

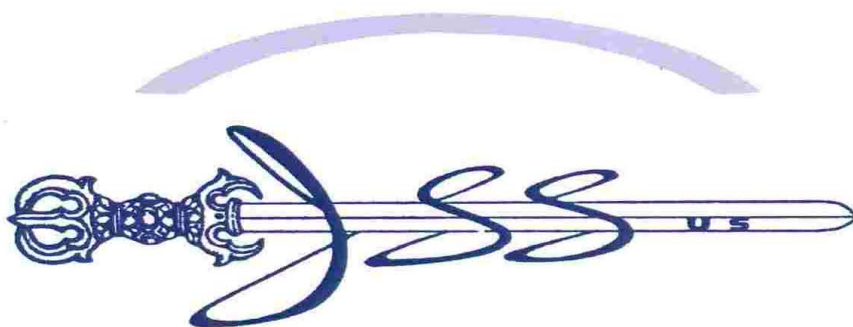
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Real-life *kantei* of swords, Part 5: Long inscriptions and difficulties in finding the Smith

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Introduction: Previous articles – **Coutinho (2010-a)**, **Coutinho (2010-b)**, **Coutinho (2010-c)** and **Coutinho (2010-d)** –discussed some problems which were encountered when examining unusual swords. This article considers yet another problem: swords with very long inscriptions.

The first hurdle when confronted with such long inscriptions is the determination of the maker of the sword. Following the solution of this problem is the translation of the rest of the inscription. This can be very problematic because these inscriptions are old, written in Chinese, and about places or events for which information is unavailable or even worse, for which all the records have been lost.

A collection of this kind of inscription was published some time ago by R. Fuller and R. Gregory (**Fuller (1985)**).

This article offers another example of a sword with long inscriptions whose meaning was discovered with the aid of many friends. The process used, it is hoped, will be instructive.

The Sword

The sword is very long and strong. In spite of its size it sits very well in the hand and transmits the desirable sense of power associated with holding a Japanese sword. In this sense, this sword is splendid.

The sword is long with deep *sori* and there is a difference between the *moto haba* and the *saki haba*. The maximum curvature is on the middle of the sword and so it is a *torii sori* sword.



Figure 1

Its measurements are given below with all the measurements in centimeters.

Nagasa-77; *Sori*-2.1; *Kisaki Nagasa* 4.5, *Moto Haba*-3.1, *Saki Haba* -2.1;

Moto Kasane -0.6; *Saki Kasane*-0.4 *Nakago Nagasa*-23

The *hada* is a very tight *itame* (one might say *muji hada*). The *hamon* is *gunome midare* of *nioi* intertwined with *ko-nie*.

Both sides of the *nakago* are shown in Figure 1. Both sides are signed in two columns. This is an added difficulty, but the usual way of deciphering signatures, described in the article by Ian Bottomley **Bottomley (1995)** in this Newsletter, still applies. It is necessary to look for sign-posts, that is, key *kanji* that appear in almost all the signatures.

From the *hada* and the general structure of the sword it can be deduced that it is a *Shinshinto* sword. As a result, the name of the smith can be written either on the *ura* or on the *omote*.

First column on the *omote*

The beginning assumption is that the signature is in the *omote*; in fact, since the signature is written in almost typographic *kanji*, the *kanji saku* is found at the end of the first column on the right.

Consequently, it may be presumed that the two *kanji* above are the name of a swordsmith. With some difficulty they may be translated as *Yoshi Tatsu*. Five more *kanji* above that remain to be deciphered.

At this point it is usually convenient to check if this smith is listed in the books. First checked was the book by Hawley (**Hawley (1981)**) and indeed on page 978 swordsmith called *Yoshi Tatsu* is identified. Of course the *kanji* for *Yoshi* and the *kanji* for *Tatsu* must match the *kanji* written in Hawley and fortunately they do. Furthermore this is the only *Yoshi Tatsu* listed. So it seems that luck and experience both came together here. The complete signature listed in Hawley is *Ryu Jyo Shi Yoshi Tatsu*.

Yoshitatsu 吉達 Musashi, Satsuma 1854 10 Masayoshi school YOS 848 龍城士吉達 Ryūjōshi Yoshitatsu
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The first two *kanji* that read *Ryu Jyo* match the first two *kanji* identified earlier. However the third *kanji* that reads *SHI* is different. This third *kanji* in (**Hawley (1981)**) is listed on page 158 of the book by Koop and Inaba (**Koop (1972)**) and the actual *kanji* in the sword is list in Koop on page 232 reads *SHIN* and means “retainer”. Since the two *kanji* have similar meaning the first three *kanji* may be translated as: *Ryu Jyo Shin* that is "Retainer of *Ryu Jyo*". That leaves two *kanji* in this first column to decipher. At this stage it is better to look

in other (Japanese) books for the signature. The smith listed in the book by **Osamu (2005)** has more information on the potential smith. (The same information can be found in the book by **Honma and Masakuni (2010)**). The information given in **Osamu (2005)** is reproduced on Figure 2 with a translation.

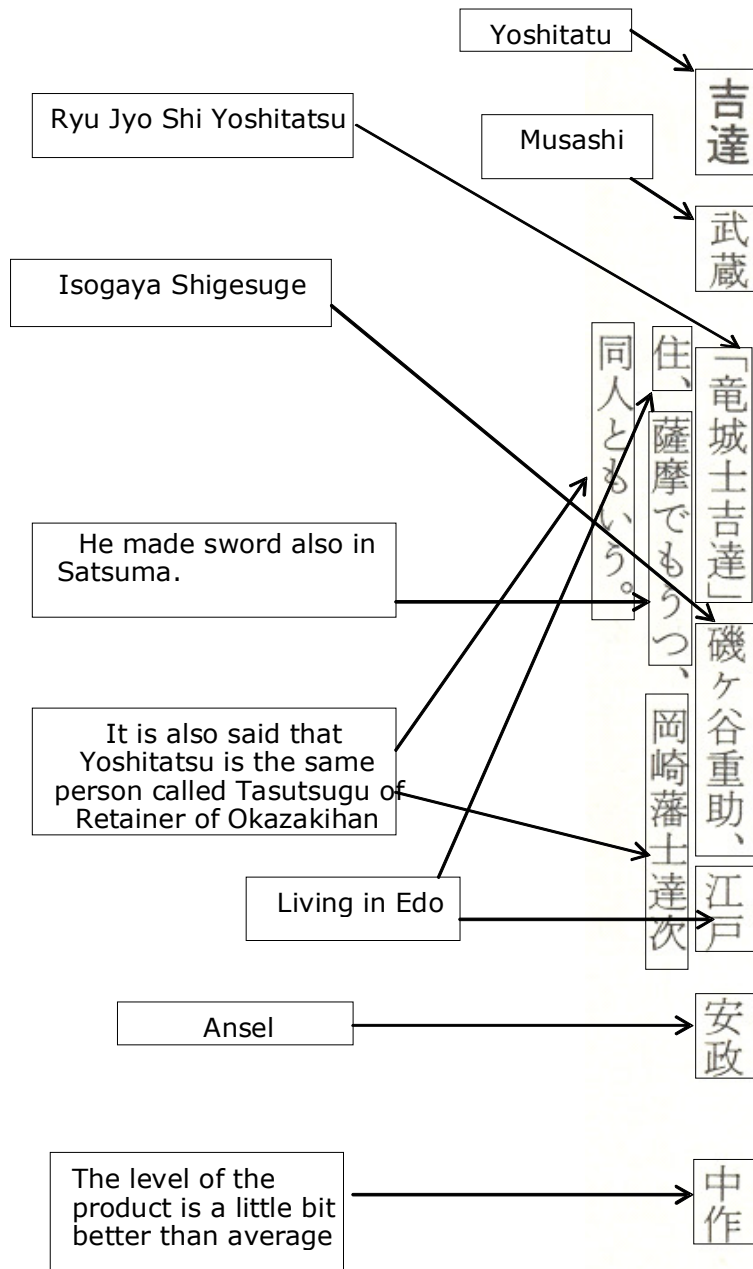


Figure 2

The fourth and fifth *kanji* in the sword reads *ISO GAYA*. (The *kanji ISO*, with seventeen strokes, can be found in the book by **Koop (1973)** (page 493) and in the book by Self and Hirose (**Self (1987)** page 397 *kanji* 1227). The reading *ISOGAYA*, for the fourth and fifth *kanji*, is explained by **Koop (1973)** on page 397 as a family name. This can be found under the explanation for the *kanji* for *ISO*.

The *kanji Ryu*, in figure 2, is a simplification of the *Ryu* in Hawley (See **Haig (1997)** page 824 *kanji* (4232)

In conclusion, the following translation for the first column on the *omote* (the column on the right) reads:

Ryu Jyo Shin (a retainer of *Ryo Jyo*) **Isogaya Yoshi Tatsu Saku** (made by *Isogaya Yoshitatusu*). It is probable that this smith was a Samurai and that he was a retainer of *Ryu Jyo*. The only mystery left is: what is *Ryu Jyo*? Some possibilities include a castle, a domain or a person.

Figure 2 offers more details about this smith and classifies him as an average smith. This is in contrast with Hawley (**1981**) who gives him only 10 points.

Second column on the *omote*

This second column is almost trivial, except for the fourth and fifth *kanji*.

It reads: **Ko ka Shi Hino Hitsuji Hachi Gatsu Kitsu Jitsu**; this is a date. This translates as *Koka* four (1848) eighth month, a lucky day. The next dilemma concerns the fourth and fifth *kanji* that read *Hino Hitsuji*. There are three ways by which the Japanese indicated the year **Koop (1973)** in the old times. The first indicates the reigning emperor and the year of his reign. The second, and most common, indicates the *nengo* and the year. In this case the *nengo* is *Koka* and, thus, the fourth year of *Koka*. The third way is based on a division of the eras in cycles of sixth years **Koop (1973)**. The date is indicated by the year of the cycle. In this case *Hino Hitsuji* means the 44th year of a cycle. (See **Koop (1973)**, page 63, for a table covering the full cycle). In principle, the precise cycle is unclear; however, there is the *nengo*, *koka*, the cycle must be the one that began in 1804. So the year is $1804 + 44 = 1848$, the same as above. Thus this smith indicated the year by two different methods.

There are two further observations to be made with respect to the date. The first one is that the eighth month may be or may not be August. Until *Meiji* the Japanese adopted a lunar calendar with only twenty nine or thirty days in the month; consequently it is necessary periodically to include extra months in the year. It is not clear, without a table, whether *Koka* 8 was or was not one of these extra months or if the eighth month was August. Second, this smith is listed as working during *Ansei* (1854-1859); as a result this must have been one of his early works.

First column of the *ura*

The first three *kanji* on the first column on the *ura* are the same as the first three *kanji* on the first column on the *omote*. They read *Ryu Jyo Shin*, that is, retainer of *Ryu Jyo*.

This is followed by four *kanji* that from the experience gained from the signature of the *omote* should be a name. In fact these four *kanji* are followed by the two *kanji* *Kitau Kore* or *Kitau Wo* meaning “forged this”. The *kanji* *Kitau* is *kanji* 1543 in the book by Self and Hirose **Self (1987)**. An actual example of this use is given in Self (1987) page 129.

With concentration, effort and the dictionary as a companion the four *kanji* are identified as *Saka*, *Guchi*, *Rei* and *Shi*. These four *kanji* read ***Saguchi Reichi***, the name of a person. There is no swordsmith listed as *Saguchi Reichi*. Since a search for other reading for the characters failed, this may be an unlisted smith. The *kanji* *Rei* is found in Koop (1973) on page 501 (third *kanji* on the page) and the *kanji* *Shi* is found on Koop (1973) on page 252 (second *kanji* in the page).

The remainder of this first column is relatively simple. The whole column can now be read: ***Ryu Jyo Shin Saka Guchi Rei Shi Kitau Kore Oite Bu Shu Sen Ju***; the meaning is clear. *Sakaguchi Reshi*, a retainer of *Ryu Jyo*, forged this at *Bu Shu Sen Ju*. Mr. Kazushige Tsuruta added the information that *Senju* was a famous prison. Accordingly it may be deduced that *Yoshitatsu* was helped by *Sakaguchi Reichi* in forging this sword at the prison of *Senju* in *Musashi (Bushu)* province. At this point, translation of the second column in the *ura* side remains.

Second Column in the *ura*.

The New Nelson (**Haig (1977)**) was a great help in facilitating the translation of this column. The *kanji* in this dictionary are numbered; each is listed by both number and page.

They are listed below:

First *kanji* – ***Tame*** (su) N 5611 page 1010, meaning **Test**

Second *kanji*- ***Kore*** N 48 page 40, meaning **This**

Third *kanji* - ***Otoshi*** N 5130 page 949, meaning **Outcome**

Fourth *kanji* -***Mune*** N 4811 page 904, meaning **Chest**

Fifth *kanji* - ***Hone*** N 6784 page 1202, meaning **Bone** (Rib)

A plausible translation is "Tested this (and) succeed (in) cutting (the) chest (ribs)".

It is now possible to offer a plausible translation of the entire inscription. It seems that the two smiths were samurai (retainers of *Ryu Jyo*). One of them (*Yoshitatsu*) became an

average swordsmith. Other information about him is that his name was *Isogaya Shigesuke*. He also made swords in *Satsuma* and finally that possibly he worked as a retainer for *Okazakiham* under the name *Tatsutsugu*. He lived in an era where, after 200 years of Tokugawa government, Japan came under the pressure of occidental powers.

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