

Tajima Yahei and Seiryō-iku

Tajima Yahei (1822–1898) was a key figure in Japanese sericulture during the late 1800s. He is best remembered for creating the *seiryō-iku* method of silkworm rearing. This method, which incorporated a monitor roof to improve ventilation, was first tested in 1863 when he built the Tajima Yahei Sericulture Farm. Yahei's design would be the dominant model of sericulture farmhouse construction for the next decade.

Yahei's books, *Yōsan shinron* (A New Theory of Sericulture) and its sequel, *Zoku yōsan shinron* (A New Theory of Sericulture, Continued), spread his teachings across Japan. By 1873, Yahei had become prosperous selling silkworm eggs and several times between 1879 and 1882 he even took his eggs to sell directly to silkworm farmers in Italy.

In the 1860s and 1870s the silkworm population in France and Italy, Europe's major silk-producing nations, had nearly been obliterated by two diseases: *pébrine*, or "pepper disease," which is caused by a parasitic fungus that prevents silkworms from spinning cocoons, and *bouffée flacherie*, which makes silkworms wilt and perish. Prices for silkworm eggs increased exponentially across Europe, and raw silk and silkworm eggs were in high demand at the silk markets of Yokohama. Yahei and many others, including the Japanese government, prospered from this demand.