

THE TO-KEN SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN
for the Study and Preservation of Japanese Swords and Fittings



HON. PRESIDENT, KAZUTARO TORIGOYE, Dr. Litt.
SECRETARY, JEFFREY RODFORD.

Programme

Next Meeting: Wednesday, 3rd February, 1965. 7.30 p.m.
The Tudor Room, Fulham Conservative Club,
4, Shorrolds Road, S.W.6.

Sword Theme

Bon Dale will talk on Boshi.
Bring Koto blades.

Fittings Theme

An informal discussion and appraisal session based on Tsuba generally. Bring your favourite piece, late or early iron or soft metal. It is hoped Mr. W.W.Winkworth will have something to say on collecting Tsuba.

Special Feature

I have actually got them in my hot little hand at last! Film slides of a sword polisher at work. It is hoped, repeat hoped, that we shall also have slides of the swordsmith at work.

Books

Tsuba Kansho Ki. Torigoye, Tsuba. £9. 10. 0.
We are saving £5 on the retail price.
Yasuchika, His Life and Work. Tsuba.
Excellent plates. English text. 12. 15. 0.
Nihon Meito Zukan (Catalogue of One
hundred Superb Blades). Juuji Homma, 12. 10. 0.
Tokyo 1963. Some English text.
Excellent illustrations showing
forging grain, etc.

NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

In a letter received from Dr. Torigoye, commenting on the summary of the talk given on Sword Etiquette at the December meeting, the President gives an interesting additional piece of information. He confirms that as a general rule swords should be placed on a sword rack in the manner described, with the hilts towards the left. But, he adds, in the case of Daimyo swords, these should be placed on a rack in the opposite manner, that is, with the hilts towards the right. This is interesting in that it is obviously the explanation of photographs which are sometimes seen in Japanese sword literature, i.e. "Token Bijutsu", of swords resting on a rack in this manner, in what one would normally suppose was the wrong way round.

BLADE JUDGING

At the January meeting a very lively time was had by eighteen members who tried their hand at placing in order of merit five sword blades. The blades were laid, resting on pillows, on a table with the hilts in place, the nakago remaining covered. The blades were judged for quality of condition, shape, boshi, forging and yakiba. Points from 0 to 10 were awarded privately by each member on a form provided for the purpose, and the points for each sword brought to a total. The eighteen totals for each blade were then added, and an average mark worked out for each. Out of a possible top mark of 50, the highest mark of $37\frac{1}{2}$ was obtained by a heavy wakizashi blade by YAMATO NO KAMI YOSHIMICHI, 1st generation, Kwanbun period. The other totals were 33, 29, $28\frac{1}{2}$, 27. The last three marks rather suggest an element of caution amongst members!

As a matter of interest, the blade which was given the highest number of points by the most experienced members present, was given the lowest mark on the combined totals of the membership. A lesson may be learnt from this, and the writer, Bon Dale, makes no apologies for stressing it again. The Yoshimichi was in nearly perfect condition, the blade in question, which proved to be O-suriage and unsigned, was in very poor state. However, look into

the blade, ignore the mere surface condition. A clean pretty face is all very fine, but a grimy face may be even more beautiful beneath the dirt.

TSUKARERU

Due to a lack of clarity in my talk on the examination of blades, summarised in the January programme, there seems to have been a tendency for some members to regard the condition of TSUKARERU, or tiredness in blades, as a major fault. It cannot be said too emphatically that this is not so. Tiredness is a condition, which may develop in blades of great age, but it is not a fault. For example, in descriptions in JUYO TOKEN NADO ZUFU, some of those blades which are regarded in Japan as National Treasures will be found to be described as having areas of tiredness. Even sometimes to be generally "faded" or tired.

Obviously this condition can become advanced to such an extent that a blade ceases to have any real aesthetic value, and here the collectors personal feelings must be the final judge. But a little tiredness should not damn an otherwise good old blade. If, however, the condition is apparent, extensively, in a late Koto or Shinto blade, this may be another matter and may indeed be faulty workmanship.

IDENTIFICATION OF SOME UNSIGNED TSUBA

Summary of the talk given by John Harding on Jan.6th.

The object was to explain some of the fundamental technical features related to different schools (not individual artists) and so introduce a little rule of thumb into the problem of identification.

On this occasion two open work schools of similar character were chosen. Akasaka family & Higo, Hayashi & Nishigaki for open-work.

It should be understood that the following information must be regarded as a general rule and that individual artists varied in

their work, also many pieces will not fit the rule at all. Some excellent copies of genuine pieces are so borderline that the most experienced persons have difficulty in judging them. However, armed with some of the right information it may just be possible to detect the copyist reverting to his own school technique.

HIGO AND AKASAKA 17th - 19th CENTURY

There were eight generations of Akasaka from 1657 - 19th century. They started as employees of a designer and dealer - Karaganeya Hikobei, who is said to have taught the first master of the family, working to his own designs.

At this same time in Higo Province the two other openwork families with which we are concerned, were flourishing. The Hayashi family, of which there were seven generations, Matashichi being the first master. The Nishigaki family which had eight generations, Kanshiro was the first master.

For the first three generations in each family there were no common designs and no evidence of copying seems to be available. It was the later Akasaka artists who seemed to take a fancy to copying the earlier Higo designs, and it appears that the feeling was not mutual, because there is little evidence of the Higo artists copying Akasaka designs.

The fourth Akasaka master was particularly clever at imitating Higo work. His pieces could sometimes be accepted as Higo student work, or even that of later Higo main line artists, if it were not for the fact that his Akasaka schooling shows in his technique. At first glance his work appears the same, it is in fact quite different.

Towards the end of the existence of the two schools, which may be called the period of decline, the artists mixed their work, and it is virtually impossible to tell who made which, unless the piece is signed, although by this time it does not really matter who made which.

Later still the tsuboi workers came on the scene and imitated everything and everyone connected with Higo, and so making life even more difficult for us.

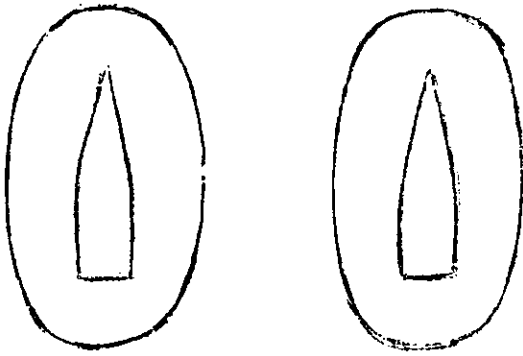
This article is to help to distinguish between the two schools.

When one has examined a tsuba and decided to which school it belongs, it is then that another problem arises, to decide whether it is student work or a main line artist. If student work, of which Master is the student a pupil? If main line, the work of which Master? This last problem cannot be written in a few words or indeed, in many pages. Many genuine pieces need to be seen and if possible handled, and the subtle differences between the Masters examined. It is here that we are concerned with the temper of metal, simplicity of design and many other aspects. When all these points are understood then true appraisal may be possible.

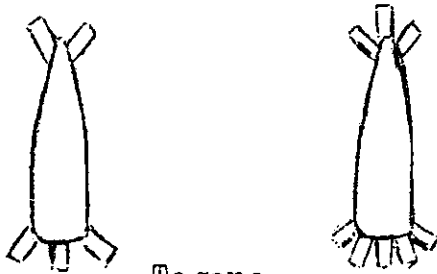
THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN AKASAKA AND HIGO SCHOOLS

1. The thickness of the work of the first three masters of Akasaka was generally 6 mm., sometimes slightly under, sometimes a little over. The work of the Higo masters varied from 4 mm. to 6 mm.
2. Forging lines are often seen inside the piercing of Akasaka work, they are never seen in Higo pieces; the iron was forged tight.
3. The designs of Akasaka are: Bamboo leaves; Ichimai kiri, (single kiri leaf); flying storks; Mizu aoi and geese; geese alighting; swallows returning; bamboo and clove; willow and heron; drying nets; aoi and wheel; Nihon matsu, (Two pine trees); bamboo in the wind; axe and Hishi; Yatsubashi (bridge of eight sections); these designs are not seen in Higo work.
4. The seppa dai of Akasaka Tsuba are comparatively narrow and tend towards a point at the top, even when the top is rounded it gives the impression of trying to make a point.
Higo seppa dai are broader and rounder, some are Koban shaped. See illustrations.
5. The edge (mimi) of Akasaka is nearly always round. The edge of Higo work is also round but tends towards the elliptical. See illustrations.
6. The togane (chiselling around the tang hole) is different, and there are set patterns in the later work. See illustrations.
7. The inside walls of the piercings in Akasaka work are slightly concave to give the impression of sharpness or stiffness to the design. The inside walls of Higo piercings are slightly convex giving a roundness and warmth to the design. See illustrations.

HIGO SCHOOL



Seppadai

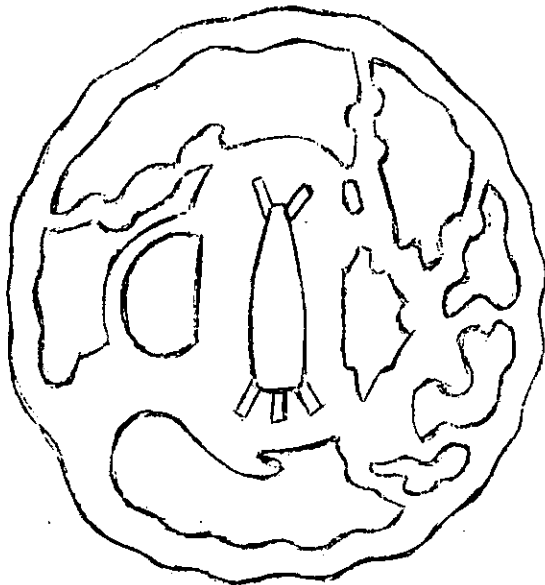


Togane



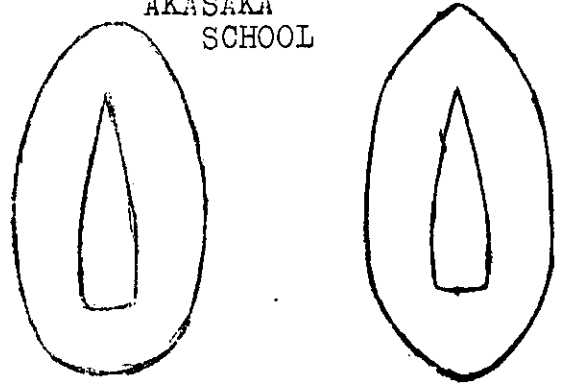
Wall Section

Edge

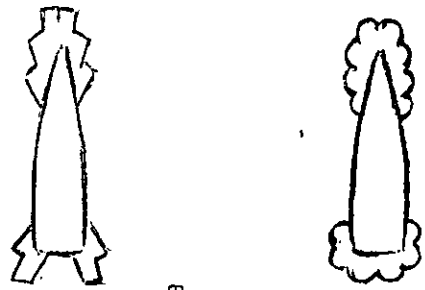


Higo Tsuba

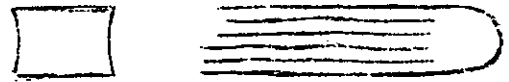
AKASAKA SCHOOL



Seppadai

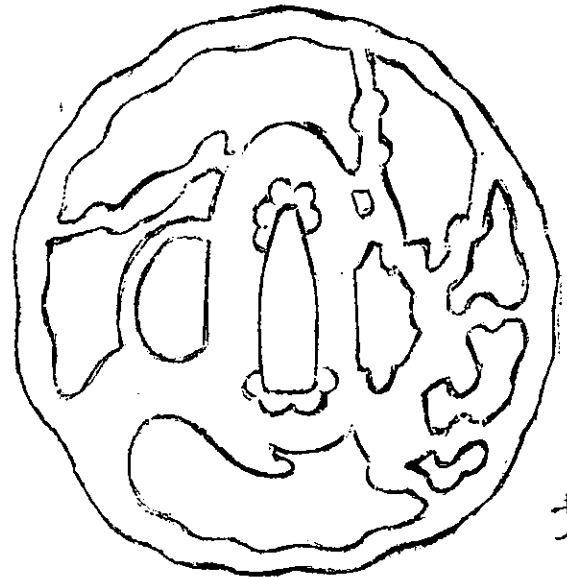


Togane



Wall Section

Edge, folding of metal



Akasaka copy

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