

New Information about the Birth of the Kamakura Schools**Introduction**

Only only a few sword connoisseurs know the hidden and secret truth of the origins of the Kamakura Sōshū-den. This article will outline how recent archaeological evidence combining with little known old book information and stylistic evidence is shedding new light on the origin of Sōshū-den.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**Ōshū Emishi to Fushū**

To understand the development of the Ōshū 奥州 schools and how they moved and developed with time, we need to look at the history of the region

The barbarians or disobeying people of the Ōshū district in the Northern third on Honshu were called the Emishi 蝦夷. The Nihon Shoki 日本書紀 mentions the Emishi who Jimmu and his armed forces (the Yamato) defeated before he was enthroned as the Emperor of Japan. The Nihon Shoki, also states that Takenouchi no Sukune in the era of Emperor Keiko proposed that they should subjugate the Emishi of Hitakami no Kuni 日高見国 in eastern Japan.

The Emishi were composed of two main populations, the Jōmon Ainoid who were the majority and a smaller group the Kofun, united by a common Ainoid language distinct from the Yamato. These two populations were not distinguished by contemporaries, but rather by present-day physical anthropologists. Historically, their contemporaries the Yamato saw them as one group consisting mainly those who were descendants of the natives (the Jōmon) who also had in their population those of mixed ethnicity, most likely descendants of early colonists from the mainland (the Kofun). In addition, the contemporary Yamato for their part looked upon the Emishi as foreigners and barbarians whose lands they desired to conquer and incorporate into the Japanese state.¹

The first major attempts to subjugate the Emishi in the 8th century were largely unsuccessful. The imperial armies, which were modelled after the Mainland Chinese armies, were no match for the guerrilla tactics of the Emishi. The Yamato changed tactics to match the Emishi on horseback and archery. By the mid-9th century, most of the Emishi land in Honshū was conquered, and they ceased to be independent. The Emishi of the late 9th century were represented by different tribes, some of who became allies of the Yamato (*fushū*, *ifu*) and others of who remained hostile (*iteki*). However, they continued to be influential in local politics as subjugated, though powerful, Emishi Fushū families creating semi-autonomous feudal domains in the north. The Abe 安倍 and Kiyohara 清原 Fushū families were dominant in the region by the 11th century. Early in the 11th century Abe no Yoritoki 安倍頼時 refused to pay taxes to the central government, led raiding parties south of the Koromo

River and generally ruled as an independent monarch. This led to the Zenkunen War 前九年合戦 or Early Nine-Years War (1050 - 1062) in which Minamoto no Yoriyoshi 源 頼義 reinforced by Kiyohara no Takenori 清原武則 from Dewa province defeated the Abe. The six semi-autonomous districts were then given to Kiyohara no Takenori. Corrupt administration in the Kiyohara family led the region to war a second time. In the Gosannen War 後三年合戦 or Latter Three Years' War (1083 - 1087) in which Minamoto no Yoshiie 源義家 subdued the Kiyohara.

Fushū Power Struggles and the Minamoto

The Northern Fujiwara (奥州藤原氏 *Ōshū Fujiwara-shi*) or Hiraizumi 平泉 were a noble family that, with the support of the Imperial Court, ruled the Tohoku 東北 region (subjugated north east part of Ōshū) of Japan from the late 11th through the 12th centuries. They succeeded the semi-independent Emishi Fushū families. The Ōshū Fujiwara ruled over an independent region populated by Emishi Fushū and Yamato settlers that derived its wealth from gold mining, horse trading, and as middlemen in the trade in luxury items from the continental Asian states and from the far northern Ezo Emishi. They were able to keep their independence vis-à-vis Kyoto by the strength of their Emishi warrior bands.

Hiraizumi was the name given to the capital established by Fujiwara Kiyohira 藤原清衡 in the Tamatsukuri 玉造 county (present day Miyagi prefecture). Kiyohira's mother was from the Abe clan so he considered himself half Emishi. By 1180, Hiraizumi was the second largest city in Japan, only smaller than Kyoto.

Mamiya states, "There was a saying from Heian era "Tachi is Tamatsukuri". Since the area was the front line of Ōshū business, Tamatsukuri County must have been thriving in the Nara era and the early Heian era. In this area goods, people, troops, traders, and craftsmen were gathered and infrastructure was substantial. There is no doubting the possibility that a new culture was born in such chaos.... The Tamatsukuri area must have been an important source of sword production at that time. Still now the area has the name Meiken 名剣 (good sword). " ²

At about the same time 1083 in the Kanto, Minamoto Yoshiie 源義家 (great great grandfather of Minamoto Yoritomo 源 頼朝) had established his headquarters for the Seiwa 清和 Minamoto in Kamakura. Archaeology now shows us that Kamakura was far larger than the assumed small fishing village mentioned in some sword texts. It was a large military stronghold with natural defences and an extensive administrative centre.

Within a few generations, rivalries in the Imperial Court brought the Taira 平 and Minamoto into conflict. After the Heiji Rebellion 平治の乱, the Minamoto family had been devastated by the Taira. Minamoto Yoritomo as a young boy of thirteen was banished to Izu province. Izu being adjacent to Sagami it was under the control of the Hojo 北条. In 1179 Yoritomo married Hojo Masako 北条 政子 and he moved back to his ancestral home in Kamakura. Over the next two years the two clans began preparations for war against the Taira. By 1185

at the end of the Genpei War 源平合戦, Yoritomo's combined forces had disposed of the Taira and he turned his attention to Hiraizumi, which fell to the Minamoto forces in 1189. The emperor Go-Toba 後鳥羽 (then just twelve years old) proclaimed Yoritomo Shogun in 1192.

THE ŌSHŪ SCHOOLS AND THE KAMAKURA MOKUSA SCHOOL

The Nara period

Fukunaga says "Mokusa Area was famous for legendary swordsmiths in the Heian Period (AD 794-1185). They are considered as the original producers of the Japanese swords known as Warabite-to 蕨手刀 which can date back to the sixth to eighth centuries. Warabite-to gained its fame through the series of battles between Emishi people and the Yamato-chotei government in the late eighth century. Using Warabite-to, the small number of Emishi soldiers could resist against the numerous Yamato-chotei army over a Thirty-Eight Years' War 三十八年戦争 (AD 770-811)."³

Kunzan states "Kanchi In Bon 観 智院 and other swordsmith directories list many smith names from Mutsu and Dewa Provinces between the Nara and the Kamakura Periods "⁴

The Nihonto Meikan 日本刀名鑑 shows the earliest and by far the largest group of Ōshū smiths from the beginning of the 8th century was the Mokusa 舞草 school, listing over 100 Mokusa smiths before the beginning of the Kamakura period. Archaeological excavations of the Ōshū Tohoku region show iron ore smelting sites dating back to the early Nara period. As we can see from the Historical background above, the Tohoku region and indeed the whole Ōshū district in the 8th century was controlled and populated by the Emishi. Archaeological evidence of recovered Warabite-to show a high concentration in the burial goods of the Ōshū and Hokkaido regions ⁵

The Heian Period

By the Heian period, according to the Nihonto Meikan, the Ōshū swordsmith group consists of the Mokusa (舞草), the Gassan (月山) and the Tamatsukuri (玉造), later to become the Hoju (寶壽) schools. The Mokusa had their base around Ichinoseki (today's Iwate Prefecture) supplied the city of Hiraizumi and the Abe clan. The Gassan in Dewa supplies the Kiyohara. A smaller group was the Tamatsukuri. Their base was around Tamatsukuri County, Miyagi prefecture, which also supplied Hiraizumi.

An entry in the Nihonto Meikan states that in 970 a Mokusa smith Moriie 森戸 moved to Sagami in the Kanto and established the Kamakura Mokusa school. Under the sponsorship of the Seiwa Minamoto this school began to prosper as more Mokusa smiths moved with the employment. By 1160 the Kamakura Mokusa School was firmly established and must have been sizable. It was this school of swordsmiths that supplied the armies of the Hojo and Seiwa Minamoto with armour and weaponry for the Genpei War 源平合戦 and the subsequent war against Hiraizumi. It would be safe to conclude that many swordsmiths

names that appear in Nihonto Meikan in the mid 12th century, and listed just as "Mokusa", would in fact be working in this school. Who they were can't be established and many smiths may just be unrecorded. The Ichinoseki School in turn armed Hiraizumi. The Tamatsukuri School and the Dewa Gassan School were in decline after the defeat of the Kiyohara clan.

The Kamakura period

Mamiya states "After the fall of Hiraizumi, Kamakura General Hatakeyamauji 畠山氏 occupied the area and took some swordsmiths into Kamakura. " ⁶

It seems that General Hatakeyamauji procured the co-operation of some of the Ichinoseki and Tamatsukuri Mokusa swordsmiths and took them to Kamakura to join the Kamakura Mokusa School; they probably didn't have much choice. At least this statement seems to suggest so. What we do know is that most of Hiraizumi was destroyed and subsequently abandoned. The Ichinoseki School was also abandoned, being far from the new ruling power in the region, the smiths moved along with the work to other parts of Japan. During this time a winning army viewed captured swordsmiths as an asset to procure. Swordsmiths traditionally worked as close to their Clan leaders that the raw materials would allow. In this case the swordsmith areas of Kamakura were just two kilometres from Yoritomo's mansion. To leave the swordsmiths to work over 200 kms away in Ichinoseki was unthinkable for the Minamoto, as that would leave their asset vulnerable to be acquired by a potential enemy. We know that good quality sand iron was available in Kamakura and iron ore in nearby in Shinano what is now Gunma prefecture. Members of the Ichinoseki Mokusa School also moved further afield, as far as away from the Minamoto as possible. They moved to where they found work and raw materials. The Nihonto Meikan records Ōshū swordsmiths turning up at this time in Bizen namely Ōshū Taro Masatsune 奥州 太郎正恒 and Senjuin namely Shigemura 重村. Other swordsmiths from the Ichinoseki Mokusa School are noted in the Nihonto Meikan as moving far north to Namioka and Tsuaru, and far south to Hoki, Bungo and Kyushu. This migration needs to be investigated in detail.

The wars over the Ōshū district had continued for nearly 200 years as the valuable resources of the area, particularly gold and iron ore were highly prized by both the Yamato and the Emishi.

GENEALOGY

The Early Schools

From late the Nara period, the Nihonto Meikan lists the founder of the Mokusa schools as Mototoshi 元寿 701. Another 30 smiths are listed as working before the beginning of the 11th century.

In earlier time there was a list of forty-two famous swordsmiths in the Toukou Meikan 刀工 銘鑑 at Kanchiin 観智院. Eight of these swordsmiths were from Ōshū schools. Five from Mokusa being: Onimaru 鬼丸, Yoyasu 世安, Morifusa 森房, Hatafusa 幡房 and Gaan 瓦安, two from the Tamatsukuri being Fujū 諷誦, Houji 寶次 and one from Gassan 月山.

Additional to this list, the Nihonto Meikan list another hundred and ten swordsmiths who were working in the Ōshū area between 1126 and 1190, most listed only as Mokusa (probably Ichinoseki and some likely being Kamakura) with a smaller number listed as Tamatsukuri and Dewa Gassan.

It seems that up to the fall of Hiraizumi, the Kamakura Mokusa School was still a smaller offshoot of the main Ichinoseki Mokusa School. After 1190 the number of swordsmiths listed in the Ōshū schools dramatically decline. It must be remembered with all the swordsmiths working dates that they are approximate and represent the era. The actual working life of each smith covered many years.

The Kamakura Mokusa School

As previously stated, the Nihonto Meikan lists the first Mokusa swordsmith to move to Kamakura as Moriie 森戸 970. It further lists Mokusa smiths moving to Kamakura, Takishiro Taiu 滝四郎 1158, another Moriie 森戸 1158 and Yukishige 行重 1184. It is my belief that many more unrecorded were working there at the time being both descendants of the Kamakura Mokusa and relocated from Ichinoseki by the Minamoto.

According to the Institute for Research in World Systems, by the year 1200 Kamakura was the largest city in Japan eclipsing Kyoto⁷. It seems reasonable to suggest that many of the dislocated Ichinoseki Mokusa smiths found work in the existing Kamakura Mokusa School. It would also be reasonable to suggest that any Mokusa smiths listed in the Nihonto Meikan as Mokusa after 1199 would be working in the only existing Mokusa school at the time, namely in Kamakura. I make this assumption also on the basis that as stated above, the Nihonto Meikan makes notations under the Mokusa listings of some smiths moving to Bizen, Bungo, Hoki, Yamato, Shinano and Chikuzen between 1199 and 1260. Also many Mokusa smiths of this time who moved to other areas of Japan are listed alternatively under their new home schools. Between 1199 and 1264 the following twenty-two smiths are listed as Mokusa, most of them must have been working in Kamakura. (Note: only a handful is listed as Gassan and Tamatsujuri at this time, both schools were in decline)

Hideyasu 秀安 1199, Mitsutsune 光恒 1199, Kimiari 王有 1211, Yoyasu 世安 1211, Kunihiro 国平 1219, Shigenaga 重長 1224, Yasumitsu 安光 1224, Ietoku 家時 1233, Kiyofusa 清房 1233, Kunitou 国任 1233, Fusayasu 房安 1233, Yukishige 行重 1233 (noted as moving to Kamakura), Undou 雲同 1235 (noted as moving to Kamakura), Yoyasu 世安 1235, Ariyuki 有行 1243, Unken 雲顕 1243, Nagahisa 長久 1243, Kiyomaru 鬼王丸 1249, Shigetaka 重高 1249, Fushimi 伏見 1249, Motohira 基平 1249, Yoyasu 世安 1261,

Nagayama Kokan says “However, it seems likely that many other swordsmiths, whose work no longer exists, also visited Kamakura and local swordsmiths, and that their work had an influence on the development of the Sōshū tradition”⁸

After the Mongol Invasion

The Nihonto Meikan lists, at the time of that followed the Mongol Invasions, fourteen Kamakura Mokusa and Ōshū swordsmiths. By this time it is a hundred years after the fall of Hiraizumi, the Ichinoseki Mokusa school site has been long abandoned. Of the fourteen remaining, eleven were (Kamakura) Mokusa; two were Gassan and one Tamatsukuri, who were working between 1287 and 1308, after which we see no listings for any Ōshū school swordsmiths for sixteen years.

They were

(Kamakura) Mokusa school: Mitsutsune 光恒 1287, Ietoki 家時 1288, Takamoto 高基 1288, Fushimi 伏見 1288, Yoyasu 世安 1293, Tomokiyo 友清 1293, Yorimune 頼宗 1293, Yoriyasu 頼安 1299, Tomonaga 友永 1303, Tomonaga 友長 1306, Yoshinaga 吉長 1308

Gassan school: Gassan 月山 1287, Tomoyasu 友安 1308

Tamatsukuri school: Yukimitsu 行光 1288, said to be the 3rd generation, having moved to Kyushu, we see no record of him showing up there

I must point out that my conclusion that all of these Mokusa swordsmiths moved to Kamakura is unlikely to be perfect. Some would have held out for some time in Ichinoseki.

I think it is fair to say many did indeed turn up in Kamakura and many had descendants who continued to work in Kamakura. It is at this point in history that the Kamakura Mokusa swordsmiths disappear. It is clear they were working in Kamakura up to and past the time of the introduction of the Sōshū School. In some way these Mokusa swordsmiths working in and near Kamakura influence the development of the traditional Sōshū School and Sōshū-den. It is likely that they merged or were absorbed into one school. They may have become the nameless assistants to their more famous and illustrious peers in the Sōshū School. It is just as possible that some are known to us by other names, having changed their names as was tradition when changing schools and working for new master smiths.

SŌSHŪ CHARACTERISTICS ŌSHŪ SWORDS - HEIAN TO KAMAKURA JIDAI

Warabite-to are by far the most abundant examples left extant of the workmanship of the Ōshū swordsmiths. By correlating the known earliest time periods of Iron production in the Tohoku with the known earliest Warabite-to, it seems likely that the earliest examples were either imported or manufactured locally from imported iron. I will examine this proposal in depth in another article. For now I would like to present some evidence as to the workmanship of the Ōshū and in particular the Mokusa from known extant examples that date later than the early Nara period.

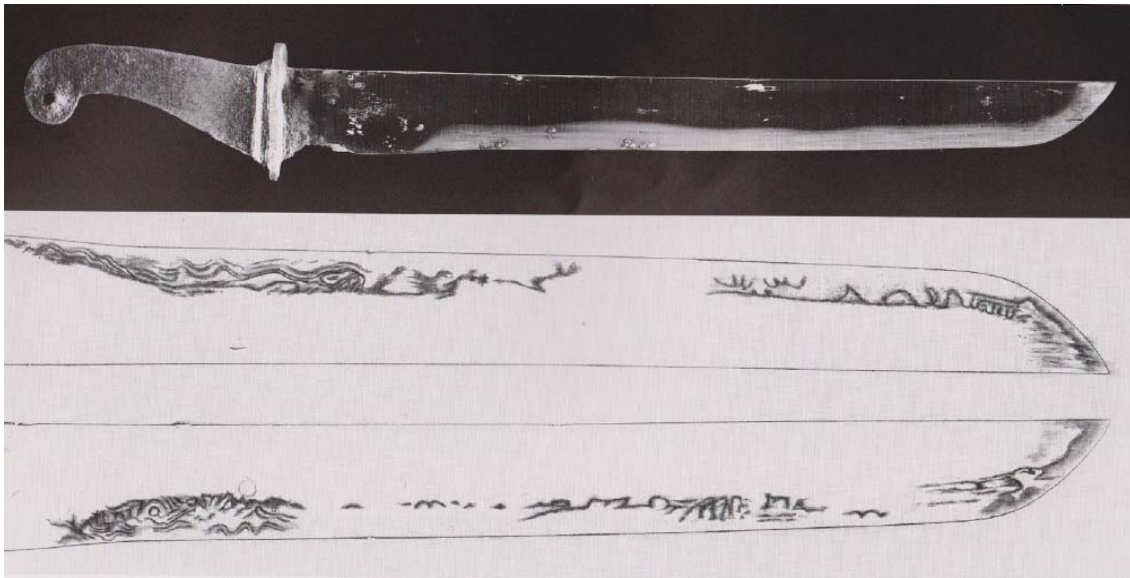


Illustration 1

Warabite-to, excavated from Kanayama site, (Miyagi Tohoku), Nara period 8th century

Description: Length 38.2cm. The description accompanying this sword is as follows. Hirazukuri with a stylised fern bracken type nakago and press fit tsuba. The jihada is blackish in mixed Oitame-mokume nagaru with profuse ji-nie and prominent chikei and chihan. The hamon has choji gunome magiri with many kinsuji, sunagashi and inazuma variations. This Warabite clearly show a Ji and Ha closely resembling that of the later Sōshū-den.

Kunzan states “Considering that there were many battles in this area, such as ‘Zen-kunen-no-eki’ and ‘Go-sannen-no-eki’ when the Imperial Court sent their armies to Ōshū to subjugate the Ezo (Japanese aborigines) ... It is quite natural that many swordsmiths resided there and there was remarkable progress in sword forging techniques. “⁹

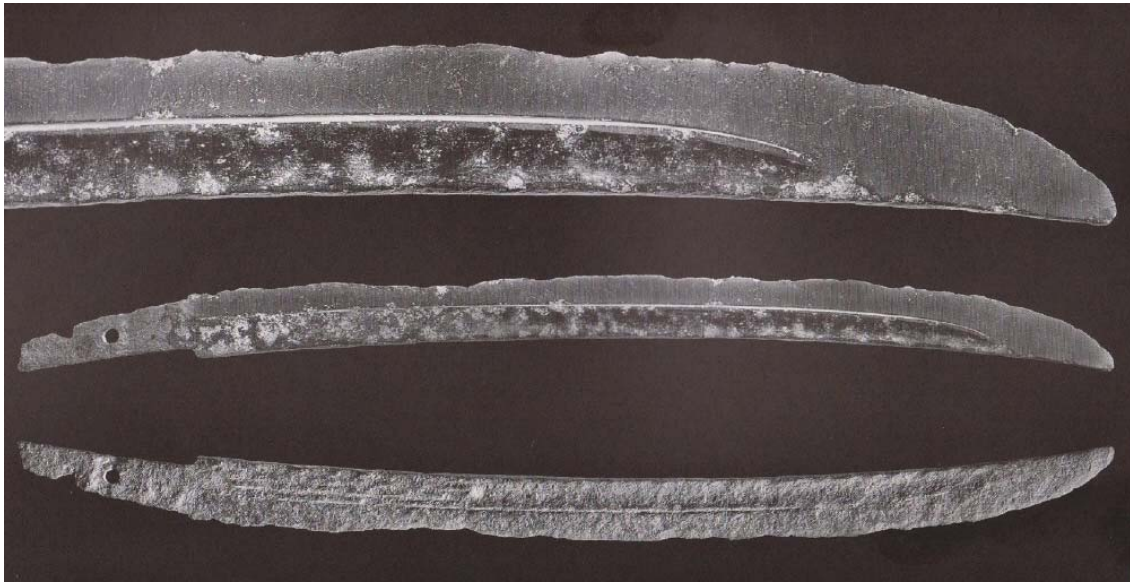
I agree with Kunzan that this example shows advanced forging techniques. The Ji and Ha of this sword is remarkable for its era and clearly shows many characteristics of Sōshū-den. It should be noted that the koshisori of the nakago on this example is one of the earliest dated and predates examples of chukoto tachi of the early Heian showing the same feature.



Illustration 2 Warabite-to the Ōmiya-Iwatsutsumi-jinja, (Saitama) Nara 8th century courtesy Carlo G Tachinni

“It has a strange midareba and vehement hataraki within the ha, making it looking at a glance like a Sōshū blade from the Nanbokuchō period. It has further a deep nioiguchi, a deep boshi whose kaeri runs back in a long manner. Towards the cutting edge, it resembles other ancient swords, which means it is dark but has clear areas without hataraki, sunagashi-like nie structures running through the ji, and in places spot-shaped hardening effects which are dark in the centre . “¹⁰

The previous two swords show clear workmanship close to Sōshū-den in the Ji and Ha.



III. 3 Uchigatana of Nomikuchishiki type, Chūson-ji Konjiki-in, Iwate (Tohoku) Heian 11th Century

Description: Length 48cm. Hirazukuri, wide mihaba, thin kasane, torii sori. This is the Emishi-to excavated with the grave goods of Fujiwara Kiyohira 藤原 清衡 It must be clearly noted that the revolutionary features of the sugata of this sword predate the similar sugata of Sōshū-den by one hundred years.

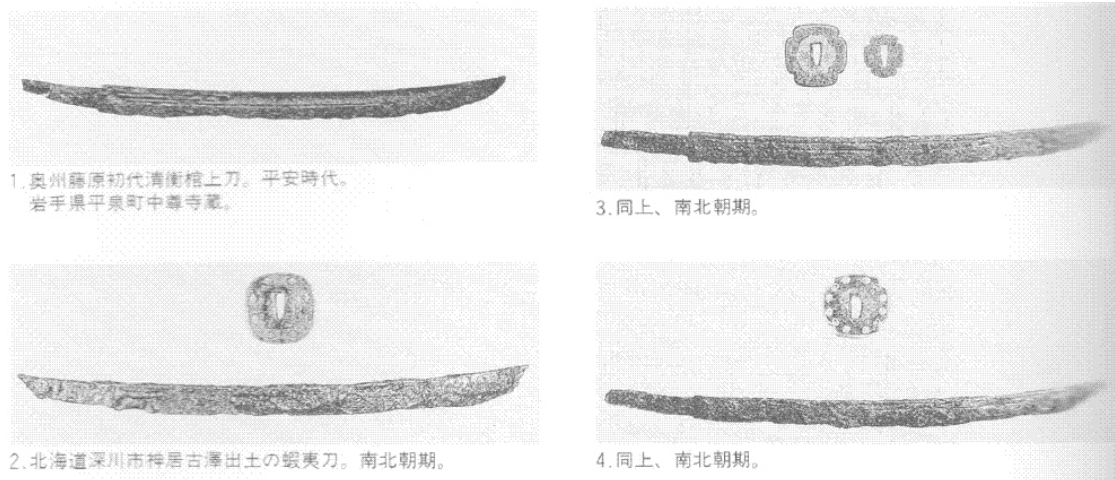


Illustration 4 More excavated Emishi-to , all exhibit similar features, app. Heian 11th century

There can be little doubt that the Kiyohira uchigatana was produced by Fushū Ōshū swordsmiths. Similar examples of this style of Emishi-to have been excavated in the Northern regions of Honshū and Hokkaido. Fujiwara no Kiyohira (1056 – August 10, 1128) was a samurai of mixed Japanese-Emishi parentage of the late Heian period, who was the founder of Hiraizumi.

In old literatures and tales of war

Ōshū swords appear in various old books of this time, for example Heiji Monogatari 平治物語 (Tale of Heiji), Konjaku Monogatari 今昔物語 (Anthology of tales from the past), Kojidan 古事談 (Japanese collection of Setsuwa 説話), and Gikeiki 義経記 (War tale that focuses on the legends of Minamoto no Yoshitsune 源義経 and his followers). Ōshū swordsmiths appeared in books in quite early times compared to others. Tales in these books tell of the Emishi-to in the capital city and these swords seem to have been quite popular with the Bushi. Maybe a badge of honour being captured weapons. For example from Mamiya ¹¹

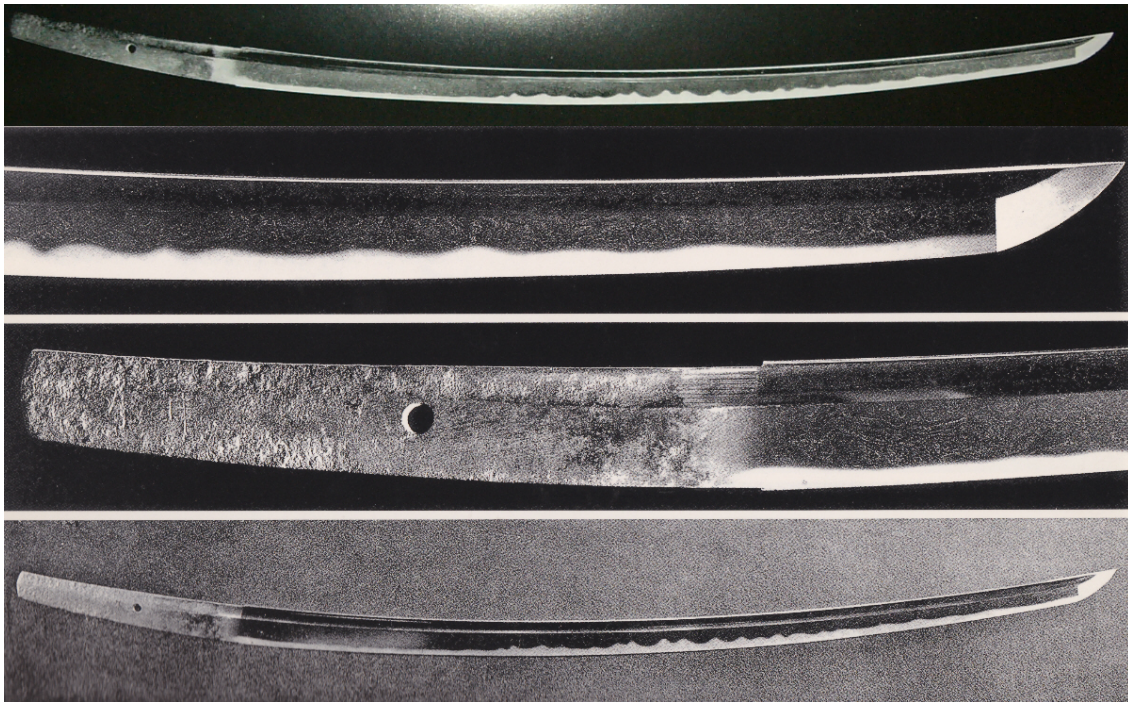
In “Nihongiryaku” 日本紀略 983AD:” the number of people wearing a funny looking Tachi is increasing.”

This is a clear reference to a tachi of another style than the mainland type chukoto tachi. There has been some contention if this passage is referring to Warabite-to, an Emishi-to or an early Kenuki tachi. With this early date I can not accept the Kenuki tachi theory, as they seem to have developed much later and would have to consider the passage a reference to an Emishi-to

In “Kauyagokau” 高野御幸 1124AD :“ when emperor Shirakawa 白河法皇 visited Kouyasan 高野山, Fujiwara Zaemon Michisue 藤原左衛門通季 was wearing a Fushū sword “

In “Heihanki” 兵範記 1158AD there was a line that mentioned the Emperor himself had Fushū Tachi.”

It seems that during the late Heian, the Fushū sword was gaining some popularity in Kyoto. During this period Emishi-to were being replaced by the Kenuki tachi that were the norm in use in the Kanto and the Kinai. Also it is clear that increasing trade with the Yamato of the Kanto and Kyoto was having an influence of the style of swords being made by the Ōshū and Kamakura Mokusa swordsmiths. It seems that the local Bushi were creating a demand for the “Yamato style” tachi. It is probable that both styles were being produced into the late Heian in Hiraizumi, merging into the early Kamakura jidai. This demand for two styles of swords in the area created in my opinion a cross pollination of ideas and technology evident in the next sword.



Ill. 4 Tachi signed Yoyasu (alt. Sei-an) , Juyo Bunkuzai, Tokyo National Museum late Kamakura 13th century

Description: Mei “Yoyasu” 世安 Length 68.2cmn Mokusa School. This sword is shinogi zukuri and is close to a ubu nakago. The jihada shows a remarkable similarity to the previously illustrated Warabite-to being blackish in mixed Oitame nagaru and mokume with profuse ji-nie with prominent chikei and chihan. The Hamon is sugha from in from the hamachi for a third of the blade changing to gunome midare in thick nie with many kinsuji, sunagashi and inazuma is abundant. The boshi is notarekomi ending in yakitsume. My opinion is this sword is early Kamakura work of the 5th generation Yoyasu 1211, or earlier due to the sensuki nakago and that the iroi mune is low and may have been re-shaped from maru mune. In referring to the Nihonto Meikan it lists this sword as the work of the 6th generation Yoyasu working in 1235. Both swordsmiths were likely working in the Kamakura Mokusa School. As can be seen by this Yoyasu example, and comparisons to all other known swords, the Kamakura Mokusa School were closest stylistically at this time to Sōshū-den.

Connections between the Mokusa Schools and Sōshū-den.

The history of the establishment of the Kamakura Sōshū School of swordsmiths by the Hojo Bakufu 鎌倉幕府 is well documented in many references. Here I would like to present to you from the historical, archaeological and stylistic evidence presented a new theory of the beginnings of the Sōshū-den.

Commonly the features of the Kamakura Sōshū-den have been considered a hybrid of Awataguchi and Bizen kaji styles. For the purposes of this article I will defer the stylistic characteristics of these two schools to the research of the reader from the common texts. However it is becoming more evident that the Kamakura Mokusa School could be the true root of the Kamakura Sōshū-den. Mr. Mitsuharu Mamiya (the chairman of Mokusa Sword

Research Group) said “Mokusa swordsmiths and Kamakura swordsmiths were like parent and child.” Mr. Nakabachi also from the Mokusa Sword Research Group said that Kamakura swordsmiths’ Nie 沸 is like the Ōshū sword, and it must have been a strong influence”¹¹

Another striking clue from analysing the Nihonto Meikan to be considered: Is it only co-incidental that the third generation Tamatsukuri smith is named Yukimitsu 行光, his working period exactly coincides with the late Kamakura period. He is the last of his school with his only predecessor being listed 37 years before him, the Tamatsukuri School morphing into the Hoju after his time. It could be that this swordsmith became Sōshū Yukimitu 相州行光. The work style of Yukimitsu could be considered a fusion of the Tamatsukuri Ōshū style and that of Shintogo Kunimitsu. If that was so, then the story of Masamune 正宗 being the adopted son of Yukimitsu may also be a direct reference to Masamune coming from a brother school, the Kamakura Mokusa. Of interest, we know that the kanji characters that make the name Masamune do not appear in the genealogy of the Sōshū School prior to him. Alternatively in the record of the Mokusa smiths we do see one kanji appear in the name of, Yorimune 頼宗 1293, it being common practice for junior smiths to change their name when studying with a new master. Quite an interesting and plausible hypothesis.

Around the mid Muromachi era the Bushi started to appreciate the beauty of swords and studied Meito. All the information about the genealogy of the Kamakura Mokusa swordsmiths disappears at that time. The connection of the Kamakura Mokusa swordsmiths with the birth of Sōshū-den was written out of the sword texts for political reasons and for the ethnic pride of the Yamato people. The implications of the evidence are obvious. But there may be more to it than just deleting the Mokusa from the sword books to cater to the egos of the Yamato Bushi. It may well have also suited the purposes of Hideyoshi and subsequently the Tokugawa Shogun to create the myth of the origins of Sōshū-den.

Historically, good Ōshū swords may well have been passed off as Sōshū-den in their own right. Ōshū swords have O-itame hada and Sōshū characteristics. Kamakura swords are also hadamono. It seems likely that to fill the demand for good Sōshū-den for gift giving, good Ōshū swords were altered to become Kamakura Sōshū den, and the not so good swords were left as they were. This may account for the scarcity and the generally lower quality of extant Ōshū swords.

Some more points to consider. Kunzan describes Hoju, “Hoju forges whitish jigane and itame-hada that combines nagare-hada and stands out, and tempers ko-midare and sugu-ha mixed with ko-midare in accompanied by a hazy nioi-guchi in nie-deki.”¹¹ Generally Hoju hamon characteristics are described as watery and weak nioiguchi, but the Hoju example at Tokyo National Museum has a strong Yakiba and is refined.

Mamiya states “Many swords made by Sōshū Yukimitu 相州行光, Masamune 正宗 and Sadamune 貞宗 are suriage and mumei, especially Sadamune..... Most suriage swords are better quality than swords with Mei 銘. One of Masamune’s superb swords Jo Izumino Kami Shoji Masamune 城和泉守所持正宗 is mumei and suriage, but from its shape you can tell it could be an ubu tachi from the early Kamakura era, with the Mei removed “¹²

Conclusion

The Mokusa School of swordsmiths, with a five hundred year heritage had existed in the Tohoku region right up to the time of the establishment of the Kamakura Sōshū School. They were regarded as highly skilled swordsmiths. The Mokusa were the swordsmiths of the Emishi, the Fushū and the Seiwa Minamoto. Stylistically they have a striking resemblance to Sōshū-den which can clearly be seen as an ongoing evolution from at least the early Heian period. Some Mokusa smiths definitely moved to Kamakura and established a school. After the fall of Hiraizumi more Mokusa swordsmiths were taken to Kamakura. The exact names of all the smiths the Kamakura Mokusa school are unknown, but we know they were there. When the Sōshū Kamakura School was established, the local Kamakura Mokusa swordsmiths may have been put to work in some capacity in the Kamakura Sōshū workshops. The Hojo Bakufu spent a lot of money preparing for a potential third Mogul Invasion. The Hojo valued the resources of the Tohoku and Kanto areas, in particular the iron ore reserves with a view of self-sustainability. The imported iron resources from Korea and China were controlled by the Mongol Yuan government at this time and were cut off from export to Japan. The Sōshū School was forced to fully utilise all the local resources and labour at hand to meet the increased demand for arms.

Stylistically the biggest change in Sōshū-den came just after the Mongol invasions and is attributed to Masamune. Before the time of Shintogo Kunimitsu, the swordsmiths from other provinces, that relocated to Kamakura seem to have been content to work in the style of their forbearers with little deviation. It may well be that the Kamakura Sōshū school gladly and openly co-operated in joint efforts with the Kamakura Mokusa school for the common good. Combining resources and trading technical innovation, this union was the birth of Sōshū-den. It is also possible that the Kamakura Mokusa school, with the addition of swordsmiths coming from other parts of the country, actually then became known as the Kamakura Sōshū School. Then how it that the origin of the Kamakura school is passed down with such myths. Accepting that later it may well have served the purposes of the Honami or the Tokugawa, the mythology seems to stem from an earlier time. The reason is possibly in the Kamakura Mokusa swordsmiths themselves. Tales in the old books refer to the Ōshū Swordsmiths by the derogatory term Fushū swordsmiths. Pedigree and ancestry was an important part of samurai culture, which included swordsmiths. I assume that by this time, the descendants of the Mokusa smiths were ashamed of their ancestry. As their ancestors were Emishi to be called Fushū (also translated as war prisoner or slave labourer) was socially detrimental, even bad for business. Mokusa Yoyasu had a pedigree of six generations, yet Shintogo Kunimitsu seems to have come from nowhere. It sounded better to claim they were descendants of Awataguchi 粟田口 or Bizen 備前 swordsmiths who were their peers, and it certainly became a popular misconception.

It is quite probable from his innovative and manly style that Masamune was one of the local swordsmiths from the Mokusa line as could have been Yukimitsu. From the beginning of the Nambokucho jidai the Mokusa schools virtually disappeared and so ended the story of one of the most innovative swordsmith schools in Japanese history.

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