

Real-Life kantei-of swords, part 10: Addendum to the article “Real challenge -kantei Wakimono Swords ”

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Introduction: In a recent article (ref 1) we tried to identify a sword which was unusual for three reasons:

First it was a *wakimono*, that is, a sword from a school that does not belong to one of the famous five *Den* (*Bizen, Mino, Yamato, Yamashiro, Soshu*)

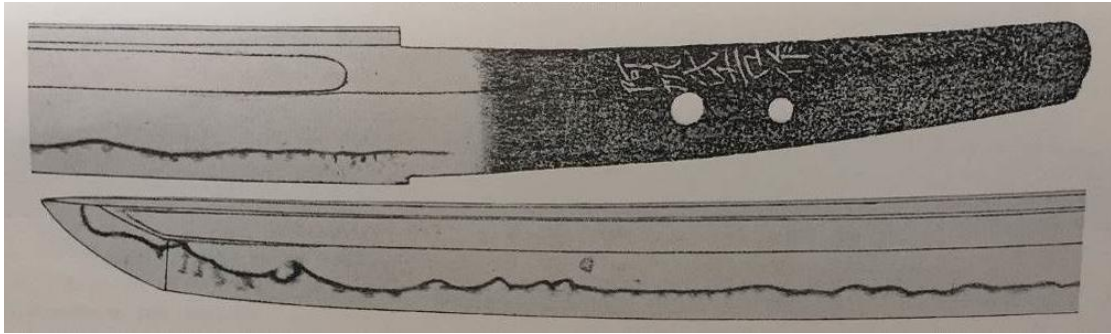
Second it was identified as *Kaifu* by the NBTHK having received a *Hozon* certificate, but also identified as *Bizen Gorozaemon Kiyomitsu* by the NTHK, for reasons described in the article. Although we understood the NTHK attribution we believed the *Kaifu* attribution was more appropriate due to the other *Kaifu* swords we reviewed and their similar characteristics to the one we presented.

Third was our perplexity as to why the Japanese disdain *Kaifu* swords.

After the article was completed and published we discovered a few more examples of published *Koto Kaifu* swords, one of which was a *Meibutsu* called the “*Iwakiri*” which was formally owned by Miyoshi Nagayoshi (1522-1564). In fact, we discovered some additional interesting information about this school (ref 3) we would like to share with the readers in this addendum. We also believe we know which smith from the *Kaifu* School produced our sword. As is often the case, the *Kantei* certificates frequently only identify the school and not the smith, or if the smith is identified the generation is not given. We pointed this out in two previous articles (refs 4 and 5), suggested that this can be a source of fun to ascertain which smith produced the sword, although this may be considered pretentious, due to the limited experience most of us Westerners have.

Additional examples of *Kaifu* swords

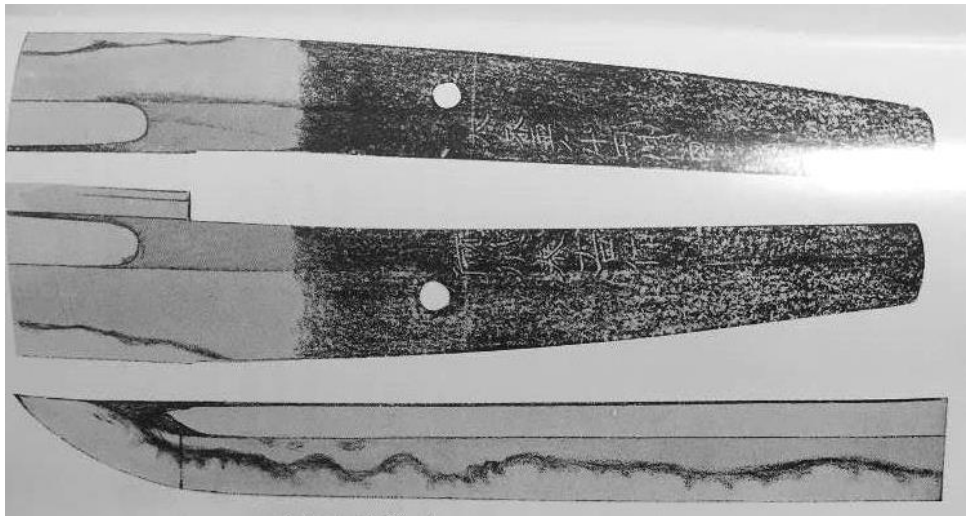
Figure 1 shows an *oshigata* signed *Ashu Ju Ujiyoshi saku* that is a *Meibutsu*, called “*Iwakiri*”. In our previous article (ref 1) we presented an *oshigata* of a *Kaifu* swordsmith that was awarded JUYO status, however, this new *oshigata* is more important because this sword has historical context and is considered a *Meibutsu* although it is not registered in the *Kyoho Meibutsu*. (more written on it below.) Unfortunately, we have no other information other than the fact it was made in the *Eisho* era and named the “stone cutter” (“*Iwakiri*”). The existence of such a sword increases our perplexity as to why the Japanese dislike *Kaifu* swords. The sword bears some similarity to the Juyo sword discussed in our previous article (1) and comes from the same era. Ujiyoshi was the father of Yasuyoshi.



Nihonto Zuikan Koto by Kataoka

Figure 1

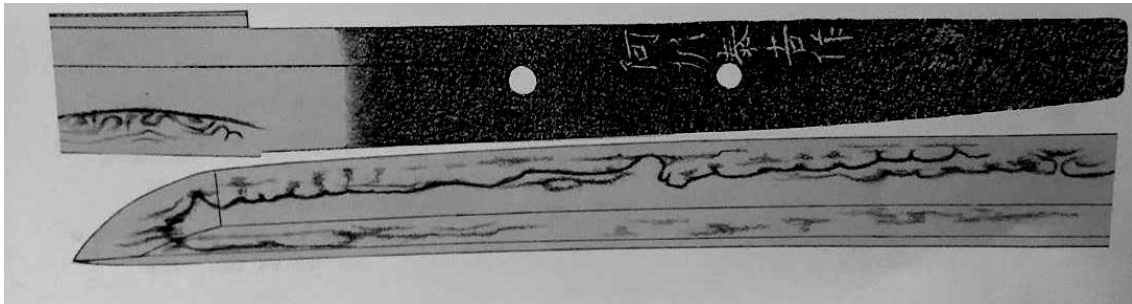
Figure 2 shows the *oshigata* of another *kaifu* blade *Ashu Yasuyoshi Saku* and is dated *Daiei Gonen Nigatsu Hi* (second month of 1525). Comparing the description of this sword with the description of the *Juyo* sword and of the *mumei* subject sword of article (ref 1) we can see that it is very likely made by the same smith.



Nihon to Koza Koto part 3 - AFU

Figure 2

Figure 3 shows another *oshigata* of the *Juyo* sword studied in the previous article. The *Kaifu* blade is signed *Ashu Yasuyoshi Saku*. The blade is dated, but the dated is illegible, but attributed to the *Muromachi* era. This *oshigata* is better than the previous one. Comparing the description and *oshigata* of this sword with the *mumei* subject sword in our previous article as well as comparing it to the *Juyo* example, we see the common characteristics of Yasuyoshi in all three swords.



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Figure 3

Further Clarification on prior Article

In the prior article, we were perplexed by why the *Juyo* description (24th *Juyo setsume*) was negative about a sword that was just granted *Juyo* status. With great appreciation to Markus Sesko, who elaborated on part of the *Juyo* description in a *Nihonto* Message Board (NMB) in a Post from 21st October 2016 - 10:20 PM.

“The Kaifu School is very interesting and I did some research on it a while ago. A theory says that the “**resemblance to Go**” (i.e. what the 24th *Juyo setsume* actually means, **not “transformed itself into a big river”** as mentioned in the newsletter) goes back to the fact that the former owner of the Iwakiri, Miyoshi Nagayoshi (1522-1564) had the Kaifu master smith Ujiyoshi, who worked for him, study the originals. This approach is supported by the “fact” that Nagayoshi was known for owning two great Soshu meibutsu, the Miyoshi-Masamune and the Miyoshi-Go, which were both unfortunately damaged in the Great Meireki Fire of 1657. “

This makes much more sense and provides a compliment to the sword that it has “a resemblance to Go”. This also demonstrates the challenge with translating “*Nihonto Japanese*”. To Japanese speakers not familiar with the history or specific *Nihonto* context of a phrase, it often appears as confusing or unintelligible.

To help further understand why the *Kaifu* swordsmiths are indeed not well considered in Japan we looked at the lineages shown in the figure below (ref 2) and examined the ratings of all the smiths described in our articles.

In the *Tosho Zenshu* (ref 7), there are four Ujiyoshi working in *Oei* (1394), *Bun Mei* (1492) *Eisho*(1504) *Tensho* (1573). Except for the *Bun Mei* smith that is rated *chu* (middle) the others are rated as ordinary.

In the same book there are three Yasuyoshi (three generations) listed working in *Bunmei* , *Eisho* and *Eiroku* (1558) . We think the our example is from the second or the third generation. Note that in the lineages chart below the second and the third

generations are shown as a single generation. In any case the first generation is rated as *gyo* (good), the other generations as *Chu* (average).

In general, the smiths are rated very low. One exception is Yasunaga who is rated Excellent and apparently has a *Juyo* sword. We have not encountered any of his works yet.



Lineage of Ujiyoshi Smiths - Nihon to Koza Koto part 3 - AFU

Conclusion

In comparing the *oshigata* of the five *Kaifu* examples that we have presented (three in the previous article (ref 1) and two in this addendum) it is apparent that the *hamon* and other *jihada* activities of *Yasuyoshi* are different from the other *Kaifu* smiths. In comparing these examples with our *mumei* subject sword, we conclude that the sword presented in our previous article (ref 1) is by *Yasuyoshi* during the *Muromachi* era.

In addition, we believe the common attributes used to describe *Kaifu* smiths are inaccurate. As stated in our previous article, the *Kaifu* swords need to be divided into three categories, *Koto*, *Shinto* and all other. Most of the material we have read describes *Kaifu* smiths from the *Shinto* or *ShinShinto* era. In reference 2 we find the statement “the *Kaifu* smiths prospered in the *Shinto* period and beyond, producing *YAMAGATANA* (woodsman hatchet) used by hunters. These were very keen edged, but the *kitae* (forging) was the same as the *kitae* for *HOCHO* (kitchen knives)” (ref 2) This statement is only relevant to the *Shinto* and later smiths. The *Koto Kaifu* smiths were much closer in style to the smiths of *Yamashiro* or *Soshu*. The same applies to the statement about *Kaifu* swords being rustic in nature. This does not apply to the *Koto* blades we have studied. It is a pity that there isn’t more written about these early *Kaifu* smiths. From the examples, we have seen they are both interesting and well crafted, but not well documented.

References

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2. Honma Junji and Koizume Hisao, Nihon To Koza Vol IX Koto Kantei Part 3. (Translated by Harry Afu Watson), AFU RESEARCH ENTERPRISES, INC. Rio Rancho, New Mexico USA, pages 110-123
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4. W.B. Tanner and F.A.B. Coutinho, Real life Kantei, part 8:Oei Bizen Swords - What we see and what we read. Newsletter of the Japanese Sword Society of the US, 48(3) 6-11
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6. Kataoka NihonTo Zuikan Koto, page 947
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