

A History of One Sword
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Many articles and books which discuss the katana will begin with the statement that the sword is the “soul of the samurai” without further elaboration. The reader may even be left to draw the conclusion that the sword, his weapon, is as important as his soul. The Japanese sword is the metaphorical goal in the cultivation of the warrior spirit. It is a unification of contradictory elements to form an incorruptible and eternal force.

The sword must fulfill the practical requirements of unbreakability, provided by the soft yet tough metal, iron, which can absorb the impact of a sudden blow. To implement the strategy of seizing the first opportunity to attack, the warrior’s weapon must also have excellent cutting power provided by steel. Durable iron is wrapped with tough steel and forged countless time to make the polarized elements complement one another. Thus, the sword is the unity of attack, cutting, and defense, blocking.

Every sword is the smith’s accomplishment of harmonizing all elements. Fire used to make the iron malleable is fueled with a pine charcoal: **wood**. Before every firing the metal is coated with a mixture of straw-ash and clay: **earth**. The creation of the cutting edge by heating the blade to a critical temperature with the aid of bellows: **wind**. Lastly, the quenching process of the malleable metal and the polishing of the sword at its completion: **water**. Throughout the roughly 50 day process, the smith and his assistants isolate themselves, maintain their purity and observe dietary restrictions. Once, his task is complete the smith must scrutinize the blade for flaws (kizu) just as a samurai must constantly reflect on and correct his own imperfections. Rough polishing may be needed to adjust the thickness of the metal before it is given to a specialist polisher to give it a bright finish.

I have greatly simplified an amazingly complex and at times secretive process to give an idea of how valuable each handmade blade was to the feudal warrior. The focus of this essay will be the Sesshu (Settsu) sumi (or jyu) Ikeda Kijinmaru Kunishige the beloved sword of Saitou Hajime and the fascinating lineage of its creator. The blade is believed to be lost. It appeared on the list of swords which sustained damage during the Ikedaya Raid.

Commentary by "S.K."...
Settsu no kuni (Sesshu) is what nowadays is Osaka and some parts of Hyogo

Prefecture. Just as a curiosity, Ito Kashitaro changed his name to Ito Settsu when he departed from the Shinsengumi.

NAME

Sesshu is the name of the place. Sesshu is also known as Settsu.

Sumi (or jyu) is "lives in".

Ikeda (Family name) Kijinmaru (meaning "fierce god's son"; smith's given name when he was a young boy) Kunishige (smith's given name when he became an established sword smith, or inherited his master's given name) is the name of the smith

LENGTH WEIGHT

2 shaku 3 sun 1 bu (69.827 cm)

"made on Ten'na 2nd,70cm length" or the second year of the Japanese year name (nengo) Ten'na Era

<http://www4.ocn.ne.jp/~ikkaku/138saito.htm>

Tennna is the incorrect spelling, should be Ten'na for the year Ten-wa (or pronounce Ten'na)1681. The second year would be 1682. The length of the sword was originally indicated to be 3-sun 1 minute. However, if the blade was made in the Shinto era then it could not have possibly been forged in 1681. My argument is based on the estimated dates of the swordsmith's father.

ESTIMATED CREATION DATE

The blade was created during the Shinto era. The world of sword appraisal is highly technical and it is necessary to understand the time periods.

Japanese Art Periods (compiled for arts and crafts by the Agency for Cultural Affairs of the Japanese Government)		Sword Creation Periods
Kamakura	1185-1332	Koto ('Old Sword') Period (Pre-Edo Swords before 1600)
Nambokucho	1333-91	
Muromachi	1392-1572	
Edo	1600-1867	Shinto ('New Sword') Period (1597-1780) Shinshinto ('Recent Sword' or 'new-new sword') Period (1781-1876)
Meiji	1868-1912	

The most important development of the Shinto Era is the daisho "big-little", katana and wakizashi combination. The Shinshinto period was known for the revival of Koto Period sword style.

Commentary by "S.K."...

According to my source, it is from the Tenwa Era, lineage of Mita, called as Choubee, later a disciple of Nakakawachi Kunisuke, living in Ikeda, Osaka.

It goes like: Kunisuke (from Kan-ei Era, region of Yamashiro, living in Ise, Kobe) -
> Kunisuke (from Man-ji Era) -> Kunishige. The lineage I have here shows
Kunishige with three other smiths: Kunisuke, Kunishige, Sukeshige, Kunitake.

CLASSIFICATION

The aesthetical value of the smith Kunishige is Jo-josaku. There is more than one rating system. The designation of Jo-josaku is based on the Fujishiro system, which focuses on the sword smith and NOT the blade itself as seen in the widely used NBTHK and NTHK origami system.

Chu Saku - "Average Made"

Chu Jo Saku - "Above Average Made"

Jo Saku - "Superior Made"

Jo Jo Saku (Jo-josaku) - "Above Superior Made" 2nd highest

Sai Jo Saku - "Most Superior Made"

<http://home.earthlink.net/~steinrl/origami.htm>

The sword's sharpness or cutting ability is graded as a wazamono.

Saijo O-wazamono - (best cutting swords)

O-wazamono - (excellent cutting swords)

Ryo-wazamono - (very good cutting swords)

Wazamono - (good cutting swords) 4th highest

Test cutting, tameshigiri, was performed on the bodies of criminals. The sword was judged on how many bodies were severed with each type of cut. Most cuts were executed horizontally across the torso. Some focused on wrist, knee and ankle joints, diagonal cuts starting at the shoulder and vertical cuts starting at the head.

<http://www.geocities.com/alchemyst/sharp.htm>

SWORDSMITH

We know his name was Kunishige. To learn about Kunishige we must study his more famous father Kunimitsu who used the name Shintogo (commonly referred to as Shintogo Kunimitsu). Let's take another step back and mention Kunimitsu's father Kunitsuna. If you are thoroughly confused then calm down hopefully the diagram below will help.

Koto Period	
Kunitsuna (aka Awadaguchi Kunitsune According to Ethel Watts Mumford)	Pupil of Kunimune (originally from Bizen) Kunitsuna moved from Awadaguchi in Kyoto to Kamakura Kunitsuna was in the Sagami Province before Masamune's birth. However, he is also considered to be one of Masamune's teachers as well.

Kunimitsu (aka Shintogo Kunimitsu)	The first to create a blade, the Midare Shintogo, in the Soshu-den (Sagami) lineage. He was definitely one of Masamune's teachers Masamune (1288-1328) is accepted by many to be the greatest swordsmith of Japan. Muramasa (16th century) is a student of Masamune.	
Kunimitsu's 3 sons		
Kunimitsu	Kunishige Smith of the Sesshu (Settsu) sumi Ikeda Kijinmaru	Kunihiro
All 3 sons usually signed their blades with "Kunimitsu" It is hard to distinguish the work of the four smiths accurately		

ESTIMATED CREATION DATE QUESTIONED

Upon examining the relationship between Kunimitsu and his student Masamune who lived between 1288-1328 then one must wonder how Kunishige, Kunimitsu's son, could have forged the Sesshu (Settsu) sumi Ikeda Kijinmaru Kunishige after 1597 (Shinto Era). Would not the blade have been born in the Koto Era?

EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITY OF KUNIMITSU'S INFLUENCE ON KUNISHIGE

"It was common for many generations to sign exactly the same way each new generation taking over the traditional family signature on the death of his father."
(Hawley 1) Signing some of one's own work under the name one's father or teacher points to not only an expression of gratitude, but a desire to memorialize and imitate him as well.

Kunishige's "blades are like those of his father, Kunimitsu." (Mumford 377). Kunihiro, Kunishige's brother, aside from minor differences were also "like the blades of his father" (Mumford 377). So to entertain how the Sesshu (Setsutsu) sumi Ikeda Kijinmaru Kunishige may have looked like, we must return to Kunimitsu and the unique features of his swords.

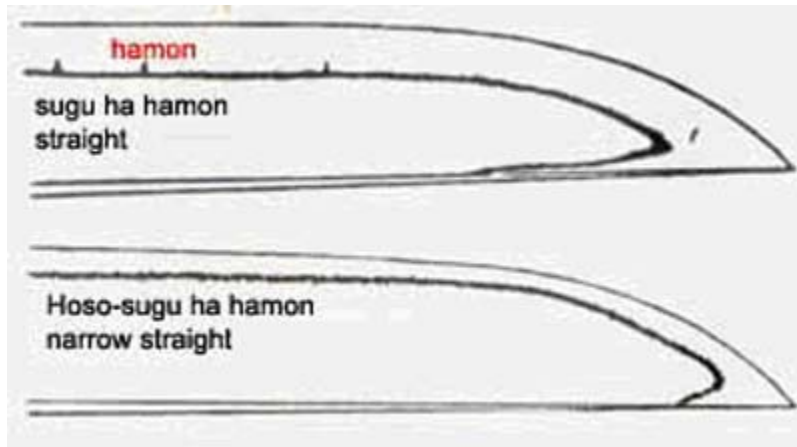
Kunimitsu specialized in tanto (short blade less than 30cm) and some tachi (slung swords worn with the edge downward, signature on the tang faces AWAY from the body when worn, tachi are longer and more curved than katana) attributed to him have survived. Shintogo Kunimitsu blades are known to have a Hosu-sugu ha hamon.

Hamon is the term for the outline on the tempered "sharp edge" of the sword known as the yakiba.

Hosu=narrow
Sugu ha=straight

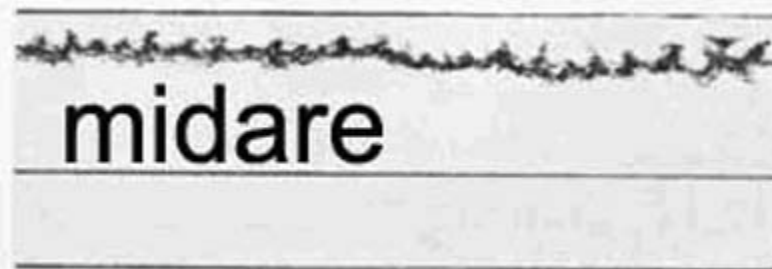
Besides Hosu-sugu ha hamon, some of his work also have the characteristic of a suguha hamon or "straight" hamon. Note how Hosu-sugu ha hamon is a more

specific term for a hamon which is both narrow and straight while sugu ha hamon does not define the width of the hamon



Like all artists, Shintogo Kunimitsu varied his work. Kunimitsu was also known to be proficient in the production of ito suguha (“thread” or thin suguha). However, the Aizu Shintogo has a broad suguha. The Aizu Shintogo appeared in Kyoho meibutsucho and the name was derived from its owner Gamo Ujisato (1556-95) a wealthy lord of Aizu. The blade left the Gamo family and was purchased by Maeda Toshitsune. “In 1702, it was presented to the shogun Tsunayoshi (1646-1709) during his visit to the Maeda domains. Thereafter it remained the property of the shogunal house.” (Earle 108)

To people who study the Soshu-den (Sagami) lineage Kunimitsu's "Midare Shintogo" tanto is very important. The tanto is believed to be the first blade produced in the Soshu-den lineage, which his own father Kunitsana helped to found. The hamon on this blade is neither hoso-sugu nor suguha it has a distinct midereba (irregular) hamon. Midareba is a very general term, komidare means small frequent irregularities, omidare has large, less frequent irregularities.



Even though we will never know exactly how the Sesshu (Settsu) sumi Ikeda Kijinmaru Kunishige may have looked like we can speculate from Kunimitsu's legacy.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE NAME "KUNIMITSU"

“When a succession took place in the shogun family it was customary for daimyo throughout Japan to present a tachi, katana or tanto with the signature Kunimitsu, the characters for which can be taken as meaning “may the fortunes of the nation prosper” by way of congratulation. The most famous Kunimitsus were of course Rai Kunimitsu and Shintogo Kunimitsu, but since the work of both these smiths is comparatively rare, it became quite usual to secure a blade which had lost its signature through shortening, have a certificate (origami) made out stating that it was the work of Rai Kunimitsu or Shintogo Kunimitsu, and present it to the new shogun. As a result there are today a great many Kunimitsu blades in a many different styles in existence, some of which have even had the signature added. Just as the daimyo had no qualms about presenting these blades to the shogun, so the shogun was happy to accept them without inquiring as to their authenticity, and it was also quite usual for them to be presented back by the shogun family to the daimyo from whom they had been received on suitable occasions.”

From the records and stories we have of Saitou he was a connoisseur who undoubtedly took great interest in the history of any weapon he possessed

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*The Japanese Book of the Ancient Sword
Ethel Watts Mumford
Journal of the American Oriental Society Vol 26 1905*

To Learn More please visit

<http://www.1to5.net/saito/arekore/kishin.html>

<http://www.3-hajime.com/aitou.html>



66. "Aizu Shinrigis." *Tamé*. By Kaminomiu. Steel. Length 25.5 cm. Late thirteenth century. Collection of Arisawa Takayoshi.

BLADE: Negligible *uchizori*; *matohata* 2.4 cm. *Hira-izutsu*, *shitsumono*.

GRAND: extremely compact *tsutome*, with frequent *shibubé*.

HAMON: *sugata*, narrow near the tang and broadening towards the point. Very active edge, rich in *tsurite* and *tsuguri*.

POINT: exceptionally fine *tsurite* turning back very sharply at the point.

TANG: *abe*, with *tsujiri* butt. *Kiri* filemarks. Signed *Arisawa* in center, beneath the *metagana*.

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Earle, Joe
The Japanese Sword
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