

A Traditional View on Japanese Pottery

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It is generally considered that there are three important factors in the creation process of Japanese pottery: kiln, material (clay) and form (potter). Only when all these three factors are highly achieved and well balanced a resultant piece is considered to have high artistic value. Sometimes kiln is considered to be the most important of the three, which means that the baking process determines the overall artistic value of the piece. The extreme example of this emphasis of the kiln can be observed in non-glazed (naturally glazed) pottery, a type of Japanese traditional ceramics most typical example in Bizen. In these cases, the "natural spirituality" of the pots is so emphasized that it is tried that the intentions of potters are excluded as much as possible.

This "natural-spirituality" can be traced back to Jomon era, around 12,000 BC. The earthenware in this era (Jomon Earthenware), which is now considered to be one of the oldest earthenware in the world, is used as in religious ceremonies and thus regarded as something sacred. In Shinto, a traditional Japanese religion, Jomon style earthenware is used in religious activities. Because of this relationship between this sort of earthenware and the religion, this type of earthenware is considered to have "natural-spirituality", rejecting the artificial "form" imported by human beings (especially by the eyes of human beings). The same interpretation can, in fact, be recognized in the structure of Shinto-shrine.

In many Japanese traditional crafts or constructions, it is said that spirituality is put above the artificial form or structure. It is not difficult to explain the simple structure and gray-based coloring of many shrines and temples from this "spirituality". Rejecting clear forms and colorings are interpreted as the manifestation of this "spirituality".

The same mentality is observed in the people who appreciate the beauty of naturally-glazed ceramics. In the traditional firing with firewood, natural glaze comes from the firing point. As a result, pieces far from the firing point in the kiln, and the far side of the pieces do not have a natural glaze. As a result, the symmetry of the wheeling is destroyed and negated. This also means the exclusion of the intention of potters.

At the end of 16th century, this natural-spirituality is highly praised in *wabicha* (tea ceremony) advocated by Sen no Rikyu. Rikyu claimed that there is special beauty in ordinal ceramics in Korea and Japan, which is simple but extraordinary. He explains this beauty with the "natural-spirituality" which exists outside human intention. Since then simple naturally glazed pots have been used for tea ceremony as well as fully colored pots originated in China. And in the tradition of the tea ceremony, these two are uniformly appreciated from the point of view of natural-

spirituality; the former as a result of the negation of human intention and the latter at the extreme of human intention.

This mentality observed in the tea ceremony, i.e. trying to regard everything from the point of view of spirituality, in fact, is omnipresent in Japanese who appreciate traditional Japanese ceramic of any type. In this sense, what many of Japanese try to find out in traditional Japanese ceramics is a sense of catalysis supported by this tradition.



Clockwise from the left: "Bizen-style Wide-mouthed Bulbous," (w)21.0 -(d)21.0 -(h)31.0 cm, stoneware with natural wood ash, sesame seed fired decoration, Bizen traditional way fired to 1300 degrees C. oxidation, eight day firing, Collection of The British Museum (U.K.), 1996. Top right: "Bizen-style Cylindrical Lidded Pottery Mizusashi," (w)19.0 -(d)19.0 -(h)17.0 cm, thrown and altered stoneware with natural wood ash, sesame seed fired decoration, Bizen traditional way fired to 1300 degrees C. oxidation, eight-day firing. Collection of The British Museum (U.K.), 1996. Bottom right: "Fire Change Spherical Lidded Pottery Mizusashi," (w)19.3 -(d)19.3 -(h)17.8 cm, thrown and altered stoneware with natural wood ash, sesame seed fired decoration, Bizen traditional way fired to 1300 degrees C. oxidation, eight-day firing. Published in Amedeo Salamoni, Foreword by Jack Troy, *Wood-Fired Ceramics: 100 Contemporary Artists*, pp.90-91, Schiffer Publishing, Ltd., 4880 Lower Vallery Road, Atglen, PA 19310, U.S.A., 2014. 1996. Published in Amedeo Salamoni, Foreword by Jack Troy, *Wood-Fired Ceramics: 100 Contemporary Artists*.

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