

The Ayumi Chronology

By

Ono Yoshimitsu

1975 (Showa 50)

In the start of March of 1975 I received my swordsmith's license from the Agency of Cultural Affairs. My teacher said, "Your license has arrived". When he passed it to me, my heart began to dance. From that instant on I was a swordsmith. That evening, my fellow apprentice Shinohara Koji (Yoshihiro) invited me out for a drink. While we were drinking we celebrated by talking about the past and future and this and that about swords. On the counter we had created a row of about 15 empty sake bottles. When I was about to leave, my teacher came in with a customer of his. He said, "Today is a celebration. I will pay your bill. You just take care on your way home". I replied, "Thank you", bowed deeply and left. About twenty meters down the road, I found my fellow apprentice lying out in the road completely drunk. We were both very happy. Since that time, although we have been drinking several times, we have never been quite as drunk as that.

Then came the time of my first entry to the *shinsaku-meitoten* exhibition. On the advice of my teacher and *sempai*, I was going to reproduce a copy of the national treasure *tachi* by Yoshifusa from the *Kanzan Oshigata* scrolls. This *tachi* had a *bo-hi* and a *koshi-hi*. To be able to copy the shape alone correctly would be a dream come true for me. Some years later I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to be able to inspect the original first hand. At the time I was very surprised—whilst there were some good and bad points, the *ura* of the *tachi* did not have a *koshi-hi*. The *Kanzan Oshigata* scrolls only showed the *omote*. I had still been honoured with and happy to receive the Award for Excellence. I remember this sword best of all. This was the only sword that I completed during that year.

1976 (Showa 51)

I was still forging four swords from the previous year. Of these four, I took two to a polisher for finishing. When I thought they were in about their final stages of polish, I telephoned the polisher Nagayama Kokan and asked if I could come and see the progress at his studio in Oiso, Kanagawa prefecture. At that time, they had only been polished as far as *uchigumori*, but I could see the *hamon* and *jigane* clearly even though they required further polishing.

Nagayama sensei whilst showing me the blades said, "This one is better than your last years entry, but this other one is not very good. I can polish it to try to make it look reasonable if you want". When I looked at it I could see it wasn't good. In places on the *hamon* the *nie* died and were not clear. The *jigane* was generally weak all along the blade. He said, "This one would best be destroyed." I replied, "Yes, I agree." Using Nagayama sensei's vice and iron saw, I cut down from the *mune*, past the *shinogi* to the *hamon* in two places, then smashed it onto a rock in his garden and broke it into three pieces.

While I was looking at the broken blade, Nagayama sensei said, “When you have to destroy a blade you are destroyed a little too. If I foot the costs of the *habaki*, *shirasaya* and the polishing bill, that would help you out wouldn’t it?” Nagayama sensei’s goodwill even now is always in the back of my mind. That time, just before I became an independent smith, was a time when I was in need of money.

However, the good blade that he said was better than the previous year’s still only managed to receive the Award for Effort.

1977 (Showa 12)

In the fall of 1976 I became an independent smith and built my own forge in Niigata. This year’s blade was the first entry that I had made in my own forge.

Until then, I had not realised that there was no one around for me to consult, or any of my teacher’s blades for comparison. There was no one to discuss it with either. This was a period of concern and a large obstacle for me to overcome. I think this is the reason it is said that when a swordsmith first goes independent his ability wavers.

As for the *shinsaku-meitoten*, my first entry of an *utsushi-mono* had been a good challenge, so I thought I would try to make another sword from the *Kanzan oshigata* book. It was a *tachi*, 2 *shaku*, 3 *sun*, 4 *bu* (70.9cm) in length with 1 *sun* (3.03cm) *sori* and a single ‘*ichi*’ inscribed on the tang. I wanted to make a copy true to the original, so I inscribed an *ichi* on the *nakago*, then put my own inscription on the *mune* of the *nakago*.

Unfortunately, I could not regain the Award for Excellence.

1978 –1979 (Showa 53-54)

At an exhibition at the sword museum, my eyes were drawn to an *aoe* katana. It had an *o-suriage* shape with an undulating flamboyant *saka-choji hamon*. The katana was called *araiso*—a reefy shore. You can imagine that the *hamon* looks like waves breaking on a reefy shore.

I thought that I would like to try to copy it for this year’s *shinsaku-meitoten*. I searched for information on this katana, but I could not find an *oshigata* of it in any sword books. With no information, I could do nothing but try to make it from memory, so in the end it turned out a quite different reefy shore.

I was unable to locate the current whereabouts of my 1979 entry, but I believe that it was in the same style as the previous year’s sword.

1980 (Showa 55)

I remember this year’s entry well. However, I think it was *tachi-sugata* rather than a katana. Also, instead of *saka-choji hamon*, on this occasion I returned to a *choji hamon*.

I was now in my fourth year of being an independent smith and used to working alone, so I thought I could easily get the Award for Effort.

Around this time, I had been researching *jigane* and *hamon*. However, the desired results had not been forthcoming and all of my research blades had to be destroyed.

1981 (Showa 56)

This blade had been ordered five years earlier when I had first gone independent. It was the only order that I had received. It was from my *iaido* instructor Mr. Kawabata Terutaka. "Please make me a sword when you have time and it is convenient for you", he had said, and had paid me in advance. As I had no money at the time I was very grateful to receive the order and payment. After about four years had gone by he contacted me and said, "It's been about five years now and I am still waiting for my sword". I replied, "Actually, I am trying to make a blade right now". He asked, "What kind of blade?" I answered, "A Kanemitsu *Suijingiri ustushii-mono*. I want to try to make it at least one time". "That's good, it will probably be excellent", he said. I had the information I needed on hand and the operation went smoothly. At this time, I was making four blades to ensure a successful one for the customer. Of the four blades on this occasion, Mr. Kawabata bought one and his friend bought another.

The blade production had gone smoothly, but carving the *horimono* was very taxing. Because I was not used to carving *horimono* it took me a long time to ensure that I did not make any mistakes. It was a real test of endurance, as I did not have much experience in artistic carving. This year's entry was my sixth entry to the competition and bloomed into a return to the Award for Excellence.

1982 –1983 (Showa 57-58)

This is the year I was given the Prince Takamatsu Award. In my whole life I never thought that I would get this award. The news reached me when Shimizu Tadatsugu called my house in Tokyo and told my wife that I had won it. When she called me at my forge in Niigata and told me, I thought it was a joke so I called Shimizu to make sure. "Well done Ono, keep up the good work", he said. Those words of blessing still ring in my ears today. That year's entry to the competition was representative of the results of my research of *hamon* since becoming an independent smith.

Through my research of the *juka-choji hamon* of the Ichimonji school, I realised that *juka-choji ashi* are connected *yo*. It is said that *yo* are cut *ashi*, however, I think it is the opposite; I think that *ashi* are several *yo*. So the heart of *yo* activity lays in the application of the clay for *ashi*. It is hard to get good results during research when making swords, so I think there is also an element of luck involved. My 1983 entry, similar to the previous one, which was also a *tachi*, was given The Chairman of The Agency for Cultural Affairs Award.

1984 (Showa 59)

I first saw the *Yamatorige* about fifteen years earlier at the opening of the All Japan Taikai in Tokyo. There were many famous blades on display, but to me, in comparison with all the others the *Yamatorige* looked bright and sparkling. It can be said that this *tachi* has all *hamon* within it. It is complicated and always changing. People looking at it were overwhelmed by it. However, while looking at it I was inspired. Recreating this kind of *hamon* was impossible, although I thought I could get close. I thought, “What smiths make Bizen Ichimonji their target?” Around that time as an independent smith, I was happy making katana only for research, so I probably thought that I needed a challenge.

This was the turning point of my swordmaking life. I immediately bought the *Kanzan Oshigata* scrolls and everyday for five years I searched for an approach to making a comparable *hamon*. Through repeated experiments implementing various thoughts and ideas I estimated that I also needed about three more years of experience before I could achieve the *hamon* of this *tachi*.

After seeing the *Yamatorige*, a life of inspiration and tough challenges was the probable path of my life.

1985-1986 (Showa 60-61)

The entries for 1985 and 1986 were not *utsushi-mono*, but they were *juka-choji tachi*, neither of which were titled. This was contrary to my 1984 entry sword *Yamatorige*, which was highly debated. I kept hearing “*utsushi-mono* as an entry to the shinsakumeitoten is strange. It’s foolish to do because even if you make a good copy it will never be better than the original...” On the other hand, there were many people who had said to me that they thought my *utsushi-mono* was very good. I had not experienced such strong opinions while receiving Awards for Effort.

While making *utsushi-mono*, I was faced with the limits of gathered data. I researched from various angles trying to ensure the sword’s distinctive features and dimensions (*nagasa*, *sori*, *hamon*, *moto-haba*, *moto-kasane*, *saki-haba*, *saki-kasane*, *nakago* and so forth) were all stored in my memory while making little adjustments here and there and refining the plan. Then I would put it into action. There are swordsmiths who produce *utsushi-mono* exactly in their current dimensions. I think this is good to do too. Either way it requires skill and experience. If they say it is bad to make *utsushi-mono* of old *meito*, then I believe apprentices spending their life copying their teacher’s workmanship must also be wrong. It is said that apprentices only have half the skill of their teacher, so if they spend their lives following their teacher’s workmanship they will never succeed them. Swords produced after the war and swords produced during the war are different. The blades produced after the war were reborn as art objects with the shape changing from the previous period. In 1954, swords that had been produced as weapons were outlawed. That was now thirty-eight years ago. When you look at the Japanese sword’s thousand-year history, today’s swords are still in an infantile stage. I believe as children always look to their parents, old *meito* will be always be the favoured originals. I also think that as a way of improving skill, making *ustushi-mono* is a good method of study. I think this kind of study is pertinent for developing personal styles of workmanship.

1987 (Showa 62)

On the 3rd of February 1987 a great lover of Japanese swords—the crown Prince Takamatsu—passed away. I remember I had another *Yamatorige* in mid-production for my entry for the *shinsaku-meitoten* when he died.

One of my memories of Prince Takamatsu was in 1982 when I had won the Takamatsu Award for the first time. We were at the event and I was being introduced to him when he asked, “Are you managing to make a living making swords?” Being nervous I could only manage to stammer, “Yes”. Shimizu Tadatsugu, standing next to me at the time jumped in and saved me, saying, “He has done ok so far!” My fondest memory of Prince Takamatsu is that I was grateful that he understood the life of a swordsmith. This year due to the Princess’s goodwill in place of her husband, I was to receive the Prince Takamatsu Award once again. I am eternally grateful of the late Prince’s kindness.

On the 2nd of June of that year at the awards ceremony I was surprised to also be elevated to the rank of *mukansa*. The next morning I took my wife and children to pay our respects to my former teacher Yoshihara Yoshindo at his home to inform him of my promotion, and thank him for everything. Yoshindo and his wife were very happy for me.

1988 (Showa 63)

From this year onwards I was to display in the *mukansa* category of the *shinsaku-meitoten*. Even though becoming *mukansa* was something of a relief for me, I did not want people to be able to say that I had become complacent. The making of the *Yamatorige* had become my trademark.

I always begin making my *shinsaku-meitoten* entry in the January of the same year. The first stage forging, second stage forging, *sunobe*, *hi-zukuri* and so forth all continue until around the end of February or start of March when *yaki-ire* takes place. On this occasion, I could not get any decent results. One day, as the time for entry was approaching fast, I had my last two forged blades waiting for *yaki-ire*. With the first sword, I made a mistake during *yaki-ire*. The moment I put it into the water, I heard ping!—the sound of a *hagire* (crack) occurring in the blade.

At that time I had 99 percent given up on entering the competition. Including the *hagire* blade, my total amount of failures had grown to 11. The next day I was to quench the last blade. I carefully applied the clay to the blade and dried it in front of the fire. I piled up the hearth with *yaki-ire* charcoal and lit the fire. Gradually the tension began to mount. This was my last chance. I had to pull a good sword from this fire. With my left hand I kept the rhythm of the bellows while drawing the blade through the charcoal over and over. Gradually the blade turned red and then crimson.

The conditions for making good *juka-choji*, when performing *yaki-ire*, depend on the critical point of the temperature at the time. Tension was at a maximum high. All my nerves were transfixed onto the crimson blade. The chance I had to plunge it into the water could be lost in the blink of an eye. The crimson blade made a dull sound as it was

extinguished in the dark water trough. The feelings that run through a swordsmith the very moment the red-hot blade is completely submersed in the trough are very complicated.

Happily, this blade was a great success and made it just in time for the competition.

1989 (Heisei gannen)

The crowning of a new emperor also gave me the feeling of the beginning of a new era. Until now, I had made many *tachi* entries to the competition. However, this time I was going to enter an *o-kissaki*, *suriage* shaped blade with a *juka-choji hamon*. *Juka-choji* blades in this shape are quite a rarity.

This blade displayed *utsuri* about 5 sun (15cm) from the *habaki-moto*. Until now blades with an emphasised high *hamon* did not usually produce *utsuri*. When it comes to *Bizen-to* this element is a necessity. Usually for *utsuri* to be produced the *hamon* has to be kept low, but with my recent skills for flamboyant *juka-choji hamon* I had put all of my effort into producing this blade. From now on this characteristic of *juka-choji* and *utsuri* displayed together would be the theme of my research.

1990 (Heisei 2)

Since the production of my first *Yamatorige utsushi-mono*, I had produced four as entries to the *shinsaku-meitoten* within a seven-year period. A favourite with laymen and connoisseurs alike, it was a popular order.

With special order blades, well-studied people have their own personal preferences: asking for swords in this particular style or *utsushi-mono* of specific *meito*. Since the Heian period (794-1185) swordsmiths have accepted orders for making katana. It can be said about the many extant *meito* that they all have very distinctive traits that display the periods and styles well. However, swordsmiths are not the cause of a particular period's social conditions, the social conditions of the period effect the swordsmith's workmanship.

The force required for sword evolution comes from swordsmiths accepting orders in the styles that the customers require. I believe that *koto-meito* styles came from actual fighting, a necessity in the pursuit of optimum functionality, and display the results of social conditions at that time. With *gendaito*, there are no orders through the necessity of actual fighting, so no new shapes or forms have evolved and all forms of *hamon* already exist.

If you were to make a new shaped Japanese sword and *hamon* it could not be on the basis of being classed as a *nihonto*, so I feel there is nothing to gain from doing it. Nowadays people have the opportunity to see good old blades at many art galleries, museums, *kantei kai* and so forth. In the past I don't think it was so easy. However, whenever I did see a good old sword I wanted to aspire to that kind of work. This is how modern swords will establish their own special character: through the inspiration of old masterpieces.

1991 (Heisei 3)

In the three years since I was asked to do this private exhibition, I thought, “What will catch people’s eye?” I decided to make a large *o-dachi* 3 *shaku*, 2 *sun* (97cm) in length. To this day, it is still the longest blade I have ever made. I had to be extra careful while performing the quenching process. Because of the length of the blade, it had to have a strong *nakago* of around 8 *sun* (24cm) in length. In addition, the tool to hold it during *yaki-ire* was 2 *shaku* (60.5cm), so in total it came to around 6 *shaku* (182cm). I was going to have to maneuver this with one hand while trying to keep the temperature from the *kissaki* all the way to the base even. It was a tough job!

Happily, it turned out to be a great success. When it returned from the polisher I carefully scrutinized it all over, but there was not a single thing wrong with it.

Epilogue

It is my goal in life to produce Bizen-den *meito*.

In Okayama prefecture, the home of Bizen-den, the wonderful Hayashibara Art Gallery is located. It has been a great pleasure fulfilling my dream of presenting a display of my work there. I am completely indebted and grateful to the Director of the Hayashibara foundation, and to the Director and support staff of the Hayashibara Art Gallery. I am also deeply grateful for all the advice and support from Kashima Susumu sensei. I would also like to thank all the people involved in the production and editing of the catalogue.

If I think back to the days when I was learning Bizen-den from my two teachers, Yoshindo and Shoji (Kuniie III) Yoshihara, I realise how quickly the last 20 years or so have passed. Until now, I was oblivious to everything, completely immersed in my work. Now, looking back after all these years, I feel I should present an exhibition of the forty-two swords displayed here (Ono Yoshimitsu's World of Juka-choji). However, it would have been tedious to the viewer if the blades for this exhibition were all variations of *juka-choji*. I had to provide some variety, so I came up with the idea of dividing the exhibition into two parts: *Pursuing Koto Bizen*, and *The Ayumi Chronology*.

Pursuing Koto Bizen is a display of various *juka-choji* works after the development of my *juka-choji*.

The Ayumi Chronology documents my entries to the *shinsaku-meitoten* (The annual exhibition of newly made swords) from 1975 To 1991.

This exhibition is the result of my ongoing research. Please examine my works and, if you have any criticisms or comments, I would be happy to hear them. After seeing this collection of my works together, I feel that it is very difficult to make satisfying pieces. I intend to continue to devote my efforts to the search for Koto-Bizen. I would deeply appreciate any advice or help should anyone wish to comment.

Lastly, I would like to extend deep heartfelt thanks to all of the sword specialists for their support.

Ono Yoshimitsu
Fall 1991

Ono Yoshimitsu Profile

Yoshimitsu's real name is Yoshikawa Mitsuo, but when making swords he uses the swordsmith's art name of Ono Yoshimitsu. He is the third son of Sukasa (father) and Saki (mother) Ono. He was born on the 16th of October, 1948 in Kurosaki city, Niigata prefecture. Yoshimitsu attended Ono elementary school and Kurosaki primary school before graduating from Niigata Prefectural High School of Commerce. He went on to enter Nippon University's Agricultural Veterinary Department. It was while he was a student that he developed an interest in Japanese swords. In 1969 he joined the swordsmith studio of Yoshindo and Shoji Yoshihara and by March 1975 he had received his swordsmith's licence from the Agency of Cultural Affairs. In the same year he received the Award for Excellence at the 11th Shinsaku-meitoten (the annual exhibition of modern swords held at the Japanese Art Sword Museum).

In March of 1976 Yoshimitsu opened his own forge in Kurosaki city, Niigata. In October 1977 he married his wife Yoshikawa Kazue and they set up home in Tokyo. From the 12th *Shinsaku-meitoten* in 1977, to the 15th *Shinsaku-meitoten* in 1980, he won the Award for Effort every year. The next year at the 16th *Shinsaku-meitoten* he received the Award for Excellence. Then, in 1982 at the 17th *Shinsaku-meitoten*, he won the Prince Takamatsu Award. Yoshimitsu then won the Chairman of the Agency for Cultural Affairs Award in 1983, and for the next four consecutive years won the Prince Takamatsu Award. It was during this time (1984) that Yoshimitsu received an invitation from Japan's premier shrine, Ise shrine, to produce a sacred sword for the shrine's 61st shrine reconstruction ceremonies. Following his successes at the annual sword exhibition he was elevated to the rank of *mukansa* (above competition level) in 1987, and has displayed swords in the *mukansa* category every year since. In 1989 Yoshimitsu received yet another invitation from Ise shrine to make a sacred spear for the ceremonies of the 61st reconstruction of the shrine.

Glossary

A

Ashi Literally legs, usually nioi, extending from the hamon to the cutting edge.

Ayasugi-hada Wavy grain pattern in the ji resembling a Japanese cedar grain pattern.

Ayumi Step by step (footsteps)

B

Bakufu (lit. Tent government)

Bizen Archeaic province of Japan, modern day Okayama precture

Bizen-to Swords produced in Bizen

Bizen-zori Deep curvature close to the tang area of the sword; also known as koshi-zori

Bo-hi Long groove, carved into the blade, often mistakenly referred to as a blood groove

Bonji Sanscrit characters carved into the blade invoking Buddhist deities.

Boshi Literally ‘cap’, the hamon formed within the kissaki

Bo-utsuri A straight formation of usturi

Bunkacho-chokan-sho The Agency for Cultural Affairs Chairman Award given at the annual swordsmiths’ exhibition.

Bushi Another term for samurai—the warrior class

C

Chikei A curved line of nie, seen in the ji

Choji abura Clove oil, used for preserving blades

Choji ashi Clove-shaped ashi

Choji midare A hamon consisting of choji shapes, but the overall line of the hamon has no definable form.

Choji midare komi A choji midare hamon that continues into the kissaki

Choji usturi Utsuri in the pattern of choji

Chokuto A straight sword, but similar in construction to the tachi

Chu-kissaki A medium sized kissaki, in relation to the overall size of the blade

Chu-suguha A medium-sized straight hamon

D

Daisho A pair of swords in matching fittings worn together: dai- being the long sword, and sho- being the shorter companion sword. Only the samurai were permitted to wear them during the Edo period.

Doryokusho The Award for Effort at the NBTHK’s annual swordsmiths’ exhibition.

E

Eto Zodiacal calender often used for date inscriptions on swords, originally from China.

F

Fudo Myo-O Buddhist deity, the immovable King of Light. Patron deity of swordsmen. Commonly used for horimono.

Fukusa Special handkerchief-like cloth used for handling blades during viewing

Funbari Used to describe a blade when it noticeably tapers between the base of the cutting edge and the tip.

Futatsuji-hi Two parallel grooves carved into the blade

G

Gendaito Japanese swords produced after 1876

Goban-kaji The swordsmiths summoned to work for the retired emperor Gotoba during his exile to Oki island

Goki shichido The five home provinces and seven main roads. Originally used for units of governmental administration. Currently used for classifying swordsmiths by region and style.

Gomabashi a horimono in the form of the ritual chopsticks used in both Shinto and Buddhist rites.

Gunome A type of hamon that undulates in a series of semi-circles

Gyo no kurikara (see kurikara)

H

Ha The cutting edge of the blade

Habaki The small metal collar (often decorated) that buffers the tsuba and secures the blade into the saya

Habaki-moto The part of the blade that sits under the habaki

Habuchi The line that divides the hamon and the ji, commonly called the nioi-guchi

Hada The steel skin of the blade, also called jihada

Hadori A polishing technique which highlights the hamon, also known as kesho

Hagire A crack in the blade rising up from the cutting edge

Haitorei The law administered in Japan 1876, banning the wearing of swords in public

Hakikake Similar to sunagashii, ashi resembling brush strokes.

Hamachi The notch where the cutting edge of the blade begins

Hamon The crystalline structure which forms along the cutting edge of a blade as a result of the hardening process

Hataraki The various activities within the hamon, created during the hardening process

Hi A groove carved into the blade for decoration or weight decreasing purposes

Hira-zukuri A sword made without any ridgelines, flat on both sides

Horimono Decorative blade carvings

I

Ichimonji A 13th C school of swordsmiths working in the Bizen tradition

Inazuma (literally, lightning) A line of nie inside the hamon resembling lightning
Iorimune A two-sided mune resembling the roof of a house
Itame-hada The wood grain pattern in the skin steel of the blade

J

Jihada The surface area of the blade between the hamon and the shinogi, see hada
Jifu-utsuri Discontinuous utsuri
Jigane The steel used for making the hada
Juka-choji Multiple grouped choji pattern

K

Kaen A type boshi that resembles burning flames
Kaeri The part of the boshi that turns back towards the tang, along the mune
Kaiken A small concealable dagger
Kakinagashi A groove that ends by tapering within the tang
Kakitoshi A type of groove that continues through the tang to the end
Kakudome A groove end that is square, usually stops just before the habaki
Kani no tsume A type of gunome resembling crabs claws
Kanmuri-otoshi-zukuri The backridge of the blade is beveled like a naginata
Kanzan oshigata A collection of four scrolls of oshigata drawn by the late Sato Kanzan.
Kanzan-sho The (Sato) Kanzan Award, one of the first prize awards given at the NBTHK's annual swordsmiths' exhibition.
Kasane The thickness of the blade
Kataochi gunome Flat topped gunome that slant in the same direction like saw teeth
Katana Curved blades worn with the cutting edge up, when thrust through the sash
Katte agari yasuri File marks on the tang that slant downward to the left
Katte sagari yasuri File marks on the tang that slant downward to the right
Kawazuko choji Tadpole shaped choji
Ken Straight ritual Chinese style sword, often associated with Fudo Myo-O
Kinsuji a small shiny line of nie inside the hamon, similar to inazuma
Kiriha-zukuri A sword made with the shinogi close to the cutting edge
Kiri yasuri File marks on the tang that are horizontal
Kissaki The tip of the blade, from the point to the yokote
Kissaki-moroha-zukuri A blade made with a double edge in the monouchi area
Ko-ashi small ashi
Kobuse The most common type of blade manufacture, in which the steel used for the cutting edge is wrapped around a lower carbon steel, then hammered out into the shape of the blade
Kobushigata choji Fist shaped choji
Ko-dachi A small tachi
Kogatana Utility knife
Koiguchi The mouth of the saya

Ko-maru A type of boshi that turns back in a small smooth circular motion
Ko-nie Small nie particles
Koshi-ba A flamboyant section of hamon at the base when compared to the rest of the blade
Koshi-bi A short type of groove carved in the blade close to the tang
Ko-shinogi The part of the shinogi that runs from the yokote to the tip in the kissaki
Koshi no haraita Wide based undulations that slope gently, usually with choji.
Koshi-zori Swords with the deepest part of the curve near to the tang
Koto (Old swords) Swords made in the pre-Edo period
Kurijiri Round-ended type of nakago, similar to the shape of a chestnut
Kurikara A horimono of a dragon wrapped around a ken, a representation of Fudo Myo-O
Kuzan-sho The (Honma) Kunzan Award one of the first prize awards given at the NBTHK's annual swordsmiths' exhibition.

M

Machi The notches that mark the end of the mune; mune-machi and the end of the cutting edge; ha-machi
Marudome A carved groove end that is rounded
Marumune A mune that is rounded
Masame-hada A straight grain pattern in the hada
Mei Signature or inscription on the tang
Mekugi The bamboo peg used to secure the handle onto the tang
Mekugi ana The hole on the tang where the mekugi is inserted
Mekugi nuki A tool for removing the mekugi
Midare komi A boshi where the a midare hamon continues into the kissaki
Midareba A hamon of irregular form. All hamon are midare except suguha.
Midare utsuri irregular utsuri
Mihaba The width of a blade: measured from the mune to the cutting edge.
Mitsukado The place where the Shinogi meets the ko-shinogi and the yokote
Mitsumune A mune with three sides
Mokume-hada A grain pattern in the hada similar to itame but round
Monouchi One-third of the blade from the yokote towards the tang
Moroha-zukuri An asymmetrical blade with a cutting edge on both sides
Mukansa A grade awarded to swordsmiths whose work is recognised to be above the regular ranking systems
Mune The back of the blade
Mu-zori A blade with no curvature

N

Nagasa The blade length; measured from the tip to the mune-machi
Nakago The tang of a blade

Nakagojiri The tip of the tang
Nezumi ashi Very small ashi
Nie Small martensite crystals individually visible to the naked eye
Nie-deki A blade with a predominantly nie hamon
Nihon Bijutsu Token Hozon Kyokai The society for the preservation of Japanese art swords and the Japanese art sword museum in Yoyogi, Tokyo. The recognised governing body for Japanese swords in Japan
Nihonto Japanese swords
Nioi Martensite crystals not individually distinguishable to the naked eye, like the milky way in appearance
Nioi-deki A sword with a hamon consisting mainly of nioi
Nioi-guchi The dividing line between the hamon and the ji
Notare Gently undulating hamon
Nyusen The NBTHK's award for accepted entrants at the annual swordsmiths exhibition.

O

O-busa Large rising choji
Omote The front side of the blade
Oshigata A rubbing taken of the tang and outline of a blade. The hamon and activities are then drawn by hand.
Osoraku-zukuri Blades made with a very large kissaki that is longer than the lower half of the blade

S

Saka ashi Slanted ashi
Saka choji Slanted choji
Sakihaba Width of the blade at the yokote
Saki-zori When the curvature is noticeable in the upper part of the blade
Saya Scabbard
Shinogi The ridge line that runs from the yokote to the end of the nakago
Shinogiji The area between the shinogi and the mune
Shinogi-zukuri A sword manufactured with the ridgeline near to the mune
Shinsaku-meitoten The annual exhibition/competition of newly made blades, held at the sword museum in Tokyo
Shinsakuto (newly made swords) Swords made by contemporary smiths
Shinshinto Swords made between 1781 and 1868
Shinto Swords made between 1600 and 1781
Showato Swords made between 1926 and the end of WWII
Soden-Bizen Bizen swords displaying soshu-den traits
Soe-hi A smaller carved groove that runs parallel to the large groove
Sori Curvature of the blade
Sugata The shape of the blade
Suguha A straight hamon
Sujikai yasuri Acutely slanted file mark pattern on the nakago

Suken Also known as a ken, short straight ritual Chinese style sword, often associated with Fudo Myo-O

Sunagashi An activity in the hamon that resembles sweeping sands

Sunobi tanto Oversized tanto

Suriage Blade that has been shortened from its original length

T

Tachi Swords made to be worn with the cutting edge down, suspended from the belt

Tachi-me A blade signed on the side of the tang that faces outward when worn with the cutting edge downward

Takamatsu-miya-sho One of the first prize awards given by Prince Takamatsu at the NBTHK's annual swordsmiths' exhibition.

Tamahagane Purified steel, used for the manufacture of Japanese swords, indigenous to Japan

Tanto Blades made shorter than 30cm

Togariba Pointed shapes protruding from the hamon

Toranba A type of hamon that resembles the waves of the sea

Torii-zori A blade with an even curve

Tsuchioki The clay applied to the blade before the hardening process

Tsuka The hilt

U

Ubu Original, usually used when referring to the nakago.

Ubu-ha An area of the cutting edge from the hamachi, which has not yet been sharpened. This is typical with new blades.

Uchigatana Blades produced for one-handed use during the Muromachi period

Uchigumori One of the last stones used in the foundation polishing process

Uchiko A fine powder, made from one of the stones used in sword polishing, used for sword preservation

Uchi-zori The back of the blade curves toward the cutting edge

Ura The back side of the blade

Utsuri (Reflection) A white misty formation that runs parallel to the hamon in the ji.

Utsushi-mono Copies of past masterpieces (not to be confused with forgeries)

W

Wakizashi Blades over 30 cm in length, but shorter than 60 cm. Often a companion sword to the *katana*.

Y

Yakidashi A part of the hamon which starts off straight at the hamachi, but turns into a different hamon several centimetres along the blade

Yaki-ire The hardening process of the blade when it is heated, then quenched in water

Yamagata Mountain shaped

Yasurime File markings (on the tang)

Yo An activity in the hamon that resembles falling leaves

Yokote The dividing line between the kissaki and the body of the blade (mainly on shinogi-zukuri swords)

Yoroi-doshi Armour piercing (tanto)

Yushusho The Award for Excellence at the NBTHK's annual swordsmiths' exhibition.

Z

Zaimei A blade with an original signature

Zen Nihon Toshokai Kaicho Sho The All Japan Swordsmiths Association Chairman's Award given at the NBTHK's annual swordsmiths' exhibition.