

Real-Life kantei-of swords , part 10: A real challenge : kantei Wakimono Swords

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1) Introduction

Kokan Nakayama in his book "The Connoisseurs Book of Japanese Swords" describes *wakimono* swords (also called *Majiwari mono*) as "swords made by schools that do not belong to the *gokaden*, as well other that mixed two or three *gokaden*". His book lists a large number of schools as *wakimono*, some of these schools more famous than others.

Wakimono schools, such as Mihara, Enju, Uda and Fujishima are well known and appear in specialized publications that provide the reader the opportunity to learn about their smiths and the characteristics of their swords. However, others are rarely seen and may be underrated. In this article we will focus on one of the rarely seen and often maligned school from the province of Awa on the Island of Shikoku. The *Kaifu* School is often associated with Pirates, unique *koshirae*, kitchen knives and rustic swords. All of these associations are true, but they do not do justice to the school.

Kaifu (sometimes said Kaibu) is a relatively new school in the realm of *Nihonto*. *Kaifu* smiths started appearing in records during the *Oei* era (1394). Many with names beginning with UJI or YASU such as Ujiyoshi, Ujiyasu, Ujihisa, Yasuyoshi, Yasuyoshi and Yasuujii, etc, are recorded. However, there is record of the school as far back as Korayku era (1379), where the schools legendary founder Taro Ujiyoshi is said to have worked in *Kaifu*. There is also a theory that the school was founded around the *Oei* era as two branches, one following a smith named Fuji from the Kyushu area and other following a smith named Yasuyoshi from the Kyoto area (who is also said to be the son of Taro Ujiyoshi). Little is formally written about the school, but in the AFU Quarterly from 1995, an article from the Token Shunju by Okada Ichiro in August 1994 was translated and published. This is the most comprehensive article we have seen on the school. Okada gives his reason for writing the article as, "the sword books commonly available seem to look with disfavor on swords made in Awa no Kuni, which is now Tokushima-ken on the island of Shikoku, and provide very little information about the smiths from there. It is for this reason that I have selected this article." Normally all you find are references and anecdotal stories involving *Kaifu* swords, so thankfully Okada has provided a little more material.

When studying swords from the *Kaifu* School one must break them down into three subgroups; those made in the *Koto* era, early *Shinto* works and "everything else". The "everything else" category is what most people encounter when they think of *Kaifu*.

These include the often seen “kitchen knives” or swords made in the *kata kiriba zukuri* style, (they have a bevel on only one side like in a *kogatana*), various long *hira zukuri wakizashi* sometimes referred to as pirate swords, (Shikoku Island did a good business supplying Japanese pirates) and many *Shinshinto* swords made in the late Edo era. When attributing a sword to *Kaifu*, the NBTHK normally assigns a *Shinto* or *Shinshinto* designation to the attribution to help distinguish the category. What is rarely seen are *Koto* works, particularly signed ones. We will explore some theories on why we think this is so.

The Awa province on the island of Shikoku and particularly the *Kaifu* district is on the cross roads of several powerful *Daimyos*. To the south are Kyushu (Saikaido) *Daimyo* fiefdoms and to the north are the Honshu (Sanyodo) *Daimyo* fiefdoms. As Okada stated, the Lord of *Kaifu* needed a strong army to defend his territory and brought in sword expertise from the north and the south to develop what became known as the “*Kaifu-To* that were excellent in keenness and rich in individuality”. What this means for those of us studying *Kaifu* swords is that they possess a variety of styles and characteristics and in some cases could be considered experimental! Among the finer pieces it is not uncommon to see swords that look Yamato, others that could be mistaken for *Soshu* and some that could be considered *Soden Bizen*. As we enter into the *Shinto* era, many take on Sue-*Bizen* characteristics. In a NTHK REI Magazine article from 1992 it is mentioned that the smith Hikobei Sukesada migrated from *Bizen* to Awa and brought with him the *Bizen* tradition. We have also seen it stated several times that good *Kaifu* works can be mistaken for works by GO (Yoshihiro), or better *Soshu* works.

This leads us to the question of why do we see so few *Koto Kaifu* swords? In reviewing the NBTHK Juyo results, we found only one *Kaifu* sword. This sword is signed Yasuyoshi and partially dated. A review of this sword will be done later in the article. An internet search (Japanese and English) found several *Shinshinto* and *kata kiriba zukuri* style *Kaifu* swords for sale or sold, but only a handful of *Koto Kaifu* for sale or sold. Signed *Koto* swords are even rarer. The *oshigata* books also have very few examples from this school. Why is this so? Obviously there were many swords produced to support the *Kaifu* army, where are they? We believe that many of the early *Kaifu* swords were *mumei* or had their signatures removed. Since *Kaifu* swords didn't possess a specific characteristic but borrowed from many traditions, it is likely that many are attributed to other schools or traditions. Perhaps, many had *gimei* signatures put on them for other traditions or schools as well?

2) The sword to be reviewed

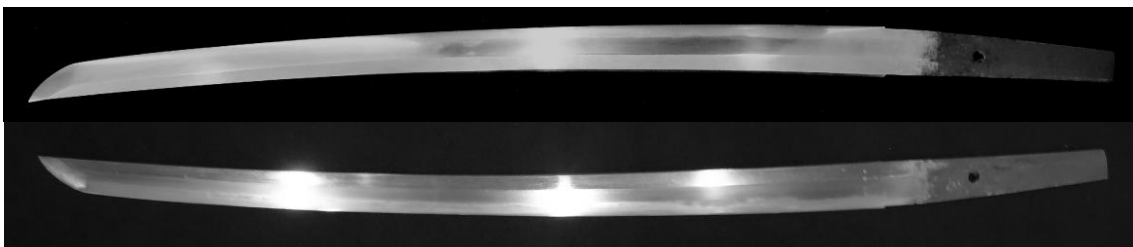
We will now examine a sword that we believe is a typical challenge for *kantei* of *Kaifu* swords. The sword has been to Japan *Shinsa* twice with differing results and also had

kantei done by a visiting expert from Japan who in about thirty seconds said; “Oh, this is a *Kaifu* sword from the mid to late 1400’s”, but also said that other experts would classify it differently.

The sword being examined is a *shinogi zukuri wakizashi* of the following description:

Details	Nagasa	Sori	Motohaba	Sakihaba	Kasane	Kitae/Boshi	Hamon	Utsuri
Ubu or o-suriage with Kiri end Ihori mune Katte sagari yasurime	50 cm	1.5 cm Saki sori	2.9 cm	2.0 cm	7 mm	Darkish tight ko-itame with chikei Ichimai with long kaeri , pointed ko-maru, hakikake	Notare based complex nie deki gunome midare with deep nioiguchi and ashi, sunagashi, kinsuji, nie and ara-nie in the hada. Tobiyaki and muniyaki	none

When viewing the sword in hand what is most noticeable is the dark, tight and fine *jigane* and the *nie* scattered in the *boshi* and along the *habuchi* as well as the dark *ara-nie* scattered in the *hada*.



Above – the sword being examined

As a result of submitting the sword for *shinsa* in Japan the sword was given one attribution to *Kaifu* (assume *Koto*, since no reference to *Shinto* or *Shinshinto* was given) and the other to *Bizen Gorozaemon Kiyomitsu (Eiroku - 1558)*. The purpose of this article is to understand why there were two attributions and to try and identify the *Kaifu* maker of this sword, since we believe this is a *Kaifu* sword. (Two of the three attributions say so)

However, this sword presents several challenges. First the sword is *mumei* or had its signature expertly removed. Second the sword was not properly polished. In order to view many of the fine details of the *jihada* a thorough cleaning and the use of magnifying equipment and photography was required to observe some of the characteristics of the sword.

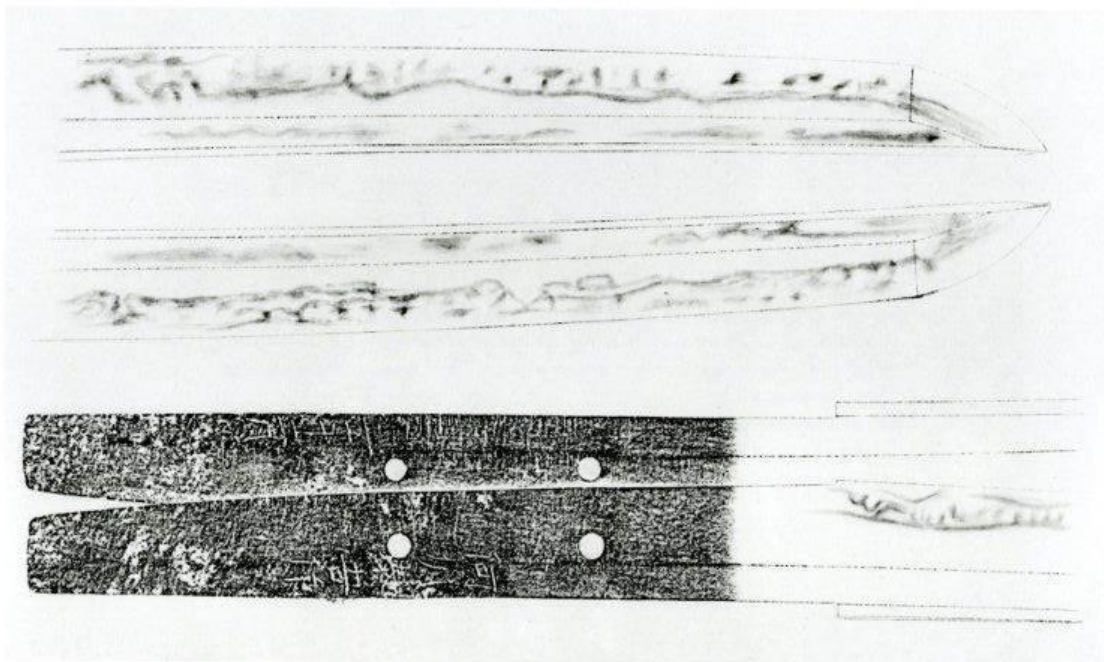
3) Examples of Kaifu swords.

In the above mentioned article from AFU there were three examples of *Kaifu* Swords, all signed, respectively Yasuyoshi, Yasuyoshi and Yasuji. The first of the three signed swords is the only *Juyo* on record we found for the *Kaifu* School and by coincidence fits the description of the sword we are examining. We also have two other *mumei* examples from the market attributed to Yasuyoshi, which fit the description of the sword we are examining as well.

In addition, we will present several other *Koto* examples from the market that do not fit the description of our sword, but demonstrate the wide variety of characteristics found in *Kaifu* Swords.

Example 1 –

This is an *ubu shinogi zukuri katana* signed “Ashu Yasuyoshi saku” on the *omote* side and “XX ni nen nigatsu hi” on the *ura* side. It has a 68 cm *nagasa* with 1.6 cm of *sakisori*. The *motohaba* is 3.0 cm, The *sakihaba* is 2.0 cm and the *nakago nagasa*, which is slightly *suriage*, is 20.2 cm and has a negligible *sori*. The sword is constructed with tight *ko-itame* with *chikei* and scattered *nie*. It is *mitsumune* and the *nagako* is *kiri* with *katte sagari*. The *jihada* is the interesting part. It is a complex combination of *notare* and *nie deki* based *gunome midare* with frequent *ashi*, *yo* and *sunagashi*. There is *tobiyaki* and *muneyaki*. The *boshi* is *ichimai* with a long *kaeri* and *hakikake*.



NBTHK *Juyo* Token report – 24th session

The sword received the designation as *Juyo Token* in the 24th *Juyo* selection and is described by the NBTHK as follows:

"The works of Ashu Kaifu School are generally referred to as mountain swords of Kaifu. Their swords are, like many of those of the wakizashi kata kiriba zukuri style, not very sophisticated. This sword bears a signature (inscription) of five letters, meaning "made by Yasuyoshi of Ashuu". The year inscribed on the back side is not legible. This sword smith has other works dated Daiei 5. So this sword was probably made around that time. There is a tale in which Kaifu's sword turned into KOU 江. There could also be a tale or tales related to the sword 地刃 Jiha and to the boshi 帽子 of these swords."

This is a very unusual *Juyo* sword description. Normally the NBTHK praises the sword and the smith, which is why it received the *Juyo* designation. This description has a negative tone prescribed to the *Kaifu* School and this sword. It also describes the "kitchen knife" and *kata kiriba zukuri* style swords of later *Kaifu*, which this sword bears no resemblance to. The *Juyo* designation appears to have been begrudgingly given to a sword from *Kaifu*!

Example 2 -

This is a sword which appeared on the market several years ago and was attributed to *Kaifu Yasuyoshi* by the NBTHK in 2004. This is an *o-suriage shinogi zukuri mumei katana*. It has a 62 cm *nagasa* with *sakisori*. The sword is constructed with *ko-itame* and *mokume* with *chikei* and scattered *nie*. It is *ihori mune* and the *nagako* is *kiri* with *katte sagari*. The *jihada* is a complex combination of *notare* and *nie deki* based *gunome midare* with frequent *ashi*, *yo* and *sunagashi*. The *boshi* is almost *ichimai* with a long *kaeri* becoming *muneyaki* and *hakikake*.

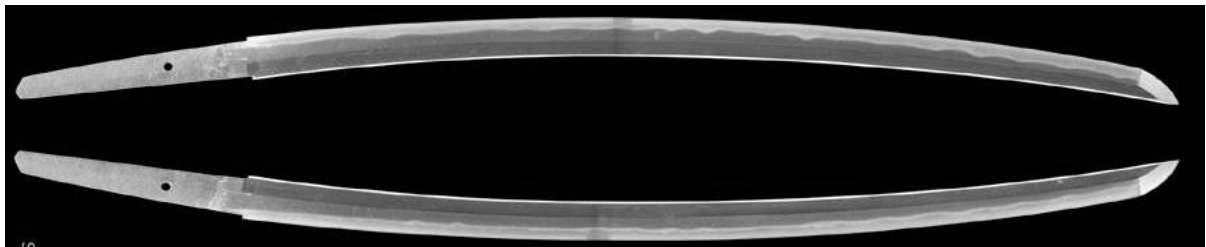


Although the sword does not have as much *muneyaki* or any *tobiyaki* as the *Juyo* sword does, the characteristics of Yoshiyasu are present.

There was also a sword sold by Nihonto.us (#S0232) which the NBTHK attributed to *Yasuyoshi*. It is a *mumei* 62 cm *katana* with a *motohaba* of 2.9 cm, *sakihaba* of 2.0 cm, a *kasane* of 6.5 mm and with “pronounced *sakisori*”. The website describes it as follows; “the *hamon* is very complex *hirosuguha* with *ashi*, *yo*, *choji*, *ko-choji*, *hako gunome*, *kinsuji*, *inazuma*, *ha nie*, *tobiyaki*, *hataraki*, *muniyaki* and areas of *sudareba*, *nado*. The *jigane* is *itame nagare* with *ji nie* and *chikei*.” The characteristics and construction of this sword is a close match to the *wakizashi* being reviewed.

Example 3 –

This is a sword from Sanmei Trading Company of Japan that is attributed only to *Kaifu*, but differs from the other two in *jigane*, *jihada* and *nakago*. It is an *ihori mune*, *shinogi zukuri mumei katana*. It has a 64 cm *nagasa* with 2.4 cm of *sakisori*. The *nagako* is *ubu* in a *iriyama* shape with *osujikai* filemarks. The *jigane* stands out in a mixture of *itame*, large *mokume* and some *ayasuji* with *chikei*. The *hamon* is a regular *notare* with *ko-gunome* and a bright *habuchi* of *ko-nie*. There are many *ashi* and *sunagashi* as in the other swords and the *boshi* is nearly *ichimai* with *hakikake*, but lacking a long *kaeri* or *muneyaki*. Overall it is a much more restrained *jihada*, less *Soshu* than the other two.

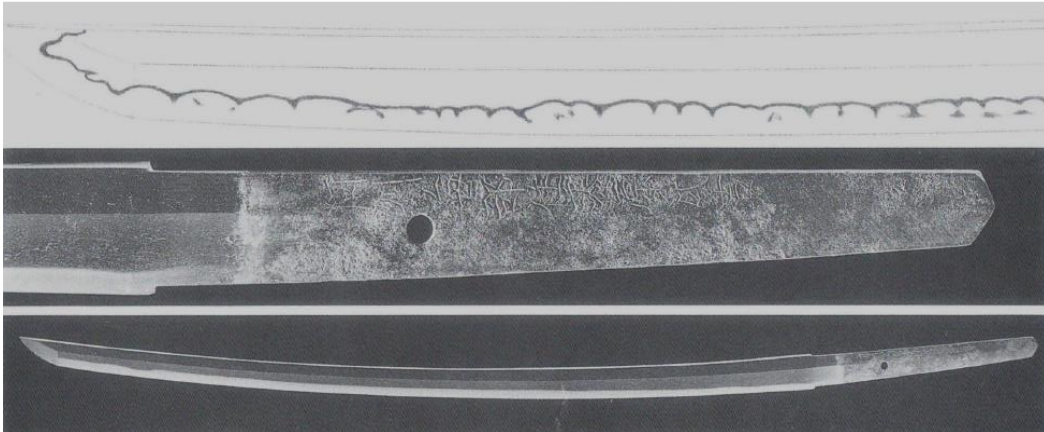


Sanmei Trading Co #S2087

Example 4 –

In the The To-Ken Society of Great Britain Nihon-To Magazine issued in June 1996 is an example of a late *Muromachi Kaifu katana* that looks similar in workmanship to a *Sue-Bizen* sword. The sword is an *ihori mune*, *shinogi zukuri katana* signed *Ashu Kaifu ju Fujiwara Ujiyoshi*. It has a 61 cm *nagasa* with 1.82cm of *sakisori*. The *motohaba* is 2.91 cm, the *sakihaba* 1.94 cm and it has a *kasane* of 7 mm. The *nagako* is *ubu* in *iriyama* shape with *katte agari* filemarks. The *jigane* is a tight mixture of *itame* and *mokume* with *ji-nie*. The *hamon* is *ko-nie* based *suguha* with *choji* and *gunome ashi* and *yo*. The *boshi* is based on *o-maru midare* with a point and short *kaeri*. This sword appears to

have borrowed heavily from the *Sue-Bizen* tradition and could be mistaken for a sword from that school.



Nhon-To Magazine Issue No. 4

Example 5 –

This *wakizashi* was offered by Nihonto.us and is shown only as an example of the immense variety of workmanship and characteristics found in *Kaifu* swords. This example is a late *Muromachi mumei wakizashi* attributed by the NBTHK to Ujiyoshi but made in the *Yamato* tradition. The sword is an *ihori mune, hira zukuri mumei wakizashi*. It has a 43 cm *nagasa* and shallow *sakisori*. The *motohaba* is 3.28 cm with a *kasane* of 7 mm. The *nagako* is *ubu* in a *kurijiri* shape. The *jigane* is mostly *masame* with prominent silver streaks throughout. (very unusual) The *hamon* is *suguha* based *ko-midare* with *sunagashi* and *ara-nie* in the *hada*. The *boshi* is *ko-maru* and a very short *kaeri*. The scattered *ara-nie* is characteristic of many *Kaifu* swords.



Nihonto.us #S0295

4) The other attribution??

As we stated before, the sword being examined also received an attribution to *Bizen Gorozaemon ju Kiyomitsu* from the *Eiroku* era (1558). So how is this possible?

Let's consider a couple of facts. First the sword is in poor polish, therefore characteristics, such as *utsuri* may not be visible. Second, the *Kaifu* School received influence from many different traditions, including *Sue-Bizen* with the arrival of Hikobei Sukesada. Considering these facts, let's review the characteristics of *Bizen Gorozaemon ju Kiyomitsu's* work. In Markus Sesko's eIndex they are recorded as follows:

“compact *sugata* with a *chū-kissaki*, somewhat standing-out *itame* mixed with *mokume* or also a fine and densely forged *ko-itame* with *ji-nie*, the *hamon* is a *hiro-suguha* or *chū-suguha* with peculiar *ko-ashi* with a compact *nioiguchi*, his peculiar *ashi* are also called „Kiyomitsu no ushi no yodare“ (清光の牛のよだれ, lit. „Kiyomitsu’s ox-saliva“)” (Markus Sesko eIndex)

Gorozaemon ju Kiyomitsu was also known to temper swords in variety of styles such as *o-notare*, *hitatsura* and *gunome-midare*, all with very active *hamon*. In the NBTHK Token Bijutsu # 427 & 467 there is an example of a *Katana* that is forged in tight *ko-itame* with *chikei*. It is tempered in *gunome-midare* and *ko-choji* with much *ashi*, *sunagashi*, *yo*, *tobiyaki* and *hakikake* in the *boshi*. *Nie* is scattered throughout the *hada*. With the exception of the *ichimai boshi* and *muneyaki* it is similar to our subject sword and most of these characteristics can be seen in the sword we are examining. What is not consistent is the lack of *utsuri* in our subject sword as well as other *Kaifu* swords. This would generally preclude an attribution to a *Bizen* smith.

However, it is interesting to note that the third (and last) generation of *Kaifu* Yasuyoshi also worked during the same time period as Gorozaemon ju Kiyomitsu. (*Eiroku* – 1558).

5) Conclusion

Based on the description of the *Juyo* and other Yasuyoshi swords described above we believe an attribution to an early generation of Yasuyoshi is reasonable. We also believe that if the sword were properly polished and resubmitted for *shinsa*, that this attribution would be upheld and possibly upgraded to a *tokubetsu hozon* certificate. *Koto Kaifu* swords are very rare and those in good condition are worthy of respect. Although the School is not well known and even derided, the fact that it produces interesting and well-made examples of *wakimono* with mixed traditions can provide us with hours of enjoyable (often frustrating) research and study. It is for this purpose, as Westerners, we love and study *Nihonto*.

Acknowledgements:

The authors would like to thank Fred Weisberg for kindly providing us with a copy of the *Juyo* Document and to Prof. Yukihsa Nogami for translating the strange comments of the *Juyo* certificate. Prof. Nogami told us that the KOU in the document apparently means that the sword transformed itself in a big river.

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