

**NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL**  
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**Meito Kansho**  
**Appreciation of Important Swords**

Juyo Bijutsuhin

Owner: NBTHK

Type: Tachi

Mei: Kunimura

Length: 2 shaku 7 sun 1 bu 9 rin (82.4 cm)

Sori: 9 bu 1 rin (2.75 cm)

Moto haba: 9 bu 2 rin (2.8 cm)

Saki haba: 4 bu 8 rin (1.45 cm)

Moto kasane: 2 bu 3 rin (0.7 cm)

Saki kasane: 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)

Kissaki length: 8 bu 3 rin (2.5 cm)

Nakago length: 8 sun 9 rin (24.5 cm)

Nakago sori: 1 bu (0.3 cm)

**Commentary**

This is a shinogi zukuri tachi with a mitsumune. There is a standard width, and it is thick. The widths at the moto and saki are different. There is large wasori with a small kissaki. The jigane is ko-itame hada, and in places it is mixed with itame and nagare hada, and the hada is slightly visible. There are ji-nie,

fine chikei, and shirake utsuri which are slightly dark and pale. The hamon is chu-suguha, with a slight notare shape. On the ura around the monouchi area mixed with kuichigaiba, there are small ashi, and a tight nioiguchi with ko-nie. Notably, the omote has prominent intermittent nijuba. The boshi is straight with a large round point, and a slight return. The nakago is ubu (but is about 1 sun machi okuri), and the tip is a shallow ha-agari kurijiri. There are three mekugi-ana, and the original yasurime are unknown. On the omote, above the second mekugi-ana (the original) along the mune side, there is a two kanji signature.

The provinces along the Western road (Seikaido) were active among the Kyushu koten (classic) schools, such as Ko-Naminohira which started with Yukiyasu, Bungo koku Sadahide, and Yukihiro from the Heian period. Their jiba (jigane and hamon) has a soft appearance which shows the area's unique jigane. The hamon are narrow with a suguha style, and a moist appearing hamon, and the entire hamon is worn down.

In later years, around the end of the Kamakura period, the school began using a new style that was similar to the Higo Koku Enju school. That school's founder is supposed to have been Kunimura who was called "Enju Taro". Old theories say he was supposed to have been the son-in-law of Rai Kuniyuki, or the Yamato Senjuin school's Hiromura's son, or Kuniyuki's grandson. The school produced many master smiths, such as Kuniyoshi, Kunitoki, Kuniyasu, Kunishi, and Kuninobu, and until the Nanbokucho period the school was very prosperous in Higo Kikuchi gun's Sunpu (town). The school's styles are similar to Rai, but their originality shows in relatively

prominent shirake utsuri, a slightly worn down hamon, the jigane has nagare hada, and sometimes there is nijuba. Also there is a large round boshi tip, and the return is short. Their work is based on the Rai style and adds Yamato characteristics, and these are considered as being the school's characteristic points. However, there are not many signed works which can be confirmed as being signed with Nanbokucho period dates in the meikan books. Most of them are signed with South Court period dates, and we can guess there was an association between the Enju school and the local samurai group.

Among Kunimura's signed works, one is Juyo Bunkazai, four are Juyo Bijutsuhin, two are Tokubetsu Juyo Token, but we can't say that he produced a large number of works. Looking at traditional commentaries or sources, many of his ubu nakago tachi shapes are around 2 shaku 7 sun long, and the difference in the widths at the moto and saki are notable, and there is a small kissaki. Furthermore, his bo-hi on the shinogi-ji often have ryo-chiri (space between the hi and shinogi). Also, compared with the school's other smiths, many of his jiba (jigane and hamon) look weak, there are mainly suguha hamon, and the hataraki are not prominent, and there is usually a gentle look or impression.

This is a signed tachi with an ubu-nakago, it is 1 sun machi okuri, but there is still a long elegant shape with a wa-sori (kasagi sori). The boshi yakiba is narrow, but you can imagine that even originally it was supposed to be small, and shows well a Kunimura tachi's characteristic points. Also, the jigane is ko-itame hada, but compared with the original Rai work, it is slightly less refined, with shirake utsuri, and from these details, you can see his characteristic

points. The jigane, in places, is mixed with nagare hada, and mainly on the omote there are intermittent nijuba. In addition, the boshi is a large komaru with a shallow return. While this has Rai school details, you can also see Yamato school influences, and these show the Enju school's and Kunimura's characteristic points. Originally, the blade was thick, but its current preserved state is very good, the mitsumune is unusual for the smith, the hamon is clear compared with his usual work, there is excellent workmanship, and this is a valuable work with a rare Kunimura signature.

The old saya has written on it "Genroku 6 nen (1693) tori 9 gatsu 18 nichi", and has the mei, "Enju Kunimura daikin (value)15 mai, nagasa 2 shaku 7 sun 2.5 bu. Inherited from Maeda Kunai, Kanpo 2 nen (1742) 9 gatsu 18 nichi daijo 50 mai (value)". Also the "Tokugawa jikki (diary) says in Joken-in (Tokugawa Tsunayoshi), in the 28th issue, Genroku 6 nen, that same date has an entry that "Maeda Kunai Toshiro's heirloom sword, was presented by his son Ukyo Toshiyoshi." It is known that when Toshiyoshi succeeded as Ueno Koku's Nanaka-ichi clan lord, he presented his father's heirloom tachi to the shogun. In Showa 14 nen (1939), this was classified as Juyo Bijutsuhin, and the owner was the original Tokugawa family's 16th generation lord, Mr. Tokugawa Ietatsu, and this had been handed down in the Tokugawa family for a long time. However, in Reiwa 4 nen (2022), Mr. Ikeda Hiroshi kindly gifted this sword to the NBTHK and we sincerely wish to thank him for this.

Explanation and picture by Ishii Akira.

## **Shijo Kantei To No. 812**

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 812 Shijo Kantei To is October 5, 2024. Each person may submit one vote. Submissions should contain your name and address and be sent to the NBTHK Shijo Kantei. You can use the Shijo Kantei card which is attached in this magazine. Votes postmarked on or before October 5, 2024 will be accepted. If there are sword smiths with the same name in different schools, please write the school or prefecture, and if the sword smith was active for more than one generation, please indicate a specific generation.

you can submit votes online to <https://www.touken.or.jp/shijokanteinyusatsu.html> (see the April, 2024 issue, page 30). We will accept votes every month from the 10th at 10:00 am to the 5th of the following month at 23:59 pm. If there are sword smiths with the same name in different schools, please write the school or prefecture, and if the sword smith was active for more than one generation, please indicate a specific generation.

### **Information**

Type: Katana

Length: slightly over 2 shaku 3 sun 2 bu (70.4 cm)

Sori: slightly over 5 bu (1.6 cm)

Motohaba: slightly over 1 sun (3.15 cm)

Sakihaba: slightly less than 7 bu (2.05 cm)

Motokasane: 2.5 bu (0.75 cm)

Sakikasane: 1.5 bu (0.45 cm)

Kissaki length: slightly over 1 sun 3 bu (4.0 cm)

Nakago length: 6 sun 8.5 (20.8 cm)

Nakago sori: slight less than 1 bu (0.2 cm)

This is a shinogi tsukuri katana with an ihorimune. It is wide, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. The blade is thick, there is a narrow shinogi ji for the width, there is small degree of hiraniku, a slightly large sori, and a long chu-kissaki. The jigane is a tight ko-itame hada and a muji style, and there are abundant ji-nie. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. The hamon, in some places, has gunome and gunome choji, three gunome waves group together and form a single wave. There are ko-nie, a slightly tight nioiguchi, the hamon edge or border is hard. The nakago is ubu, the tip is ha-agari kurijiri, the yasurime are a large sujichigai with kesho. There is one mekugi ana. On the omote and the ura there is a long signature. (usually many of this smith's signatures are on the omote under the mekugi-ana and along the mune side, and are long signatures. The ura has a date below the migaki surface, along the mune side, and a half kanji character or several kanji were drilled out in making a mekugi-ana )

## **Juyo Tosogu**

### **Shamo zu (fighting chicken design) fuchi-kashira**

### **Mei: Toshinaga with kao**

Nara Toshinaga was a mid-Edo period goldsmith. He was born in Kanbun 7 (1667) and is supposed to have passed away in Genbun 1 (1738) age at the age of 70.

He is supposed to have been a student of Nara Toshiharu or Toshinaga (written with a different “naga” kanji) and used to live in Honjo Banba machi. Among the Nara school smiths, Toshinaga’s skill was the best, and he was one of the Nara san-saku smiths (three best master smiths).

This is a shamo (fighting chicken) design fuchi-kashira by Toshinaga. On the iron ground with a unique ishime carving, the shamo are expressed with takabori-suemon inlays. The shamo’s feathers are wild and disordered, his neck feathers are standing up, there is a sharp facial expression, strong legs, and the shamo is going into a battle, and this is depicted with dynamic chisel work, and we can see Toshinaga’s high level of skill which overwhelms that of other smiths. From a Kano Natsuo lecture about goldsmiths, he said “a goldsmith’s essence is not found in a particular detailed carving technique, but more in how he expresses himself”. Also he praised Toshinaga saying that “he has a very high reputation, and among the school’s smiths, and he is the number one carver. His work is full of natural and magnificent feelings. His work has dignity and grace, is not too busy, and as we expected among the three best Nara master smiths, he is the number one master smith”. This is among his best works using a shamo design, and he carved it in a dynamic manner. We can see the shamo is prepared for a battle and it is a great masterpiece.

Explanation by Kugiya Naoko

## **Shijo Kantei To No. 810 in the July, 2024 issue**

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To 810 is a tanto by Hakushu Saino-o Kansuke Hiroyoshi dated Bunroku 2 (1593).

In Hoki no kuni, the Yasutsuna school was famous, but after that, there was not much activity. In the Muromachi period, around the Bunmei (1469-86) period, Hiroyoshi (popular name Hiroga) moved to the area, and his school prospered from the late Muromachi period to the early half of the Edo period. Among the smiths, from the shodai to the 3rd generation, there were many swords made around the Tenmon to Tensho (1532-91) period, and the Saino-o Kansuke Hiroyoshi and Mita Goro Saemonjo Hiroyoshi names are famous. However, there is a story that around the beginning of the Tenmon period, Soshu Tsunahiro came to Izumo no Kuni and Kanagoya Shrine, and Mita Goro Saemonjo Hiroyoshi hosted him and studied under him.

Around the Tenmon and Tensho periods, the Hiroyoshi school had two branches, one is the Saino-o school around the Saino-o area, and other is the Mita school based in Tsuhara. They have many works without the Hiroyoshi name, and some of Mita Goro Saemonjo Hiroyoshi's children used the Saino-o name, and the two school's were supposed to have had a very close relationship. Also, looking at both schools' style, it is difficult to judge the differences, so at this time, all "Hiroyoshi" names were treated as correct answers. However, there are almost no opportunities to examine older generation Hiroyoshi



works, so in case you chose the Shodai and Nagamasa Hiroyoshi, you should be careful unless there was a clear deciding factor.

This tanto has an especially prominent shape. It is very thick and slightly less than 3 bu thick with a length of around 8 sun 9 bu which is a standard length. This kind of shape is seen sometimes in older work such as Atsu Toshiro's, and mostly is seen in the latter half of the Muromachi period. It continued into the Shinshinto period and there are a few in the Shinto period. If it was made after the Shinto period, the jiba (jigane and hamon) is supposed to have a fresh or new appearance.

In the latter half of the Muromachi period, characteristic tanto shapes have a slightly poor fukura, and the thickness is suddenly reduced going towards the point. Especially at the end of the Muromachi period, sakisori shapes are prominent. Furthermore, sometimes in this kind of thick tanto, the thickness is reduced shortly above the moto, it looks like an isosceles triangle shape. Such shapes are almost never seen in old tanto.

Hiroyoshi's work does not have mitsumune very often, and many of them have ihorimune.

The jigane does not have a Ko-Hoki period look, and besides itame and ko-itame hada with shirake utsuri, like we see here, they sometimes have a tightly forged jigane, and this means that they are supposed to have some influence from nearby Bizen. Hiroyoshi's original Soshu Den characteristic chikei are not prominent, and if it is present, many of them have been polished down to bright chikei.

Hiroyoshi hamon are mainly nie-deki, his midareba hamon have his teacher's Soshu style hitatsura, and a nearby Sue-Bizen style midare. Among his works, just like this tanto, square shaped gunome valleys with a slightly open hamon have a simple repeat at regular intervals. The hamon is wide, the midare valleys go near the hamon edge, there are yubashiri, tobiyaki, muneyaki, a slight hitatsura effect, and around the monouchi, the boshi has these hataraki. In addition the boshi return is long, and quite different from the hamon side's undulating midare hamon. Many of them are a gentle notare or suguha style, and these styles supposed to be Hiroyoshi's characteristic style. Beside these, there are other styles of midare hamon.

Hiroyoshi does not have too much horimono, there are some hi and bonji, and very rarely, he has a so-style kurikara, and carved kanji which are somewhat detailed.

His nakago have a nakago mune which is round, and the tip is a narrow ha-agari kurijiri. The tanto yasurime are katte sagari or kiri, the signature is along the mune side, and this matches his usual nakago style. Also, many of his tanto nakago lengths are around 3 sun 3 bu.

However, an especially notable Hiroyoshi characteristic point, is that sometimes he signed on a tanto mune with a date and part of a long mei. Mune-mei are seen often in Shinshinto and Gendaito work, but in the Koto period we have never seen many of these. Hiroyoshi has a relatively prominent percentage of mune-mei. Often, most of his hi are

carved through the nakago, except for two and three blades.

In voting, beside Hiroyasu, many people voted for Sue Soshu smiths, and many voted for Tsunahiro. Not only Tsunahiro, but many Sue Soshu Den smiths' styles have mitsu-mune, thick tanto are seen relatively less often, and we never see mune-mei. Their chikei are clear, there is a less whitish ji, their midare hamon do not have only square shaped gunome, but are mixed with gunome, choji, togariba, and form an irregular composition. Their ashi and yo are prominent and more complex, and notably, many Tsunahiro hamon have crescent moon shaped tobiyaki. From the horimono, some people voted for Fusamune. His horimono contain more subjects and more complex subjects, and are exquisitely carved.

Sue Bizen has the largest number of thick tanto that we see among the Sue Bizen period smiths, and often have hitatsura hamon. Compared with them, even the tight jigane and hamon in Hiroyasu's work are slightly worn down, and there are less ashi and yo hataraki. Also, many Sue Bizen tanto nakago mune are usually kaku-mune, and even with niku, it is a small amount of niku (however Harumitsu has many maru-mune). There are few confirmed mune mei, but they just contain the date, and we almost never see a name signed.

From the omote and ura hamon's slightly equal appearance, some people voted for Muramasa and Heianjo Nagayoshi. However Hiroyoshi hamon have uniform hamon repeat elements, and consequently, I can say that the omote and ura look similar or equal. Muramasa and Nagayoshi hamon are mixed with

several hamon elements or motifs, such as notare, hakoba, gunome, and suguha, and the omote and ura hamon are arranged nearly the same, and we can see that the pattern is intentional. Furthermore, Muramasa's midare hamon have prominent high and low areas, and some of the valleys in the hamon reach close to the cutting edge of the hamon, and his nakago are tanago bara or a fish belly shape.

Nagayoshi's hamon undulations are more gentle compared with Muramasa's, and have a narrow width, and compared to Hiroyoshi's, have a low width or narrow hamon for the blade's width. His mune are mitsumune. Many of his swords have a tight jigane like Kyoto work, the jiba (jigane and hamon) are bright, his signature is almost always five kanji, and it is often pointed out that he emphasised details in his kanji.

Explanation by Ooi Gaku.

**NOTE:** some people wrote several answers on their postcard submissions. In such a case, even if one answer is the correct answer, this entry becomes invalid, so please be careful. Only submit one smith's name. Also, using both, a postcard and internet to submit an answer, if you write two different smith's names, the later vote will become invalid.