The Kobayashi Brothers: Swordsmiths in Okuizumo

The Kobayashi family has been active in ironmaking and swordsmithing in the Okuizumo region since the late eighteenth century. Starting in the 1980s, a trio of brothers named Kobayashi Hirotsugu (b. 1938), Kobayashi Sadatoshi (b. 1941), and Kobayashi Rikio (b. 1948) led local efforts to preserve traditional swordmaking techniques. They are also known by their respective artisan names: “Sadanaga,” “Sadanori,” and “Sadateru.”

The brothers learned swordsmithing from a young age under the guidance of their father, Kobayashi Daishirō (1903–1976), who worked using the name “Sadayoshi.” Sadatoshi and Hirotsugu became licensed by the Agency of Cultural Affairs in 1970, and Rikio earned his license in 1972. Their work garnered attention in 1982 and 1983 at exhibitions held by the Society for Preservation of Japanese Art Swords, at which all three brothers received awards for their entries.

The Kobayashi brothers also engaged in outreach activities: they held administrative roles in swordsmiths’ associations at the regional and national levels and offered periodic public demonstrations of the forging process in a workshop on the museum grounds.

In 1999, Shimane Prefecture recognized the skills of two of the brothers, Rikio and Sadatoshi, by designating them Intangible Cultural Properties.