**Part 1: Before Shimazu**

To fully understand the story of Miyakonojō City, we must travel back thousands upon thousands of years, to a point in time when the entirety of the area in which the city now presides was once a simple lake. A portion of this area traditionally known as Kinkōwan, or what is now known as Kagoshima Bay, erupted spectacularly, spewing forth white pumiceous ash known as Shirasu and blanketing the lake. Following this eruption, but still some 13,000 years before the common era, Japan entered into the Jōmon era, and the people of Japan made their way to this newly formed area. After another 14,000 years pass, during the Manju era from 1024 to 1028, an official for the Dazaifu known as Taira-no-Suemoto began developing the region that would become Miyakonojō, beginning with an area near to modern-day Kōrimotochō known as Shimazu.

Suemoto would eventually hand this land over to Fujiwara-no-Yorimichi, a particularly powerful political figure of the time. This land would come to be one of Japan’s first great manors, the Shimazu-no-shō.

**Part 2: Birthplace of the Shimazu Family during the Middle Ages**

Here, it is worth noting that Miyakonojō is well known as “The Birthplace of the Shimazu Family”, yet it is not the only location to boast such a title; when people hear of the ‘Shimazu’, their thoughts may instead turn to Kagoshima! During March of the 1st year of the Bunji era in 1185, Minamoto-no-Yoritomo and his younger brother Yoshitsune fought in the battle of Dan-no-ura, eventually defeating the Hei family and seizing control of the area. In light of this, in August of the same year, Yoritomo designated Koremune Tadahisa to be the Shimazu Estate’s “Gesushiki”, or custodian. Tadahisa would eventually become the lord of the estate, or Jitō, as well as the military governor or Shugo of 3 ‘kuni’: Hyūga, Ōsumi, and Satsuma.

Tadahisa would later take the name of the estate as his own, becoming Shimazu Tadahisa; this is the origin of Miyakonojō’s “The Birthplace of the Shimazu Family” phrase. After becoming lord of the estate, Tadahisa is said to have built a hall in the area of Miyakonojō currently known as Iwayoshi, and moved to this hall to live. A monument now stands on this location in present-day Miyakonojō.

**Part 3: How Miyakonojō came to be Miyakonojō**

Over two hundred years later, we arrive at the naming of our city. Hongō Yoshihisa the second, during the first year of the Eiwa era in 1375, built a castle on the site that the Miyakonojō History Museum now calls home. The local area around the castle was known as Miyakojima, which literally translates to ‘the island of the capital’. Taking the first half of the area name, the castle became known as Miyako-no-jō, written using three kanji. It would be some time yet before the region itself would take on the current two kanji form of Miyakonojō.

**Part 4: Hongō, retaking the ‘Shimazu’ name, and the establishment of the** Miyakonojō **Shimazu**

Fast forward almost 300 years, and we come to the establishment of the Miyakonojō Shimazu. During the 2nd year of the Kanbun era in 1662, the second son of the clan head, Mitsuhisa, along with the lord of the Miyakonojō estate, Hongō Hisasada, passed away at only 19 years of age. This led to significant trouble regarding the estate’s successor between the Satsuma Clan and Miyakonojō.

The clan declared that they would have the current clan head’s 3rd son, Ki’ire Settsu-kami-Tadanaga, marry Hisasada’s partner, lady Chiyomatsu, in order to have them become the new lord of Miyakonojō. Accordingly, Tadanaga was instructed to take the Shimazu name.

Mitsuhisa also dispatched Hisatsune. While he was from the same ancestral line as Tadayoshi of the Hongō family, he was sent as Mitsuhisa’s son to become lord. Fearing that Hisatsune may harbour feelings of dissatisfaction regarding the Hongō lineage, Mitsuhisa decided to send them a number of traditional articles from the Hongō household, in addition to 300 koku of rice. Note that a ‘koku’ is a traditional measurement unit equivalent to approximately 180.4 litres, making the 300 koku offered equivalent to approximately 54117 litres of rice.

In response, Hisatsune insisted that either themselves or their child upon becoming 8 years of age, were to be officially appointed as the Sōryōshiki, or lord of the estate. Were this not possible, he would reject the offering of goods and rice from Mitsuhisa.

The clan responded to these demands by hardening their stance, withdrawing the offer they had made to Hisatsune, and notifying them that Tadanaga had been appointed lord of the estate and would take the Shimazu name. (In the end, Hisatsune decided not to disobey the clan, leading Tadanaga to become lord of the estate and take the Shimazu name.)

The reality of the matter is that the Hongō family, in line with the will of the clan, were allowed to retake the name Shimazu as they were direct descendants of the original Shimazu family. Thus, a new ‘Miyakonojō Shimazu Family’ was born.

**Part 5: The Family Crest of the Miyakonojō Shimazu**

An important part of each major family throughout Japan is their family crest. To explain briefly, the family crest is a device or mark which is used to represent a family or related personages through its shape and form. The family crest for the Miyakonojō Shimazu is strikingly similar to that of the Shimazu family main branch, with the characteristic difference being that there is a gap between the outer circle and the inner cross.

It is unfortunately unknown when exactly the Miyakonojō Shimazu’s family crest took this shape. However, we do know that by the 18th century, regulations regarding the crest’s form and usage had been decided upon by the Satsuma clan.

During November of the 2nd year of the Hōei era in 1705, the clan sent the following directive to the Miyakonojō Shimazu family: ‘As the gap between the cross character and the surrounding circle of the Miyakonojō Shimazu family crest is small, we require you to change your design so as to make this gap more apparent’.

In other words, due to the similarity between the clan head’s family crest and the Miyakonojō Shimazu family crest, they were ordered by the clan to make the difference clear.

One may wonder as to why it is that the clan decided, at this particular time, to regulate the family crest design in this way. It is believed that this was primarily due to the fact that the Bakufu, or Shogunate at the time had begun regulating the use of crests that were similar in style to that of Tokugawa Aoi, up to and including the ban of similarly designed crests. The clan, following suit, decided to ensure differentiation was possible between their various families’ crests, in a bid to increase their value. As a result of following this request, the Miyakonojō Shimazu family crest and its distinctive characteristics were strengthened, which gained it recognition amongst the wider society.

**Part 6: Shimazu Hisanaga and their Jinbaori**

Now for something a little different: Have you heard of the Jinbaori, or battle surcoat, known as the Hirashaji-marunijūjimon-jinbaori?

The lord of the Miyakonojō domain, Shimazu Hisanaga used to wear this surcoat, which translates directly to ‘Crimson felt backed cross-in-circle emblem Battle Surcoat’. Even amongst the Daimyō of the time, this particular surcoat was considered extremely expensive, and hence difficult to make. Hisanaga made his appearance wearing this at the very beginning of the Meiji Restoration period.

During the 2nd year of the Bunkyū era in 1862, on March 16th, Shimazu Hisamitsu led a battalion of approximately 1,000 soldiers to the old capital of Kyōto. At the time, a number of warriors seeking to overthrow the government continued to amass in Kyōto, causing public safety to significantly worsen. In the end, the Imperial Court gave an order to Hisamitsu to guard and protect the Imperial Palace.

As Shimazu Hisanaga’s wife was the daughter of Hisamitsu, he had Hisamitsu’s implicit trust. As such, when Hisamitsu himself left Kyōto headed for Edo, he entrusted the task of guarding the Imperial Palace to Hisanaga.

The directive from Hisamitsu to Hisanaga ordering him to make his way to the capital was relayed to him on the 25th of April, during the fourth year of the Bunkyū era in 1864. Hisanaga was currently undergoing medical treatment at an onsen in Kirishima, and headed directly to Kagoshima after his recovery was complete. On May 4th, he put together a force of 200 soldiers, headed to the capital, and arrived on May 19th. On the following day, at the Daimyō’s residence in Kyōto, he had a face-to-face meeting with Hisamitsu, where he was officially ordered to police the capital and guard the Imperial Court. It is believed that it was at this point that the Jinbaori was worn.

However, perhaps due to the stresses of the journey or a case of measles contracted, Hisanaga passed away just 1 week after arriving at the capital. Due to the fact that knowledge of his death could lead to significant unrest throughout society, his passing was kept a secret, and those that came with the family continued to carry out their mission of policing the capital and protecting the Imperial Court.

**Part 7: The birth of Miyakonojō Prefecture**

Just a few short years later, Miyakonojō went through a rather significant administerial change… Did you know that at the start of the Meiji era, Miyakonojō was, for a brief period of time, ‘Miyakonojō Prefecture’?

The new government, during the 2nd year of the Meiji era in 1869, by the graces of the then-emperor, enacted the Hansekihōkan, a policy requiring all feudal lords to return the lands and people over which they ruled to the central government (or, as it was written in effect, to the emperor). This policy came into force on the 17th of June, and was subsequently followed by the enactment of the Haihanchikenin 1871, abolishing all feudal domains, and establishing prefectures in their place. Feudal domains were abolished in name, being directly replaced with prefectures with no further adjustments, hence there were initially some 305 prefectures!

In particular for the Hyuga feudal domains, the Nobeoka, Takanabe, Sadowara, Obi, Hitoyoshi and Kagoshima prefectures were established.

In the case of the Haihanchiken, it cannot be said that this was simply a stand-in for the previous feudal domain and its territory, nor that the clans themselves were entirely dismantled. Based on this, the Kaichifukenwas passed by the new government around October to November of the same year, reducing the number of prefectures significantly, down to 75 by the year’s end, and eventually down to the prefectures that exist today. In accordance with this change, the 6 prefectures around the Hyuga area were reorganised into the Yatsushiro, Mimitsu, Miyakonojō & Kagoshima prefectures. This is how the prefecture of Miyakonojō was established.

Miyakonojō’s Sanji, equivalent to the present-day prefectural governor, was Katsura Hisatake, a central figure of the Kagoshima clan. The following day after arriving in Miyakonojō, Katsura was appointed to the prefectural office, equivalent to present-day Miyakonojō City Hall, and spread the 3 proclamations of honouring the morning, diligent study & the promotion of civil affairs, and began his work for the Miyakonojō Prefectural administration.

Here, Miyakonojō found itself anew, becoming a separate entity from the Kagoshima clan, and continued to develop and grow on its own. However, during the 6th year of the Meiji era in 1873, there was another sudden change to prefectures, and Miyakonojō became a part of Miyazaki prefecture.

**Part 8: The Meiji Restoration and Miyakonojō**

In addition to the birth of Miyakonojō Prefecture, the Meiji Restoration brought about other changes to the region. As discussed before, the new government, during the 2nd year of the Meiji era in 1869, enacted the Hansekihōkan, a policy requiring all feudal lords to return the lands and people over which they ruled to the central government. In response to this, Miyakonojō’s then-lord Shimazu Hisahiro relinquished his domain to the government, and moved to Kagoshima where his mansion was located.

The administration of the era, the Meiji Government, elected to appoint Mishima Michitsune, who was one of the Kagoshima Clan’s warriors, as the estate steward of Miyakonojō.

The city’s warriors rose up in revolt upon the appointment of Mishima to Miyakonojō, and Miyakonojō’s regional administration, operations and objectives needed to be changed. Following this, feudal clans were abolished through the enactment of the Haihanchiken during November of the 4th year of the Meiji era in 1871, and the land all the way to Ōsumihantō south of Ōyodogawa became a part of Miyakonojō Prefecture.

The Miyakonojō Shimazu, who had previously moved to Kagoshima, returned to Miyakonojō in the 12th year of the Meiji era in 1879, and the remnants of the shrine known as Hayasuzudaimyōjin were rebuilt as the Shimazu household. This household still stands on the same location in present-day Miyakonojō.