

NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL
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Meito Kansho
Examination of Important Swords

Classification:
Tokubetsu Juyo Token
Especially Important Sword

Type: Katana
Mei: Sesshu ju Fujiwara Sukehiro

Length: 2 shaku 5 sun 1 rin (76.7 cm)
Sori: 5 bu 8 rin (1.75 cm)
Motohaba: 9 bu 2 rin (2.95 cm)
Sakihaba: 6 bu 7 rin (2.05 cm)
Motokasane: 2 bu 3 rin (0.7 cm)
Sakikasane: 1 bu 7 rin (0.5 cm)
Kissaki length: 1 sun 2 bu 2 rin (3.7 cm)
Nakago length: 7 sun 2 bu 8 rin (22.05 cm)
Nakago sori: 3 rin (0.1 cm)

Commentary

This is a shinogi zukuri katana with an ihorimune, thick and slightly wide, the widths at the moto and saki are a little different, and there is a chu-kissaki. The jihada is a tight ko-itame mixed with some itame hada. There are ji-nie, some places have fine chikei, and at the machi there is a pale mizukage. The entire hamon is high, and the yakiba almost extends over the shinogi. The hamon is choji mixed with ko-choji, gunome, ko-gunome, and togariba. At the bottom, there is a narrow unusually shaped hamon with a lively midare pattern. There are ashi, yo, a nioiguchi with some dense nie, and the entire hamon has a tight nioiguchi. There are tobiyaki, yubashiri, and on the ura side around the monouchi, there are muneyaki. The boshi on the omote is straight, and the ura is a slight notarekomi. Both sides have an o-maru, and the tips have hakikake. The nakago is ubu, there is a thin edge along the ha side, the tip is iriyamagata, and the yasurime are osuji-chigai. There is a one mekugi-ana. On the omote beginning above the mekugi-ana and along the

mune side, there is a long large kanji signature, and the size of the kanji become larger towards the bottom.

In the Osaka Shinto period, the smiths who were active after the Kanei period such as Sukehiro, Shinkai, and Nakakochi were all nidai or second generation smiths. In the previous two NBTHK journal issues, the smiths such as Kunisuke and Kunisada who were mentioned were the first generation smiths, and the shodai Sukehiro (Soboro Sukehiro) is also a first generation smith.

Soboro Sukehiro was a kazu-uchi smith (who worked to make mass production blades) in Harima province's Kokuganoshō Tsuda village (today, this is in Himeji City's southwest area). Later, he went to Osaka, and became a student of the Shodai Kunisuke. It is thought that he became Kunisuke's student in the early Kanei period. His earliest acknowledged signature is Keian 1 (1648), which was a year after his teacher passed away, and at this time he is thought to have become an independent smith. From his highly skilled work, he is thought to have produced his teacher's daisaku swords for a long time.

The date he died is not certain, but in Showa 52, Mr Kazuo Iida's study (NBTHK Sword Journal, Issue Number 243) concluded that the Shodai Soboro Sukehiro's own temple records at Myotokuji (in Osaka City, Minami-ku) showed that he passed away on Kanbun 3 (1663), November 16th. Later sword books such as the "Shinto Shokan Yoroku" and the "Honcho Shito Ichiran" have indicated the same records and so Iida's opinion is understandable. According to historical records in the temple, it is definite that the Nidai Sukehiro was the son of Soboro. Recent opinions are divided over whether he was an adopted son or actual son. But according to Iida, evidence for him being an adopted son is not seen in Edo period books. In Iida's opinion, it is possible that recent sword books may have made errors when they copied the older books. Also, the Nidai's birth place is Settsu province's Uchide village (today, this is in Hyogo prefecture's Ashiya city's southwest area) so Sukehiro would have moved from Tsuda village and the Nidai is supposed to have been born in there.

Another opinion is that the Shodai received his title around Meireki 2 (1656), and after the Banji era he was no longer making swords for several years before he passed away in Kanbun 3, and so the Nidai was supposed to be responsible for making his swords. In any case, the Nidai's rare sense and talent were developed under Soboro, and his accomplishments in the sword world are very large. The shodai's (first generation) nickname "Soboro" comes from his early work which has a soe (companion)-mei in hiragana: "そぼろ" or "Soboro" such as those dated Keian 1 and Shōō 3. Also Meireki 3 works have a hiragana soe-me and kanji mixed together: そ不 (本) 路. 不 and 本 can both be read as "BO" and 路 is read as "RO". There are several theories to explain where the name Soboro came from: (1) He used to wear tattered and poor clothing; (2) from breaking up fine pieces of material for forging; (3) a location; (4) the kanji 'kusatsuyu' ("dew on the grass") means sharp blades; (5) a Kanji Christian name "Sopolo (Anjiro)"; (6) The highest skilled smith. However, none of these ideas are firmly established yet.

Sukehiro's styles, besides emulating his teacher's style, were Bizen-den (mainly gunome hamon) and some suguha hamon. Usually, his swords have a standard length and are not too long, and have a gentle appearance. However, this sword is long with a dynamic shape and refined jihada. Also, there is a prominent high yakiba with vertical alterations or variations in the height of the choji midare hamon, and notably, the upper half has more frequent alterations in height. The entire katana is well done, and has many characteristic points, and this is one of his best works. This katana is being exhibited at the NBTHK "Osaka Token" exhibit from July 15-October 26, 2014.

Explanation and photo by Ishii Akira.

Juyo Tosogu

Niji zu (rainbow design) kozuka

Mei : Senzai Atsuoki tsukuru

Atsuoki belonged to prestigious Kyo kinko Otsuki school and his teacher was the high skilled master smith Kawarabashi Hideoki. Many of his styles reflect the Otsuki school's characteristic picture designs in takabori (high relief carving) with iroe (colored inlays). His favorite styles make good use of hira-zogan (high relief inlays) and katakiri-bori with a strong composition, and have a Kyoto style sophistication. This kozuka's theme is rainbows, and a rainbow is a very unusual theme. For some reason, rainbow designs are not seen in Japanese paintings and other craft arts, and not in toso kanagu. Maybe this is because it is difficult to express the rainbow's bright light, or because the rainbow is a mysterious natural phenomenon. It could be very difficult to express a rainbow in soft metal or kinko carving instead of in a painting. The rainbow's expression has to use many layers of delicate color differences with shibuichi and silver hirazogan (high relief inlays), and also a zougan inlay with a fine sandy background. If you move your vision, the sandy zougan's many layers of different colors and brightness could produce rainbow-like colors, just like an aogai-chirashi saya's aogai. This is Atsuoki's original skillful and sophisticated technique. Also, besides the rainbow, the small cloud's layout is sophisticated, and this shows Atsuoki's extraordinary and skillful talents.

Explanation by Iida Toshihisa

Shijo Kantei To No. 693

The deadline to submit answers for the No. 693 issue Shijo Kantei To is November 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 November 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: Katana

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 5 bu (68.2 cm)

Sori: 6.5 bu (1.97 cm)

Motohaba: 1 sun 07 rin (3.25 cm)

Sakihaba: 7 bu 4 rin (2.25 cm)

Motokasane: slightly less than 2 bu (0.6 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)

Kissaki length: 1 sun 3 bu 4 rin (4.05 cm)

Nakago length: 5 sun 3 bu (16.06 cm)

Nakago sori: very slight

This is a wide shingi zukuri katana with an ihorimune. The widths at the moto and saki are not very different; there is a poor hiraniku; the tip has sori, and there is a long chu-kissaki. The jihada is itame mixed with nagare hada, and there is a visible jihada. There are ji-nie, and whitish utsuri. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture, and some parts have ashi extending toward the hasaki or edge. There is a tight nioiguchi and nioiguchi type ko-nie. The nakago is ubu, the tip is iriyamagata, and the yasurime are taka-no-ha. There is one mekugi-ana. On the omote side of the nakago, there is a two kanji signature on the mune. Many of this smith's boshi are midarekomi.

Teirei Kanshou Kai For September

The swords discussed below were shown in the September 13, 2014, meeting at the NBTHK headquarters building. This discussion presents information and answers concerning the makers of these blades.

Meeting Date: September 13, 2014 (2nd Saturday of September) at 1:00pm.

Place: Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Kubo Yasuko

Kantei To No. 1: katana

Mei: Kinzogan mei Sa Kunihiro
Honnami with kao (Koson)

Length: 2 shaku 9 sun 9 bu

Sori: 5 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: itame mixed with mokume, and some places have nagare hada. There are frequent ji-nie, fine chikei, and pale midare utsuri.

Hamon: ko-choji mixed with ko-gunome, ko-notare, square shape gunome, and around the monouchi area it is suguha. There are frequent ashi and yo, nioi type ko-nie, kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: wide yakiba; the omote is a shallow notarekomi; the ura is straight; both sides are tsukiage with a sharp tip; there are frequent hakikake and a return.

This is an osuriage katana by one of the Samonji school smiths, thought to be Kunihiro. The wide mihaba with an okissaki shows a peak Nambokucho period Enbun/Joji shape. The hamon is ko-choji mixed with ko-gunome, ko-notare, and square gunome. The jihada has pale midare utsuri, which appears as Bizen-den style work. In particular, from the nagare hada and sharp boshi, many people voted for Motoshige. This is understandable, but Motoshige's characteristic points, are a square shape gunome hamon and kataochi type saka-ashi, or a square shape gunome hamon which becomes wider with the bottom valleys showing togariba. Also, Motoshige's jihada are usually visible, and the boshi tips are sharp, but you never see such pronounced tsukiage, frequent hakikake, and a sharp tip and return. Some people voted for the Aoe school. If it were Nambokucho period Aoe work, the jihada would be very tight, and many swords have dan-utsuri. The hamon are either a gorgeous saka-choji midare hamon, or a saka-ashi type suguha with ko-ashi, and many of them have a tight nioiguchi.

Most of the Samonji school's signed blades are tanto and wakizashi. Most of the long blades are o-suriage mumei judged as being Samonji. It is difficult to find clear deterministic and characteristic points among the individual smiths, and if this were judged as Samonji school work, it would be fine. Usually, Kunihiro's work has a

wide notare type hamon, Hiroyasu's hamon are mixed with prominent gunome, and many of Yoshisada's hamon are a gentle gunome type.

Kantei To No. 2: wakizashi

Mei: Nobukuni

Length: 1 shaku 1 bu

Sori: slight

Design: hirazukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jihada: ko-itame mixed with mokume-hada and the hamon side is mixed with nagare hada. There are thick dense ji-nie, and fine chikei.

Hamon: mainly gunome-midare mixed with ko-gunome, ko-notare, and togariba, and in places, there are two continuous yahazu gunome and a wide midare hamon. There are frequent ashi, yo, nie, fine sunagashi, yubashiri, and frequent mune-yaki.

Boshi: the omote is a shallow notare, the ura is straight, and both sides have a sharp tip, hakikake, a long return, and continuous but uneven muneyaki.

Horimono: on the both sides, the upper parts have katana-hi with marudome, and inside the hi there are two bonji; under this there are long bonji, and on the omote side there is a kasane-bori rendai.

Nobukuni was active in the Nambokucho era around the Enbun/Joji period, and is supposed to be a Shodai smith. The school's generations continued to the end of the Nambokucho period to the early Muromachi period around the Oei period. The signature is a unique shape: inside the "kuni" kanji, the left and right are written in opposite directions, and from the characteristic signature, this could be judged as being from around the Oei period and Saemon no jo Nobukuni's work. This is long for the width, and is a thick hirazukuri wakizashi, and the shape shows the period's style. His hamon are either suguha with a tight nioiguchi, or primarily a midare gunome hamon. Notably, the midare gunome hamon have two continuous gunome with a yahazu type midare hamon, and between the gunome the hamon is continuous with ko-notare and gunome.

This kind of characteristic hamon is seen at the end of the Nambokucho period in Nobukuni work dated around the Eitoku and Meitoku periods. In the Oei period Nobukuni continued to use this hamon, and he used it frequently. Also, in the case of a midare hamon, there are more frequent nie than is seen in suguha work, and the hataraki are more prominent.

The jihada is ko-itame mixed with mokume-hada, and there are thick dense ji-nie and fine chikei, which is a Yamashiro type refined jihada. Also, towards the hamon side there is often some nagarehada mixed into the hada, which tells us he is a Ryokai school smith.

The omote and ura both side have kasane-bori, and all generations of Nobukuni liked horimono and they were skillful. Besides bonji horimono, there are often all types of detailed horimono.

In voting, people recognized these characteristics, and they had the correct answer on the first vote. In the Oei period, this Saemon no jo and Shikibujo Nobukuni are famous. But it is difficult to judge either smith's work, so if this is judged as Oei period Nobukuni work, it would be enough. Some people just wrote the Nobukuni name, and at this time, if the Oei period was indicated, this was treated as a correct answer. If it is Shodai work, the kasane would be thin, the hamon either Yamashiro-den suguha or a Soshu-den shallow notare, and we would never see this kind of gunome midare hamon.

Kantei To No 3: katana

Mei: Hirosuke

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun

Sori: 9.5 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: itame mixed with mokume; some parts of the jihada are only slightly visible. There are ji-nie, fine chikei, and a very pale whitish colored jihada.

Hamon: wide hamon, mainly notare, mixed with gunome, choji, ko-gunome, and ko-choji, and some parts have a small notare hamon. There are frequent ashi, yo, frequent ko-nie, and places have rough larger nie, kinsuji, sunagshi, and small tobiyaki.

Boshi: wide yakiba; suguha with a small midarekomi; tips are komaru and mixed with a shimaba type hamon.

Horimono: on the omote and ura there are futasuji-hi with marudome.

This is a wide blade with a large sori, the tip has a large sori and there is a long chu-kissaki. The hamon around the monouchi gradually becomes wider, the boshi has a very wide yakakiba, and from these characteristics, we wish to judge this as work from the end of the Muromachi period.

The jihada and hamon do not have many outstanding characteristics, and after judging this as Sue Bizen work, it would be difficult to judge the school. The omote hamon has vertical alterations, but the ura does not have as much. Some parts of the hamon show all kinds of continuous small midare patterns. From this, the Senju school in which the omote and ura have almost the same hamon, and the Sue Bizen smiths, who have open bottom hamon and fukushiki (double) hamon, are ruled out. Also, if it were Seki work, there would be mainly independent gunome or togariba, and the jihada would be more prominent with masame and a whitish color. From this, it is a high possibility that this is a Sue Soshu or Shimada school work.

The katana is supposed to be modeled largely from Soshu Sadamune's work. Sadamune's katana are different from his tanto, and often have a notare type of hamon mixed with small and large gunome, choji, with a nioiguchi, just like this katana. Also Sadamune often used futatsuji (twin) hi horimono. Notably, the Juyo Bunkazai classified Futasuji-hi Sadamune and this katana have a strong resemblance. But this work is not in a Soshu-den style. In the Nambokucho to Muromachi periods, they produced many hitatsura hamon work. The ideals of the Soshu-den master works are seen often in the work of the Shimada smiths. Also, Sukemune is known to make Sadamune utsushi (copy) works. Among the Shimada school, three smiths, Yoshisuke, Sukemune, and this Hirosuke are famous. Among them, many of Hirosuke's works are wide with a dynamic shape just like this katana.

People voted for all kinds of smiths, and many people finally voted for the correct answer in the third vote. From the large healthy shape, many people voted for Keicho Shinto smiths, or Wakasa no kami Ujifusa. These answers are understandable, but their hamon are different from this one, which has vertical alterations and a notare hamon mixed with large and small continuous elements. Especially, Ujifusa does not have many horimono. If he has horimono, the horimono are bo-hi and usually never this type of futasuji-hi.

Kantei To No 4: katana

Mei: Tsuda Echizen no kami Sukehiro
Kanbun 12 nen 2 gatsu hi

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 6 bu

Sori: 5 bu

Design: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight ko-itame; there are thick dense ji-nie, fine chikei, a bright and clear jihada.

Hamon: long yakidashi gradually becoming wider from the moto, and above it, large and small gunome mixed with choji; the hamon becomes a toran midare hamon, and in some places, the midare elements have a square shape. There are nie ashi, yo, dense nioiguchi, dense nie, and the entire hamon has fine sunagashi, ball shaped tobiyaki, and a bright and clear nioiguchi.

Boshi: wide yakiba, suguha and a shallow notarekomi, round and with a return.

This is dated Kanbun 12, and is Sukehiro's the last Kaku Tsuda style signature from this period of his work, and he was 36 years old at this time. This is a Kanbun Shinto shape, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. The jihada is a tight ko-itame, bright and refined, with a beautiful toran midare hamon, and half of

the people voted for Sukehiro in the first vote. But this sword has a large sori for Osaka Shinto, and a longer yakidashi than usual for his work. The entire hamon has sunagashi, and the midare hamon has prominent square elements. From these characteristics, many people voted for Omi no kami Sukenao and Terukane (the Nidai Kanesada) or a later period smith such as Ozaki Suketaka. Naokado Sukenao was active until the Genroku period, and sometimes he has a larger sori, but his toran midare hamon are different from Sukehiro's which appear exactly like a real wave's movements. Sukenao's hamon are also based on o-gunome hamon. Terukane's hamon have a slightly sharp slope, and large up and down variations, and can have a katayama type midare hamon, or each midare hamon is continuous and becomes a yahazu hamon. Under his yokote there are often three continuous gunome. Terukane's shapes have a prominent high ihorimune, and poor hiraniku. Towards the hamon side of the ji, many of his jihada are mixed with nagare hada. Because Suketaka is a Shinshinto smith, his shapes have less hiraniku, and his jihada are a characteristic Shinshinto muji type. His midare hamon waves have valleys which are square shaped, and these are his characteristic points.

Because of this, you can recognize some similarities and differences. But this sword has a dense nioiguchi, beautiful nie, and the jihada and hamon are both very clear. Also the wave shapes show Sukehiro's original beautiful tama (ball) yakiba.

Kantei To No. 5: wakizashi

Mei: Yamashiro Daijo Fujiwara Kunikane with Kuyomon

Length: 1 shaku 7 sun 5.5 bu

Sori: 3.5 bu

Design: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight masame hada; there are dense ji-nie, fine chikei, and under the machi there is a mizukage.

Hamon: chu-suguha; shallow notare, mixed with ko-gunome. There are ko-ashi, yo, nie-suji, a dense nioiguchi, frequent nie, at the habuchi has hotsure, kuichigaiba, nijuba, kinsuji, sunagashi, yubashiri, and a bright and clear nioiguchi.

Boshi: the omote is straight and yakizume, and the ura is notare and komaru.

The Shodai Kunikane was hired by Date Masamune in the Keicho period. Under Masamune's order, he supposed to have become a student of Etchu no kami Masatoshi and returned home in Genna 5. Today, his blades are seen from after Kanei 3 when he received the Yamashiro Daijo title. As people know, his styles are modeled after the classic Hosho school.

On this wakizashi, the widths at the moto and saki are not different, there is a long chu-kissaki, and an elegant shape. From the former kanteito, if this were a katana, this would be a Kanei and Shoho period shape. Because this is a wakizashi, it is harder to judge the period. But notable points are a wide shinogi for the width, and the high shinogi shape.

The jihada is a tight masame, the hamon is a chu-suguha with a shallow notare, and the edge of the hamon has frequent hataraki which include hotsure, kuichigaiba, and nijuba. There are frequent nie and a bright nioiguchi. The boshi on the omote is yakizume, and these are characteristic Yamato Hosho-den school details.

Because this is a wakizashi, not many people voted for koto. This is a Kunikane showing his original characteristic work, and many people voted for the correct answer. Some people voted for Inoue Shinkai and Nanki Shigekuni. Kunikane's masame jihada are very tight, and some of them look like ko-itame at the first examination. Both sides show these characteristics, just like on this wakizashi. The wide yakiba, with a dense bright nioiguchi is just like Shinkai's. Among the Teigai school, Shigekuni's work is of course in the Yamato-den style, also the boshi on the omote and ura are different, and the vote seems to come from these characteristic points. But if you look at the high shinogi and the masame hada again, you would recognize this as a Sendai Kunikane work.

With the habaki on, in voting, it was hard to recognize the mizukage under the machi on the omote and ura sides. This is a characteristic point for the Shodai and Nidai Kunikane's work. Also, he often signs with the Kuyomon which he received from Masamune.

Shijo Kantei To No. 689 (in the August, 2014 issue)

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To No. 689 in the August issue is katana by Taikei Naotane dated Bunsei 10 nen.

This is slightly wide, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. There is a large koshizori, funbari, the tip has sori, there is a chu-kissaki and a tachi shape. The jihada is a tight itame and there is midare utsuri. The hamon has kaku (square shaped) gunome mixed with choji and togariba. There are long ashi, and nioiguchi type ko-nie. This is a typical Taikei Naotane Bizen-den work, and most people voted for him.

His Bizen-den works are seen in each era of his work, and especially from around the Bunka and Bunsei periods. Many of his blades have detailed horimono and most of them are supposed to have been done by Honjo Yoshitane. He has many kinds of horimono such as Goho-shin (a protective god), Shin no Kurikara, Haramiryu, Jo-ge-ryu, Bishamonten, Fudo Myo-o, Naminori Fudo, Suken, Tsumetsuki-ken,

and bonji. His nakago tips are kurijiri, the yasurime are o-sujichigai with kesho. His signatures in the case of katana, are often on the ura side, and there are long signatures; and the omote side has a date. This kind of long katana signature is often signed on the mune side of the nakago and made with a fine tagane (chisel). A few people voted for Jiro-Taro Naokatsu.

He has some work similar to Naotane's Bizen-den, and also his nakago and the location of the signature is similar, so from this, the Naokatsu name was treated as a correct answer at this time. However, Naokatsu katana are wider, and the widths at the moto and saki are not very different, there is a shallow sori and an o-kissaki. We do not often see this kind of tachi style. This tachi's widths at the moto and saki are different, with a large sori which is not seen in Naokatsu's work. Also, he has very few signatures with a kao, and this is an important detail.

As an almost correct answer, a few people voted for Suishinshi Masahide. His Bizen-den have gunome choji and choji midare hamon, each choji bunch is narrow and somewhat small, and the entire hamon has saka-ashi and is small. His nakago tip are ha-agari-kurijiri.

In the Koto period, there were few smiths who inscribed a kao with their signature. But in the Bakumatsu period many smiths often used a kao under their signature, such as Suishinshi Masahide, Taikei Naotane, Sa Hideyuki, and Gassan Sadakazu. A kao was used in earlier times, when upper class people would hire a daihitsu (someone who specialized in writing for them) and they did not write by themselves. With daihitsu papers or documents, they used an individual customized shaped kao to guarantee a paper or document was genuine. This is the origin of the kao. But in later periods, the original meaning disappeared, and gradually the kao became something like a stamp. In later years, this became more common, and in the Shinshinto period, sword smiths' kao were more likely used simply as a stamp.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai