

Kaba-zaiku: Crafting with Cherry Bark

Kaba-zaiku, or cherry bark work, uses cherry bark as a covering for practical and decorative items. The technique is believed to have been brought to Kakunodate from northern Akita during the Tenmei era (1781–1789) by Fujimura Hikoroku, a North Satake clan retainer who ruled the castle town of Kakunodate.

Initially it was mainly low-ranking Kakunodate samurai who engaged in cherry bark craft as an extra source of income, but after the feudal system was abolished in the early Meiji era (1868–1912), former samurai turned to the craft as a new way to earn a living.

As the industry grew and became more organized, wholesalers emerged, and techniques evolved. This continued through the Taisho era (1912–1926) and prewar and wartime Showa era (1926–1945), laying the foundation for today's cherry bark work.

During those years, cherry bark work became known beyond Akita Prefecture's borders through trade shows and offerings to Japan's imperial family. In 1976, it was designated as a traditional protected *kogei* craft, a first for Akita.

In Kakunodate craftspeople mainly employ bark from *oyama-zakura* cherry trees, using three main techniques: *kata-mono*, where cherry bark is adhered to a wooden mold to make items such as cylindrical tea canisters; *kiji-mono*, a technique to make box-shaped items such as inkstone cases and tables; and *tatami-mono*, where many layers of polished bark are glued together before being carved and polished to make small cases, brooches, pendants, and similar items.