

Kaga Domain and the Maeda Family Cultural Policy

The area now known as Ishikawa Prefecture was once a part of Kaga domain—one of about 250 relatively autonomous regions under the authority of the shogun during the Edo period (1603–1867). Kaga was governed by 14 lords of the Maeda family from 1583 until the abolition of the domain system in 1871. Thanks to the family's strong commitment to fostering Kaga's traditional arts, the Maedas' legacy remains alive and well in the cultural life of Ishikawa.

Kaga domain was a large and highly productive agricultural region. Because a domain's wealth was determined by the volume of crops—particularly rice—that it produced, the Maedas' income was second only to the aggregate income of the shogunate itself.

Before the start of the Edo period, Japan had endured centuries of conflict among independent warlords who had funded and waged war with their own armies. At the end of the sixteenth century, the Tokugawa family rose to ascendancy and established a shogunal government based in Edo. The Tokugawas were well aware that greater wealth meant more resources to recruit and equip troops, and that wealthy domain lords like the Maedas could pose a significant threat should they decide to revoke their allegiance and funnel their wealth into rebellion.

The Maedas, too, worried their wealth might lead the shogun to view them as political rivals. As a result, they embarked on a shrewd political course: to invest heavily in non-military pursuits like noh theater, the decorative arts, and tea ceremony. This policy kept the family in the shogun's good graces, giving them access to government posts and transforming Kanazawa into a regional hub despite its distance from the capital. At the same time, developing cultural influence was a peaceful way to assert the domain's independence and offset the control of the shogunate.

The Maeda cultural policy can broadly be categorized as twofold: collection and cultivation. Accumulating fine works of art lent prestige to a domain lord. While this was a common pursuit among the samurai class, the deep pockets of the Maedas allowed them to outspend their rivals, and many masterpieces from around Japan ended up in their possession. The Maedas were not satisfied, however, with simply collecting. They made the promotion of local arts and crafts a fundamental part of their domain management. They attracted many of the country's finest artisans to Kaga by offering generous stipends, patronage, and land. Many of the crafts for which Ishikawa is

famous, such as Kaga *yūzen* silk dyeing, were established by artisans from Kyoto and Edo (now Tokyo) who moved to Kanazawa at the Maedas' invitation.

One of their most influential acts was to turn a former armor repair workshop at Kanazawa Castle into a multidiscipline crafts workshop called the Kaga Domain Workshop (Osaikusho). With the financial support of successive domain lords, artists honed their skills, trained successors, and collaborated on boundary-pushing projects and masterworks. The fifth Maeda lord, Maeda Tsunanori (1643–1724), initiated the creation of a wide-ranging compendium of contemporary craft samples from around the country. Known as the Hyakkō Hishō, it helped to educate and inspire artisans at the Kaga Domain Workshop. Many key techniques that define Ishikawa's lacquerware, metalwork, and woodwork today emerged from this innovative institution.