



“Jingasa and Somen” — Lacquer parade hat and full-face war mask.

Japanese Armor and Weapons

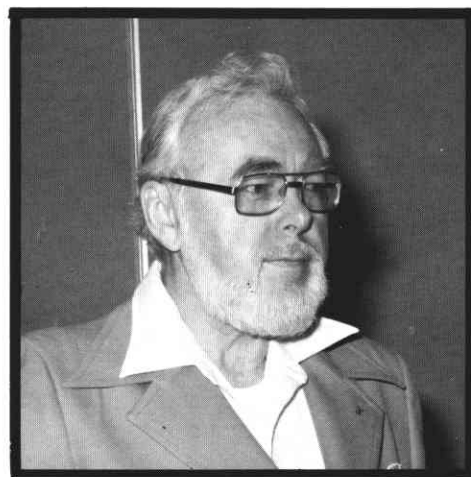
by: Dean S. Hartley, Jr.

There are probably as many strange and unbelievable stories about Japanese swords as about any other weapon, except perhaps the so-called Damascus blades of the Saracens, with which we have been so much more familiar through centuries of history of the crusades. However, since World War II, we have become ever more exposed to the tales of the Japanese sword. We have heard that they will cut a machine gun barrel in two. We have heard that they will cut a human body in two with one stroke — or even two or three or more bodies. We have heard that there are swords made and signed around 930 AD that appear to be as fresh and new as the day they were made. We have even heard that there are National Treasures at large in *this* country, and that one sword may sell for as much as \$70,000.00 in *this* country. We have also perhaps *not* heard that the armor of the Japanese equivalent of the European knight could turn most sword cuts as well as its European counterpart, and yet be light and flexible enough to enable the wearer to leap from his horse and fight with great agility on the ground.

So now I will tell you that there is indeed a great deal of truth in those stories. One method of the official court testers of the cutting ability of swords was to cut down through a standing iron plate. There is — or was — in existence a movie of a highly qualified swordsman cutting cleanly through a 50 cal. machine gun barrel. In my collection I have a sword with a gold inlay by a famous tester certifying that he did indeed cut through two bodies with one stroke (2), and another by an equally famous tester — and his son — on which it is inscribed that the father cut through the pelvic girdle of a man, and his son cut through “stack of bodies”, each with one stroke. I am sorry to say that I don’t have a sword signed and datable to 930 A.D. — but I *do* have one signed and datable to around 1055 A.D. — and it is as fresh and clean as a brand new sword.

I think I had better digress here and explain that “a nice brown age patina” is the last thing we want on a blade. In fact, when we can afford it, we send our good swords to Japan to be “polished” (3), by an expert at a cost of somewhere around thirty dollars per inch. Polishing is actually a misnomer. What really is accomplished is a resharpener and special surface finishing — all by hand — to bring out the texture of the many-times-folded steel. *Never, never*, buff polish a Japanese sword. We are looking for the same thing gun collectors look for — a weapon theoretically ready to perform *now*. With a Japanese sword, that performance is to *cut*. So we have our blades “polished”.

Back to the story — there *are* National Treasures loose here in the United States. There were fourteen of those, plus twenty-eight other Important Cultural Object swords “lost” to American service men who did not realize that



the sword standing unprotected in that apparently deserted shrine was indeed a designated National Treasure, and may have been sitting there equally as unprotected for three to five hundred years, with no danger of loss. Of these, Dr. Walter Compton (President of Miles Laboratories, and a long time collector of Japanese Arms and Armor) found one in a gun shop and returned it to its place in Japan. One other National Treasure is legally in the possession of a collector in this country, and perhaps the locations of three or four others of the forty-two are known to one or two collectors. As with any country’s National Treasures, they may not legally be exported from Japan — nor can the next two levels of artistic rating. The higher art rating exportable is Juyo Tokem which might be called a “third level National Treasure”. There are several of these in this country owned by collectors such as Walter Compton — or even by me and a few others who have been collecting and studying for many years until we could recognize one when it came by.

Finally, *are* there individual swords in this country worth as much as \$70,000.00? Indeed yes! An Army colonel (in Seattle, I think) owned several swords, one of which did in fact bring \$70,000.00 at a Sotheby Parke Bernet auction about three or four years ago. Others have also been sold at very high prices — *but* —

- one — although collectors do buy, trade, and sell (as you all certainly know), you don’t sell the “only one” or “the best one” just for money — not and claim to be a collector. Of course there are always perfectly good reasons to sell — I am just explaining why there are some unbelievably fine swords in this country which can’t be bought.
- two — the majority of the half- to three-quarter million Japanese swords brought back from



"Tameshigiri" — A gold inlay cutting test of a "two body" cut.



Mr. Kentaro Yoshikawa (of Tokyo) polishing a Japanese sword.

World War II are good *only* as the souvenirs they always were. They are machine made, armory stamped, or mass produced by fourth level apprentice blacksmiths (Showa-To) who rushed to fill the sudden demand for swords with the resurgence of Bushido (the way of the warrior) in the 1930's.

three — of the properly made swords, eighty five percent are still collectable only as decoration or examples, and would not be worth the \$30.00 per inch for repolish. As for the remaining fifteen percent, of those actually signed with "big names", probably eighty percent are forgeries. Since the very beginning, Japanese swords have had false names put on to enhance their value. The best bet is to study *blades*, not signatures, and be able to recognize the treasures among the unsigned blades — which make up the preponderance of available swords.

four — that "treasure" you see in the shop, or that the service man brought back from the Pacific, even with the "certificate" from the Japanese expert *may* be real and valuable but in all probability it is not. Most of those "experts" after the war were so only in that they could read the Japanese name on a sword, find that name (along with eighty-six other similar names with the same characters) in a reference book, pick out the most important of the eighty-six, and write a certificate so stating. You should know: age does not automatically confer value. A sword is judged and valued according to the reputation of the swordsmith as a maker of swords that *cut* well and didn't break, or from the beauty of the worked steel (it *is* visible, you know), or sometimes, and to a lesser degree, from the historical relationships of a particular sword.

Oh yes — did I tell you? You will notice I have been referring to *blades*. The fittings, scabbards, guards, etc. while being eminently collectable in their own right, are in the final analysis, the "clothes" of the blade. That's what you will hear a hard-core collector call himself a "blade man". (4)

so — five — You can't start out green and make a fortune in Japanese swords — but you can have one fine time learning.

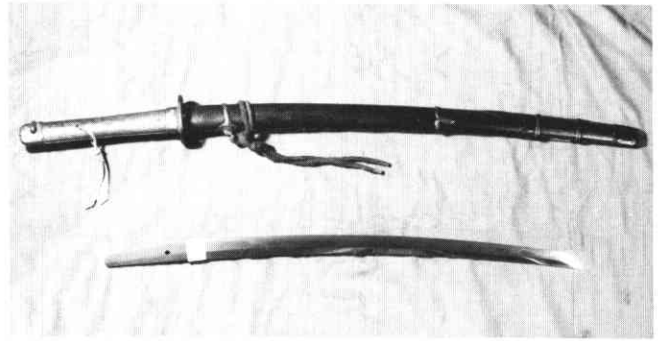
The first thing to learn is that the Japanese sword is the finest cutting weapon ever devised. The only legitimate contender — and far back — are the Persian blades, the so called Damascus swords. And why is that? Well, in its finest form, the Japanese sword is made in its entirety by the swordsmith. He gathers the sand iron ore washed down from the steep mountains, smelts it, purifies it, divides it according to qualities desired, and starts to make a sword. He needs pine charcoal, ground limestone, some

special trace chemicals known only to himself, a hand operated furnace, three apprentice hammer men, a forge which can be darkened when desired, a set of exceptionally fine hammers, and a mirror smooth anvil weighing 300-400 pounds or more.

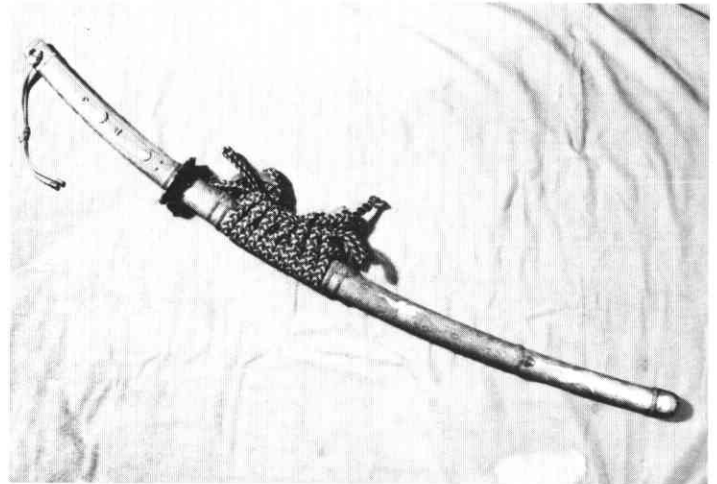
Then (5), he starts with a stack of thin, thumb nail size flakes of iron on an iron plate with a handle, and douses it with a slurry of limestone and charcoal. This he heats to welding temperature, and hammers into a solid mass. Then he folds, heats and welds again — and again for 15-16 times. Each fold drives out more impurities, adds a little carbon, and refines the metal. This will be the cutting edge. Then with fewer foldings, he fashions side pieces, a back piece, and with the fewest foldings (five) he hammers out the core. At this point he assembles all of the various forged billets into proper relationship to one another — and hammers the whole mass right out to basic sword shape. Remember — the final hammering must retain each segment in its proper place and relative thickness. Using files and draw knives he does a final shaping and cleaning. Now he has a multiple-layer laminated bar — but not yet a sword. That is when he darkens his forge. He coats the blade with a special mixture of clay, leaving the cutting edge bare or thinly covered. Working in the darkened forge he heats the whole until it is exactly the right color — and dunks it into water to cool. The bare edge cools immediately into high carbon steel — the covered part cools more slowly into mild steel — and the soft core remains flexible. There we have a high carbon cutting edge, supported and reinforced by the mild steel side plates and the flexible core. So, off to the polisher for sharpening — and a bit of quality control. Because, you see, if any of the fold welds didn't take and they show up in polishing as visible flaws, the whole blade is broken up. If not, after polish, the signature is put on, "clothes" arranged — and we have a sword, at last — after about one to three months.

There is still — to this day — a great deal of ceremony associated with making a sword. Does the "to this day" confuse you? It might well do so, but the fact is that swords are still made as they were over a thousand years ago. They are made by swordsmiths who have managed to continue the masterstudent line continuously (and often with great difficulty) from those ancient days to the present. One of these, Fujimara Matsutaro, (6), who signed his blades with the art name KUNITOSHI was my friend and sensei (teacher). He lived and worked in the city of Iwakuni, about thirty-five kilometers from Hiroshima — and died at the age of seventy-six while at his forge working on a sword. He made for me the sample set of steps in making types of swords which is on display.

The sword is held in such high regard even today that smiths of exceptional skill are designated "Living National Treasures". One of these, Miyairi Kenichi, who signed YUKIHIRA has died within the past four months and was mourned throughout Japan. At a purely commercial level, swords made by these smiths may bring \$10,000.00 or perhaps more — and they are limited by law to making only a small number each year.



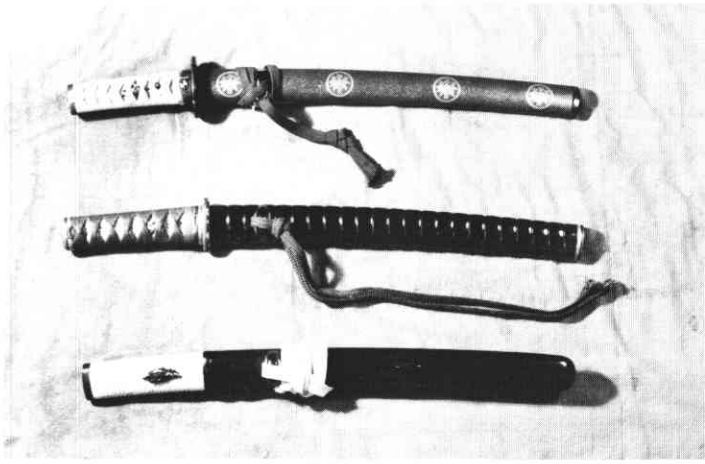
A freshly "polished" blade and its mounts!



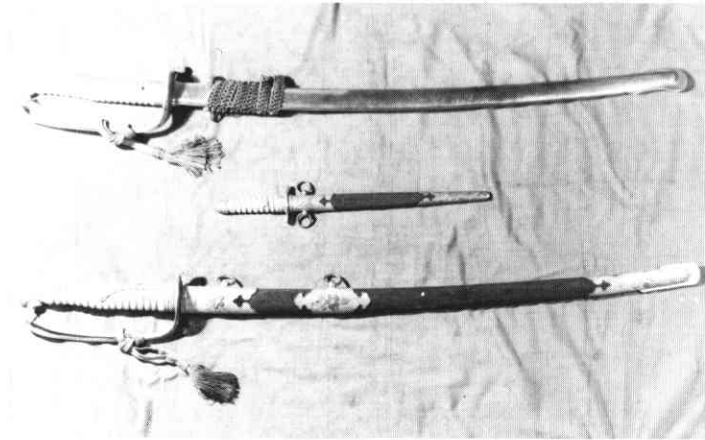
A "Tachi" — i.e. the mounts of a sword which is worn with the cutting edge down — "western style".



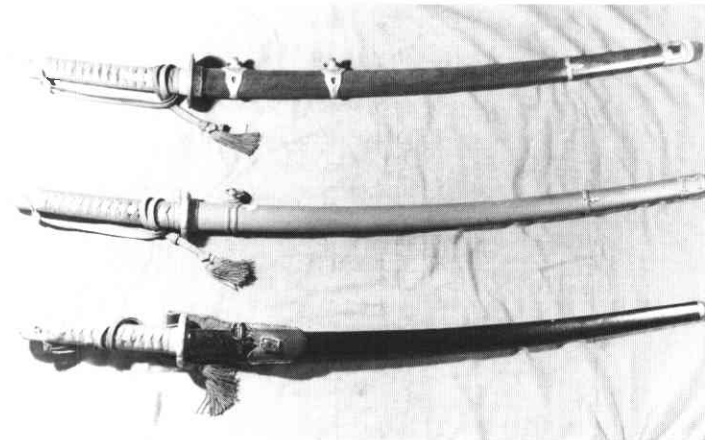
Two swords are "Katana" — blade thrust through the sash and worn with cutting edge up. Below: "Sirasaya" with "Sayagaki" — a white wood storage scabbard with an attribution (authentication) written on the wood.



Three "Tanto" — daggers, worn thrust under sash, cutting edge up.

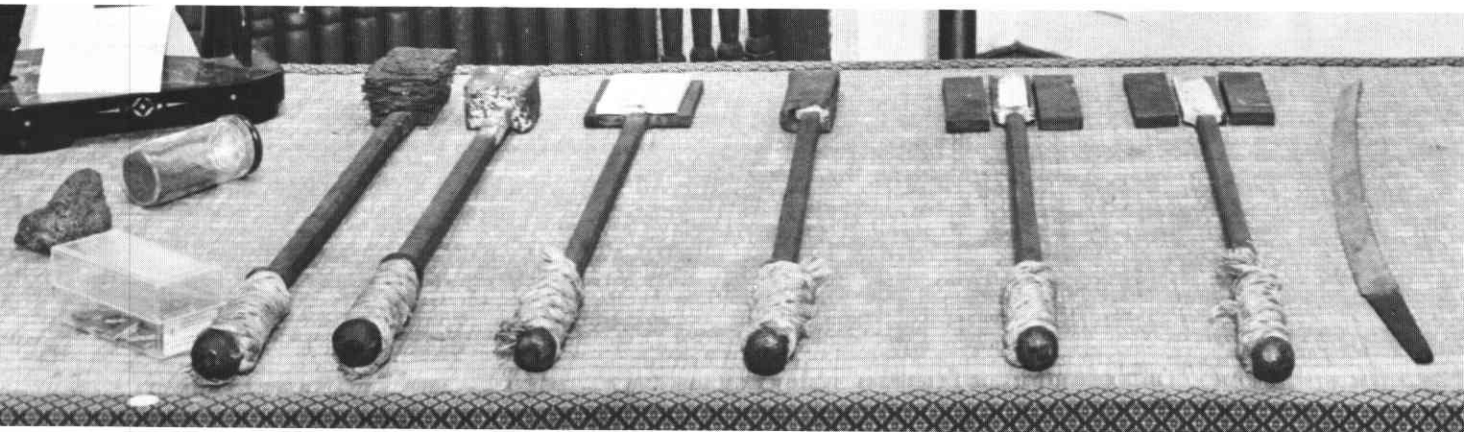


Top: Russo-Japanese War army mounts; middle: navy dirk; bottom, Russo-Japanese War navy mounts.



Top: WWII navy mounts; center, WWII army mounts; bottom, WWII Staff NCO mounts.

What is the source or cause of the very great respect in which Japanese swords are held? Most of our modern collectors of Japanese arms and armor have a tendency to think that we have only just now invented the collecting of these magnificent and beautifully artistic articles of war. That is perhaps a natural feeling for anyone with a newly discovered enthusiasm, but the facts are that Japanese arms and their accoutrements have been wandering about the world since around 1007-1072 (in the Chinese Sung Dynasty). This period coincides with the Japanese Heian period (794-1191), and is the period during which the Nippon-To achieved the shape and qualities which have persisted through the ages. It is, in fact, from this period that the term "Nippon-To" (simply "Japanese Sword") was applied to the Japanese sword, resulting from the earliest written reference to an interest in Japanese swords by people outside of Japan. In this period, Ou Yang Hsfu wrote of the "Nippon-To" which were so eagerly sought by the Chinese: "Treasure swords are obtained from the east (Japan*) by merchants of Etsu. Their scabbards are of fragrant wood (probably impregnated with the oil of cloves used in preserving the swords from rust*) covered with shark-skin. Gold, silver, copper, and metals adorn them. Hundreds of gold pieces is their cost. When wearing such a sword, one can slay the barbarians." Obviously a reputation for quality had already been established — a reputation which remained virtually intact through the centuries. Joao Rodriguez, a Jesuit priest who came to Japan in 1585, and stayed for about 40 years as a priest and confidant of Tokugawa Iyeyasu, as written, "Some Lords may ask other nobles for some men who have been condemned to death in order to see whether their sword cuts well, whether they can trust it in emergencies. They often sew up bodies which have been cut by swords and put together the severed parts so that they may once more cut and see if the sword passes through the body with one blow." John Saris, an English salesman, came to Hirado (a small island just off Kyushu) in 1613, and as a result of his experiences and observations, wrote "Every man that listed came by to try the sharpness of their katana upon the corpses so that before they left off they had hewn them all three into pieces as small as a man's hand." Rodriguez further comments on the swords after this, "In olden days there used to be fine armorers who were very famous in this art because their weapons are now of great value for their perfection in cutting and everything else. Scimitars, daggers, blades of lances of war size, (here he is referring to naginata or nagamaki*) (7), arrow heads and other which are valued. Swords and daggers, as we have noted are worth many thousands of quesados and even nowadays through the whole kingdom there are craftsmen who are very skillful with these weapons. Experience has shown that Japanese weapons are in general the best, and cut better than any others. One of their ordinary swords can cut a man through the middle into two parts with the greatest of ease, while a dagger or sword of one and one-half or at the most two spans in length will part a man's head from his neck and a lance will do the same, for their blades are



A set of sequential steps in forging a sword.

such that they not only wound with a thrust but also cut like swords." Rodriguez discusses appraisal of swords, "There are certain experts whose office is to recognize by their style and marks the swords, daggers, and other iron weapons made by ancient and famous craftsmen. Such weapons command a high price and esteem among the Japanese; not only on account of their age and the smith who made them, but also much more because they are excellent weapons which will cut anything without notching or blunting the cutting edge. Even when they touched bodies lightly, they cut them like lopped turnips. This (sword appraisal) (8), is highly esteemed and important art among the Japanese, and even the noble lords devote themselves to it so that they may not be deceived when they deal for such valuable things. Some of these blades bear the marks of the craftsman who made them. There are many, many false and counterfeit ones. Others do not bear any marks but there are infallible rules which make it possible to distinguish the genuine blades from the false ones". Rodriguez continues, discussing sword fittings. "Nor are the men whom we could call goldsmiths less superior in the art of working gold, silver, and copper and they are superior to the Chinese and any other nation in the orient with regard to their excellence, (9), the type of work, and the mixture of copper with silver and gold with which they make a third metal which they call black copper. This is highly esteemed among the Japanese and they use it to make certain instruments which they insert in sword scabbards and which is decorated with a flower or an animal carved by very skilled craftsmen (this would be kozuka and kogai*). These men are highly regarded by them and enjoy high esteem in the art of working gold and silver. This sort of engraving of trees, (10), plants, birds, water and land animals, and ancient legends on copper is extremely fine and life-like in every detail. — They are incomparable in embellishing and engraving with gold and silver or inlaying gold with silver and silver and black copper with gold and all of it engraved. This is something very excellent and attractive, and work of this kind is found only among the Japanese."

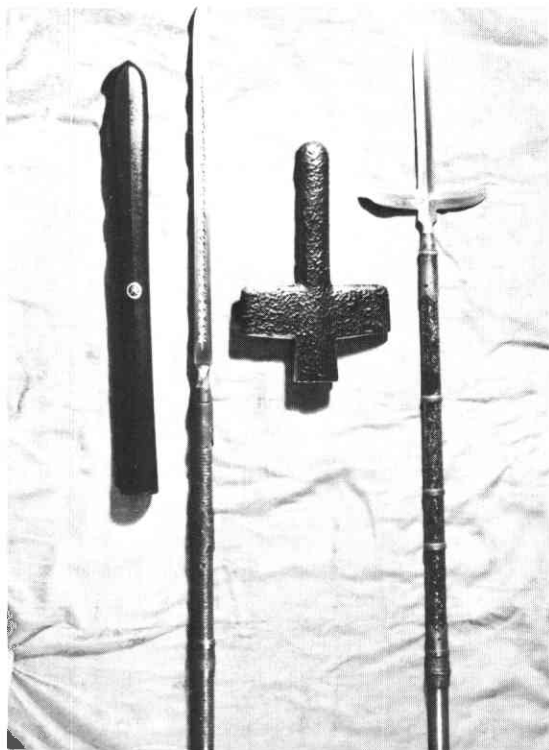
H. Chamberlain wrote in his "Things Japanese," "Japanese swords excel even the vaunted products of Damascus and Toledo. To cut through a pile of copper coins (or a body or two*) without nicking the blade is, or was, a common feat. History, tradition, and romance alike re-echo with the exploits of this wonderful weapon." Of course we today continue to uphold this superiority, and have the multiple-body cutting test to sustain our beliefs.

It would probably be appropriate to divide the chronological periods of "foreign" interest in Japanese arms into five basic segments. These would begin with "early history" — say 800 A.D. to the advent of Europeans into Japan around the middle of the 16th and 17th centuries (followed by some 250 years of seclusion); a "middle" period from the opening of Japan by Commodore Perry in 1853 to the Haitorei Edict in 1876, at which time the wearing of swords



Mr. Fujimura Kunitoshi, a modern swordsmith in the old style.

In the late 19th Century, to continue, Professor Basil



Polearms. Left, a "SU-YARI"; right, a "JU-MON-JI YARI".

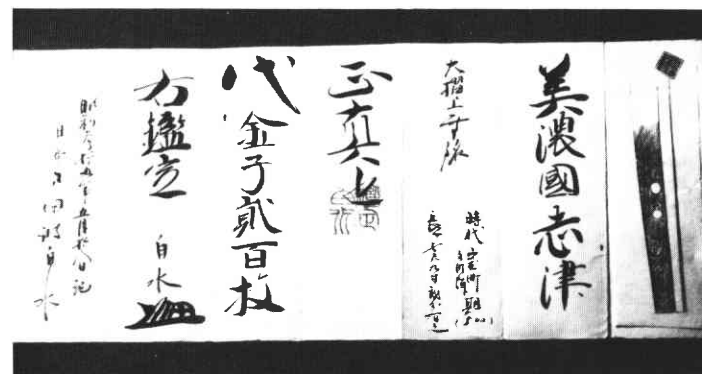


Polearms. Left, a "NAGINATA"; right, a "SODE-GARAMI" (a "sleeve tangler" — a sort of police catch-pole).

as every-day wear was prohibited; a "late" period from the Haitorei Edict to World War II; and a final period from World War II to the present.

In considering these five periods, certain interesting differences occur. For example, as mentioned earlier, even in the Chinese Sung period, the reputation of the Japanese sword had been solidified, and we have Ou Yang Hsiu's comments. Not too long afterward, during the period of the Yuan, or Mongols (Genghiz Khan and Kublai Khan), one Marco Polo was in the Chinese court, and in his writings refers to "— the weapons of Cipengu (Japan*)." This was in the period around 1280-1300. There was also instituted around 1032 — and lasting to 1547 — a series of eleven Kon-Go trade missions between Japan and China. It is estimated that between 100-300 thousand swords were exported to China in this period. It must be assumed, since Marco Polo had established trade between Europe and China — relations which were to continue and grow from that time on — that some of these swords, and the unique style of Japanese armor, must have found their way to Europe. As an indication of this, at the battle of Omdurman in 1898, Sir Winston Churchill reported that one of the dervishes slain by Lord Kitchener's troops was wearing a partial suit of Japanese armor. (11) One may wonder at the slow progress of this armor westwards, to end up in near modern times in Africa. With regard to this period Captain Frank Brinkley notes that, around 1420, a brisk trade was carried on between Japan and China, where "— a sword costing one kwanmon in Japan fetched five kwanmon in China." Already the pattern has been set.

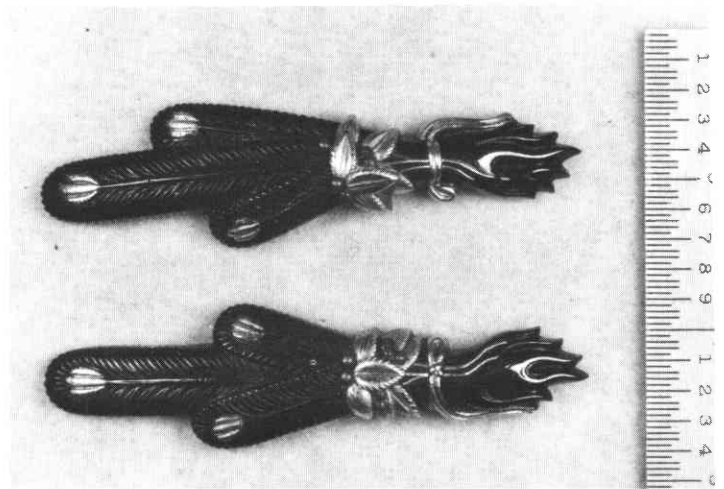
With the landing of a Portugese ship on the island of Tanegashima, off the southern coast of Japan in 1542, we enter the second or "short-middle" phase. As was inevitable during that period, the priests were hot on the heels of the explorers, and the traders immediately behind them — and all protected and reinforced by the fleets and soldiers. These "visitors" were at first welcomed by the Japanese and were given the highest recognition and finest gifts th



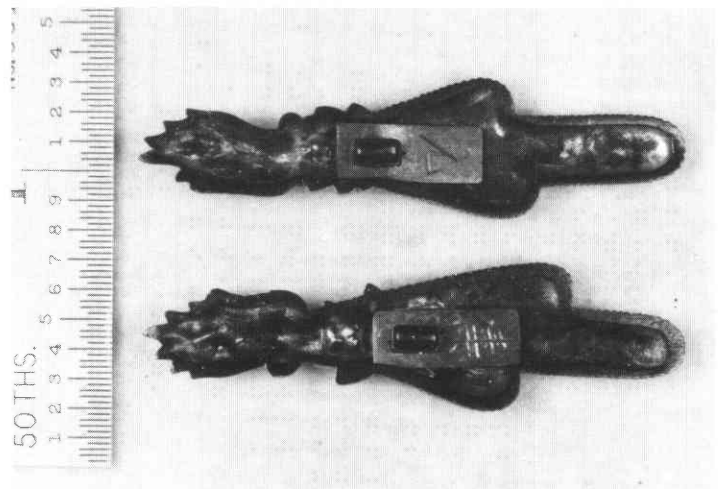
"ORIGAMI" — a certificate of authenticity.

Japanese had to offer — specifically, swords. They also brought the Portugese matchlock, which was copied by the Japanese almost without change until Perry's arrival. Joao Rodriguez reports that blades of the highest quality, in addition to two suits of armor — were given to Viceroy Mathias derAlbuquerque by Hideyoshi, over the objections of his retainers, who maintained that the Viceroy could not possible appreciate the extent of the honor represented by these blades. During this period, it was customary to honor foreigners and their sovereigns with gifts of swords. For example, there is now a group of swords in the Etnografic Department of the National Museum in Copenhagen, Denmark, which belonged to King Frederick III — and so cannot date after 1670. At the same period in Denmark, artist Karl Van Manders' possessions at his death included "two Japanese daggers." It is also reported that in his will, Leonardo da Vinci bequeathed his Japanese swords to his heirs.

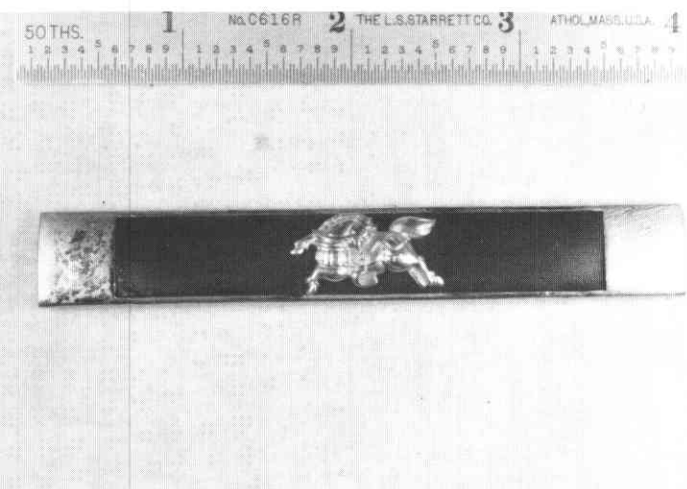
It is doubtful if there was any further significant export of swords, especially to Europeans or Americans after Japan was "closed" in the mid-1600's until Commodore Perry's "re-opening" with his landing on 8 July, 1853. Perry's journals refer to a number of swords that were presented to the President at that time. In addition, a fine sword (now in the Smithsonian) was presented to Perry himself and others to members of his crew and staff. One of these was presented to Major Jacob Zeilen (USMC), and is now on display in the Marine Corps Museum in Quantico, Virginia. Others were given to other individuals. Similarly, blades of quality were presented to other heads of state, as for example, a sword by MAGOROKU KANE-MOTO (a swordsmith famous for very sharp blades) which was presented to Queen Victoria by Shogun Iyemochi in 1860, and is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum. During this middle period, many rather fine blades were presented to various dignitaries and governmental representatives, the "face" or prestige of the Japanese being at stake, as Hideyoshi had pointed out in the 16th century.



"MENUKI" — under-the-wrapping handle decoration.



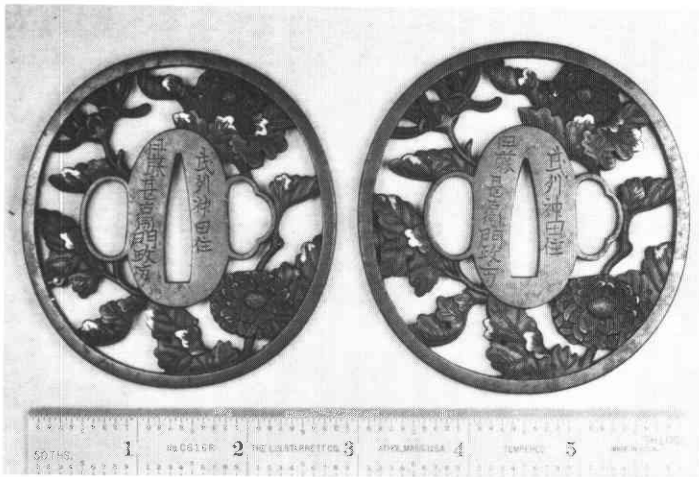
Back of Menuki with signature of maker, "MOTO-TOSHI".



"KODZUKA" — the handle to a small scabbard "side knife".



More MENUKI.



"DAI-SHO" Tsuba: large-small matched pair of sword guards in iron.

However, with the accession of Mutsuhito — that is, Emperor Meiji — to the throne in 1867, and the return of power from the Shogun to the Emperor, Japan entered the modern world. Emperor Meiji acted to break up the feudal system under which Japan had operated — and remained stagnant — for so many centuries, and to re-direct the energies and imagination of his people toward joining the rest of the world. He issued in 1876 the Haitorei Edict, which in effect deprived the daimyo of their great powers, abolished the samurai class as such, and in so doing, made the Nippon—To, that symbol of the rights, prestige, and power of a select group, nothing more than a cutting weapon. From that time until just before World War II, the sword had in general little meaning. They were tied in bundles and sent to Europe for sale as souvenirs. Some non-Japanese, however, recognized the inherent artistic qualities of the swords and their fittings. Tourists swarmed over the land, picking up mementos, with individuals of each nationality revealing some of their national traits in the way they collected. The British did then — and still do to a certain degree — concentrate on the ornate and unusual. There are — or have been — quite a few very fine collections such as the Gilbertson (now dispersed), the David Craig (status unknown), and that of Sir Francis Festing (still intact). The Victoria and Albert Museum has maintained one of the few properly organized and catalogued collections, under the able oversight of Basil W. Robinson, Deputy Keeper of the Department of Metalworks (now retired). There were many genuine students in England and much of the available information available in English came from publications of their studies in the Transactions and Proceedings of the Japan Society, London. The French tended to specialize in archaic items, and some of the best of the very fine, very old collections of fittings are found in French collections. The Germans, in their normal organized, systematic manner, collected representative examples of each known school of work. Their collections probably constitute the best reference and study groups available outside of Japan. There are

also large — and primarily colorful or gaudy collections — in Czechoslovakia and Italy (Museo Orientale in Venice) as well as other countries. The Americans, as fits their polyglot origins, made diverse collections. The Boston Museum of Fine Arts has about 575 blades only recently thoroughly studied and catalogued — but not yet published — by Mr. Ogawa Morihiko of the Japanese Sword Museum. The Boston Museum seems to have had in the late 19th century a special team wandering about the countryside of Japan, picking up everything from junk to (literally) National Treasures. Edward S. Morse specialized in Japanese ceramics. Fenellosa collected paintings, scrolls, and National Treasure quality Heian period scrolls. The Bigelow collection (presented by the son of the Dr. Bigelow who taught Walter Compton at Harvard) constitutes the core of the Boston Museum's sword collection, with significant additions from the Weld Collection and from Major H. L. Higginson. Frank Lloyd Wright, a great admirer of Japan, had a fine collection, now broken up, with about half in the collection of Graham McQuire (near Minneapolis) and the remainder dispersed. The collection of T. B. Walker, a Minneapolis lumber baron, was put together in the 1880's, and was installed in the Walker Armory Institute which was built for this purpose. The many hundreds of sword guards, hundreds of swords, and many suits of armor were disposed of in 1948 for the grand total of \$550.00. The Avery Brundage collection, which I had the good fortune to see in part, was largely destroyed by fire in his Santa Barbara home around 1965, although some of the iron tsuba were refinished and disposed of in Japan. There is a fine collection in the Walters Museum in Baltimore — practically inaccessible; the Gunsaulus fitting collection in the Field Museum in Chicago has been, I am informed, "cleaned up," and is not available (translate — "the 'rust' has been cleaned off of the iron tsuba, and the 'corrosion' polished off the soft metal ones.") I have not seen this collection, and I hope this report is false. If it is true, it is not an unusual example of what happens to collections of Japanese blades and fittings in the hands of uninformed museum curators. I insert a plea here — if you don't *know* what you are doing in "restoring" any of these items, DON'T!! The Metropolitan Museum collections, mostly from the Stone collection (Stone's *Glossary*) has fine armor, but the blades are open to question. In addition, blades in bundles were sold into Louisiana, fitted to machete handles, and used for cutting sugar cane. Further, in Francis Bannerman's catalogue for 1911 Samurai swords were offered at \$3.00 each for insertion into regulation Army mounts for fighting in the Philippines, as being heavier and sharper for jungle fighting.

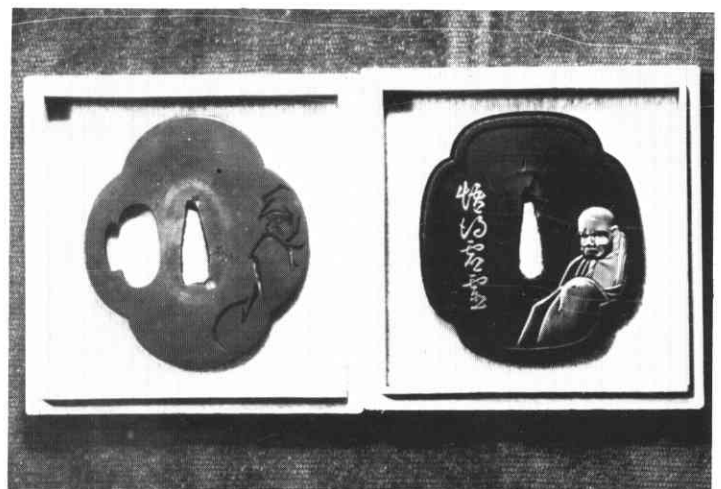
The above listings are mostly of U.S. collections. A listing of European collections of importance would be of great interest, but not in the time we have. But what of individual blades? Well, when then crown Prince Hirohito visited England before his accession to the throne, he presented a solid gold mounted blade to Edward, then Prince of Wales. This blade was pursued for many years by a friend of mine who eventually acquired it. I believe it is still in

the United States. On 18 July, 1917, a Japanese Artist, Mr. J. Yoshida, presented a "600 year old Samurai Sword" to President Wilson — whereabouts unknown. On 23 October, 1917, a "Samurai of Japan, Yasujiro Ishikawa" presented, on behalf of the Mikado, a tachi mounted sword which was then "386 years old." One of the four others which Mr. Ishikawa was carrying on to Europe to present to King George of England, President Poincare of France, King Albert of Belgium, and King Victor Emanuel of Italy may be seen on page 597 of Stone's Glossary, under "Tachi". On 4 July, 1918, Viscount Kikujiro Ishii presented a very fine tachi (which I have seen and which was being carefully preserved — it has only recently been stolen) to the town of Fairhaven, Massachusetts, on behalf of Dr. Toichiro Nakahama. Dr. Nakahama was the son of one "John Mungo" (otherwise Manjiro Nakahama) who was rescued at sea in June of 1841 by Captain Whitfield of Fairhaven, brought home and raised as a son, and finally returned to Japan. There, among other things, he acted as interpreter for Commodore Perry. Thus the sword has come full circle as a sign of esteem and high regard.

Since World War II, many, many (hundreds of thousands) of swords have come out of Japan, because, upon Japan's loss of World War II, the Nippon-To for the second time lost its place as a status symbol. Once again, they were available in large numbers — some legitimately so, others not quite so. Swords collected during and after World War II fall into two major categories. There are the battlefield souvenirs and the post-war acquisitions. There exists a strange and false myth about the battlefield swords. Both American collectors and Japanese experts have propagated the misconception that there were no good swords on the battlefields. Such a belief if, among Americans, understandable, until a genuine assessment is made of the quality of blades so obtained. For Japanese to maintain such a position is either self-deception or profound ignorance of their own national character. The position is based upon a presumption that no one would take a valuable sword into combat, for fear it would be lost. Come now! The Japanese did not expect to lose a war, or even a battle — and what more appropriate than that the famous sword of a valiant ancestor should have yet one other victory added to its credit. Even I, a gaijin, would feel that way today. Perhaps this misconception was based upon a statistical evaluation — certainly there *were* many Showa-To, blades of no value, lost on the battlefield, but this was only because each soldier did not have access to a sword of his ancestors. There were not enough to go around, either because of numbers or high costs, so that Showa-To and arsenal blades were produced in the millions, thereby diluting the percentage of good blades. It is also true, for the same reasons, that the proportion of *good* "battlefield" swords was higher in the early phases than toward the end — but the original premise was patently false. After the war, the Occupation Forces required all swords to be turned in, with the stated goal of destroying them as weapons. Only the ceaseless efforts of Dr. Junji Homma, of the Japanese Art Sword Preservation Society, and a few of his

associates, and the help of Americans like Army Colonel Cadwell (Tokyo Provost Marshal) made it possible to conserve these tangible evidences of a long and rich culture. Nevertheless, the blades *were* turned in, and many blades of great historical and artistic value were lost. Dr. Walter Compton found the one I mentioned earlier and returned it to its owners. Others of lesser importance were returned to specific owners — I was fortunate enough to return a Nagamitsu, dated 1288 and for centuries a family treasure, to Lieutenant General Nemoto Hiroshi. These blades were returned in realization of their genuine importance to their owners. Hundreds of thousands of others, however, were either given out of the warehouses as souvenirs, "creamed off" from the warehouses by individuals with access *and* skilled advice from a Japanese assistant, or just plain stolen. I have seen groups of 10-15-30 swords which were "acquired," with no real appreciation of their importance — but with an absolute refusal to release them to individuals who did know and care. I have seen *fine* swords released to children for chopping brush — a beautiful dagger employed for 30 years as "the turkey knife." I have seen opportunists grab up every blade in sight to hoard as a "speculation." But then I have also seen individuals and groups undertake a genuine study, first of swords, and then of the entire history and culture of Japan. All of this is necessary if one is really to understand the impact of the Japanese sword on Japanese culture and vice versa. So there are accumulators (they could just as easily collect beer cans), collectors, and students. Then there are American dealers, European dealers, and Japanese dealers. It is very unlikely that any one person is purely one of the above, so we will consider the major thrust of each person's interest. It is my guess that there may be 20-30 genuine students in this country. There are perhaps 3-400 serious collectors, and 7-800 more genuinely interested collectors — and then there are the others.

Early in the occupation phase in Japan, some truly interested gai-jin sought help from a knowledgeable sword



"TSUBA" — sword guards. Left, a red copper guard. Right, a lacquered leather guard.

expert in Japan. I know that one of these gai-jin was Hans Conried (the actor) — I don't know any of the others. The expert was Inami Hakusui, proprietor of "Japan Sword" in Tokyo. He and his son, Tomihiko — I hope both are well — still operate there. Inami wrote with the encouragement of his class the book "Nippon-To." Those of us who have an autographed first edition feel rather fortunate. Then John Yumoto wrote "The Samurai Sword," which was my first introduction to this fascinating field. In this country, around 1962, the Japanese Sword Society of the United States was formed. At a later date, I had the honor of twice being Chairman of the J.S.S.U.S. The Southern California Sword Club (Nankai Token Kai) was also formed, and I was also fortunate to be President of that club at one time. There are other groups which are active and progressive — a group in the San Francisco area which was formed by John Yumoto; a group in Chicago; a group in New York; the Maryland Sword Society which has been going in Pikesville for many years — and of course the Dallas group which organized and carried off the first ever N.B.T.H.K. Shinsa (Authentication meeting) outside of Japan. With Dr. Kanzan Sato (who has just died last month) as the head of the team, we gai-jin had an opportunity few of us had ever dreamed of, to have our blades authenticated by the real experts — here at home.

With the constant help, understanding, and instruction of Dr. Homma and others, I think we have now begun to dispel the idea that there are no good swords in the United States. The second false idea is that there are no gai-jin capable of recognizing or appreciating Nippon-To. If there were none, those good swords just mentioned would still be in use as brush-cutters and cane-cutters. With this beginning, there should now be a sound basis for communication between Japanese and non-Japanese lovers of Japanese swords and arms.

There is more — so much more, such as "how do you explain the painting of the interior of a genuine Oglala Sioux teepee, by the famous Western painter George Catlin, which shows a Japanese war tachi hanging against the inside wall?" and "when will we exhaust our sources of Japanese blades? — and what will collectors do then?" and more. I commend all of those unanswered questions to you — and I thank you for the opportunity to put in my few (hundred) words. It should be apparent that the Nippon-To has indeed been wandering around the world longer and to a greater extent than one would have thought when we first started collecting and studying this strange item from the Far East. There is certainly much to learn from just following those wanderings. Join me in following the trail.



"GUSOKU" — suit of armor — dating to about 1830. No, Reginald, it is NOT Colonel Hartley in his WWII flying suit!