

Takayama Chōgorō and His Legacy

Takayama Chōgorō (1830–1886) had a lasting impact on the development, modernization, and commercial success of Japan's sericulture industry. He developed a novel method for raising silkworms that he called *seion-iku* and that stabilized and improved cocoon yields. He also contributed to advances in improving silkworm breeds, cocoon quality, and thread quality.

Chōgorō was born in 1830 in the village of Takayama, part of the present-day city of Fujioka. As a former samurai, he lost his hereditary stipend a few years after the Meiji Restoration (1868) swept away the samurai government of the Tokugawa shogunate. He turned to raising silkworms as a way to survive but for six years failed to produce a viable batch. Chōgorō finally succeeded in his seventh year of raising silkworms, and in 1883 he published a book explaining his methods.

In 1884, Chōgorō opened Takayama-sha to promote and develop his sericulture methods in Japan. His final message to his students before his death in 1886 urged his countrymen to “keep researching *seion-iku* and spread its teaching to every corner of Japan and keep improving sericulture for the benefit of our entire nation and to increase our communal happiness.” Chōgorō's final statement became Takayama-sha's guiding principle. The company sent its teachers throughout the Japanese Empire, and by the early 1900s, Japan was producing around 60 to 70 percent of the world's raw silk. When he died at age 56, he could not have known of the lasting influence he would have on Japan's economic development.