Varieties of Koi

Koi varieties are distinguished by coloration, patterning, and scalation. Some of the major colours are white, black, red, yellow, blue, and cream. While the possible colour variations are virtually limitless, breeders have identified and named a number of specific categories. The most popular category is Gosanke, which is made up of the Kohaku, Taisho Sanshoku, and Showa Sanshoku varieties.

New koi varieties are still being actively developed. Ghost koi were developed in the 1980s, and have become very popular in the United Kingdom. There are a hybrid of wild carp and Ogon koi, and are distinguished by their metallic scales. Butterfly koi (also known as Longfin koi, or Dragon Carp) were also developed in the 1980s, and are notable for their long and flowing fins. They are hybrids of koi with Asian carp. Butterfly koi and Ghost koi are considered by some to be not true Nishikigoi.

The major named varieties include:

- **Kōhaku** (紅白) - A white-skinned koi, with large red markings on the top. The name means "red and white;" kohaku was the first ornamental variety to be established in Japan (late 19th century).

- **Taishō Sanshoku** (or Taisho Sanke) (大正三色) Very similar to the Kohaku, except for the addition of small black markings called sumi (墨). This variety was first exhibited in 1914 by the koi breeder, Gonzo Hiroi, during the reign of the Taisho Emperor. In America, the name is often abbreviated to just "Sanke". The kanji, 三色, may be read as either sanshoku or as sanke.
• **Shōwa Sanshoku** (or Showa Sanke) (昭和三色) A black koi with red (hi 赤) and white (shiroji 白地) markings. The first Showa Sanke was exhibited in 1927, during the reign of the Showa Emperor. In America, the name is often abbreviated to just Showa. The amount of shiroji on Showa Sanke has increased in modern times (Kindai Showa 近代昭和), to the point that it can be difficult to distinguish from Taisho Sanke. The kanji, 三色, may be read as either sanshoku or as sanke.
• **Tanchō (丹頂)** - Any koi with a solitary red patch on its head. The fish may be a **Tancho Showa, Tancho Sanke**, or even Tancho Goshiki. Named for the Japanese crane (Grus japonensis) which also has a red spot on its head.

• **"Chagoi"** lit. 'Tea-collared' koi ranging in colour from pale olive-drab green or brown to copper or bronze and more recently darker, subdued orange shades. Famous for its docile, friendly personality and large size, it is considered a sign of good luck among koi keepers.
• **Asagi** (浅葱) - A koi that is light blue above and usually red, but also occasionally pale yellow, or cream generally below the lateral line and on the cheeks. The Japanese name means "pale greenish blue." Sometimes incorrectly written as 浅黄 (light yellow). **Asagi**

• The Asagi koi is one of the oldest varieties of koi and has provided the basis for many subsequent varieties. Its back is covered in a net-like reticulated scale pattern of indigo, navy blue or pale blue. The light blue head should be clear and unblemished. The base of the pectoral fins, tail fin and stomach and gill plates is a deep orange or red colour.

• The scales on the back have whitish base and thus collectively give an appearance of meshes of a net.

• The important viewing points are conspicuously vivid appearance of the meshes and light blue, spotless head region. However, as they age, black spots often appear in the head region and Hi (red) on the belly tend to climb up reaching as far as the back.
**Utsurimono** (写り者) - A black koi with white, red, or yellow markings. The oldest attested form is the yellow form, called "Black and white markings" (黒黄斑 Kuro Ki Han) in the 19th century, but renamed **Ki Utsuri** (黄写り) by Elizaburo Hoshino, an early 20th century koi breeder. The red and white versions are called **Hi Utsuri** (赤写り) and **Shiro Utsuri** (白写り) respectively. The word utsuri means to print (the black markings are reminiscent of ink stains). Genetically the same as Showa but lacking either red pigment (Shiro Utsuri) or white pigment (Hi Utsuri/Ki Utsuri).

**Bekko** (龜甲) - A white-, red-, or yellow-skinned koi with black markings sumi (墨). The Japanese name means "tortoise shell," and
is also written as べっ甲. The white- red- and yellow varieties are called **Shiro Bekko** (白) Aka Bekko (赤) and Ki Bekko (黄) respectively. May be confused with the Utsuri.

• **Goshiki** (五色) - A dark koi with red (Kohaku style) hi pattern. Appears similar to an Asagi with little or no Hi below the lateral line and a Kohaku Hi pattern over reticulated (fishnet pattern) scales. The base colour can range from nearly black to very pale sky blue.

• **Shūsui** (秋水) - The Japanese name means "Autumn Water." The Shusui was created in 1910 by Yoshigoro Akiyama, by crossing Japanese Asagi with German mirror carp. The fish has no scales, except for a single line of large mirror scales dorsally, extending from head to tail. The most common type of Shusui have a pale, sky-blue/grey colour above the lateral line and red or orange (and very, very rarely bright yellow) below the lateral line and on the cheeks.
- **Kinginrin** (金銀鱗) - A koi with metallic (glittering metal-flake appearing) scales. The name translates into English as "gold and silver scales." Often abbreviated to Ginrin. There are Ginrin versions of almost all other varieties of koi, and they are fashionable. Gin-rin refers to sparkling, glittering scales as opposed to the smooth, even metallic skin and scales seen in the Ogon varieties. Recently these characteristics have been combined to create the new "Ginrin Ogon" varieties.
• **Kawarimono** (変わり者) - A "catch-all" term for koi that cannot be put into one of the other categories. This is a competition category and many new varieties of koi compete against each other within this one category. Also known as **Kawarigoi** (変わり鯉).

• **Ōgon** (黄金) - A metallic koi of one colour only. (hikarimono 光者). The most commonly encountered colours are **gold**, **platinum**, and orange. Cream specimens exist but are very rare. Ogon compete in the Kawarimono category and the Japanese name means "Gold". The variety was created by Sawata Aoki in 1946 from wild carp he caught in 1921. Recently the metallic skinned Ogon is being crossed with ginrin scaled fish to create the ginrin Ogon with metallic skin and sparkling (metal flake) scales.

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• **Kumonryū (九紋竜)** - Kumonryu is a black doitsu scaled fish with curling white markings. The patterns are thought to be reminiscent of Japanese ink paintings of dragons. They famously change colour with the seasons. Kumonryu compete in the Kawarimono category.

• **Ochiba (落葉)** - A light blue/gray koi with copper, bronze, or yellow (Kohaku style) pattern, reminiscent of autumn leaves on water. The Japanese name means "fallen leaves."

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• **Koromo (挙母)** - A white fish with Kohaku style pattern with blue or black edged scales only over the hi pattern. This variety first arose in the 1950s as a cross between a Kohaku and an Asagi. The most commonly encountered Koromo is an **Ai Goromo**, which is coloured like a Kohaku, except that each of the scales within the red patches has a blue- or black-edge to it. Less common is the **Budo-Goromo** which has a darker (burgundy) hi overlay that gives it the appearance of bunches of grapes. Very rarely seen is the **Sumi-Goromo** which is similar to Budo-Goromo, but the hi pattern is such a dark burgundy that it appears nearly black.

\[Image of Koromo varieties\]

• **Hikari-moyomonono (光模様者)** - A koi with coloured markings over a metallic base, or koi in two metallic colours.

• **Kikokuryu** - A metallic skinned version of the Kumonryu.

\[Image of Hikari-moyomonono\]

• **Kin-Kikokuryu** - A metallic skinned version of the Kumonryu with a Kohaku-style hi pattern developed by Mr. Seiki Igarashi of Ojiya City. There are (at least) six different genetic sub-varieties of this general variety.
• **Ghost koi** - A hybrid of Ogon and wild carp with metallic scales. Considered by some to be not Nishikigoi.

• **Butterfly koi** - A hybrid of koi and Asian carp with long flowing fins. Various coloration examples depending on the koi stock used to breed the hybrid. Considered by some to be not Nishikigoi.
• **Doitsu-goi (ドイツ鯉)** - Originated by cross breeding numerous different established varieties with "scale-less" German carp (generally, fish with only a single line of scales along each side of the dorsal fin). Also written as 独逸鯉. There are four main types of "Doitsu" scale patterns. The most common type (referred to above) have a row of scales beginning at the front of the dorsal fin and ending at the end of the dorsal fin (along both sides of the fin). The second type has a row of scales beginning where the head meets the shoulder and running the entire length of the fish (along both sides). The third type is the same as the second, with the addition of a line of (often quite large) scales running along the lateral line (along the side) of the fish, also referred to as "Mirror koi". The fourth (and rarest) type is referred to as "Armour koi" and are completely (or nearly) covered with very large scales that resemble plates of armour.