

**NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL**  
**ISSUE NUMBER 763**  
**August, 2020**

**Meito Kansho: Examination of important swords**

**Tokubetsu Juyo Token**

Type: Katana

Shugaki (mei signed in red ink): Rai Kunimitsu  
77 sou (at the age of 77 years old) Shoan

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 6 bu 1 rin (68.5 cm)  
Sori: 5 bu (1.5 cm)  
Motohaba: 1sun 2 rin (3.1 cm)  
Sakihaba: 7 bu 6 rin (2.3 cm)  
Motokasane: 2 bu 3 rin (0.7 cm)  
Sakikasane: 1 bu 7 rin (0.5 cm)  
Kissaki length: 1 sun 2 bu 9 rin (3.9 cm)  
Nakago length: 6 sun 5 bu 3 rin (19.8 cm)  
Nakago sori: slight

**Commentary**

This is a shinogi-zukuri katana with an ihorimune. It is wide, and there is almost no difference in the widths at the moto and saki. The blade is thick, there is a shallow sori, and a long chu-kissaki. The jigane has ko-itame hada, mixed with itame and mokume hada. There are abundant dense ji-nie and frequent chikei. The hamon is chu-suguha mixed with ko-gunome and kuichigaiba. There are frequent ashi and yo, a dense nioiguchi, abundant nie, and from the center down to the machi, some places have hotsure. The entire hamon has kinsuji and sunagashi, and a bright and clear nioiguchi. The boshi is almost straight, with a komaru and a short return. The horimono on the omote and the ura are bo-hi. The hi on the omote is carved through the nakago, and on the ura the hi stops at the nakago. The nakago has suffered a large degree of suriage and the tip is kiri. The yasurime on the omote are kiri and on the ura are sujikai. There are two mekugi-ana, and under the mekugi-ana on the omote and the ura there is a shugaki (a mei written in red ink).

Rai Kunimitsu is listed as Rai Kunitoshi's son in many old sword books. As a successor of Kunitoshi, he and Kunitsugu are famous for maintaining the school's tradition. His earliest extant work is from the end of the Kamakura Period in Karyaku 1 (1326), and his latest works are from the early half of the Nanbokucho Period in Kano 2 (1351), and from this information it appears that he was active for about 25 years.

Among the Rai school smiths he produced remarkable master works along with Kunitoshi. Among his signed works, he has three Kokuho, 17 Juyo Bunkazai, and 14 Juyo Bijutsuhin. From his many swords with high level classifications, and the number of certificated or papered swords, you can easily recognize the high level of his work.

His various different styles do not affect the level or quality of his work or their classifications. His blades can be long or short, have various widths and be narrow, standard, or wide. Conventionally, his hamon often are wide and have different styles, such as a neat well defined suguha, suguha with ashi, and hamon based on suguha and mixed with small gunome and choji. Although we do not see it often on tachi, on many tanto the hamon are based on gunome and ko-notare and large midare hamon. Incidentally, his large midare hamon have more prominent nie, and show a strong sense of movement or a dynamic appearance. Kunimitsu's work is not like typical Yamashiro work, but more like a Soshu-den style.

This katana has suffered from a large amount of suriage or shortening, but it is wide and thick, and the difference in the widths at the the moto and saki is almost inconspicuous. There is a strong shape, and also a long chu-kissaki and this shape is from the end of the Kamakura Period and is a an early Nanbokucho Period shape (however, there are also blades with slightly narrow shapes and a small kissaki from the same period.) This katana reflects the period's dynamic shape. The jigane shows a ko-itame hada mixed with itame hada, there are abundant dense ji-nie, frequent chikei, and show well refined forging, and produce a strong impression from the steel ground. The chu-suguha style hamon has frequent kinsuji and sunagashi, abundant nie, and the jiba (jihada and hamon) are bright and clear, and this is an excellent work.

Looking at the hataraki such as chikei, nie, kinsuji and sunagashi, this could remind us of Taima and Soshu Yukimitsu's work. However, there are frequent ashi and yo hataraki, and the tips of the ashi appear wide and are surrounded by nie, just like the choji ashi which are seen sometimes in Kyoto work. The boshi is almost straight with a komaru and return. These are Rai school characteristic points and hard to miss. Including the period's characteristic shape, this is easily judged as Rai Kunimitsu's work.

Considering the original shape, this was a magnificent large katana, with a rich hiraniku and a heavy weight, and reminds us strongly of Shinto period work. This is in an excellent state of preservation, and even with its suriage condition, it exhibits great workmanship, and is a masterpiece.

This was handed down in the Kishu Tokugawa family during the Edo period. With this katana, there is a Tensho style uchigatana koshirae with a black urushi saya which is supposed to be work from the end of the Edo period.

In the shugaki (red ink) writing in the mei, the "Shoan" kanji means that it was written by the historian Inou Shinri in the Meiji period. He was the curator at the Tokyo Teishitu Museum (today this is the Tokyo National Museum).

In the historical novel "Saka no ue no kumo" (Clouds Above the Hill) by Shiba Ryotaro, about the Russo-Japanese war successes in Japan, the famous Navy officer Akiyama Saneyuki is mentioned, and he was the son-in-law of Inou. Inou had a deep knowledge of swords and history, and there are other items he judged which have been confirmed today. Considering his judgement of this katana, we can appreciate his insights.

Explanation and illustration by Ishii Akira

## **Tokubetsu Jujo Tosogu**

**Koryu zu (crawling dragon design) menuki**

**Mumei: Yujo**

**With origami (paper) certificate: Shotoku 5 nen (1715) dai (value) 300 kan Koju**

Goto Yujo is one of the top soft metal smiths in Japan, and his work became an essential and permanent model for later work. At this time, I would like to introduce one of his masterworks.

These menuki depict the dragon's power and dignity by using just shakudo, and this shows Yujo's skill as an artist. The dragon holds the ball firmly, there are delicate details in his claws, and each elaborate scale looks like it is alive and ready to start moving at any moment. The entire dragon exhibits a sense of life and motion. Every single element in this carving generates some emotion or impact.

From wear and usage through time, menuki change and renew or grow, and this kind of wear and change along with skillful work, help the makes this work more effective.

Many of Yujo's works were made using jet black shakudo for the jigane (ground or base of the work), and produced a strong impact. A nuregasasu kogai from Higashiyama gyo-motsu(Ashikaga Shogun collection) and Maruki-bashi mitokoro-mono are famous examples. Since he can make such highly items made from Shakudo only, he is praised as a master of soft metal smiths.

The menuki has an origami, dated Shotoku 5, with the Yujo appraisal and an estimated value of 300 kan. Koju was the writer of the certificate. This was handed down in the Konoike family.

Explanation Kurotaki Tetsuya

## **Shijo Kantei To No. 763**

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No.763 Shijo Kantei To is September 5, 2020. 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 September 5, 2020 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: Katana

Length: slightly over 2 shaku 2 sun 9 bu (69.40 cm)  
Sori: 6 bu (1.82 cm)  
Motohaba: 9 bu 9 rin (3.0 cm)  
Sakihaba: 6 bu 4 rin (1.95 cm)  
Motokasane: 2 bu 5 rin (0.75 cm)  
Sakikasane: 1 bu 7 rin (0.5 cm)  
Kissaki length: 1 sun 1 bu 6 rin (3.5 cm)  
Nakago length: 6 sun 9 bu (20.91 cm)  
Nakago sori: none

This is a shinogi-zukuri katana with an ihorimune. The widths at the moto and saki are slightly different. There is a large sori and a chu-kissaki. The jigane is itame hada mixed with nagare hada, and entire ji is tight. There are ji-nie and chikei. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture, and some parts of the midare hamon have square shaped elements. There are ashi, yo, a bright nioiguchi, frequent nie, some places have nie-kuzure, and sunagashi. The nakago is almost ubu, (there is a slight machi okuri: that is the machi has been moved up slightly, and the nakago tip has been shortened). The tip was originally kurijiri, and the yasurime are katte-sagari. There are two mekugi ana. On the omote side along the mune edge and extending to the shinogi ji, there is a mei written in two lines. There is an official title with a long kanji signature, and under this there is a kao. On the ura there is a date, located slightly lower than the omote side signature and located along the mune side.

Sometimes this smith makes a hamon with clear square shaped elements which are more obvious than this example. This work is from the latter half of his career.

## **Shijo Kantei To No. 761 in the June, 2020 issue**

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a katana by Nakasone Okimasa.

In voting, the majority of people voted for Okimasa, and for an accepted answer, a few people voted for his teacher Kotetsu.

This katana has a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. There is a very shallow sori and a chu-kissaki. From this, you can judge this as a Kanbun Shinto period work.

There is straight yakidashi at the moto, and above this, a juzuba style continuous gunome hamon which is similar to Kotetsu's style. But some places have just two continuous gunome, and as you can read in the hints, the smith's hamon usually have rough areas. You can recognize these as Okimasa's characteristic points.

Now, I would like to talk about the boshi and yakidashi.  
This month, I will talk about the boshi or the hamon in the point area.

In the token world, when you study and appreciate the Japanese sword, it is important to look carefully at these two areas. In appraising and appreciating the Japanese sword

since early times, it has been important to carefully examine and study these two features.

People used to say “if a boshi and yakidashi were human features, they would be the face and legs, so you must pay attention to them”. Alternatively, people would say “a person must pay attention to the yakidashi and hamon if you are a serious student of the sword”. From these expressions, you can understand importance given to these features.

This means that the boshi, or a small part of the hamon which is bounded by the shape of the fukura, the yokote, and the ko-shinogi can be important points in judging if the work is old or new, and if it was made by a highly skilled or lowly skilled smith.

Even though it just my opinion, it seems that if a beginner is just learning about these features, it seems to be difficult to rapidly understand or comprehend their importance.

In this case, initially it does not matter if people immediately understand this. It is important to keep these details in mind, and observe the boshi carefully.

In the beginning, if you do not understand the importance or relevance of the boshi, learn to examine it until eventually you begin to understand what it is and its importance.

The boshi's shape can be straight, round and have a return; it can dip or drop towards the hamon edge or rise up toward the mune edge; or it can be a prominent wide yakihaba which is often seen in Muromachi period katana. Of course, there are some exceptions to the shape and form of the boshi. For a mumei work, if the hamon is well formed and strong under the yokote, and the boshi is wide, you should immediately think of judging this as Muromachi period work. This is an ordinary type of judgement during an appraisal.

In describing a boshi, we might note that “the boshi is midarekomi, the tip is sharp and there are hakikake”, and in this situation it is important to observe details. Such important details are: what kind of midarekomi shape do we see; how would we describe the sharp tip, that is the tip aimed straight toward the tip of the point, or does it fall towards the edge; are there ha-nie around the boshi, and if so, are the ha-nie evenly distributed over the entire boshi or unevenly distributed over the boshi? If there are hakikake, are they fine abundant hakikake, or rough flat appearing hakikake? From these details, you can develop some idea whether the work is old or new, and ideas about the level of skill the smith possessed.

If I write this way, some people might feel that learning about the boshi is very difficult, but as I explained above, continue to carefully observe these details, and eventually you will understand their significance with more experience.

To understand a sword, the best way forward is to look at and examine swords. Serious students of the Japanese sword should look at and examine as many swords as possible. If you do not get many opportunities to look at various types of actual swords, examining good quality oshigata can be very helpful.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai