

NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL
ISSUE NUMBER 709
February, 2016

Meito Kansho
Examination of Important Swords

Juyo Bijutsuhin
Important Art Object

Type: Tachi
Mei: Rai Kunisue

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun 6 rin (72.9 cm)
Sori: 6 bu 5 rin (1.98 cm)
Motohaba: 9 bu 2 rin (2.8 cm)
Sakihaba: 5 bu 7 rin (1.75 cm)
Motokasane: 2 bu 6 rin (0.8 cm)
Sakikasane: 1 bu 1 rin (0.35 cm)
Kissaki length: 7 bu 6 rin (2.3 cm)
Nakago length: 6 sun 1 bu 4 rin (18.6 cm)
Nakago sori: 3 rin (0.1 cm)

Commentary

This is a shinogi zukuri tachi with an ihorimune, it is a little narrow, the widths at the moto and saki are different, and there is large sori with a small kissaki. The jihada is ko-itame mixed with mokume, some parts have a jifu type jihada, and the entire jihada is well forged and tight. There are ji-nie, chikei and jifu utsuri. The hamon is chu-suguha, and has small traces of notare. There are ko-ashi, saka-ashi, soft yo, and the hamon border is mainly a nioiguchi, and there is a little bit of fine ko-nie. The boshi is straight, with a komaru and shallow return. The horimono on the omote and ura are bo-hi, but on the omote, the hi is carved though the nakago (kaki-toshi); on the ura the hi is finished in the middle of the nakago (kaki-nagashi). On both sides near the kissaki and just under the yokote, there are traces of tsure-hi (small companion grooves). The nakago is suriage, the tip is a saki-kiri, and the new yasurime are katte-sagari, and the original yasuri mei style is unknown. There are two mekugi-ana, and on the omote under the second mekugi-ana on the ji, there is a small signature.

After the mid-Kamakura period, the Yamashiro Rai school produced many master smiths, such as Kunitoshi, Kunimitsu, Kunitsugu, Kuninaga and Mitsukane. Today, most of Rai school work we see are by these smiths. Other than these, and known only by their signatures and old oshigata, there are Rai smiths such as Kunihisa, Kunimune, Kunihide, Kuninaga, Kunizane, Kuniyasu, Kunigami, Hidetsugu, and Mitsushige, and Kunisue is one of these.

In Showa 5 (1316) the oldest sword book published, the “Kanchiin-hon Meizukushi” lists Kunisue as “ Rai Magotaro Nyudo’s third son Rai Saburo who lived in Hikigayatsu, Kamakura, and who passed way at the age of 30; there are a few katana and tachi with small suji-chigai yasurime, and hoso-suguha. The Meikan lists Kunisue’s active period as around the Sho-o (1288-93) period.

Rai Magotaro was naturally Kunitoshi. Recently, there are strong theories about this: the two kanji Kunitoshi is the same smith as Rai Kunitoshi. From the fact that there is a Rai Kunitoshi tachi dated Showa 4 (1315) stating his age as 75 (this is classified as Juyo Bunkazai and owned by the Tokugawa museum), the Sho-o period, Kunitoshi was around 50 years old. If Kunisue was working when Kunitoshi was around 25 years old in Sho-o period, Kunisue would have been around his mid-20s. So the theory that Kunisue’s active period was in the Sho-o period appears well founded. We can say that the Meizukushi lists Kunisue as the son of Rai Magotaro appears to be a highly reliable fact.

But in the same Meizukushi book, another page lists Kunisue as Kunitoshi’s younger brother. Another theory is that Kunisue was Rai Kuninaga’s father or grandfather. Thus, more study is still needed to resolve this situation.

The name of the place Kawakura Hikigayatsu where Kunisue is supposed to have been working, in old times was called “Hikiga Rai. Also as it was written that he passed way at the age of 30, his active period is supposed to have been short. This is the only tachi existing with what is definitely his signature.

The tachi is suriage, but is wazori, and for the period, is thick and has a healthy shape. From the mei location, you can imagine that originally this was about 2 shaku 6 sun with a dynamic shape. The jihada is a tight ko-itame, there is a very refined hada, and this shows evidence of being a Rai school smith’s work. You can imagine he might be a highly skilled smith. The hamon is tight compared with Kunitoshi, but the entire nioiguchi is soft looking, and clearly exhibits the Rai school’s sophisticated work. The steel is clear and clean and has a refined appearance. The jihada is mixed with a relatively large amount of mokume hada, and in some places there is a jifu type hada, jifu utsuri, and some saka-ashi. These characteristics are elements of Aoe and Unjo work, and it is unique for Rai work, and this makes it interesting. Also, you cannot miss the fact that the signature’s “Kuni” kanji is similar to Rai Kunimitsu’s. As on Rai school shinogi zukuri work, the signature is on the flat area of the ji and outside of the hi, and this is not too common except in Kuniyuki’s work. This type of example has been seen only in the work of three smiths: twice in the two kanji Kunitoshi’s work, once in Kunitoshi’s work, three times in Ryokai work, and twice in Kuniyuki’s work.

This is a very rare signed Kunisue tachi. This is one of the fine works which you will recognize again, and the Rai school has a large number of smiths.

This was the Shonai clan's Sakai family's tachi during the Edo period. In Showa 23, the tachi was classified as Juyo Bijutsuhin, and at that time the owner was Dr. Honma Kunzan's younger brother Mr. Honma Yusuke who established the Honma museum in Sakai city, Yamagata prefecture. The sword now is in the Mori Shusui Museum of Art.

Explanation and photo by Ishii Akira.

No.709 Tosogu Kanshou Juyo Tosogu

Kocho (orchid) sukashi tsuba:

Mumei: Umetada (Momoyama period)

As one of the representative workers of the Momoyama period Kinko group, there is no question that the Umetada family and the Goto family are among the best craftsmen.

Umetada Myoju is supposed to be the founder of the Shinto school. At the same time in the tsuba world, he is admired as one of three best Momoyama master smiths along with Kaneie and Nobuie. Myoju was first among the Umetada family, and they produced many master smiths. In talking about habaki, people admire what is called the Umetada habaki. These habakis' yasuri work is amazingly skilled, very sophisticated, and favored by many sword smiths. The tsuba's koke (moss-like) yasuri work produces a moist and warm impression. There is a work similar to this, which is supposed to be Kikkawa Hiroie's sashiryo (sword he wore) called "Ikarigiri" which has a kinmuku (solid gold) habaki. The habaki has Umetada Hikojiro's needle-like signature, and the koshirae is supposed to have been made around the Bunroku period, and from this we can recognize that period's techniques. Also, you can recognize that period's relationship to this tsuba.

The koke yasuri work on the solid gold ground with a very well balanced flat area produces an atmosphere of calm beauty. Also, the stylized Kocho (orchid) design is carved with a tight sukashi technique. The tsuba workmanship has fine details over every small area, with gorgeous solid gold work, and this is a highly valued tsuba.

Explanation by Kurotaki Tetsuya

Shijo Kantei To No. 709

The deadline to submit answers for the No. 709 issue Shijo Kantei To is March 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 March 5, 2016 will be accepted. If there are sword smiths with the same name in different schools, please write the school or prefecture, and if the sword smith was active for more than one generation, please indicate a specific generation.

Information:

Type: tanto

Length: 8 sun 2.5 bu (25.0 cm)

Sori: slightly less 1 bu (0.25 cm)

Motohaba: 7 bu 3 rin (2.2 cm)

Motokasane: 1 bu 7 rin (0.5 cm)

Nakago length: slightly less than 3 sun (9.0 cm)

Nakago sori: 7 rin (0.2 cm)

This is a hira-zukuri tanto with an ihorimune, a standard width, thin, and with a shallow sori. The jihada is itame mixed with mokume, and the entire jihada is tight. There are thick ji-nie, frequent chikei, pale utsuri on the mune side and bo-utsuri on the hamon side. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. The hamon has some saka-ashi and yo, a bright nioiguchi, nioi type ko-nie, kinsuji and fine sunagashi. The horimono on the ura side is koshi-hi carved through the nakago. The nakago is ubu, the nakago tip is kurijiri. The yasurime are kate-sagari, and there are two mekugi ana and one is closed. On the omote side, under the original mekugi-ana on the center is a long kanji signature. The ura has a date. Besides this work, this smith has many wide blades and long blades.

Teirei Kanshou Kai For New Year

The swords discussed below were shown in the January 2016, meeting at the NBTHK headquarters building. This discussion presents answers concerning the makers of these blades.

Meeting Date: January 9, 2016 (2nd Saturday of January)

Place: Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Kurotaki Tetsuya

The Heisei 28 (2016) New Year's Teirei Kanshokai was held at the Token Hakubutsukan auditorium, with 78 attendees and members. Usually one vote is allowed, and prizes awarded from the single vote's results. The people listed below are the prize winners. After the lecture, they received their awards from the lecturer.

Prizes:

Ten-i : Maki Takatomo, Miyano Teiji, Nakamura Kazuhito

Chi-i: Myoga Ryosuke, Daimoto Yasuhiro, Suzuki Kaoru

Jin-i: Senkai Osamu, Horikoshi Shin, Paul Martin

Kantei To No. 1: tachi

Mei: Ohara Sanemori

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 2 bu

Sori: 7 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: itame mixed with mokume, and the entire hada has a large pattern and is visible. There are dense ji-nie, frequent chikei, jifu utsuri and a dark colored jihada.

Hamon: based on suguha mixed with ko-choji midare, ko-midare, and ko-gunome. There are frequent ashi and yo, a worn down nioiguchi, dense nie, kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: shallow notarekomi, and the tip has hakikake.

The tachi is narrow, the widths at the moto and saki are different, there is a large sori, there is uchizori, and a small kissaki. From the shape, you can say this tachi is from no later than the early half of the Kamakura period.

Examining the jihada, the itame hada is visible, there are dense ji-nie, and prominent jifu utsuri. From these characteristics you can imagine this is Ko-Bizen work. But pay attention to the dark jihada and large pattern jihada.

Next is the hamon. The entire hamon has dense nie and a worn down nioiguchi, which is a strong characteristic of a country style. Also, the hamon is mixed with clear ko-gunome shapes, and from these characteristics, you would hopefully vote for Ko-Hoki work.

This is a Sanemori tachi classified as Juyo Bijutsuhin and this tachi shows these characteristic points very well. Compared with Yasutsuna's hamon, Sanemori's hamon are smaller and this is a characteristic point of Sanemori's work.

In voting, some people voted for Bungo Yukihiro. But if it were Yukihiro's work, the jihada would be a tight itame with a moist looking appearance, and the jihada would be mixed with nagarehada, a whitish utsuri, and the entire jihada would be soft looking.

Kantei To No. 2: tanto

Mei: Yoshimitsu

Length: 7 sun 2 bu

Sori: uchizori

Design: hira-zukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jihada: tight ko-itame, some parts are mixed with mokume; there are thick dense ji-nie, fine chikei, and bo-utsuri.

Hamon: based on narrow suguha and mixed with ko-gunome; around the monouchi the hamon is narrow. There are small hotsure and yubashiri around the habuchi, a bright nioiguchi, frequent ko-nie and kinsuji.

Boshi: straight, with komaru, and the tips have fine hakikake and niesuji.

This is small sized tanto, with a standard width, and it is uchizori and has a sophisticated shape. From this you can judge this as mid- to late-Kamakura period work. The jihada is a tight ko-itame, there are dense ji-nie, the jihada is a clear bluish color, and refined. From the jihada and hamon characteristics, you can imagine this is work from Rai Kunitoshi, Shintogo Kunimitsu or Yoshimitsu. Please look at the hamon. This is a gentle suguha style hamon, and at the yakidashi area it is mixed with a little bit of gunome; in the fukura area, the hamon width is a little low, and from these characteristics, it would be possible to judge this as Toshiro Yoshimitsu's work. Looking at this carefully, you can recognize the beauty of the jihada and hamon, and the tanto's original charming character comes out.

This can be compared to the Samonji tanto. At first impression, they look similar, but compare them carefully to each other, and please recognize differences in style between them.

Kantei To No 3: tachi

Mei: Kuniyasu

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 5.5 bu

Sori: 8.5 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: large itame mixed with mokume and nagarehada, and the entire jihada is visible. There are dense ji-nie, frequent chikei, and pale bo-utsuri.

Hamon: ko-choji- midare mixed with komidare, and ko-gunome; in places, there are yubashiri on top of the hamon, frequent ashi and yo, some parts of the hamon are soft; and there are kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: on the omote above the yokote it is yakikome; on the ura it is straight; both sides have a komaru and hakikake.

Horimono: on the omote and ura are futasuji-hi (twin hi) finished with marudome.

This tachi has a narrow shape, and the widths at the moto and saki are different, there is a large koshizori with funbari, and a small kissaki, and this is an elegant tachi shape. From the shape, you can judge this as work from the end of the Heian period to the early Kamakura period.

The jihada is a large patterned itame and mokume and there is a very visible hada. There are frequent chikei, and at the first impression, one feels like voting for Ko-Hoki work.

But, take a look at the hamon. The hamon is the same as a Ko-Hoki ko-midare style, and there are ha-nie which become dense ko-nie, which is seen often in Kyoto work. At the top of the hamon in places there are yubashiri and bo-utsuri, and these are also characteristic Kyoto points. From this style, you can choose either Awataguchi Kuniyasu and Ayanokoji Moritoshi. Now the boshi is critical, and the kaen style boshi is Morie's style, and a gentle komaru style is Kuniyasu's.

From this, you can narrow this work down to Kuniyasu's name. The Awataguchi school's characteristic jihada are nashiji, but among them, many of Kuniyasu's jihada are a large size itame and mokume, and the hada is visible.

This is classified as Juyo Bijutsuhin, and is the Saku-shu Matsudaira family's tachi.

Kantei To No 4: tanto

Mei: Sa

Length: 7 sun 4 bu

Sori: slight

Design: hira-zukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jihada: itame mixed with mokume; there are thick dense nie and pale utsuri.

Hamon: chu-suguha; there is a little bit of ko-ashi, and nioi type ko-nie.

Boshi: both the omote and ura are straight; the omote has niju-ba, and the ura has kuichigai-ba, and both sides have sharp tips, komaru, and a slightly long return.

Dai-Sa has a tanto dated Ryakuo 2 (1339). The tanto jihada pattern is large and a midare-like itame jihada is visible. The hamon is a soft suguha style.

Also, Hiroyuki who is supposed to have been his student, has a tanto classified as Kokuho and is dated Kano 1 (1350) and this has a more sophisticated Dai-Sa style jihada and hamon. From this observation, there is an opinion that Dai-Sa's favorite characteristic style is supposed to have been established between Ryakuo 2 and Kano 1.

Looking at this, we see the jihada is a tight itame with pale utsuri, the hamon has a bright nioiguchi suguha style, and from this, it looks like Rai Kunitoshi work. But please look more carefully. The shape is not Rai Kunitoshi's uchizori: this has a slight sori, is thin, and there is a poor fukura, and from these characteristics, we see Dai-Sa's characteristic style. The boshi is not a usual style, but is sharp appearing, and both the jihada and hamon are brighter than Ryakuo period work. From these details, it is possible to look at this as a transition work going towards the characteristic Dai-Sa style.

In voting, this was supposed to be difficult to judge. Please look at this as an example of one of Dai-Sa's styles.

Kantei To No. 5: tachi

Mei: Bizen kuni Yoshii Yoshinori
Shocho 2 nen (1429) 10 gatsu hi
Design: shinogi-zukuri
Mune: ihorimune

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun 1.5 bu
Sori: 7.5 bu
Design: shinogi-zukuri
Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: itame; some places are mixed with mokume; the hada is visible. There are ji-nie, chikei, and pale utsuri.

Hamon: based on square shape ko-gunome mixed with kataochi style ko-gunome, and ko-gunome; there are hotsure in the habuchi, frequent ko-nie, and kinsuji.

Boshi: midarekomi; the tips are komaru, and the return has hakikake.

This has a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. There is a large koshizori, the tip has sori, and the blade is thick. From these characteristics, you can judge this as early Muromachi period work. Considering the period, let's examine the jihada and hamon.

The hamon is a continuous ko-gunome which often seen in Yoshii school work. The jihada has unique characteristic utsuri, which is almost the same shape as the hamon. This tachi shows Yoshii's characteristic points very well. From this, some people voted for Yoshii. Usually, in the Muromachi period Yoshii work is supposed to usually be nioideki (i.e. there is usually a nioiguchi). This is dated during the

Shocho period, there are frequent nie, prominent kinsuji, and both the jihada and hamon strongly show a Kamakura to Nanbokucho period Ko-Yoshii feeling. Therefore, at this time, not only Yoshii, but also Ko-Yoshii, and Izumo's branch Izumo-Doei names are all treated as correct answers.

Shijo Kantei To No 707 (in the December, 2015 issue)

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To No. 707 in the December issue is a wakizashi by Bizen Osafune Morimitsu, dated Oei 27 (1421).

This blade has a standard width. It is very long for the width, and the upper half has sakizori. From the shape you can judge this as early Muromachi work from around the Oei period.

During the early Muromachi period, in inland areas, there were often small battles. But basically, between the Nambokucho period battles, and the latter half of the Muromachi period, the Sengoku period was time of major and frequent battles, although there were periods in which there were fewer battles.

Of course the Oei (1394-1427) Bizen smiths such as Morimitsu and Yasumitsu made many long tachi. But because there were periods which were somewhat less combative, there are many hira-zukuri wakizashi just like this one, or shapes which were standard or slightly narrow. The widths at the moto and saki are different, and sori at the koshimoto and tip which are somewhat gentle in shinogi-zukuri wakizashi are seen.

In the work of Oei Nobukuni, Yamato's sue Tegai school smiths, and Fujishima Tomoshige's works around the Oei period, instead of many tachi, we see noticeably more small sized blades such as wakizashi and tanto. Around this period, we also often see the same trend in other areas and in other schools. The Oei Bizen jihada are itame mixed with mokume, the hada is visible, there are frequent ji-nie and chikei, and midare utsuri. Also, in either suguha and midare hamon, there is often bo-utsuri.

The hamon on this wakizashi is based mainly on open valley midare and choji mixed with togariba. The hamon shows small vertical alterations, and is a gorgeous midare hamon. There are tight nioiguchi suguha hamon with ko-ashi, sometimes saka-ashi, and either style has nioiguchi type ko-nie.

Other examples are based on a suguha type hamon, mixed with ko-choji and ko-gunome, with ashi and yo, and often with saka-ashi. There is a bright nioiguchi, and nioiguchi type ko-nie. At first impression they look like Osafune smith work from the latter half of the Kamakura period, such as Kagemitsu and Chikakage, and they are classic looking. Their boshi with midare hamon are midarekomi and

the tips have a sharp candle flame-like shape. In the case of suguha hamon, The boshi is komaru, but the tip is a little sharp.

The Oei Bizen nakago tips are a wide kurijiri, and the yasurime are kate-sagari.

In voting, the majority of people voted for Morimitsu. Besides Morimitsu, people voted for other Oei Bizen smiths such as Yasumitsu, Iesuke and Tsuneie. Some also voted for Eikyo (1429-1440) Bizen smiths such as Norimitsu and Sukemitsu.

These smiths have work which is similar to this wakizashi, and at this time, Oei and Eikyo period Osafune smith's name are all treated as correct answers.

Generally, Morimitsu's midare hamon have open valleys and round shaped choji are prominent. Many of Yasumitsu's hamon are midare hamon with prominent togariba hamon, and smaller hamon. These characteristics have been pointed out often since historical times.

Iesuke and Tsuneie's itame and mokume jihada are a little less regular when compared with Morimitsu and Yasumitsu's hamon. Their hamon are midare hamon mixed with prominent togariba, square shaped gunome, and gunome and often their hamon shape are different.

Eikyo Bizen smiths' work from smiths such as Norimitsu and Sukemitsu are sometimes similar to Oei Bizen. But their unique points, around the Eikyo period, show a characteristic tachi shape which is a little narrower than Oei period work.

Their hamon are somewhat lower than Oei Bizen hamon, and are based on smaller sized open valleys in their midare hamon, and their hamon can also have square shaped ko-gunome and also ko-gunome, and do not show much vertical variation in their midare hamon, and many of these hamon are more gentle looking.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai