

**NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL**  
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**Meito Kansho: Examination of Important Swords**

**Classification: Kokuho**

Type: Tanto

Mei: Yoshimitsu

Owner: Tachibana Family Historical Museum

Length: 7 sun 6 bu 9 rin (23.3 cm)

Sori: slightly uchi-zori

Motohaba: 8 bu 6 rin (2.6 cm)

Motokasane: slightly less than 2 bu (slightly less than 0.6 cm)

Nakago length: 3 sun 1 bu 4 rin (9.5 cm)

Nakago sori: none

**Commentary**

This is a hira-zukuri tanto with an ihorimune, and is wide for the length. There is a standard thickness, and the tip is slightly uchizori. The jigane has tight fine ko-itame hada, and the ura has some areas where the ko-itame hada is mixed with visible itame and mokume hada. Over the entire ji, there are abundant ji-nie, and the upper half has thick straight bo-utsuri. The hamon is chu-suguha with a slightly shallow notare. The omote's yakidashi has ko-gunome, and on the ura's upper part, the edge of the hamon shows small hotsure. There are frequent ko-nie, and along with upper part of the hamon there is a slightly rough appearance, and a little bit of kinsuji. The boshi is straight with a komaru, and with a slightly long return. The tip has small hakikake. The horimono on the omote and ura are katana-hi carved through the nakago. The nakago is ubu and the nakago tip is ha-agari kurijiri. The yasurime are a shallow katte sagari. There are two mekugi-ana, and on the omote, on the center, there is a large sized two kanji signature.

In the Kamakura period, Toshiro Yoshimitsu is known as being the last Awataguchi school master smith, and the school was active in the Kamakura period for one century. Yoshimitsu is supposed to have been Kuniyoshi's son or student. Kuniyoshi's work shown in old oshigata is dated in the Kenji and Koan periods (1275- 88). Yoshimitsu's active period is listed in the Meikan as being around the Shoo (1288-93) period, and this appears to be reasonable. Along with Shintogo Kunimitsu, Yoshimitsu is known as an

expert in making tanto and produced many master works. Besides tanto, he has several ken, kanmuri-otoshi blades, the “Namazu-o Toshiro” with a formal koshirae, the “Ichigo Hitofuri Toshiro” which is an emperor’s katana, and the Owari Koku Inuyama clan’s Naruse family ancestral wakizashi which was recently classified as Tokubetsu Juyo. In the Edo period Yoshimitsu was considered to be one of “Tenka san-saku (the three best smiths in the country)” along with Masamune and Go. In the historical sword book “Kyoho Meibutsu-cho”, which includes some blades which have been lost in fires, he has 34 blades listed compared to Masamune’s 59 blades, and this shows us how highly he was regarded.

Yoshimitsu’s tanto can have several shapes and can be wide and narrow, and long and short, and these characteristics are also seen in Kuniyoshi’s work, so we can see a close relationship between these two smiths. Yoshimitsu has two types of jigane: one is a very refined ko-itame hada and nashi-ji; the other type has a slightly visible itame hada. Both jigane styles have abundant ji-nie, and the nashi-ji style has a moist appearance which shows influence from the Rai school. Many of Yoshimitsu’s hamon are a well defined or clear appearing suguha, but some are a ko-gunome midare. In his suguha hamon, around the yakidashi area there is a continuous ko-gunome hamon. Also, it is conventionally pointed out that many of his characteristic narrow hamon have a narrow suguha around the fukura area. Furthermore, his boshi’s nie are strong, and some of the nie going into the ji create an appearance described as “nie raining down” and this is hard to miss. His signature styles are not defined by several uniform styles, but are said to appear like they are written with the tip of a brush, and his signatures are considered to be the best among Japanese sword smiths. Along with his excellent work, his signatures are an important element for kansho or appreciation.

This tanto is wide for its length and its shape suggests a hocho (kitchen knife) shape, and is one of several types of tanto shapes he made. The jigane is a tight ko-itame. On the omote side, there are abundant dense ji-nie and the jigane is close to a nashi-ji hada, and there is a very refined appearance. Also, on the omote and the ura, the katani-hi are conspicuously close to the mune and these are Awataguchi school characteristic points. The hamon are a clear well defined suguha style, there are frequent ko-nie, a bright nioiguchi, and the jiba (ji and ha) is clear, and there is a very sophisticated warm and elegant feeling. Also, on the omote and ura, the nie utsuri areas are rod shaped, and this is unusual for his work, and an important detail which should be studied more.

Concerning this tanto’s history, we know that in Kenmu 3 (1336), on January 11, at the Higashinoto-In (shrine) in Kyoto, the Chikugo Yanagawa clan lord’s Tachibana family founder Tachibana Sakon no shogen Sadanori fought the emperor Godaigo’s close associate Yuki Chikamitsu. Chikamitsu feigned his surrender and then attempted to assassinate Ashikaga Takauji (or attempted to assassinate Tachibana Sadanori according to one theory). While sustaining heavy injuries, Sadanori captured Chikamitsu, and for this, he was rewarded with this tanto from Takauji. Sadanori died the next day or 3 days later. The year before, in Kenmu 2 (1335), Takauji defeated Nitta Yoshisada, one of the emperor Godaigo’s generals, and then traveled towards Kyoto. During this campaign, there was a battle in Hakone called the “Take-no-shita Battle”, and Sadanori’s achievements were very important there too. The tanto is an important heirloom of the Tachibana family and is associated with Sadanori’s efforts and death.

Explanation and photo by Ishii Akira

## **No.746 Tosogu Kanshou**

**Juyo tosogu**

**Guncho (mass of butterflies)-zu (design) daisho tsuba  
Daisho kinzogan mei: Kyozan Mitsunaka with kao**

This dai sho tsuba set was very popular during last year's NBTHK exhibition. Strictly speaking however, these are two single Juyo classified tsuba, but a preliminary memo mentioned a pair, so I will describe these as a dai-sho tsuba set.

Mitsunaka (Bunsei 13 - Meiji 22, 1830-1889) was a Shonai gold smith in the Washida school and had two titles, Kozeni and Kyozan. Mitsunaka's older brother was the fourth generation Mitsuchika. The school worked for the Shonai Sakai family as okakae (craftsmen who worked for daimyo) smiths and two brothers are the last master smiths from this school. Mitsunaka passed away before his older brother Mitsuchika. The older brother Mitsuchika followed the Yasuchika style very closely. However, the younger brother Mitsunaka's specialty was the Kaga zogan style, and this is an excellent example. Obviously, the workmanship is excellent. I had a chance to ask contemporary artists about the difficulty of working in this hirazogan style, and it is an unbelievably difficult technique in which layers of inlay are built up over and through other layers, and can almost be like weaving. These tsuba were made in this way, therefore Mitsunaka is not just a Shonai gold smith, but was able to work with other techniques. On the shakudo base with gold nanako, the zogan produces a glitter-like background, and the dancing butterflies in the spring light were made using all kinds of colored metals. They are beautiful and just magnificent. The details are meticulous, and this engulfs people who look at it. This is a great example of workmanship, and only Mitsunaka could do this.

Explanation Kubo Yasuko

The picture is 85% of the actual size.

## **Shijo Kantei To No. 746**

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 746 Shijo Kantei To is April 5, 2019. 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 April 5, 2019 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 3 sun 8.5 bu (72.27cm)

Sori: 8 bu (2.42 cm)

Motohaba: 9 bu 9 rin (3.0 cm)

Sakihaba: 5 bu 8 rin (1.75 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 6 rin (0.8 cm)

Saki kasane: 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)

Kissaki length: 9 bu 6 rin (2.9 cm)

Nakago length: 6 sun (18.18 cm)

Nakago sori: 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)

This is a shinogi-zukuri tachi with an ihorimune. It has a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. There is a large koshizori with funbari, the tip has sori, and there is a chu-kissaki. The jigane has a tight ko-itame hada, there are ji-nie, chikei, and clear midare-utsuri. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. In the hamon, there are frequent ashi and yo, a bright nioiguchi, nioiguchi type ko-nie, kinsuji and fine sunagashi. The nakago is ubu, the nakago tip is kurijiri, the yasurime are kattesagari and there are three mekugi ana. On the omote, a little above the original mekugi ana and toward the mune side, there is a two kanji signature.

When we see this style of gorgeous work from this smith, we often see a midare-komi boshi.

## February, 2019 Teirei Kanshou Kai

Date: February 9, 2019 (2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of February)

Place: Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Hinohara Dai

### Kantei To No. 1: tanto

Mei: Masamune (written in red ink)

Length: 8 sun 1 bu

Style: hirai-zukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jigane: itame mixed with mokume hada, and the hada is visible; there are abundant ji-nie and frequent chikei.

Hamon: ko-notare mixed with ko-gunome, and the border of the hamon has hotsure. There are yubashiri, ashi, yo, abundant nie, some strong bright and clear nie, frequent kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: midarekomi; the tip is sharp and there are yubashiri and frequent hakikake.  
Horimono: on the omote there is a sankotsuka-ken; on the ura there is a bonji and gomabashi.

### **Kantei To No. 2: tachi**

Mumei: den Norishige

Length: 2 shaku 6 sun 1 bu

Sori: slightly over 7 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jitetsu: itame mixed with mokume-hada; the entire jigane is tight; there are abundant ji-nie and frequent chikei.

Hamon: suguha style hamon with komidare and ko-choji-midare; in the bottom half there are ko-choji clusters or groups, and vertical variations in the height of the hamon. There are frequent ashi and yo, a relatively wide nioiguchi, abundant nie, and some places show bright rough prominent nie. The hamon is bright and clear, and there are frequent kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: on the omote and the ura the boshi is straight; there is a komaru and fine hakikake.

### **Kantei To No. 3: katana**

Mei: Kunihiro

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun

Sori: slightly over 6 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: mitsu-mune

Jitetsu: itame mixed with mokume hada; the entire ji is visible; there are abundant ji-nie and chikei.

Hamon: shallow notare style hamon mixed with ko-gunome; there are frequent nie and sunagashi.

Boshi: shallow midarekomi with a komaru and a slightly sharp return.

### **Kantei To No. 4: wakizashi**

Mei: Yamato-shu ju nin Kuro Saburo Shigekuni kyo  
Suruga-shu nochi oite Kii-shu Myokouzan saku kore  
Genna 8 nen (1622) Inu 8 gatsu kichijitsu  
Habouki tame Tsuzuki Kyudaiu Ujikatsu saku kore

Mei on the Mune: Horimono Tenka-ichi Ikeda Gonsuke Yoshiteru

Length: 1 shaku 3 sun 7 bu

Sori: slightly over 3 bu

Design: hirazukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jitetsu: itame mixed with mokume and nagarehada, and the hada is visible. There are abundant ji-nie, frequent chikei, and a clear jitetsu.

Hamon: notare style hamon mixed with gunome; the border of the hamon has hotsure and kuichigaiba. There are ashi, yo, a dense nioiguchi, abundant nie, and frequent kinsuji and sunagashi. The hamon is bright and clear.

Boshi: midarekomi with frequent hakikake.

Horimono: on the omote and ura there are katana-hi; the omote is finished with kaku-dome; the ura is finished with marudome. Inside of the hi, on the omote is a shin-no-kurikara; the ura has a ko-ryu shallow horimono.

### **Kantei To No. 5: katana**

Mei: Mondosho Fujiwara Masakiyo with Ichiyo Aoi mon

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun 5.5 bu

Sori: 4.5 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jitetsu: tight ko-itame; in some places this is mixed with a large pattern hada; there are abundant ji-nie and chikei.

Hamon: shallow ko-notare mixed with ko-gunome and ko-togariba; the border of the hamon has yubashiri, niju-ba and sanju-ba. There are frequent ashi and yo, abundant nie, prominent ara-nie (rough nie), kinsuji, nie-suji and sunagashi.

Boshi: the omote is a shallow notare-komi; the ura is midare-komi; on both sides the tip is komaru; there are frequent hakikake and a kaen appearance.

### **Commentary**

Recently, the Mino Kuni Ogaki clan lord's Toda family donated family ancestral masterpiece swords, including the shu-meï Masamune, to the NBTHK.

For the kantei-to item 1 here, we are exhibiting this Masamune tanto.

The kantei-to swords 1-5 are all listed above. In addition to the kantei-to swords, we are including kansho-to swords: a Muramasa blade with a red ink mei which was also donated by the Toda family, a Tokubetsu Juyo Token classified Masamune wakizashi, a Hankei tanto, and a Juyo Bijutsuhin classified Shodai Kawachi no kami Kunisuke katana.

After you examine the nakago, you can compare the kantei-to and kansho-to swords by the Soshu Den master Masamune, and other major sword smiths who modeled their work after Soshu Den master work in the Momoyama and mid-Edo periods.

The kantei-to item 1, a Masamune tanto, is classified as Juyo-Bijutsuhin, and has the meibutsu or sword name of Hachisuka Masamune go

The length is 8 sun 1 bu, the width is standard, there is a moderate Kasane or thickness, almost no sori, and the shape is from around the latter half of the Kamakura period, and is an elegant tanto shape.

The jigane is itame mixed with mokume, there is a visible hada, and there are frequent bluish chikei hataraki.

The hamon is based on Masamune's Soshu Den style master work with a notare gyo-so style midare hamon. The edge of the hamon has prominent hotsure, and there are bright abundant ha-nie.

Also, inside of the ha, there strong bright nie visible everywhere, and this makes the blade more interesting. In addition, the nie are not only on the edge of the hamon, but also extend into the ji, and they appear condensed, and form groups and small yubashiri.

Some historical sword books list Masamune's hamon as having relaxed shapes, tanzaku (caligraphy on paper) shapes, and chidori (bird-like) shapes. This is supposed to indicate that there are yubashiri in the ji, and that these yubashiri can define a variety of shapes.

Also, the nie on the edge of the hamon and the yubashiri nie in the ji work together or interact and produce dark colored kinsuji which are clearly visible everywhere.

One of the Masamune's typical Soshu Den characteristic points is that the hataraki on the jiba are present everywhere, and I strongly agree with this comment.

At this time, along with two Masamune blades, we are displaying other Soshu Den work from the Shinto period.

The Hankei tanto is supposed to have been modeled after Norishige's work. The Kunihiro and Masakiyo katana were modeled after Masamune and Shidzu work, and the Shigekuni wakizashi was modeled after Go work. All of these blades express the Soshuden style well, and after looking at them again, I think, as may be expected, that they are great masterpieces.

However, if you compared them with the Soshu Den school's established master works, I can see that they are quite different, and this opinion is held by other people besides me. The kantei-to number 3 is a Kunihiro from the Keicho Shinto period, and has a classic hamon. Because the blade is especially thin for Kunihiro's work, if we put this in a kantei-to meeting, people often voted for it to be Shidzu work. However, compared with Masamune's work, in my personal opinion, I feel that the difference is quite large.

Ogasawara Nobuo, a teacher who passed way last year, told us a while ago in a meeting that in the Token association that "your people do not judge Masamune work in the same manner as Shidzu Saburo's katana with a jigane without masame hada". Both smiths have similar shapes, and of course many similar characteristic points such as itame hada with prominent chikei, bright ha-nie, prominent kinsuji, and a notare style hamon.

But as I explained above, Masamune's freely moving hataraki such as nie, chikei and kinsuji surpass Shidzu's work. Since historical times, experts have judged Masamune as being ranked above the ju-tetsu (the 10 best smiths) in Kamakura and Nanbokucho

times. Among those before and after him, they judged Masamune as the best master smith, and I agree with this.

This is understandable, but I think it is a good idea and an educational opportunity to allow people make this kind of comparison in person.

The kantei-to 2 blade has an ubu nakago and is mumei, and is judged to be a Norishige tachi which is classified as Juyo Bijutsuhin. This is a Bizen Ikeda family heirloom tachi, which the Ikeda family lord received from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tokugawa Shogun Iemitsu.

There is funbari at the habaki-moto, an ubu shape, a long length, a slightly wide shape, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. Also, there is a shallow koshizori, the tip has a slight sori, and from this, you can judge this as work as a tachi from around the latter half of the Kamakura period.

In the first vote, the Norishige name was not voted for by everyone, and the majority of people voted for classic work from the beginning of the Kamakura period and into the Kamakura period such as work from Ko-Bizen and Ko-Hoki.

Norishige emphasized Soshu Den style work, the same as Masamune, and besides this, people pointed out that he has classic ko-midare style work, in which he seems to follow Ko-Bizen and Ko-Hoki classic styles, and this is one of these, and so votes for old classic style work is understandable.

But if you handle the tachi, you will see that it is wide, and that the entire tachi is thick and the tsukuri-komi (construction) is heavy. The first impression is that it has a similar shape, but to judge this as work from the end of the Heian to the beginning of the Kamakura period is strange. Also, the tachi's shape at the tip does show a clear "falling down" type of curvature, and I think this is one element which would make someone hesitant to judge this as such an old work.

Also, looking at the jigane, this has itame hada, but the dark areas do not have clear jifu-utsuri usually seen in old work, and this is important. At the koshimoto, the tachi has dark areas, but this is shingane iron which is becoming visible, and is different from other types of steel colors, although it resembles dark steel.

The hamon is a ko-midare style, but makes a strong impression. The ha-nie is strong and brilliant, kinsuji and sunagashi hataraki are frequent, and considering these details, a final answer would be that this is Norishige's work modeled after Ko-Bizen and Ko-Hoki work.

In addition, this is a little wide and long, and heavy. One of reasons it is heavy is that this tachi has a rich hiraniku.

It has been pointed out there are a number of blades with rich hiraniku which have been judged as Norishige's work, and this characteristic is helpful in judging this as Norishige's work.

At first, identifying this work seems difficult, but if you consider all of the above characteristic points, I hope that, at the third vote, one would reach the Norishige answer.



## Shijo Kantei To No. 744 in the New Year, 2019 issue

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a katana by the Shodai Dewa-no-kami Yukihiro.

Among Hizen blades, Keicho Shinto period smiths such as the Shodai Tadayoshi and Iyo-no-jo Munetsugu have work with Keicho Shinto shapes. But after them, smiths such as the Nidai Tadayoshi, Kawachi daijo Masahiro, Dewa-no-kami Yukihiro, and Harima daijo Tadakuni made shapes which did not depend on trends in a specific period, and produced many unique Hizen styles.

Like we see on this katana, the width is either standard or a little wide, the widths at the moto and saki are not too different, the kissaki is either a chu-kissaki or a slightly long chu-kissaki, the sori for a standard length sword is average and around 6 bu, and there is a large torii-zori shape.

This katana has a tight ko-itame hada, Hizen To's unique komenuka-hada, but a slightly darker colored iron in the ji than is usually seen in Hizen branch school characteristic work.

The hamon is based on round top choji and gunome, notare and a midare hamon. There are prominent condensed appearing nie in the hamon valleys, and dark colored kinsuji everywhere. The boshi is parallel to the fukura with a komaru and a return. The entire hamon has Hizen-to characteristic points.

Midare hamon based on round top choji and gunome are seen in the work of the Shodai Tadayoshi and the Nidai Tadahiro. However, the hamon shows several continuous choji and gunome, and can have large groups of choji and gunome, and the separate groups are connected with a low notare hamon. This is the favorite style of branch Hizen smiths such as Masahiro and Yukihiro.

The Shodai Dewa-no-kami Yukihiro's nakago tips are kurijiri, and the yasurime are sujichigai. His mei on a katana are a long kanji signature on the ura side towards the mune edge.

In voting, a majority of people voted for Yukihiro, and some people voted for Masahiro and Tadakuni.

These smiths have similar katana. So, at this time, Hizen branch smiths who have sujichigai or o-sujichigai nakago yasurime, are all treated as correct answers.

However, Masahiro's nakago tips are iriyama-gata, and Tadakuni has iriyama-gata and kurijiri nakago tips.

For an almost correct answer, a few people voted for the Shodai Tadayoshi and the Nidai Tadahiro.

These are Hizen-to smiths from the same period, and some of their styles are very similar. But the Hizen mainstream smiths' yasurime are horizontal, such as kate-sagari, kate-agari, and kiri, so please pay attention to this.

Now I will talk about another subject. The other day, I took a Kamakura period master work to a kansho-kai. One of the newer members was not impressed very much, and I asked if he understood the quality of a sword, and I think he did not understand this idea very well.

The token world has many master works from each period, from each prefecture, and from each school. Among the swords which are called meito, it can sometimes be difficult to clearly understand their quality and features, especially if you have just started to study swords.

Sometimes I hear an individual's opinions, and since Japanese swords have many shapes and styles, people will have their own likes and dislikes among swords. However, standardizing good and bad opinions is not realistic, and I will talk about this issue later.

The important thing is to value your feelings even if you do not understand a sword's quality or features well.

You don't need to express your impression in a loud voice. It is not necessary to argue with people who have helped prepare and exhibit master work blades, and this would be impolite. Your current impression should be important. It is not necessary to restrain your honest opinions, and just because people around you are saying something is a meito, you do not have to look at it as a meito.

Your present opinion of a sword's quality is based on what you understand now. From now on, as you keep looking at all kinds of swords, your level of understanding and perception will increase, and you should gradually be able to understand aspects of a sword which you might not understand at the present. If you deny your honest impressions and feelings, this can hinder your developing a better eye for swords in the future.

As you examine swords, value your honest impressions, and make it a habit to look at swords other people call meito.

Along with ongoing studies, you will continue to develop your eyes. A few years from now, when you see the same sword again, you will recognize that "this sword has this kind of beauty and charm" and could be surprised to discover this increasing power of observation in yourself.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai

