

The Chiyoganemaru Sword

This is a replica of a sword called Chiyoganemaru (“golden sword of a thousand generations”), that played an important role in the history of Nakijin Castle. The original, a Japanese National Treasure, is preserved at the Naha City Historical Museum. The tempering pattern of the blade suggests it was forged in Japan in the fourteenth century. The hilt and scabbard, including the gilt ornamental fittings, were likely made by Ryukyu craftsmen. Though the design sensibility of the sword is very similar to those used in Japan, it has been modified for one-handed use, unlike Japanese swords which are designed to be used with both hands. According to the official Ryukyu historical account, it belonged to Hananchi, the last lord of the Hokuzan domain of northern Okinawa, whose headquarters were at Nakijin Castle.

Nakijin Castle was attacked by the forces of the Chuzan domain to the south in 1416. According to legend, as the Chuzan army penetrated the castle, Hananchi learned that he had been betrayed and his defeat was inevitable. Enraged that the gods had not protected him, Hananchi shattered the sacred stone of the castle’s shrine with a blow from Chiyoganemaru. He then turned the sword on himself, intending to commit suicide, but the sword refused to cut his belly. He then hurled it over the castle wall into the Shigema River far below and killed himself with his short sword instead. Chiyoganemaru was carried downriver and lay there shining every night until it was discovered and brought to Hashi, lord of Chuzan. It later became the royal sword of the dynasty he founded, known as the First Sho Dynasty.

The hilt features a chrysanthemum motif and the engraved inscription, “taisei.” Historians believe this refers to the Ryukyu king Sho Taikyū (1415–1460) who was also known as *Taisei-o*. The sword is thought to have been taken to Satsuma in Kyushu when the Ryukyu treasury was looted after the defeat in 1609. In 1996, Sho Hiroshi, the great-grandson of the last king of the Ryukyu Kingdom, presented it to the City of Naha. It was designated a National Treasure in 2006.

A detailed investigation of the sword was conducted by experts in 1909, and much of what is known is based on their reports. This replica was made in 2014.