

**NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL**  
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**APPRECIATION OF IMPORTANT SWORDS**

**2024 Gendai Toshoku Ten**

**Tachi, Katana, Wakizashi, Naginata,  
and Yari Section**

**Prince Takamatsu Memorial Award**

Type: Tachi

Mei: Kaneda Shimizu Kunizane sei kore  
Oun Reiwa 6 nen kichijitsu

Length: 2 shaku 7 sun 5 bu 9 rin (83.6 cm)

Sori: 1 sun 1 bu 4 rin (3.45 cm)

Motohaba: 1 sun 1 bu 6 rin (3.5 cm)

Sakihaba: 7 bu 9 rin (2.4 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 1 rin (0.65 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 7 rin (0.5 cm)

Kissaki length: 1 sun 5 bu 5 rin (4.7cm)

Nakago length: 8 sun 1 bu 8 rin (24.5 cm)

Nakago sori: 1 bu 2 rin (0.35 cm)

## Commentary

This is a shinogi zukuri tachi with an ihorimune. It is wide, and difference in the widths at the moto and saki are not prominent. There is a large koshizori with funbari, sori at the tip, and a long chu-kissaki. The jigane is a tight ko-itame hada, there are ji-nie, and pale utsuri at the koshimoto. The entire hamon is wide, and primarily composed of different types of choji mixed with togariba and ko-gunome. There are frequent ashi and yo, some tobiyaki, a nioi-deki hamon, and the entire nioiguchi is bright and clear. The boshi is prominent and has a wide yakiba. It is a pronounced midarekomi, and the tip is yakizume. The horimono on the omote and ura is a bo-hi with kaku-dome. The nakago tip is a shallow ha-agari kurijiri. The yasurime are sujichigai, and there is one mekugi ana. On the omote, under the mekugi ana and on the shinogi-ji there is a long kanji signature. On the ura above the mekugi ana, the shinogi-ji has a two kanji mei, and below that there is a date.

Kaneda Shimizu Kunizane comes from Fukuoka Prefecture, was born in Heisei one, and is 34 years old. When he was in his second year of high school, he read a book by the Mukansa sword smith in Nara prefecture, the Mukei Bunkazai, Kawachi Kunihiro, and the book introduced him to the fascination of the Japanese sword. He then developed a strong desire to become a sword smith, and in Heisei 20, he began to study in Kunihiro's forging shop. After six years, as a student, he received his sword smith's license, and the following year, participating in his first exhibit, he received the Kunzan award and the "new worker" award. Since then, over the next six years, he received the excellence award, and twice, the hard

work award, and almost every year he received some award. In Reiwa 3, he set up his own forging shop in Nara Prefecture's Yamazoe village and became an independent sword smith.

Kunizane is skillful, and consistently works in the Bizen Den style, and year by year he seems to continue to develop his own style. His hamon are inherited from his teacher and shows a natural range or variation of features, and he continues to exhibit work showing a so-called "contemporary choji" style.

This is a grand prize award, and he has finally won the the first place Prince Takamatsu Memorial Award. The blade is long, and the difference in widths at the moto and saki is not very prominent. There is a large koshizori, the tip has sori, there is a slightly long chu-kissaki, and a really dynamic tachi shape which is full of feeling. In addition, the gorgeous hamon is high, the grouped midare hamon features do not become monotonous, there are hataraki and variations, the ashi and yo hataraki are moderate, and the hamon structure is even from the the moto to the tip. Also, although the blade is thick, because of the bo-hi, in spite of its long length, the blade does not feel heavy, and is well balanced. The bo-hi finishing style is not Maru-dome (round) or carved into the nakago, but is kaku-dome (square) which we see sometimes see in Koto period work.

The result of this effort gave the smith the highest award, ten years after he received his sword smith licence, and there is no question that this was a result of constant work and effort, and from constant improvement in his skills and artistic sense, and we hope to see him continue to hone his skills and spirit. Over the next ten years, I look forward to seeing more high level Gendai works.

Explanation and photo by Ishii Akira.

## **Shijo Kantei To No. 809**

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 809 Shijo Kantei To is July 5, 2024. 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 July 5, 2024 will be accepted. Also, from April, you can submit your answer online (see the April issue, page 30) to

<https://www.token.or.jp/shijokanteinyusatsu.html>. We will accept answers every month from the 10th of the month at 10:00 am to the following month on the 5th of the month at 23:59 pm. 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: 2 shaku 2 sun 9 bu (69.4 cm)

Sori: slightly less than 5 bu (1.45 cm)

Motohaba: 9.5 bu (2.85 cm)

Sakihaba: slightly less than 7 bu (2.1 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu (0.6 cm)  
Sakikasane: 1.5 bu (0.45 cm)  
Kissaki length: 1 sun 3.5 bu (4.1 cm)  
Nakago length: 6 sun 1.5 bu (18.6 cm)  
Nakago sori: very slight

This is a shinogi zukuri katana with an ihorimune mune (with a sharp angle; usually many of this smith's works have a mitsumune). There is a standard width, the difference in widths at the moto and saki is not prominent, the kasane (thickness) is standard, there is a shallow sori, and a long chu-kissaki. The jigane is itame hada mixed with large itame, mokume, and nagare hada, and the hada is visible. Some places have ji-ware, there are ji-nie, frequent thick dark chikei and a unique hada. The hamon and the boshi are as seen in the picture, in some areas the boundary between the ji and hamon is not clear. There is a dense nioiguchi, abundant nie, some rough uneven nie, yubashiri, frequent long niesuji, kinsuji, and sunagashi, and a worn down nioiguchi. The nakago is almost ubu, and both the hamachi and munemachi are wide, the tip has the smith's unique shape, the yasurime on the omote is o-suji-chigai, and on the ura is a reverse o-suji-chigai, and the mune yasurime is higaki. There are two large mekuigi ana. On the omote under the ubu mekuigi ana, there is a two kanji signature in a unique style.

## **Juyo Tosogu**

**Shio taki zu (salt making design) tsuba**

## **Mei: Seneishi Nomura Kanenori** **Eshu Hikone ju**

Seneishi Nomura Kanenori was a gold smith who came from Omi-kuni in Hikone. His birth and death dates are unknown. He has a confirmed work dated “Kyoho 8 (1723) nen kinoe tatsu” and from this, we can see that his active period was around that time.

His styles are the same as Mogarashi Soten’s. One style uses either an iron or shakudo ground, and he carved using a nikubori ji-sukashi technique, and depicted Japanese and Chinese subjects such as battle scenes, warriors, and hermits. Another style uses very dense carving work on the entire ground without any sukashi. Usually, we see ji-sukashi work, but we have seen his best work when sukashi is not used, and this is the same trend we see in Soten’s work.

This work is a tsuba with a shakudo ground with takabori carving and inlay. On the omote, Kanenori carved raging waves with a kirin and a hermit watching. No question there is a kirin jumping on the wave, and the carving work is excellent, but I wish to focus attention on the background wave carvings.

On this tsuba, Kanenori seems to have strongly focused on a three dimensional effect. This is not simply a carved wave pattern on a flat ground. The entire tsuba has high and low nikudori areas, and these areas show high levels of activity such as pounding waves. In addition, the tops of the waves have silver inlay which clearly shows the breaking water, and this reminds us of “Kanagawa oki namiura” (Hokusai’s famous hanga or print). The black shakudo ground is a major point. When you look at this, with

light reflected from various angles, you can see wave kebori (carved lines), and this emphasizes the movement of the waves. This is the reason, that even though Kanenori used gold, silver, and copper to depict driftwood, a man, and a kirin, our perspective goes out to the rough waves rolling over the entire tsuba. This is the same as we saw in the Issue No.797 Juyo Tosogu Kansho tsuba by Mogarashi Soten, "Mizube mai tsuru chidori zu", and this is a Hikone schools master work.

In a complete change, the ura emphasizes the scenery and people. Kanenori carved a densely detailed image of the Akashi scene from the "Tale of Genji". On the top right, the Hikaru Genji is singing a poem. The carving shows details of a scene where a person puts shiba (plant material to serve as fuel for fire) under the kettle, and scoops in some seawater, and we can almost understand the period's salt making process. The shoulder pole and the bucket, and the person facing the kettle, are very well done. Compared to other master smiths, Kanenori's skills are impressive.

The Kanenori school was good at nikubori ji-sukashi, so his three dimensional effects and perspective are thought to reflect his personal style. He expressed his images, not by using sukashi, but by using takabori, and these works show Kanenori and Soten's detailed careful master works. We tried to describe here the underlying reasons why this school is popular in the tsuba world.

Explanation by Takeda Kotaro

# Teirei Kansho Kai

**May, 2024**

Date: May 11 (the second Saturday in May)

Place: Token Hakubutsukan Auditorium

Lecturer: Takeda Kotaro

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

**Mei:** Sadakiyo

**Length:** 2 shaku 5 bu

**Sori:** slight

**Style:** hirazukuri

**Mune:** ihorimune

**Jigane:** masame hada; there are abundant nie, frequent chikei, and utsuri.

**Hamon:** suguha with a slight notare pattern; it is nioideki with hotsure and kuichigaiba; there are long kinsuji at the koshimoto, and a bright nioiguchi.

**Boshi:** straight, and the tip is yakizume; the ura has hakikake.

This is a Hosho Sadakiyo Juyo Token wakizashi. There is a standard width, it is long; and there is a small sori. The entire jigane is masame hada with suguha. Looking at it carefully, the forging has nagare hada at the koshimoto going forward to the hamon edge, and also at the tip extending up towards the mune. The suguha hamon has hotsure, and kuichigaiba. The boshi has hakikake and the tip is yakizume. These are strong Yamato school



characteristics, and among the Yamato five schools, this shows the Hosho school's characteristic points.

In voting, from the typical style, a majority of people voted for Hosho school smiths. From the style, it is difficult to judge an individual name, and all the Hosho school smiths' names were treated as correct answers. If I had to say something, Sadaoki has more small sized works, and Sadakiyo has both large sized work like this, and small sized work. For other smiths, a crack or line along the hada would be treated as a defect, but for the Hosho school, it is looked at as a characteristic in their work, and some places on this wakizashi have this kind of line or gap with a masame pattern. This is a master work, and beside this, there are many of the school's characteristic points, such as utsuri along the nagare hada, the signature has gyaku tagane areas, the yasurime are higaki, and the nakago tip is kiri.

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

**Mei:** Kunitoki

**Length:** slightly less than 2 shaku 1 sun 6 bu

**Sori:** slightly less than 6 bu

**Style:** shinogi zukuri

**Mune:** ihorimune

**Jigane:** itame hada mixed with some nagare hada; there are frequent ji-nie, chikei, and a whitish jigane.

**Hamon:** based on a gentle notare chu-suguha, and mixed with some ko-gunome. There are ko-ashi, it is ko-nie-deki, and there is a worn down nioiguchi.

**Boshi:** nijuba and straight. The tip is a large round circle and there is a short return.

This is a Juyo Token Enju Kunitoki tachi. Observing the funbari, the shape has less a small funbari at the habaki moto, a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are not too different. The sori is centered at the mid-point of the blade, and there is a chu-kissaki. The jigane is itame hada mixed with nagare hada, and there is a whitish appearance. The hamon is suguha with a worn down nioiguchi. The boshi is large and round, and there is a short return. From these details you can look at this as Enju school work. Also, the tachi omote and ura has nijuba under the yokote extending up into the boshi, and this is seen sometimes the school's work. The historical sword book "Funkiron" states that the school's work resembles Awataguchi work more than Rai work.

In voting, from these characteristic points, people concentrated their votes on Enju school smiths and Rai Kunimitsu, and a people few voted for Unrui. Among the Enju smiths, some voted for Kunimura. Kunimura's tachi are wide, the widths at the moto and saki are different, there is a small kissaki, his hamon are low with a classic style, and one should keep these characteristics in mind.

The Enju school was started by Rai Kuniyuki's grandson Kunimura. He is supposed to have accepted an invitation from lord Kikuchi and moved to Higo with his students. The school was prosperous there. From this history, it is understandable that Enju school work is similar to the Rai school's work. However, if it were Rai school work, there would be a clearer jiba (jigane and hamon), and many of them would have bo-utsuri. Considering the Unrui, they

have some similarities, but their characteristic points are that the jigane has prominent dark jifu utsuri, which have a shape resembling a fingerprint. Their lower part of the hamon have prominent midare with frequent yo, and the upper part of the hamon becomes a gentle pattern in contrast.

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

**Mei:** Bizen kuni ju Osafune Ukyoryo Katsumitsu  
Bunmei 16 nen (1484) 2 gatsu kami (early)  
kichijitsu

**Length:** slightly less than 2 shaku 9 bu

**Sori:** 6 bu

**Style:** shinogi zukuri

**Mune:** ihorimune

**Jigane:** itame hada; there are frequent ji-nie, chikei, and midare utsuri

**Hamon:** choji mixed with ko-gunome, togariba, and open valley gunome; some places have fukushiki (double) hamon. There are ashi, yo, a nioiguchi with ko-nie, small shimaba, tobiyaki, yubashiri, some kinsuji, and sunagashi.

**Boshi:** midarekomi; the omote has yubashiri, and a round tip; the ura tip is komaru and there is a long return.

**Horimono:** on the omote and ura there are bo-hi with maru-dome. On the omote it says “Tenka taihei kokka annei”, and the ura has the kanji “Fuki manfuku kairyo manzoku”.

This is a Tokubetsu Juyo Token Sakyoryo Katsumitsu katana. It is wide, and the widths at the

moto and saki are slightly different. It is thick, the tip has sori, there is a long chu-kissaki, and the shape is that of a latter half of the Muromachi period katate-uchi. For the period, this is a long length and impressive. Also, there are “Tenka taihei kokka anei” and “Fu-ki manfuku kairyo manzoku” kanji horimono, and from the workmanship, we can see that this is a carefully made work.

The jigane is itame hada with midare utsuri, the hamon is mainly choji and ko-gunome mixed with all kinds of features such as togariba, open valley gunome, and fukushiki hamon, and this blade shows Sue Bizen’s characteristic points well. From this, in voting, there were two different opinions: Sue Bizen work such as Katsumitsu and Sukesada, or Shinshinto work. Votes for Shinshinto work likely came from considering the well preserved condition and heavy weight. Katsumitsu was forging from the late half of Bunmei 16 up to Bunmei 19, and this katana was made in Bunmei 16 at the Ukita family’s home base in Bizen’s Kojima and Bichu’s Kusakabe areas. Katsumitsu has gassaku work with his younger brother Sakyoshin Munemitsu. From the “Inryoken nichiroku” temple diary, we know that in Chokyo 2 (1488) five years after this katana was made, there was an invitation from Ashikaga Yoshinao to both Katsumitsu and Munemitsu to work at Omi Magari, so we can see that their high level of skill was recognized in that period. This is a carefully made work in that period, and it is a master work.

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

**Mei:** Kunihiro

**Length:** slightly over 2 shaku 3 sun

**Sori:** 6.5 bu

**Style:** shinogi tsukuri

**Mune:** mitsumune

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

**Hamon:** mainly a shallow notare mixed with gunome and konotare; very wide around the monouchi to the yokote area; there are frequent nie, an uneven nioiguchi, kinsuji, fine sunagashi, and a worn down nioiguchi.

**Boshi:** midarekomi; the omote tip is ko-maru, and the ura tip is a togari style; both tips have hakikake.

**Horimono:** on the omote and ura there are futatsuji-hi carved into the nakago.

This is a Juyo Token Horikawa Kunihiro katana. It is wide and thin, and differences in the width at the moto and saki are not prominent. There is a slightly shallow sori and a large kissaki.

People were misled by how thin the blade is. They considered the style, and voted for Shizu and Soshu Den master smiths. Kunihiro might be greatly honored as a sword smith, but people appraised this work as being from a Soshu Den master smith.

Kunihiro made copies (utsushimono) of frequently polished and worn down old blades and their horimono. His work is known, just like that of Yanbagiri (made by Chogi) and he copied hi carved into the nakago, and signed on the flat area (hira) of the ji. In other words, this thin blade with futasuji-hi carved into the nakago fits this description, and there's a possibility that he copied an older work. Since a Horikawa school characteristic point is the itame hada

mixed with mokume hada and being a visible hada, its unique jigane, called a zanguri hada is present, and clearly visible here.

The hamon is low or narrow, and is a shallow notare mixed with gunome and ko-notare, and is a gentle hamon. Around the monouchi area it is wide, and also the nioiguchi is uneven with some areas wide and some areas narrow. The nioiguchi is worn down, and these details show Kunihiro's characteristic points. The hamon has gentle areas, but overall, the hamon has a dynamic strong composition, and the katana fully exhibits Kunihiro's traits.

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

**Mei:** Tsuda Echizen-no-kami Sukehiro  
Kanbun 7 nen (1667) 8 gatsu hi

**Length:** slightly over 2 shaku 3 sun 4 bu

**Sori:** 4 bu

**Style:** shinogi zukuri

**Mune:** ihorimune

**Jigane:** tight ko-itame hada; there are abundant ji-nie some chikei, and a bright and clear jigane.

**Hamon:** diagonal yakidashi at the moto, and an active notare hamon; there is a dense nioiguchi, abundant nie, the upper half has frequent yubashiri, and there is a bright and clear nioiguchi.

**Boshi:** straight; the tip is komaru, and there is a long return.

This katana has a standard width, the widths at the moto and saki are different, there is a shallow sori,

and from this, you can judge this sword as being Kanbun Shinto period work. The jigane is a tight ko-itame, there are abundant ji-nie, a bright and clear ji, and a dense notare nioiguchi. The gentle notare has five peaks, and in the case of Sukehiro's shallow notare or suguha hamon, this is a characteristic point. This katana's features looks like they are somewhat exaggerated. In addition, there are hataraki along the the hamon edge such as nie, and the description is given that it is "just like a tear in a thick piece of Japanese paper". The hamon gradually becomes wider going towards the yokote, and straight continuing into the boshi, and there are many characteristic points which are appraised as Sukehiro's.

If people recognized these points, they should have voted for Sukehiro on the first vote. Besides votes for Sukehiro, the same number of people voted for Inoue Shinkai. This likely came from the fact that the hamon is high, and higher than usual. Also, there are prominent frequent nie. I think people were observing the details closely, but if it were Shinkai's work, there would be more chikei, prominent kinsuji and sunagashi, and more Soshu Den elements. Some people voted Sukehiro's student Sukenao. They are a teacher and student, and have similar styles, and that is potentially a proper answer. But Sukenao's last work is confirmed today as having been made in Genroku 6 (1693), so if they are compared to Kanbun Shinto shapes, many of his shapes have a slightly large sori, and his midare hamon would have sunagashi. Also, in general, his jiba's (jigane and hamon) clarity or appearance is not as good as his teacher's. So, with this much excellent workmanship, it would better to vote for Sukehiro without hesitation.

The nakago photo is 95% of the actual size.

## **Shijo Kantei To No. 807 in** **The April, 2024 issue**

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a wakizashi by Soshu Hiromitsu.

This is hirazukuri wakizashi, which is long and wide, and with a shallow sori. In addition, there is a short nakago for the blade. From the shape, you can imagine it is from the Nanbokucho era, the end of the Muromachi period, the Keicho Shinto period or is Shinshinto period work. The description focused on the width, and stated it is slightly thin, so you should consider Nanbokucho period work.

Around the Enbun-Joji period, one of the characteristic points for hirazukuri wakizashi and tanto was that they were thin. The Hasebe, Aoe, Bingo and Hokke schools have prominently thin blades. But Soshu Hiromitsu's and Akihiro's shapes are either not notably thin, or are slightly thin, and this is supposed to be one of characteristic details one should notice.

At the end of the Muromachi period, hirazukuri blades sometimes were thin, but a difference is the prominent saki-zori. In the Keicho period, many of them are thick, and some have saki-zori. In the Shinshinto period, utushi-mono (copies of old blades)



were made in large quantities, and there were all kinds of shapes, but in general they are thick from the moto to the saki, and heavy.

On this blade, the jiba (jigane and hamon) has strong nie, a hitatsura hamon, a mitsumune, detailed horimono, the jigane is itame with frequent chikei, and so we could say that the entire blade is clearly a Soshu Den style.

The hamon is hitatsura, and there is a variable midare. The nioiguchi has wide and narrow areas, and a soft feeling, and is mainly gunome mixed with prominent choji, and notably, we can see what are called dango-choji, which are very round choji. On this wakizashi this can be seen on the omote and the ura around the monouchi area. A kawazuko choji spreads out to the sides and can form a round shape, and sometimes it separates from the hamon and forms a tobiyaki shape. In addition, going towards the point, the hamon's width gradually become wider, and often yubashiri, kinsuji, and sunagashi are entangled with the ji's itame hada. The boshi is midarekomi with a sharp tip and long return, and these characteristics are often seen in Hiromotsu's work.

The nakago tip is slender and is kurijiri, the yasurime are a shallow katte sagari, and on the omote, under the mekugi ana on the center, there is a long kanji signature made with a fine chisel. The same style engraving on the ura has a date, and this matches Hiromitsu's nakago style.

For another proper answer, some people voted for Soshu Akihiro. Hiromitsu's dated works are from Shohei 7 to Kano 3 (1352), and Joji 3 (1368). Akihiro's dated work is from Enbun 2 (1357) and

Shitoku 4 (1387). The small number of Akihiro's Enbun Joji works are difficult to differentiate from Hiromitsu's work.

In general, Akihiro's style includes a slightly small size midare hamon, some places have togariba, and compared with Hiromitsu's hamon, many of them have a slightly stiff appearing midare hamon.

However, Hiromitsu has very few works less than 1 shaku, such as short length tanto with lengths of 8 sun and 9 sun which are often seen in Akihiro's work, and this is supposed to be an important difference between them. Among these short works, we see a short length with a wide, stocky shape, which reminds us of a hocho (kitchen knife) shaped small tanto. The source of the differences in the smiths' shapes derives from the fact Akihiro's active period spanned the latter half of the Nanbokucho period, and he is supposed to have been junior to Hiromitsu, and was affected by the changing times (this situation is similar to that of the two Hasebe school smiths Kunishige and his younger brother Kuninobu.)

In addition, Akihiro's signature uses a simplified "aki" kanji. The "hiro" kanji's first stroke is slanted to the side, but his early dated Enbun 2 (1357) work was the same as Hiromitsu's, and had the usual vertical stroke. Except for his Enbun and Joji work, and some of his Oan period work, his dates omitted the "nen" kanji, and the "gatsu" and "hi" kanji too, for example we have "Eiwa gan" and these are his characteristic signatures.

Besides the correct answer, from the Nanbokucho period hitatsura hamon, some people voted for Hasebe Kunishige. As I explained above, if it were

Hasebe school work, it would be thinner. The jigane along the mune and hamon edge becomes masame hada, and because of this, we see long kinsuji and sungashi entangled with the masame hada, and these are prominent. Many basic hamon are a notare, without tobiyaki or yubashiri, and the midare hamon's height from the moto to saki is constant or constrained within a narrow range. In addition, the boshi is a large round style, and the return is either a long return up to the machi, or an intermittently continuous muneyaki, and shows many differences from this wakizashi.

Explanation by Ooi Gaku.