

Kaga Domain Workshop (Osaikusho)

The Kaga Domain Workshop (Osaikusho) was a crafts workshop established in the late sixteenth century and operated by Kaga domain (present-day Ishikawa and Toyama Prefectures). The workshop was patronized by the region's powerful Maeda family, and it contributed significantly to the development of highly skilled artisans, crafts, and decorative arts until it closed in 1868.

The workshop's original purpose—like that of similar workshops in other domains—was to manage and repair weapons and armor during the decades of countrywide warfare that preceded the Edo period (1603–1867). After the final battle ended in 1615, stability and peace ensued, which meant there was less need to craft or repair weapons and armor.

Maeda Toshitsune (1594–1658), the third lord of Kaga domain, changed the workshop's focus to the advancement of decorative arts and crafts. Under Toshitsune's influence, the workshop was formally established as the Osaikusho, and artisans of every type were drawn to the growing Kanazawa castle town.

Maeda Tsunanori (1643–1724), the fifth lord of Kaga domain, receives much of the credit for advancing craft techniques in Kaga during the 1600s. Raised by his grandfather Toshitsune, Tsunanori was enthusiastic about the arts. To encourage their development, Tsunanori had artisans live near the workshop. Craft techniques had previously been kept as family or trade secrets, but craftsmen of all disciplines—lacquer, painting, metalworking, and many others—gathered and collaborated at the Kaga Domain Workshop. Their combined efforts enabled the creation of many of Kaga's most superb pieces. Tsunanori also rewarded the artisans when they produced particularly high-quality items.

In addition to their main crafts, many of the Osaikusho artisans worked to excel at cultural pursuits that the Maedas favored, such as noh theater and tea ceremony.