

Takayama-sha Sericulture School

Painting of Takayama-sha

A silk painting by Gunma artist Iwasaki Hanko (1881–1952) shows Takayama-sha Sericulture School at its height in the early decades of the twentieth century. The site was the home of the farmer Takayama Chogoro (1830–1886), who founded the school, and his ancestors.

The painting features not only the Takayama-sha complex, but also the wooded terrain and hillside behind. It shows the ramp leading from the front gate, which is still the primary access to the site.

Main Buildings

In the foreground is the *nagayamon*, a structure combining an entranceway and space for storage or accommodations for people of low status, which was built in 1687. *Nagayamon* were common features in the compounds of wealthy farmers until well into the twentieth century. A couple of small, thatched storage sheds can be seen attached to one end of the *nagayamon*.

At the center of the painting is the main school building. This was the family home, which Chogoro rebuilt to his own design based on his *seion-iku* (“clean and warm nurturing”) method of silkworm cultivation. *Seion-iku* involved controlling ventilation, temperature, and humidity to produce healthy silkworms, which are key to the production of high-quality raw silk.

The painting shows the three air vent cupolas on the roof and ample windows that helped assure suitable temperature, humidity level, and airflow. The main roof is brown, indicating that it was covered with wooden shingles, whereas the cupolas have tile roofs.

Outbuildings

Almost hidden behind the main school building is the *takiya*, a building that contained a kitchen and bathhouse for use by the students. It was built in 1894 and is one of the few remaining buildings on the site. The tiled-roofed outhouse just to the right of the *takiya* is also original. Seen in front of the outhouse is a building with many windows and air vent cupolas that served as a laboratory. Today, only its foundations remain.

Behind the outhouse and bathhouse, at the back of the compound, the painting shows a storehouse that no longer exists. There was a large subterranean space in the foundations that was used to store mulberry leaves for feeding to the silkworms. Keeping the leaves underground ensured that they stayed relatively green and fresh until they were needed.

To the left of the storehouse is the dormitory where students from around Japan, as well as parts of the Korean Peninsula and China, lived while studying at Takayama-sha. Next to the dormitory is the Takayama family shrine.

At the far left is a two-story fireproof storehouse (*kura*). Many Japanese farms had such warehouses, with thick plaster walls that kept the contents cool and dry. They were often used for storing the family’s most treasured objects when not in use, for example, heirlooms and works of art. These items, along with seasonal clothing, were kept in the storehouse until needed. The painting shows that this storehouse, no longer extant, was quite large, with at least two rooms on the ground floor.

In the corner of the complex, to the left of the *nagayamon* gatehouse, is a small shingle-roofed building used for raising silkworms.