitokuji Temple, had deep ties to samurai families and the tea ceremony; it was given artworks by Kano School artists who had the confidence of the samurai. Meanwhile, many family temples of Rinpa School artists were of the Nichiren sect of Buddhism, which had set up an autonomous government in league with the merchant class as an act of self-protection against its enemies. The most famous family temple was Honpoji Temple, where works by Hon'ami Koetsu, the craftsman considered to have founded the Rinpa School, and the painter, Hasegawa Tohaku, remain. In the Edo period (1603–1868), Hon'ami Koetsu was involved with "sagabon", elegantly printed books using wooden movable type, whose technology was used in the mass production of Ukiyoe woodblock prints. When the shogunate government relocated to Edo (Tokyo), Kyoto, with its population of over 400,000, was still the center of Japanese culture and maintained its industries. The Rinpa School popularized the craftwork arts of Kyo-yaki and Kiyomizu-yaki ceramics and uchiwa round fans. Kyoto, renowned as the birthplace of fashionable Yuzen dyeing, became a tourist destination where folding fans, dolls and wrapping cloths grew popular. From the Edo to the Meiji period (1868–1912), heightened demand for fine arts from the shogunate government, feudal lords and wealthy merchants meant that many metalwork and lacquerware craftsmen made decorative fittings, metal crafts and enamelware for furnishings, arms and armor, small object cases (suspended from obi sashes) and swords. After the London International Exposition of 1862, Japonism, the study of Japanese art, became a trend in Europe and America. The artistic value of woodblock prints and handicraft goods was highly regarded, leading to a flood of such objects out of Japan to foreign countries.

Japanese culture is now at a new generation, with growing attention from overseas. The history of "Monodzukuri", which honors continuation, innovation and trust, will carry on into the future by craftsmen who have long defended the methods of tradition.