

History of Kobeigama

Kobeigama was founded in 1804 by Kōbei Katō I (1755–1815), who established the kiln by supplying tableware to Edo Castle. Since then, Kobeigama's subsequent generations of ceramics masters have greatly influenced the development of Mino ware through the introduction of new styles and techniques. In recognition of this continuing legacy, the name Kōbei Katō has been adopted by many subsequent heads of the family.

Under the first three generations of leadership after Kōbei Katō I, Kobeigama mainly produced *sometsuke*, a Chinese-influenced style of indigo blue ornamentation on white porcelain. Kōbei Katō V (1893–1982) expanded production into other Chinese styles, including celadon and *kinrande* (gold-leaf overglaze). This departure from previous generations laid the foundation for Kobeigama's culture of innovation. Kōbei Katō V also spent 23 years as the director of the Gifu Prefectural Pottery Research Institute, where his work developing new techniques and training young artists established him as “the father of modern Mino ware.”

Takuo Katō (1917–2005), the sixth-generation family head, rediscovered *sansai*, or “three-color,” glazing techniques. This earned him the designation of Living National Treasure in 1995. Takuo Katō also had a deep interest in Persian ceramics. Through extensive research, he was able to re-create low-temperature glazes, such as those used for lusterware and Persian blue. His son, Kōbei Katō VII (1945–), also focused on lusterware, applying his father's glazing technique to distinctly modern forms.

The current, eighth-generation head of Kobeigama, Ryōtarō Katō (1974–), has brought the kiln's development full circle by focusing on late sixteenth-century Mino ware, such as Shino, Oribe, and Seto-guro.