

Metal Chasing (*Chōkin*)

Chōkin refers to a variety of decorative chasing techniques used in metalwork. These include specialized methods of engraving, carving, hammering, and inlay. They were collectively designated an Important Intangible Cultural Heritage in 1955.

Early chasing techniques were imported from continental Asia during the Yayoi period (300 BCE–300 CE) and evolved alongside Japanese metallurgy as a way of ornamenting both ritual and functional objects. A shift towards purely artistic applications happened in the late nineteenth century, when the wearing of swords was banned by the new Meiji government and metal production became more mechanized. Metalworkers turned their skills to art instead, finding an international market eager for all kinds of Japanese crafts.

Chōkin encompasses specialized techniques for line engraving, relief carving, and openwork, but the technique most associated with Ishikawa Prefecture is inlay, in which softer metals, like gold and silver, are embedded in harder base metals. The local style is called *kaga zōgan* (Kaga inlay), named after the domain that preceded the modern-day prefecture. It is distinguished partly by the way the inlaid metal is held in place. The artisan cuts into the base metal at an angle so that the bottom of the cavity is wider than the opening. When the inlay is hammered in, it spreads into this indentation while the base metal overhang is pressed down over it.

The Ishikawa Prefectural Museum of Art holds many pieces demonstrating *chōkin* techniques, including some of the *zōgan* metal stirrups that were the pride of Kaga domain.