

Here is a document film, we Emperor Gotoba Executive Committee has just released about the fine art of Japanese Sword.



<https://youtu.be/QD658JZBQR0>

**【English texts】** by Paul Martin, Founder *Shin-Goban Kaji* Project

Japanese swords are one of the Japanese arts that are recognized all around the world.

The spiritual roots of Japanese swords date back to mythical origins of Japan. Even today, they continue to captivate people with their beauty, and have become accepted internationally as fine art.

The culture surrounding Japanese swords has been passed down continuously from its mythic origins to modern times.

Why has the technology for these archaic weapons that have no use in modern warfare continued uninterrupted for generations?

It begs the question, is this Japanese traditional art sustainable in the modern world?

Today, we are facing a new challenge in Japan

## Chapter1

### Introduction to Japanese swords

### The Wonderful World of Japanese Art Swords

**Paul Martin (Great Britain)**

**Japanese sword researcher**

*“Every country or culture’s swordsmiths have had the same objective; to make swords that do not bend or break and cut well. However, Japanese swords are slightly different in that they are also recognized for the beauty of the steel of the itself, and the belief that the swords are imbued with the spirit of the people of Japan. ”*

Japanese swords were originally created as weapons, but they also have a robust history of being regarded as fine art. It is often asked, from when, and by whom was the artistic value of Japanese swords recognized? The answer always naturally ends up at the same person: Gotoba the 82<sup>nd</sup> Emperor of Japan.

In Japanese history, the cloistered Emperor Gotoba is well-known for his participation in the Jokyū Disturbance and the compilation of the famous collection poetry, the Shinkokin-Wakashū.

However, he also excelled in martial arts and Japanese poetry. Nowadays, it is said that his existence was like that of an artist. The catalyst for his deep interest in swords is said to be when the Heike family were defeated at the Battle of Dannoura. The 81<sup>st</sup> emperor along with the sacred imperial treasure sword (Kusanagi-no-Tsurugi) sank into the sea and were never seen again.

Swords said to have been made by Emperor Gotoba are called, *Kiku-go-saku* (by Imperial manufacture). Some of those swords have also been designated as Important Cultural Properties.

You may be surprised to know that the chrysanthemum crest currently used by the imperial family can be traced back 800 years to when the cloistered Emperor Gotoba engraved chrysanthemum into the tang of his *Kiku-go-saku* blades

## Chapter2

### The Current Crisis Facing Japanese Sword Arts.

When Emperor Gotoba first started making swords, he selected the best swordsmiths from all over the country to make Japanese swords with him. Those smiths became collectively known as the *Goban-Kaji* (Swordsmiths in monthly attendance of the Emperor). It is recorded Emperor Gotoba gave the swords that he made to his favorite officials and generals.

Combining an ancient spirit with new sensibilities, Emperor Gotoba pursued a beauty that transcends time. This pursuit of beauty also spread to sword culture. Without the legend of the Emperor Gotoba and his treasured swords, Japanese swords may not have become the famously mysterious and artistic objects that they are known as today.

However, in the modern age the traditional Japanese sword culture is facing a critical situation. According to records from the All Japan Swordsmiths Association, swordsmiths and the other various specialist craftsmen required to complete each process needed to produce a single Japanese sword are in decline. If just one of those technologies are lost, it effects the craft as a whole and is extremely difficult to replace the intangible skills.

It is if there is an assault on traditional Japanese sword making. It can be said that it is becoming increasingly economically challenging to the traditional sword world because of the many foreign-made cheap copies of traditional swords. These cheap non-Japanese copies are being sold to the unsuspecting public as "Japanese swords"

Now suddenly in the modern era, the survival of traditional Japanese sword culture is at stake.

## Chapter 3

### A Sacred Sword Site on a Remote Island.

#### ○ Ama Town, May 2023

On a remote island in the Sea of Japan, a Japanese sword is dedicated to a shrine in a solemn ceremony.

#### **Ama Town Oki Shrine**

Ama town is on a remote island floating in the Sea of Japan with a population of only 2,300 people.

Following his defeat in the Joku Disturbance, Emperor Gotoba was exiled from the capital of Kyoto to the Oki islands, and spent the rest of his life there.

After Emperor Gotoba left the center stage of Japanese political history he spent his time here in Ama town, where he continued to demonstrate his artistic talent for the remaining 19 years of his life.

We in Ama Town feel deeply connected to Emperor Gotoba, and will try to follow in his footsteps of discovering Japanese swords as art. We have begun a new project that aims to revitalize Japanese sword culture.

#### ○ **About Votive Swords**

The swordsmith responsible for the first votive sword of the New *Goban-Kaji*, is one of Japan's finest swordsmiths, Master Gassan Sadatoshi.

Gassan swordsmiths have been active in Japan since the 11<sup>th</sup> Century. Sadatoshi is the current head of the Gassan family. He is a master of his craft following in the footsteps of his predecessor Gassan Sadaichi, who was designated a Living National Treasure swordsmith.

As the current representative of his family tradition, Sadatoshi has been designated as a modern-day member of the *Goban-Kaji*, creating a sword that is suitable as an offering to Oki Shrine.

*“ The sound of a hammer,  
the light of the flames*

*I want them to reach  
The spirit of Emperor Gotoba”*

After a year and a half of devoted effort, the first sword was finally dedicated to the spirit of Emperor Gotoba at Oki Shrine.

**Gassan Sadanobu**  
**Executive Director, All Japan Swordsmiths Association**

*“This is a tachi (long sword) made by my father (and mentor) Gassan Sadatoshi. When you look at the hada (grain pattern) and jigane (surface steel and its condition) which is a result of the forging process, the characteristics of the blade can easily be seen. From the base of the blade to the very tip, the grain pattern undulates. When you see these attributes, without even looking at the inscription on the tang, it is easily apparent that this was made by Gassan Sadatoshi, who was a member of the Heisei Goban-Kaji. ”*

A project was started that followed the example of Emperor Gotoba by assembling a group of master swordsmiths. It was named the, *Shin* (New) *Goban Kaji* Project. Starting with the work of Gassan Sadatoshi, we are aiming to dedicate 12 Japanese swords made by Master Swordsmiths to the residing deity of Oki Shrine, Emperor Gotoba.

## Chapter4

### Breathing New Life into an Old Tradition

Shigeki Murao

Oki Shrine in Ama-town

#### ○ Ending

The Japanese sword is a distillation of traditional Japanese arts and crafts. Furthermore, it is possible to say that the Japanese sword is the foundation of Japanese culture. When talking about the history of Japanese swords, one cannot fail to mention Emperor Gotoba's role as the earliest person who gave prominence to the artistry. For over 800 years, the memory of his spirit has been passed down from generation to generation. Once again, here in the land where Emperor Gotoba spent his final years, a movement rises to revitalize Japanese sword arts.

#### ○ The Amanuma spear

The two founding gods, Izanagi and Izanami, used a heavenly spear when they stirred the Sea of Japan. From the tip of the spear dropped some sediment that formed the islands of Japan.

There are currently over 14,000 islands in Japan. According to the *Record of Ancient Matters* (Kojiki), Oki Island was the third to be created. Therefore, we cannot help, but feel the depth of the connection between Japanese swords and the Oki Islands.

## End credits Appearances

Sadatoshi Gassan  
Sadanobu Gassan  
Paul Martin  
Shigeki Murao

Interview cooperation  
Gassan Japanese Sword Forging Studio  
Oki Shrine  
The Emperor Gotoba Museum

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Service Association of Oki Jinja(Shrine)

Committed by  
*The Executive Committee for the Legacy of Emperor Gotoba for Future Generations*