

Taikei Naotane

Naotane was born in 1778 (the 7th year of the Anei era) in Yamagata, Dewa Province, and was originally named Shōji (庄司 or 莊司) Minobē (箕兵衛 or 美濃兵衛). He used the name "Taikei" (大慶) as his smith name. Around 1821 (the 4th year of the Bunsei era), he received the title "Chikuzen Daijō" (筑前大掾), and in 1848 (the 1st year of the Kaei era), he went to Kyoto and changed his title to "Mino-no-suke" (美濃介).

He went to Edo and learned swordsmithing under Suishinshi Masahide. Like his master, he later served the lord of the Yamagata Domain, Akimoto, and became a notable disciple within the Suishinshi school. The exact time when he entered Suishinshi's school is not clear, but based on the inscription "Shōji Naotane, January, Kansei 13" (庄司直胤 寛政十三年正月日) on one of his earliest swords made at the age of 23, it is assumed that he began his apprenticeship around 1798 (the 10th year of the Kansei era). It is also believed that he became independent around the beginning of the Bunka era (around 1804).

His style was highly artistic and he skillfully handled "Gokaden" (The Five Traditions; Yamato, Yamashiro, Bizen, Sōshū, and Mino), with particularly notable works in the Bizen and Sōshū styles. It is unanimously agreed upon that he was one of the top disciples of the Suishinshi school.

Throughout his life, Naotane traveled extensively, making swords in various regions, including Aichi, Ibaraki, Chiba, Kanagawa, Shizuoka, Nagano, Mie, Kyoto, Osaka, and Okayama (as they are known today). Some of his journeys lasted for 4 years, even when he was over 70 years old. His strong physique, coupled with the purpose of his travels—such as studying iron materials—reflect his constant drive for improvement. His wide circle of connections, his popularity, and, of course, the high regard for his works at the time, were all key to his achievements. His extensive influence is a testament to his considerable skill.

Naotane passed away on May 27, 1857 (the 4th year of the Ansei era), at the age of 79. Over the course of his more than 50-year-long sword-making career, he gained great renown. His skills earned him the praise of surpassing his master, Masahide, and he became widely famous during his time. He is truly a swordsmith worthy of being called a master of the Shinshin-tō period.

No.20

Dai-shō Mei Taikei Shōji Naotane (Kaō)

後期

Bunka jū nen chūshun Horiguchi Mitsushige no motome ni ōji kore wo tsukuru
(mid-spring in the 10th year of the Bunka era)

This piece is based on the famous sword "Kogarasumaru," an unsigned blade from the Heian period, long regarded as a work of Amakuni. It was awarded to Taira no Sadamori for his success in the military campaign to subdue Fujiwara no Sumitomo, and later passed down as a treasured possession of the Taira family. During the Edo period, it was owned by the Ise family, who were well-versed in courtly traditions. In the Meiji era, the Tsushima Sō family bought the sword and presented it to Emperor Meiji, where it has remained to this day. This work, which embodies the "Fukko-tō Ron" (Restoration Sword Theory) proposed by his master Masahide, is a true example of Naotane's literal implementation of the theory. It is a remarkably valuable piece, preserved in dai-shō (katana and wakizashi set).

No.21

Katana Mei Dewa-no-kuni Taikai Shōji Naotane (Kaō)

Bunka jūichi nen chūshun (mid-spring in the 11th year of the Bunka era)

Koshiguruma to tanharai Ōta Ryōzō kore wo tamesu

The hamon, primarily composed of squared waves and incorporating several other types of waves, exhibits movement and variation in activity. The nioiguchi is soft with prominent ashi, showcasing excellent craftsmanship. Additionally, the tempering at the base of the blade is glossy, and part of the hamon's edge blends into the utsuri, demonstrating Naotane's distinct features. This sword also possesses the robust appearance typical of shin-shin-tō (new-new swords). The hamon is bright and sharp, and the jigane is tightly forged, reflecting Naotane's mature skill in his later years. This is a superb piece of work.

No.23

Katana Mei Dewa-no-kuni jūnin Taikai Shōji Naotane (Kaō)

Hori Yoshitane

No mo yama mo terasanu tsuki ha nakeredomo

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Umi niya fukaku kage yadoruran

(There is no moon that does not shine upon the fields and the mountains, but could there be a deep shade settled in the sea?)

This piece, like many of Naotane's works from the same period, was made based on the "Fukko-tō Ron" (Restoration Sword Theory), with Kagemitsu and Kanemitsu as ideal models for the sword. The sharpness of the blade is renowned, and this piece is considered one of the finest examples of the Bizen tradition among Naotane's works. The carvings by his disciple, Yoshitane, enhance the blade's beauty, further elevating its value. The waka (a classical Japanese poetry form with 31 syllables) on the tang identifies the sword as "Tsukikage Naotane" (Moonlight Naotane). Although it is unclear whether Naotane himself created this poem, the piece evokes the serene and soft moonlight of an autumn night, making it a truly exceptional work.

No.26

Wakizashi Mei Shōji Chikuzen Daijō Taikei Naotane (Kaō)

Bunsei jūsan nen chūshū (mid-autumn in the 13th year of the Bunsei era)

Hori Yoshitane

This wakizashi features a jigane that combines itame and ō-itame, along with Naotane's distinctive pattern with moku known as uzumaki-hada. The overall surface has a thick nie, with prominent kinsuji, niesuji, and sunagashi, all demonstrating an audacious effort in the Sōshū tradition. The broad blade with an ō-kissaki (large tip) gives the sword a dynamic presence, enhanced by the jigane and hamon. The carvings on the front, depicting Kongara-dōji, and on the back, Seitaka-dōji (both messengers of Fudō Myō-ō), are exceptionally intricate and finely crafted by Yoshitane. This piece fully showcases Naotane's skill, making it a remarkable work.

No.27

Katana Mei Shōji Chikuzen Daijō Taikei Fuji Naotane (Kaō)

Tenpō ni nen chūshun (mid-spring in the 2nd year of the Tenpō era)

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Naotane, well-versed in various traditions of sword-making, began crafting swords with a style that blended the techniques of the Bizen and Sōshū traditions after the Tenpō era. This piece features a hamon with thick nie, composed of several types of activities, such as prominent kinsuji and sunagashi, showcasing the unique style of his work. The prominent nioi and thick nie, with well-formed ashi and yō, give the nioiguchi a bright and clear appearance. This piece, incorporating all the techniques he had mastered up to that point, is filled with highlights to appreciate.

No.29

Katana Mei Taikei Naotane tsukuru (Kaō)

Tenpō yo nen chūshun (mid-spring in the 4th year of the Tenpō era)

This sword has a robust, imposing shape with a broad body and an ō-kissaki (large tip). Its hamon complements this appearance with large, irregular patterns, featuring thick, well-formed nie, which clearly expresses the Sōshū tradition. Among Naotane's works, where pure Sōshū style is rare, this sword stands out in both its appearance and boldness, showcasing the exceptional craftsmanship of Naotane. Furthermore, another sword of the same style from the same year, believed to have been made concurrently, has been designated as an Important Sword.

No.30

Katana Mei Taikei Naotane tsukuru (Kaō)

Tenpō go nen chūshun (mid-spring in the 5th year of the Tenpō era)

This piece is traditionally regarded as one of Naotane's finest works in the Sōshū tradition and is considered one of the best examples among his creations. With a balanced and harmonious shape, the blade features a well-forged jigane that displays chikei along with thick ji-nie. The hamon, predominantly in ko-notare, exhibits deep nie and nioi, with abundant kinsuji and sunagashi, demonstrating a high level of completion in the Sōshū tradition. Few works by his master, Suishinshi Masahide can

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compare in quality to this, and it is celebrated as a piece that truly surpasses the craftsmanship of the master.

No.32

Tantō Mei Fuji Naotane (Kaō)

Tenpō go nen haru ni gatsu-jitsu Horii Yoshitane

(February in the 5th year of the Tenpō era)

The construction of this tantō follows the style of a small knife intended to be mounted on a sword's koshirae, with a rounded mune, making it extremely rare among Naotane's tantō works. Additionally, the engravings by Yoshitane, which are the kiri-mon (paulownia crests) applied in gold iroe, are scattered in the hitsu (recess carved in a rectangular shape), giving it a decorative appearance and suggesting that it was made to special order. The hamon on the blade is straight on the front (inscription side) and irregular on the back (reverse side), demonstrating a transition to the characteristics of the school. Even though it is a small piece, it conveys a strong sense of craftsmanship and attention to detail.

No.34

Wakizashi Mei Taikei Naotane tsukuru (Kaō)

Tenpō nana nen chūshun (mid-spring in the 7th year of the Tenpō era)

Naotane was a prolific swordsmith, and this wakizashi, however, is a slightly longer blade with a hira-zukuri construction, a shape that is relatively uncommon in his works. It demonstrates the style of the Sōshū tradition, with a thick nie and a significant, irregular hamon, featuring activities such as tobiyaki, yubashiri, and mune-yaki. Kinsuji and niesuji also appear occasionally, giving the blade a sense of dynamic movement. The finely detailed carvings on the front and back are the same as those in work No. 26, created by Yoshitane. On the front, there is a carving of Kongara-dōji, and on the back, a carving of Seitaka-dōji, both expressing devotion to Fudō Myō-ō (the Immovable Wisdom King).

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Katana Mei Rokujū-go okina Shōji Chikuzen Daijō Fuji Naotane (Kaō)
Tenpō jūyo nen ni gatsu-jitsu (February in the 14th year of the Tenpō era)

Although Naotane was well-versed in all traditions of swordsmithing, this work is particularly unique in its jigane and hamon. The jigane displays a tight ko-itame, with fine masame appearing throughout. The hamon features sections of continuous gunome, widening in the middle with greatly irregular notare. It also showcases an abundance of sunagashi and kinsuji, blending elements from the Yamato and Sōshū traditions, along with Naotane's own distinct hamon, resulting in a highly ambitious piece that combines various influences.

No.38

Wakizashi Tōshin-mei Ansei san nen ni gatsu-jitsu Taikei saku (Naotane)
(February in the 3rd year of the Ansei era)

This piece is crafted in the katakiriba construction, with no yokote or kissaki at the tip of the blade. The inscription is engraved on the blade, not the tang, which is an unusual feature for a sword, so it was possibly made as a special order. The blade exhibits well-forged, tight ko-itame. The hamon on the front displays a slanted gunome-midare, while the back features frequent sunagashi and nie suji (lines of nie running parallel to the hamon), following the Sōshū tradition. The hamon on both sides is different, in keeping with the unique construction of the piece. This work is extremely rare among Naotane's swords and demonstrates the high level of craftsmanship in its creation.

No.39

Katana Mei Hachijū-ichi okina Mino-no-suke Naotane (Kaō)
Ansei yo nen Shōgatsu kichijitsu Suishinshi Masatsugu (Kaō)
(An auspicious day in the first month of the 22nd year of the Ansei era)

This is a collaborative work between Naotane and Masatsugu created during Naotane's year of passing, featuring a pure Yamato tradition style with a frayed

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straight hamon on masa-hada jigane. When Masatsugu was twelve years old (in the 8th year of the Bunsei era), both his father (the second-generation Masahide) and grandfather (Suishinshi Masahide) passed away. As a result, Naotane became Masatsugu's guardian and later his father-in-law. Apart from this piece, only one other collaboration between Naotane and Masatsugu has been confirmed, making this work highly valuable. Naotane's final piece was completed the following month, dated "ni gatsu-jitsu" (February), and Naotane passed away on May 27th of the same year, fulfilling his destiny.