

Pre Edo iron sukashi tsuba: The four classic ji-sukashi schools

- Kyo



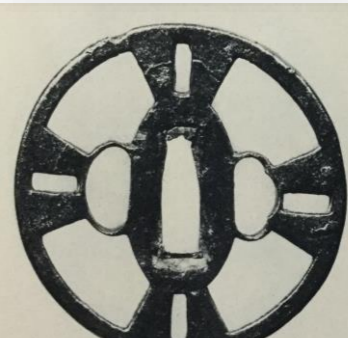
- Ko Shoami



- Owari



- Kanayama



A few remarks on collecting and attributing tsuba

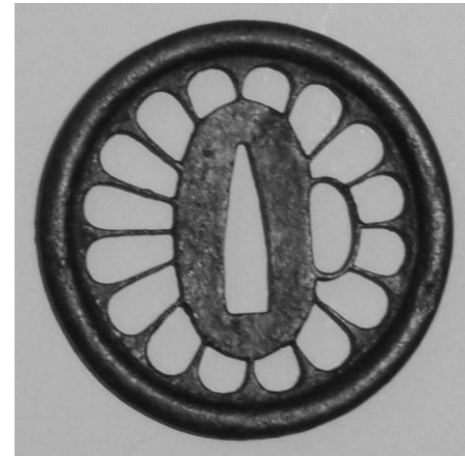
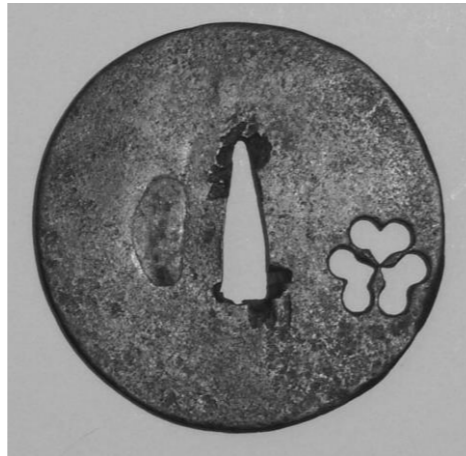
- Classifying is a consequence of collecting
- Copies (not forgeries) were often made
- Fashion and style influenced each school
- Opinions change
- The makers did not stick to the rules (round v's square rims)
- Condition can make attributions difficult

Topics for discussion

- Ji and Mon sushi tsuba
- What purpose does a tsuba serve
- When did ji sukashi tsuba first appear
- What are the characteristics of each school
- What came after the Momoyama period

Ji and Mon sukashi tsuba

- Mon sukashi



- Ji sukashi



What purpose does a tsuba serve?

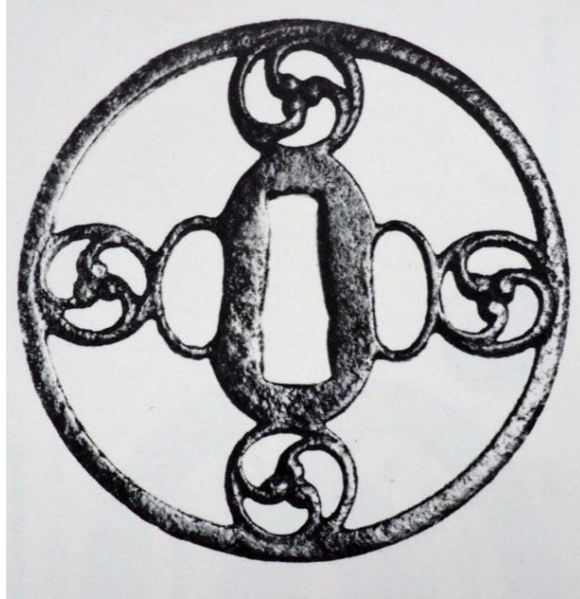
- Purely decorative ?
- Protection against an opponents sword ?
- Preventing your hand sliding onto the blade ?
- Status symbol - social rank and aesthetic ideals?
- Balance ?

When did ji sukashi tsuba first appear?

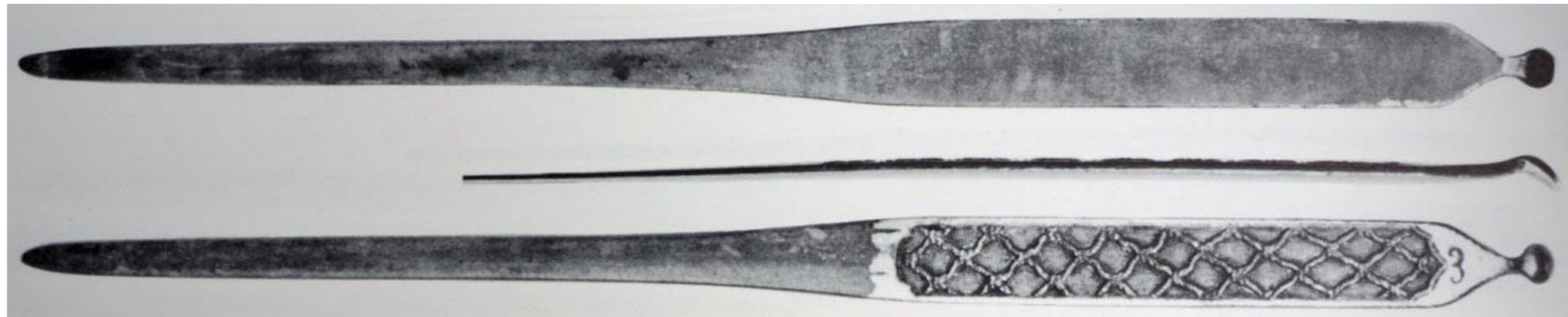
- From Edo period thought to be a result of the aesthetic taste of the Ashikaga Shogun Yoshinori (1394 -1441, r1428 -1441)
- Some propose Ashikaga Shogune Yoshimasa (1435 - 1490)
- Honpo Token Ko (History of Japanese Swords) published 1795 suggests coincides with uchigatana changing from hira zukuri to shindig zukuri in shape which is around the early 1400's and Yoshinori
- A clue lies in the shape of the hitsu ana of early ji sukashi guards

When did ji sukashi tsuba first appear ?

- Early sushi tsuba had this type of hitsu ana

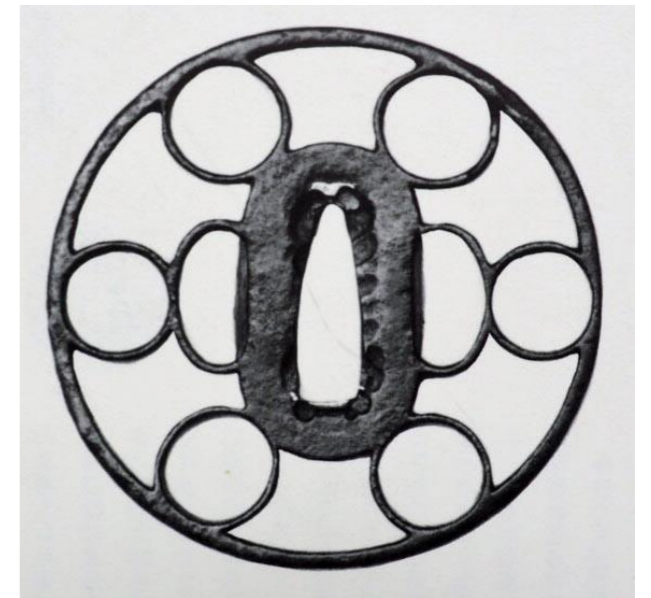


Early Kogai and kozuka were slim with low level carving



When did ji sukashi tsuba first appear

- Goto Yujo (1440-1512) introduced high relief carving and a flat back for kogai and kozuka - much thicker. The hitsu had to be larger.



- Lets assume Goto fittings began to become popular sometime around the mid 1470's
- Therefore ji sukashi tsuba with smaller half moon shape hitsu must predate this period leading to a likely date around the early 1400's

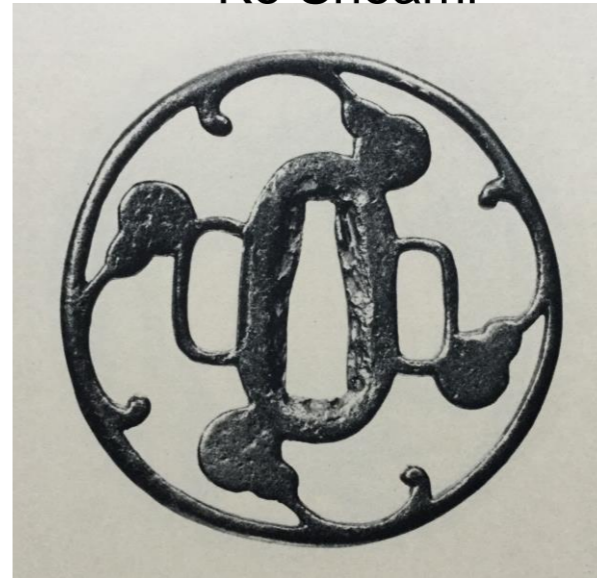
When did ji sukashi tsuba first appear ?

- All early ji sukashi tsuba share the pre- Goto Juyo shaped hitsu ana

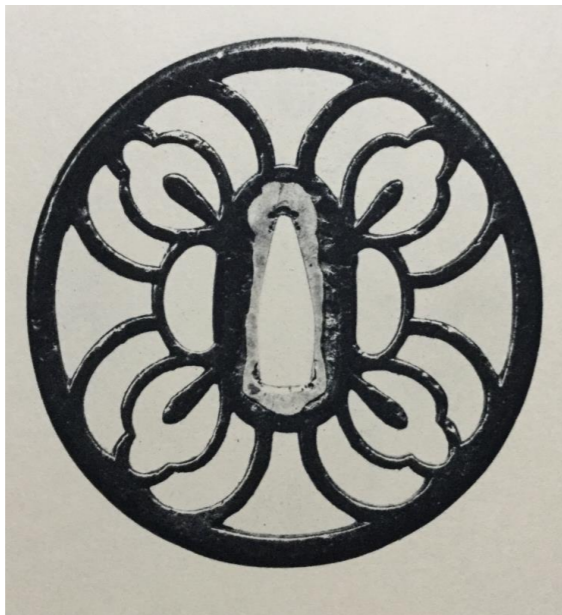
Kyo



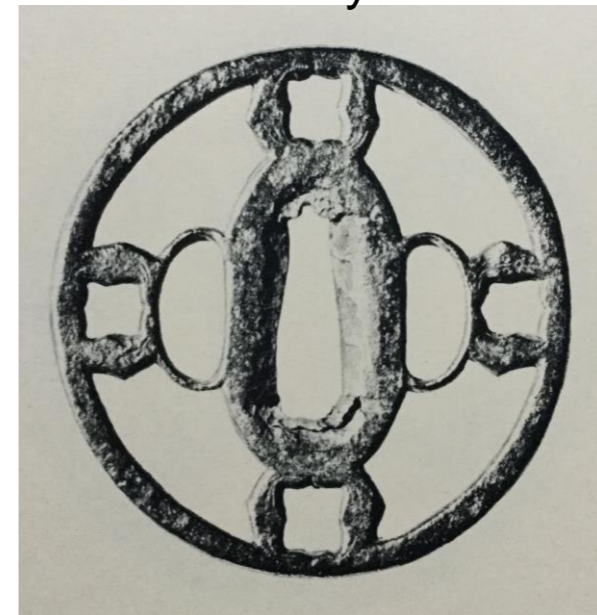
Ko Shoami



Owari



Kanayama



So we can assume that all four schools started production at much the same time

Kyo sukashi tsuba

- Nomenclature - Heianjo sukashi, Kyo sukashi
- Production location - Kyoto
 - Likely to have been copied in other regions
- Characteristics
 - Early Muromachi period - 7.3-8.0 cms
 - Mid Muromachi period and later - 7.8 - 8.2 cms
 - Relatively thin 4-5 mm
 - Usually round
 - Rim - maru mimi (rounded)
 - Relief carving (niku bori) a typical feature
 - Early guards thin hitsu ana - half moon shape
 - Long and oval seppa dai
 - Tekkotsu often present - granular and linear
 - Tsuchime - later guards sometimes polished
- Design features
 - Refined, elegant, elaborate, and delicate
 - Monogatari themes - Ise e.g. Yatsushashi
 - Subjects/scenes from nature
 - Mon (especially early guards)
- Collecting - fairly numerous, earlier tsuba hard to find, generally not expensive



Kyo sukashi tsuba



Ko Shoami tsuba

- Nomenclature - Ko (old) shoami, Kyo Shoami (nunome) Shoami (Edo period and catch-all)
- Production location - Kyoto but eventually other regions
 - Initially a family of silversmiths serving the Ashikaga Shogunate who switched to iron tsuba production
 - 'ami' from Amida Buddha - honour rank of priests of Jishu Buddhism, the dobo or artistic advisors
 - Other ami - Kanami and Zeami - Noh drama, Zenami - garden designer, Honami -swords, Noami ,Geiami and Soami - painting
- Characteristics
 - Early Muromachi - 7.0 - 8.0 cms
 - Mid Muromachi and later 7.8cm - 8.2 cms
 - Maru mimi - round rims
 - Relatively thin - 4-5 mm
 - Occasional relief carving
 - Tekkotsu often present - granular and linear
 - Fine tsuchime
 - Slightly wider seppa dai than Kyo - heavier appearance
- Design
 - Bolder than Kyo sukashi - somewhere between Kyo and Owari
 - Symmetry and abundant movement
 - Well balanced asymmetry
 - Mon (ginger, matsukawabishi)
- Collecting - Medium quality relatively numerous but high quality very rare. Pricing similar to Kyo sukashi



Ko Shoami tsuba



Owari tsuba

- Production location - Owari province- Kiyosu (eventually Hoan and Yamakichibei)

- Characteristics

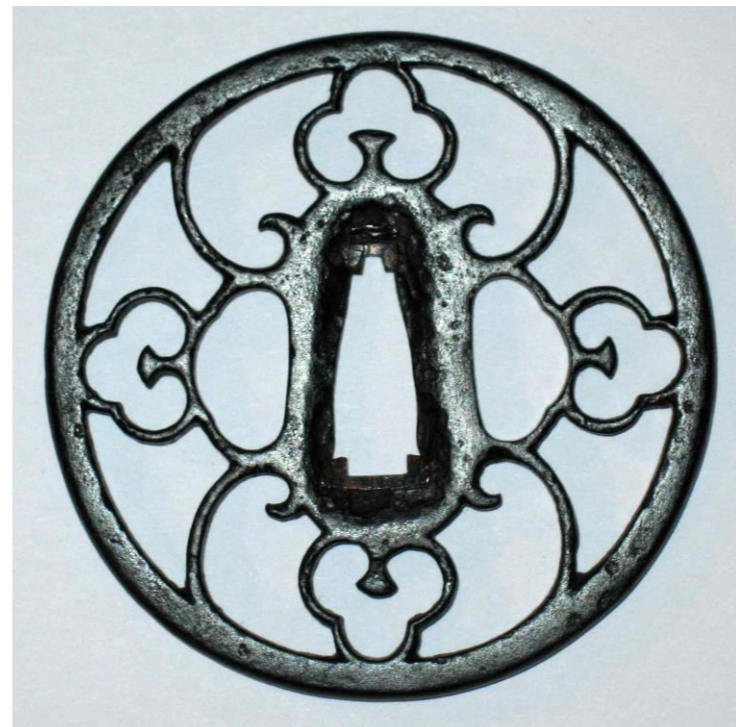
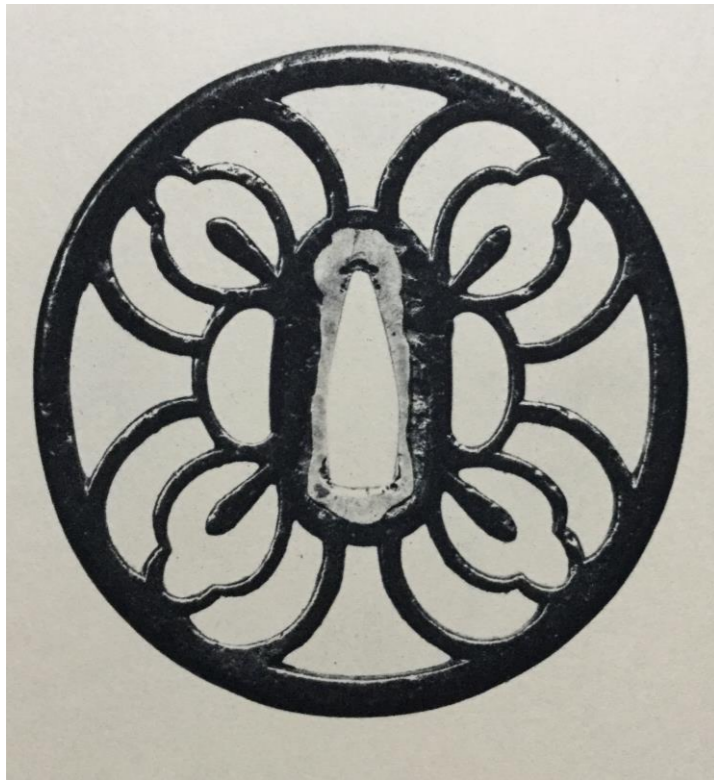
- Large dimensioned - 7.8 - 8.2 cms
- Generally round, occasionally mokko gata
- Kakumimi - square rim
- Tekkotsu - granular and linear - often shaved down
- Mumei
- Tsuchime (deep) and later period polished surface
- Niku oki - bi concave - may explain prominent tekkotsu
- Seppa dai koban shaped
- Wider rims than Kyo or Ko Shoami

- Designs

- Aesthetic ideal of Samurai
 - Ryo hitsu often uniform (half moon or suhama [trefoil])
 - Often symmetrical
 - Monogatari
 - Musashino
 - Mon, warabite, suhama
- Collecting - Very good examples very hard to find and very expensive



Owari tsuba



Kanayama tsuba

- Production location - Owari province. Kanayama means ore or Iron Mountain.
 - Kiyosu - Seki sword Smiths
 - Ono - Port, commercial and cultural connection to Kyoto, many iron smiths
- Characteristics
 - Generally small size - 6.8 -7.5 cms (but made for katana)
 - Tekkotsu - granular and larger lumps
 - Niku oki - bi concave
 - Mumei
 - Rim- Kakumimi ko niku and often thick - sometimes 8-9 mm
 - Finish - often deep tsuchime
- Designs
 - Symmetrical
 - Compact and massive - often look bigger than they are
 - Often incorporates the seppa dai in design e.g. Cha tsubo or temple bell
 - More man made object - kan (tansu handles) umbrellas, bells, cha tsubo, carpenters square
- Collecting - small easy to find, large (7.8cm and over) difficult and expensive



Kanayama tsuba



What came after the Momoyama period

- The establishment of the Tokugawa Shogunate changed many things
- Kyoto was no longer the political and commercial centre of Japan
- Daimyo continued to rule their fiefs and attracted more craftsmen to work for them
- Edo grew and developed rapidly and the policy of sankin-kotai (alternative attendance) mean many Samurai spend time residing in Edo rather than their fief
- Edo culture was less bound by strict tradition