

The Innovations of Kimura Kuzō

Born in the village of Takayama in 1845, Takayama Minosuke (1845–1898) was the youngest brother of Takayama Chōgorō (1830–1886). Like his brother, he would become a key figure in the growth of Japan's silk industry during the Meiji era (1868–1912). In 1867, he married Kimura Shimako (dates unknown), changed his name to Kimura Kuzō, and was charged with restoring the Kimura family to greatness by his father-in-law, Kimura Katsugorō (dates unknown).

The brothers worked together to develop new systems for rearing silkworms. Like Chōgorō, Kuzō became deeply absorbed by the challenge. In 1861 catastrophe struck the Japanese sericulture industry when most of the silkworm population in the country was wiped out by a fungal disease. The brothers, however, refused to give up. They reintroduced healthy strains, and slowly their business grew.

When Chōgorō announced his *seion-iku* method, Kuzō announced his similar *ippa ondan-iku* method. In 1877 Kuzō assembled a group of like-minded colleagues to form the *Yōsan Kairyō Kyōshin-sha*, which roughly translates as the Silkworm Production Improvement Competitive Company. His plan was to spread his methods of silkworm cultivation and introduce new types of silkworm to people across the Japanese Empire. He set up his main office and a training school in present-day Honjō, Saitama Prefecture.

Kuzō visited Europe in 1899 to learn about sericulture there and used what he learned to improve silkworm storage in Honjō. Kuzō helped revolutionize Japan's silk industry, bringing it into the modern era. Yet his success was not achieved without considerable challenges. In his early years, skeptics accused him of witchcraft, and he was supposedly shot at with a hunting rifle. Fortunately for Gunma and the nation, the shooter missed.