

NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL
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Meito Kansho
Examination of Important swords

Kokuho: National Treasure

Type: Tachi
Mei: Norikuni
Owner: Kyoto National Museum

Length: 2 shaku 6 sun 3 4 rin (74.65 cm)
Sori: 7 bu 5 rin (2.25 cm)
Motohaba: 8 bu 8 rin (2.65 cm)
Sakihaba: 5 bu 9 rin (1.8 cm)
Motokasane: 1 bu 7 rin (0.5 cm)
Sakikasane: 1 bu 2 rin (0.35 cm)
Kissaki length: 8 bu 9 rin (2.7 cm)
Nakago length: 7 sun 3 bu 5 rin (22.25 cm)
Nakago sori: 7 rin (0.2 cm)

Commentary

This is a shinogi zukuri tachi with an ihorimune, high shinogi-ji, a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. There is large sori in the bottom half, and a short chu-kissaki. The jihada is a tight well forged ko-itame, and the entire jihada is tight. There are thick dense ji-nie, a little bit of fine chikei, and pale usuri which is straight in some places.

The hamon is based on suguha, with a small notare. There are ashi, yo, a dense nioiguchi, thick dense even ha-nie with some rough looking areas. There are kinsuji, nie-suji, and in some places, the nioiguchi becomes wider. The entire hamon nioiguchi is bright and clear. The boshi is straight with a round tip and the omote side has kinsuji. The nakago tip is suriage and is now kuri-jiri. The yasurime are old and the original style can't be determined, but the newest yasurime are katte-sagari. There are three mekugi-ana, and on the omote on the mune side, there is a small two kanji signature made with a fine chisel.

In the early Kamakura period in Yamashiro, besides the Sanjo and Gojo sword schools, there was the Awataguchi school which elevated the Kyoto's sword

smiths' reputation. Awataguchi was one of seven entrances into Kyoto, leading from the Tokaido (the great eastern Road) and other Eastern roads and was the location of an important fort for the military. Today the address is Kyoto-fu (Kyoto City), Higashiyama-ku (Higashiyama Ward), Awataguchi (the Awataguchi entrance or gate). The Awataguchi school produced many master smiths for one hundred years such as Kunitomo and his six brothers, and the latter part of that period's great smith Toshiro Yoshimitsu.

Among these smiths, Norikuni is supposed to be the son of the oldest brother Kunitomo, and after the six brothers era, he continued to work as part of the next generation. After Kunitomo, there was Kuniyoshi and Yoshimitsu who were supposed to be Kuniyoshi's sons or students, and they took over leadership of the school. But the oldest sword book, the "Kanchiin-hon Meizukushi", lists the Awataguchi school with two different schemes: one is same as the usually accepted one: Norikuni follows Kunitomo. The other scheme is that Norikuni is the third son of Kuniyasu, and on another page, he is listed again as the son of Kuniyasu.

Norikuni's signed work is very rare today. His main existing tachi, besides this one, are two Juyo Bunkazai tachi, and one owned by Aichi prefecture's Atsuta shrine. Another one is owned by the Osaka-fu Konda Hachimangu Shrine, and there is one Tokubetsu Juyo Token tachi. His existing tanto are a Juyo Bijutsuhin, and one Juyo Token tanto. His signatures are all made with two kanji, and both fine and thick chisels were used. It is a commonly accepted idea that his son Kuniyoshi continued using the same "Kuni" kanji shape.

This tachi reflects its period with an elegant shape. The jihada is tight ko-itame, there are thick dense ji-nie and the school's characteristic beautiful jihada. The old sword book "Genki Gannen (1570) Token Mekiki Sho" admired this sword's jihada saying "the jihada is masame and looks very refined", and "the jihada color is dark and reflective," and there is "very clear forging". The hamon is a hoso (narrow) suguha style mixed with ko-midare and has ko-choji. Besides the large and small elements, the book lists "a lot of nie", which is a characteristic point for him. There are dense nie compared with the later smiths Kuniyoshi and Yoshimitsu.

The tachi, as the old sword books say, has a very refined jihada which is even and well forged, with the school's characteristic thick fine ji-nie, and has an elegant, but at the same time, strong jihada. Look at the beautiful jihada, the hamon with a dense nioiguchi, the even fine ha-nie, and the bright and clear hamon. Some places have kinsuji, and these hataraki create an interesting atmosphere with the gentle hamon and fascinate people. The preserved condition of this sword is very good, it is very dignified, and very rare with Norikuni's signature. At the same time, it is a rare Awataguchi school tachi, and the school's characteristic hada which the old sword book described as "reflective" is suitable.

During the Edo period, this tachi was owned by the Inshu Ikeda family.

Explanation and photo by Ishii Akira.

Tokubetsu Kansho No.714
July, 2016
Tokubetsu Juyo Tosogu

Shikunshi zu dai sho tsuba:

Shikunshi refers to orchids, plum, bamboo, and chrysanthemum being compared to the four men of virtue.

Dai mei (large tsuba): Ihokyo Ichijo zu tsukuru

Monjin Funada Ikkin Yoshinaga with kao

Sho mei (small tsuba): Goto Ichijo shitaga (drawing).

Kouto (Tokyo) ju Hashimoto Isshin with kao

Goto Ichijo is the last master smith who worked in the Goto family for daimyo. Also, he trained many great students such as Funada Ikkin, Hashimoto Isshin, Nakagawa Issho, Wada Isshin, and Araki Tomei. This dai sho tsuba set is a collaboration of Ikkin and Isshi.

The large tsuba's craftsman Funada Ikkin came from Dewa Shonai to Edo, and studied with Yoshiyuki at the Kumatani school which was called Edo Higo. Later he became a student of the Ichijo school, and become a Shonai Sakai family kakae craftsman in Edo (kakae craftsmen worked for daimyo).

The small tsuba's smith Hashimoto Isshin came from Kyoto. He studied under Ichijo for 16 years. In Kaei 3 (1850) he became independent, and he moved from Kyoto to Edo, and continued as a member of the Shogun okakae artist Ichijo's group and he worked in collaboration with his teacher. Both of these artists are supposed to have been very close to Ichijo. The dai sho tsuba are exactly like Ichijo's style of work. The fine nanako on the very clear shakudo ground are elegant and well done, with deep carving, accurate neat takabori (engraving), colorful iroe (inlay), and the entire work has a very elegant feeling. Both tsuba are nearly equal to their teacher Ichijo's work and are great works which utilize all of their skills.

Also, both tsuba are signed and the signatures say they are based on Ichijo's sketches. This type of signature is only allowed for master craftsman, and for the best work. There is a possibility that this was done under Ichijo's direction, so maybe we could say that this was a collaborative work by three people.

Explanation by Iida Toshihisa

Shijo Kantei To No. 714

The deadline to submit answers for the No. 714 issue Shijo Kantei To is August 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 August 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: tachi

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun 8.5 bu (75.3 cm)

Sori: 8.5 bu (2.58 cm)

Motohaba: 9 bu 6 rin (2.9 cm)

Sakihaba: 5 bu 8 rin (1.75 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 3 rin (0.7 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 2 rin (0.35 cm)

Kissaki length: 8 bu 7 rin (2.65 cm)

Nakago length: 6 sun 8 bu (20.7 cm)

Nakago sori: 1 bu (0.3 cm)

This is a shinogi-zukuri tachi with an ihorimune, narrow shape, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. There is a large koshi-sori with funbari, the tip is uchizori, and there is a small kissaki. The jihada is itame mixed with mokume, some parts have nagare hada, and the entire jihada has a large pattern and is visible. There are ji-nie, chikei, jifu type hada, pale jifu utsuri, and the jihada is dark. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. The hamon is midare mixed with prominent ko-notare and ko-gunome. There are ko-ashi, dense nie, nie hotsure at the habuchi, kinsuji, fine kinsuji, and is yaki-otoshi at the koshimoto. The nakago is ubu, the tip is shortened and is kiri, but originally was kuri-jiri. The yasurime are katte-sagari, and there is one mekugi ana. On the omote side, above the mekugi-ana on the mune side, there is a two kanji signature, and the lower kanji is a little larger than the upper one and closer to the right side.

Teirei Kanshou Kai For June

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

Meeting Date: June 11, 2016 (2nd Saturday of June)

Place: Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Tanaka Hiroko

Kantei To No. 1: tachi

Mei: Bungo kuni so (priest) Sadahide

Length: slightly less than 2 shaku 5 sun 9 bu

Sori: 8.5 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight ko-itame; some places are mixed with nagare hada. There are fine jinie, and white utsuri.

Hamon: suguha mixed with ko-choji and ko-midare. There are ko-nie, small hotsure, yubashiri, and the entire whole hamon has a soft appearing nioiguchi; the hamon is yakiotoshi at the koshimoto.

Boshi: slightly notare and yakizume.

This is a Juyo Bijutsuhin Bungo no kuni so Sadahide tachi. It is narrow, the widths at the moto and saki are different, there is a large koshizori, and the tip is uchizori with a small kissaki. From the shape, this is typical end of Heian to early Kamakura period work. The jihada is a tight ko-itame with some nagareha, The entire jihada is moist appearing with whitish utsuri, and these are characteristic of the Kyushu area's unique jihada. The hamon is a ko-midare style, the entire hamon is soft appearing, and it is yakiotoshi at the koshimoto. From these characteristics, you can judge this as Kyushu ko-saku (classic) work.

In voting, a majority of people looked at this as a Kyushu kosaku tachi. Besides Sadahide, some people voted for Yukihiro and other Ko-Naminohira smiths. Yukihiro is supposed to either Sadahide's teacher or student, and their work is very similar. But Yukihiro's work often has pale yubashiri and tobiyaki, and many of them have horimono.

Ko-Naminohira work is common and has the same period's characteristics and the characteristic jihada. But they have a high shinogi and there are prominent fine nijuba and kuichigaiba at the habuchi and these details define differences between them.

Kantei To No. 2: tachi

Mei: Kunimura

Length: 2 shaku 5 sun 7.5 bu

Sori: slightly less 1 sun 1 bu

Design: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight ko-itame hada; there is a little bit of nagare hada. There are ji-nie, chikei and whitish utsuri.

Hamon: chu-suguha mixed with ko-choji and ko-gunome. There are fequent ashi and yo; on the omote there are Kyo-saka-ashi and the ura has saka-ashi; there are ko-nie and a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: straight; on the omote, the tip is round; the ura tip is large and round; there is a return, and the return is short on both sides.

Horimono: on the omote and the ura there are bo-hi with maru-dome.

Kunimura is a founder of the Enju school which prospered in Higo in Kyushu. This is Kunimura's work, and is classified as Juyo Bijutsuhin. Kunimura is a Rai school founder, and grandson of Kuniyuki. Kunimura's father was Kuniyuki's son-in-law Hiromura who was from the Yamato Senjuin school. There is another version of his background saying he is Kuniyuki's grandson through his daughter. The Enju school is descended from the Rai school and their styles are similar. Usually their jihada are mixed with nagarehada and whitish utsuri. The hamon have less hataraki, are a suguha style, have worn down nioiguchi, and often have some nijuba. The the boshi has a large round tip and short returns, and these are Enju characteristics.

The tachi's jihada and hamon are bright compared with the usual Enju school work, and there are either whitish or jifu-type utsuri. The hamon is mixed with Kyo-saka-ashi, there are frequent hataraki, quiet nijuba, and from these details, at the first impression it looks like Rai school work, and especially like Rai Kunitoshi.

But if you look carefully, the jihada is mixed with a little nagare hada, the utsuri is not bo-utsuri, and the boshi tip is large and round, and these are the Enju school's characteristic points. In addition, Kunimura's characteristic points include a long length, the widths at the moto and saki are different, and there is a small kissaki. If you account for the suriage condition, the original lengths were very long, and this tachi shows his characteristic features.

Kantei To No 3: tachi

Mei: Masanori

Oei 3□ nen

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 7 bu

Sori: 4 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: itame mixed with nagare hada; some parts of the hada are slightly visible. There are ji-nie, chikei, and midare utsuri.

Hamon: Continuous ko-gunome hamon; There are ko-ashi, frequent nie, hotsure, kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: midarekomi; on the omote the tip is sharp; the ura is komaru; both sides have small hakikake.

The Bizen Yoshii school was called Ko-Yoshii up to the end of the Nambokucho period, and in the Muromachi period was called the Yoshii school. The school also had a branch in Izumo. This was called the Unshu Doei school, and this tachi is the work of that school's Masanori.

This has a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. This was originally koshi-zori, the tip has sori, and it is very thick for the width. From the shape you can judge this as work from the early half of the Muromachi period. There is a continuous gunome hamon and unique utsuri which closely reflects the hamon shape in the jihada, and these are the Yoshii school's characteristics. The Unshu Doei school's styles are same styles as seen in Bizen Yoshii school work, so considering this as Muromachi period Yoshii work is fine.

In voting, some people voted for Ko-Yoshii, Kanemitsu and Shikkake Norinaga. Both Ko-Yoshii and Yoshii's characteristic hamon are continuous ko-gunome. In the Muromachi period Yoshii hamon are more of a nioiguchi type, but in the Nambokucho period, Ko-Yoshii hamon have frequent nie, and more prominent hataraki, such as kinsuji and sunagashi.

This is an early Muromachi period work, and compared to the usual Yoshii work, there are more frequent nie on the habuchi, and kinsuji and sunagashi hataraki are prominent, and these details are likely to be seen in Ko-Yoshii work. If I am forced to list differences, it is usually that Ko-Yoshii swords do not have blades which are so thick for the width.

Kanemitsu's hamon are prominent kaku-gunome, kataochi-gunome and show more nioiguchi styles. Norinaga's jihada have prominent masame hada, and his habuchi show many nijuba and kuichigai-ba. Also, in these two smiths' work, we usually never seen this kind of utsuri and they are as not thick as this one is, and this is an important detail.

Kantei To No 4: katana

Mei: Shoji Chikuzen Daijo Taiseito Naotane with kao

Bunsei 4 nen (1822) 5 gatsu bi

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 3.5 bu

Sori: slightly over 8 bu

Design: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight ko-itame; there are frequent ji-nie, fine chikei, and midare utsuri.

Hamon: based on square shaped gunome, and mixed with togariba, gunome, and kataochi-gunome; the entire hamon has saka-ashi. There are frequent ashi, and nioiguchi like ko-nie.

Boshi: midare-komi; the tip is sharp and there is a return.

This katana has a standard width, the widths at the moto and saki are different, and there is a tachi shape with sori. The jihada has clear utsuri, the hamon is based on square gunome, and the entire hamon has saka-ashi. The boshi is midarekomi with a sharp tip and a return, and from these characteristics the first impression reminds us of Kanemitsu.

But looking carefully, we see the shape is thick for the width, and there is a poor hiraniku which are Shinshinto characteristic points. The jihada is a tight ko-itame which is muji-hada-like, and the hamon midare is rough or not smooth, and there are ashi which extend to the bottom of the hamon (they extend down to the sharpened edge).

Naotane aimed to further his teacher Suishinshi Masahide's goal of "Fukko zo-ho ron" or an effort to revive Koto swords), and this is a master work and an utsushi-mono or copy of a Kanemitsu. In his Bizen Den style work, often, areas in the utsuri become compact and appear to have well defined borders. The hamon area around the koshimoto is soft or diffuse, and from these details some people judged this as Koto work. But people who recognized enough of the sword's characteristics voted for the correct answer in the first vote.

Also, there is tight ko-itame jihada with utsuri, a midarekomi boshi with a sharp tip and a return or kaeri, so some people voted for Ishido school smiths such as Nagayuki. If it were Ishido school work, the jihada would not be a muji type, there would be a tighter ko-itame hada, the utsuri would be different, the hamon would have more prominent choji, and the ashi would not be so long, and these are important distinctions.

Kantei To No 5: katana

Mei: Oku Yamato-no-kami Taira Ason Motohira

83 sai (age is 83 years old)

Bunsei 9 Tsuchinoe Haru (1826 Spring)

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 6.5 bu

Sori: 6 bu

Design: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight ko-itame; there are dense ji-nie, chikei, and some parts show dark colored kawari-tetsu (steel)

Hamon: based on togari-gunome and is a mix of gunome, ko-notare, and square shape gunome. There are ashi, a dense nioiguchi, dense nie, rough or ara-nie, kinsuji, sunagashi and a bright and clear nioiguchi.

Boshi: midarekomi with a small round tip or komaru; the tip has hakikake.

This katana is wide, and the widths at the moto and saki are not very different, there is a full rich hiraniku, and a heavy weight, and these are Satsuma blades' unique characteristics. The tight ko-itame jihada is mixed with dark colored kawari-tetsu areas. There is a prominent togari-gunome and gunome notare hamon, aranie, kinsuji, and sunagashi, and from these characteristics, many people voted for a Satsuma Shinshinto smith.

Motohira's katana are usually either of standard width or are a little wide, and the kissaki are chu-kissaki or a long chu-kissaki. But this katana is unusual for him, with its wide shape and very long chu-kissaki. Probably because of these details, some people voted for the Satsuma Shinshinto master smith Hoki-no-kami Masayuki. From the shape this is understandable. But if it were Masayuki's work, the jihada would have white lines from the forging, and this katana does not have this feature which is one of Motohira's characteristic points. Also, the hamon is continuous with gunome and togariba from the moto to saki, and this kind of hamon is seen more often in Motohira's work. At the same time, on the omote, the upper half has strong lightning-like kinsuji, called "Motohira's fishhook" and this is another of Motohira's characteristic points. People who recognized these characteristics voted for Motohira in the first vote.

In addition, some people voted for Suishinshi Masahide. From the Shinshinto shape and the gunome midare hamon with rough nie they likely thought that this was Masahide's toranba. If it were Masahide's toran work, the width would be standard, the widths and moto and saki would be a little bit different, There would be a poor hiraniku, and the hamon would have a yakidashi at the moto, and there would not be such prominent kinsuji like we see here.

Shijo Kantei To No 712 (in the May, 2016 issue)

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To No. 712

is a katana by Hizen kuni Tadayoshi (shodai).

This blade is wide, the widths at the moto and saki are not different, and there is a large kissaki, and this kind of shape is seen often in Keicho Shinto work. In this period we often see blades which are thicker than this katana.

The jihada is a tight ko-itame, there are thick dense ji-nie and fine chikei, and this kind of jihada is Hizen-to's unique komenuka-hada.

During the period when the Shodai Tadayoshi used the five kanji Tadayoshi and the ju-nin Tadayoshi signatures, there are not many Hizen-to with the unique belt-like suguha nioiguchi which was established and produced in volume during the Musashi Daijo Tadahiro period. In this earlier period, he produced many blades in Koto styles with all kinds of suguha hamon.

Often the entire suguha hamon is a shallow notare mixed with ko-gunome and the nioiguchi is not belt-like. The nioiguchi has wide and narrow areas and places in which we see wide and narrow alterations in the nioiguchi's width in the hamon.

Also, there is supposed to be an Aoe utsushi (copy) with a suguha hamon with a tight nioiguchi, and a Yamato style copy where the jihada is mixed with nagare and masame hada, and the habuchi has nijuba and kuichigai-ba. There are also standard suguha blades with some bright kinsuji, which appear like accents.

In these cases, the jihada is not necessarily a komenuka-hada, and in some examples the hada is visible and mixed with jifu. At the same time, in small numbers, we see the boshi with komaru and a return, and the boshi is parallel to the fukura line. There are boshi which are straight with a komaru and a return, and some which are notarekomi where the tip is komaru, and both styles sometimes have hakikake.

In the Shodai Tadayoshi's Tadayoshi period, the nakago tips are kuri-jiri, the yasurime are usually a shallow kattesagari or kattesagari. The signatures are usually on the ura side with a long signature towards the mune edge.

In voting, almost everyone had the correct answer.

To avoid confusion at this time, we did not list some information, and if you look at this katana, it has a high shinogi and wide shinogi-ji. In the case of most kantei, when you do not have enough information, and the signature is on the ura side, some people would look at this katana as Nanki Shigekuni work.

If it were Nanki Shigekuni's work, the jihada would be a more prominent masame hada, and often a long oval shaped pattern mokume hada is seen. At the same time, his habuchi have frequent hotsure, nijuba, and kuichigai-ba. There are dense ha-nie, frequent kinsuji and sunagashi, and the boshi has frequent hakikake, which is more like a strong Yamato style.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai

