

NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL
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Meito Kansho
Examination of Important Swords

Juyo Bijutsuhin
Important Art Object

Type: Wakizashi
Mei: Kotetsu Nyudo Okisato
Hori do-saku

Length: 1 shaku 7 bu 6 rin (32.6 cm)
Sori: 1 bu (0.3 cm)
Motohaba: 1 sun 1 rin (3.05 cm)
Motokasane: 2 bu (0.6 cm)
Nakago length: 3 sun 5 bu 3 rin (10.7 cm)
Nakago sori: very slight

Commentary

This is a hirazukuri wakizashi with a mitsumune. It is wide and there is a shallow sori. The jihada is ko-itame and some places have a large pattern nagare type jihada. There are dense nie, frequent chikei and a clear jihada. The hamon is a shallow ko-notare mixed with ko-gunome. In the center of the ura side and on the omote and ura around the fukura area there are kuichigaiba. The bottom half has thick ashi, there are dense, slightly large nie, some kinsuji, fine sunagashi, nie-suji, and a bright and clear nioiguchi. The boshi is straight and yakizume. The horimono on the omote is a so kurikara and a rendai. On the ura there are bonji and a daikokuten relief inside a frame. The nakago is ubu, the tip is a ha-agari kurijiri and the yasurime are a slightly pronounced katte-sagari. There are three mekugi-ana, and on the omote mune side there is a prominent long signature made with a fine chisel. The ura has a soe-mei.

Originally, Nagasone Kotetsu was at Kashu-shi in Echizen. In Kanei 14-15 after the Shimabara revolt (in 1637), there was almost no war in the country, and possibly the demand for armor had greatly decreased. Around the Sho-o era (1652-55), Kotetsu moved to Edo, and he changed his occupation to be a sword smith. There

is an early signed sword dated in March of Meireki 2 (1656). Before this date, we see signed tsuba, kote and kabuto.

According to some of his signatures on swords, he became “itaru 100 nakaba” (became half of 100), kyoju (residence) Bushu no Edo”, or he became 50 when residing in Edo, and his age when he came to Edo is estimated to be around 50. But recently, people have re-interpreted this signature to read that he came to Edo in the middle of his life, or at middle age, and this is a current theory. His last dated signature was Enpo 5 (1677) , and he had been making swords for 20 years.

Kotetsu used the Okisato signature, and after he become a monk, he used the Kotetsu name. His early signatures use the Kotetsu (old iron) kanji in Banji 4. In Kanbun 1, we see the Kotetsu (tiger iron) kanji, and after August of Kambun 4 he used a different kanji for Kotetsu. But during the last Kotetsu kanji period, when he signed “ Tora nyudo”, the tora kanji was written in the so-sho or “grass” style. In his early “hane tora” period, his hamon contain pairs of large and small gunome fused together which are called “Hyotanba”. His latter “hako tora” period hamon have continuous round top gunome, and a more uniform hamon called “Juzuba” (or a “string of beads”) and these characteristic hamon are well known. In particular, during his latter period, his blades are not gorgeous like Osaka-shinto, but are more practical and for actual combat. His jihada are refined, very strong, and both the jihada and hamon are bright and clear. These are his characteristic points, and that is why his work is appreciated very highly.

During a his not-too-long period of making swords, he produced many master works. You can imagine, during his katshu-shi (armor making) period in Echizen, he must have been an expert in making steel. We can say the same thing about his early period which has many sharp to-shin-bori works (horomono on his swords). He has simple horimono such as hi, bonji, kensaku, sanko tsuki ken, and many detailed horimono such as kurikara, fudo-nyo-o, ni-o, fujin raijin, mo-sou (from the design, these are usually called urashima), Horai-san, and daikokuten which is like what we see on this wakizashi. But the same composition for the daikokuten horimono seen here is only seen on four blades.

Among the many Kotetsu (虎徹) period works, this is a rare hirazukuri work. In this style of work, all of the blades are slightly less or slightly over 1 shaku, and many of them have mitsumune, and there is a shallow sori, and these are very rare without some horimono.

This is different from his usual work, since the hamon is ko-notare mixed with ko-gunome, and there is a small or narrow hamon compared with his usual work, and the area around the fukura has kuichigaiba. The boshi is clearly yakizume, and these are characteristic Yamato style features. There is some opinion that Kotetsu’s juzuba are modeled after Nanki Shigekuni’s style. On this sword, he worked in the Yamato-den style.

From the signature, the date is supposed to be around the end of Kanbun 4, right after he changed to his signature’s hakotora kanji, and compared with his usual signatures, the chisel marks are extremely fine.

Explanation and photo by Ishii Akira.

No.707 Tosogu Kanshou Jujo Tosogu

Sagicho zu (design showing the New Year's fire festival) tsuba

Mei: Nihon horimono ganso (inventor)

Ichikawa Hikoza chakuryu (main stream) 23 se (23rd generation)

Shiryudo Tsuki mitsuoki hori

Kansei 12 nen seiyo (early spring) zo (made)

Sagicho is a fire festival on ko-shogatsu (January 15th). This is a special event in which people burn New Years decorations after Jan15, and the previous year's amulets intended for exorcism and for purification. Another common name for this event is Dondon-yaki.

This type of yearly event used as a theme and design is unusual for Mitsuoki's work. Looking at the children playing with drum and fans, and dancing in a circle is fun. One never gets tired of looking at their actions. This work comes with his much admired ability to sketch, his variety in the use of chisels, and the precisely colored metals used for hirazogan (high relief). There is no question that Mitsuoki is the best master smith among the Kyoto kinko smiths (gold smiths).

This was made in Kansei 12 in the early spring, when Mitsuoki was 35 years old. The reason the tsuba attracts me is that with his highly skilled work, the entire theme produces a very relaxed feeling. The Mitsuoki kanji and kai-sho style kanji signed with his scrupulous technique are fine. The Tsuki Mitsuoki signature has variations in the strong tagane (chisel) marks, and a balanced refined feeling after he established his high level of skill. Mitsuoki's original designs are very comfortable to view and enjoy.

The signature "Ichikawa Hikosaburo 23 se" is supposed to show his pride and feeling for this work. This kind of soe-mei (a companion or additional mei) is seen often, not only with Mitsuoki, but also in the work of the Otsuki school founder Korin in which he signed "Nihon horimono ganso Ichikawa Hikosuke 18 se". The 2nd generation Mitsutune signed in the same manner with "19 se". According to the historical book "Soken Kisho," "Before Yujo, Ichikawa Hikosuke used only three tagane or chisels, and was known as a very skilled carver". However, there is no hard evidence to confirm this now.

We wish for a good year next year, and this last month of the year is very busy as usual.

Explanation by Kubo Yasuko

Shijo Kantei To No. 707

The deadline to submit answers for the No. 707 issue Shijo Kantei To is January 5, 2016. 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 January 5, 2016 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: wakizashi

Length: 1 shaku 2 sun 8 bu (38.780 cm)

Sori: 2 bu (0.61 cm)

Motohaba: 8 bu 09 rin (2.65 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 3 rin (0.7 cm)

Nakago length: 3 sun 7.5 bu (11.36 cm)

Nakago sori: 3 rin (0.1 cm)

This is a hirazukuri wakizashi with an ihorimune, a standard width, a long size for the width, and there is saki-sori in the upper half. The jihada is itame mixed with mokume, and the hada is visible. There are thick dense ji-nie, frequent fine chikei, and midare utsuri. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. The hamon has frequent ashi and yo, a bright nioiguchi, nioi type ko-nie, and some places have kinsuji. The horimono on both the omote and ura are katana-hi with soe-hi, and have marudome slightly above the machi. The nakago is ubu, the nakago tip is kurijiri hari. The yasurime are kate-sagari, and there are two mekugi ana. On the omote side, one kanji is over the mekugi-ana, and on the center, there is a long kanji signature. The ura has a date.

Teirei Kanshou Kai For November

The swords discussed below were shown in the November, 2015, meeting at the NBTHK headquarters building. This discussion presents answers concerning the makers of these blades.

Meeting Date: November 14, 2015 (2nd Saturday of November) at 1:00pm.

Place: Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Hinohara Dai

During these meetings, five swords are displayed for examination. The blades can be examined, but the nakago are covered and cannot be seen (they are left in the shira-saya tsuka). After examining the 5 swords, the meeting attendees must decide who they think made the 5 swords which were available for examination, and submit a paper ballot with these names. The 5 swords seen in the November meeting are described below, and the correct names of the makers are presented, along with an explanation of important details which should lead a person to pick the correct sword smith's name.

Kantei To No. 1: katana

Mei: Shugaki mei (written in red ink): Rai Kunimitsu

77 ou Shoan □

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 6 bu

Sori: 5 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: itame mixed with mokume, and the hada is visible. There are dense ji-nie and frequent chikei.

Hamon: chu-suguha hamon mixed with ko-choji and ko-gunome; around the habuchi are hotsure and kuichigai-ba. There are frequent ashi and yo, a slightly thick nioiguchi, thick nie, a bright and clear nioiguchi, and frequent kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: on the omote the boshi is almost straight; the ura is slightly midarekomi, and both are komaru.

Horimono: on the omote and ura are bo-hi, the omote is carved through the nakago; the ura hi does not go the full length of the nakago.

Today, four of the five kantei to are Rai Kunimitsu's work, and one is an Uda Kunifusa tanto. Kunifusa greatly admired Kunimitsu's notare hamon.

After seeing the nakago, you can recognize all of the wide styles seen in Rai Kunimitsu's work, and you can compare those to Kunifusa's work which is supposed to modeled after Kunimitsu's style.

The first katana was judged as Rai Kunimitsu work by Shoan, the mei is written in red ink, and this is classified as Tokubetsu Juyo Token.

Shoan was a curator at the Tokyo Imperial Museum, and his name is Inou Shinri. He was known as an expert in the appraisal of antique Japanese art besides swords. I have seen several blades judged by him, and his name is written in red ink on the nakago.

Since the funbari from the koshimoto is small, you can recognize that this is a suriage katana. Originally, it was wide, and the widths at the moto and saki are not very different, and there is a long chu-kissaki. There is koshizoshi even though it is suriage, the tip has sori, and from these characteristic shape features you can judge this as work from the end of the Kamakura to the early Nambokucho period. With the shape, the itame jihada and chu-suguha hamon, this looks like a typical Rai Kunimitsu work. Other characteristic points are: there are strong nie in both the jihada and hamon; there are frequent chikei and kinsuji hataraki; and at the habuchi we see hotsure and kuichigaiba. But the Rai school's characteristic Raihada and bo-utsuri are not prominent.

In the beginning, when I picked this as one of the kanti to, from the above reasons, I thought some people would vote for the Toma and Soshu Yukimitsu names.

Beyond my expectations, many people voted for Rai Kunimitsu and Rai Kunitsugu, at the kanshou-kai.

One of reason seems to come from the characteristic suguha style.

This is a slightly wide hamon, there are slightly dense nie, and a chu-suguha hamon. There is a bright nioiguchi, frequent ashi and yo hataraki, and the ashi tips looks wide with nie, and we call these choji-ashi which are often seen in Kyoto work. The boshi is straight with a komaru.

This kind of sugaha style is seen in addition to each province's own jihada and hamon characteristics, and from different levels of skill, and all Rai schools and smiths have some of the same kind of characteristic points as Rai Kunimitsu and Kunitsugu, who are the main Yamashiro school smiths. We see these points in work from the Settsu Nakajima Rai smiths and from the Echizen Rai smiths. These are among the characteristic points to use in judging this as Rai school work.

People seemed to judge this as work from the end of the Kamakura to the early Nambokucho period Rai school. The jihada and hamon are sophisticated work and appear as mainstream Yamashiro Rai work. The jihada and hamon have strong nie, the kinsuji and sunagashi hataraki are prominent, and there is more emphasis on a Soshuden style, and from this people seem to judge this as Rai Kunimitsu work.

Many people voted for Rai Kunitsugu. Sometimes, we have seen this kind of work judged as Kunitsugu's. It is difficult to judge the difference between them and we treated a Kunitsugu answer as a correct answer.

Kantei To No. 2: tanto

Mei: Rai Kunimitsu

Length: 9 sun 3.5 bu

Sori: uchisori

Design: hira zukuri

Mune: marumune

Jihada: tight ko-itame; there are thick dense ji-nie, and different colored kawari-tetsu; there are clear bo-utsuri and a clear jigane.

Hamon: shallow notare mixed with ko-gunome; there are ashi, yo, frequent bright and clear ko-nie, kinsuji and fine sunagashi.

Boshi: midarekomi; the tips are sharp and there is a return.

This is a standard width and long for the width. It is also thick for the width, and slightly uchizori. From the shape you can judge this as work from the end of the Kamakura to the early Nambokucho period.

The jihada is a tight ko-itame with dense ji-nie, and clearly Kyoto work. There is a refined jihada with clear bo-utsuri and Rai-hada (the Rai school's characteristic hada). The hamon is notare mixed with gunome and with frequent bright ha-nie, which is often seen in Rai Kunimitsu tanto. The Boshi is tsukiage, and has togari, and the entire work shows prominent Rai Kunitoshi characteristics.

At a kantei to meeting, most people voted for Rai Kunitoshi. But at almost any meeting, a few people voted for Dai-Sa or Sa Yasuyoshi as makers of this tanto. Dai-Sa work has a tight itame hada and a refined jihada; a deep blue colored jihada with bo-utsuri, and a bright and clear jhada. The hamon are a shallow notare mixed with ko-gunome, frequent nie, and are bright and clear. The boshi are midarekome, and the tips are sharp. His work is closer to Rai Kunimitsu and Kunitsugu's than to his own province's Soshu Yukimitsu and Masamune work.

The only big difference is the shape.

Considering Dai-Sa's tanto sizes, the shortest is the Kuroda family's 6 sun 9 bu 5 rin tanto, which is classified as Juyo bijutsuhin. Another Tokubetsu Juyo classified tanto is 8 sun 1 bu 2 rin but is a little suriage, and originally was slightly over 8 sun 5 bu, and now this is supposed to be the longest tanto by him that we have.

Recently, I have seen a saiha (retempered) Dai-Sa tanto 9 sun long with his signature, and today this would be the longest tanto for him. Even so, this is shorter than the Kunimitsu. Dai-Sa's shapes are thinner, not uchizori, and the shapes are different from Kunimitsu's.

Because this is similar to Sa's work, some opinions are that this is Yasuyoshi's work. Actually, Yasuyoshi sometimes has work similar to Dai-Sa's. Yasuyoshi's

tanto are wider than Dai-Sa's, thinner, and have a shallow sori, which is an Enbun-Joji shape.

At this year's Juyo Token shinsa, a Kunitoshi tanto with a two kanji signature was recognized and received a classification.

One signed Kunitoshi tanto with a two kanji signature is classified as Juyo Bunkazai and is the Aizome Kunitoshi, and another signed Kunitoshi tanto with a classification is important. The hamon on this tanto, the Aizome Kunitoshi, and the Rai Kuniyuki hirazukuri wakizashi classified as Tokubetsu Juyo are a notare mixed with gunome and with frequent nie.

An earlier work of this kind is a Rai Kunitoshi tanto dated during the Bunpo period which is classified as Juyo Bujutsuhin. It is remarkable that there are few works like this tanto from Kuniyuki and from the two kanji (ni-ji) Kunitoshi.

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 itame, some palaces have a large pattern jihada. There are dense ji-nie and bo-utsuri.

Hamon: suguha; ko-choji mixed with ko-gunome; the top of the hamon has uneven yubashiri. There are ashi, yo, a bright nioiguchi, frequent ko-nie, kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: straight; the omote is komaru, the ura is togari; both sides have hakikake.

This is a signed Rai Kunimitsu tachi. In spite of the suriage shape, it still has a recognizable and obvious wazori shape. The jihada is based on ko-itame with pale utsuri, and clearly shows a characteristic Rai-hada.

The hamon is suguha with choji midare, which is often seen in the Rai school. The boshi is komaru, and from these characteristics it should not be too difficult to judge this as Rai school work.

Among the Rai school smiths, the question is which smith's work is this. For the school, this is wide and there is a long chu-kissaki, and from the shape you can judge this as work from the latter half of the Kamakura to the early Nambokucho period.

The hamon is based on ko-choji and ko-gunome with midare. Among the Rai school smiths, in the mid-Kamakura period there is a two kanji signature for Kunitoshi with a gorgeous large choji hamon. In latter half of the Kamakura period, Rai Kunimitsu and Rai Kunitsugu's hamon are gunome hamon with prominent choji.

This transition in styles is seen in Bizen work too. If you looked at examples of the differences between Fukuoka Ichimonji and Yoshioka Ichimonji, Osafune Mitsutada and Nagamitsu, Hatakeda Morie and Sanemori, it would be easier to see. The tachi could be viewed as either Kunimitsu and Kunitsugu's work. But Kunitsugu's wide blades often have more abundant strong ha-nie.

Kantei To No 4: tachi

Mei: Rai Kunimitsu

Length: slightly over 2 shaku 1 sun 9 bu

Sori: 5 bu

Design: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight ko-itame; the hada is visible and mixed with a little bit nagare hada towards the hamon side. There are ji-nie and frequent chikei.

Hamon: chu-suguha with shallow notare, mixed with a little ko-gunome. There are ko-ashi and ko-nie, and the hamon is bright and clear; there are kinsuji and fine sunagashi.

Boshi: both the omote and ura are straight with a komaru.

This tachi has a ko-itame hada with a chu-suguha hamon, and in some respects is typical Kunimitsu work. But compared with his usual work, the shinogi ji is high and it does not have the usual utsuri.

Also, the hamon at the habuchi is mixed with some nagare hada. From this, many people voted for Mihara work.

Clearly, this has a high shinogi ji, but the jihada's nagare hada is not obvious which is seen generally in Yamato school work. There are no Yamato school characteristic hamon details at the habuchi, such as nijuba, hotsure, and kuichigaiba.

Sometimes Ko-Mihara hamon are not a clear Yamato style, but more similar to the neighboring province's Aoe suguha. In this case, their hamon are mainly narrower and the nioiguchi are tighter.

The jihada is a tight ko-itame with the nioiguchi line from the moto to the tip forms a straight line. The hamon is chu-suguha with gentle ko-nie, and from these characteristics we should consider this as Yamashiro school work.

Some people voted for Enju. His work is definitely similar to this, and it is a good judgment. But this does not have the Enju school's characteristic whitish jihada.

The hamon has more bright ha-nie than Enju, and is bright and clear. The boshi is a sophisticated komaru and from these details, this is a mainstream Rai work.

Among the Rai school, this kind of wide chu-suguha is seen often in the work of Rai Kunimitsu.

Kantei To No. 5: tanto

Mei: Uda Kunifusa
Oei 12 nen 8 gatsu hi

Length: 9 sun 4 bu

Sori: none

Design: hirazukuri

Mune: mitsumune

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

Hamon: wide suguha with shallow notare, mixed with ko-gunome. There are yubashiri in the habuchi, ashi, yo, a dense nioiguchi, frequent nie, and it is bright and clear; there are kinsuji and sunagashi.

Horimono: on the omote and ura sides there are katana hi carved through the nakago.

This is an Uda Kunifusa tanto classified as Juyo Bijutsuhin. This is supposed to be modeled after Rai Kunimitsu and Rai Kunitsugu's work. It is known as being excellent work and similar to theirs.

Even when compared with the work of mainstream smiths, this is not less dignified, and is a healthy and well made tanto. Possibly because of the context of this meeting, many people voted for Rai Kunimitsu and Rai Kunitsugu.

Definitely this is an excellent tanto, but if you compared it with the number 2 Kunimitsu tanto, there is no characteristic Rai hada, and no clear bo-utsuri.

Also, from the hamon's koshimoto to the center of the blade, the ko-gunome and ko-choji are close to each other and there is a continuous hamon; in addition, the top of the some parts of the hamon have yubashiri. These are different details from the mainstream's shape and feeling. The tip of the boshi are not shaped like the mainstream work and there is a long midare type return. These details are different from Rai school work.

The smooth ha-nie is a deciding factor in judging this as Uda work. But about 80 years later, another Kunifusa has a high level skill and his work was much closer to mainstream Rai work. The jihada and hamon are clear. Every time I look at this, I can not to help but be amazed.

Shijo Kantei To No. 705 (in the October, 2015 issue)

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To No. 705 in the October issue is a tachi by Ko-Bizen Tomonari.

This is slightly wide and there is a chu-kissaki. The hints said that usually this smith's ubu shape is a around 2 shaku 6 sun long, and there is a narrow shape with a small kissaki.

Considering this information, the widths at the moto and saki are different, there is a large koshizori with funbari, tip is slightly uchizori, and from this you can judge this as work from the end of the Heian period to the early Kamakura period.

In this period, the schools known known for sword making are: old Kyoto such as Sanjo, Gojo, and Awataguchi; in Yamato, Senjuin; in Bizen, Ko-Bizen; in Bitchu, Ko-Aoe; in Hoki, Ko-Hoki; in Bungo and Satsuma, the work is called Kyushu koten (old or classic) work. Among these, characteristic jihada with jifu-utsuri are from Ko-Bizen, Ko-Aoe, and Ko-Hoki, or just three schools.

The jihada has a slightly dark color, and usually this is a characteristic Ko-Hoki point. But the hints said that generally, this school's jihada are not dark. This means this is not Ko-Hoki work.

The two best master smiths in Ko-Bizen were Tomonari and Masatsune, and they are well known. Beside these, there were many smiths working there.

Typically, many of Masatsune's jihada are tight with clear utsuri, his hamon are slightly wider than Tomonari's, and his ko-midare hamon are mixed with prominent modern ko-choji, and this appears more like a designed pattern rather than a natural appearing hamon.

Tomonari's jihada are slightly darker, itame hada is visible, there are pale utsuri and some bo utsuri which are not prominent. His hamon are midare hamon, ko-choji are not prominent, and his hamon are more likely based on a komidare hamon, and more classic looking than Masatsune's hamon.

Tomonari's boshi tips are similar, the boshi are a shallow notare, there is a komaru and return, and there is nijuba and this is a characteristic point.

Sometimes Tomonari's tachi have bo-hi, and in this case many of his hi are kaki-nagashi or stop in the middle of the nakago.

Many of his signatures are "Bizen kuni Tomonari" with five kanji, but sometimes we see "Tomonari saku", a three kanji signature just like on this tachi. This blade is notably wide and long. This kind of wide blade with a dynamic shape is an example of a Tomonari tachi (length: slightly less 2 shaku 6 sun 2 bu, sori: slightly over 1 sun; motohaba: slightly less 1 sun, saikihaba: 6 bu 3 rin); and this sword is classified as Kokuho and owned by the Itsukushima shrine and is well known.

In voting, the majority of people voted for Tomonari. Other people voted for Ko-Ichimonji smiths such as Masatsune, Kanehira, and Nobufusa.

As I explained, the tachi shows Tomonari's characteristics, but Ko-Bizen smiths' works are similar to each other and it is difficult to judge differences. So Ko-Bizen and Ko-Ichimonji smith's names are treated as a correct answer at this time.

At this time, this is a smith who is well known but rarely is seen as a kantei to. This is different from the usual Ko-bizen and Ko-ichimonji works and hopefully you will enjoy looking at Tomonari's very classic work.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai