

NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL
ISSUE NUMBER 836
September, 2026

MEITO KANSHO
APPRECIATION OF IMPORTANT SWORDS

Wakizashi

Juyo Bijutsuhin

Owner: NBTHK

Mei: Soshu ju Tsunahiro

Length: 1 shaku 2 sun 1 bu 4 rin (36.8 cm)

Sori: 2 bu 3 rin

Motohaba: 9 bu 1 rin (2.75 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu (0.6 cm)

Nakago length: 3 sun 7 bu 3 rin (11.3 cm)

Nakago sori: 3 rin (0.1 cm)

Commentary

This is a hiratsukuri wakizashi with a mitsumune. It is wide and large. It is long, slightly thick, and there is a shallow sori. The jigane is itame hada mixed with mokume and nagare hada. There are jifu, and the entire jihada is visible. There are ji-nie, and chikei. The hamon is ko-gunome with choji, and there is a ko-notare style hamon. There are ashi, yo, and abundant even nie. The upper half has tobiyaki and yubashiri, and there is a high and wide midare hamon. There are muneyaki, and this becomes a hitatsura hamon, and there are some kinsuji and sunagashi. The boshi is midarekomi, the tip is komaru, and there is a long return which continues to form muneyaki. The horimono on the omote are a bonji with a suken. On the ura there is a carving of the kanji "Hachiman Daibosatsu". The nakago is ubu, the tip is a narrow funa-gata (boat-like shape), there is a ha-agari style kurijiri, and the yasurime are katte-sagari. There is one mekugi ana, and on the omote under the mekugi ana, biased slightly toward mune side, there is a small size five kanji signature.

Soshu Tsunahiro was a Muromachi period master smith who followed the Nanbokucho period master smiths Hiromitsu and Akihiro. He had the best Soshu Den style and was recognized as Soshu Den's representative master smith in that period. His oldest existing work is dated Tenmon 3 (1534) which the Meikan lists as Tenmon 2, and his dated works are concentrated in the Tenmon period (1532-54). From this, he was thought to be the school's actual founder. Among his well-known signed works is a large Juyo Bunkazai tachi owned by Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine, which Hojo Ujitsuna ordered as one of three tachi from the school's three smiths, Tsunahiro, Tsunaie, and Yasukuni. Each of the three blades is signed on the omote with "Honou Hachimangu go-hoden Hojo Sakyo-daiu Taira no Ujitsuna", and on the ura with "Tenmon 7 Tsuchinoe-inu 8 gatsu futsuka shogan jo-ju kairyo manzoku", and each smith's name. Tsurugaoka Hachimangu was a guardian deity for warriors since Minamoto Yoritomo's time which destroyed by a fire in a war, and Kamakura's Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine's re-construction was one of Ujitsuna's major projects. These honou tachi (or honou-to, i.e. blades made to be dedicated to a shrine) were supposed to be part of the project. One theory is that these tachi were to commemorate Ujitsuna's victory when he won a battle with Uesugi Tomotada and conquered Kawagoe castle, and at the time, the smiths received the "Tsuna" kanji from Ujitsuna's name. But from the dates and signatures, Tsunahiro used the Tsunahiro mei before this time, and so that theory should be rejected. Also, his existing dated Tenmon period's latest work is dated Tenmon 22 (1553) and is owned by the Tokyo National Museum, and the next Tsunahiro signature is Genki 4 (1573), and so there is a gap of 20 years between these signatures. Because of this we can imagine there might have been a generational change. Moreover, in the later period, signed on the omote we see "Tsugaru-shu Tamenobu Soshu Tsunahiro yobikudashi saku kore", and on the ura "Keicho 10 tsuchinoto-otsu 8 gatsu kichijitsu 300 koshino uchi" (one of 300 ordered blades). These were for the Mutsu Koku Hirosaki domain's lord Tsugaru Tamenobu, and a later generation Tsunahiro was making swords for him. This is attracting attention as it is interesting historical material. After that, the Tsunahiro family worked for six generations in the Edo period, and worked for the Tokugawa family, and worked at tasks other than sword making, with the rise and fall of their fortunes.

As a Japanese sword making family, they continued until Masamune's 22nd generation mago (grandson), and the Tsunahiro family's 18th generation Yamamura Tsuyoshi, a smith who passed away in December of Reiwa 5.

In the Muromachi period, Tsunahiro's signed work, besides katana included many hiratsukuri long wakizashi, rarely any tachi, and a few tanto among which there are blades with mitsumune. In his hamon, hitatsura hamon are worth seeing, and there intentionally are tobiyaki, yubashiri, and muneyaki, and these are different from the Nanbokucho smiths Hiromitsu and Akihiro's work, and they show a stronger trend to have a nioiguchi. Also, many of his works have horimono, starting with bo-hi and katana hi, and horimono such as gomabashi, bonji, so-sho style kurikara, carved kanji words such as "nunmyo-

ho-ren gekyo”, “san-ju ban shin” “Hachiman daibosatsu”, “zaiun ten”, “daisei fudo-myo-o” and “yanagi wa midori hana wa kurenai” (a willow is green and the flower is crimson red).

This wakizashi is obviously judged as a Tenmon period Tsunahiro work, and we see his expertly made hitatsura hamon, abundant even nie which are different from his usual work, and an entire midare hamon which is complex, and changes or flows naturally, and features such as tobiyaki are unpretentious, except on the omote crescent moon shaped hamon which are seen in some of Sukehiro’s work. This is a high quality work, and appears like older work. The upper half of the hamon is a strong high midare, but from the hamon and the horimono locations, we can speculate that the hamon composition suggests that he might have been planning to carve another horimono later. The nakago is a typical Soshu funagata with a narrow tip. The mitsumune center ridge is narrow which shows a Muromachi period characteristic point. This seems to be his absolutely finest work, and it is understandable that among Tsunahiro’s work, this is the only Juyo Bijitsuhin work.

Also, although there is not much material to work from, many token books say this is supposed to have been handed down in the Dewa Akita domain’s Satake family.

This was a gift from Mr. Nara Iwao to the NBTHK in November of Reiwa 7 (2025) along with the tanto described in last month’s issue (No.835) by Norishige which is Juyo Bijutsuhin, and there was a total of 19 pieces donated to the NBTHK. We are planning to show these blades extensively, and we would like to express our sincere gratitude once again.

Explanation and oshigata by Ishii Akira

Shijo Kantei To No. 836

Information

Wakizashi

Length: slightly over 1 shaku 3 sun 4 bu (40.7 cm)

Sori: slightly less than 4 bu (1.15 cm)

Motohaba: 1 sun (3 cm)

Motokasane: slightly over 1 bu (0.35 cm)

Nakago length: slightly less than 4 sun 3 bu (12.95 cm)

Nakago sori: slight

This is a shobu tsukuri wakizashi with an ihorimune. It is long, wide, and thin. There is a large shinogi ji, a strong sori, and the tip has sori. There is an itame

hada mixed with some mokume hada and some nagare hada. The entire hada is visible, and is a unique hada. There are abundant ji-nie and frequent chikei. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the oshigata. The hamon has a dense nioiguchi, in some places frequent nie stand out, there are yubashiri, muneyaki, niesuji, sunagashi and a slightly worn down nioiguchi. The nakago is ubu, the nakago mune is round, the tip is narrow, and there is a round kurijiri. The yasurime are a large sujichigai, and around the togi-dashi area there are some kesho yasurime. There are three mekugi ana. On the omote there is a zuryo mei (an honorary title), and the ura has a date. The signature is slightly large, formed with thick chisel marks, and not orderly or continuous. On the omote, the signature starts in the center of the shinogi line, and because of the narrow tip, the bottom half of the signature is almost on the center of the nakago.

Juyo Tosogu

Kuro-roiro (jet black) hiwari mon raden (mother of pearl inlay) saya dai sho
koshirae

Dai-sho tsuba mei: Tomohiro

Dai fuchi mei: Ryu-unsai Yoshinobu tsukuru kore

Sho fuchi mei: Bunkyu gan shinyu nanryo Yoshinobu tsukuru kore

Dai kogai mei: Toshinobu saku kore

Dai kurikata mei: Kouei

Sho kurikata mei: Toshiyoshi

Sho kozuka mei: Bunkyu gan shinyu nanryo Yoshimasa tsukuru kore

A dai-sho is a pair of swords consisting of an uchigatana and wakizashi to make one set, and the style is thought to have been almost established by the end of the Muromachi period. In the Edo period, when visiting a castle, a formal dai-sho koshirae style was prescribed. However, in general, a dai-sho did not have to follow the Bakufu's rules, and many different styles were developed.

All of the metal fittings from this school have designs based on flowers and birds, and this started with Tanaka Koei Toshiyoshi, and a group derived from the Toryusai school. Their subjects were birds such as sparrows, pheasants, swallows, and wild geese. The flowers and trees depicted were plum, pine, willow, and orchids, and they spanned a wide range. Either subject, trees or flowers, was vividly depicted with fine carving and an excellent sense in using colors. This koshirae has a jet black saya, and the hiwari mon is expressed in mother-of-pearl inlay which exhibits the refined aesthetics of Edo.

This dai-sho koshirae was owned by the former NBTHK chairman and museum director Mr. Suzuki Kajo. After he passed away on April 20 of Heisei 16, his bereaved family donated two Juyo Bijutsuhin blades, three Tokubetsu Juyo Token, one Tokubetsu Juyo Toso, twenty one Juyo Token, and five Juyo Toso, and this is one those items. This year is the 23rd year since he passed away, and we are planning an exhibition titled "The Suzuki Kajo Collection" from September 5th to October 12th, and this daisho will be exhibited then.

Explanation by Arakawa Fumito

Shijo Kantei To No. 834 in the July, 2026 issue

The answer to the July Shijo Kantei To is a tachi by Osafune Motomitsu.

Motomitsu is supposed to be either Kanemitsu's son or a student, and his existing work signed Sabyoe Jo was the 21st Juyo Token blade. The Meikan lists his active period as being from Koei 2 (1343) to Eiwa 2 (1376), and there are existing works from Bunwa 2 (1353) and Eiwa 1(1375). He was active around the peak Nanbokucho period, the Enbun-Joji period.

This was not made as an extremely large tachi, but it is about 1 sun suriage at the koshimoto and still has some funbari. It shows the period's standard ubu tachi shape, and we can recognize a peak Nanbokucho period shape. In other words, there is a koshizori and the tip has sori, so the shape retains features from about the latter half of the Kamakura period. But we can find the period's characteristic points, such as being very wide, the widths at the moto and saki are not very different, and the blade is slightly thin.

Also, the jigane is itame with midare utsuri, and from this, it is easy to judge as Bizen work. In addition, the hamon is based on kataochi gunome midare, the boshi is midarekomi, and from the nakago and the signature's characteristic points, the Osafune Kanemitsu school initially comes to mind.

Among these smiths, Motomitsu has many works with a visible itame hada, and his kataochi gunome midare hamon are mixed with many types of features. From this it can follow that the hamon is not tightly disciplined or organized, and also that many of the hamon features can be high, and some of the midare hamon valleys are slightly too open, and the gunome look like slightly large kataochi gunome, and these details are several of Motomitsu's characteristic points. In addition, the hints mentioned that among school's smiths, he has a smaller number of existing works, and fewer notare midare hamon. From these details it is possible narrow the maker down to Motomitsu.

Many of Kanemitsu's jigane are tight, and his kataochi gunome midare hamon are always well organized. Notably, his midare hamon in this style are from the Kamakura to the early Nanbokucho period, and after Kano (1350-51) his hamon become mainly notare midare and there are fewer kataochi gunome midare hamon. For this kind of obvious Nanbokucho period shape, if you choose Kanemitsu, it is important to carefully examine the jigane and hamon.

Among the school's smiths, Yoshimitsu has relatively less work which matches the hints, but many of his jigane are tight, and in case of kataochi gunome and gunome midare hamon, they are a small midareba. Also, his dated works are from Genko to Joji (1321-67), and from this, we can see wide blades with a Nanbokucho shape in his tanto and wakizashi. However, most of his tachi widths are either standard or slightly wide, and both styles have a chu-kissaki.

Tomomitsu is noted mainly for notare and ko-notare midare hamon in the school. Sometimes we see kataochi gunome midare hamon work, but most of these have a small size. Also, we often see elaborate horimono which includes bo-hi and simple horimono, but most of his work has horimono and this is supposed to be a characteristic point.

Masamitsu has relatively many existing works. His active period is the latter half of the Nanbokucho period, so many of his works appear like Kosori work, most of his hamon are ko-notare mixed with many types of features, and are a small size. Overall, the entire hamon is a small size, and a narrow midare.

In an NBTHK appraisal, Hidemitsu's work was treated as Kosori work, but there is a theory that he is Motomitsu's son, so at this time we treated him as a correct answer. Usually, his work is in a Kosori style, and he is especially good at making continuous gunome hamon, and his shapes are not large. Among his works, he has a famous work, dated Oan 4 (1371), a Juyo Bunkazai tachi, which is long, wide, and has a large kissaki and a distinct Nanbokucho shape. The hamon is not kataochi gunome, but continuous square gunome, and also narrow, and mixed with elongated features which is somewhat closer to Motoshige's work rather than to Motomitsu's work.

Besides the correct and proper answer, from the visible hada, and a disordered midare hamon, some people voted for Chogi, Morikage, Yoshikage, Moromitsu, and Motoshige. These smiths' kataochi gunome midare hamon are rare or almost never seen. Many of Chogi's and Morikage's hamon are mainly notare or bottom open valley hamon. Many of Yoshikage's and Moromitsu's hamon have many types of small sized complex features mixed in the hamon.

Motoshige's hamon have continuous gunome, but not kataochi gunome, but there are square gunome in the upper area in his hamon. The edge and hamon border in the upper part of the hamon are almost parallel, and there regular square gunome. Moreover, in the upper part of the hamon, there are

often elongated hamon features. In addition, in his jigane, many of his jigane are mixed with masame hada and jifu.

Explanation by Ooi Gaku

PLEASE 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 the correct answer, all of their entries will become invalid. So please be careful and submit only one smith's name.