Appreciation of Koto Bizen – focus on Ichimonji

Introduction





Where it started

- Bizen (situated along the Sanyodo road/ "sunny mountain region") flourished on the banks of the river Yoshii, which was both the fecund source of iron sand and livelihood but also of natural calamity (various floods). This is the region which for over 400 years, from late Heian until the 1590-91 inundation, produced most swordsmiths and blades in the history of ancient Japan
- The area is reasonably compact, with a diameter of around 30km

AP OF JAPAN IN THE EDO PERIOD

Kinai: Yamashiro 出城 (modern-day Kyoto Prefecture), Yamato 太相 (Nara), Settsu 摂津 (Osaka and Hyogo), Kawachi 河内 (Osaka), and Izumi 和泉 (Osaka).

San'yodo: Harima 播巻 (Hyogo), Bizen 備前 (Okayama), Mimasaka 美作 (Okayama), Bitchu 備中 (Okayama), Bingo 備後 (Hiroshima), Aki 安差 (Hiroshima), Suo 周助 (Yamaguchi), and Nagato 長門 (Yamaguchi).

San'indo: Tanba 丹波 (Kyoto and Hyogo), Tango (升後), Tajima 但馬 (Hyogo), Inaba 因幡 (Tottori), Hoki 伯若 (Tottori), Izumo 出雲 (Shimane), Iwami 沿見 (Shimane), and Oki 隐岐 (Shimane).

Nankaido: Kii 紀伊 (Wakayama and Mie), Awaji 淡路 (Hyogo), Awa 阿波 (Tokushima), Sanuki 讃岐 (Kagawa), Iyo 伊子 (Ehime), and Tosa 土佐 (Kochi). Tokaido: Iga 伊賀 (Mie), Ise 伊勢 (Mie), Shima 志厚 (Mie), Owari 尾張 (Aichi), Mikawa 三河 (Aichi), Totomi 遠江 (Shizuoka), Suruga 職河 (Shizuoka), Izu 伊豆 (Shizuoka), Kai 甲斐 (Yamanashi), Sagami 相模 (Kanagawa), Musashi 武蔵 (Tokyo, Saitama, and Kanagawa), Awa 安房 (Chiba), Kazusa 上稔 (Chiba), Shimousa 下稔 (Chiba and Ibaraki), and Hitachi 常稔 (Ibaraki).

Tosando: Omi 近江 (Shiga), Mino 決讀 (Gifu), Hida 飛騨 (Gifu), Shinano 信濃 (Nagano), Kozuke 上野 (Gunma), Shimotsuke 下野 (Tochigi), Iwaki 登城 (Fukushima) (Washiro 岩代 (Fukushima), Rikuzen 陸唐 (Shor gi and Iwate), Rikucha 陸中 (Iwate and Aleva), Mutsu 陵畏 (Aomoi and Akita), Uzen 彩影 (Shamagata), and Ugo 羽後 (Akita and Yamagata)

Oki C

imasaka

Taiima

Yamashi

Hokurikudo: Wakasa 若狭 (Fukui), Echizen 越前 (Fukui), Kaga 加賀 (Ishikawa), Noto 能登 (Ishikawa), Etchu 越中 (Toyama), Echigo 越後 (Niigata), and Sado 佐渡 (Niigata).

Saikaido: Chikuzen 筑前 (Fukuoka), Chikugo 筑後 (Fukuoka), Buzen 豊前 (Fukuoka and Ohita), Bungo 豊後 (Fukuoka and Oita), Hizen 肥前 (Saga and Nagasaki), Higo 肥後 (Kumamoto), Hyuga 日向 (Miyazaki), Osumi 大開 (Kagoshima), Satsuma 薩座 (Kagoshima), Iki 壱岐 (Nagasaki), and Tsushima 対馬 (Nagasaki).

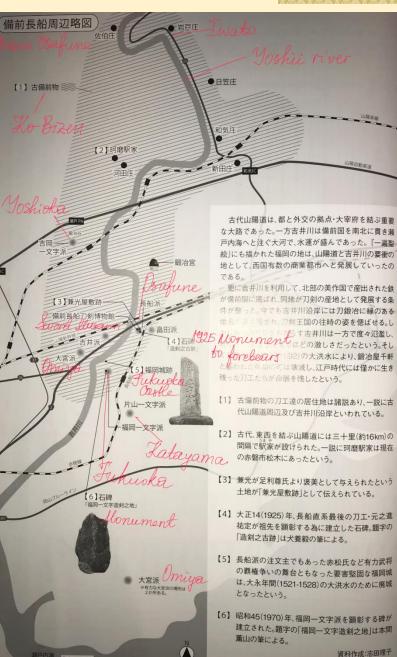
Etchu

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Rikuchu

Uzen

Sources: Japanese Sword & Sano Museums, Kokan Nagayama



Where it started (cont.)





History of Bizen Province (the current Southeastern part of Okayama)

The Old Sanyodo was an important road connecting the City and Dazaifu (in Kyushu). Yoshii River was a major trade route and the Yoshii river cut across Bizen from the North to the South and fed into Seto in-land sea. Those factors contributed to making Bizen a major city.

Steel was produced in the North of Bizen and the Yoshii river facilitated its transport to Bizen, helping Bizen become known for their sword making. There were a lot of blacksmiths who traded along the river but due to the numerous floods over 1573-1592, their numbers dwindled by the 17th Century.

1) 古備前物(KoBizen)

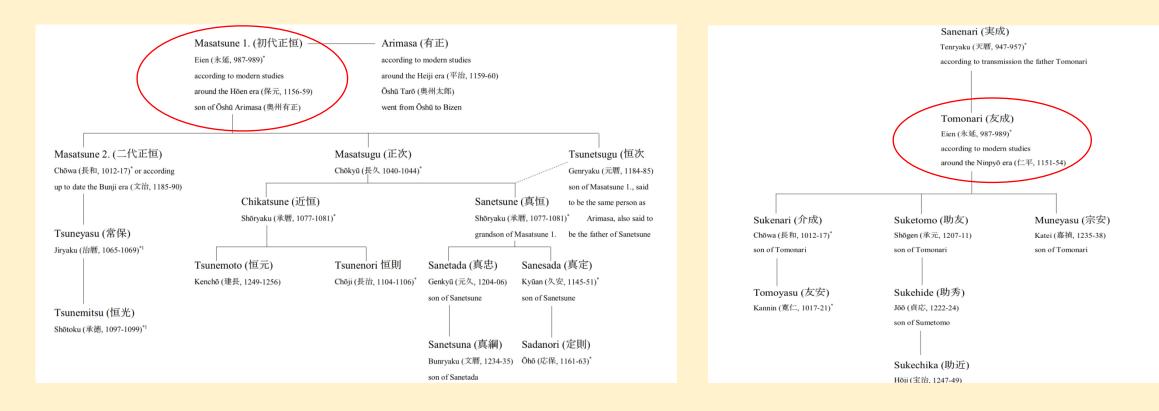
It was said that the school of KoBizen sword makers lived near Sanyo road and along the river banks

- 2) 珂磨駅家 A major terminal place for the Sanyodo
- 3) Remains of the Kanemitsu House
- 4) Osafune School's stele
- 5) Ruins of Fukuoka Castle
- 6) Fukuoka School's stele

The forefathers



- KoBizen is the forebear of Bizen den it is defined by the leading smiths Tomonari and Masatsune, whose swords were reputedly worn by the Taira and Minamoto daimyo (c.f. Gempei wars, also known as the Genji-Heike wars)
- Key characteristics are: narrow but "wild", naturalistic hamon with plenty of kinsuji, sunagashi, chikei activities BUT unlike later Bizen, the hamon is rendered in ko-nie. Also jifu utsuri is common (sometimes even mizukage utsuri) on itame jihada. Sugata is graceful, with koshizori and funbari



Historical side note



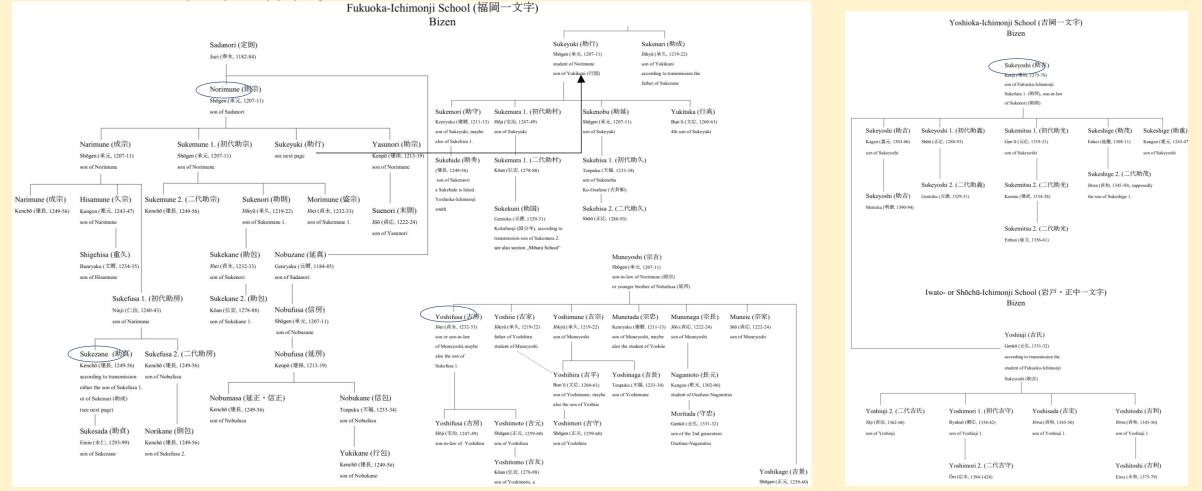


- Cloistered Emperor Gotoba (後鳥羽天皇, 1180-1239, r. 1184-1198), in his exile following an unsuccessful endeavour to overthrow the bakufu government after the death of the third Kamakura shogun, invited the best smiths in the country to teach him sword-forging in his so-called *"goban-kaji"* (御番鍛冶) project, starting in 1208
- The first group included 13 smiths, from Yamashiro (x3 Awataguchi smiths), Bitchu (x3 Aoe smiths) and 7 Fukuoka smiths: Norimune, Nobufusa, Sukemune Muneyoshi, Yukikuni, Sukenari and Sukenobu
- Norimune was the first smith (month of January) and his disciples (Sukemune, Narimune, Muneyoshi) are often referred to as Ko-Ichimonji. The most notable Ichimonji smiths thereafter are Yoshifusa, Norifusa, Sukezane, Yoshihira, etc.
- From the beginning of the Kamakura period and through the middle of the Kamakura period, the centre of the Ichimonji production was in the area called <u>Fukuoka</u> (福岡)
- From the end of the Kamakura period and into early Nanbokucho, likely due to exhaustion of resources, production moved to <u>Yoshioka</u> (吉岡)
- Around the Shochu era (1324-1326) another branch of the Ichimonji school emerged in Iwato (岩戸). This branch is called the <u>Iwato</u> <u>Ichimonji</u> (岩戸一文字) or sometimes <u>Shochu Ichimonji</u> (正中一文字)
- Around 1225, Norifusa founded <u>Katayama Ichimonji</u>school (片山一文字) when he moved to Katayama (片山) from Fukuoka (福岡)
- <u>Sukezane</u> of Fukuoka would also leave Bizen entirely for Sagami on order of the Shogun, and create <u>Kamakura Ichimonji</u>, and is followed by Suketsuna (first pure Soshu-based Bizen descendant)

<u>"Muteki" Ichimonji</u>



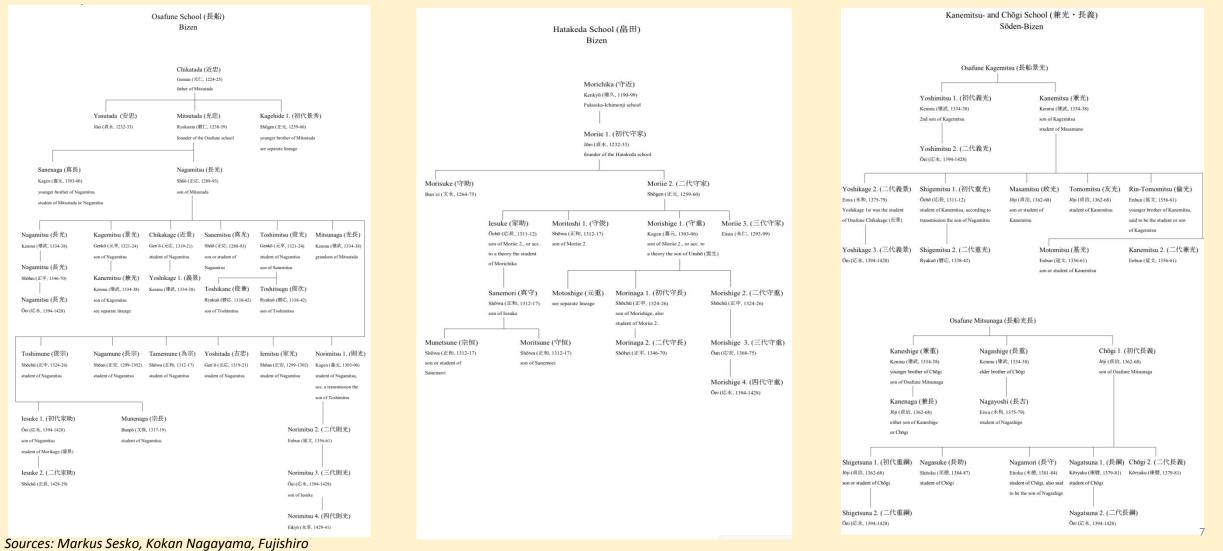
- Fukuoka Ichimonji developed the <u>flamboyant choji hamon</u> with <u>vivid midare utsuri</u> across <u>mokume- itame</u> jihada. The vivid style emerged in the Goban-kaji work (7 out of the first set of 13 smiths selected by Gotoba were Ichimonji)
- Yoshioka followed in its footsteps, with <u>slightly smaller choji</u>, some <u>more gunome</u> and <u>occasional togari</u> elements. Kamakura Ichimonji also has togari, and even smaller gunome choji but more chikei and more nie
- The jigane appears "soft" (as opposed to nie-laden jigane like Soshu or Mino), the nioiguchi is nioi-based and that overall softer kawagane (skin steel) is hardened by way of applying utsuri



Evolution



- Osafune evolved in parallel to mature Ichimonji and flourished later, continuing into Muromachi
- The choji hamon became a <u>little smaller</u> than Fukuoka, <u>more consistent height-wise</u> (florid in middle with uniform height but quieter in monouchi and habaki areas) and contained <u>kawazuko choji</u>. Utsuri was either midare or jifu or towards late Nanbokucho and Muromachi – <u>bo utsuri</u>
- Some of the Osafune smiths forged in suguha based gunome hamon and developed kataochi gunome. Towards Oei era, also koshi-no-hiraita





Key features of the Ichimonji school

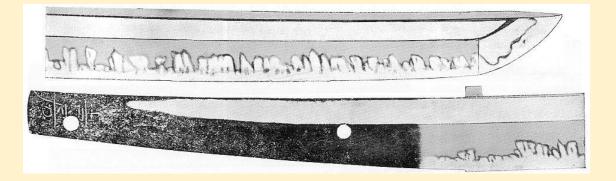
Some key characteristics

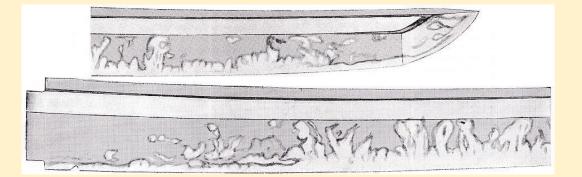


- Origin of the name of 'Ichimonji': often smiths of this group used just 'One' or 'Ichi' (-, in Chinese character or a horizontal line) as a smith name. There are smiths who used their smith names in addition to 'Ichi' also smiths who used their smith's name without 'Ichi'. It is uncertain if 'Ichi' that looks like a diagonal line and is seen in the mei of early Ichimonji smiths (Ko-Ichimonji smiths) is a character or a mark
- The meaning is symbolic, indicating they are "number one", "supreme", beyond comparison



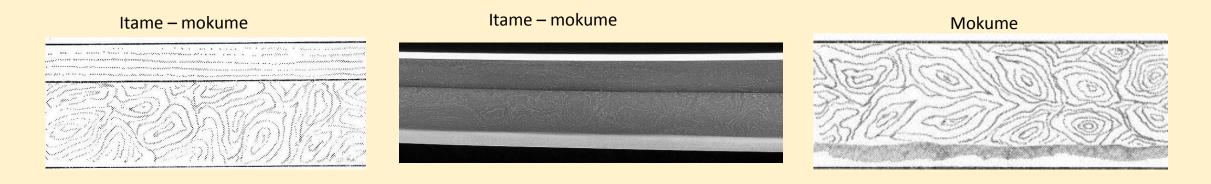
• Key characteristic of the hamon is the presence of choji (clove shapes) as illustrated by the two kokuho meito below Okazaki-giri Fukuoka Ichimonji Yoshifusa and Sanchomo Ichimonji





Some key characteristics (cont.)

• Another tell-tale feature of Ichimonji is the predominantly **mokume** (wood-burl-like) or **mokume-itame** (wood grain with ovals/arcs) jihada



• The hardened edge is rendered in **nioi** (smaller martensite crystals appearing as a haze or mist) as opposed to the more visible, larger **nie** crystals





Nie / ara-nie



Some key characteristics (cont.)



- Utsuri (literally "reflection") is additional hardening of the top layer of the skin steel above the hamon to provide torsional rigidity
- A mixture of ground bone and charcoal or of leather, hooves, salt and urine was used
- The temperature must not be very high and should stay under the melting point of iron. The longer the temperature is held, the deeper the carbon will diffuse into the surface, with a typical depth of case hardening with this method is up to 1.5 mm (that is why utsuri still can be seen after several polishes but gets weaker and eventually disappears when too much material is removed
- The dark areas between the nioiguchi and the border of the utsuri are called antai



According to the pattern in which utsuri appears, we differentiate between bō-utsuri or sugu-utsuri (棒映り・直映り, straight utsuri), chōji-utsuri (丁子映り, chōji-shaped utsuri), midareutsuri (乱映り, irregular utsuri), nie-utsuri (沸映り, ji-nie based utsuri), shirake-utsuri (白け映り, shirake-based, white-ish area utsuri), botan-utsuri (牡丹映り, peony-shaped utsuri), and danutsuri (段映り, utsuri which consists of different layers).

Some geometry observations



- Longer, slender shaped Heian/Ko-Bizen blades with koshizori gave way to more robust, toriizori blades
- Kokissaki (earliest blades) evolved to chukissaki into early Kamakura and then ikubu (square-ish) into mid-Kamakura
- Into Nanbokucho, the blades became even bigger, with larger kissaki, lost some of their funbari and niku when compared to Kamakura blades

