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 opponent’s 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

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. Yatsuhashi
  - 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