

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

**Tokubetsu Juyo Token**

Type: Tanto

Mei: Yamato Fujiwara Yoshimitsu  
Shochu 2 nen (1325) 2 gatsu hi  
Namu hachiman dai-bosatsu

Length: 7 sun 9 bu 9 rin (24.2 cm)  
Sori: almost none  
Motohaba: 7 bu 3 rin (2.2 cm)  
Motokasane: 2 bu 3 rin (0.7 cm)  
Nakago length: 3 sun 2 bu (9.7 cm)  
Nakago sori: 3 rin (0.1 cm)

**Commentary**

This is a hira-zukuri tanto with an ihorimune. The width and the length are standard, it is thick, and there is almost no sori. The jigane is itame mixed with mokume, and on the omote side it is mixed with nagare hada. Some areas have jifu, the entire ji is well forged, and the hada is just visible. There are ji-nie, the entire ji has a moist appearance (uruoi), and there are slightly pale utsuri.

The hamon is based on chu-suguha. The upper half is a slight notare, there are frequent ashi and yo, there is a dense nioiguchi, abundant ko-nie, and some fine sunagashi. The boshi is straight, and there is a slightly long return. The nakago is ubu, the tip is ha-agari kurijiri, and the yasurime are a shallow katte-sagari. There are two mekugi-ana, on the omote there is a long kanji signature, and along side of this, there is a date. The ura is inscribed with kanji which say "Hachiman dai-bosatsu".

The Yamato Koku Senjuin school is the oldest school among the original five schools. Their original forge is supposed to be in the Wakakusa Yama western foothills, and once there was a Senju-Kannon hall, or a Todaiji group's monastery, or a child's school in that

location. One theory is that the school was near Todaiji's Tamukeyama Kannon hall in the Senjuin valley. According to historical sword books, there are two founders of the school, Yukinobu and Shigehiro, and under them, dozens of sword smiths names are listed, but today there is no clear information concerning these two smiths, or any confirmed signatures. The school's oldest early Kamakura Period works are signed with "Senjuin" in a three kanji signature on a tachi classified as Juyo Bijutsuhin, and on another signed "Yamato Kuni junin Shigeyuki", and both of these swords belong to the Tokyo National Museum. There are later period works signed "Senjuin Yasushige" on a tachi classified as Juyo Bijutsuhin and dated Genkyo 4 (1324). There is also a ken signed Shigeyoshi which is classified as Juyo Bunkazai. In addition to this, there is a tanto dated Shoshu 2 (1325) and signed Yoshimitsu. Furthermore, in the Nanbokuchō Period, there is a tanto signed "Yamato Koku Soekami gun ju Yoshihiro" dated Bunwa 2 (1353), and a large tachi classified as Kokuho which is signed "Joji 5 (1366) nen Hinoe Uma Senjuin Nagayoshi". Also another smith who is supposed to have belonged to the school at the end of the Kamakura Period around the Shōō period was Ryumon Nobuyoshi who has a work dated Einin 6 (1298).

Today, there are about twenty blades classified as Juyo Token from the Senjuin school. Their jigane are based on itame mixed with nagare hada, and among them we see some strong nagare hada and masame hada. Their hamon, a clear and disciplined suguha, is rare, and many of them have prominent nie, hotsure at the edge of the hamon, sunagashi, and sometimes uchinoke. Nijuba hataraki are seen, and more remarkable hataraki are seen. Therefore in the case of a mumei blade, if it is a Yamato style, and does not belong to one of the four other major schools, the jiba (jigane and hamon) appears to be a classic style, or it has a hamon similar to one of Ryumon Nobuyoshi's prominent midare hamon, it is likely to be a Senjuin School work.

According to the Meikan, Senjuin Yoshimitsu's oldest work is from the early Kamakura Period's Kenryaku era (1211-12), and up to the mid-Muromachi period Bunmei era (1469-86) there are five smiths. This tanto has a Shoshu date, so we can guess this smith was active around the Tokuji (1306-1307) period. This is a rare signed tanto. The width and length are both standard, and it is thick, and this is a Yamato characteristic style. The jigane on the omote shows some nagare hada, and the rest of the hada is itame mixed with mokume. It is well forged, and the entire ji appears moist (the appearance is described as uruoi), the hamon is suguha and has a dense nioiguchi. There are abundant large ko-nie and nie ashi. The entire tanto has a very distinctive appearance, and you can recognize the smith's

extraordinary skill. Also, as a reference or study material for the school, this is an important work.

One detail which is very noticeable is that the “Yamato” kanji used by Yoshimitsu here is a different kanji or “倭” instead of the usual kanji used for Yamato, and this could be an unusual feature. On the ura side, the signature’s location is located above the unusual Yamato kanji, it it seems to have “大” kanji which means “great” or “large”.

This tanto is listed in the “Kozan Oshigata”. During the Edo period, this tanto belonged to the Mito Tokugawa family, and was later owned by Kuroda Kiyotaka who was a Satsuma clan samurai who became a “Goryokaku” or war time general during the Bochin War, and later became prime minister. In Taisho 6 (1917) the Kozan Oshigata listed this as belonging to Tanimori Saneo who was a government official and councilor. Furthermore, there is a comment that it was “assigned to Kuroda Kiyotaka’s son Kiyohaku in Taisho 5” and there is a special note accompanying the tanto indicating that it was supposed to be left with the family of Earl Kuroda.

This was exhibited at the “Yamato Art Sword Exhibit” at the Nara National Museum Annex (today this is the Nara National Museum) shortly after the war in November and December of Showa 24 (1949).

Explanation and photo by Ishii Akira

## **Shijo Kantei To No. 781**

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 781 Shijo Kantei To is March 5, 2022. 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, 2022 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: 9 sun 3 bu (28.2 cm)  
Sori: slight  
Motohaba: 8 bu 5 rin (2.6 cm)  
Motokasane: 2 bu (0.6 cm)  
Nakago length: 3 sun 1 bu 5 rin (9.55 cm)  
Nakago sori: none

This is a hirazukuri tanto with an ihorimune. It is wide, long, thin, and has a shallow sori. The jigane has an itame hada, and the hada is visible. Along the hamon side of the ji, there is a strong nagare hada which becomes a masame hada. There are abundant dense ji-nie and fine chikei. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. The hamon has abundant nie, the edge of the hamon has hotsure, frequent sunagashi and kinsuji. The horimono on the omote and the ura are katana-hi with tsure-hi carved through the nakago. The nakago is ubu and the tip is kurijiri. The yasurime are higaki. There are two mekugi-ana. On the omote, under the original mekugi-ana and on the center, there is a two kanji signature made with a with fine tagane (chisel).

## **Tosogu Kansho**

### **Juyo Tosogu**

### **Oni yarai (repelling a demon) zu (design) tsuba**

Mei: Hinoto hitsuji toshi sei (the year the tsuba was made)  
Kiyotoshi Hogan with kao

Tanaka Kiyotoshi is one of “the three best master smiths at the end of the Edo period”. He left many masterpieces, and his art name was “Toryusai”. He was self-educated, and had a close friendship with Goto Ichijo, and at the same time, he trained many students and passed away in Meiji 9 (1876) at the age of 73 years.

This is work from the middle of his career, and we can see his strong spirit and high level of skill. On the upper left side we can see a sign saying “Toryusai” on a building, and the eaves of the building are weathered by the wind which makes you feel motion. At the edge of the eaves, there is a sardine head hanging on a holly branch which is for warding off evil.

There is an upset demon who is looking to see who is warding off evil and demons, and his expression is exquisite and humorous, and at the same time, a depiction of reality. From the demon’s eyes, facial

expression, and movement of his hands and feet, you can feel that the demon is thinking about the situation. On the ura side, lucky beans have fallen out of a plate (i.e. beans have been tossed out of a plate to repel a demon), and this forms the demon's "oni yarai" story. On the small mimi or rim, there are skillful neko-kaki (cat scratch-like yasuri or file marks), which helps to unite the theme or effects on the entire tsuba, and we can admire Kiyotoshi's skill.

This tsuba shows Kiyotoshi's skills with its sense of balance, his ability, and ideas. In this small tsuba, he has skillfully formed the image with the shape, hiraniku, surface texture, and extremely detailed carving which shows us details such as the demon's eye, the leopard pattern fundoshi (loincloth), the decayed eaves, and the sardine's head. This tsuba utilizes science, craft and art.

Explanation by Kurotaki Tetsuya

## **New Year Token Teirei Kansho kai**

Date: January 8th (second Saturday of January)

Location: The Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Ishii Akira

## **Kantei To No. 1: Katana**

Mei: **Toma**

### **Mumei**

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 3 bu

Sori: 7 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: itame mixed with nagare hada and mokume; there are large abundant ji-nie, fine chikei, and pale utsuri.

Hamon: based on chu-suguha; there are some areas with a shallow notare and ko-gunome; there are ashi, yo, a dense nioiguchi, large rough nie, nie-suji and sunagashi.

Boshi: on the omote the boshi is a small midare-komi; the ura is straight; the point on and both sides is yakizume.

Horimono: on the omote and ura there are bo-hi carved through the nakago.

This sword is classified as JuyoToken and judged to be Toma work. At first, looking at the jiba (jigane and hamon), there are large frequent ji-nie, chikei, and a relatively strong hada. From the moto to the saki, rough ha-nie are prominent, and both, the jigane and hamon have abundant nie. Furthermore, inside of the hamon there are sunagashi and nie-suji, and there is a strong Shoshu character at a glance.

However, the ji has nagare hada, and some parts along the edge of the the hamon have hotsure, the boshi is yakizume, the shinogi-ji is wide, the blade is thick, and there is a strong shape, and these Yamato characteristic points are hard to miss.

Due to these details, this katana looks a Soshu Den masterpiece at first glance, but at the same time, Yamato Den details appear. So we can say that the blade is based on Yamato-den, and also has Soshu Den characteristics. I can say this these are the katana's characteristic and unique points, and are important details in judging it as Toma work.

From the above points, there were two different votes: people looked at it as Yamato work, and voted for Toma or Teigai. A small number of people looked at it as Soshu Den work, and voted for Yukimitsu. As an established judging protocol during kantei, one could say that "if it is not Yukimitsu's work, it could be Toma work". A judgement for either maker would have many common points, and these points are important.

However, the supposed Toma school's actual founder Kuniyuki has only two confirmed signed works. Both smiths' styles have fine ha-nie and look like a gentle style from Kyoto. However, among Yamato work, in the case of blades which are greatly suriage, many of them are especially notable for nie hataraki. In the case of a blade judged to be Teigai work, the ha-nie often are finer than what we seen on this katana, and the hataraki inside of the hamon are somewhat gentle, and more well defined or clear, and show an increased sophistication.

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

Mei: Shume no-kami Ichinohara Yasuyo with Ichiyo Aoi mon  
Kyoho 13 nen (1728) oite Sashu Kiire gun saku kore

Length: 1 shaku 5 sun 9 bu

Sori: 4 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight ko-itame with abundant ji-nie.

Hamon: wide suguha hamon with shallow notare; some areas have large spaces between sharply shaped gunome. There is a dense nioiguchi with abundant rough nie and thick kinsuji.

Boshi: straight; the point on the omote is round, and on the ura is sharp; there is a return.

This wakizashi has abundant rough nie from the moto to the tip, and if you recognized the thick dully shining kinsuji inside of the hamon as Satsuma imotsuru it is not too difficult judge this as Satsuma work.

Notably, the wide shinogi-ji and and high shinogi line is a Yamato-den style. In addition, the shallow notare in the wide suguha hamon is modeled after Shinkai or Go, and from these details you can narrow this down to Yasuyo's work. Also in the gunome hamon, there is a distance or space between the gunome which is sometimes seen in Yasuyo's work, and this is one of his characteristic points.

Furthermore, Yasuyo's jigane is a tight ko-itame hada, but the hada is barely visible, and he has a unique jihada among the Satsuma smiths.

In voting, as we expected, there were some opinions that this is a work by Shinkai. However, Shinkai's nioiguchi are denser and wider and gentle, with abundant nie. They are also clearer than on this sword and different from this sword's nie.

Yasuyo was called by the Shogun Yoshimune in Kyoho 6 (1721) and forged swords at the Hama palace and received permission to use the Aoi mon. Seven years after this event, on the same year as this wakizashi's Kyoho 13 date, he passed away at the age of 49 years.

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

Mei: Hasebe Kunishige

Length: 1 shaku 7.5 bu

Sori: 1 bu

Style: hira zukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jigane: itame mixed with mokume; on the hamon and mune edges there are prominent nagare hada, and the entire hada is visible; there are ji-nie and chikei.

Hamon: narrow suguha, with slight notare pattern; the edge of the hamon has hotsure and uchinoke; there are sunagashi, a dense nioiguchi and frequent ko-nie.

Boshi: straight with a round return; the tip has hakikake; on the omote side, the return continues on to form muneyaki.

This wakizashi is wide, long, and thin, and from this it is easy to judge it as Nanbokucho period work. Furthermore, in this period, the smiths who most emphasized thinner blades were in the Yamashiro Hasebe, Bitchu Aoe, and Bingo Hokke schools. Nanbokucho Period Aoe work has a refined ko-itame hada, the hamon is a nioiguchi style, the jiba (jigane and hamon) is bright and clear, and if there is a suguha hamon, it usually will not have dan-utsuri. Also, the Hokke school was different from the Mihara school whose work was based on Yamato-den, and there are whitish utsuri, a tighter nioiguchi than we see on this sword, a low or narrow suguha hamon mixed with ko-gunome, or sometimes we see a continuous ko-gunome style which is different from this sword.

This wakizashi's jigane along the hamon and mune edges show a nagare hada, and between these areas, some places are mixed with mokume hada, and this is the Hasebe school's unique jigane. Also, this hamon is an unusual suguha for the school, but the boshi return continues to form muneyaki and extend to the moto. This is supposed to be their technique to form hitatsura, and we can see this detail which is a characteristic point and hard to miss.

Some people thought about work from the same period and same level of smith and voted for Nobukuni. The Ryokai school's Nobukuni has jigane mixed with nagare hada, but in this case, the nagare hada are concentrated along the hamon's edge, and Nobukuni's suguha does not have this much prominent hotsure and uchinoke.

However, a gentle suguha style hamon is seen in many Kunishige tanto and wakizashi, and in Kuninobu tachi.

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

Mei: Fujiwara Korekazu seitan (forging)  
Ganji 2 nen (1865) 2 gatsu hi

Length: 2 shaku 5 sun 1.5 bu

Sori: slightly less than 4 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jigane: ko-itame hada; some areas are mixed with nagare hada; there are ji-nie and fine chikei.



Hamon: primarily a choji style hamon mixed with gunome, ko-gunome, and togariba. There are frequent ashi, a dense nioiguchi, abundant even fine nie, and kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: midarekomi; the omote tip is sharp, the ura tip is komaru, and there is a return.

In the Bakumatsu Period (at the end of the Edo Period), riots occurred which were generated by events originating outside of Japan, and the demand for swords surged. Following Suishinshi Masahide's proposed Fukko-To theory (there should be a revival of classic style swords), smiths modeled their work on traditional individual schools of sword making. Notably, the Bizen Den revival emulated the work of many Bizen smiths.

The smith Unju Korekazu was one of these smiths, and his work exhibits his excellent skills and personality.

Often, many of the Bizen Den smiths made hamon which showed repeat patterns at regular intervals, and also made tighter or denser nioiguchi. Following these Bizen Den examples, Korekazu's hamon are based on large and small chojil with an irregular midare pattern. There is a dense nioiguchi, prominent nie, and inside of the hamon there are kinsui and sunagashi, and these details show his unique style. Korekazu's work shows a gorgeous Bizen Den style and the strength of Soshu Den, and we can say that this is Unju Korekazu's characteristic point. Another characteristic is that the dense or tight ko-itame hada is mixed with strong and weak nagare hada, and you can recognize this detail in this katana.

In voting, many people observed the above characteristics, and voted for Korekazu. Besides Korekazu, a considerable number of people voted for Naotane and Satsuma Shinshinto work. In the case of Naotane, on many of his Bizen Den, the top of the hamon becomes smoky appearing and appears to be diffuse. Another strong Soshu Den characteristic is a style of jigane in which the jihada is mixed with a unique mokume hada called "uzumaki hada," and a hamon based on a notare pattern. If this were a Satsuma Shinshinto work, the jigane can have a unique hada, and there are would be more larger and rougher nie than we see here, and wide frequent kinsuji inside of the hamon. The shape would have a large sori on the bottom half, be wide, have a long kissaki, a rich hiraniku, and the shape would be more robust.

In the Shinshinto period, Korekazu has a few wide blades with a large kissaki, and an exaggerated shape. Most of his shapes are wide, the kissaki are almost standard, and usually any bo-hi are carved through the nakago.

## Kantei To No.5: Tachi

Mei: Bishu Osafune Iesuke  
Eikyo 9 nen (1437) 8 gatsu hi

Length: 2 shaku 5 sun 6.5 bu

Sori: slightly over 8 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: itame mixed with mokume and nagare hada; the hada is slightly visible. There are ji-nie, chikei and midare-utsuri.

Hamon: mainly a choji style. The hamon details are based on gunome, ko-gunome, togariba, and square shaped gunome. Some areas have an open valley midare hamon. There are ashi, yo, a clear nioiguchi, and some ko-nie. On the ura side around the monouchi there are kinsuji.

Boshi: small midarekomi. The point on the omote is komaru, and on the ura the point has a togari or sharp or pointed shape, and there is a return.

This tachi's funbari at the habaki-moto is gone, and you can recognize this as a suriage tachi. If you think about what the original shape was, this had a koshizori, the tip also has sori, and there is a tachi shape. In addition, for the width, the blade is thick, and from this, you can guess this is from the early Muromachi Period from around the Oei era. Also, the jigane has itame hada mixed with mokume hada, and following the hada lines you can see there are dark chikei-like areas. There are midare utsuri, and an open valley midare hamon. From these details, you should look at this as Oei Bizen work. At that time, two smiths, Morimitsu and Yasumitsu, were prominent, and some people voted for them. However, compared with their work, the jigane's jihada pattern appears loose, the hada is only slightly visible in the ji, and somewhat less refined. In addition, the hamon is mixed with square shape gunome, togariba, and in places, the hamon is narrow, and some areas of the hamon appear slightly distorted, so overall, the hamon does not seem to have an orderly or defined composition.

If this was work from Morimitsu or Yasumitsu, their hamon would show a regular and consistent composition, and they have very few hamon which show a mix of hamon types like this sword. Also, the collapsed appearing nioiguchi appears to have a strange shape too, and the workmanship is not as well executed as work by Morimitsu or Yasumitsu.

## Shijo Kantei To No. 779 in the December, 2021 Issue

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a katana by Tsuda Echizen no kami Sukehiro dated Kanbun 7 nen (1667).

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

The jigane is tight ko-itame, there are abundant ji-nie, and Osaka Shinto's characteristic refined work. Sukehiro's hamon usually has five notare waves and this shows that. Generally, the hamon are low for the width of the blade, and there is a nioiguchi and frequent ko-nie.

Among Sukehiro's work, this katana has a prominently wide hamon, and the Hamon's width and vertical variations stand out. This katana also has relatively strong nie.

The majority of people understood these characteristic points and voted for Sukehiro.

At this time, I would like to talk about the Japanese term "ubuha".

When polishing a new sword for the first time, polishers usually do not make a sharp ha or edge on the first 3 to 4 sun of the edge starting right above the hamachi. This area is usually left unsharpened. The resulting dull edge or lack of a sharp edge above the machi is easily seen and we call this part of the edge the "ubuha".

This custom likely developed because when actually using a sword, this area around the koshi-moto does not have to be sharp. As a result, it became a custom for shinsakuto, or newly made swords, to have an ubuha at the koshi-moto or area directly above the hamachi.

This ubuha would disappear after repeated polishings. Among old swords, there are not many swords with ubuha left. If some old swords did have ubuha, it would be evidence that a sword handed down for many years is in a healthy state and possibly its shape is very close to its original shape.

Many Gendaito have ubuha, sometimes healthy Shinshinto blades still have ubuha visible on them, and we even see a rare Shinto blade with an ubuha if it is well preserved. We also see a very few ubuha on older Koto period blades too.

The Tokyo National Museum's Kokuho, Kin-ikakeji (gold makie ground) Guncho-mon hyogo no tachi (go Uesugi tachi) is a mid-Kamakura Period tachi. This is a Fukuoka Ichimonji school work with an "ichi" kanji signature and it has about 2 sun remaining on an ubuha.

Also, an Osafune Morimitsu tachi dated Kyotoku 2 nen (1453) was submitted to an NBTHK shinsa, and it also has some ubuha left.

The common point for both blades, besides being masterpieces from the Koto period, is that they have a tight nioiguchi and a hamon based on choji and an open valley midare pattern, just like Shinto period Ishido school work.

Of course, their jiba (jigane and hamon) display an old and classic appearance, and are different from Shinto blades.

Usually, the nioiguchi on a sword's hamon is tighter and stronger when the sword is new, and after numerous polishes, the nioiguchi tends to become gentle and elegant. This kind of pattern is especially conspicuous in Bizen Den nioiguchi type hamon.

It appears that these two Koto blades, the Ichimonji blade and the Morimitsu, did not suffer from much polishing, so we can say the blades with an ubuha have been polished a smaller number of times than would be expected for an old blade. The condition of these blades is very valuable and informative.

A long time ago, I brought a Sa Hideyuki katana to a Kansho-kai. After the voting, one of the elderly members came to me and scolded me saying that "bringing a Gendaito to a kantei-to is unacceptable". Since the nakago was not uncovered initially, I did not understand what he meant, but later I realized that he considered the ubuha to mean that the blade was new or a gendaito. The Hideyuki katana is a very healthy and splendid blade, and the ubuha was still present at the moto.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai