



Photo: Iwachu Co., Ltd.

An iron kettle for boiling water

Japan-made Ironware Making Its Mark Worldwide

***Nambu Tekki*, or Nambu ironware, a traditional craft from Iwate Prefecture, boasts significant popularity worldwide, especially in Europe. Elaborately crafted by artisans, each piece embodies the allure and advantages of Japanese traditional craftsmanship. (Text: Kato Yukiko)**

N*ambu Tekki* represents a traditional craft of Iwate Prefecture in the Tohoku region, consisting of utensils such as pots and kettles crafted from iron as the primary material. In the 17th century, the lord of the Nambu domain¹, headquartered in Morioka City, invited artisans from Yamanashi and Kyoto to start ironware production. The lord, who excelled in the tea ceremony, had tea kettles made for the practice, and as the tea ceremony progressed, the kettles gained nationwide fame as *Nambu Kama* kettles. Later, an iron kettle that could be easily used by attaching handles and a spout to a pot was devised and it became more widespread.

Ironware made not only in Morioka but also in Oshu City, renowned for its longstanding production of everyday household castings, is referred to as *Nambu Tekki*. In 1975, this form of ironware was designated as

a traditional craft by the Japanese government.

Takahashi Kiyomitsu of Iwachu Co., Ltd., which produces and sells Nambu ironware, discusses its advantages: “Due to its high thermal retention, iron keeps boiled water warm for an extended period. Also, it is believed that water boiled in an iron kettle is smoother, enhancing the flavor of tea or coffee. Since iron enters the water, it gradually restores the body with this essential mineral, addressing a common deficiency in daily nutrition.”

Nambu ironware is finely crafted by qualified traditional artisans², who perform most of the 100 or so processes by hand. They carefully adjust the thickness to ensure usability, treating each piece with the same care and attention to detail as if creating a work of art. Users can also enjoy watching the way the appearance of Nambu ironware changes with use over time,” says



Photo: PIXTA

The kettle used in the tea ceremony is stationary, with water scooped using a ladle.

Takahashi.

In recent years, Nambu ironware has become popular overseas as well. “About 30 years ago, when we exhibited Nambu ironware at a trade show in Europe, we were challenged to produce colorful *kyusu*³ teapots by a renowned French tea maker,” explains Takahashi. “It took several years to develop the new coloring technique, but this led to the popularity of iron *kyusu* teapots in Europe. Afterward, its popularity extended to the North American market, which also prompted a reevaluation in Japan.”


While tradition is upheld, efforts are made to craft products that seamlessly blend into modern life. This includes a wide range of Nambu ironware, from *kyusu* teapots to cooking utensils like pots and frying pans, as well as small items like incense burners⁴. Users discover that their affection for Nambu ironware, renowned for its durability and longevity, deepens with each use. Exploring production sites to find a personal favorite is also a highlight of the journey. 



Photo: Iwachu Co., Ltd.

Colorful *kyusu* teapots are popular items overseas. Many are displayed in the company’s store.

1. Another name for the Morioka domain, headquartered in Morioka City, Iwate Prefecture. It is also referred to as the Nambu domain, named after the lord of the domain, the Nambu clan.
2. This system of qualification, born in 1974 with the aim of expanding the demand for traditional crafts industries, is a national qualification that focuses on preserving region-specific traditional crafts, refining techniques, and passing down these skills to future generations.
3. Simply meaning “teapot” in Japanese, the *kyusu* is a small utensil typically equipped with a handle for pouring, used to steep Japanese tea leaves and extract tea.
4. A tool used to heat incense or other scented solids to release pleasant aromas.

Photos: Iwachu Co., Ltd.



Above left: It is believed that if you boil water in an iron kettle, you can take in iron from the water.

Below left: Its appeal lies not only in its traditional craftsmanship but also in its exceptional design that fits perfectly with modern living.

Below right: The intricate granular pattern on the surface is known as the *Arare* (dotted) pattern.

Photos: Iwachu Co., Ltd.



Left: Mixing clay with mud-like casting sand to create a mold for casting

Right: Pouring molten iron, melted at 1,400°C to 1,500°C in an electric furnace, into the mold