

NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL
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Meito Kansho
Examination of Important Swords

Classification:
Juyo Bijutsu Hin

Type: Wakizashi
Mei: Sagami kuni ju nin Hiromitsu
Joji 3 nen 3 gatsu bi

Length: 1 shaku 1 sun 3.5 bu (34.4 cm)
Sori: 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)
Motohaba: 9 bu 6 rin (2.9 cm)
Motokasane: 2 bu 2 (0.6 cm)
Nakago length: 3 sun 1 bu 7 rin (9.6 cm)
Nakago sori: slight

Commentary

This is a hirazukuri wakizashi with a mitsumune, and which is wide and long. There is a standard thickness or kasane and a shallow sori. The jihada is itame mixed with mokume hada, and the entire jihada is well forged and some parts are visible. There are thick dense ji-nie, frequent chikei, and mizukage at the habaki-moto. The hamon is gunome mixed with choji, and there are ko-gunome, square shaped gunome, and togari (pointed gunome). Along the upper part of the hamon, the hamon width becomes wider. There are ashi, yo, thick even nie, kinsuji, sunagashi, yubashiri, and tobiyaki. The boshi on the omote is straight with a komaru and return; on the ura the boshi is a small notare with togari and with a komaru and return. Both sides have small hakikake and there is a long return. The horimono on the omote is a suken with tsume, and on the ura there is a katana hi carved through the nakago. The nakago is ubu, the tip is kurijiri, and the yasurime are unclear. There are two mekugi-ana. On the omote under the first mekugi-ana (original) along the center, there is a long kanji signature, and the ura has a date.

At the end of the Kamakura period, the Soshu Den was established by Masatsune, and was continued by Sadamune who was succeeded during the Nambokucho period by Hiromitsu and Akihiro. Hiromitsu has blades dated around Kan-o (1350-52) to Joji 3 (1364). Akihiro's dated blades are from Enbun 2 (1357) to Shitoku 4 (1387) and from this, it is supposed that Hiromitsu is a somewhat senior smith to Akihiro. Hiromitsu's hamon, instead of Soshu Den's primary notare hamon, are mixed with his unique wide topped choji hamon called "dango (a round shaped rice cake) choji". He has hitatsura hamon with tobiyaki, yubashiri, and muneyaki which he is supposed to have originated. Masamune and Sadamune have hamon with tobiyaku and yubashiri, but these features probably were not made deliberately. Since he was a mainstream Soshu Den smith, we could say that the hitatsura hamon style was established by Hiromitsu. This hamon style influenced not only Sue Soshu smiths during the Muromachi period, but also other smiths around Japan and the style continued with the Shinto, Shinshinto and gendai (modern) smiths. We could say this is an inovative hamon which appeared during Japanese sword history. Sometimes, the hamon's hataraki, such as tobiyaki and yubashiri, could lose sophistication. But Hiromitsu's hataraki are natural and soft, and display a high level of sophistication, displaying his high level of skill. Besides Hiromitsu's usual long kanji signature, he has two blades with a small two kanji signature with square shaped kanji, and these are classified as Juyo Bijutsu Hin. One has a hitatsura style hamon on the upper part of the blade, and the other has suguha style hamon. They are supposed to show an earlier style and be early period work but we are not sure about this conclusion today: either these are Hiromitsu's early work, or his late predecessor's work. Compared with Akihiro's work, both of them are unusual since they have no horimono. Most of Hiromitsu's blades have simple horimono such as katana hi, gomabashi and suken, and the jihada and hamon do not differ much. Sometimes Akihiro has smaller size blades which are less than 1 shaku, but most of Hiromitsu blades are large and more than 1 shaku. This wakizashi's large shape reflects the period's style. This hitatsura hamon has worn down tobiyaki and yubashiri, and the hamon becomes gradually wider, and has many variations. There are thick even fine ha-nie, kinsuji, nie-suji, sunagashi, and all kinds of variability or activity which blend together, and this shows one of Hiromitsu's best elements. This was clasified as Juyo Bijutsu Hin in Showa 16 (1941), and at that time was owned by the Tottori-han's 14th lord, the Marquis Ikeda Nakahiro. In the Tokugawa era, it is possible that this was the Inshu Ikeda family's wakizashi.

Explanation and photo by Ishii Akira.

Juyo Tosogu

Akegarasu zu (picture of crows during sunrise) tsuba

Mei : Fujiwara Kiyotoshi with kao

Among the many toso gold smiths, I think Kiyotoshi really deserves the label of a gold smith. He produced excellent work with great designs, shapes, backgrounds, carving techniques, color, and detailed construction. His works are always original, and exhibit high levels of perfection. From the impressive reisho-style signature (a signature using old Chinese kanji characters), this is a Tenpo 6 period work, when Kiyotoshi was around 31 to 32 years old. The omote has 5 crows and the ura has 2 crows. All different shaped crows are flying through the clouds at daybreak, and screaming and looking each other. Among Kiyotoshi's work, this is a relatively neat design. In the chilly air of daybreak in a still world, the crows are cheerfully flying and full of life, and they give us a feeling of positive energy. Kiyotoshi's sketches of living subjects are very well done, and just as though you can hear voice in the case of people, you can hear the sounds of wings in the case of birds. The simple round tsuba shape reminds us of the extensive sky, and the nikudori (surface and volume) is a little high toward the center and is detailed. The fine light green shibuichi dots are not made with a chisel, but might be iron dots, and the moist appearing rough surface is elegant. The combination of this with the jet black crows and golden field of clouds produces an impressive color effect. The crows tongue, in a micrometer size with scarlet color copper work, is amazing. The accuracy of his techniques for carving, zogan (inlay), and iroe (colored metal) are excellent, and didn't change even during his later years. None of his techniques are careless and people call him a master smith. Kiyotoshi passed away in Meiji 9 at the age of 73. We could say that he might have been lucky as he passed way at the same time as the Haitorei edicts which prohibited wearing swords in public. That would be rude, but I wish to see his gold smith work in other fields than beside toso kanagu (sword fittings), and I am sure they would also be very wonderful works.

Expalanation by Kubo Yasuko

Shijo Kantei To No. 690

The deadline to submit answers for the No. 690 issue Shijo Kantei To is August 5, 2014. Each person may submit one vote. Submissions should contain your name and address and be sent to the NBTHK Shijo Kantei. You can use the Shijo Kantei card which is attached in this magazine. Votes postmarked on or before August 5, 2014 will be accepted. If there are swordsmiths with the same name in different schools, please write the school or prefecture, and if the swordsmith was active for more than one generation, please indicate a specific generation.

Information:

Type: Tanto

Length: 8 sun 8.5 bu (26.82 cm)

Sori: uchizori

Motohaba: 7 bu 4 rin (2.25 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 1 rin (0.65 cm)

Nakago length: 3 sun 6 bu (10.9 cm)

Nakago sori: very slight

This is a hira-zukuri tanto with an ihorimune. The mihaba is narrow for the length, and there is uchizori. The jihada is itame mixed with mokume and nagare hada, and the entire jihada is visible. There are ji-nie, frequent chikei, and bo-utsuri along the hamon. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture, and there is a bright tight nioiguchi and nioi type ko-nie. The horimono on the omote and ura are katana hi with marudome. The nakago is slightly machi okuri. The nakago tip is kurijiri, the yasurime are kattesagari and there are three mekugi-ana. On the omote side of the nakago, one kanji is in contact with the original mekugiana and under the mekugi-ana along the center, there is a long kanji signature. The ura side has a date.

Teirei Kanshou Kai For June

The swords discussed below were shown in the June 14, 2014, meeting at the NBTHK headquarters building. This discussion presents information and answers concerning the makers of these blades.

Meeting Date: June 14, 2014 (2nd Saturday of June)

Place: Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Hinohara Dai

Kantei To No. 1: tachi

Mei: Rai Kunitoshi

Genkyo Gan-nen (first year of Genkyo) 12 gatsu bi

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun 5.5 bu

Sori: 9 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight ko-itame; there are thick dense jinie, fine chikei, and pale bo-utsuri.

Hamon: wide suguha style hamon mixed with ko-choji, ko-gunome; this is a ko-gunome type hamon. There are ashi, yo, and saka-ashi. There is a bright nioiguchi, frequent ko-nie, kinsuji, fine sunagashi, and some places have muneyaki.

Boshi: wide yakiba, straight and with a komaru.

In Edo times, there was a story about some sword connoisseur. One time in voting for the makers of 10 blades during a kantei, he voted for the Rai Kunitoshi name for 9 blades in the first vote. However, the last one was a Rai Kunimitsu and he also gave the correct answer in the first vote. I never experienced this kind of difficult kantei voting experience. Even if all the blades look like Rai Kunitoshi, if voting this way continues to the 5th to 7th blades, usually people are thinking "this cannot continue because there cannot be this many Rai Kunitoshi blades". The connoisseur above continued to vote for Rai Kunitoshi, but the last one was not Rai Kunitoshi, and he changed to Rai Kunimitsu. We respect his wise judgment. He might have had a highly analytical ability, but at the same time he did not use prejudice or idle thoughts. He judged with his own eye, and this is a firm rule for any judgment, and he always kept this rule. Maybe he is a person who had strong self confidence with excellent analytical abilities. We are not attempting to re-enact this story, but at this time, among today's 5 kantei-to, we have 4 Rai school blades and one Hasebe school blade with a suguha blade. There are supposed to be a couple of familiar blades. But this situation is different from the usual selection of blades from different individual schools. In today's voting all kinds of names came up and you cannot help this. Even if the persons who selected the blades for voting were to vote, the same results would be seen. This was a special case for voting and we accepted a wide range of answers as correct answers. But there are two people who received 100 points for all of the correct (but not necessarily exactly correct) answers, and this was excellent. This kind of selection is very difficult for those voting, but on this occasion we thought we would try a different type of blade selection. Usually in the Teirei Kansho Kai, we do not display blades from just one school for comments, but at this time we had a purpose and kept a record of the results.

This is a Rai Kunitoshi tachi, which belonged to the Uesugi family, and is classified as Juyo Bijutsu Hin. This is a tachi from the second half of the Kamakura period. It has a tachi shape, the jihada is a tight ko-itame and a refined Rai-hada, and there are pale bo-utsuri. Genkyo gannen was the time of his last work, and around this

time many of his works are based on a gentle suguha style. But this tachi has a prominent out ko-choji hamon and is a lively midare hamon, and for his last work it has a spirited feeling. Also, in the signature, inside of the “Kuni” kanji, inside of the square, four lines four are slanted down to the left side with deep chisel marks, and this kind of kanji shape is similar to those of Kunitoshi’s son Kunimitsu. From these details there is an opinion that this tachi could be some kind of joint work with Kunimitsu. However, this is supposed to be among Rai Kunitoshi’s small number of tachi with a prominent ko-choji midare hamon. For this reason, the Ryokai and Rai Kunimitsu names are treated as correct answers. Some people also voted for Unjo. The tachi’s utsuri is a little different from the usual bo-uturi, and there is some dark midare utsuri inside the utsuri. Possibly people thought this was jifu-utsuri and voted for Unjo. The term used to describe Unjo’s jifu utsuri translates to something like “this looks like just like it was pressed by a thumb” and many of the dark parts of the utsuri are clear. Many of Unjo’s hamon are ko-choji and ko-gunome alternating at the koshimoto, but the upper half of the hamon are a simple suguha type. Usually Unjo’s boshi tips are round and have a long return. The tachi boshi have a wide yakiba and a Mount Fuji shape, which can also be seen in Rai Kunitoshi’s work, so please note this.

Kantei To No. 2: katana

Mei: Mumei Den Ryokai

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 5 bu

Sori: slightly over 7 bu

Design: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight itame mixed with nagare-hada towards the hamon side. There are thick dense ji-nie, fine chikei and utsuri.

Hamon: suguha style hamon mixed with ko-choji, and ko-gunome. There are frequent ashi and yo, a slightly thick nioiguchi, frequent ko-nie, a bright and clear nioi guchi, kinsuji and fine sunagashi.

Boshi: straight and with a komaru.

This is an osuriage mumei, Den Ryokai tachi, and it is classified as Juyo Bijutsu Hin. The original shape before it became suriage is a narrow tachi from the latter half of the Kamakura period. The jihada is a tight refined ko-itame, and there are utsuri. The hamon is a suguha style mixed with ko-choji and ko-gunome; there are ko-ashi, yo, and the nioi guchi is bright and clear. The boshi is a sophisticated komaru. All the elements clearly show the Rai school’s good points. Ryokai is classified as a Rai school smith. Many of his shapes have a high shinogi-ji, his jihada are a masame type, and there is often a whitish jihada. His hamon are suguha or a suguha style mixed with ko-choji and ko-gunome. The hamon are soft,

and his characteristics are a little different from the usual Rai school work. But the katana's jihada has bo-utsuri, and clear and strong utsuri, the hamon is a prominent ko-choji, and the nioiguchi is not soft but bright and clear. The katana is more likely to remind us of Rai Kunitoshi's work. The reasons for the Ryokai name with the use of "den" or tradition is because this is different from a 100 percent typical Ryokai work, or the katana had long been attributed as a respectable Ryokai work. Looking at this katana as a Rai Kunitoshi or Rai Kunimitsu work is very reasonable, and either name is treated as a correct answer. If you look at Ryokai's characteristics here, there is the high shinogi-ji, and another is that the jihada is mixed with masame hada.

Kantei To No 3: tachi

Mei: Rai Kunimitsu

Length: slightly over 2 shaku 2 sun 7 bu

Sori: 7.5 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight itamehada; some parts have ohada: there are dense ji-nie and bo-utsuri.

Hamon: suguha style, based on ko-gunome mixed with ko-choji. There are intermittent yubashiri at the top of the hamon, ashi, yo, a bright nioiguchi, frequent ko-nie, kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: straight; the omote is ko-maru, and the ura has a sharp tip, and both sides have hakikake.

The tachi has deficient funbari at the habaki-moto, and from this you can see that this is a suriage blade. The original shape was slightly wider, and the widths at the moto and saki are not different. There is a large koshizori, the tip has sori, and there is a long chu-kissaki. The shape is from the late Kamakura to early Nambokucho period, and the entire tachi has a beautiful wazori shape, and you can see Rai school characteristics. The jihada is a refined tight itame hada or Rai hada and there are bo-utsuri. The hamon is based on suguha mixed with ko-gunome, and ko-choji and there are ko-nie. On the omote side hamon, there are Kyo-saka-ashi, and the boshi is a gentle komaru, and entire tachi has outstanding Rai school characteristics. Among the Rai school smiths, Rai Kunitoshi is known for a wide range of styles. One of his Juyo Bunkazai tachi is described as: the hamon is ko-choji mixed with ko-midare; the midare hamon peaks are close to each other; there are intermittent kijimata shaped yubashiri at the top of the hamon which reminds us of Kuniyuki's work at first glance. For these reasons, voting was difficult, but the katana has some of Kunimitsu's characteristics. Things to consider

are: among the Rai school smiths, shapes can have have a wide mihaba and we see this in the work of Kuniyuki, the two kanji Kunitoshi, Kunimitsu, and Kunitsugu. The kissaki is not a mid-Kamakura period inokubi kissaki, and this is a late Kamakura period's longer chu-kissaki . The hamon is mixed with many round topped gunome, which were not prominent until Kunimitsu's time. If it were Kunitsugu's work with a wide mihba, the jihada and hamon would have stronger nie. People observed these details and many people voted for Rai Kunimitsu.

Kantei To No 4: wakizashi

Mei: Hasebe Kunishige

Length: 1 shaku 7.5 bu

Sori: 1 bu

Design: hirazukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jihada: itame mixed with mokume, on the ha and mune sides the nagare hada become a masame hada and the entire hada is visible; there are ji-nie and chikei.

Hamon: hoso-suguha, slightly notare, and the entire habuchi has hotsure. There are ko-ashi, frequent nie, kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: the omote and ura are straight, the tip is round, there are kinsuji, hakikake, and a long return.

Horimono: on the omote there is a suken, and the ura has a gomabashi.

This is a Hasebe Kunishige suguha wakizashi. If this were a normal set of swords, many people would have voted for Hasebe and Nobukuni. At this time, because of the many Rai school blades present, many people voted for Rai Kunimitsu.

Kunimitsu has hira-zukuri wakizashi, over a 1 shaku sunnobi size, a wide mihaba, a slight sori, and a thin kasane with suguha. But this kind of work is very rare for him, and you should note the following elements. Hasebe's tanto and hira-zukuri wakizashi jihada have a strong visible hada for the Yamashiro school. For the Rai school, later generations such as Tomokuni and Kuninaga, the jihada are sometimes similar to Hasebe. But Rai Kunimitsu's jihada are usually a tight itame hada with dense ji-nie, and a refine well forged jihada, and this is different from Hasebe. Also, the wakizashi's boshi has a large round tip and return, and the long return comes down intermittently to the koshimoto, and considering these characteristics, the Hasebe name would be appropriate.

Kantei To No. 5: tachi

Mei: Rai Kunitsugu

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun 4.5 bu

Sori: 1 sun 1 bu

Design: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight itame hada, and some places have a dark colored kawari-tetsu: there are frequent ji-nie, fine chikei, and pale bo-utsuri.

Hamon: suguha style, shallow notare, mixed with ko-choji and ko-gunome; there are ashi, yo, frequent ko-nie, a bright and clear nioiguchi, and muneyaki at the koshimoto.

Boshi: straight with a komaru and with a return.

This is a Rai Kunitsugu ubu-nakago tachi with a signature, and is classified as Tokubetsu Juyo Token. This is a ubu tachi shape, with funbari at the koshimoto, a standard to slightly narrow mihaba, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. There is a chu-kissaki, a large koshizori, and the tip has sori which is a shape from around the end of the Kamakura period. The entire shape shows a clear wa-zori, the same as the Number 1 and Number 3 blades here, and this is a major characteristic of the Rai school's shape. Except for the kawari-tetsu area, the jihada is a tight ko-itame, and there is a refined hada with pale bo-utsuri. The hamon is suguha with notare mixed with ko-choji and ko-gunome. There are frequent ko-nie, and the nioi guchi is bright and clear. On the omote side, some parts of the hamon have Kyo-saka-ashi, and there are muneyaki. The entire sword shows remarkable Rai school characteristic points. Today, there are only ten Rai Kunitsugu signed tachi extant. The mihaba are wider than usual, the hamon are different from tanto and wakizashi midare hamon. Many of his tachi hamon are a suguha style mixed with ko-choji and ko-gunome and there are nie. Also, the hamon are based on ko-notare and ko-gunome hamon with vertical variations. There are strong ha-nie, yubashiri, kinsuji and sunagashi, which places a focus on the hamon's variations and an emphasis strong nie. Other hamon are based on a clear shape with large size gunome and choji.

Rai Kunitsugu's usual signatures are a large size with a slightly thick tagane (chisel). Kunitsugu's signature's "Kuni" kanji are shorter, just like on this month's Shijo Kanteito tanto, and the tachi has the same kind of signature. Compared with his usual signature, the Number 5 tachi signature is a smaller size made with a fine tagane or chisel. Also the "Kuni" kanji is longer, and seems to be from a different period of work. There is another suriage tachi, classified as Juyo Token, on which the part of the signature below the "Rai Kuni" kanji is cut off, and this has a signature similar to this one. Among the many wide Kunitsugu's tachi, this has a narrow mihaba, an elegant shape, and the hamon is a suguha style with notare, and mixed with ko-choji and ko-gunome, which is a gentle hamon. This is almost the same as his teacher Rai Kunitoshi's work, and the other suriage tachi are a Rai Kunitoshi style suguha hamon with the same style signature. From this, there is an opinion that this tachi and the other Juyo Token tachi are Kunitsugu's early work. This tachi reminds us of Rai Kunitoshi and Ryokai work, and it is difficult to judge

the Kunitsugu name precisely. So Rai Kunitoshi, Ryokai, and Rai Kunimitsu answers are treated as correct answers. Either Kuniyuki, and the two kanji Kunitoshi answer is treated as almost correct answer, and an Enju answer is treated as a secondarily correct answer. Kuniyuki has narrow tachi, but many of his hamon are mixed with a ko-midare hamon, and the midare are close each other or there are intermittent kijimata shaped yubashiri on the top of the hamon, which are a more classic looking appearance.

Shijo Kantei To No. 688 (in the May, 2014 issue)

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To No. 688 in the May issue is a tanto by Rai Kunitsugu.

This tanto is a standard length, and a little wide for the length, thick, and there is almost no sori, and from this shape, you can judge this as an end of Kamakura to early Nambokucho tanto. According to sword book "Kokon mei zukushi", Rai Kunitsugu's active period started around the Gen-o period, and includes the Kareki, Gentoku, and Sho-o periods. Today we do not see many of his dated blades, and there is one ken dated Kareki 2. His active period is supposed to be from the end of the Kamakura to the early Nambokucho period. Today we see that his tanto and hira-wakizashi are more or less standard sizes and his sunnobi tanto are around 9 sun and are thick and have no sori. There are tanto longer than 1 shaku and wide with a little sori, and small wakizashi, and an example is the Kishu Tokugawa family's blade classified Kokuho.

The Kokuho wakizashi is large among his works, but this is quite different from other Nambokucho blades: those are notably long sunnobi tanto with a little sori, and a peak Nambokucho Enbun and Joji shape. These are thin with a clear sori. From this, you can recognize that his active period was before the peak of the Nambokucho period. His tanto and wakizashi jihada are a tight ko-itame or large itame and mokume, and the hada is visible. Many of them have Rai-hada and clear bo-utsuri. He has tight itame jihada with suguha which are very similar to his teacher Rai Kunitoshi's work. But most of his characteristic tanto and wakizashi have notare and gunome mixed with a midare hamon. This means his hamon are notare mixed with gunome, there is a slightly wide nioiguchi, dense nie, the nioiguchi is bright and clear, and there are kinsuji and sunagashi. Kunitsugu's boshi are straight with a komaru, or shallow a notarekomi where the tip is sharp and with a komaru. His nakago tips are kurijiri, the yasurime are kiri or a shallow katte sagari. In the case of tanto and wakizashi, usually on the omote side under the mekugi-ana on the center, there is a three kanji signature "Rai Kunitsugu". In voting, most people voted for Rai Kunitsugu, and some people voted for Rai Kunimitsu. Both smiths have very similar work, and sometimes it is hard to recognize the differences, so Kunimitsu is treated as a correct answer. In the case

of midareba hamon, Kunitsugu's hamon are often wider than Kunimitsu's, and there are more dense nie and prominent kinsuji and sunagshi, which are strong Soshu Den style details. For an almost correct answer, a few people voted for Rai Kunitoshi. He has a tanto dated Bunpo 2, classified Juyo Bijutsu Hin: the hamon is notare mixed with gunome, and there is a bright nioiguchi and frequent nie. This reminds us of Kunimitsu and Kunitsugu's work, and the answer may have considered this. But Rai Kunitoshi has a very few works of this kind. His tanto are around 7 sun 4 sun, a small size with uchizori, and which is an older shape than this tanto; in addition, his nie in the jihada and hamon are more gentle compared with the usual Kunimitsu and Kunitsugu work.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai