

NIHONTO NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY, 1968

VOL. 1, NO. 2

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Dear Readers

We now bring to you our second edition of the Nihonto Newsletter.
We hope you will enjoy the subjects covered in this issue.

Since this is only the 2nd edition, we have yet to hear from any of our readers, however, we are quite certain that there are many readers and students of Japanese swords who have many questions that need answering, and we hope to hear from these readers.

This is the 2nd issue and our last complimentary copy. We hope to hear from interested readers soon. For others, we hope that you have enjoyed reading our Nihonto Newsletter.

Albert Yamanaka
December, 1967

HISTORY OF THE JAPANESE SWORD

Heian Period

The Heian period was from the first year of Daido, 806 to the 2nd Year of Juei, 1183

Although this period as a whole was relatively peaceful, as indicated by the word "Heian" meaning peace, nevertheless, strife was present as seen in struggles for power in scattered areas.

In the early part of the period, two forces which eventually met to fight one another saw their birth. One group, the Taira, traced their origin to the 50th Emperor Kammu who ruled from Teno I (781) to Enreki 24 (805), and whose son Prince Kuzuwara was the founder of the clan.

The second group, the Minamoto Clan, traced their beginning to the same Emperor Kammu, however Kammu's other son, the emperor Saga, the 52nd emperor who ruled from Daido 4 (809) to Konin 14 (823) is the actual founder.

The emperor Saga is supposed to have had some 50 odd offspring, and for the court to support this large family was a heavy burden on the treasury, so different "houses" were established which became independent of the court, and the Minamoto was one of these.

These two houses, having had their origin in the court, used their influence and gained power in various sections of the country.

The Taira gained power first, however they eventually met defeat at the hands of the Minamoto. The power which the Minamoto wrested from the Taira was not long lasting either as later history tells us.

Some of the important battles in this period should be mentioned. The first is the "Zen Kunen no Eki". This was a small disturbance in which a local strong-man, Abe Yoritoki, who controlled a part of the country in Northern Japan, which today is known as Iwate Prefecture, started marching south to expand his domain, and to show and the central government his power.

Since he did not pay taxes or heed orders from the central government, the central government sent Minamoto Yoriyoshi to discipline Abe. The uprising is supposed to have started in the Lisho Era (1050) and last until 1062, which was a 12 year period, so what later historians called the Zen Kunen the "9 year War" is a misnomer.

In 1083, Minamoto Yoshiie, popularly known as Hachimantaro Yoshiie, was ordered to go to Matsu Province, the present day's Aomori and Iwate Prefectures, as its governor, and about this time Kiyohara began his efforts to take over the area where Abe failed. Yoshiie put down this rebellion which is called "Go Sannen no Iki", or the "Latter 3 Year War". It started in 1086 and lasted until 1087 or two years. Why it is called the 3 year war, we do not know.

Next comes the "Hogen no Ran" of 1156. This was a power struggle between one emperor and another with the two forces supporting them.

In 1159 we see the "Heiji no Ran" in which the Taira gain enough power and control to banish the emperor and the Minamoto Clans who supported the emperor. The succeeding battles, of which there are many, are all between the Taira and the Minamoto. These are:

Uji no Tatakai, 1180: the Minamoto attempt to overthrow the Taira and fail.

Ishibashiyama no Tatakai, 1180: the Minamoto attempt to overthrow the Taira and fail.

Fuikawa no Tatakai, 1180: the Minamoto attempt to overthrow the Taira and defeat them.

Kurikara Tani no Tatakai, 1183: Taira forces defeated by Kiso Yoshinaka,

a Minamoto clansman.

Shinohara no Tatakai, 1183: Kiso Yoshinaka pursues the retreating Taira forces and defeats them at Shinohara.

Ujikawa no Tatakai, 1184: Kiso Yoshinaka having defeated the Taira, who fled the capital, meets the disfavor of Minamoto Yoritomo and is defeated at Uji River.

Ichino Tani no Tatakai, 1184: The Taira forces who fled the capital, are pursued by the Minamoto.

Yashima no Tatakai, 1184: The Minamoto pursue and face the Taira and annihilate them at

Dan no Ura no Tatakai, 1185

At Dan no Ura, the mother of the infant Emperor Antoku (81st emperor: 1180-1185) committed suicide with him by jumping into the sea, and the power of the Taira was seized by the Minamoto.

We listed the battles to associate them with the making of weapons, for battles always have had a great influence on the development of arms and armor, which still holds true to this day.

In the early part of this period, that is during the wars in Northern Japan and until the time when the Taira clan took to the sea, many of the events were fought on horseback, so that swords were long and had a strong Sori. These swords were tachi and were worn suspended from the waist. The previous period's straight swords or ken became useless in this period.

All of the battles in this period served as an impetus for the great surge forward in the skills of sword makers and armor makers in the coming Kamakura Period. The fact that the forces in the north, such as the Abe, the Kiyohara, and later the Fujiwara, instigated uprisings tell us that there were swordsmiths to supply them with weapons, and they must have been kept quite busy. The group of smiths who worked in this area at the time are known as the Mogusa or Mougusa (and sometimes as Muso).

The earliest of the smiths in this school was named Amahara who was supposed to have been active around 810, and after who there is a long list. However, there are no known works by these smiths today, or at least we have not heard of any. Towards the latter part of this period, a few smiths in Dewa Province such as Gassan became active followed by Oniomaru, Yukitsune, Ganmaru and Garima. Since Muso blades are non-existent today, an explanation or description of their work, we feel, is unnecessary. However, Gassan blades are seen on very rare occasions. The one

chief characteristic is that the hada is ayasugi hada, i.e., the steel has been folded and forged so that the hada resembles waves.

In the West this ayasugi hada seems to intrigue some collectors, and we have seen some blades that have been treated with acid, so that the wavy hada characteristic would show even more prominently (this makes one shudder!).

Unlike the previous period, during the Heian Period, we see smiths working in all parts of Japan. A list of smiths in provinces is:

Yamashiro Province.	Sanjo Munechika	Gojo Kanenaga	
	Sanjo Yoshiie	Gojo Sadatoshi	
	Sanjo Arikuni	Gojo Chikamura	
		Gojo Munetoshi	
		Gojo Muneyasu	
		Gojo Munenori	
		Gojo Kanetsugu	
		Gojo Kuninaga	
		Gojo Munetada	
		Gojo Munenobu.	
		Awataguchi Kuniie	
		Awataguchi Koremasa	
	Awataguchi Koretsugu		
Kawachi Province	Hata Kanehira		
	Ariuji	Arinari	Ariyuki
	Tameyoshi	Arikuni	
	Aritsuna	Arimasa	
Yamato Province	Amayuki (806)	Koretaka	
	Senjuin Yukinobu		
	Senjuin Shigehiro		
	Senjuin Shigenaga		
	Senjuin Shigemura		
Bizen Province	Sanenari	Tomonari	Takahira
	Kanehira	Sukenari	Masatsune
	Yasumune	Suketomo	

In Hoki Province (the present day's Shimane Prefecture) there was the famous Yasutsuna of Ohara and his son Sanemori, and a little over a dozen smiths. From about 806, which is the date given for Yasutsuna, until about 1024, the Hoki smiths seems to have enjoyed the good patronage of someone in that area. In contrast to the Muso smiths in the North, the Hoki smiths are not associated with strife and war, and the reason why Yasutsuna and his associates made blades is not explained very well. However as mentioned in the previous installment on the historical periods, the Hoki district was said to have produced abundant iron sand or satetsu, the material

used to make swords, and this may have been the reason. Another reason is that the general region around Hoki was said to have been one of the contact points with the Korean Peninsula, and this may have had some bearing on the development of the Hoki smiths. Although the Hoki smiths are famous, their blades do not compare in artistic qualities to the blades of Sanjo or Ko-Bizen. This is probably due to the promotion given to Yasutsuna by later historians when Yasutsuna's blade (the famous Dojikiri Yasutsuna) was used when hunting bandits by Minamoto Raiko.

A characteristic of the Japanese swords during the Heian Period is, that, without exception, they are all strongly curved, i.e., the sori is very large. The majority of the blades we see today from the Heian Period have all been shortened so that it is difficult to imagine the blade in the original form, however, there are a few in existence and from these we see the highly stylized or characteristic shape of the period.

If these blades are not shortened, they always have fumbari. Fumbari is found at the machi of the blade, that is, the width at the Machi is wide and then the blade slowly becomes narrower.

Fumbari means to stand erect with your feet apart, and this is the "feeling" one gets when seeing blades from this period with this characteristic. Some well made blades, even though they have been shortened (if not shortened too much) still retain some of the original shape and fumbari. Blades with fumbari start to narrow or taper from about 6 inches above the machi, and then become narrow and end in a very graceful kissaki giving the blade an aura of elegance.

Carvings or horimono are extremely rare for this period, although a few smiths did make horimono such as Sadahide in Buzen Province in Kyushu. The horimono or carvings are not as detailed or intricate as those made by later smiths, and the simplicity with which they were executed adds something to the blade which can be appreciated.

Miike Mitsuyo, sometimes called Tenta, of Chikugo Province also in Kyushu, made an extremely wide groove or hi, covering the full width of the shinogi ji, giving the blade an unusual appearance, but also producing a very nice appearance. It can be said that almost all of the blades of this period have followed the Yamashiro Tradition, mainly in that the shape of the blade shows a strong sori, and are very graceful and have a torii sori where the center of curvature is at the center of the blade.

The width of the yakiba is narrow and in ko-nie. The jitetsu is very fine resulting in ko-mokume hada.

Exceptions to these details are seen in work from the Muso School, the Hoki School, and the Satsuma School, and also in the work of the Dewa Gassan smiths. Since the Muso smiths' blades are non-existent, we can hardly give a description of them, but if we were to speculate what the differences are from the Yamashiro tradition, then it would be that the shinogi is high, the hamon will have sunagashi, there will be hakikake, the jitetsu will be in o-itame mixed with mokume and masame.

In the work of the Hoki smiths, the shinogi is high, but the width of the Shinogi ji will not be too wide, and the nie in the hamon will be rough.

Satsuma blades will have hakikake in the boshi and the itame hada from the hamon will run into the area of the ji.

An easy way to identify some of these smiths is in the jitetsu and the hada; the hada will be o-itame turning into ayasugi hada, and will have ji-nie. The Gassan blades are famous for their ayasugi hada, but the Gassan ayasugi

differs slightly from that of the Satsuma blades, in that they are more uniform and distinct.

SWORDSMITHS

Yamashiro Province's Sanjo Munechika

During the reign of Emperor Shomu (50th emperor, 781 - 806 AD), in the 3rd year of Enreki (784 AD), a plan was set forth for the establishment of a new capital in the part of the country then known as Yamase Province, Otonori Gun. This Yamase no Kuni later came to be known as Yamashiro Province.

It is not known whether there were any smiths living in that part of the country, but in any event, during the reign of Emperor Ichijo (66th emperor, 986-1011), in the Eien Era (987-989), Munechika of Sanjo appeared.

Some of the old chronicles give us the genealogy of Munechika as being the 2nd son of Tachibana Nakamichi, who in turn was the 8th descendant of Tachibana Moronari. The Tachibana were allegedly a noble family. The chronicles also tell us that Munechika was born in the 1st Year of Shoo or 964, and lived to be 70 years old and died on February 15th in the 6th Year of Chogen or 1033.

The establishment of the capital took place in 776 and it supposedly took ten years to complete. Munechika was born in 964 and died in 1033, so we can presume that he started forging swords from about 980 or thereabouts, about the time when he was 15 or 16 years old. Thus, there is a lapse of 200 years from the time of the establishment of the new capital. It seems very odd (to this writer) that there are no known smiths prior to Munechika. We think this can be said of Yamato Province, and of Bizen province as well.

We have to ask the question of why there was a sudden appearance of this smith, and it is odd that no one has asked this question before, for we are sure many have wondered about this very point. Since there are no known smiths prior to Munechika, from whom did he learn his craft from?

With Munechika's skill, it is hard to believe that he developed his techniques by himself, and he certainly must have learned it from someone.

Some old texts place Munechika in Kawachi Province and state that his name was Arinari then, and that he later migrated to Kyoto where he changed his name to Munechika. But some sources tell us that Arinari was Munechika's son.

Although original question is still unanswered, concrete evidence concerning what occurred before Munechika, and the lack of known swordsmiths prior to Munechika's time should prove to be very interesting.

There are few blades by Munechika in existence, of which the most famous is the one called Mikazuki Munechika. It was formerly in the Tokugawa Shogunate collection, however it presently is in a private collection in Tokyo and is the only blade by Munechika which has been selected as a National Treasure of Japan. Although the blade has been worn down from over polishing, it still retains its former elegance. The name Mikazuki was given to this particular blade because it has many uchinoke in the shape of a "mikazuki", which means "quarter moon." Uchinoke occurs at the edge of the hamon or at the habuchi.

The blade is 31.5 inches long and the deepest (maximum) point of the sori is a little over one inch. During the Muromachi Period it was one of the "5 Great Blades" (or the "Tenka Go Ken") and belonged to the Ashikaga Shogunate, and then later to Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Hideyoshi owned it, and then it was given to the 2nd Tokugawa

Shogun Hidetada, and since then, it was in the Tokugawa Collection until shortly after the end of the World War II when the Tokugawa sold many of their possessions. There is another famous Munechika called the Taka no Su Munechika, meaning "falcon's nest". The tale of this blade is that long ago a traveler was traveling through a mountain pass and saw something shining in a tree. He climbed it to investigate and found a falcon's nest with this blade resting in it.

The blade is supposedly from the former Marquis Shimazu Collection. The blade was given to one of the Shimazu ancestors by Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Where Hideyoshi got the blade is not known, however, chances are that he confiscated it from the poor traveler who retrieved it from the falcon's nest. Hideyoshi was well known as a sword collector who acquired many of his blades by force.

There is yet another Munechika, which is of more doubtful origin. Munechika is supposed to have received an imperial decree to make a blade. He went to a shrine to purify himself for the prescribed number of days, and when he started forging the blade a white fox came to aid him in hammering the blade at the anvil. The sword later came to be known as Kogitsunemaru, and kogitsune means "little fox". This story has been made into a Noh play as well as a Kabuki drama.

Munechika along with Masamune are probably the most popular Japanese swordsmiths. Their names are known among people who know nothing whatsoever about swords.

The blade signed "Munechika" which is in the Imperial Collection is probably the best preserved. This blade measures just short of 31 inches with a Sori 7/8" deep and is ubu. The description of this blade is as follows.

It is narrow, ending in a ko-kissaki and the deep sori gives it a very graceful appearance. The skin is exquisitely forged with ko-ji-nie found in abundance throughout the length of the blade, and yubashiri from the ji-nie is found at the bottom of the blade. The hamon has very dense nioi with ko-nie around the ko-midare nioiguchi. Uchinoke is seen in the upper portion of the blade, and tobiyaki, nijuba, and in places sanjuba, are seen. The Boshi is midarekomi with a small kaeri, and at the tip there are hakikake.

There is a yakidashi at the machi which is typical of blades from the early Heian Period.

The Nakago is kijimomo with traces of kate sagari file marks remaining. This blade was given (?) to the Emperor Meiji by the Sakai who ruled at Ohama in Wakasa Province (the southern part of Fukui Prefecture on the Japan Sea coast). This blade very closely resembles the Mikazuki Munechika, and the only difference is that this blade is signed "Munechika", whereas the Mikazuki is signed "Sanjo". The famous meibutsu "Ebina Kokaji Munechika" in the Owari Tokugawa Reimeikai Collection is a Tanto, and as far as we know, it is the only Tanto by Munechika. The length is 11 and 5/8" inches long with a very slight Sakizori. The shape is katakiriha tsukuri and there is a very wide hi on the omote side finished with a kakinagashi end and extending into the Nakago. There is a suken in the hi at the base of the hi. On the ura, there are three Sanscrit characters.

The Nakago is made in a furisode style, it has four mekugi ana, and is signed "Munechika".

This blade was one of the heirlooms of the Ashikaga Shogunate, and then was given to one of the Ashikaga retainers named Miyoshi Chikuzen no Kami Yoshinaga. On the 30th of March in Eiroku (1561) when the 13th Ashikaga Shogun Yoshiteru visited Yoshinaga at his home, this blade was given back to the Ashikaga shogun when gifts were exchanged. The blade was supposedly taken away from Ashikaga

Yoshiteru when Matsunaga Hisahide attacked him at Nijo Castle in May of Eiroku 8 (1565) and forced Yoshiteru to commit suicide.

The blade later went to Oda Nobunaga, and then to Toyotomi Hideyoshi. However, regrettably the blade was damaged in the fire during the Battle of Osaka Castle on 1615. Tokugawa Iyasu had it re-tempered and it has been handed down in the Owari Tokugawa since then. Although the blade is retempered, it nonetheless retains some of the steel's characteristics of Munechika.

A description of Munechika's works is:

Tachi shape and construction:

worked in the Yamashiro Tradition around the Eien Era around 987 AD.

Munechika's Tachi tend to be slightly stronger in shape when compared to swords from other Heian Period smiths.

His blades lack hiraniku.

The kissaki is a little long for this period. He made kotachi at times, and in all cases, the blades exhibit grace and elegance.

Carvings and Hi

There are bo hi ending in kakudome or in kakinagashi, and the the tip of the hi covers the entrie area of the ko-shinogi. An old text tells us that he made other horimono, such as banners, hoko, and suken. We have yet to see any of these blades, and I am told that there are none left to be found.

Hamon

The Hamon starts out wide at the machi, and becomes narrow as it goes towards the Kissaki. The Hamon itself is suguha with ko-choii midare in places.

The dense nioi is mixed with nie.

On the habuchi and inside of the hamon there are many clusters of nie, showing as either inazuma, kinsuji or uchinoke. Nijuba will be seen from the monouchi area and towards the kissaki.

Boshi:

The boshi is nie kuzure, kaen or komaru with very little or a small kaeri.

There are some swords that have a yakizume style.

Jitetsu and hada

High quality iron has been well forged into an exceptionally fine steel resulting in ko-mokume hada and with an abundance of ji-nie.

Chikei will be seen in places.

Nakago

The nakago is long and will have sori and the hira will have niku. The nakago jiri is square and there are occasional kiji-momo nakago.

The signature is inscribed as Sanjo, Munechika or Munechika tsukuru.

The Sanjo School

Munichika	Yoshiie	Sanetoshi	Munenari	Munetoshi
	Sanenori	Muneyasu	Chikamura	Arikuni

Comments

Of all of the Munechika blades that we have seen with Munechika signatures, some were good and many not so good, having been polished so much that very little of the original steel or the outside skin is retained. If a Munechika blade were to be found in its original condition, then it would indeed be a sight to behold.

We would imagine the blade would have many details in it which we are not able to see in his blades today. However, this may just be wishful thinking, for we know that there is no such animal and we will have to be content with what we have available.

It is our contention that among the many swordsmiths who have been "promoted" or lionized in later periods, Munechika heads the list.

We feel that Munechika is not as great as he has been made out to be. His blades do not have all the fine workings found in such blades as the Okanehira in the Ikeda Collection, the Ichimonji Sanetsune in Kunoza Temple in Shizuoka, the Tsurumaru Kuninaga (Gojo) in the Imperial Collection to name but a few.

We said in the beginning of these comments that Munechika's blades in their original state might have had much more to see, however even if they did, we feel that compared to the blades mentioned above in their former state, Munechika's blades would fall below the class of the above three.

Two of the above mentioned blades are from Bizen Province. I am not an advocate of Bizen smiths, although I like them much better than the Yamashiro Smiths. This is because there are many more things to be seen and appreciated in Bizen blades than in Yamashiro blades, no matter how good the Yamashiro blades may be.

FAMOUS SWORDS IN JAPANESE HISTORY

Tenka Goken:

Onimaru Kunitsuna

A great number of the blades famous throughout the long history of Japan have been written up in history books, chronicles and records, and some are from Japanese mythology, and others are from as early as the Nara Period and from throughout history. Five of the famous blades which still exist to this day and are intact, are called the "Tenka Goken" which belonged to the Ashikaga Shogunate. The Tenka Goken translated freely means something like "The Five Blades", or the "Five Best Famous Swords" among the swords in the realm". These are:

Onimaru Kunitsuna by Awataguchi Kunitsuna. of Yamashiro Province

Mikazuki Munechika by Sanjo Munechika of Yamashiro Province

O-Tenta by Miike Mitsuyo of Chikuzen Province

Dojikiri Yasutsuna by Yasutsuna of Hoki Province

Juzumaru by Aoe Tsunetsugu of Bitchu Province

The first blade mentioned, Onimaru Kunitsuna, has been discussed in many books from historical times. One of the books is the Kyoho Meihutsu Cho, where it states (we give a very free translation here), "It has been handed down through generations in the Muromachi Shogunate, and is signed with two characters. Along with the O-Hakata, it was given to Lord Hideyoshi (Toyotomi) by Lord Yoshiteru (15th Ashikaga Shogun 1568-73), and then for some unknown reason, it was left with Kotoku (the 9th Honami).

After the Winter Battle of Osaka Castle (in Keicho 91 or 1614), Koshitsu (the 10th generation Honami) told Lord Ieyasu (Tokugawa) and Shogun Hidetada (the 2nd Tokugawa shogun) about the sword, and was told to take care of it and keep it in the Honami Collection.

Accordingly, it was kept in the Honami estate in Kyoto for a number of years. During the reign of the 108th Emperor Go-Mizunoo, an heir was born to the throne, and the governor of Kyoto, acting for the Shogun, informed the Honami that the Onimaru was to be presented to the throne on that joyous occasion. However, the heir died soon thereafter, so the presentation was not made. The reason why Hideyoshi, as well as Ieyasu, left the sword with Honami, is that the two must have had some thoughts about the sword.

After Hojo Tokiyori (5th Hojo Regent, 1246-57) had subdued all the opposing forces and ruled the country, he was tormented nightly by a goblin in his dreams, and he tried everything to drive the nightmare away, but nothing had any effect. Shortly later, he took ill. One night a sage appeared in a dream and told him that he was the spirit of the sword, and that there were rust spots on the blade which must be removed first, and then he would drive the devil away. Tokiyori awoke, and after inspecting the blade, found the blade to be rusted. He had the rust removed and left the blade exposed leaning against the wall by his bedside. One night after going to sleep, the sword suddenly fell. A nearby Hibachi had a figure of a goblin on it, and the falling sword cut the head of the goblin off. From then, he was not bothered by a nightly dream of the goblin of the hibachi, and was cured of his illness.

He named the sword Onimaru (Oni meaning a devil, ogre or demon) and the sword came to be highly treasured by the Hojo, and later down through history by succeeding rulers."

The text of the Meibutsu Cho covers the blade in much more detail, however the Meibutsu Cho is being translated for another issue of the Nihonto Newsletter, and details will be covered there.

The Taiheiki states that this was the blade which Hojo Tokiyori had Kunitsuna forge for him when he called Kunitsuna to Kamakura. Most sword books give the date for Awataguchi Kunitsuna as having been around the Shogen Era (1207-8).

Also, Kunitsuna is listed as having served Emperor Gotoba during his Oki Island exile which was from 1221 till 1259 when the emperor died while still in exile. Kunitsuna is listed as having been in Oki Island during the May-June period and whether he was at the island all through 1221-1239 is not known.

Kunitsuna is regarded as one of the founders of the Soshu tradition, having been called to Kamakura by the Hojo Regent, along with Sukezane of Fukuoka Ichimonji in Bizen Province, and Kunimune also of Bizen Province. The date in which Kunitsuna went to Kamakura is not recorded in any of the books that we have delved into, and it can be surmised that he may have gone to Kamakura after his assignment at Oki Island, that is after 1239, for the smiths that went to serve the Emperor at Oki Island were sent there by the Hojo Regent, and thereafter

Kunitsuna's ability may have been recognized and he may have been called to Kamakura to help set up sword smithies.

The sword, after belonging to the Hojo, went to the Ashikaga, then to Toyotomi Hideyoshi and to Honami. During the Meiji Era it was presented to Emperor Meiji.

The Tokugawa Jikki states that during the time of the 8th Shogun, Yoshimune (1716-1745), the Shogun had the blade sent from Kyoto to Edo, and then sent it back to the Honami.

The details of Onimaru are: 2 shaku 5 Sun 7 Bu long, (30 5/8"); sori: 1 Sun 2 ri; width: 9 bu 5 ri. Made in shinogi tsukuri style with an ihori mune. The sori is very strong and it has a pronounced fumbari as well as much niku.

The steel shows a ko-itame hada, and the ji has abundant ji-nie. The hamon is ko-midare with ko-nie and there is a large koshiba on both sides of the blade at the machi.

The boshi on both sides is notare komi, and the omote side has hakikake with a komaru and a slight kaeri. The nakago is ubu, with kiri file marks. There is one mekugi ana and a two characters signature above the mekugi ana.

The blade is currently owned by the government and is in the custody of the National Museum since the Imperial Household had to relinquish it shortly after the end of World War II along with a great many other swords which their imperial forebears had accumulated, especially the Emperor Meiji who was an avid sword collector.

The founders of the Soshu Tradition are said to be Awataguchi Sakon Kunitsuna as previously mentioned, Kamakura Ichimonji Sukezane, ca. 1259, and Bizen Saburo Kunimune ca. 1232.

As previously stated, we feel that Kunitsuna went to Kamakura after 1239, and the three smiths founded the Soshu Tradition around the 1230s to the 1240s. Minamoto Yoritomo became the first military dictator by becoming Sei Tai Shogun (generalissimo) in 1192, and prior to this he was in Kamakura for some years.

With these dates we have often wondered about the absence of any swordsmiths in Kamakura prior to these smiths. For a man of Yoritomo's position and standing not to have had any first class swordsmiths in Kamakura until 50 years after the establishment of the Kamakura Military Capital, and well after his death seems very strange.

Dates for the Minamoto dictatorship

The Hojo Regents were:

Yoritomo	1192 - 1199
Yoriie	1199 - 1203
Sanetomo	1203 - 1219
Tokimasa	1203 - 1205
Yoshitoki	1205 - 1224
Yasutoki	1224 - 1242
Tsunetoki	1242 - 1245.

The Hojo Regency lasted until the 16th Hojo Moritoki whose rule ended in 1331 which is the year of the Mongol Invasion.

When Minamoto Sanetomo became the 3rd Shogun, his uncle Hojo Tokimasa became the regent and ruled for Sanetomo.

Yoritomo was exiled to the Izu Peninsula in 1160 by the Taira who controlled the country at the time, and he remained in this general area until his death, so the absence of swordsmiths prior to the three smiths Kunitsuna, Sukezane and Kunimune is very odd indeed.

THE MEIBUTSU CHO

2nd Installment

Kyoto

Karasumaru Toshiro length: 8 sun 5 Bu 5 ri value: unknown

This blade has been in the Karasumaru household from ancient times. The tip of the Nakago has been cut off. Miki Gondaiyu of Kyoto has had it since about the Empo Era (it is not known who Miki Gondaiyu was).

Kozan's Notation (the text is very brief):

Nothing is known of this blade today or its whereabouts. The Karasumaru was present during the Ashikaga Shogun's time when the shogun attained a position of Kebi-Ishi, similar to a police commissioner.

Another one of the family's descendants reached the position of Dainagon similar to a police commissioner. Another descendant became the Chief Counselor of the State.

Owari

Okayama Toshiro. Signed length: 8 sun 5 bu value: unknown

There are gomabashi on both sides.

Maeda Matazemon purchased this sword for 15 Mai of gold and presented it to Lord Hideyoshi. As the legacy of Hideyoshi, it was willed to Lord Hideaki who later gave it to Lord Ieyasu, and it has been in the House of Owari ever since. The reason for the name Okayama is that Lord Hideaki was the youngest son of Kinoshita Higo no Kami and the younger brother of Choshiro. He was adopted by Lord Hideyoshi and named Hashiba Daemon. He was also adopted by lord Kageyaka to carry on his lineage and became Chunagon of Chikuzen Province. He was also at Kita no Sho in Echizen Province and had the title of Chunagon. After the Battle of Sekigahara, Lord Ieyasu gave the fief of Ukita to him and he became the lord of Okayama Castle.

Imamura notation: This simply states that he 'saw it'.

Kozan notation: The description given by the Honami for this blade needs some explanations since there are some errors. Hashiba Hideaki is an error for Hashiba Hideaki (the "aki" kanji was wrong) who was at one time called Kita-no-sho Chunagon. During Toyotomi Hideyoshi's expedition to the Korean Peninsula, Hideaki led an army of 160,000 soldiers and fought alongside his troops, and upon his return, he was reprimanded by Hideyoshi and banished to Kita-no-sho.

After two years there, through mediation efforts by Tokugawa Ieyasu, he was forgiven and sent to Chikuzen Province to rule there. Owari refers to the Owari Tokugawa.

Gyobutsu (defined below)

Atsushi Toshiro signed length: 7 sun 2 bu Thickness: 4 Bu
Value: 500 Mai

This was one of the Gyobutsu of the Muromachi Shogunate. Later it came into the hands of a merchant from Sakai in Izumi Province from whom Honami Kotoku purchased it for 100 Kan, and then sold it to Hitotsu Yanagi Izu no Kami. It next went to Kuroda Gyosui who gave it to Lord Hidetsugu. Hidetsugu gave it to Lord Hideyoshi who in turn gave it to Mori Kai no Kami whose grandson, Kai no Kami gave it to the Shogun Ietsuna and received 1,000 Mai of gold for it. It has an Orikami by Kotoku issued at the beginning of the Kammon Era.

There are no Imamura notations. Kozan's notation is:

Gyobutsu in this case refers to the Tokugawa Shogunate. Things belonging to any ruling body are referred to as Gyobutsu, so during the Tokugawa Period, any item belonging to the Tokugawa is considered to be a Gyobutsu. Similarly, today, anything belonging to the Imperial Household is referred to as a Gyobutsu. The blade is extremely thick, hence the name Atsushi derives from the verb 'atsui' (or thick). "Muromachi" refers to the Ashikaga Shogunate.

The reason why this blade went to a merchant in Sakai is easily understood. From about the Oei period to about the Keicho Era, many Daimyo, in order to finance their armies and wars, went into debt to merchants, with the merchants receiving various valuable articles as collateral. It is said that most famous paintings, famous swords and pottery all went into "hock" during this time.

Hitotsuyanagi Izu no Kami Naomitsu served Oda Nobunaga and later Hideyoshi, and under Hideyoshi he ruled in Mino Province.

On Tensho 18 (1590), he fought with Hideyoshi to crush the Hojo, and died at Hakone in the battle there.

Kuroda is famous as one of the important people working for Hideyoshi. Lord Hidetsugu was a relative of Hideyoshi, and was the son of Hideyoshi's elder sister, and became prime minister. However, Hideyoshi believed Hidetsugu was conspiring against him, and forced Hidetsugu to commit hara kiri at Mt. Koya. Hidetsugu used this Atsushi Toshiro to disembowel himself. The blade later was given by Hideyoshi to Mori Hidemoto. Hidemoto, at the time when Hideyoshi gave this blade to him, was only 14 years old. He later became the Lord of Choshu Province, and during the 3rd Shogun Iemitsu's reign, he was a story teller to the shogun. Ietsuna was the 4th Tokugawa shogun.

This is the only blade, so far as we have been able to learn, during the long history of Japan for which 1,000 pieces of gold was exchanged for. There are other blades which had values of 1,000 pieces of gold, but this is the only one for which that amount was actually paid.

We recall seeing this blade back in 1948 and 1949, and on both occasions saw the blade for about a 3 day period. Koson Sensei asked us what we thought about it, and we recall saying 'I don't think it's good, and it does not have all the qualities which a Yoshimitsu should have'.

The blade is a National Treasure and is owned by the government and is in the National Museum.

The reasons for our above observations about this blade are:

1. During the time of Yoshimitsu, that is around the Shogen Era (1259), the Yoroidoshi had not yet been invented, but the Atsushi Toshio very closely resembles a yoroidoshi. If there are other blades with a structure similar to the Atsushi, then one can understand it, however, the case is that this is the only blade with this form and even though it may be a national treasure, we cannot agree with all of the experts' views who selected this blade as a national treasure.
2. The steel, that is the jitetsu of the Atsushi does not have quite the qualities of other better known Yoshimitsu works.
3. The boshi of the Atsushi is too wide and the kaeri is too long. Yoshimitsu simply did not make boshi like this.
4. The nakago of the Atsushi is too long. Here again, Yoshimitsu simply did not make this type of nakago. Having a long nakago, the blade as a whole does not have the balance one expects in a Yoshimitsu work, nor is it akin to Yoshimitsu's work. Some of Yoshimitsu's nakago are long, but not this long. This blade "looks" like a Kikuchi yari.

This man's work should almost be 'perfect'. That is, there should not be anything in Yoshimitsu's work which is overly emphasized. Everything should be in place and in balance. In this work, the boshi is too wide, the kaeri is too long, the nakago is too long, and the jitetsu is not right!

ETIQUETTE AND CARE

In ancient Japan etiquette regarding the handling of swords was very strict. The Samurai had to carry these blades day in and day out, and it being a very sharp instrument, care naturally had to be observed. Further, since the samurai revered it as something sacred, they took care that certain rules were followed for care and handling. Women in Japan were not allowed to handle swords with their bare hands, but used the sleeves of their Kimono to carry or hold them.

In caring for swords, some strict Samurai even went so far as to forbid women from entering the room when they were cleaning their swords. Also, this process was something like a ritual. Of those who followed the very strict rules, some went so far as to hang mosquito nets, and cleaned swords under the nets, since this was found to be a dust free place. In some Japanese Movies, depicting scenes where a Samurai is cleaning a sword, one will notice that a Samurai will have a piece of paper in his mouth, not only in cleaning but in looking at swords as well. This was done so that one's breath would not touch the blade.

We do not feel this served any purpose, since if one closes his mouth, and then must breathe through his nose, surely, in the close inspection of swords "hot air" from nostrils will fall on the blade and thereby defeat the purpose of having the paper in one's mouth. Although the appearance of a person seated on a Japanese Tatami, with a piece of paper in his mouth and looking at a sword certainly poses a pretty picture, that seems to be the extent of it. Today the ancient rules are no longer heeded, however, to preserve and appreciate swords, certain rules are still applied, and we, as students of Japanese Swords, should heed these rules

1. When one is given a sword to see, whether it be for appreciation or otherwise, it is proper to give a slight nod of respect to the blade before the sword is removed from the sword bag, or from the scabbard.

2. In removing the sword from the bag, grasp the bag in your left hand, and unravel the silk cord so that only the hilt of the sword is exposed. During this phase always keep the cutting edge up.

3. Having exposed the hilt, the open part of the bag is folded back and is lightly wrapped with the loose cord.

The sword is then held so that the tip of the saya's kojiri is away from you, and the tip of the tsuka's kashira is near you, and then you are ready to remove the blade from the Saya. At this point, with the tsuka exposed, it is proper etiquette to hold a "fukusa" (a square of clean cloth) around the tsuka so that you will not soil the tsuka.

Often, a fine blade is in a fine mounting and will be wrapped in fine aged silk cord or deer skin and they are easily soiled by the oil in your skin, therefore in looking at such blades, one should always carry a fukusa. In addition, one should also have a nugui-gami (Japanese washi or paper) or another fukusa. Like a well-to-do person, a good blade wears expensive clothing. Although not all blades are in fine clothing, sometimes one comes across a blade in a very dirty mounting, and at such times rather than dirty your fine fukusa and nugui, as well as your hands, a piece of plain newspaper may be used, or be well prepared to get your hands dirty.

4. Grasp the tsuka with your fukusa wrapped firmly around it, and with your left hand, take a firm grip on the saya.

5. In drawing the blade from the saya, always keep the tip slightly lower than the tsuka, and also when you have drawn the blade out, keep it in mind to not allow the tip of the blade as it leaves the saya to scrape the mouth of the saya (the koiguchi).

At times, one sees a person draw a blade out about 10 inches or so then look at the half-drawn blade turning the blade and the Saya over and over. This act is the worst offence and an insult to the owner of the blade, as well as to the blade itself. In turning a half drawn blade over and over, there is a great possibility of chipping the cutting edge as well as putting scars on the blade.

This offence should never be committed by a student of the Japanese Sword.

6. Having drawn the blade from the saya, cover the mouth of the saya with the loose part of the bag so that dust will not enter the saya. the saya may be laid down close by. It may be rather difficult for a person to draw the blade out and cover the Saya with the loose bag, so then you must lay the sword down, however when you do lay the sword down, place a fukusa or nugui paper below the tip so that the blade will not touch any surface such as the table top, or whatever surface you are laying the blade down on.

7. You are now ready to look at the blade. First hold the blade at arm's length with the habaki about even with your eye and look at the shape of the blade from the habaki towards the kissaki. Then inspect the other side in a like manner. It is very important that your first impression of the blade be taken in a proper manner, and your impression of the blade at this point will largely influence your judgement later in observing other parts of the blade. Your observations at this stage will give you a good foundation in determining in what school and in what period the blade was forged. It also will tell your host that you have the right attitude and know the correct etiquette. Accordingly, he will be glad to show you what he has. On the other hand, improper observation of these rules will result in a negative reaction from your host.

8. Now you are ready to observe the finer, minute details of the blade, the blade's hamon pattern and steel structure. For this you must have another fukusa or nugui gami as mentioned previously. Have the 2nd fukusa or nugui gami in your left hand, and place the blade on it at a slight angle. Point the blade towards the light and you will be able to see the finer details of nioi and nie in the blade pattern. In looking at nie, you must have the light source shining over your shoulder on the blade which will give you the best angle to observe nie. In looking at the tip or the kissaki, slightly lower the blade and bring it near you. However, whenever you move the blade in any direction always be careful that you are not near any object so you will not cause any damage to the cutting edge, or for that matter to any other part of the sword. You can then scrutinize the details and fine points in the nie/nioi, the condition of the jitetsu, the grain or hada of the steel, and the shinogi ji and mune.

Never allow any part of the blade to come in contact with your clothes, because this act is considered the worse offense.

9. Having gone through this ritual, you then replace the blade into the saya in a reverse sequence of the steps you used to withdraw it. In returning the blade into the Saya keep the cutting edge up and straight. Allow the mune to rest on the saya's mouth, keeping the blade and the saya always in a straight line, and let the blade slide into the saya, however you must always maintain control of the blade so it won't rub against the sides of the saya.

10. At this point you may rewrap the saya bag and the cord, although in most cases the host will do this himself according to his own preferences. Also, the host will always wipe the blade before putting it away after your visit, so this part should be left up to him.

11. In looking at a good quality mounting, extreme caution and care must be observed. A fine blade in fine mounting will have a tsuba, menuki, kozuka and kogai by master craftsmen.

In drawing the kozuka and the kogai out from the saya, use the utmost of caution so as not to mar the tsuba, saya, kozuka or the kogai, for in certain cases, the kozuka and the kogai rest very snugly in the hitsu-ana of the tsuba, and if one is to draw the blade out without caution, the sliding action could cause the kozuka and the kogai to rub forcefully against the hitsuna thereby marring the backside of the kozuka or kogai as well as the part of the hitsuana. It would perhaps be best to leave this operation to the host and have him draw the blade, kozuka and the kogai for you.

12. It often becomes necessary when one has drawn the blade to pass it from one person to the next. In such cases, again, extreme caution must be used. When passing a drawn blade to another person, "ALWAYS" keep the cutting edge towards you. Hold the blade right below the tsuba or habaki, and make doubly sure that the recipient has firm grip on the tsuka below your grip before you let go.

If the blade is mounted, then it will have a tsuba so it will not cause too much trouble. However, with a blade in a shirasaya, one must be extra cautious. Be sure that the person you are passing the blade to has a secure grip before you let your grip go. Here it is advisable before letting go to shake the blade a little to see if he has a firm grip.

Note that we may sound a little persistent in this part about passing a blade to another person, however, we have seen the result of a person who has not heeded cautionary signals which always results in cut fingers, and it can be a very deep cut too.

The person receiving the sword holds the tsuka below the hand of the person passing it to him. Also with your other hand, hold the tsuka at the kashira, then you will know for sure that your grip will not slide. After one has seen the blade, then one may want to see the signature, in which case permission from the host must be obtained first.

If the host is proud of his blade, he will show you the nakago without your asking, and so it then becomes necessary to remove the tsuka. The host in most cases will remove it, however at times, this operation is performed by the person wanting to see the nakago. At such times, the following rules must be observed.

1. With a small hammer (mekugi nuki) available for this purpose, remove the mekugi by giving a slight push at the smaller tip of the mekugi. Once having taken the mekugi out, put it aside so you will find it readily after you have examined the nakago, for this peg is very easily lost.

2. Having removed the mekugi, you are now ready to remove the blade from the tsuka. Hold the tsuka in your left hand at the Kashira or the pommel and with your right hand give a rap to the wrist of your clenched left holding the tsuka, this will usually loosen the blade from the tsuka.

If the blade has not been out of the tsuka for a good many months or years, then it will not come loose by this action alone, and you must resort to some other method. The blade should then be returned to the host to have him loosen it. He will use a mallet and a small block of wood set against the Seppa and tap with the mallet, this will loosen just about any stuck nakago. Having loosened the nakago from the tsuka, you then re-place the blade in the saya and then remove the tsuka. However, this is often done without replacing the blade back into the saya.

You are now ready to observe the condition of the nakago, the color of the rust, the signature and dates, and the shape of the nakago. Having finished, replace the tsuka and then remove the sword from the Saya.

Give a slight tap upward to the bottom of the tsuka while holding the blade vertically, and this should set the blade in its proper position so that you can replace the mekugi and then put the blade back in the saya.

In inspecting the sword, both the blade and the nakago, "NEVER" give your opinion without first being asked.

If your host should ask for your opinion then you may give your thoughts. But never offer your thoughts voluntarily. If one sees a signature which he thinks is not right, then often times your thoughts will show in your facial expression such as a frown or smile. Be sure at times like these to keep control of your emotions.

Care of the sword

Rust is the greatest enemy of steel and iron, and the Japanese sword is no exception. No matter how good a blade is, if rust is left on for any length of time, chances are that eventually this will render the blade worthless. There are different types of rust which we find on swords.

One type is ordinary red type, and although being rusty is bad enough, this type, since it does not run deeply into the steel, is not too harmful. The second type of rust, black and string-like, usually results from mildew on the blade and is bad. This type usually runs deep into the steel and oddly, this type often occurs on the better blades by the better smiths. However, in polishing, much of the outer layer of the steel must be removed thereby reducing the value as well as the quality of the blade. The only solution against rust is constant care, and by this "oil" is the best and is essential.

It has been the belief of Japanese sword collectors that the best oil for Japanese swords is Choji Oil, and that oil with a mineral base is not good, however, we have found through long experience that many oils used in the West are just as good as those recommended by the Japanese. Such oils as 3-in-1, obtainable at a five and dime store, or any oils used by gun collectors seem to be just as good.

Care should be taken not to leave oil on the blade for any length of time, for if the oil coagulates, then one must resort to using oil solvents such as benzene, carbon-tetrachloride, alcohol or others.

And although these will dissolve the coagulated oil, they can leave minute scars or scratches on the blade while rubbing off the hardened oil, therefore, oil should never be left on the blade for any length of time.

Equipment used in Caring for swords

1.UCHIKO

A good quality uchiko is made from a mixture of finely ground powder of deer horn and powdered uchigomori stone which is used by sword polishers.

The powder mixture is wrapped in a thin layer of cotton which is in turn wrapped in Yoshino gami (very thin rice paper), and lastly in silk. The silk should have been laundered once or twice.

The above mentioned type of uchiko is very difficult to obtain, and that obtained in maintenance kits is usually of a poorer quality, and since these are the only ones one can get, we must be satisfied with them. One must know a good polisher very well to get better quality uchiko.

Ordinary uchiko can be purchased for about \$.50 U.S. and up.

2. NUGUI GAMI

A special Hosho paper is wrinkled softly until all coarse grains become loosed and removed. In areas where Hosho paper is not available, a soft deerskin or Chamois or flannel or cotton may be substituted.

However, one must always launder these well before use.

Hosho paper costs about \$0.15 U.S. a sheet and up. Good quality Hosho paper made in Echizen Ken costs about \$0.20 U.S. a sheet.

3. CHOJI OIL

Referred to above. Choji Oil comes in many grades, the cheap ones costing about \$0.25% and higher quality oils cost about \$0.75 for a small bottle.

4. YOSHINO PAPER

This paper is used to oil the blade. Recently it has become hard to obtain, even in Japan. Many users substitute a fine gauze for it.

5. FUKUSA

A fukusa is used in handling the blade, and so it is outside the scope of "care", however, we feel a mention is necessary.

Fukusa are usually about 10 to 11 inches square, and made from a fine quality of silk called "Shioze" and are usually dyed purple.

Some collectors have their names or initials dyed white on the corner.

A fine quality fukusa made from Shioze cost about \$10.00 U.S. and up, although there are cheaper ones made from lesser grades of silk. This is the same type of fukusa which is used by the tea ceremony or Cha-no-yu people.

Methods used in handling and examining swords

1. After having removed the blade from the tsuka (as previously mentioned), it is now time to remove the habaki. If the habaki does not move due to rust, oil must be inserted and allowed to seep in. Then with a mallet, lightly tap it along the edges. Use extreme care in tapping, for if too much force is used, a habaki with a gold or silver foil cover could have the foil loosened, and could also experience damage along the soldered seam and become useless. If the habaki does not come loose, then it should be left alone.

among the many kinds of habaki we see, there are:

Solid gold	silver base with gold foil
Solid silver	copper base with gold foil
Wood	bronze base with gold foil
Shakudo	copper base with silver foil
Steel or iron	bronze base with silver foil
Copper	
Bronze	

2. A blade which has not been cleaned for a long time must have all foreign particles or material removed from its surface, and as previously mentioned, solvents as alcohol benzine or carbon-tetrachloride may be used. Oil should be used first before resorting to these solvents.

3. Having removed all oil and other foreign particles, next dust the blade with uchiko.

4. With the nugui gami placed between your thumb and fingers, wipe away the uchiko. Care should be taken as not to put pressure on your fingers on downward motions, and always use pressure only in wiping upwards, otherwise you will end up with a cut finger. The upward motion should be started about an inch or

two above the habaki, leaving the lower section for the last. Having cleaned off the uchiko on the blade, with careful downward motions, wipe the last couple of inches above the habaki and move towards the nakago. However, after each stroke use a different part of the nugui gami that is clean. This is because in the previous downward stroke, the nugui gami has touched the rust on the nakago and the rust particles could cause fine scars or scratches called "hike" to form if one were to use this part of the paper on the polished surface. Therefore, after each stroke, use a different part of the nugui gami, and also after several strokes shake off the uchiko powder by tapping the nugui gami against the edge of a hard object.

Always remember that the price of the very best polish by the very best polisher today starts from about 100,000 Yen or about \$280 U.S. and up (there is only one person who can provide this type of top quality polish), therefore a blade which has had such a polish will require extra care in using uchiko (cheap uchiko can leave "hike" or scratches on a blade). With a very valuable blade having a fine polish, or if you are in doubt about the quality of your uchiko, having covered the blade with uchiko, make a brushing motion like a fanning motion against the uchiko with the nugui gami. This fanning motion will blow away any hard particles of uchiko, and in wiping you will not have to worry about "hike".

The use of uchiko is, in a sense, the last phase of a polish, for in wiping, the abrasive motions will act as a polishing effect, so the use of too much uchiko is not recommended, except in the case of a newly polished blade, (be careful of "hike") because rubbing the blade will help clean or improve the polish.

5. If in caring for the blade you find the nakago rusted badly, remove the blade from the mounting and coat the nakago with oil so that it is liberally coated with oil. Then expose the blade to hot sun for about half a day. This should loosen the top layer of rust, and it should come off. Also, a small mallet with wooden pegs may be used in removing stubborn rust: just tapping the rust will loosen any rust on the top of the surface. Never use a hard metal pin or peg this purpose, because you will damage the old rust below. This is a tedious operation and something that cannot be rushed, so one should be well prepared for time consuming work ahead, if trying to clean a nakago this way.

ADVICE AND COMMENTS

From time to time, we receive many tracings of nakago on katana for an evaluation of the signatures etc. We think that people are aware of the difficulties in judging a blade from a tracing, especially when the tracings are made on onion skin paper, tissue paper, paper towels, toilet tissues, wrapping papers and other like products available in the West. Only when these tracings are made on thin rice paper are some of the qualities of the nakago transferred to the rice paper.

This type of rice paper can be had for a very nominal fee. A sheet about 10" x 14" cost about a penny. We strongly recommend the use of this paper for tracings. Also,

an ink stick or sekkaboku should be used for this purpose rather than a soft B type drawing pencil. An ordinary stick of sekkaboku costs about US\$1.00, and a fine quality piece costs about \$2.50. With average use, these sekkaboku sticks should last a lifetime.

Thus, an investment of one or two dollars is well worth it, since the cost is nominal. Please do not misunderstand, we are not trying to promote the sales of Japanese goods, but since nothing similar is available in the West, we are only suggesting that people use the best or most effective materials for their efforts.

KANTEI NYUSATSU

The literal translation for this term is a "Bid for Judging", or an attempt to identify the name of a smith or details about a sword.

For those who have had some background in the study of the Japanese sword, we are sure that they have come across this term at times. Kantei Nyusatsu is, without exception, conducted in all serious sword meetings in Japan and is probably one of the better ways of advancing one's knowledge in sword study.

For those of us who study Japanese Swords, our chief aim is:

1. be able to tell a good blade from a bad one
2. to identify the period in which the blade was made
3. to identify what province it was made in
4. to identify what school the blade belongs to, and finally, if at all possible,
5. to identify who made the blade.

With Japanese swords, like with any other art, there is no exception, and there are many forgeries, and as such, to be able to tell the good from the bad is one of the aims of our studies. Therefore, basic knowledge becomes much more important.

In the Kantei Nyusatsu at club meetings, there will generally be five swords for this purpose. The blades will be in shirasaya, the saya is removed, and the exposed blade is displayed with the tsuka wrapped in paper.

The reason for this is, if the blade is in a mounting, someone may recognize it from the tsuka or the tsuba. The purpose of covering of the shirasaya tsuka with paper is so no one will recognize it.

If someone still recognizes the blade, then he must admit that he knows the blade. The blades for Kantei Nyusatsu are generally those which follow their respective traditions faithfully. Blades which are extremely difficult are not used, such as a difficult wakimono (items made in branch schools or side schools).

When looking at blades in a Kantei Nyusatsu, one must always have a fukusa handy, and if possible nugui gami as well. This is an essential piece of etiquette. Take ahold of the handle and hold it at arm's length to get a good idea of its shape and length. At this stage that should give the observer some hints as to which period the blade was made. Also, here it must be determined if the blade is suriage or not. The blade is held at arm's length and if funbari is seen at the habaki, then it should be an ubu blade in most cases. On the other hand, if the blade at the habaki seems narrow and is wide towards the tip, then it will be suriage. Look at the kissaki to see whether it is long or short, small or large. Look at the shinogi to see whether it is high or not, and the shinogi ji to see if it is narrow or wide. Look at the blade around the hamon and see if it has "niku" or not, look at the hamon to see whether it is in nioi or

nie, then look at the boshi, jitetsu, hada, ji-nie, tobiyaki, yubashiri, usuri, chikei, etc., which combined should tell us one of the following:

1. from the shape, the period
2. from the yakiba, the tradition
3. from the jitetsu, the area or province
4. other points to be looked for are the individual traits and characteristics of smiths.

Never casually look at a blade. Each blade should be given a detailed "going over" or examination. Even if one thinks the blade is an unusual one, he should first of all look for basic characteristics. Looking at the jitetsu has traditionally been the main emphasis in judging, whether it is at a Kantei Nyusatsu or otherwise, however, the study of the jitetsu for a beginner is next to impossible, and it is known to take a lifetime to be able to fully understand it, and many will never fully understand it. Therefore, the more easily understood characteristics such as the shape, yakidashi, boshi, hamon and other parts should be considered. The boshi and the yakidashi are the two key points to look it, so these should not be overlooked or casually examined.

The jitetsu and hada should not be confused. The jitetsu is the steel, and the hada is the visible pattern seen on the steel's surface.

If one becomes careless, he will say a Shinto blade is a Koto blade or vice-versa, and misinterpret one tradition for another, and so these points will be mentioned in future copies of this newsletter. One does not need to follow and observe all of the rituals, nevertheless, he should still observe all of the other rudiments of sword study. The above practices are not only good for Kantei Nyusatsu, but if followed in looking at blades, they form a good routine in sword studies just the same. The time limit for the Nyusatsu is about 2 hours after which the judge compiles the scores of each bidder and the top three are selected. The first position is "Ten" or heaven, the 2nd is "Chi" or earth, and the 3rd is "Jin" or man.

Mr. Ben Vincent, who is currently studying at a Japanese University and also studying Japanese swords on the side, has been attending sword club meetings around Tokyo and we have heard that quite recently, at two club meetings, he took the first place or "Ten". One can just imagine the faces of the Japanese who were at the meeting when the "Gaijin" out pointed all of them.

In Kantei Nyusatsu, illustrating with an example:
The Sanjo, Gojo and Ayanokoji Schools are listed together for Yamashiro Province. If a bid is made for Sanjo Yoshiie for a Gojo Kanenaga blade, then the answer given for the bid will be "Atari Dozen" and he is given 10 points on a 12 point system.

As another example, an Osafune Nagamitsu bid for a Mitsutada blade will also be "Atari-Dozen".

The following shows the replies or scores given for each bid.

- 1 A clean hit, that is a swordsmith identified by his name is "Atari".
2. A father and son or brother, or a teacher-student relationship is "Atari Dozen".
3. If the bid is for a smith of the same province, but who has no connection with the actual smith, the score is "yoku soro", which freely translated means "you are close and this is someone from the same province"

4. If the bid is for a smith of the same Kaido (or road), the reply will be "Tori Yoku Soro". Meaning "you are on the right Kaido"

5. If the bid is Koto for a Shinto blade or vice versa, the reply will carefully considered.

A blade which has been overly polished, re-tempered, or not too well made, and having other conditions present might make judging difficult, so again one should always look at a blade from various aspects. Take everything into consideration and overlook nothing.

In Kantai Nyusatsu, if one correctly identifies the name of the swordsmith, then the answer from the judge will be atari" meaning a hit and is given 12 points on the first try, 10 points on the 2nd try and 8 points on the 3rd attempt. The point system varies from one club to the next, and some clubs give 10 points whereas others give 15 points.

If the miss is a father-son or brothers, or a teacher-student relationship, then the answer to the guess is "Atari Dozen" or equivalent to a hit and is given 10 points on the 1st, 8 on the second, and 6 on the 3rd try.

This writer has, in his long years of studies, found that making a mental note of the following made things easier for himself. Note the length, sori, width, width of the yakiba, hamon, boshi, kissaki, hada, shape, period, and province, and if observations of each of the above elements is made, then a picture should form, and one can come up with a smith's name or very close to one, providing that the description for each element was made correctly.

Say you are looking at a blade with the following characteristics;

length: about 8 sun

width: a little wide for the length

Width of the Yakiba: uneven

Hamon: in nioi; gunome notare midare with an umanoha (large wide repeated gunome which reminds one of a horse's teeth) midare

Kissaki/boshi: pattern is a continuation from the lower portion of the blade with a small kaeri.

Hada: contains ji-nie and has chikei and yubashiri

shape: tanto

period: mid-Kamakura

Province: Soshu

There is only one smith that fits the above description: Masamune. Not all blades fall into a pattern this easily, however, we have found that this is an easier way to come up with a correct answer, or very close to one.

Since Kantei Nyusatsu is not conducted in the West, the only opportunity to experience something like it will be in a form of a sword quiz (we expect to have one later, and this will be about "Jidai Chigai" meaning the wrong Jidai).

6. If the bid is other than any of the first 4 above, the reply will be ""Iya" meaning "no".

7. If the bid is made for a smith of the same school, however living in another

province, the reply will be "Iya En", meaning "no but has a relation".

8. If the bid is made for any of the Masamune students associated with one another, the reply will be "Iya Suji", meaning "no, but there is a connection".

To explain more precisely the above replies to the bid:

One and two do not need an explanation.

#3. say, if one bids Yamashiro Nobukuni for a Rai Kunimitsu blade, both are of same province, but they have no connection with one another, the answer to the bid will be "Yoku Soro", so then one has to search in the same province for someone else, so by deduction one should be able to come up with a smith or one close to him which will give him an "Atari Dozen"

#4. if the bid is Nakajima Rai for a Yamashiro Nobukuni blade, the reply will be "tori Yoku Soro". Nakajima Rai is from the Rai School smiths who went to Settsu Province, and since Settsu Province is in Go Kinai (the home provinces) they are on the same Kaido or road.

Identifying an Awataguchi blade for a Rai blade or Hosho for Tegai all fall into this category.

Identifying a Hatakeda Moriie blade for a Ko Aoe blade: Moriie is from Bizen Province and Aoe is in Bitchu Province, so they are on the Sanyodo, so this will be "Tori Yoku Soro":

#5 if the bid is made for Masamune whereas the blade is by Horikawa Kunihiro, this will be Jidai Chigai.

Horikawa Kunihiro made many copies of Masamune blades, so often times he is mistaken for Masamune (look at the Jitetsu carefully: there will be differences to distinguish between the two).

#6 a bid is made for a Rai Kunitoshi on a Aoe Moritsugu blade: the reply will be "Iya". There are no connections between these two.

#7 a bid of Tadayoshi of Hizen Province for a Horikawa Kunihiro blade. The answer to this would be "Iya En". The two studied under Umetada Myoju.

#8 Hasebe Kunishige for Etchu Norishige. The reply will be "Iya Suji". Both of these smiths were students under Masamune. Naming any of the Ten Masamune students for another will be Iya Suji. This is the same for the three students under Sadamune as well.

Masamune Jittetsu:

Go Yoshihiro
Hasebe Kunishige
Shizu Kaneuui
Etchu Norishige
Bizen Kanemitsu
Bizen Chogi
Rai Kunitsugu
Chikuzen Sa
Seki Kinju
Ishimi Naotsuna

Sadamune Santetsu

Bizen Motoshige

Yamashiro Nobukuni
Tanba Kunimitsu

In replies to some of the bids, the answer given for a province which will fall into the same Kaido will be "Tori Yokusoro", therefore knowledge of the Kaido or Gaido in relationship to provinces is a must. The Kaido are:

The Kinai or Go Kinai:

Yamashiro, Yamato, Kawachi, Izumi, Settsu

Tokaido

Ise, Shima, Mikawa, Suruga, Izu, Musashi, Kazusa, Hitachi, Ina, Owari.
Totomi, Kai, Sagami, Awa – Shimofusa

Tozando

Omi, Mino, Hida, Shinano, Kozuke, Shimosuke, Iwaki, Iwashiro, Rikuzen, Rikuchu, Mitsu, Uzen, Iyo

Hokurikudo

Wakasa, Echizen, Kaga, Etchu, Noto, Echigo, Sado

Sanindo

Tamba, Tango, Tajima, Inaba, Hoki, Izumo, Ishimi

Sanyodo

Harima, Mimasaka, Bizen, Bitchu, Bingo, Aki, Nagato, Suwa

Seikaido

Chikuzen, Chikugo, Buzen, Bungo, Hizen, Higo, Hyuga, Satsuma, Osumi

NIHONTO Newsletter

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EXHIBITION

In the latter part of December, just before Christmas, an exhibition of yari was held at one of the department store exhibition halls in Tokyo. It had on exhibit about 50 famous yari associated with historical figures. The exhibit was held under the auspices of the Yomiuri Newspaper and the Nihon Bijutsu Token Hozon Kyokai and was very successful. The number of visitors to the exhibit was more than expected.

Famous yari used by Kato Kiyomasa during the Battle of Shizugatake was there, as well as the famous yari he used when he fought a tiger in Korea on the expedition for Hideyoshi in 1592.

The yari of Kuroda Nagamasa called Ikkoku Nagayoshi was exhibited. The yari famous for being in the song Kuroda Bushi and called Nomitori no Yari was exhibited. Also present was the famous yari belonging to Honda Tadakatsu called Tombo Kiri no Yari.

Most yari as we all know, were not made by famous smiths, however here are the names of swordsmiths whose yari were on display:

Osafune Sukosada
Wakasa Munenaga
Monju Kanehisa
Sanjo Yoshihiro
Soshu Hiromitsu
Kanabo Masasada
Osafune Norimitsu
Osafune Yoshimitsu
Osafune Koremitsu
Uda Kunitsugu
Shimada Yoshisuke
Sagini no Kami Masatsune
Musashi Daijo Tadahiro
Tanoue or Tagami

Shimosaka
Heian jo Nagayoshi
Kanabo Masatsugu
Mino Seki Kanewaka
Yamato Kanenaga
Osafune Tademitsu
Osafune (no) Norimitsu
Fujishima Tomoshige
Ise Muramasa
Umetada
Hizen Tadayoshi
Nagasone Okimasa

In looking through the exhibition, we could not help but "chuckle" at some of the captions given for the yari. Example: a yari supposedly belonged to a warrior named Kimura Matazo who was a retainer for Kato Kiyomasa. This yari is signed "Tagami saku" and in reference to this smith, all it said was, quote "There are many stories regarding this swordsmith, but no definite identification has been arrived at as yet". This is from an organization which boasts two (2) PHDs in Japanese swords as well as other experts. Also, the yari is owned by the Tokyo National Museum at Ueno Park, where one of the PHDs has his desk.

Aside from this we thought the exhibit was quite good except for the fact that the explanations and descriptions given were very inadequate, only providing historical facts and very little information concerning the yari or makers. The recognizable yari with obvious makers had detailed explanations, but those that are a little "difficult" to explain had hardly any information provided about them. Again, we say, this is from an organization which boasts all the experts with PDs in Japan on their roster?

Kotetsu Exhibition

Another exhibit was held in December about the same time as the forgoing exhibit on yari. This one was devoted to blades by Kotetsu.

There were 40 blades altogether, one helmet, one armor sleeve, two kogatana, and one tsuba. Of the blades, there were 3 blades that are designated as Juyo Bunkazai, which can be considered as the best of Kotetsu's work.

They are:

One katana signed: ju Toeizen Shinobazu ga okabe Nagasone tora Nyudo
and dated: Kanbun 11 nen 2 getsu kichi yo jitsu

One katana signed Nagasone Okisato Nyudo Kotetsu

One katana signed: Nagasone Okisato Nyudo Kotetsu

It was very interesting to see all these Kotetsu blades exhibited together, for it is not often that one comes across even one Kotetsu nowadays that is not "suspicious".

