Distribution of Medieval Ceramics in North-East
Littoral Area on the Sea of Japan

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Although the data have so far been accumulated on the distribution of medieval ceramic wares by their respective production sites, it has not yet attained such a development stage as to define and evaluate the distribution stratum, and to elucidate the locality of economic specialization structure reflected on the constitution of ceramics, all throughout the comprehensive analysis of the constitution by time, type and production site, of the ceramics to be found in such medieval vestiges as villages, manor houses, tombs, harbors and so forth.

This paper is an attempt to consider, from the viewpoint of social strata of the possessors of ceramics and in grasping them by development stages, their wide distribution in and between the regions, in limiting our study to civilian goods which are so difficult to seize by philological researches as well as in quantifying, as far as possible, the actual state and characteristics of the constitution of ceramics, especially the medieval ones to be found in a wide variety of vestiges dispersed in the field of the north-eastern littoral districts on the Sea of Japan.

In order to investigate into the distribution of medieval ceramics over the said districts during the five centuries from the middle 11th c. up to the end of the 16th c., we have divided this duration of developmental evolution into three stages six periods drawing dividing lines at the beginning of the 14th century when “tamasu” ceramics enlarged their market all over the littoral area on the Sea of Japan, and at the beginning of the 16th century when “Echizen” ceramics will be distributed all over in place of the “tamasu” ceramics whose kilns would at last be abolished. In the first stage, in the middle of the 12th century, various ceramic kilns were opened in Kaga and Echizen provinces as well as “tamasu” and tamasu-descent kilns, thereby forming labor division spheres by province and by a unit of several provinces respectively. Thereafter up untill the 13th century, the tamasu kilns and diverse tamasu-descendant kilns rivaled
each other in the Noto Peninsula and the east region thereto. This type of
dual structure of distribution would be laterally supported by coexistence of
remote distribution to be assumed from the remains of sunken ships and the
distribution by cargo-vessels going all along the littoral districts.

Next, in the later medieval age from the 14th to 15th centuries (the second
stage), the tamasu ceramics will occupy about one quarter of the Archipelago
of Japan as a whole, as their commercial territory, during which the ceramic
for daily use (earthen ware pots, bowls and lipped bowls) were distributed
even into the lower social stratum (lower class of farmers) in farm villages.

Increased demands for cinerary urns by the lords of the manor and by the upper
social class in farm villages might be one of the causes of increased distribution
volume of ceramics. This phenomenon is to be considered as the other face of
the establishment of large markets in inland regions, the production development
by division of labor, the progress of the maritime transportation between remote
countries and the appearance of a series of nuclei harbors and their surrounding
towns the most flourished in the first half of the 15th century as the bases
thereof.

Abundant consumption in Chinese and Japanese ceramics seen in the vestiges
at certain harbor towns and temple surrounding towns, such unearthed high-
quality Chinese ceramics as “Sierhu”, “Meiping”, and “Shuizhu” which are to
be counted as one of the status symbols for the social stratus of loads of manor,
imply, different from the constitution in common farm villages, the enhanced
distribution economy through intermediary of “Toimaru” merchants.

It is expected henceforth that the research and investigations into the life
culture of common people will further be deepened by elucidating varied phases
of material civilization made possible by the development of the archaeology
on medieval ages.