

NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL

ISSUE NUMBER 828

JANUARY, 2026

MEITO KANSHO: APPRECIATION OF IMPORTANT SWORDS

Tachi: Tokubetsu Juyo Token

Owner: NBTHK

**Mei: Bizen koku Osafune ju Chikakage
Karyaku 2 nen (1327) 5 gatsu hi**

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 4 bu (70.9 cm)

Sori: 4 bu 5 rin (1.35 cm)

Motohaba: 9 bu 2 rin (2.8 cm)

Sakihaba: 5 bu 8 rin (1.75 cm)

Motokasane: 1 bu 7 rin (0.5 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)

Kissaki length: 8 bu 6 rin (2.6 cm)

Nakago length: 7 sun 4 bu 3 rin (22.5 cm)

Nakago sori: 5 rin (0.15 cm)

Commentary

This is a shinogi tsukuri tachi with an ihorimune. There is a standard width, the widths at the moto and saki are different, it is thin, there is a koshisori although it is suriage, and there is a short chu-kissaki. The jigane is ko-itame mixed with itame, the entire ji is well forged, there are ji-nie and midare utsuri. The hamon is a choji style hamon mixed with ko-gunome and angular shaped features. Around the monouchi area, there is a suguha hamon, and there are saka-ashi at the koshimoto. Along the entire hamon, there are frequent ashi and yo, it is nioideki, there are some ko-nie, and there are some kinsuji on the ura side. The boshi is straight and there is a round point. The nakago is suriage, the tip is a shallow ha-agari kurijiri. The yasurime are katte sagari, and there are two mekugi-ana. On the omote, below the second mekugi ana (the original ana) along the mune side, there is a small sized long kanji signature, and the ura has a date.

Osafune Chikakage is supposed to be Nagamitsu's student or son. His dated work ranges from Showa 4 (1315) to Jowa 3 (1347) over a thirty year period. The elder son Kagemitsu was 10 years older than Chikakage, so Chikakage was either Kagemitsu's junior or his younger brother. Some work from Kagemitsu's early period has confirmed Chikakage daime, and are possibly daisaku, and from this, we can recognize their close relationship. In Chikakage's signature when there are long signatures such as on tachi, most of them are signed "Bizen koku" or "Bishu Osafune ju Chikakage". But only his latest works on tachi are signed "Bizen koku ju Osafune Chikakage", with "Osafune" signed below the "ju" kanji bringing attention to it (indicating it is a school name). Also, he wrote the "kage" kanji in the same manner as other Nanbokuchō period smiths, such as Yoshikage, Morikage, Morokage, and Mitsukage, and his signature is written in a gyaku-tagane style (inscribed in a reverse direction from the usual direction used to inscribe lines). From these common points, there is an opinion that he was likely an ancestor of these smiths. In fact, this is supported by Yoshikage's signature which is similar to Chikakage's in Chikakage's Jowa period work. Morikage also has work which used "Osafune" as the school's name.

Most of Chikakage's signed works are tachi, some naginata, (naginata naoshi wakizashi), kanmuri otoshi tsukuri wakizashi and ken, but his tanto are very rare, although Kagemitsu has many tanto. This is a difference in their output and it is interesting. In Chikakage's characteristic style, his jigane has some visible hada often showing some large hada patterns, and there is somewhat less refined forging when compared to Kagemitsu's work. His ji-utsuri are not very clear. His hamon are suguha, and mainly ko-choji with a notare style. In addition, there are relatively many works based on suguha mixed with square gunome and saka-ashi which is similar to Kagemitsu's work. Also, among his signed works, there are slightly prominent nie which are never seen in Kagemitsu's work, his boshi more often are "Sansaku boshi" which are straight going above the yokote, and a shallow notare, with a stylistic sharp point and a return, and sometimes the point falls down towards the ha or up towards the mune side. Also, some opinions are that in some works, the yokote was likely moved by a polisher.

This tachi has a gentle koshizori although it is suriage. There is a standard width, the widths at the moto and saki are different, and there is a short chu-kissaki. This is a graceful shape from the late Kamakura period and is different from a mid-Kamakura period shape. The jigane is based on ko-itame hada mixed with itame, the entire ji is well forged, there is a soft look or appearance, and there is a small jihada pattern compared with his usual work, which has a controlled visible and refined jihada. In addition, the hamon is mainly a choji style hamon mixed with ko-gunome, and there are not many saka-ashi, and this is a characteristic point. The hamon from the moto to the saki is mainly midare, but around the monouchi area it becomes a gentle suguha style. The entire hamon style is less like his own style and more similar to Nagamitsu's style. Also, the plump tops of the hamon features are similar to Nagamitsu's. Since there is a date, this work has an enhanced documentary value, and with the quality of workmanship, this deserves to be appreciated as one of Chikakage's excellent works.

This blade is one of Mr. Nezu Akira's gifts made in July of Reiwa 3, and we will study and display it. I would like to express my gratitude once again to Mr. Nezu.

Commentary and oshigata by Ishii Akira

Shijo Kantei To No. 828

Katana

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 5 bu (71.2 cm)

Sori: 5 bu (1.5 cm)

Motohaba: 1 sun 1 bu (3.3 cm)

Sakihaba: 7 bu (2.15 cm)

Motokasane: 2.5 bu (0.8 cm)

Sakikasane: slightly less than 2 bu (0.55 cm)

Kissaki length: slightly less than 1 sun 3 bu (3.9 cm)

Nakago length: slightly less than 7 sun 6 bu (22.95 cm)

Nakago sori: slight

This is a shinogi tsukuri katana with an ihorimune. It is wide, and the widths at the moto and saki are not very different. It is prominently thick, there is a wide shinogi ji, a slightly high shinogi, a shallow sori, a long chu-kissaki, and the entire katana is robustly made. The jigane is a tight masame hada, there are abundant ji-nie and fine chikei. The hamon and the boshi are as seen in the oshigata. The hamon is based on a wide suguha. At the bottom half there are gunome and ashi, and frequent nie mixed in places with mura nie. There are tobiyaki and muneyaki. In the upper half, there are brush stroke-like wide and long yubashiri, nijuba and sanjuba, frequent long hotsure, sunagashi, and kinsuji, and a slightly worn down nioiguchi. The nakago is ubu, the tip is ha-agari kurijiri. The yasurime are kiri and there is one mekugi ana. On the omote, along the mune side, there is a long kanji signature, and the ura has a date.

This smith's jigane is often a rough visible masame hada.

Tokubetsu Jujo Tosogu

Kiri Hoo zu (paulownia tree and phoenix design) Tsuba

Mei: Mifu ju Hagiya Katsuhira with kao

Keio Gan-nen (1865) kinoto ushi Chushu (Mid-Autumn) sen

The statues of the two master smiths in the Kairakoen plum grove in Ibaragi Prefecture's Mito city were built by Unno Shomin and the second generation Unno Yoshinori in Meiji 4 (1910) to commemorate their teachers Hagiya Katsuhira and the Shodai Unno Yoshinori. In Heisei 27 (2015) in response to the Ibaraki Kogei (craft) association's request and donations, the statues were restored after the great east Japan earthquake.

The tsuba-shi (tsuba craftsman) Hagiya Katsuhira worked carefully using classic techniques, and his work exhibits an elegance and vitality, and he produced many excellent works.

This tsuba has a carefully polished iron ground. On the omote there is a hoo (phoenix) flying elegantly over a sea of clouds carved in takabori. The ura shows a paulownia tree and bamboo carved in sukedashi-takabori, and at each key point there is an elegant placement of gold and silver inlay iroe. This smith produced realistic and accurate carvings.

Katsuhira was good at using Mito's characteristic powerful carving style and produced a strong sense or impression of the volume of the subjects. On the other hand, he sometimes incorporated Machi-bori elements from the Yokoya school. From the hoo's distinctive and elaborate takabori, we can recognize the usual powerful Mito carving style plus the machibori techniques. This shows the Bakumatsu Period's Mito gold smiths' strong carving techniques.

On the omote and ura's upper sections, there are a large hoo (phoenix) and a paulownia tree design, and such a basic composition is seen in the work of many gold smiths such as Sano Naoyoshi's hoo and paulownia design tsuba. Here, on the omote under the hoo there are huge clouds, and on the ura, the top of the paulownia tree is wrapped by clouds, so the omote and ura display a heaven and earth composition. On the limited space of a tsuba, the smith created the feeling of space.

This is a Mito gold smith masterpiece, and he originated this type of design with the zuicho (hoo) which is supposed to live in an aogiri tree (a Chinese parasol tree), and comes out only after an appearance of a holy angel or after a joyous event. This work exhibits grace, vitality, and a refined design.

Explanation by Koiwai Daiki

Shijo Kantei To No. 826 in the November 2025 issue

The answer for the November Shijo Kantei To is a katana by Shitahara Terushige.

From the signature, this is supposed to be the fourth generation Terushige's work, and he led the school after third generation passed away. Chronologically, this is in the Shinto period, but early Edo period Shitahara work still retained strong traces of the Sengoku period style, and it is difficult to distinguish it from Koto period work. In addition, differences in the work of individual smiths were fewer, so in consideration of this, at this time, any Shitahara smith's work from the latter half of the Muromachi Period to the early Edo period (during the transition period between Koto and Shinto) was treated as a correct answer.

The shape is wide, the difference in the widths at the moto and the saki does not stand out, there is a shallow sori and a long chu-kissaki. If this were a large suriage Nanbokuchō period tachi, there should be no funbari. If it were a tachi from the end of the Muromachi period, many of them would have a prominent saki-sori. Also, the jiba (jigane and hamon) does not have a fresh looking Shinshinto appearance. From these considerations, we wish to think about Keicho Shinto period work.

The jigane has a prominent mokume hada mixed with ayasugi hada. There are especially large mokume hada call nyorin-moku which has strong round shapes like a ring, and these are one of Shitahara's characteristic points. Among these swords, some of them have nyorin-moku from the moto to the saki along the center of the flat areas or ji, but many of them are only partially visible. Also, we often see an ayasugi hada between two mokume circles in a narrow space, and these can form a choji-like shape. In addition to these characteristic jigane features, there can be a dark colored ji and a visible hada, or sometimes a whitish ji. The entire jigane has a wild or undisciplined texture called "Shitahara hada" which is the school's unique jigane. But these characteristic jigane features are rarely seen around the Kanbun period.

This is a suguha style hamon, and usually Shitahara hamon are notare, gunome, or a hitatsura style, and we see all kinds of hamon. Until around the early Edo period, their hamon on the omote and ura have the same midare pattern and prominent muneyaki, or a worn down nioiguchi, and often we see sue koto style. Also, it is pointed out that a yakiba that starts around the hamachi has often mizukage.

On the nakago, the lower part has a slightly strong but narrow shape, and can be a slightly slender tanagobara style. The nakago tip is ha-agari kurijiri, the yasurime are kiri (they are sometimes kurijiri and katte sagari too). The signature is along mune side, and these details match the characteristics of smiths working at the Shinto and Koto boundary period, such as the Shitahara school's major smiths like Yasushige and Terushige's nakago style.

Their horimono in the case of special orders show excellent work of all kinds, and usually their designs are lacking in sophistication. However, they are simple and unique designs. Among these, there are kurikara in which the dragon's tail winds up along the ken, and looks like it is tied to the ken, and this is the school's unique horimono, and this is a major point at this time. The dragon's face is playful, and the

beak looks like a duck's beak, and sometimes the knee and elbow have an angular shape.

Notably, Terushige has many horimono, and he left the most Shin no Kurikara horimono among the school's smiths. Yasushige made the same kind of horimono, but he was good at Fudo Myo-o which is seen less in Terushige's work. At this time, people used this difference as a clue, and many people narrowed the smith's name down to Terushige.

Also, besides major smiths such as Yasushige and Terushige who left many works, dozens of people voted for Teruhiro. Teruhiro is from Terushige's branch family, he left very few works, and except for local collectors from his area, he is likely to be an unfamiliar smith. His works included many wakizashi, and there are few confirmed swords and horimono. From now on, unless absolutely certain, it's a safe choice not to vote for him.

Also, Yasushige's family produced the most work, with Terushige's family following, and Hiroshige's family following them, but many of their works were after the beginning of the Shinto period, and they have a prominent Shinto appearance, and look less like Koto work.

Besides the correct answer, some people emphasized the ayasugi hada and voted for Gassan and Naminohira.

The Gassan school's ayasugi hada are relatively gentle and wide, and can form large gunome-like shapes, and the spaces between the mokume-like patterns are slightly small, and sometimes there are round patterns called nyorin-moku. Many of their hamon are a suguha style, and overall, their nioiguchi are soft and weak looking. If there is a relatively strong nioiguchi, it is entwined with the ayasugi hada, and often there are hotsure and uchinoke. There are often any detailed horimono.

The Naminohira school has some areas in the ji mixed with ayasugi hada, but clear shapes or patterns are surprisingly few, and we often see itame hada becoming nagare hada with a slightly strong notare-like ayasugi-like hada. Also, they are based on the Yamato school style, many of their works have a high shinogi, and if there is a suguha style hamon, then at the hamon edge there would be prominent hataraki, such as hotsure and sunagashi. Sometimes there is a soft nioiguchi, and detailed horimono are not very common.

Some people noticed the good at horimono work, and they voted for Heianjo Nagayoshi, Yasutsugu, and the Shinshinto smith Gassan Sadakazu. However, their Kurikara carving characteristics do not match that of the Shitahara school. If it were Nagayoshi's work, many of his jigane have a Kyoto style characteristic sophisticated tight ko-itame hada, and his nakago have a curved funagata (boat shape) shape.

Yasutsugu's mokume jigane are not commonly mixed with nyorin-moku which has a prominently round and large pattern, sometimes his ha-nie are rough, many of his boshi have a sharp tip and a long return, his nakago tips are kengyo and iriyamagata, and his yasurime are either katte sagari or sujichigai.

Many of the Sadakatsu's jigane are very tight, and have ayasugi hada with a dark jigane and with a visible hada pattern, and the layered hada pattern stands out clearly. Overall, the jiba (jigane and hamon) are fresh looking, and the yasurime are sujichigai or a large sujigai with kesho.

Commentary by Ooi Gaku

NOTE: Once you vote for an answer and submit it, you cannot change it. Also, some people submit several answers, and in this case, even if one is correct answer, all of their entries will become invalid. So please be careful and submit only one smith's name.

The number of articles accepted for Shinsa will be limited

Amendments

In order to improve efficiency in Shinsa evaluations, the NBTHK will limit the number of articles which will be accepted for Shinsa. Since there may be an excess number of applications, applications will be accepted beginning at a later date, starting with the August, 2025 Shinsa applications (applications start from July) and there is a limit per person in the number of items which can be submitted. If someone submits a number of items which exceeds this limited number of items, the application will be rejected. If any items are submitted with false statements (including an excess number of applications), the NBTHK may make a decision that it is an inappropriate application and make the space available to other applicants. The excess items **will be removed from the Shinsa without notice**. (please look at the terms of service).

Token Shinsa

A limited number of items will be accepted. During the acceptance window or month for a Token Shinsa, a limited number of items will be accepted, and this will generally be 1,600 items.

The number of articles accepted through internet applications for a Shinsa will usually be limited to 1,400 items (with a maximum of 30 items per person).

The number of items accepted through paper applications will usually be limited to 200 items (with a maximum of 10 items per person).

Toso Shinsa

Toso (koshirae) Shinsa applications can be made by mail or through the internet.

For Toso Shinsa, a limit of 100 items will be accepted.

The number of items accepted through internet applications will usually be limited to 80 items (with a limit of 10 items per person).

The number of items accepted through paper applications will generally be 20 items (with a limit of 5 items per person).

Tosogu Shinsa

Tosogu (koshirae component) Shinsa items will generally be limited to 750 items.

Up to 650 items (with a limit of 30 items per person) will be accepted from internet applications.

Up to 100 items (with a limit of 10 items per person) will be accepted from paper applications.

Applications through the internet

After a registration for shinsa is completed, click on the “registration” button, and the screen should show your complete pre-registration document. After the pre-registration is complete and you have a confirmed reservation number, you cannot change the accepted shinsa item for another item. In case you desire to change an item for shinsa, you must cancel the registered item, and then register another item. If you cancel an accepted item when the submitted Shinsa applications reach the limited number, other items cannot be accepted for Shinsa.

During the registration period, if you wish to register another item, and we have already reached limit for the number of accepted items, you cannot register any additional items.

During the application period, applications must be received from the 10th at 10:00am to the 20th on the month before the scheduled shinsa.

Application via documents

The NBTHK must receive applications within the designated application period.

During the appropriate application periods, applications must be received the month prior to the Shinsa on the 1st to 5th (with a valid postmark within that period). Applications for February Shinsa should be received from the 4th to 7th of January.

If the number of applications reaches the upper limit, we will select items by lottery from among all valid applications.

For the lottery we will use a digital protocol, and we will post a public notice concerning the process:

1. For the lottery we will use an Excel function and generate a random number for each applicant.
2. Based on the number of items, until we reach the upper limit for the number of items, we will accept applications.

We will accept items by postage, but we cannot accept applications delivered directly to the NBTHK office or via a courier service.

When the number of documents is above the limited acceptance number, or past the acceptance date, we will return the applications.