



# THE JAPANESE SWORD

*Dedicated to the Preservation and Promotion of Japanese Swords, Swordsmiths, and Related Crafts*

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Hi Everyone,

Summer has finally come to an end. The last cicada has stopped singing and the 2020(+1) Olympics and Paralympics gently fade into the distance. Typhoon season seems to have slipped by relatively unnoticed this year. However, my work schedule appears to be like riding a roller-coaster in a Category 5 Typhoon at the moment. We are currently preparing to launch our Emperor Gotoba, Shin (New) Gobankaji project. I am excited by the prospect, but it is probably the most stressful project that I have ever taken on so far.



This year is the 800<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Emperor Gotoba's exile to Okinoshima in modern day Shimane prefecture. The Island is three hours off the coast in a modern ferry, and in the more tempestuous seasons,

is often cancelled. So, it is not hard to imagine how difficult it was to get to the island in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. This is even illustrated in Gotoba's waka that he composed on his arrival to Oki.

I came up with the idea for this project after visiting the island in 2017. In my research, I had heard stories of a fuigo (bellows) being on display for many years in a small street side shrine. However, at my time of research, the shrine had been standing empty for many years. I have long made it a personal policy of mine to actually visit the place that I am researching, to get a feel of the places and hear what the locals have to say. So, I contacted Oki Shrine which is also in charge of the Emperor Gotoba Museum. I told them of the legend I had heard of the fuigo, to which they replied, "That's right, we have it here!", in my amazement I found myself asking, "Is it possible to see it?", and they very casually replied, "Yes, no problem. When are you coming?". Within a few short weeks, I was on my way.

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My visit to Ama Town, Nakanoshima, Oki Islands was to be one of the most surprising and rewarding trips of my life. I arrived on the island on a dark and rather stormy night. I alighted from the ferry and figured out which bus to ride to get to the Ryokan traditional inn. I didn't see much. It was very rural, with little to no street lighting. The driver informed me of when to get off, and I found myself at a country crossroads with the Nakamura Ryokan on one of the corners. I had a late dinner, and eventually went to bed during the beginning of a howling storm.

To my surprised, early in the morning a loud chime sounds in the streets, followed by public announcements. Something that I hadn't taken in to account was getting back to the mainland. To my greater surprise, the announcement was that due to the inclement weather the Hydro-foil ferry to the mainland had been cancelled. I wasn't due to return until the following morning, but being a city dweller the chance that transport being cancelled for indefinite periods had not occurred to me in the slightest.

I had breakfast, and thought that I would take a leisurely stroll down the road to the shrine and museum, and pay my first visit to Emperor Gotoba's grave before my scheduled appointment. As I departed the Ryokan, a small van stopped and a spritely older man called out to me. Are you Paul Martin, going to the Emperor Gotoba Museum? Somewhat surprised, I replied in the affirmative. He introduced himself as Mr. Tamura (82 at the time), and said, "Jump in, I'll take you to the museum". So, I arrived early, and did not get to see the Emperor's grave before-hand.

It turned out the Mr. Tamura was the sword specialist who cared for the museum and shrines swords. He had written articles about them for the island magazine, and his father had also written the books and booklets on the history of Emperor Gotoba and the Island at the shrine store.

I was taken in to the museum, and met my contact I had been in touch with originally, Mr. Murao. I was also introduced to Mr. Murao senior, who was the head priest of the shrine. I was given a tour of the museum, starting with the archeological artifacts, but we soon headed for the mezzanine where there was a substantial sword display. There were some important swords to the history of Oki and Shimane prefecture. A prefectural Important cultural property Rai Kunimitsu with a tachi koshirae, a blade signed Sukemune, said to be from the Kajiya family.

However, the majority of the display were by members of the Showa Gobankaji. This was special for me as I had heard of the group, but never seen any of the blades, and they were fabulous. Obviously, they



were typical of the period, but there was some great names among them, Gassan Sadamitsu (pictured left, later Living National Treasure Sadaichi), Horii Toshihide, Yoshihara Kuniie (1<sup>st</sup> Gen.), Yasukuni smiths, Takahashi Yoshimune (brother of LNT Takahashi Sadatsugu), and so forth. In total there are 25 Showa Gobankaji blades, 10 were given to Oki Shrine, and 15 were given to Minase Shrine on the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Emperor Gotoba's passing. The ones from Minase shrine currently reside in the vaults of Kyoto National Museum.

After the tour of the museum, and being shown some important swords to Oki Island and all of the swords of the Showa Gobankaji, they brought out the fuigo. The fuigo was actually in lots of small pieces. You could tell very easily that it was a fuigo, but it was obviously very old. I have never seen a Kamakura period, so I could not guarantee that it was from that era. However, it had been put into a custom-made wooden box in the Meiji period by Yasusada Koteda. Who was the Governor of Shimane prefecture at that time. He had included a personal inscription on the inside of the deep lid of the box (hako-gaki).

It stated that the fuigo had been in the possession of the Kajiya family for many generations. Although the word for (metal) smith is pronounced Kajiya, the Japanese characters used were different. The Kajiya family had been a very prominent family on the Oki islands. They had also been the owners of a Sukemune tachi in the Gotoba Museum's collection, which they also claim to have been given by Emperor Gotoba. There was also said to be a tanto. However, it has been missing for decades, and it is a bit hard to imagine as tanto before the mid Kamakura period are pretty much non-existent. The other interesting fact about Koteda, was that he was a samurai before the Meiji restoration, and a top student of Yamaoka Tesshu.

*(Sidebar) I have also come across Koteda's name before. A well-known collector owns a tsuba that belonged to Koteda, that had been a gift from Tesshu and contained a hako-gaki by Tesshu himself. The tsuba is said to have belonged to non-other than Oishi Kuronosuke, the leader of the 47 Ronin.*

*(side bar: I also recently discovered the seppuku site of Oishi not too far from Sengakuji)*



Following this I was taken to the front of Emperor Gotoba's grave and was able to pay my respects. It was a strange feeling standing there after only seeing black and white photos for 25 years. I was then guided around the nearby area, seeing the site of the old Zenpukuji temple that had been torn down after the Meiji Restoration and the separation of Buddhism and Shinto. There was also a well that is said to have been there and the source of water for the temple and Gotoba at the time. I was also told that Gotoba's actual residence had been situated between the temple and the well. In

front of all these was the katsura pond, upon which one of Gotoba's famous waka poems was based.



We then went through a small gap in the trees and came out right next to Oki shrine. The shrine was spacious and lovely. It had a small space set aside for an ancient type of soccer game called, Kemari. Another activity that Gotoba was said to have excelled at. I paid my respects to the enshrine spirit of Emperor Gotoba in the Shinto manner.

Over to the right-hand side of the shrine are two stone monuments dedicated to Living National Treasure swordsmith Gassan Sadaichi. As mentioned earlier, a member of the Showa Gobankaji, he returned to the island in 1975 to

perform a ceremonial forging in front of the shrine along with his son (Sadatoshi) and other apprentices.





A group photo was taken and in the photo is also another young apprentice who actually looks like he is the latest addition to the team at the time. This young apprentice is non-other than master swordsmith Mikami Sadanao, who also went on to become a chairman of the All Japan Swordsmith Association among other things. So, another reminder to never give up on your dreams.

We retraced our steps went down the path that leads from the main road to Emperor Gotoba's funeral pyre/gravesite and came back out onto the main road opposite the Gotoba Museum.

Just to the right of the road that leads to the gravesite is another rather large stone monument. It is a brief history of Emperor Gotoba and the Gobankaji and was written by Sato Kanzan sensei. I felt like I was making lots of small discoveries of little known hidden treasures.

After a brief respite at the museum, I was taken around the island to various spots associated with Emperor Gotoba. The place where his ship landed at Saki Harbor, a stone that he sat upon while his servants searched for lodgings, the shrine where he ended up staying for his first night on the island, and then via the modern main road ways intermittently shown the path that he walked along the mountain tops to get to Zempukuji temple.

*(sidebar #2. A replica of the temple bell from Zempukuji hangs outside the Emperor Gotoba Museum. However, the original bell was moved to ??? shrine, and in Yunotsu village in Shimane prefecture and hangs outside.)*

I was then taken to the site that had been the seed of the fuigo legend for me. I had read someone's blog about the rumors of the fuigo being stored for many years in a street-side shrine. The area's name was also related to sword making and there were large crevasses / holes in a cliff side that were rumored to be where the sand-iron was taken from. However, these are now just full of unwanted items. Mr. Tamura was very keen to stress that these were actually just holes carved for the storage of items, and that the area was actually private property, so they wanted to avoid any unwanted visitors turning up unannounced. We went back onto the main road, and there was the street-shrine I had seen in photographs. It was still empty, and gradually dilapidating with age. Mr. Tamura also informed me that the fuigo had never been stored there, but a sword had. However, it had been removed and restored.

Next, also a short walk from the museum, we visited the former Murakami Residence. The building had been rebuilt in later years, but it is the site of the Murakami family's residence for many hundreds of years. They are an important family on Oki Islands, and as they were great friends of Emperor Gotoba they became the attendants of his grave for many generations. The head of the family is called Sukekuro, and the current Sukekuro is the 48<sup>th</sup> Generation. They also have items like a tea bowl that was given directly to the family by Gotoba on the event of his death. On their grounds is another small well, that it is said that Gotoba liked the water from for making a kind of tea. They have many other items as well, and several Emperors have taken respite there when visiting Gotoba's grave. This was another place that I had only seen on photos, then suddenly I have the 48<sup>th</sup> Generation Sukekuro placing Emperor Gotoba's cup in my hands in the very same spot!

We went back to the Emperor Gotoba Museum where I was allowed to wander at my leisure for a while. There are realistic facsimiles of the famous National Treasure portrait and last will and testament with red hand prints of Emperor Gotoba that belong to Minase Shrine, but are housed in Kyoto National Museum. The great thing about the way they have displayed the last will and testament at the museum is that they have the outline of Gotoba's hands printed onto the glass, so that you can place your hands over where his hands would have been when making the hand prints. It seems like just a fun thing to do, right? However, after seeing so much history and places related to the actual last 19 years of Gotoba's life, as my hands touched the glass, I suddenly felt the weight, history, importance of the area, and sadness of Gotoba's final years. What should have been just a checking hand sizes became a rather moving experience.

After a full day of being completely overloaded with amazing information while ticking many things off my bucket list that I never even knew about previously, I was fed well on Oki beef yakitori and sake, then Karaoke'd until it was time for bed.

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Amazing on a rather short, but very deep sleep, I awoke bright as a button. I still had a deep desire to go back to Emperor Gotoba's grave site and take photos at a more leisurely pace and take it all in privately. It was only a short walk from the Ryokan, and I had a fair amount of time before my ferry departed. The weather was fine, and it was very peaceful as it was still early in the morning.

I arrived in front of the mausoleum, paid my respects again, and just began taking it all in. It was still somewhat surreal actually being there. It was sublime, it had everything you would want, wabi-sabi, mono no aware, nature, everything. I then realized that I had only ever seen it from the front, which separated me by two low walls and gates. I decided that while I was here and this may be my only ever chance, that I would walk around the whole thing once. As I went around the side, I realized that what I thought had been a roof, was only actually a wall with a small roof.

Suddenly, in front of my eyes, there it was. The actual funeral pyre mound/grave of Emperor Gotoba that had been sitting there for 800 years. I felt like I had seen something I shouldn't have, but there it was (\*actually, when I got back to Tokyo, I discovered that you can see it on Google maps). I was suddenly covered in goosebumps, I was stopped in my tracks in awe. I felt like the whole area was like an 800-year-old time capsule full of delightful surprises. What with everything I had learned that weekend, combined with the sensory overload of actually seeing the grave, I had a lightning bolt moment where the notion that I needed to form the Heisei Gobankaji was born.



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This month on the 16<sup>th</sup> of October, we will be kicking off the Shin (New) Gobankaji Project with a ceremonial sword forging demonstration in front of Oki Shrine, and it will be streamed live directly to you via a couple of sites. One will be the Oki Shrine YouTube page ([隠岐神社](#)). This newsletter is also late because I was waiting for links associated with the project.

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Gassan Sadatoshi sensei has at my request agreed to perform the forging demo, just like he did with his father, 46 years ago in 1975. This time, when he returns to Oki Island, he is bringing his son, Sadanobu. I have already asked Sadanobu to come back in 18-years-time on the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Emperor Gotoba's death to hopefully kick off the Reiwa (2019~) Gobankaji. Sadatoshi's father, Gassan Sadaichi (Living National Treasure), was one of the Showa Gobankaji who all devoted swords in 1939. His sword was made using his swordsmith name at the time, Sadamitsu. I see this event as an excellent opportunity to cement a tradition that recognizes Emperor Gotoba's influence on Japanese swords, while helping to provide a vehicle for preserving the skills, and collecting a generational database of representative smiths from each imperial era. I think that it will become an incredibly valuable research resource in the distant future. Part of the reason that the current Kiku-Gosaku and original Gobankaji's existence as a group is unclear is because of the lack of supporting evidence. It is also an effort to document, record and preserve all of the recent historical evidence that we have now.

On this occasion, although the project is called the Shin-Gobankaji, this particular generation of smiths who are being invited to take part (depending on crowd funding success) will be known as the Heisei (1989-2019 Gobankaji. We are still figuring out how we can make all of the items available internationally as the crowdfunding page owners (as well as taking 20%) only use DHL which will not ship tanto abroad. We are searching for ways to get around this.

I will be using the Emperor Gotoba Shin-Gobakanji logo on most of my media until the project is completed. We are crowdfunding. We are also acutely aware that the vast majority of our crowdfunding will come from inside Japan. However, I wanted to make sure that international sword enthusiasts also had a chance to participate, but we are at the mercy of the crowdfunding page to a degree, so they take a substantial cut of raised funds, and the only ship internationally with DHL which means that they will not ship Nihonto.



However, we are currently investigating means where we can have proxy crowdfunding and shipping for people outside Japan who would really like a blade associated with the project.

One of the crowdfunding return gifts is going to be wooden plaques of various sizes that can have your name, or sword study association/club, or laido/kendo/kenjutsu club name written on. It will be displayed in the shrine for a period before being stored in the shrine vaults as part of the records of the project. I like this option as it is relatively inexpensive and goes to show just how far the Gotoba effect on Japanese swords reached around the world.

**Even if you do not want to donate yourself, please consider sharing our media, and making the Emperor Gotoba Shin-Gobankaji a popular topic.**

Here are some links to information on Emperor Gotoba and the various Gobankaji.

My Essay for the Toshiba International Foundation on their Japan-Insights page.

[https://topics.japan-insights.jp/Public/pdf/japan-insights\\_jp/topics/JIN\\_EmperorGotoba.pdf](https://topics.japan-insights.jp/Public/pdf/japan-insights_jp/topics/JIN_EmperorGotoba.pdf)

My YouTube video on Emperor Gotoba and the Oki Islands Part One.

<https://youtu.be/DLoz8ASu4oY>

A Kiku-Gosaku blade that is currently on display at the Suntory Art Museum in Roppongi, but belongs to Kyoto National Museum.

[https://emuseum.nich.go.jp/detail?langId=&content\\_base\\_id=101117&content\\_part\\_id=001&content\\_pict\\_id=003](https://emuseum.nich.go.jp/detail?langId=&content_base_id=101117&content_part_id=001&content_pict_id=003)

## Budo Art



I would like to introduce Tibor Balogh and his page Budo Art. Tibor has been doing a sterling job all at his own expense to introduce Nihonto to the Hungarian sword community by translating lots of articles and video subtitles (including mine). Tibor moved to the UK about ten years ago, and practices Muso Shinden Ryu Iaido. He runs a webpage and a Facebook page, links below. Tibor describes his pages as



*“Budo Art is a nonprofit informational site dedicated to the study and preservation of Japanese swords and related artifacts, and is designed for people who love Japanese culture and art.”*

But he also covers martial arts subjects as well. Please check out his pages and support his quest to expand Nihonto knowledge to non-English speaking countries.

Thank you Tibor for all your selfless hard work on behalf of the Japanese sword community.



<https://www.budoart.net>

<https://www.facebook.com/Budo-Art-102572281474602>

## So, I join a Long Line of Sword Men with Facial Scars



Back in June of 2021, I was confronted by a man that I did not know personally, but I knew the man before me was very skilled with a blade. I wasn't sure if I should feel comforted or disconcerted about his rather cavalier attitude. “Hmmm”, he said. “Yes?”, I responded...

“It's cancer, and we need to get you in rather quickly for an operation”. Even though I kind of knew, time stood still for a few seconds. “Cancer...” That word alone seemed to hang in air. “it's the not life-threatening type, but we need to remove quite a large area of flesh, and we might have to take skin from somewhere else and replace it on your face. “Oh great, I've got cancer AND I'm going to look like Frankenstein. Then he pinched a large amount of flesh on my jaw, which brought me back to my senses a bit. “No, wait. You have plenty of skin, we can just pull it up from your neck”.



What?! No, No, wait, I never ever said it was done with a sword? I said I was a swordsman with a facial scar, like many other swordsmen! What do you think I'm crazy? What I have discovered though is who does, and doesn't watch my videos! J

Here is the video where I announce it here:

<https://youtu.be/h8qtshEKGek>

So, I had a reoccurring spot appear on the side of my face just out of good visual reach, that I put down to shaving (and age). Two and a half years on it had turned into a dry patch that I was given cream for as a kind of eczema cure. What worried me was that the doctor tried to blame mask wearing because of the Covid situation. A further six months on, it is kind of angry and infected. I had a biopsy and was given the bad news. I was whisked into hospital pretty quickly for five nights, that I knew was going to be difficult in a Japanese hospital as I don't eat fish and don't like airplane or hospital food. Luckily, the hospital had a convenience store, that I was allowed to go to and feed myself.

They gave me the option of being put out, or local anesthetic. I chose the latter. The cavalier doctor and nurses were very pleasant and even offered to change the music for me as the pipe music was rather unsettling. They offered me the Beatles, which was great, but unfortunately no Beatles tunes made it out of the speakers. I asked for a Rurouni Kenshin type scar, but they told me that they were out of those, so I had to settle for a question mark (Riddle me that Batman!). Well, unique anyway...

I am no stranger to scars, but I thought that the description of my operation was, "Cancer Removal and Plastic Surgery". So, I think I was expecting a smaller, but greater number of neater stitches. Oh well, it is what it is. I was discharged from hospital a few days later, but that was when things started getting a bit strange. I lost all interest in social media. Facebook, Instagram, my big plans for YouTube, suddenly nothing... This went on for over a month, then a further two weeks of mood swings until I finally had to upload something for work or promotion. Then I gradually came back into the world again. It was strange, I didn't need anyone to feel sorry for me, but I didn't want to talk to anyone either. I just wanted to withdraw. I think that I felt kind of embarrassed at not being able to stop myself from being mentally sidelined by a non-life-threatening illness, when others have had much more serious cases of cancer.

Many of you have sent me well wishes, and some of you I have just worried you unnecessarily, for which I apologize. I am very grateful to be in your thoughts. I would like you all to know that I am fine now, and celebrated my recovery and my constant reminder on my face (that is also healing nicely, but will always be with me) by buying myself several t-shirts and a keyrings of Sabito and his Fox mask (Demon Slayer) to serve as my avatar.

I will see you all next month with a report on my appearance in a panel discussion in Miyazaki prefecture with Mukansa Swordsmith, Matsuba Kunimasa (and visiting a mountain top site, and his forge with him), and then the ceremonial forging demonstration with Mukansa (and legend) Gassan Sadatoshi sensei and his son, Sadanobu, on Oki Island kicking off our Emperor Gotoba Shin-Gobankaji Project crowdfunding campaign on the 16<sup>th</sup>. Watch NHK World news, we should be getting a spot on there too 16<sup>th</sup> Japan time.

All the Best



Paul Martin

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