

Swords used by samurai in 1868 attack on British diplomat on view

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The sword used by would-be assassin Sadakata Hayashida (Yoshiko Sato)



KYOTO--Two swords that were brandished by samurai during an assassination attempt on the British diplomat Sir Harry Parkes in 1868 will go on display at the Kyoto National Museum in October.

One of the swords was used by assailant Sadakata Hayashida, while the other was used by Hiromu Nakai, who was protecting Parkes and used the blade to slay the would-be assassin, according to the museum announcement on Sept. 5.

Hayashida, also known as Misao Suzaku, was a member of the Joi (antiforeigner) faction, which pounced on Parkes and his party during their journey to the Old Imperial Palace in Kyoto, where the diplomat was to have a private audience with Emperor Meiji in March 1868.

“Swords that contain the distant memory of a fierce fight as the sparks flew among samurai are a precious material to convey a turbulent period transforming from the era restoring the emperor and expelling the 'barbarians' to the one of the opening up of the country to the West,” said Teiichi Miyakawa, a senior researcher at the museum in Kyoto's Higashiyama Ward.

Hayashida's 74.3-centimeter blade is owned by the Reimei-jinja shrine in Higashiyama Ward, which is located near the samurai's grave.

The museum confirmed that the sword was the one Hayashida had with him when attacking the diplomat by its condition. It bears a significant nick as well as documentation written at the time of the sword's donation to the shrine by a member of the samurai's family in 1888.

Nakai's sword was the one used to defend Parkes and subsequently slay the attacker.

Nakai had once been a feudal retainer of the Satsuma clan and was escorting Parkes.

His sword was donated to the Kyoto National Museum in 1903 by Takashi Hara, who was married to Nakai's daughter and later became prime minister in 1918.

The assassination attempt took place four months after the restoration of imperial rule.

Parkes survived the attack, and the incident did not become a serious diplomatic issue between Japan and Britain. Ernest Satow, an interpreter who was accompanying the party, made a

meticulous report of the event.

However, the incident is believed to have been one of the triggers that made the Japanese government's new policy to open up to the West to be widely recognized in Japan.

The two swords will be showcased at the exhibition to mark the 150th anniversary of the death of fabled samurai Sakamoto Ryoma (1836-1867) at the museum, which is scheduled to run from Oct. 15 through Nov. 27.

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