

News Release

June 28, 2024
Proterial, Ltd.

Message on the Passing of Akira Kihara, Nittoho Tatara *Murage*

Akira Kihara, a Nittoho Tatara *murage* (master of Nittoho Tatara steelmaking) appointed by the Society for Preservation of Japanese Art Swords, passed away at the age of 88 on June 22. Mr. Kihara was a former employee of Proterial's Yasugi Works when it was operated by the company's predecessor. We would like to express our sincere condolences on the passing of the great master.

TATARA is a Japanese traditional steelmaking process in which iron sand and charcoal are transformed into a type of steel called *tamahagane*, a material indispensable for the production of traditional Japanese swords. The Yasugi Works employs a manufacturing method that grew out of the TATARA process to make its Yasugi Specialty Steel.

The TATARA process was discontinued at the end of the Second World War. Akira Kihara made tremendous contributions to its revival in 1977 under the name "Nittoho Tatara." Following the revival, he began to engage in Nittoho Tatara and was certified as a holder of a nationally selected conservation technique in 1986. Over many years from 1988, he worked as "*murage*" or master of Nittoho Tatara while also devoting himself to the education of *murage* trainers, thereby building a foundation for the ongoing future of TATARA. He also proactively passed down Japan's ironmaking culture through various educational activities including the provision of hands-on TATARA steelmaking experiences.

Long before becoming a Nittoho Tatara master, Akira Kihara began working at the Yasugi Works of Hitachi, Ltd. (presently Yasugi Works of Proterial). Starting there in 1954, he conducted research for the efficient production of Yasugi Specialty Steel out of iron sand using a continuously operating furnace called "Kakuro," which was made by applying the technologies that had been used for TATARA steelmaking.

From the time he joined the company, Akira Kihara went on to devote himself to making steel from iron sand for over 70 years. During that time, he made tremendous contributions not only to the company and steelmaking industry but to the development of manufacturing as a whole.

Akira Kihara was the very embodiment of the Yasugi Works's motto: "Sincerity creates great steel." His craftsmanship has been passed down to younger employees and he continues to serve as a tremendous role model for us all. We would like to express our deepest respect and appreciation for the outstanding achievements of the deceased master and pray wholeheartedly for his soul.



Akira Kihara



Akira Kihara working as a master of Nittoho Tatara

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Major titles held by Akira Kihara

- Holder of a nationally selected conservation technique for the production of *Tamahagane* (“Tatara-buki”)
- *Murage*, Nittoho Tatara, the Society for Preservation of Japanese Art Swords
- Guest professor at the Research Center of Ancient East Asian Iron Culture, Ehime University
- Lecturer at Shimane University
- Specialist member of the Okuizumo Town’s committee on cultural assets
- Honorary director, Okuizumo Tatara Sword Museum
- Honorary advisor, Wako Museum
- Advisor, Torikami charcoal pig-iron making factory, Proterial, Ltd.

Personal history

October 1935: Born in Yamaguchi Prefecture

April 1954: Joined the Yasugi Works, Hitachi, Ltd.

October 1956: Conducted research into iron sand smelting, collecting iron sand and manufactured charcoal pig iron in a furnace called “Kakuro”

November 1977: Revival of Nittoho Tatara

April 1986: Certified as a holder of a nationally selected conservation technique by the Minister of Education, Science, Sports and Culture

1988: Appointed a Nittoho Tatara *murage* by the Society for Preservation of Japanese Art Swords

May 1992: Received a prize from the Minister of International Trade and Industry for the improvement of a safety technique for the collection of iron sand

October 1994: Received a grand prize from the Pola Foundation of Japanese Culture

November 2004: Commended as a contemporary master craftsman (*gendai no meiko*) by the Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare

November 2006: Received the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Rays

May 2010: Named honorary citizen of Okuizumo Town

November 2023: Received a Yomiuri Aoniyoshi prize in the conservation and restoration division

Nittoho Tatara has been promoted under the Society for Preservation of Japanese Art Swords.

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