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F. A. B. Coutinho



# NEWSLETTER

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JSSUS, PO Box 52106 Albuquerque, NM 87181 U.S.A.

**Real-life *kantei* of swords, Part 6: Errors in the literature**

**F. A. B. Coutinho**

Faculdade de Medicina da USP

Av. Dr. Arnaldo 455 São Paulo - SP 01246-903 Brazil

e-mail: coutinho @dim.fm.usp.br

**Introduction:** Previous articles – **Coutinho (2010-a)**, **Coutinho (2010-b)**, **Coutinho (2010-c)**, **Coutinho (2011-d)** and **Coutinho (2011-e)** discussed some problems that are encountered when examining unusual swords. This article considers yet another problem: errors in the literature.

This article was inspired by a recent article in this newsletter by Edward P. Harbulak (**Harbulak 2010**). In this article the author describes a very nice *tanto* signed *Iwa Mura Minamoto Kiyotaka*. In the book by Hawley **Hawley (1981)** however a swordsmith, *Iwa Be Minamoto Kiyotaka*, is mentioned.

Further research in the literature (**Shimizu Osamu (2005)** and **Honma and Masakuni (2010)**) revealed references to a smith with the second *kanji* in the signature as *be* (not *mura*). One may conclude, therefore, that either there is another smith whose signature begins with *Iwabe* or that when compiling an early edition of **Shimizu Osamu (2005)** or **Honma and Masakuni (2010)** a mistake was made and the *kanji mura* was replaced by *be* and that this mistake was copied by other authors.

It is quite possible that there is another smith with this name; perhaps the membership will find another example. This is most probably a simple propagated error. This article describes another possible literature error and a possible remedy to this problem. Sadly, in some cases even this remedy cannot be implemented.

The objective of this article is to show that there are discrepancies among the references normally used and this can be a real *kantei* problem; consulting all references at hand can lead to contradictions.

**The sword**

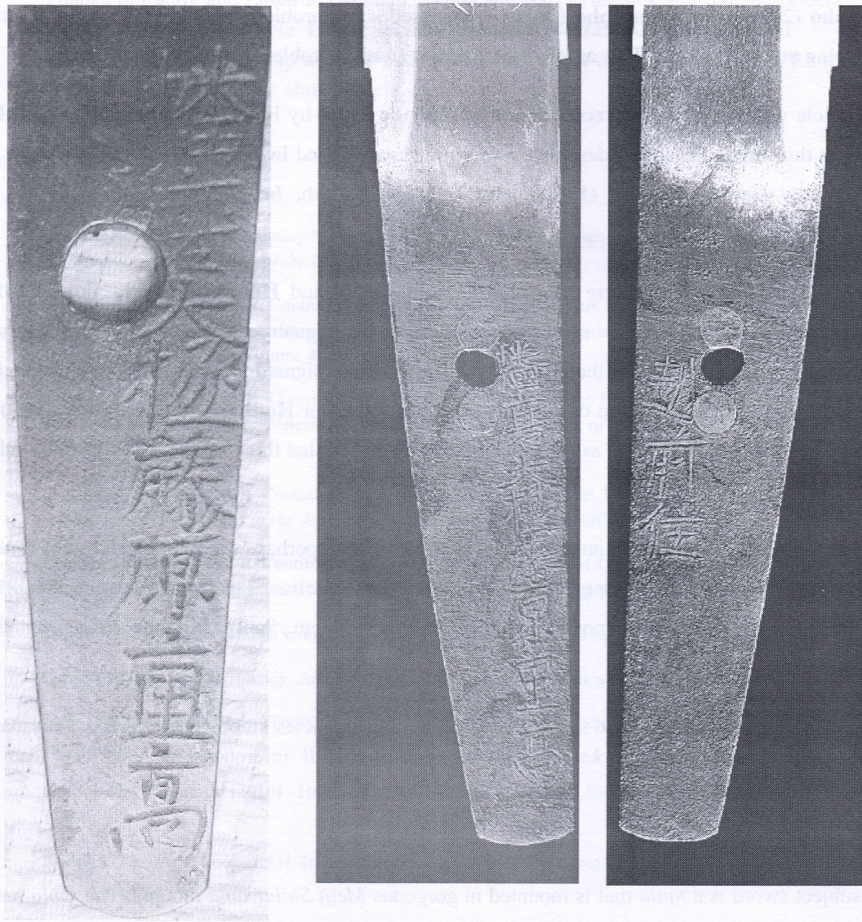
The subject sword is a *tanto* that is mounted in gorgeous *Meiji Shibayama* mounts. The *tanto* has a *horimono* (a dragon) which looks quite old; polishing tends to reduce *horimono* over the life of a



sword. The *tanto* is signed and the signature on the *omote* reads *Harima Daijo Fujiwara Shigetaka*. A photograph of the *mei* is shown on the left of Figure 1. The *omote* and the *ura* of a papered (*Tokubetsu Hozon*) sword signed *Harima Daijo Shigetaka* (RS1) as featured on the right of Figure 1. Deepest thanks to Fred Weissberg who gave permission to reproduce these photos.

Subject sword

papered reference sword RS 1





The two signatures are very different and so either the subject sword was made by another generation or it is *gimei* (fake). To clarify this, further material was sought in the literature. (See the reference *oshigata* below.)

Figures 2 and 3 show reference *oshigata*. The three *oshigata* in Figure 2 were taken from the book by Fujishiro Matsuo (**Fujishiro 1884** -pages 426-427).

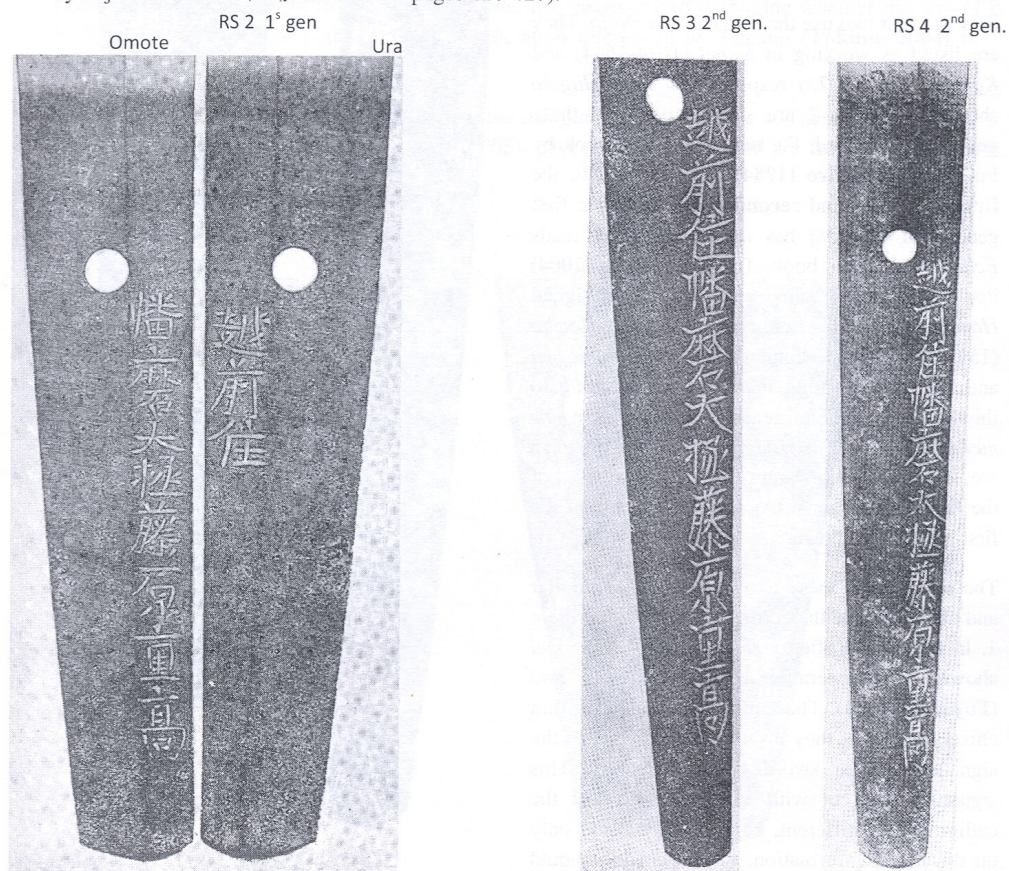


Figure 2

The *oshigata* in Figure 3 were taken from the book by Tokuno (**Tokuno 2004**) and were enlarged for easy reading. In figure 3 the left *oshigata* (RS 5) is attributed to the second generation and the right *oshigata* (RS6) to the third generation.

The three major books containing a list of smiths, (Hawley (1981), Shimizu Osamu (2005) and Honma and Masakuni (2010)), list eleven generations of smiths signing *Shigetaka*; however, only the first two use the title *Harima Daijo*. They are listed as working in *Kanei* (1624-1644) and *Kanbun* (1661-1673) respectively. The *oshigata* shown in Figure 2 are supposedly from these generations. Indeed, the *oshigata* in the book by Fujishiro (Fujishiro (1984) are attributed to the **first** generation and **second** generation. The first generation *oshigata* has an *ura mei* that reads *Echizen Ju*. In his book, Tokuno (Tokuno 2004) lists on pages 283, three generations that signed *Harima Daijo*: the first one working in *Keicho* (1596-1615), the second one working in *Kanei* and the third working in *Kanbun*. According to this book, the second generation includes an *ura mei* *Echizen Ju*. The *oshigata* shown in Figure 3 are, according to this author, of the **second** and of the **third** generations; there is no *oshigata* of the first generation shown.

The *oshigata* in these two references are similar and also resemble the certified *mei* show in Figure 1. In fact the certified *mei* is identical to the *mei* shown as first generation in the book by Fujishiro (Fujishiro 1884). The cuts are made with a thin chisel; therefore, they do not appear to match the signature of the sword being examined. This signature was cut with a thick chisel and the calligraphy is different, consequently based only on the above information, the conclusion should be that the signature in the subject sword is a *gimei* or the signature is of the first generation (working in *Keicho*) that is mentioned only in Tokuno (Tokuno 2004).

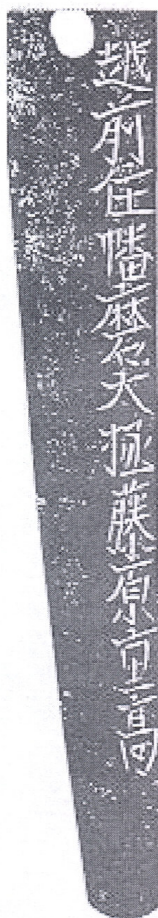
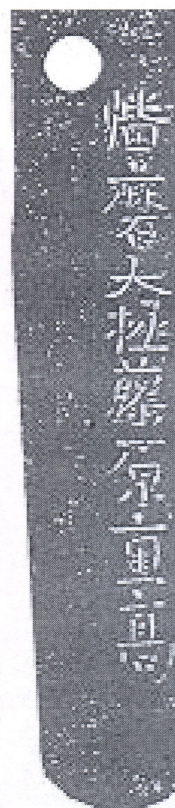
RS 5 2<sup>nd</sup> gen.RS 6 3<sup>rd</sup> gen.

Figure 3



According to Shimizu Osamu (2005) and Homma and Masayuki (Honma and Masakuni (2010)), eleven generations signed *Shigetaka*, only the first two generations (working in *Kanei* and *Kanbum* respectively) signed *Harima Daijo*. The *oshigata* of these two generations do not match the subject sword; as a result it is a fake or the work of the first generation, listed only by Tokuno (Tokuno 2004) and absent from the other books. It is necessary to determine whether this sword is by the first generation or perhaps the first generation referenced by Tokuno (Tokuno 2004) is signed differently.

Further complications arise when considering the *oshigata* shown in figure 4. These *oshigata* were taken from the book by Kanzan (Kanzan (2005), pages 136 and 137, and are from the *oshigata* numbered 253 and 254.

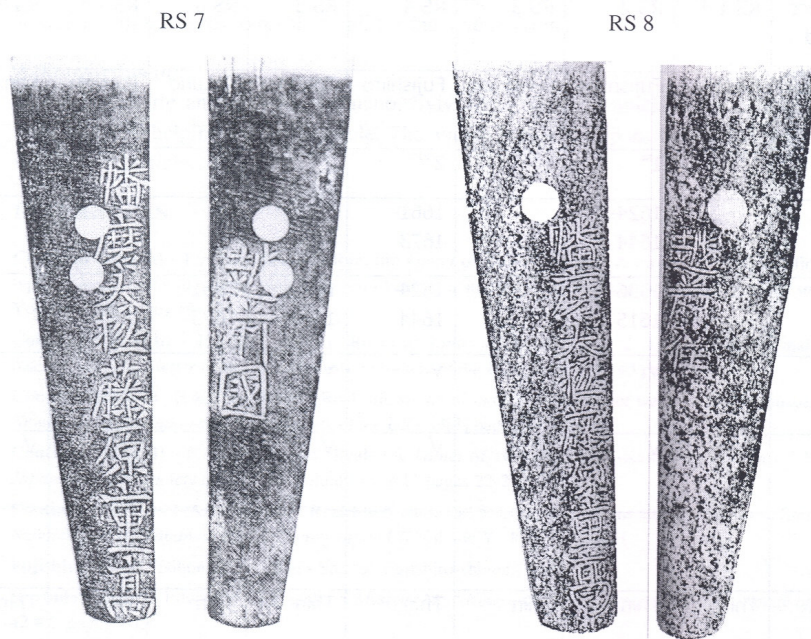


Figure 4

The *mei* on the right is chiseled with a thick chisel and, in this sense, is similar to the signature in the subject sword. At this point Kanzan (Kanzan (2005) does not mention generations and both swords are signed in the *ura* differently. In one, it is written *Echizen Ju* and in the other, *Echizen Kuni*. The subject sword has no signature in the *ura*. Comparing calligraphy requires more

specialized expertise. Ultimately the dilemma remains; whether the subject sword is *gimei* or the genuine work of first generation *Shigetaka* described by Tokuno (Tokuno 2004). To complicate the situation further, two more *oshigata* by *Shigetaka* are shown in pages 138 and 139 of the book by Kanzan (Kanzan (2005), referenced as *oshigata* numbers 255 and 256. *Oshigata* 255 appears to have been inscribed with a thin chisel and *oshigata* 256 is attributed to the fourth generation and is signed *Harima Daijo*, contradicting the references of (Hawley (1981), Shimizu Osamu (2005) and Honma and Masakuni (2010)). These authors claim that only the first and second generations signed *Harima Daijo* while (Tokuno 2004) writes that only the first three generations signed *Harima Daijo*.

Table 1 summarizes the results of the study so far.

Point	Subject sword	RS 1	RS 2	RS 3	RS 4	RS 5	RS 6	RS 7	RS 8
Source	Author	NBTHK	Fujishiuro	Fujishiuro	Fujishiuro	Tokuno *	Tokuno	Kanzan	Kanzan
Generation	1 <sup>st</sup> ?	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>		
Era Fujishiro			1624-1644		1661-1673				
Era Tokuno			1596-1615		1624-1644	1624-1644	1661-1673		
<i>Harima daijo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Echizen ju (ura)</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
<i>Echizen Kuni (ura)</i>								✓	
Chisel	Thick	Thin	Thin	Thin	Thin	Thin	Thin	Thick	Thin

\* No *oshigata* for first generation given by Tokuno

It is assumed that the organizations, the NBTHK and the NTHK, have access to a great many *oshigata* which may be helpful for comparison in this case. Submitting a photo of the *nakago* to these groups in search of an expert opinion based on the greater information base resulted in the following response. The reply to the inquiry from the NBTHK follows:

"the judgment requires examination by our *shinsa* team because it does not give a clearly negative impression." Further on they say that "... the structure of the signature which is well balanced has a trait of the *Shodai*."

For a definitive solution the sword should be sent to *shinsa* in Japan. The sword may be a fake or the work of the first generation, listed only in the book by Tokuno (**Tokuno 2004**) or of a later generation who signed *Harima Daijo*. With changing rules for airlines and the difficulties involved in sword entry and exit from Japan, this option is becoming increasingly more difficult to implement.

Reference materials often have conflicting information. Sorting out these contradictions is a challenge for collectors and scholars. Consulting many references brings more information and sometimes more issues to resolve – all for the love of *kantei*.

#### Acknowledgments

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