

Traditional Craft Designated by the Governor of Nagano Prefecture

Ajima-Kasa Umbrella

Designated on September 20, 2024



[Production area]

Takagi Village,
Shimoina-gun,
Nagano Prefecture

Summary

The traditional techniques for crafting Ajima-kasa umbrellas have been handed down over 300 years since the 1700s (mid Edo era) in Ajima district (present Takagi Village, Shimoina-gun). Ajima-kasa are produced using various materials collected in the area such as bamboos for the ribs, washi Japanese paper for rain protection, lathes (made of Japanese snowbell) to connect the ribs and red iron oxide to improve durability. It is said that “every rib requires a unique technique.” Umbrella designs vary greatly and are beautiful, reflecting the unique styles of their creators. Ajima-kasa are used not only for daily items but for tourism and events.

History

There are two theories for their origin: when a Kyoto umbrella maker fell ill with a stomachache while trying to pass through Namiai Checkpoint in 1737 (the mid Edo era), an official there kindly cared for him. As a token of his gratitude, he taught them how to make umbrellas: around the same time, an official, through a woodturner, secured subcontracting work from an umbrella lathe maker in Gifu Shinmachi (Gifu Prefecture) and began making umbrellas as a side job.

With the encouragement of Mr. Chiku who ruled the area, the production of Ajima-kasa increased in the late Edo era. The primary producers transitioned from samurai to villagers, and the distribution network broadened. In the late Meiji era, the annual output was 300,000 units. While demand slightly declined due to economic downturns during the Taisho era, the industry continued to thrive until around 1945. After the chaos of the post-war period subsided in the late 1940s, demand began to decline.

With the rise in popularity of Western-style umbrellas in the 1950s and a decline in the use of traditional Japanese umbrellas among young people, by 1970 only one umbrella maker, whose business had continued since the Edo era, remained. However, thanks to local support, the business has continued to this day, and new entrepreneurs have even emerged.

Contact information:

Ajima-Kasa Promotion Association

(Secretariat: Takagi Village Office Industry Promotion Division)

6664 Takagi Village, Shimoina-gun, Nagano 395-1107

Tel: 0265-33-5141

