

History of the Kobayashi Family

The Kobayashi family of swordsmiths in Okuizumo traces its lineage back to a blacksmith named Kobayashi Saibe'e (d. 1822) who worked in the *ōkajiba* forge at a *tatara* ironworks. When Japan began to import Western technology in the 1860s, it caused a surge in demand for iron, prompting his grandson Kobayashi Matsuzaemon (b. 1846) to establish an independent ironworks. However, *tatara* furnaces struggled to compete with new, imported reverberatory furnaces, and Matsuzaemon was soon forced to close the ironworks down.

Kobayashi Daishirō (1903–1976), Matsuzaemon's grandson, was the first member of the family to be trained as a swordsmith. After studying in Hiroshima Prefecture, Daishirō returned to Okuizumo in 1942 and opened a forge to produce military sabers. Unfortunately for the entrepreneurial Kobayashi family, sword production was banned following the end of World War II in 1945.

Eventually, the ban was amended to make it legal to produce swords as works of art. After receiving permission to craft swords in 1954, Daishirō trained under Gassan Sadakazu II (1907–1995), a craftsman in Kyoto who would later be designated a Living National Treasure. Daishirō became a renowned swordsmith, and in 1965, one of his swords was displayed in the first annual exhibition held by the Society for Preservation of Japanese Art Swords. Daishirō's three sons followed in his footsteps, and they went on to become some of Okuizumo's most celebrated swordsmiths.