

日本
玄承
社

日本玄承社

玄 Gen “Expertise” : A thousand-year history of Japanese sword-making techniques

承 Sho “Succession” : Passed on from a master, and passing onto a thousand years ahead

History

- 2017 Formed “Genshoshu” in Tokyo
- 2018 Participated in a demonstration of Japanese sword-making over a week in the Republic of Buryatia as part of a team of Japanese swordsmiths invited to visit Russia. The head of Buryatia also visited.
- 2018 Demonstrated sword making during a Japanese craft experience fair by a listed skill conservation organisation, sponsored by the Agency for Cultural Affairs.
- 2019 Founded NIPPON GENSHOSHA as a company.
- 2020 Commissioned by the national wall technique preservation group to create plasterers’ trowels made of Tamahagané (carbon steel used for Japanese swords).
- 2021 Relocated the company to Kyotango, Kyyoto.
- 2021 Invited by Kyoto Tango Heritage Archive Museum in Miyazu to perform a demonstration of sword-making at the Former Nagashima Residence.
- 2022 With a forge lighting ceremony held in January, sword-making began in January. Exhibited in “MoFF 2022 Ethical Fair” held in Tokyo.
- 2023 Our new project, a resin-sealed sword “ARATASHI”, was unveiled at an event in the Mitsukoshi Japanesque Gallery in Nagoya.

Location - Kyotango, Kyoto

Believed to be one of the first areas in Japan to be introduced to iron-making techniques, Kyotango is a region rich in history.

It has many ancient burial grounds and Chokuto swords have been found in these archaeological sites. A large rock formation, “Tateiwa”, is believed to be where demons were sealed in with a sword around 1000 years ago.

Facing the Sea of Japan, the Kyotango region is abundant in nature - beautiful seas, mountains and rivers - and is renowned for its history in the textile industry.

Archeological Sites and Legends in Kyotango

Enjo Ruins

A site believed to be where iron / steel-making took place between the Kofun and Heian periods (circa 5th-11th centuries).

Kondosokankotachi

A large gilt bronze sword excavated from a burial site.

This was a Chokuto, straight sword, marking the beginning of the history of swords that we are now familiar with.

Legends of Oni (demons)

From the late Kofun to early Asuka period: Prince Maroko, half-brother of Prince Shotoku, defeated demons in Mount Ōe. He is also said to have sealed one of the demons in Tateiwa.

From the mid Heian period: Minamoto no Yorimitsu and his trusted warriors killed a demon ‘Shuten-dōji’ from Mount Ōe. The sword he used, made by Yasutsuna, came to be known as 'Dōjigiri-Yasutsuna'.



Kondosokankotachi

Kyotango Now

From textile manufacturers using new techniques,
brewers making traditional as well as contemporary sake,
craftsmen producing Japanese lanterns for modern living,
to leading Japanese artists,

Kyotango is a thriving, highly cultural region where creators gather.



TAKENO BREWERY
brewers



TAMIYA RADEN
textile



KOJIMA-AN
Japanese lanterns

Swordsmiths of Nippon Genshosa

The three swordsmiths trained together under Master Yoshihara and acquired major techniques, namely: Tsunda Jigané (Nashi-ji Hada :very fine and difficult to see), Juka-Choji Midaré (vibrant ‘clove’ pattern) and Saka Choji Midaré (reverse ‘clove’ pattern).

It is almost unprecedented for three non-related swordsmiths to come together and form a company.

Every sword is assessed by all three swordsmiths for its workmanship during the making process, ensuring the product to be of highest quality.

	1986	Born in Osaka
Tomoki Kuromoto	2011	Trained under Yoshindo Yoshihara and Yoshikazu Yoshihara
President Swordsmith	2016	Certified by the Agency for Cultural Affairs to produce art swords
	2018	Awarded for efforts at the Exhibition of Modern Swordsmanship, organised by the Society for Preservation of Japanese Art Swords.
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	1990	Born in Osaka
Kosuke Yamazoe	2008	Trained under Yoshindo Yoshihara and Yoshikazu Yoshihara
President Swordsmith	2012	Certified by the Agency for Cultural Affairs to produce art swords
	2015	Awarded the Newcomer’s Prize at the New Swords Exhibition organised by the Society for Preservation of Japanese Art Swords.
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	1990	Born in Tokyo
Tomoyuki Miyagi	2011	Trained under Yoshindo Yoshihara and Yoshikazu Yoshihara
President Swordsmith	2016	Certified by the Agency for Cultural Affairs to produce art swords
	2018 / 2019	Awarded for efforts at the Exhibition of Modern Swordsmanship, organised by the Society for Preservation of Japanese Art Swords.
	2020 / 2021	Awarded the ‘Outstanding prize’ at the same exhibition

Yoshindo Yoshihara

Studied under his grandfather, Yoshihara Kuniie I, who was selected as the 'Yokozuna of the East' in the Showa-period swordsmith ranking, he is renowned for reproducing the Utsuri (Reflection) technique in modern times.

His vibrant Juka-Choji Midaré patterns have been named “Yoshihara-Choji”.

Having worked internationally, including the US, since the 1980s, he also owns forges outside Japan. He is the only modern swordsmith whose works are housed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, and the Bargello National Gallery.

Yoshikazu Yoshihara

Trained under his father Yoshindo Yoshihara, he won an award from his first entry in a competition held by the Society for Preservation of Japanese Art Swords.

Since then, he consistently won top prizes, and became the youngest person to be awarded the “Mukansa (Exemption from Examination in arts)” by the same Society.

He specialises in beautifully proportioned Choji Midaré, notably “Kawazuko Choji” style, and his high-level technical skills have made him an instructor at swordsmith training sessions organised by the Society for Preservation of Japanese Art Swords.

The Yoshihara School

An acclaimed school led by Kuniie Yoshihara I. His grandchildren are Yoshindo and Kuniie III.

Many of Yoshindo’s pupils, including Yoshikazu Yoshihara and Yoshimitsu Ōno, have become the leading swordsmiths in the modern era. The school has advanced Japanese sword-making techniques, notably “Bizenden”.

Present Day Swordsmiths

Swordsmiths in Japan

To become a swordsmith, you must have at least five years of training under a qualified master swordsmith, followed by a formal training course and a practical examination set by the Agency for Cultural Affairs.

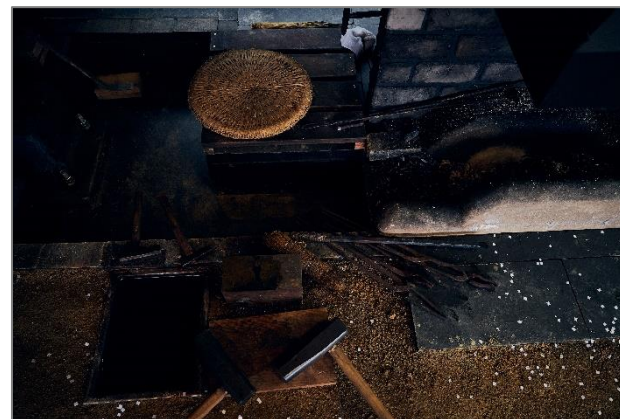
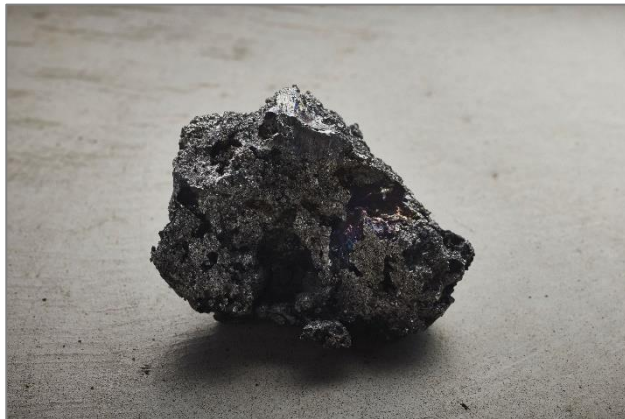
- There are only 200 qualified swordsmiths in Japan, with only fewer than a half making swords at present.
- The number of swords produced by each swordsmith is limited to 24 per year to prevent a so-called “mass production of inferior goods”.

Challenges in Sword-Making

In Japan, a sword can only be classified as “Nihonto / Japanese Sword”, if it uses Tamahagané, a specific material made in the Tatara steel-making process, and is produced through “traditional manufacturing methods”.

Today, Tamahagané is only used for Japanese swords. As it is produced by craftsmen using the ancient Tatara technique, its quality varies from year to year.

It is with the swordsmiths to use their experience to assess these differences in quality, and adjust their sword-making process. This manufacturing method has not changed since the Edo period, making it extremely challenging to keep the quality consistent today.



Iron Art Work

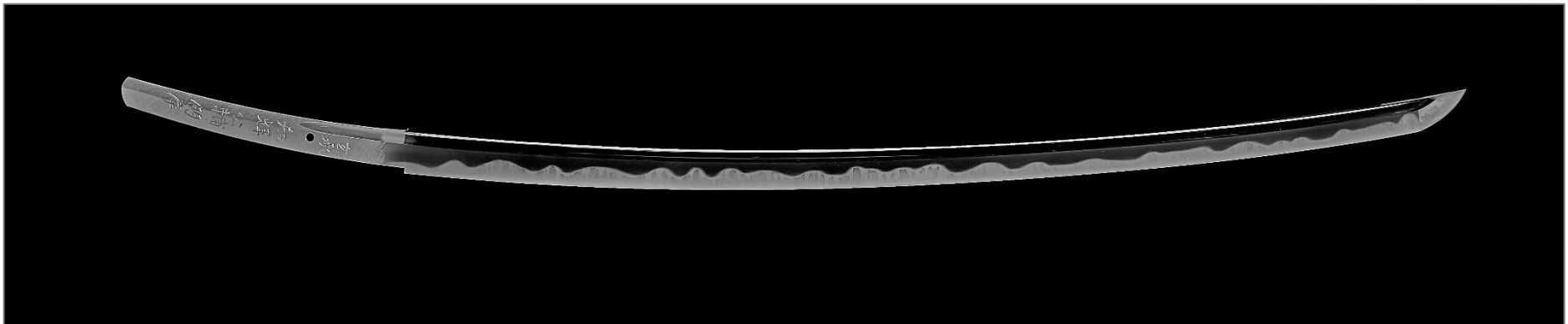
It takes around 7 kg of Tamahagané and 120 kg of pinewood charcoal to produce a sword weighing barely 1 kg (75cm in length).

When Japanese swords were used as weapons in the past, minor visual defects (e.g. scratches) were not seen as an issue. In the present day, the swords are considered works of art, so even a slight imperfection is no longer accepted. This means that it is far more difficult to produce Japanese swords now than it was in the past to achieve the desired level of finish. To compare, it would take about three swords worth of labour from the past, in order to reach the quality of a single sword today.

Furthermore, Japanese swords cannot be completed without the hands of skilled specialists including polishers, scabbard makers, and Habaki makers (silversmiths). As a sword makes its way round these top class craftsmen, it takes approximately a year from its order to delivery.

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Even with all this hard work, it is precisely because so many craftsmen take their time and effort using traditional manufacturing methods, that it becomes a one-of-a-kind iron art work, incomparable to any other works in the world.



Japanese Sword Style, inherited from our Master Yoshihara

His teachers, Yoshindo and Yoshikazu Yoshihara, specialised in Bizenden style.

Because many high-ranking works of the old Bizenden style use super fine-grained Jigané steel, our master Yoshihara believes that it is utmost important to create tenacious and well-forged, fine-grained Jigané steel during forging stages in the sword-making process. This method also helps fulfil one of the Japanese sword functions - to cut well.

For Hamon patterns on blade surfaces, he creates vibrant Hanayaka Choji Midaré. This cannot be developed unless three advanced conditions are met: well-forged Jigané steel, meticulous Tsuchioki (clay coating), and Yaki-iré (tempering) in carefully controlled temperature.

The swordsmiths of Nippon Genshosha have learned and mastered these techniques under Yoshihara. In addition, with regards to the form of Japanese swords, we were taught to ensure every blade looks as though it could slice anything from the moment you see it.



Japanese Swords by Nippon Genshosa

At Nippon Genshosa, we believe in making bespoke Japanese swords together with each customer.

After discussing what customers want for the form (length, shape, Hamon blade patterns etc.), and what they want it to mean (treasure, guardian, talisman, ornament to tighten one's spirit or to bring a sense of life and death, etc.), we digest these conditions and reflect them into our sword-making process.

We put our heart and soul into making each sword so that it will be a unique, one-of-a-kind Japanese sword for each customer. And we hope that every sword filled with their owner's wishes will be handed down to the next thousand years of generations.

Our aim at Nippon Genshosa is to produce Japanese swords that reflect the present. Historically, there were varying trends in Japanese sword styles, and therefore they echoed the history and the environment of the era in which they were made. However, most Japanese swords made today in Japan are of old styles, with the likes of the Kamakura period.

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We, Nippon Genshosa, are aiming to bring back this true quality of Japanese swords, so that they reflect the present - something only contemporary swordsmiths can create.



Nippon Genshosa's Hope

Our base, the Kyotango region, thrived in making iron and steel around the 6th century. We are envisioning a future where Kyotango's iron sand is used in traditional Japanese Tatara steel-making, reviving this land's ancient history, and allowing us to use the Tamahagané steel made in this process to create our Japanese swords.

These would then become "Japanese swords that reflect the present" that can only be made in Kyotango, in this contemporary era.

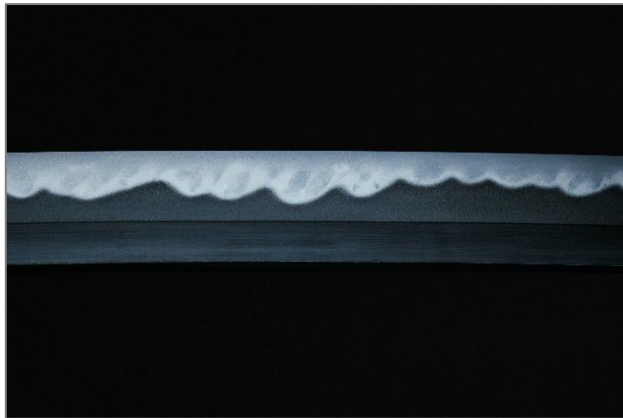
This is going to be our greatest life-long project, which is for us to produce works that, in a thousand years from now, would be recognised as one of the trending forms that can be seen in this period of time, alongside other era's swords.

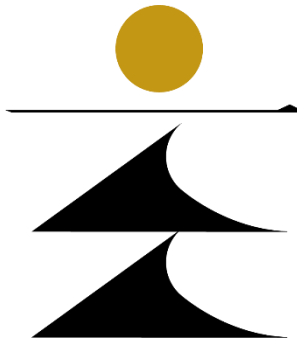
Furthermore, what we leave behind for the thousand years ahead will not be limited to Japanese swords. We also hope to nurture craftsmen who make Japanese swords to pass on the skills.

If only swords survive, they would become "relics". We believe that it can only exist as "culture" when there are craftsmen actively making them in each era.



Nippon Genshosa will pour our efforts in training craftsmen, so that Japanese swords will remain as a culture a thousand years ahead from now.





**Nippon Genshosa are devoted to achieving all of our ambitions.
The pricing of our Japanese swords has been set to accomplish these goals,
and we sincerely hope that you can see our devotion in what we produce.
We will continue our work to ultimately become the “gateway to Japanese swords”.**