

【Kotō Ware】

Kotō ware, a style of ceramics that emerged in the Hikone area in 1829, is known for elegant, high-quality porcelain. The name *kotō* means “east-of-the-lake,” a reference to Hikone’s location to the east of Lake Biwa, but it is sometimes referred to as “phantom” (*maboroshi no*) pottery in recognition of the rarity and quality of its pieces. The ceramic style is characterized by porcelain painted with celadon or gold leaf, as well as Chinese-style blue and white.

Kotō ware was originally developed in 1829 by clothing merchants, and in 1842 its production was officially sponsored by Ii Naoaki (1794–1850), who collected Chinese instruments and was said to have a keen artistic eye. Kotō ware represents one of the many contributions that the Ii family has made to the promotion of classical and traditional Japanese art. The style’s development can largely be credited to the efforts of Ii Naosuke (1815–1860), who became head of the Ii family in 1850. Naosuke expanded the scale of production and invited master artisans to Hikone in order to improve the quality of Kotō ware. The decade-long period he spent as head of the Ii family is considered to be the golden age of Kotō ware.

Ii Naosuke was born the fourteenth male of his generation, and as there was little expectation that he would ever become successor to the head of the family, he spent his youth living in quiet seclusion. However, the thirteen siblings who preceded Naosuke died or were married into other families, and Naosuke was given the lordship. Kotō ware flourished under his support, but after his assassination in 1860, the family fortunes declined, and the production of Kotō ware ended in 1895.