

Sugaya's Katsura Tree

Katsura trees have special significance in an ironworks village. They are considered sacred due to their association with Kanayago, the guardian deity of *tatara* ironmaking. For three to four days each spring, the trees' new buds appear to glow a brilliant red in the setting sun. For the residents of an ironworks village, this likely reminded them of the three to four days spent tending a blazing furnace.

Kanayago has been portrayed as both male and female, but the common image is of a woman in flowing robes with long, dark hair. Legend states that Kanayago descended from the realm of heavenly deities and arrived in Harima Province (now Hyogo Prefecture), where she taught people how to smelt iron. However, Kanayago could not find a suitable mountain on which to reside. Flying on a white heron, she scoured the region and eventually landed on a katsura tree in the mountains roughly 25 kilometers to the northeast of Sugaya Ironworks. A passing hunter happened to encounter her, and it is said that she ordered him to build a furnace and taught him the *tatara* smelting method.