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THE NAMBAN GROUP OF JAPANESE SWORD GUARDS:  
A REAPPRAISAL

# THE NAMBAN GROUP OF JAPANESE SWORD GUARDS:

A REAPPRAISAL by Dr John Philip Lissenden.

Submitted, in January 2002, for the Master of Arts degree of the University of Durham.

## ABSTRACT

There has always been a distinct dearth of scholarship with regard to the Namban group of tsuba. Many reasons can be proposed to explain this neglect, but one of these is undoubtedly the very large and disparate number of tsuba that were originally included under this heading. Ogawa's redefinition of the group in 1987 was not without its problems, but has resulted in a much more clearly defined and manageable corpus of work; it is against this background that the present reappraisal is submitted.

The early confusions resulting from the use of the term 'Namban' are described and the group is redefined in the light of Ogawa's intervention — many of these defining characteristics are individually examined in some detail.

No statistical analysis of tsuba has been published since Gunsaulus' work on a mixed group of 746 artefacts in 1923. In this reappraisal, her results have been compared with those obtained from the examination of a corpus of 273 Namban tsuba, gathered from public and private collections in Europe, and this comparison casts some doubt on Gunsaulus' figures. A comparable analysis of 1,045 arbitrarily selected tsuba, of mixed groups and periods, reinforces this doubt.

The case for the use of modern physical methods of chemical analysis in the study of Namban tsuba is considered. It is concluded that the time is not yet ripe to enable the optimal use of such studies, although a case is made for the limited use of electron microscope scanning in order to define the place of mercuric gilding in the often profuse decoration of this group of tsuba.

Finally, casting techniques are discussed and evidence is produced of their widespread use in the production of Namban tsuba.

It is apparent that the new definition of the Namban group of Japanese sword guards enables a much more focused study of the group, although the absence both of any detailed knowledge of the many Namban workers scattered throughout Japan, and of any inscriptions on their work, remain serious barriers to the systematic attribution of these tsuba.

**THE NAMBAN GROUP OF  
JAPANESE SWORD GUARDS:  
A REAPPRAISAL**

by  
Dr John Philip Lissenden

A thesis submitted in January 2002 for the degree of  
Master of Arts of the University of Durham, as a result of  
research carried out in the Department of East Asian Studies  
of the University.

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## PREFACE

The following research thesis, submitted in January 2002 for the degree of Master of Arts of the University of Durham, is based upon a study of that group of Japanese sword guards that has long been known, both in Japan and Europe, as the Namban group of tsuba.

Originally defined, in common with other Japanese artefacts of a similar nomenclature, as 'work exhibiting foreign influences', this definition created a corpus that was both unmanageably large and contained an unacceptable number of disparate sub-groups. Thus the work of any one of the existing schools — almost 100 in number — could in theory be counted as 'Namban' if its work demonstrated this foreign influence. Combined with several additional contributing factors, these taxonomic problems have resulted in the relative neglect of the group for many years. While readily acknowledging that Namban tsuba seldom excel as works of art, as a student of tsuba I was distressed by this neglect.

In 1987, Ogawa proposed a redefinition of the group that, while not in accord with the generally accepted interpretation of the term 'Namban', has resulted in a smaller and much more unified group of tsuba. In the light of this proposal, I have studied in detail this group of tsuba — as newly defined — both in the literature and by the examination of a number of the major collections in Europe.

**PART 1** of this thesis introduces the Namban group of tsuba, places Ogawa's redefinition in its context, and examines the corpus in the light of these new definitions.

I outline, in the INTRODUCTION, the historical background to the classification of Namban tsuba as they were originally defined. I also discuss the various and universally unsuccessful attempts by a number of earlier collectors, both in England and in Europe, to create some sort of order out of the chaos of this disparate group. Ogawa's redefinition is introduced and discussed; this is seen as a way of rationalising this group of tsuba, and I list a number of identifying characteristics of the group, as newly defined.

I then discuss the **ATTRIBUTION OF NAMBAN TSUBA**, consequent upon the recognition of these identifying characteristics. The problems associated with attempts to attribute this group of tsuba, either by their maker or their date of

manufacture, are described and comparisons are made between the products of the three main loci that have been identified with their production.

An ANALYSIS OF TSUBA IN EUROPEAN COLLECTIONS follows. This opens with a description of the METHODOLOGY of this study. I then discuss, as a result of the examination of a total of 273 Namban tsuba, the results of a descriptive analysis of the group and compare these results to Gunsaulus' 1923 analysis of a mixed group of 746 tsuba in the collection of the Chicago Field Museum. There is reason to question Gunsaulus' figures and, after testing these against a mixed group of 1,045 arbitrarily selected tsuba, these questions remain unresolved.

Possible reasons for the limited value both of measurements and weights, and of statistical techniques, in the study of a group of artefacts such as tsuba are suggested in an OVERVIEW OF STATISTICAL ANALYSIS. This chapter concludes with a brief consideration of some modern methods of PHYSICAL EXAMINATION in archaeology, and I discuss the relevance of these to the study of the Namban group of tsuba. I conclude that the level of scholarship concerning this group is presently insufficient to enable the optimal use of the results of such methods.

**P**ART II examines the various physical features that characterise the newly defined group, and confirmation is sought in the field work for some of the hypotheses that are proposed in this section.

The DECORATIVE FORM OF SEPPA-DAI — one of the defining characteristics of this group — is examined in some detail, and I propose an attempt at the classification of this multitude of different shapes.

NAMBAN HITSU-ANA present a number of enigmas to the student, and hitsu-ana in general are not without their problems; these are discussed. The features associated with the HIRA AND MIMI DESIGN of this group of sword guards are then examined. This examination includes the openwork and undercutting techniques that are defining characteristics of Namban tsuba; in particular the recurring themes of the dragon and of the karakusa-moyō are studied.

The various gilding methods used extensively in this group are also discussed; the occasional use of mercuric gilding appears to be one of these, but this is only possible on silver or on copper-containing bases and not directly onto iron.

The application of a copper foundation on Namban tsuba, prior to their gilding, is a possibility; this is debated and I suggest an achievable method of physical analysis in order to resolve the questions related to the use of fire-gilding on this group of tsuba.

I propose a re-naming of the uncommon sub-group of AURICULATE TSUBA, which is analysed in some detail. The form of the weapons that were introduced into Japan by the Portuguese is examined, and evidence is presented to suggest that those selected, auriculate guards that have been attributed by the N.B.T.H.K. — the Society for the Preservation of Japanese Art Swords — to the Momoyama period, should rather be attributed to the Edo period. In spite of its numerical scarcity, with its European — rather than Chinese — influence, this sub-group is considered to be of sufficient interest to justify this attention, as is the important rôle of the DUTCH EAST INDIA COMPANY in its production.

**P**ART III concerns itself with the processes involved in the manufacture of Namban tsuba, and includes a discussion relating to NAMBAN IRON and its apocryphal presence as a constituent of this group of tsuba. This discussion is preceded by a BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO IRON TECHNOLOGY, which may be required reading for some students in order to achieve a clearer understanding of its more technical aspects.

I then discuss, in general, the APPLICATION OF CASTING METHODS TO TSUBA — this is a subject that is almost a taboo for scholars of tsuba in general, but cannot be ignored with reference to the Namban group. The possible use of these methods in the CASTING OF NAMBAN TSUBA is examined. Absolute and relative indicators of casting are listed — as revealed by magnification under a bright light — and such an examination of an arbitrarily selected corpus of Namban tsuba indicates the widespread use of casting in their production.

There is, in collections, a surprising shortage of ADDITIONAL NAMBAN KODOGU and of EN-SUITE MOUNTINGS in the Namban style; I consider this shortage and examine some possible reasons for it. A SEARCH FOR A SOLUTION considers the rôle of the non-samurai classes in creating the large demand for Namban tsuba and, in the light of this, I suggest possible solutions to several of the enigmas associated with this group.

**I**n the **CONCLUSION** I consider the new, inferred meaning of the term 'Namban influence'. The possibility is then discussed of further studies, both to define the use of mercuric gilding in this group of tsuba and to investigate the use of casting as a means to the production of other groups. I also review both the advantages and disadvantages of Ogawa's redefinition of the Namban group of tsuba: while accepting its possibly limited value for large museum collections, I underline its relevance to smaller, private collections.

**T**he **ENDMATTER** includes photographic **PLATES** of tsuba that, for various reasons, I consider especially interesting, and a **BIBLIOGRAPHY** has been appended. The **APPENDIX** includes a **LIST OF NAMBAN TSUBA EXAMINED** for the statistical analysis and **SAMPLE DATA SHEETS**, as used to record the results of these examinations.

In any specialised dissertation of this type, the use of technical terms is difficult to avoid — such avoidance resulting in the tedious repetition of long, descriptive passages. Inevitably many of these terms are Japanese, and their use has been kept to a minimum. Where I considered them necessary, however, they are printed in *italic* form and, on their initial appearance, a shortened definition is given either in parentheses or as a numbered footnote. Fuller definitions of such terms are included in the Appendix, in the final **GLOSSARY OF JAPANESE AND CHINESE TERMS**.

Readers who are students of *nihon-tō* — the study of the Japanese sword — will already be familiar with these terms. Other readers may initially find them an irritating distraction; for this I apologise.

The Garamond typeface has been used for the production of this thesis,  
enabling the inclusion of macrons over the long vowels in lower case, Japanese words.

Japanese nouns have not been pluralised.

Japanese names are given conventionally, with the family name first and the given name second.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**M**y thanks are due to Professor Gina Barnes who, from October 1999 until December 2001, supervised my studies. They are also due to Mr Steve Smith, of the Liverpool Museum, for his support and assistance, and to other museum staff who, also generously giving of their time, facilitated the examination of the artefacts under their care:

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Mr Gregory Irvine (Victoria and Albert Museum, London).

Her Jørgen Schou-Christensen (Danish Museum of Decorative Art,  
Copenhagen).

Miss Veronica Tonge (Maidstone Museum and Art Gallery).

Miss Ruth Trotter (Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle).

Miss Glennys Wild (Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery).

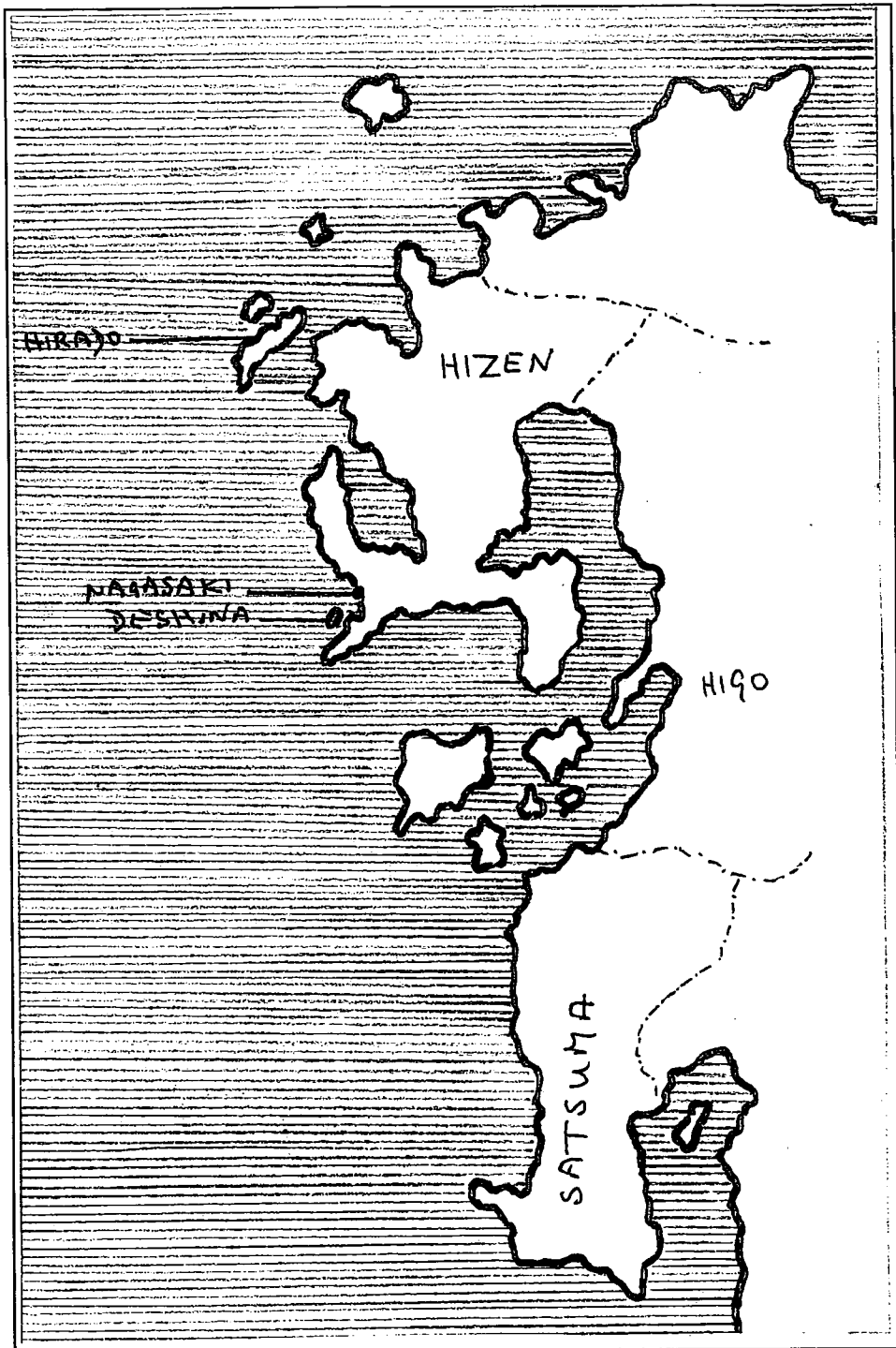


Fig. 1

Map of the Western Coast of Kyūshū

# **PART I**

# THE NAMBAN GROUP OF JAPANESE SWORD GUARDS: A REAPPRAISAL

by  
Dr John Philip Lissenden

## 1. INTRODUCTION

"...on peut faire remarquer que la classification  
des gardes dites Namban laisse à désirer."

H. L. Joly (April 1914),  
*Note sur le Fer et le Style Namban*,  
Société Franco-Japonaise de Paris, p. 2.

In 1987 Ogawa proposed a simplification of the previously disparate group that had comprised the Namban group of Japanese sword guards. He suggested:

**Those tsuba that are today called Namban (literally 'southern barbarian') appear to have been produced in China or by the Dutch East India Company in India and imported from the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The category also includes reproductions of these imported pieces, later made in Japan.** (Ogawa (1987), *Japanese Swords and Sword Furniture in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, no. 353, pp. 352 and 353.)

Thus he introduced a radical simplification of the group.

Prior to this intervention, the classification of the group had always presented a confused picture to the collector. As applied generally to Japanese artefacts, the term 'Namban' is universally accepted as being work demonstrating any foreign influence. But this influence is commonly a Western one, typically depicting European foreigners — *gaijin* — in real, or imagined, costume and their 'black ships' (see Table 1). Earle, as

editor of the catalogue of the Victoria and Albert Museum's 1986 exhibition of Japanese Art and Design, defines Namban as "a term applied to artefacts produced for Europeans or under European influence".<sup>1</sup> Likewise, Sugasi defines it as "the European art introduced into Japan by Catholic missionaries around the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and subsequently copied by the Japanese...".<sup>2</sup> The Chinese influence on this group of tsuba was of more import than the Western one, however, and resulted not merely in the utilisation of fresh images by the existing schools, but also in the introduction of a completely fresh style of metalworking.

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Victoria and Albert Museum's recently formulated "List of Schools of Tsuba-Smiths Classified in Accordance with the Arrangement of the Sir Arthur Church and Other Collections of Tsuba at the Victoria and Albert Museum" was published. Hancock included this list in the introduction to his catalogue of the collection of tsuba that was at that time held by the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.<sup>3</sup> The majority of these had had been the gift, in 1930, of Sir Charles Hyde, Bt. This taxonomic classification had been collated by Albert J. Koop as a result of the more than 30 years of study that he had carried out on the museum's collection of Japanese sword furniture, while he was Keeper of its Department of Metalwork. The earliest reference to it is to be found in a bound and annotated volume in the National Art Library, dated 1912 and relating to the display of the Victoria and Albert Museum's entire collection of sword furniture, then exhibited at the Bethnal Green Museum.<sup>4</sup>

It is surprising that more than 20 years should have elapsed before this classification was published. It listed Namban tsuba under Section F, as Number XXVIII, and defined this group as "Work exhibiting Foreign Influences".<sup>5</sup> Although

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<sup>1</sup> Victoria and Albert Museum (1986), *Japanese Art and Design*, p. 222.

<sup>2</sup> Sugase (1973), "Namban Art" in *Namban Art: A Loan Exhibition from Japanese Collections*, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Hancock (n.d.)\*, *Catalogue of Tsuba in the Permanent Collection of the City of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery*, pp. 11-15.

\*There is some doubt concerning the year of this private publication. Pearse (1991), *Companion to Japanese Britain and Ireland*, p. 113, states that "in 1932... Hancock prepared a... *Catalogue of Tsuba*", while the Senior Curator of the Birmingham collection (Wild (2000), Personal Communication) states that "Hancock seems to have written the catalogue in 1937".

<sup>4</sup> Irvine (2000), Personal Communication.

<sup>5</sup> Hancock, op. cit, p. 13.

such a definition was safely in line with the accepted meaning of the term 'Namban' as it applied generally to Japanese art, it was also quite clearly an impractical one from the very start, including as it did a disproportionately large proportion of the tsuba in any collection. Koop's taxonomic classification also included such groups as Hizen (including Hirado, Kunishige and Mitsuhiro), Jakushi, Soten and Shippō, all of which frequently demonstrate strong foreign influence and would therefore qualify also to be included under the heading of 'Namban'.

Provided that it demonstrated evidence of this 'foreign influence', any tsuba — whatever its origin — might thus have qualified for inclusion under this blanket heading. As will be expected, many of the groups located close to the Eastern coast of Kyūshū consistently demonstrated such influence although, surprisingly, the traditional motifs of the Satsuma school — those of the gourd, bamboo and bean —<sup>6</sup> served largely to protect them from it. Clearly the 'Street Carvers' — the *machibori* — were much more likely to demonstrate this influence than were the 'House Carvers' — the *iebori*. Many of the latter were sheltered from it by the demands of their elevated patronage and by the rigid traditions of their schools, while the former relied for their survival upon their willingness to supply the demands of current fashion. However, very few schools were completely immune — with the probable exception of the extremely hide-bound Gōtō schools — and many of them adopted Namban traits, even if only token ones such as decorative *seppa-dai*.<sup>7</sup> Quite clearly a numerical problem thus existed from the very beginning, with the creation of a group that could, in theory, include a large number of tsuba drawn from many of the recognised schools of makers.

The choice of the name 'Namban' was also a confusing one. This is a Japanese word with three quite distinct applications. Translated as 'Southern Barbarians' it was, in the first instance, one of the terms used by the Chinese to describe alien peoples in the countries that surrounded their 'Middle Kingdom'. This was "a general term for 'people living in the South' and also for 'those who originated from the South'."<sup>8</sup> It was also applied to the aboriginal tribes living in the southern part of their country.<sup>9</sup> Tani

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<sup>6</sup> Gunsaulus (1923), *Japanese Sword-Mounts in the Collections of the Field Museum*, p. 83.

<sup>7</sup> *Seppa-dai*: (lit. 'washer-stand'). Normally a slightly raised and undecorated oval area at the centre of the tsuba, this is commonly decorated on Namban examples.

<sup>8</sup> Iwamasa (1978), "Nanban Story" in *Nanban Torai Kibun*, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Field Museum Publication (n.d.), *Chinese Pottery in the Philippines*, pp. 30-32.

cites the Chinese classic *Li-chi* — collated as early as the first century BC — as using "the term 'nam-fan' to indicate foreign countries and peoples south of China proper".<sup>10</sup> The Chinese continued to use this term when referring to Southeast Asian countries and to the inhabitants of India and Indonesia, all of which could justifiably be considered as 'barbarian' when compared with China's level of cultural achievement. The term was adopted by the Japanese during the Heian period (794 – 1185 AD) and was similarly applied to all foreigners, irrespective of their origin.<sup>11</sup> Thus the Europeans who arrived in Japan in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, while not 'namban' people in the strict sense of the word, arrived from the south via Malaya or the East Indies, and were frequently accompanied by true namban men as servants.<sup>12</sup> It is important to note here that the terms colloquially preferred by the Japanese, 'Canton' or 'Kannon', whilst recognising the great importance of the Chinese influence, were similarly intended to apply indiscriminately to **all** foreigners.

In spite of this wider application of the word 'namban', the taxonomic term 'Namban art' — written in this thesis with an upper case 'N' — is still understood generally to apply to that art demonstrating a Western influence, particularly that of Portugal or Spain, rather than a Chinese one.<sup>13</sup>

In the third instance the term 'namban' was used by the Japanese to describe an iron of foreign origin. In a paper read by Joly before the Franco-Japanese Society in 1914, the author suggested that this iron had its origins in Java and Malaya, and even from as far afield as Northern India; analysis had shown it to be quite distinct from the native Japanese iron. Joly closed this paper by stating that "Namban iron is a subject quite distinct from, and has nothing to do with, the Namban style".<sup>14</sup> Would that it were quite as simple as this; but this foreign iron also had qualities quite different from the native iron, being harder and more fibrous than the latter and less brittle than steel.<sup>15</sup> It would thus seem ideally suited to the elaborate designs, with the undercutting of scrolls and tendrils, found in those tsuba that show a strong Chinese influence. Many

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<sup>10</sup> Tani (1973), East Asia and Europe" in *Namban Art: A Loan Exhibition from Japanese Collections*, p. 16.

<sup>11</sup> Joly (1910), *Japanese Sword-Mounts in the J.C. Hawkeshaw Collection*, p. 30.

<sup>12</sup> Tani (1973) op. cit, p. 17.

<sup>13</sup> Iwamasa (1978) "Nanban Story" in *Nanban Torai Kibun*, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Joly (1914), *Note sur le Fer et le Style Namban*, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Gunsaulus (1923), *Japanese Sword-Mounts in the Collections of the Field Museum*, pp. 73 and 74.

such Namban guards, but by no means all, are reputedly made of imported iron (see pp. 117 et seq. for a more detailed study of namban iron).

Largely as a result of this confused picture, there has been a dearth — with the notable exception of a recent publication by Shigeta — <sup>16</sup> of any scholarly study of this group of tsuba by either Eastern or Western students. This paucity of scholarship is also explained by a number of additional factors, in the light of which the relative neglect of the group becomes much more easily understood:

- Prior to 1600, sporadic warfare had made it difficult for craftsmen to travel, and had slowed design development and the migration of ideas. As a result of this, the best of the *kodōgu*<sup>17</sup> makers were under the patronage of the Shōgunate or of the feudal clans, with only a few makers catering to the needs of the commoners in the cities.<sup>18</sup> After that date, peace and a new-found prosperity enabled the establishment of the *iebori*. It also permitted the emergence, in the cities, of the *machibori*, imitating every design that came from the provinces. By the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century there were large numbers of the latter workers supplying *kodōgu* to the common man on the street. Collectors of *kodōgu* have always shown a strong predilection for 'made to order' work, and all Namban examples — being regarded as *shūremono*, or 'over the counter' products — are thus excluded from this preference.
- Neither can the Namban group be considered to represent 'native Japanese art'. The required presence in the group, by definition, of 'foreign influence', together with the possibility of their being 'foreign made', was probably responsible for their great popularity at the time. They might, however, be considered by many Japanese students to represent a bastardisation of their artistic heritage.
- The earlier inclusion of all guards showing a foreign influence produced a group that was far too large and disparate for detailed study. Additionally, the almost invariable absence of inscriptions on the *seppa-dai* of this group of tsuba, together with the absence of contemporary family records, makes their attribution and dating very difficult.

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<sup>16</sup> Shigeta (1998), *Namban Tsuba: Yearning Design*.

<sup>17</sup> *Kodōgu*: a term including all of the metallic mounts of a Japanese sword.

<sup>18</sup> Uyeno (1958), *Japanese Arts and Crafts in the Meiji Era*, p. 112.

These factors, combined with the very poor quality of the many examples made in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for export, adequately explain the indifference shown to this group by many collectors. But they fail to justify it.

### 1.1. THE WESTERN INFLUENCE ON TSUBA

Japan had its first exposure to European influence on 23 September 1543, when two or three Portuguese traders arrived aboard a Chinese junk.<sup>19</sup> Landing on the island of Tanegashima, situated at the entrance to Kagoshima Bay, these traders were inevitably followed by others, but their rôle was purely one of trade. Their effect upon the country would probably have been minimal had it not been for the arquebuses<sup>20</sup> that they carried. These guns were eagerly seized upon by several warlords and were subsequently to completely change the pattern of Japanese warfare. But it was the arrival, in Kagoshima in 1599, of three Jesuit missionaries led by Francis Xavier that was to have an even more dramatic effect upon Japan's future.

The vicissitudes of the Christian faith in Japan are beyond the scope of this study but, when Omura Sumitada ceded the port city of Nagasaki to the Society of Jesus in 1580, there were 64 members of the Society engaged in missionary work in Japan. With some 150,000 Christians under their spiritual care, this Jesuit community constituted a virtual sub-province in Kyūshū, and its Vicar General a potential *daimyō*, or territorial lord.<sup>21</sup> Since these converts included many samurai and some *daimyō*, the creation, in this period, of tsuba bearing Christian motifs is not surprising.

The crucifix is the most obvious of these — surprisingly, crucifixion was unknown to the Japanese prior to the arrival of Christianity, although it was subsequently widely practised as a form of execution. In the Japanese version of this, the victim was tied to a cross and immediate death resulted from two spear thrusts, upwards, from the right side to the left shoulder and from the left side to the right shoulder. It has been suggested that this use of a spear may also have been borrowed from pictorial representations of the crucifixion of Christ.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Elisonas (1991), *Christianity and the Daimyō*, p. 303.

<sup>20</sup> Arquebus (or arquebus): a heavy matchlock gun; a gun of fine workmanship, in contrast to the musket, used by regular infantry.

<sup>21</sup> Elisonas (1991), *op. cit.*, pp. 332 and 323.

<sup>22</sup> Cary (1970), *A History of Christianity in Japan*, p. 128.

The familiar openwork, or *sukashi*, design of a spiked wheel — once thought to represent the gear of a clock (*tōkei*) or a cross-section through a fruit — is now considered to be radiating rays of light (*shakoh*) from a cross, and thus also to be of Christian significance.<sup>23</sup>

Prior to its subjugation by Toyotomi Hideyoshi in 1587, Kyūshū had been an area of constant strife among its various warlords. Christians and merchants alike had tended to move between its various regions, seeking out the most favourable at any particular time, and playing off one *daimyō* against another. Hideyoshi's edict of 1587, demanding the expulsion of all Jesuit priests from Japan within a period of 20 days, was not so easily evaded — Christianity was now a national, rather than a local, problem.<sup>24</sup> Although the Portuguese merchants were exempted from this order, as a result of Hideyoshi's confiscation of Nagasaki they were restricted to the man-made islet of Dejima in Nagasaki harbour.

In 1580, Philip II of Spain became also the king of Portugal and, at this time, he granted to Portugal the monopoly of trade with Japan. At the same time, Pope Gregory XIII banned, under pain of excommunication, the teaching of Christianity in Japan by any but the Jesuits.<sup>25</sup> In spite of these edicts — the latter was questionably revoked by Pope Sixtus V six years later —<sup>26</sup> there was an increasing Spanish interest in trade with Japan, and a perceived need for religious support comparable to that enjoyed by the Portuguese. These led to the arrival of Franciscan friars in Japan in 1593, together with an increasing presence of Spanish traders.

For ten years, little was done in Japan to enforce Hideyoshi's edict; this was doubtless due to fear by both Hideyoshi and Ieyasu that, were the Jesuits to be expelled, they would lose the benefits of their trade with Portugal.<sup>27</sup> Finally, in 1597, rival zealotry between the Portuguese Jesuits and the Spanish Franciscans culminated in the crucifixion by the Japanese of 26 Christian martyrs. This marked the onset of more than 200 years of Christian persecution. In 1639, in furtherance of this policy, all Portuguese and Spanish traders were expelled from the country and all contacts with

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<sup>23</sup> Sasano (1994), *Japanese Sword Guards Masterpieces from the Sasano Collection*, p. 167.  
Shegata (1998), *Namban Tsuba: Yearning Design*, pp. 69-74.

<sup>24</sup> Elisonas (1991), *Christianity and the Daimyō*, p. 363.

<sup>25</sup> Cary (1970), *A History of Christianity in Japan*, p. 119.

<sup>26</sup> Cary (1970), *ibid*, p. 121.

<sup>27</sup> Boxer (1951), *The Christian Century in Japan: 1549 – 1650*, pp. 104 and 464.

Catholic lands were cut. The determination of the Japanese to remain 'unpolluted' by the Christian ethos of the Jesuits is underlined by the execution, in Japan, of 61 of the 74 members of a mission that was sent there by the Portuguese in 1640 to request the re-instatement of their previous trade arrangements. Doubtless Portuguese concern about these arrangements was based upon the reliance upon Japanese copper of their armaments foundries in Goa and Macao.<sup>28</sup>

Other trading nations — Holland, England, France and America — were relatively late arrivals to Japan, the first sending trading vessels in 1580. The Dutch ship, *De Liefde*, drifted ashore at Kyushu on the 19 April 1600. With its reduced crew of 25 survivors, it was the only ship afloat of a fleet of five vessels that had left Leiden five years previously, with the Englishman Will Adams as its pilot.<sup>29</sup> Tokugawa Ieyasu welcomed the Dutch, probably on account of their Protestant ethic and as enemies of the Catholics.<sup>30</sup> This stance was doubtless supported by the fact that Holland and England were, at this time, at war with Spain and Portugal,<sup>31</sup> and was further reinforced when the Dutch participated in the shelling of the Christian stronghold at Hara Castle during the Shimbara rebellion of 1638.<sup>32</sup>

The Dutch East India Company, which was subsequently to play a rôle in the manufacture and importation of Namban tsuba (see pp. 113 – 115), had been formed in 1602 and, in 1609, was granted permission to set up a trading station on Hirado. In 1641 it was banished by decree to the man-made islet of Dejima, vacated by the Portuguese two years previously. Interestingly, the motivation behind this forced move to Dejima appears to have been a representation by the elders of the city of Nagasaki, faced with ruin after the departure of the Portuguese.<sup>33</sup> After the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Dutch trade with Japan reduced considerably, only two ships being sent there each year. This was probably because of the depletion of the precious metals, especially

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<sup>28</sup> Boxer (1988), *Dutch Merchants and Mariners in Asia*, sect. vi, p. 83.

<sup>29</sup> Nandris (2000), "The Leiden Taikai" in *The Tō-Ken Society of Great Britain, Programme 187*, p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> Elisonas (1991), *Christianity and the Daimyō*, p. 369.

<sup>31</sup> Corr (1995), *Adams the Pilot*, p. xii.

<sup>32</sup> Goodman (1967), *The Dutch Impact on Japan*, pp. 14 and 15.

<sup>33</sup> Boxer (1988), op. cit, sect. iv, pp. 146 and 147.

of silver, that had taken place as a result of earlier trading.<sup>34</sup> The Dutch East India Company ceased trading in 1799, although Dutch traders remained on Dejima until the Meiji Restoration, in 1868.

English contact with Japan was very brief. The English East India Company had been formed in 1600 — 2 years before the Dutch company — and was prompted to trade directly with the Far East, largely because of the high prices that were being charged for pepper by the Dutch traders.<sup>35</sup> In 1613, Ieyasu granted them a charter to trade, and they were also permitted to maintain a factory at Hirado. This foothold was voluntarily abandoned in 1623, apparently because of the perception that "...the only [trade] returns must be in copper, an article [sic] produced by our own mines to the full extent of our consumption and foreign exportation".<sup>36</sup>

England and Holland entered into a brief partnership in 1619, with the union of their two East India Companies. Piracy seems to have been the main motive for this union, the two fleets sailing from Hirado and attacking Portuguese and Chinese silk-carrying vessels: unlike the Portuguese, with their trading base at Macao, the Dutch and English had no direct access to Chinese silk.<sup>37</sup> This partnership was not to last for long, however; England ceased its trading with Japan within a few years, and England and Holland — never easy partners — were to be at war in 1652 – 54 and again in 1665 – 67. With the Treaty of Edo, Lord Elgin finally secured diplomatic and commercial links between Japan and England in the August of 1858.

Two months preceding the signing of this treaty, Lord Elgin had successfully secured the Treaty of Tientsin with the Chinese. This had only been achieved after the bombardment and occupation of Canton, news of which had preceded Lord Elgin's arrival in Japan:<sup>38</sup> it is interesting to speculate upon the nature of the 'negotiations' that secured the Treaty of Edo.

France failed in its early attempts to establish a trading base in Japan. The French India Company was founded in 1604, under the protection of Henry IV, and two expeditions were subsequently sent to Japan in 1615 and 1619 in order to seek

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<sup>34</sup> Screech (1996), *The Western Scientific Gaze and Popular Imagery in Later Edo Japan*, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Boyer (1959), *Japanese Export Lacquer from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century...*, p. 8.

<sup>36</sup> Golownin (1824), *Memories of a Captivity in Japan*, p. lxxviii.

<sup>37</sup> Boyer (1959), *op. cit.*, pp. 8 and 9.

<sup>38</sup> Satō and Watanabe (1991), *Japan and Britain: an Aesthetic Dialogue, 1850 – 1930*, p.100, no. 20.

trading rights. Both of these failed and a later attempt in 1664, by three ships of the new French East India Company, met with disaster.<sup>39</sup> Thereafter, the French confined their trading activities to Madagascar.

American involvement in trade with Japan occurred even later. It commenced with a limited degree of trading between the two countries, following the intimidation of the *shōgun* by the second arrival of Commodore Perry with his squadron of warships in the February of 1854.<sup>40</sup> This trading was formalised in 1858, when Japan signed a commercial treaty with America. In the same year, similar treaties were signed with England, Holland, France and Russia<sup>41</sup> and, with the Meiji Restoration, Japan was finally — and truly — open to the West.

As late as 1983, in the introduction to his catalogue of the Halberstadt collection — arguably the finest collection of tsuba outside Japan — Ogasawara equates the Namban group of tsuba with a European influence. He states:

The so-called Nanban [sic] ("Southern Barbarian") sword guards were made in and around Nagasaki, and this name derives from the fact that these designs feature so-called Nanban people or objects, i.e. non-Japanese — usually referring to European traders, missionaries and goods that entered Japan from its Southern shores before the country was closed in the 1630s.... (Ogasawara (1983), *Sword Guards and Fittings from Japan: the Collection of the Museum of Decorative Art, Copenhagen, Vol. 1*, p. 14.)

Many of the guards demonstrating this European influence bear Christian motifs, coats of arms, or Western numerals and letters. The latter are generally random and meaningless, but sometimes represent the symmetrical 'VOC' cypher of the Dutch East India Company. This must have been a familiar sight in both China and Japan — comparable, perhaps, to the Coca-Cola and McDonald's logos in the Western world of today. Unlike its frequent appearance as a 'trademark' on the *seppa-dai* of guards of the auriculate sub-section of the Namban group, this cypher does not appear to fulfil a similar rôle in the remainder of the group, its presence being purely as a decorative motif.

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<sup>39</sup> Boyer (1959), *Japanese Export Lacquer from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century...*, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> Eidelberg and Johnston (1910), "Japonisme and French Decorative Arts: 1854 – 1867" in *Japonisme: Japanese Influence on French Art, 1854 – 1910*, p. 141.

<sup>41</sup> Sato and Watanabe (1991), "The Aesthetic Dialogue Examined" in *Japan and Britain: An Aesthetic Dialogue, 1850 – 1930*, p. 14.

Tsuba bearing random numerals and letters were manufactured on the island of Hirado, in the province of Hizen. Most are unsigned, but some bear the maker's mark of 'Kunishige'. Additionally, some guards originating from Hirado and Nagasaki in the 19th century are entirely covered with an opaque, multicoloured *shippō*,<sup>42</sup> commonly on a gilded copper base.<sup>43</sup> It has been suggested that these tsuba may also be of the Kunishige group, but there is presently no known evidence to connect them with these artists. This work is extremely coarse and quite unlike the skilful work of the Hirata artists, and tsuba of this type — generally for use on *tantō* — are relatively common. One is illustrated in the catalogue of the Peabody Museum collection, where the author asserts "pock marks, caused from [sic] insufficient heat during the firing process, indicate an early age of manufacture" and he erroneously labels it "Owari style, c.1650".<sup>44</sup> It is difficult to support such an attribution, and the presence of bubbles ('sand-eyes') on the surface of the enamel, due to the fact that air bubbles formed in the molten enamel have not completely escaped from the cooling material, may be caused by a number of factors.<sup>45</sup> Their presence is more likely to be simply an indication of an inferior skill on the part of the craftsman.

Several features are completely alien to Japanese culture and, as such, are easy to identify. The texturing of iron to represent Portuguese leather and brocades; discoid tsuba in imitation of Western rapier guards; figures of *gaijin* in Western dress; and foreign objects such as terrestrial globes all appear on guards. When present on the readily attributable work of a particular school of makers, such guards should be considered as 'demonstrating a foreign influence' and excluded from the more narrowly defined Namban group proposed by Ogawa.

## 1.2. THE EASTERN INFLUENCE ON TSUBA

Chinese influence in Japanese art is ubiquitous. Japan has borrowed extensively from China since the third century AD, and its history, language and literature are irretrievably intermingled with that of China. Some evidence of a later and more overt Chinese influence on Japanese sword guards can be identified, however, and cup-shaped

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<sup>42</sup> *Shippō*: a decorative technique involving the use of vitreous enamels.

<sup>43</sup> Bowes (1895), *Notes on Shippō*, p. 82.  
Robinson (1980), *The Bauer Collection*, p. 158.

<sup>44</sup> Hamilton (1975), *The Peabody Museum Collection of Japanese Sword Guards*, pl. XXXIV, no. 2.

<sup>45</sup> Liang-Yu (1978), *Chinese Enamel Ware*, pp. 15 and 16.

tsuba — derived from the perforated and delicate, cast bronze guards of Chinese swords — were manufactured in Japan, in solid iron, by the Hizen and Būshū schools. It will be appreciated that such tsuba were mounted, as were their Chinese counterparts, with the convex surface uppermost. This disposition was in contrast to the European guards which, mounted with their concavity uppermost, served variably as a protective covering for the hand: it may be readily confirmed, both by the placing of the dominant decoration on the upper, *omote* surface of the Japanese guard and by the positioning of the *kōgai-bitsu* and *kodzuka-bitsu*<sup>46</sup> relative to this upper surface. Such a disposition is further confirmation — if such were needed — that the influences demonstrated by these tsuba were of Chinese rather than European origin.

An example of a cast, gilt bronze, Chinese sword guard such as those from which Namban guards are derived is to be found in M.227-1921 of the Victoria and Albert Museum's collection. This is described in the museum's accession notes as "an ovoid disc with a deeply flanged edge, of gilt brass [sic]...pierced and chased with two dragons amid a maze of scrolls...18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century".<sup>47</sup> Together with M.227a and 227b — a matching pair of pommel and ferrule — it was acquired, with two *kashira* (pommels of Japanese swords), from the third of the four Joly sales, held in 1921 on June 6, 7, 8 and 9. This lot, purchased for £1 10s, is described thus in the sale catalogue:

573     *Brass gilt*, the tsuba, fuchi and kashira of a Manchu sword; *bronze*, copy of a Tori kashira, Nara; another double dragon kashira, Nara. 5  
 (Messrs Glendining & Co. Limited (1921), *Sale Catalogue of the Henri L. Joly Sale*, lot no. 573, p.45.)

The catalogue has been annotated "S/Kensington...30s." by C.P. Peak, its previous owner.

In addition to being the epicentre of Western influence in Japan, Nagasaki was the main port of entry into Japan from China and it is from thence that most of these foreign trends originated. Jakushi, working in Nagasaki in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, produced guards with pure Chinese landscapes by an etching technique that he

<sup>46</sup> *Kōgai-bitsu* and *kodzuka-bitsu*: these are openings in the tsuba, one either side of the *seppa-dai*, through which pass the two accessory implements. That for the *kōgai* is always positioned on the outer side of the tsuba as it is worn and that for the *kodzuka* on the inner side.

<sup>47</sup> Victoria and Albert Museum (1921), *Register of Acquisitions*, p. 301.

had learnt from foreigners in that port.<sup>48</sup> Many other Hizen guards also demonstrate these influences and feature dragons, the *tama* jewel — the sacred jewel of legend — and mythological Chinese monsters, commonly on a solid plate background. Three artists based at Yagami in Hizen, who signed their work 'Mitsuhiro', produced many specialised designs based on the hundred monkeys and the hundred horses themes.<sup>49</sup>

But the guards immediately associated with this area are those that are perforated with intersecting and undercut scroll designs, often bearing profuse gold and silver *nunome* decoration.<sup>50</sup> These were once attributed to the Nagasaki metalworkers and were mistakenly believed to have had their origin in the weapons introduced by the Portuguese traders. Hancock incorrectly dates these "from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century" and states, "they were copied from European, *i.e.*, Portuguese and Dutch weapons".<sup>51</sup> Even Stone, writing as relatively late as 1934, noted that Namban guards, as then defined, were very similar to many of the Chinese guards. He concluded, erroneously, "both are probably derived from the Portuguese, the Chinese cup guards certainly are".<sup>52</sup>

The openwork guards that Ogawa defines as Namban are now believed to have originally been imported from China. As early as 1914, Joly averred, "there is no need to seek for a dubious resemblance to the arms of Portugal as have certain authors".<sup>53</sup> He goes on to remind his reader that such openwork, scroll designs are to be found in ancient Chinese bronzes that predate Portuguese trade in that region by more than two thousand years. The earliest of these imported guards were crude and symmetrical, with purely Chinese designs, and trade records describe these as arriving in Japan around 1600.<sup>54</sup> Later copies of these guards were made in Japan, and cartouche-shaped *seppa-dai*, bearing incised and *nunome* decorative patterns, are a common feature of these.

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<sup>48</sup> Joly (1912), *Japanese Sword Guards: a Descriptive Catalogue of the Collection of G.H. Naunton, Esq.*, p. 49.

<sup>49</sup> Robinson (1980), *The Baur Collection, Geneva: Japanese Sword-Fittings*, p. 386, no. 321.

<sup>50</sup> *Nunome-zōgan* is a method of attaching a decorative, soft metal overlay to an iron object.

<sup>51</sup> Hancock (n.d.), *Catalogue of Tsuba in the Permanent Collection of the City of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery*, p. 110.

<sup>52</sup> Stone (1961), *A Glossary of the Construction, Decoration and Use of Arms and Armour*, p. 464.

<sup>53</sup> Joly (1914), *Note sur le Fer et le Style Namban*, p. 2.

<sup>54</sup> Wada (1913), *Hompō Sōken Kinkō Ryakushi*, p. 90.

The Namban tsuba arrived at a time when the local product was undergoing dramatic change. Prior to 1500, tsuba had been viewed as strictly utilitarian adjuncts to battle. Produced, in the main, by swordsmiths and armourers, they were of steel or wrought iron and, apart from simple piercing and primitive inlays of brass and copper, were undecorated. After this date, partly as a result of the increasing influence of Zen Buddhism and partly due to a brief respite during several centuries of continuous civil war, a rise took place in the status of the metalworking artists. Taking a pride in their work, which they began to sign, these artists produced fittings of increasing beauty and technical sophistication.<sup>55</sup> After 1600 came the adoption of a pictorial style of decoration with the increasing use of the soft-metal alloys. Finally enjoying a period of peace, Japan was highly receptive to the many innovative designs that appeared, and this group of startlingly different tsuba from China was no exception.

It is stated in the *Nihon Tō Kōza* "these designs were welcomed by the public, which liked novelties, and there is the impression that they suddenly overwhelmed a generation".<sup>56</sup> Local artists, mainly in the areas of Nagasaki, Hirato, Hakata, Kyōto and Aizu, but also in other regions, extensively copied the imported tsuba. It is also stated that artisans from Qing China (1644 – 1912) were brought to Nagasaki, where they settled in areas known as Kinyachō (Goldsmith Town) and Ginyachō (Silversmith Town) and produced tsuba. Exactly where in Japan these areas were located is not known, but the Chinese residential area, Juzenji Mura, was situated at Nagasaki, to the east of the harbour.<sup>57</sup>

As a result of these local activities, domestically made copies are described as "extremely numerous" and true imports as "unexpectedly few".<sup>58</sup> The author suggests that the period of popularity of these tsuba followed the Genroku period (1688 – 1704), but this is not supported by current scholarship, which places local manufacture firmly in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries — almost one hundred years later.

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<sup>55</sup> Robinson (1961), *The Arts of the Japanese Sword*, pp. 59 and 60.

<sup>56</sup> Homma and Satō (1935 – 36), *Nihon Tō Kōza: vol. VI, Kodōgu, part I*, p. 179.

<sup>57</sup> Goodman (2000), *Japan and the Dutch: 1600 – 1853*, p. 241.

<sup>58</sup> Homma and Satō (1935 – 36), loc. cit.

### 1.3. EARLY ATTEMPTS TO SUBDIVIDE THE NAMBAN GROUP

Because of the ungainly size of the Namban group as it was originally defined, and the disparate nature of the many tsuba included in it, various unsuccessful attempts were made by early collectors to subdivide it. One such attempt is an apocryphal statement attributed to an unknown 'learned Japanese writer', who recognised as early Namban "only those pieces that present a certain *mokkō*<sup>59</sup> shape, peculiar edge, hornless dragons and European characters".<sup>60</sup> This judgement we can discount on the basis of its lack of clarity, secure in the knowledge that European characters are a feature of Hirado work in general, and of the work of artists who inscribed their work 'Kunishige' in particular.

It is apparent that Joly was dissatisfied with the classification of "those guards called Namban", remarking in his paper to the Franco-Japanese Society that it left a lot to be desired.<sup>61</sup> It is interesting to speculate as to whether he himself had any input into the Victoria and Albert Museum's classification but, be that as it may, it was not until 1910 — when cataloguing the Hawkshaw collection — that he was tempted to subdivide this group. This he did simply because of the sheer size of Hawkshaw's Namban section, which consisted of no fewer than 197 tsuba. It was a serious mistake, however, since the choice of such groups as "Foreign Influence and Namban with Figures", "The Dragon and Jewel Pattern" and "The Dragon and Temple Type" was a purely opportunistic one and added nothing to the understanding of the group.<sup>62</sup> Fortunately, it has never been repeated.

#### 1.3.1. 'CANTON' AND 'NAMBAN' TSUBA

Another was the attempt to create a division between those guards showing a Chinese and those showing a Western influence, by calling the former 'Canton' and the latter 'Namban'. This suggestion completely ignored the common origin and interchangeability of the two terms (see p. 5) and, fortunately, was never seriously adopted. Even as late as 1992, however, Christie's catalogues of the Dr Walter A. Compton Sale contained two tsuba (Part I, no. 100 and Part II, no. 77) that are both

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<sup>59</sup> *Mokkō*: a traditional, four-lobed shape, supposedly representing a cross-section through a melon or cucumber.

<sup>60</sup> Joly (1912), *Japanese Sword Fittings: a Descriptive Catalogue of the Collection of G.H. Naunton, Esq.*, p. 45.

<sup>61</sup> Joly (1914), *Note sur le Fer et le Style Namban*, p. 2.

<sup>62</sup> Joly (1910), *Japanese Sword Fittings: a Descriptive Catalogue of the Collection of J.C. Hawkshaw, Esq.*, pp. 30-47.

described as "Canton style tsuba". Since the writer goes on to state, "this type of tsuba is commonly known in the West as a Namban tsuba",<sup>63</sup> one wonders what was the justification for this retrograde step.

### 1.3.2. 'KANTO' AND 'KANNAN' TSUBA

Another attempt to subdivide the early Namban group is seen in the sale catalogue of the François Ponçetton collection. Published in France in 1929, all of the eight tsuba listed therein as "Type dit Namban" are certainly Namban by Ogawa's definition.<sup>64</sup> This would seem to indicate that French collectors were not as willing as were their English counterparts to include under this heading all work demonstrating foreign influence, but all of these tsuba are then surprisingly attributed to the Hizen province. They are further sub-divided into two groups, either 'kanto' or 'kannan', depending upon the symmetry, or otherwise, of their design. These two groups are defined as:

1. "type des 'namban' dit 'kanto', où les ornements du décor sont symétriquement disposés", and
2. "type des 'namban' dit 'kannan', où la symétrie fait défaut dans les décors".<sup>65</sup>

These two words, 'kanto' and 'kannon', were possibly derived from Dr Wada's treatise on *kinkō* sword fittings,<sup>66</sup> in which he differentiates between Kantō tsuba from Eastern China and Kannan tsuba from Southern China.<sup>67</sup> The former are described as having "dragons, arabesques, or people engraved facing each other in the top and bottom, right and left of the tsuba", while the latter "did not use the pictures relatively disposed, and they were arranged irregularly".<sup>68</sup> This distinction is of only very limited value because

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<sup>63</sup> Christie, Manson & Woods Inc. (1992), *Japanese Swords and Sword Fittings from the Dr Walter Compton Collection, Part I*, p. 44, no. 100.

<sup>64</sup> Hôtel Drouot Sale Catalogue (1929), *Collection François Ponçetton*, pp. 19 and 20.

<sup>65</sup> Hôtel Drouot Sale Catalogue (1929), loc. cit.

<sup>66</sup> *Kinkō*: decorative sword fittings, commonly of the softer alloys.

<sup>67</sup> Wada (1913), *Hompō Sōken Kinkō Ryakushu*, p. 90.

<sup>68</sup> Homma and Satō (1935 – 1936), *Nihon Tō Kōza: vol VI. Kodōgu, part I*, pp. 178 and 179.

of the extensive copying of these guards by local craftsmen, and is only of any relevance in relation to those scarce examples of true Chinese origin.

### 1.3.3. 'KAGONAMI' TSUBA

The use of the word 'Kagonami' to describe certain tsuba of the Namban type occurs in several publications. It appears in the Hayashi,<sup>69</sup> Mène<sup>70</sup> and Ponçetton<sup>71</sup> catalogues, and was used mainly by French collectors in the early part of this century. Kagonami tsuba seem to have been considered as a clearly defined group rather than as simply a sub-section of the original Namban group, but there is considerable doubt as to what this group comprised. Joly, who despite his Gallic background was much anglicised in his approach to his subject, dismissed Kagonami tsuba simply as "something which Hayashi appeared to have made" of Kanto and Kannan<sup>72</sup> and earlier described the term as "a rather hazy and unsatisfactory" one.<sup>73</sup>

In the collection of M. Tadamasa Hayashi, presented to the Musée du Louvre at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there appears another tsuba that is classified as "Style Kagonami".<sup>74</sup> The derivation of this name is unknown although, in the catalogue of his collection, M. Hayashi states:

Sous la désignation Kagonami, nom d'une province méridionale de la Chine, on désigne un genre de découpage détaillé et compliqué.  
(Hayashi (1894), *Catalogue de la Collection des Gardes de Sabres Japonaises au Musée du Louvre*, p. 7).

This suggests that Kagonami is a province in Southern China whence these tsuba originated. Certainly this tsuba is asymmetrical — a feature we have earlier seen described as characteristic of Kannan tsuba from Southern China (see p. 17) — but, disappointingly, the *kanji* for Kagonami do not correspond with those of any of the Chinese provinces.

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<sup>69</sup> Hayashi (1894), *Catalogue de la Collection des Gardes de Sabre Japonaises au Musée du Louvre*, p. 7.

<sup>70</sup> Hôtel Drouot (1913), *Collection du Docteur Mène*, p. 77.

<sup>71</sup> Hôtel Drouot (1929), *Collection François Ponçetton*, p. 20.

<sup>72</sup> Joly (1914), *Note sur le Fer et le Style Namban*, p. 2.

<sup>73</sup> Joly (1910), *Japanese Sword Fittings: a Descriptive Catalogue of the Collection of J.C. Hawkeshaw, Esq.*, p. 30.

<sup>74</sup> Hayashi (1894), loc. cit.

In the Dr Mène sale catalogue there are listed nine tsuba described as "Genre Kagonami", in addition to 34 "Genre Namban".<sup>75</sup> Two of the former and five of the latter are illustrated, and a comparison of these illustrations reveals little to distinguish between them. Those tsuba called Kagonami by Dr Mène differ from the others in that they have conventionally shaped *seppa-dai*, but even this is not a consistent finding in the group, although it might perhaps be considered suggestive of a Chinese origin.

The François Ponçetton catalogue also includes two tsuba of the "Type dit 'Kagonami' ". These the author defines as "Voisin des Namban, mais de style plus réaliste et plus japonais" and he attributes them to "Ateliers de la province de Hizen".<sup>76</sup> But it will be recalled that he also attributed Ponçetton's entire Namban collection to this province (see p. 17), and he casts no further light on this enigmatic group.

In the Tsuba Section of the catalogue of an exhibition of Arms and Armour of Ancient Japan, which was held at The Municipal Art Gallery, Barnsdall Park in 1964, Frederick C. Martin perpetuates the confusion associated with this nomenclature. He states:

In the strict sense of the word, Namban should refer only to those fittings which have foreign subjects, other than Korean or Chinese, *which were not considered to be foreign* [italics added]. Similar tsuba with Chinese style designs, of symmetrical proportions, are Kanton tsuba. Those with native subjects, of asymmetrical proportions are Kagonami tsuba (Martin (1964), *Arms and Armour of Ancient Japan*, p. 62).

The differentiation of Kagonami tsuba from the main bulk of the Namban group was thus a difficult, and not very useful, exercise but it may be safely concluded that this group did not exclusively represent artefacts that were imported into Japan from Southern China.

#### 1.3.4. 'CHRISTIAN-PORTUGUESE' AND 'SECULAR-DUTCH' TSUBA

In 1930 Boxer proposed a classification of the Namban group of tsuba, as they were then defined, that at least had the advantage of simplicity. He divided the period of European influence into the Christian-Portuguese period of 1542 – 1640, and the secular-Dutch period of 1641 – 1852.<sup>77</sup> This was based on the premise that, between their arrival in 1543 and the arrival of the Spanish in 1593, the Portuguese were the only

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<sup>75</sup> Hôtel Drouot Sale Catalogue (1913), *Collection du Docteur Mène*, pp. 77-80.

<sup>76</sup> Hôtel Drouot Sale Catalogue (1929), *Collection François Ponçetton*, pp. 19 and 20.

<sup>77</sup> Boxer (1930), *European Influences on Japanese Sword Fitting: 1543 – 1853*, pp. 151-3.

Europeans in Japan. Even after this date, the presence of both the Spanish and the English was so short-lived — 1593 – 1624 and 1613 – 1623 respectively — as to have had little artistic influence. The years of 1543 – 1639, with the activities of the Roman Catholic Jesuit missions, may thus truly be called the 'Christian century'.

After the exclusion of the Portuguese and Spanish in 1639, the Dutch retained a monopoly in Japan until the arrival of Commodore Perry's fleet in 1853. During this period, religious persecution had effectively eliminated the open profession of Christianity in Japan, and all European artistic influence was purely secular.

Boxer thus proposed that the term 'Namban' should be limited to those tsuba that were made during the period of Portuguese influence (1542 – 1639). Those deriving their inspiration from Dutch designs would be termed 'Kōmō' — 'Red Hair' was the common name for Hollanders during the Tokugawa period — and those in which the Chinese style predominated would be called 'Canton'. Unfortunately, even the proposer was forced to acknowledge, "it is not always easy to distinguish between the three styles".<sup>78</sup>

#### 1.4. 'POST-OGAWA' NAMBAN TSUBA

This early confusion regarding Namban tsuba has persisted, and Graham Gemmel observes that Ogasawara, as late as 1983 while cataloguing the Halberstadt collection, described as "Namban style" a *nunome* tsuba which is quite clearly Hizen work.<sup>79</sup>

Finally, in 1987, Ogawa published his redefinition and this refines and simplifies a previously large and disparate group. Since it recognises the revival of interest in this style that occurred in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Ogawa's definition excludes all those tsuba that exhibit a foreign influence and were made in Japan prior to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century — these are now classified under their own schools of makers rather than as Namban. This redefinition is not without its problems, however (see Table 1 below), leaving *kodōgu* isolated amongst other Japanese artefacts, all of which have a different interpretation of the term 'Namban'. It is clearly unrealistic, for example, to expect curators with general collections of Namban artefacts to reject a large proportion of their sword furniture on the basis of Ogawa's proposal.

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<sup>78</sup> Boxer (1930), *European Influences on Japanese Sword Fitting: 1543 – 1853*, p. 153.

<sup>79</sup> Gemmel (1991), *Tosōgu; Treasure of the Samurai*, pp. 46 and 47.

TERM	OLD	NEW
Namban	<p data-bbox="525 235 880 340">"Work exhibiting a foreign influence" (V. and A. Museum Classification, n.d.)</p> <ul data-bbox="525 598 880 1415" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="525 598 880 773">• This definition was in line with the Namban classification as it is generally applied to all Japanese artefacts, BUT</li> <li data-bbox="525 773 880 1415">• it created an enormous and unwieldy group that could include any tsuba already belonging to another, previously defined school and demonstrating a foreign influence. Thus Hizen, (including Hirado, Kunishige and Mitsuhiro), Jakushi, Soten, and all Shippō work could easily be included — the Būshū and Choshū groups also, even when simply demonstrating decorative <i>seppa-dai</i>.</li> </ul>	<p data-bbox="921 235 1317 554">Tsuba "...produced in China or by the East India Company in India and imported into Japan from the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century...." Also included are later reproductions of these pieces, made in Japan in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Ogawa, 1987).</p> <ul data-bbox="921 598 1317 956" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="921 598 1317 816">• This refines and simplifies a previously unwieldy group, leaving those tsuba outside this definition to be classified under their own, individual schools, BUT</li> <li data-bbox="921 816 1317 956">• it conflicts with the generally accepted definition of 'Namban' as it was previously understood.</li> </ul>
Namban influence	<p data-bbox="525 1458 880 1594">Any foreign influence, Eastern or Western, but generally referring to that of the Spanish and Portuguese.</p>	<p data-bbox="921 1458 1317 1734">Work demonstrating the influence of the Namban group of sword guards, as newly defined. This will include tsuba with, for example, undercut scroll-work, which is a characteristic of this new group and is Chinese in origin.</p>

Table 1.

A Comparative Table of Old and New Terms Resulting from Ogawa's Proposed New Definition of the Namban Group of Sword Guards.

The inspection of a number of tsuba that may be considered to be included under Ogawa's redefinition of the group shows them to have many features in common:

- With the undercut, overlapping or entwining scrollwork that is their defining characteristic, their design may incorporate dragons with the *tama* jewel or other, smaller creatures.
- They are almost always made of iron; the possible rôle of namban iron in the manufacture of this group is discussed later, in some detail.
- With the exception of auriculate guards, which will be separately dealt with as a distinct sub-section within the Namban group, they are generally *tate-maru-gata* (oval) in form, or occasionally *maru-gata* (circular) or *mokkō-gata*.
- Gold, or less commonly silver, *nunome* or other overlay decoration is a frequent feature.
- Solid and decorative *mimi*<sup>80</sup> may be beaded, probably to represent the chrysanthemum blossom.
- The openings in the tsuba for the *kodzuka* and *kōgai* — the *hitsu-ana* — are commonly later, and relatively crude, modifications.
- Many Namban guards have a common feature in their decorative *seppa-dai*, which may be *mokkō-gata*, square, 'waisted' or cartouche in shape. These *seppa-dai*, further elaborated with a variety of incised, *usunuki-bori* (low relief) and *mokume* ('grained') designs, may or may not enclose the *hitsu-ana* (see Fig. 2).
- The large majority of Namban tsuba are for the long sword, the *katana* (see Fig. 3) — those for the short sword, the *wakisashi*, are relatively uncommon and those for dagger, the *tantō*, are rarely seen.
- Namban guards are only very rarely inscribed.

These features are present, to varying degrees, in every example of this group. They combine to make identification a fairly simple matter and are dealt with individually, in detail, in the following text. Examples will always be found, in every branch of art, that blur the defining borderlines, but such examples are relatively uncommon among the Namban group of Japanese sword guards; most examples can confidently be assigned to their appropriate group.

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<sup>80</sup> *Mimi*: the rim of a tsuba.

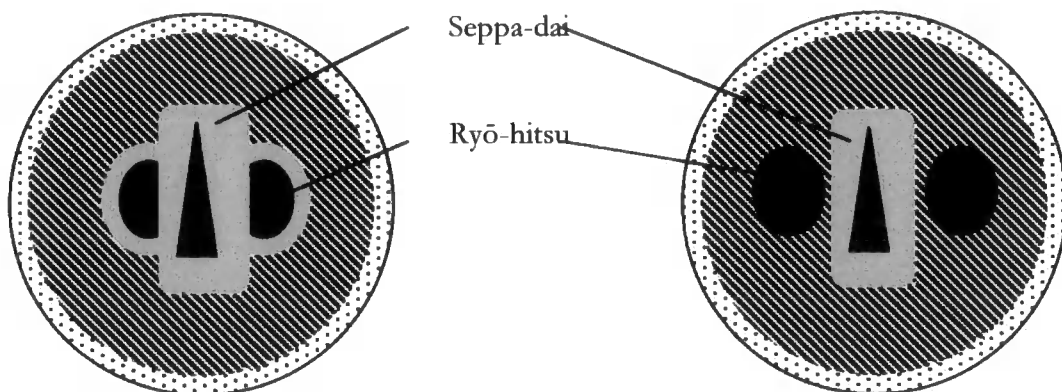


Fig. 2

Diagram Showing Extension of the Seppa-dai to Enclose the Ryō-hitsu

#### 1.4.1. 'NAGASAKI' TSUBA

It is especially depressing, in the light of Ogawa's redefinition, to find the term 'Nagasaki tsuba' appearing in recent sale catalogues. Christie's catalogue of a sale held in New York on 19 June 1993 lists, under lot no. 3, a group of "thirteen Nagasaki tsuba".<sup>81</sup> Nine of these are described as featuring undercut scrollwork, with or without decorative *seppa-dai*, and could thus be correctly labelled as 'Namban'. Another, decorated with carved monkeys in the Mitsuhiro style, is Hizen. The remaining three might well be classified as 'odds and sods'.

Likewise, Sotheby's catalogue of the Caldwell sale, held on 30 March 1994, has as lot no. 123 a guard described as "an early Nagasaki tsuba" and, as lot no. 125, one described as being either "a Canton or a Nagasaki tsuba".<sup>82</sup> Both of these are illustrated on p. 41 and, while being completely dissimilar, neither of them appears to be Namban. One of them is described as having an NBTHK Tokubetsu Kichō paper — awarded by the Society for the Preservation of Japanese Art Swords, in Tokyo, to 'especially precious' artefacts — describing the work as from Nagasaki. This is a poor basis for such a group classification in the absence of any common, identifying features, however.

<sup>81</sup> Christie, Manson and Woods Inc. (1993), *Japanese Works of Art*, p. 11, lot no. 3.

<sup>82</sup> Sotheby's Holdings Inc. (1994), *Japanese Sword Fittings from the R. B. Caldwell Collection*, p. 40, lot nos. 123 and 125.

The Carlo Monzini sale, held by Sotheby's on 18 June 1996, had as lot no. 191 "two iron tsuba of Nagasaki type".<sup>83</sup> Both of these were cup-shaped guards, the first possibly Hizen and the second, illustrated on p. 51 of the catalogue, possibly Būshū.

What then is meant by a Nagasaki tsuba? In a small selection of 17 such tsuba we have found nine Namban, two Hizen, a Būshū, two unattributed and three miscellaneous. The term does not seem to include the work of the Nagasaki Jakushi group. Nagasaki tsuba, like Canton tsuba, are better forgotten unless they can be identified as a discrete group with recognisable features in common.

'Nagasaki' might perhaps, in the future, be considered an appropriate label for those tsuba with an opaque, overall enamelling of indifferent quality, on a copper gilt background, some of which emanated from that town (see p. 12). These are currently included in the Shippō group of tsuba, but this proposed new label has some relevance, both geographically and historically, to commend it.

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<sup>83</sup> Sotheby's Holdings Inc. (1996), *The Carlo Monzino Collection of Japanese Sword Fittings and Swords*, p. 50, lot no. 191.

## 2. THE ATTRIBUTION OF NAMBAN TSUBA

We have seen how, because of the consistent presence of a number of identifying features, the allocation of a Namban tsuba to its correct group is generally not a difficult exercise. The main problem in this respect is where the influence of the Namban group upon the work of another school has not quite 'bridged the gap' between the two. The obvious chiselling skills of the maker, the quality of the iron used, or the absence of undercutting may all give cause for doubt, although such doubt is relatively uncommon. Attempts at a more detailed attribution are quite a different matter, however.

The attribution of a tsuba as to its school, its maker and the date (or period) of its manufacture is essentially based upon the presence, on its *seppa-dai*, of an inscription. Where this feature is absent, other routes may be taken in order to achieve this end, and the comparison of a tsuba with similar, signed and dated, pieces may provide an answer. Good quality photographs may serve the same purpose but, unfortunately, the high printing costs of these have resulted in the appearance of very poor reproductions in many of the recent Japanese publications. Additionally, some of the more prestigious schools of *tsubashō* — master tsuba craftsmen — produced books of designs, which may be of value as tools of reference. But, however knowledgeable the experts, their expertise is ultimately based upon the study, in one manner or another, of large numbers of confidently attributed artefacts.

The almost invariable absence of inscription on all Namban tsuba renders such attribution extremely difficult, and is largely responsible for the paucity of scholarship in the group. One reason for this absence is the frequency of decorative *seppa-dai*, the presence of which obviously preclude any inscription, but even undecorated *seppa-dai* of this group are seldom inscribed. Additionally, if one understands the term 'school' to imply a unified group of artists with a continuity of style and with its members having a disciplined tuition under a succession of accepted masters, the Namban workers did not constitute a school in this sense of the word. Rather, it is probable that there was a large number of small groups of artists, originally centred around the Eastern coast of Kyūshū and later spreading widely throughout Japan, manufacturing guards based on designs emanating from Hizen, and selling them as *shūremono*. If this organisation of production is accepted, the absence of a 'database' of attributed Namban tsuba is not

surprising and, indeed, it may prove impossible to create one. Any attempt to do so must be based on the premise that each such group of artists is likely to have demonstrated some constancy of design and to have produced tsuba with, for example, identifiable features on the *seppa-dai*, the *mimi* or the *hira* — the plate of the guard.

## 2.1. A SUB-GROUP OF TSUBA WITH FEATURES IN COMMON

This premise is supported by a comparison of three tsuba — J 10201, J 10204 and J 10215 — from the A.H. Higginbotham collection at the Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle. The three tsuba are easily identifiable, having identical and unusual *seppa-dai*. These are oval, the outer margin being defined by an engraved line and the inner by an undulating margin surrounding the *nakago-bitsu* — the triangular opening for the tang of the blade. The whole of this enclosed area is decorated with a wave diaper, and both of the *ryō-bitsu*<sup>84</sup> are crescentic in shape. All three of these tsuba, illustrated on Plates 1, 2 and 3, exhibit identical templates in their *hira* design, although variations in their shape, and small variations in their size, preclude any possibility of their being cast from a common mould. They also demonstrate a wide range of skill in their execution and can quite easily be 'graded' by this feature.

Thus, while exhibiting the same areas of undercutting as do the others, this feature is much more finely executed in J 10204. The finishing of the detail on the dragons of this tsuba is also much more skilled work, and the detail of the decorative and pierced *mimi* has been far more carefully executed. By comparison, J 10215 demonstrates very indifferent work, and J 10201 falls somewhere between the other two in its execution. Likewise, the production of the diaper design is very haphazard on tsuba J 10215. Another interesting difference in the work is that, having thus graded the tsuba according to the detail in their production, the 'better' one is seen to have gold *nunome* on the rims of the *ryō-bitsu* and as highlights to the dragon and its *tama* jewel, while the other two have a rather crude overlay which may have been produced by some form of the mercuric gilding process. This suggests the possibility that *nunome-zōgan* may have been considered the more desirable of these two gilding processes.

Four further examples of this design have been identified. One of these, (J 7633) is in the W.P. Bevis collection, also at the Laing Art Gallery, and the second is in the author's collection (WAY 27.15.1934). Both of these are of very indifferent quality, with a minimum of gilding; the second, measuring 6.2 cm in height × 5.8 cm in

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<sup>84</sup> Where two *hitsu-ana* are present, the pair is rather confusingly termed *ryō-bitsu*.

width, is one of the scarcer examples of a Namban tsuba intended for mounting on a *wakizashi*.

The sixth example is to be found in Wilkinson's book on edged weapons. In this he illustrates a tsuba from the Gregory collection: this is identical to the others in all aspects of its design apart from the fact that, instead of being contemporaneous and crescentic, the *ryō-hitsu* are later, conventionally shaped modifications.<sup>85</sup> Finally, tsuba 698 '30 in the Birmingham Museum's collection completes this group of similar tsuba. This last example, having no suggestion whatsoever of any gold decoration, measures 7.4 cm in length × 7.2 cm in width. It is *tate-maru-gata* in form and has the identifying, crescentic *ryō-hitsu*.<sup>86</sup>

All of these findings suggest that a single maker, or group of makers, produced similar tsuba of varying quality. They also suggest that *nunome* gilding may have been a more desirable option than was the alternative gilding process — not a surprising finding in view of the increased amount of work involved in the production of the former — and that tsuba could be chosen either with or without *ryō-hitsu*. The availability of such variety from a single workshop is indicative of a high level of organisational skills, whereby customers could select — or even order — their requirements from a range of merchandise.

The presence of openwork is the defining characteristic of this group, but the degree of undercutting incorporated in this work is very variable. It may occupy the whole area and, when at its best, is a cause for wonder at the technical skill involved. More often, there are found to be only three to six small areas of such work, scattered at random in the more open areas of the guard,

thus  or thus , and easily identified by

holding the guard up to the light. Such openwork is seen to be based upon the elaboration of groups of four symmetrically drilled holes. The poorest of this group are completely devoid of the skilled and labour-intensive work involved in undercutting, the openwork consisting simply of an area of drilled holes. Frequently, the lavish

<sup>85</sup> Wilkinson (1970), *Edged Weapons*, p. 198, fig. 165.

<sup>86</sup> Subsequently, two further examples of this sub-group (M.777-1931 and n/a), both in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, suggest that such tsuba are quite widespread among English collections.

application of gilding on such guards refutes any suspicion that the maker may have intended to revisit any uncompleted work at a later stage.

Any guard of solid plate form, however derivative its decoration, does not qualify for inclusion in the Namban group and can generally be confidently attributed to its own school — commonly either Hizen or Shōami.

## 2.2. THE DATING OF NAMBAN TSUBA

The dating of Namban guards is generally rendered very difficult by two conflicting factors. On the one hand, the development of better metalworking tools resulted in the later work — of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries — tending to be much finer in its execution. On the other hand, the mass-production of articles intended for export resulted in some rough and crude work after 1840. Joly recognised this difficulty when he stated:

...the classification of Namban tsuba from the chronological point of view is almost impossible, although it has been attempted, but it is a mistake to place in the earlier period those guards on which the undercutting and entwining of the scrollwork is the most delicate, the contrary is more probable. (Joly (1912), *Japanese Sword Fittings: A Descriptive Catalogue of the Collection of G.H. Naunton, Esq.*, p. 46.)

An attempt by M. Tadamasa Hayashi to classify his collection of tsuba on the basis of their supposed chronological age was a mistake for two reasons. This classification was an illogical one, since it split into several sections the work from a single school, but he was also guilty of gross errors in his dating. Joly, in 1912, expressed surprise that his "antiquarian misstatements" and "reckless datings [sic] from the Tenth Century to the Fifteenth Century should still receive any sort of support at present".<sup>87</sup> Many of Hayashi's pieces are now considered to be several hundred years younger than he suggested, and his dating of a Kagonami tsuba as "early 16<sup>th</sup> century"<sup>88</sup> must likewise be discounted. It is now generally accepted that Namban tsuba were introduced into Japan in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, and probably reached the peak of their popularity in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>87</sup> Joly (1912), *Japanese Sword Fittings: a Descriptive Catalogue of the Collection of G.H. Naunton Esq.*, p. XV.

<sup>88</sup> Hayashi (1894), *Catalogue de la collection des Gardes de Sabre Japonaises au Musée du Louvre*, p. 7, nos. 37 and 38.

A tsuba that fulfils most of our expectations of the Namban group is described, and illustrated, in the catalogue of the Baur collection, but has an undecorated *seppa-dai* on which is inscribed 'Hishū Yagami (nō)ju Mitsuhiro'.<sup>89</sup> Judging by this illustration, it appears to have a contemporaneous *kodzuka-bitsu*.

In an article in the now defunct *Bushidō* magazine, Burawoy suggests that the work of the first and second generation of the Mitsuhiro artists, whose signatures are similar, can be partially distinguished by their rendering of the name of the province. Thus Mitsuhiro I signed his work 'Hishū Yagami (nō)ju Mitsuhiro', while Mitsuhiro II favoured 'Hizen Yagami (nō)ju Mitsuhiro'.<sup>90</sup> If this guard is, as this article suggests, the work of Mitsuhiro I, its presumed place and date of manufacture — Hizen at around 1800 — may make it useful as a reference tool. Interestingly, it may equally correctly be labelled either as Hizen or as Namban work.

A similar tsuba, III.4.72.5 in the Halberstadt collection in Copenhagen, is identically signed.

Some more recent attempts have been made at dating this group, perhaps the most remarkable of these being that by John D. Hamilton in his catalogue of the collection in the Peabody Museum at Salem, Massachusetts. In this he illustrates seven examples, of which four are Namban by our current definition, and he proceeds to date these as "circa 1750, 1720, 1750 and 1780" respectively.<sup>91</sup>

The majority of collectors will probably be content to classify this group less ambitiously, initially identifying any uncommon, imported tsuba as being 16<sup>th</sup> century work. Those described by Joly, "in which the perforations are just round holes, reminiscent of a strainer, just chiselled at the edge",<sup>92</sup> they will reject as curiosities, manufactured in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, purely for the foreign market. The remainder certainly originates from a period that demonstrates a phase of improving quality, followed by one of deterioration. But to divide this period arbitrarily into three equal segments, each of 30 years, and then to allocate the locally made tsuba to one of these segments on the basis of their degree of metalworking skill, is to greatly over-simplify the dating of these.

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<sup>89</sup> Robinson (1980), *The Bauer Collection, Geneva: Japanese Sword-fittings*, p. 51, D.298.

<sup>90</sup> Burawoy (1981), "Mitsuhiro of Hizen" in *Bushidō Magazine, July-September, vol. 3, no. 1*, pp. 18-21.

<sup>91</sup> Hamilton (1975), *Japanese Sword Guards in the Collection of the Peabody Museum*, pl. XXVII, nos. 1,2,4 and 6.

<sup>92</sup> Joly (1912), *Japanese Sword Fittings: a Descriptive Catalogue of the Collection of G.H.Naunton, Esq.*, p. 46.

It is to be hoped that, with further study, this dating may be more accurately defined. In the meantime, however, the concept of 'Early', 'Intermediate' and 'Late' is probably preferable. Referring respectively to the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, these labels are less constraining, recognising the continuity of the changes that took place during this period and the consequent absence of any clearly defined 'windows' of style.

Sadly, examples of inferior, 19<sup>th</sup> century export work feature prominently in many of the European collections. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the amount of labour-intensive undercutting normally required for their production was also occasionally reduced by the production of two latticed discs, placed one on top of the another and secured by an encircling rim.<sup>93</sup> Since the perforations in both discs were not congruous, an impression of undercutting was thus created. The identification of any such work does not normally present any difficulty, and it can easily be placed to one side.

Imported tsuba of an early date are seldom seen, and the recognition of such 16<sup>th</sup> century work is more difficult. The author's own examination of several hundreds of tsuba in various museum collections has failed to produce a single one that convincingly suggests such a provenance, and Kitamura, the director of the Namban Bunka-kan in Osaka-shi, acknowledges that his own museum's collection includes no early, imported examples.<sup>94</sup> Early imports from China have been described as having "a purely Chinese design with symmetrical components",<sup>95</sup> the latter adjective suggesting that they may have been Kantō tsuba with their origin in Eastern China: in view of the proximity of the ports of Shanghai and Nagasaki, this is not surprising.

It is important to consider this group of imported guards in relation to their historical context. The Momoyama period (1573 – 1603) coincided with Hideyoshi's campaigns in both Japan and Korea, when the need for effective weaponry was paramount, and it is logical to look for such indications in the tsuba of this time. It was followed by the Edo period (1603 – 1868) — 250 years of isolation, with peace and cultural development — when sword guards became progressively less functional and

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<sup>93</sup> Heckmann (1995), *Tsuba*, T45.

<sup>94</sup> Kitamura (1998), Personal Communication.

<sup>95</sup> Joly (1914), *Note sur le Fer et le Style Namban*, p. 2.

more decorative. The differentiation between later imports and locally made copies thus becomes increasingly difficult.

The fact that later examples of Namban tsuba are so numerous in Western collections may be due, in part, to their selective gathering by that group of collectors. Japonisme — although it was not known as such until the name was suggested by Philippe Burty in 1872 —<sup>96</sup> centred on London and Paris. It had manifested itself in the West following the opening of Japan by Commodore Perry in 1854, and reached the peak of its popularity around 1878 in the huge Japanese pavilion of the second Paris Exposition Universelle.<sup>97</sup> This exhibition — preceded by one in 1867 and succeeded by a third, for which the Eiffel Tower was built in 1889 as a symbol of modern technology — was followed in 1883 by the first major retrospective exhibition of Japanese art in the Western world.<sup>98</sup> Organised by Louis Gonse and held in Paris at the gallery of George Petit, this exhibition was linked to the publication of Gonse's seminal, two-volume work, *L'Art Japonais*, which appeared a few months later.

The Namban group of tsuba, with its extravagant depiction of things Oriental and exotic, was the epitome of the earlier enthusiasms of this artistic movement, and had an obvious appeal in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century — the time when the major collections were being established. That they were also very popular in Japan is apparent, and this popularity — together with their *shūremono* status — leads one to the conclusion that they were positioned at the 'cheaper end' of the market and relevant to the less moneyed part of society, be it samurai or otherwise.

The lords in whose service they were retained supplied samurai with utilitarian and inexpensive tsuba — usually swordsmiths' or armourers' work. Is it possible that the lords of Southern Kyūshū supplied the readily available and inexpensive Namban tsuba to their retainers? Because of their extensive openwork and undercutting, it is easy for a Western student to consider these as weaker, or less effective, than solid plate guards. They were probably not considered as such by the samurai of that time, however. *Sukashi* tsuba were well established in popularity by this period and it is likely that the

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<sup>96</sup> Weisberg (1975), "Japonisme: Early Sources and the French Printmaker, 1854 – 1882" in *Japonisme: Japanese Influence on French Art, 1854 – 1910*, p. 15.

<sup>97</sup> Conant (1991), "Refractions of the Rising Sun" in *Japan and Britain: An Aesthetic Dialogue, 1850 – 1930*, p.83.

<sup>98</sup> Unknown Author (1883). *Catalogue de l'Exposition Retrospective de l'Art Japonais Organisée par M. Louis Gonse*.

defensive rôle of the tsuba has been greatly exaggerated: its main purpose was probably to balance the sword, and to prevent the user's hand from slipping down onto its blade.

The following pointers may be useful aids during the attempted attribution of Namban tsuba:

- Those tsuba with the simpler form of *seppa-dai*, such as oval or rectangular, are more likely to be of earlier manufacture, and the more elaborate forms to be later.
- Early imports, likely for geographical reasons to have their origin in Eastern China, have been appropriately described as having the Kantō characteristics of crudeness and symmetry.
- Early tsuba may, due either to a functional need or to lesser metalworking skills, be of a thicker fabric and feature less openwork.
- The presence of fine, delicate undercutting is more likely to be indicative of later, rather than of earlier, work.
- Wide, rounded *mimi*, possibly of pipe-stem structure, may be suggestive of early Chinese imports.
- It is probable that early imports into Japan had plain *seppa-dai*, and that the presence of a decorated surface is an indication of later manufacture by local craftsmen.
- Beaded rims seem to be a later, Japanese development that is not found on the earlier examples.

The attribution of auriculate guards presents problems that are additional to those discussed above. Supposedly influenced by swords introduced into Japan by the Portuguese, early examples of this sub-section are exceedingly rare but some factors, specific to this sub-section, may be of assistance in this exercise:

- As has already been observed, some guards of the Namban group bear the VOC cypher of the Dutch United East India Company (Vereenigde Oosindische Compagnie). The presence of this inscription on the *seppa-dai* of a tsuba can be considered to be an indication of its manufacture by this company, either in Japan, or in India with its subsequent importation into Japan. Since this trading company

first visited Japan in 1609 and ceased trading there in 1799, however, the presence on a tsuba of this insignia is only of limited help in the dating of such guards.

- While conventionally shaped auriculate tsuba, without the VOC cypher and of *mokkō-gata* form, may be of any period after the early 1600s and of any provenance, those of modified *maru-gata* or *tate-maru-gata* form are likely to be later, locally made copies.
- The auricular plates of some guards of the Momoyama period do not feature openwork, but have instead their decorative design rendered as *usunuki-bori* on a solid plate. This may be because of the need for strength, but is more likely to be because of the reduced labour involved in such work and an absence of the skills required to do the undercutting.
- The presence of decorative *seppa-dai* on this sub-group is probably an indication of later, and of Japanese, work.

### 2.3. THE THREE SOURCES OF NAMBAN TSUBA

Ogawa's redefinition of the Namban group identifies three discrete areas of manufacture of these artefacts — China, India and Japan. Imports from China, and from India via the Dutch East India Company, both entered Japan from the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Examples of these early pieces from China are extremely scarce and, in spite of their disproportionately great influence, probably never constituted a large group numerically. Apart from their being described as crude and symmetrical, little is known; neither is it known for how long these imports continued. Some auriculate guards may have been exported from China, and some of these were possibly originally intended as guards for Chinese pole-arms, but it seems probable that most originated from India.

Tsuba from India were probably mainly of the auriculate type. Often these bear the VOC cypher, placed on the *seppa-dai* as a 'trademark', and this is a reliable indication of their origin. These commonly have modified *nakago-hitsu*, and may have been intended for an alternative use, either on Chinese pole-arms and parrying sticks (*tie-jian*) or for mounting on weapons made in Japan for export. There was clearly a market in Siam (now known as Thailand), Korea and in the West for such weapons. It is unlikely that more conventionally shaped tsuba reached Japan by this route — none bearing the VOC cypher, other than as a decorative motif, have been described. The period over

which these imports continued is not known but, as already stated, the Dutch East India Company ceased trading in 1799.

The local production of the Namban group of tsuba, inspired by imported examples, reached a peak in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Japanese talent for the modification and improvement of foreign imports probably resulted in the early introduction of changes. Tsuba rapidly developed increasingly bizarre shapes of *seppa-dai*, with their originally blank surfaces acquiring decoration; beaded rims also appeared on the locally made tsuba. Auriculate guards originating from India were also modified, becoming increasingly conventional in form while still retaining echoes of their original features.

**W**e have seen how, with improved materials and better metalworking techniques, improvements to these early and crude productions made this group of tsuba increasingly desirable adjuncts to the sword. Only in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with a debased industry producing artefacts intended purely for export as curios, did a serious decline in quality take place.

It is logical to suppose that the influence of these imported works was first felt in the immediate environs of Nagasaki. This port was still some six weeks' journey — using the normal transports of palanquin and coastal vessel — from the administrative centre of Edo,<sup>99</sup> but these influences spread rapidly through Japan and there is no reason to believe that any part of the country was immune from them. As with the ripples from a stone, they would have been felt progressively later as they moved further away from the epicentre at Nagasaki. Thus, while earlier work would have originated from this port, later work may or may not have its origin from further afield.

**T**o what extent do the above generalisations enable us to distinguish between the tsuba from these three loci, and to attempt a sub-division of the locally made copies on the basis of their period of manufacture (see Table 2)?

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<sup>99</sup> Screech (1996), *The Western Scientific Gaze and Popular Imagery in Later Edo Japan*, p. 11.

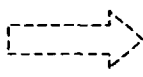
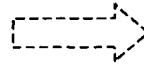
	CHINA	INDIA	JAPAN
1600	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are very scarce.</li> <li>• Crude, and with a symmetrical design.</li> <li>• Possibly some auriculate guards, also.</li> <li>• Round or square <i>seppa-dai</i>, with little ornamentation.</li> <li>• Pipe-stem <i>mimi</i> are probably an indication of a Chinese provenance.</li> <li>• The scarcity of examples suggests that importation was very limited and short-lived.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mainly of auriculate form, bearing the VOC cypher as a 'trade mark'.</li> <li>• A modification to the <i>nakago-hitsu</i> is a common feature on these guards.</li> <li>• No conventionally shaped <i>tsuba</i> are identified as coming from this locus.</li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Copying of imported models became increasingly widespread from 1750, with subsequent Japanese modifications such as decorative <i>seppa-dai</i>, beaded <i>mimi</i> and modified auriculate forms.</li> <li>• Early copies were crude, becoming increasingly skilled with the introduction of better metalworking skills.</li> <li>• Later copies, purely for export, were of very poor quality.</li> </ul>
1700		 <p>Dutch East India Company ceased trading in 1799.</p>	
1800			
1850			Local production continued until the middle of the 19 <sup>th</sup> century.

Table 2  
Comparative Characteristics of Ogawa's Three Sub-Groups

### 3. AN ANALYSIS OF NAMBAN TSUBA IN EUROPEAN COLLECTIONS

#### 3.1. METHODOLOGY

The physical measurements of 273 Namban tsuba from various European collections were recorded. These tsuba were first assessed to ensure that they conformed to the present definition of the group. Since all of these collections had been catalogued many years previously, in some instances almost half of the tsuba classified as 'Namban' were excluded as more correctly belonging to other groups — most commonly those of Mitsuhiro, Jakushi, Hirado, Hizen and Būshū. On the rare occasion of there being any doubt, the benefit of this was given to the existing museum classification.

Accepted tsuba were then examined and records made of their features, including descriptions of their shape; the metal of which they were made; the form of the *mimi* and *seppa-dai*; the presence of *hitsu-ana*, particular attention being paid as to whether or not they were contemporaneous with the guard or a later modification; any alterations to the shape of the *nakago-hitsu*, and details of the design on the *hira* and of its gilding. Those pieces of especial interest were photographed.

Measurements were then made of the height and width of the tsuba, and of its thickness, in cm. Where appropriate, two measurements were taken of the thickness and rather unsatisfactorily, and for want of an alternative, the mean of these two measurements was used in subsequent calculations. The weight of the tsuba was measured in grams, and all of the above findings were entered onto data sheets (see p. 186).

These measurements were used to construct histograms and scatterplots, as shown on Figs 3 – 6 and 9 – 13.

In order to obtain a database of an arbitrarily selected, mixed group of tsuba for the purposes of comparison with the Namban group, 1,045 measurements of height

and width were collected from seven, non-specialised sale catalogues of tsuba,<sup>100</sup> and from the author's own collection. A comparable histogram and scatterplot were produced of these measurements (see Figs 7 and 8).

### 3.2. MEASUREMENT ANALYSIS

The examination of 273 tsuba that conform to Ogawa's definition of the Namban group gives the distinct impression that the majority are intended for mounting on *katana* rather than on the smaller-bladed *wakizashi* or *tantō*. This intuitive judgement is confirmed when their measurements of height and width are plotted on frequency/distribution histograms (see Figs 3 and 4).

Both of these charts demonstrate a bimodal distribution although, as discussed later on pp. 47 and 48, these might possibly be considered to show indications of a trimodal pattern. Both curves demonstrate a marked positive skew. The modal values of the two groups are seen to be 7.2 cm in height × 7.0 cm in width for the larger tsuba and 6.2 cm in height × 5.8 cm in width for the smaller: the number of *tantō* tsuba is too small to be of significance. The standard deviation<sup>101</sup> of these two groups of figures is 0.55 cm for the length and 0.59 cm for the width.

Gunsaulus states that the average size for *katana* tsuba is 8.0 cm in height × 7.5 cm in width; that for *wakizashi* tsuba 6.6 cm in height × 6.2 cm in width; and for *tantō* tsuba 6.0 cm in height × 4.5 cm in width.<sup>102</sup> These figures have been represented on the two histograms by dotted lines, and it will be seen that Gunsaulus' figures fall well to the right of the modal values. This can be interpreted either as suggesting that Namban tsuba may be uniformly somewhat smaller than are their general counterparts, or as casting doubt on Gunsaulus' figures.

A histogram has also been produced illustrating the thickness/frequency relationship (see Fig. 5). This demonstrates a modal value of 4 mm, with a positive

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<sup>100</sup> Christie, Manson and Woods International, Inc. (1993), *Japanese Works of Art*.  
Syz (1993), *The Henry D. Rosin Collection of Japanese Sword Fittings*.  
Christie, Manson and Woods International, Inc. (1992), *Japanese Swords and Sword Fittings from the Collection of Dr Walter A. Compton, Parts I, II and III*.  
Gemmell (1991), *Tosogu: Treasure of the Samurai*.  
Syz (1994), *Masterpieces from the Randolph B. Caldwell Collection*.

<sup>101</sup> Standard deviation is defined as the root of the average of the squares of the differences from their mean of a number of observations.

<sup>102</sup> Gunsaulus (1923), *Japanese Sword Mounts in the Collections of the Field Museum*, p. 33.

skew. Due to the very narrow range of figures on the ordinate of this chart, the standard deviation is only 0.09 cm and this chart thus of only limited interest.

Recalling that Gunsaulus' measurements refer to the averages of all the groups of tsuba in the Chicago Field Museum's collection, the possibility that the Namban group genuinely differs in size from the others must be further considered. Taking 13 of the Namban tsuba depicted in Fig. 6 as possibly falling within the *wakizashi* range, the figures obtained by the calculation of the arithmetical averages of the sizes of both types of tsuba are shown in Table 3:

COLLECTION	KATANA		WAKIZASHI		TANTO	
	Height cm	Width cm	Height cm	Width cm	Height cm	Width cm
<b>Gunsaulus</b> n=746	8.7	7.5	6.6	6.2	6.0	4.5
<b>Namban</b> n=273	7.49	7.12	6.56	5.90	-	-

Table 3

Table giving Arithmetical Average Measurements of Tsuba

It will be seen from these figures — admittedly taken from a proportionately rather small sample group — that the Namban tsuba for *katana*, referred to below as (NK), are considerably smaller than are those of Gunsaulus' group for the same swords — (GK). Conversely, the figures for *wakizashi* tsuba, (NW) and (GW) respectively, are very similar. These findings may be linked to the apparent dearth of *wakizashi* tsuba of the Namban group by the following rationale.

The reduction in size of (NW) to a lesser degree than (NK) serves to approximate these two size-types, and it may be that the differentiation between them has become insignificant and can no longer be identified on a height/width scatterplot. Such a chart is seen in Fig. 6, where it is apparent that there is a strong positive correlation between the two sets of values. Here the distribution of tsuba is seen to fall into two distinct groupings. By far the majority falls in the higher ranges of the x and y

Fig. 3: Histogram of Height of Tsuba and Frequency - Namban Group

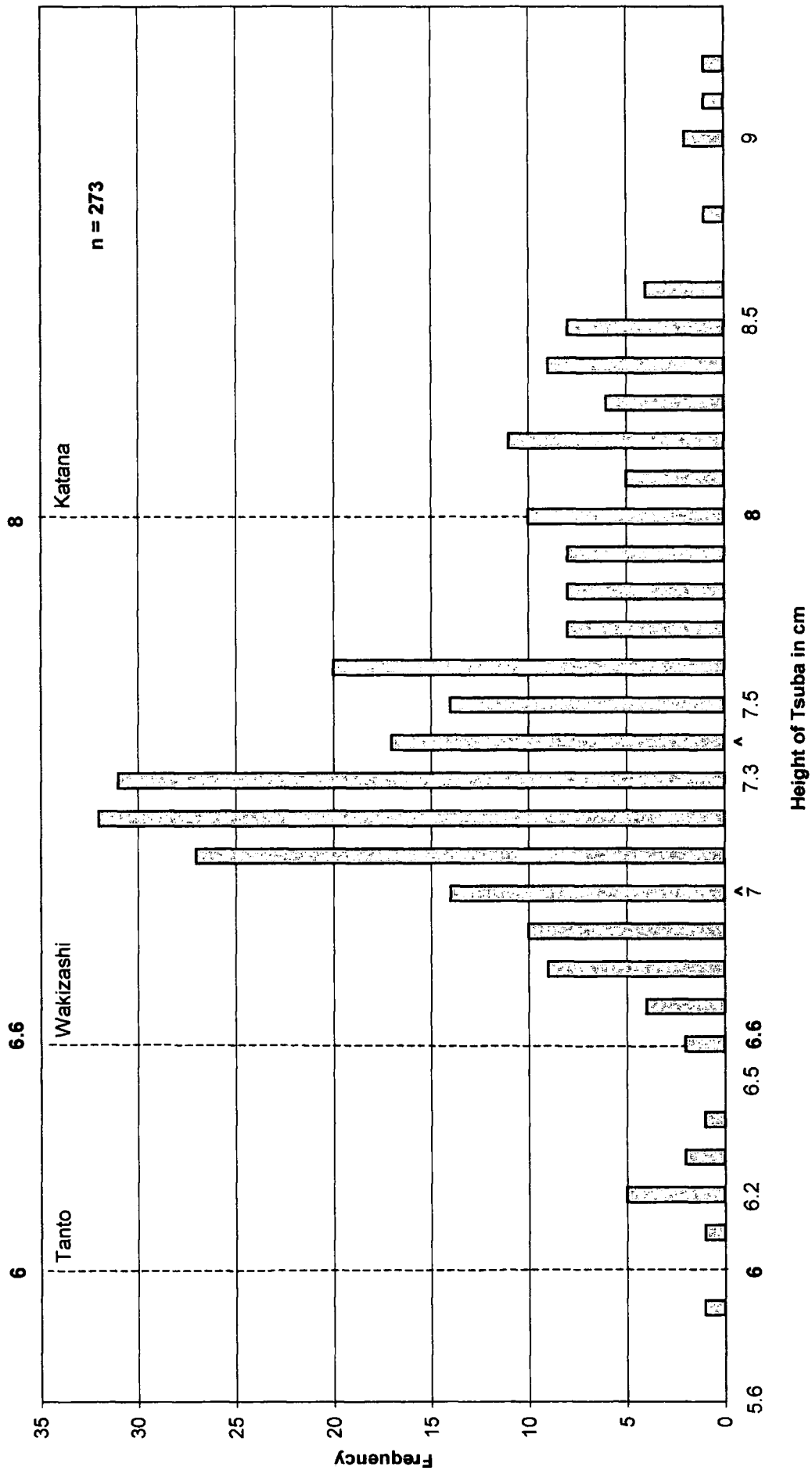
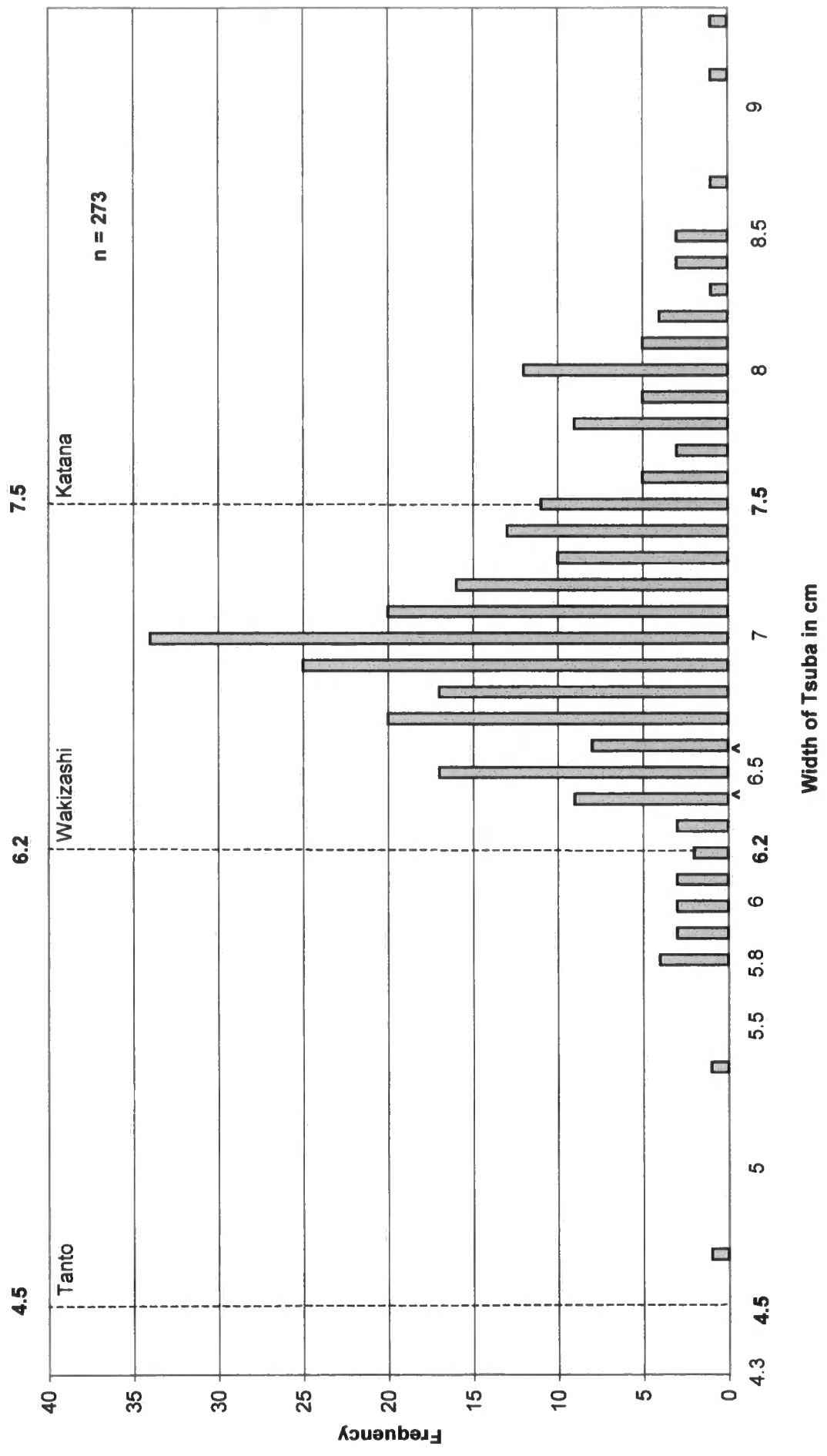


Fig. 4: Histogram of Width of Tsuba and Frequency - Namban Group



ordinates on the top, right-hand side of this chart and represents the larger tsuba—putatively those for *katana* — while the small scatter on the left may represent *wakizashi* tsuba or, indeed, these may be irretrievably mixed with the smaller of the *katana* ones.

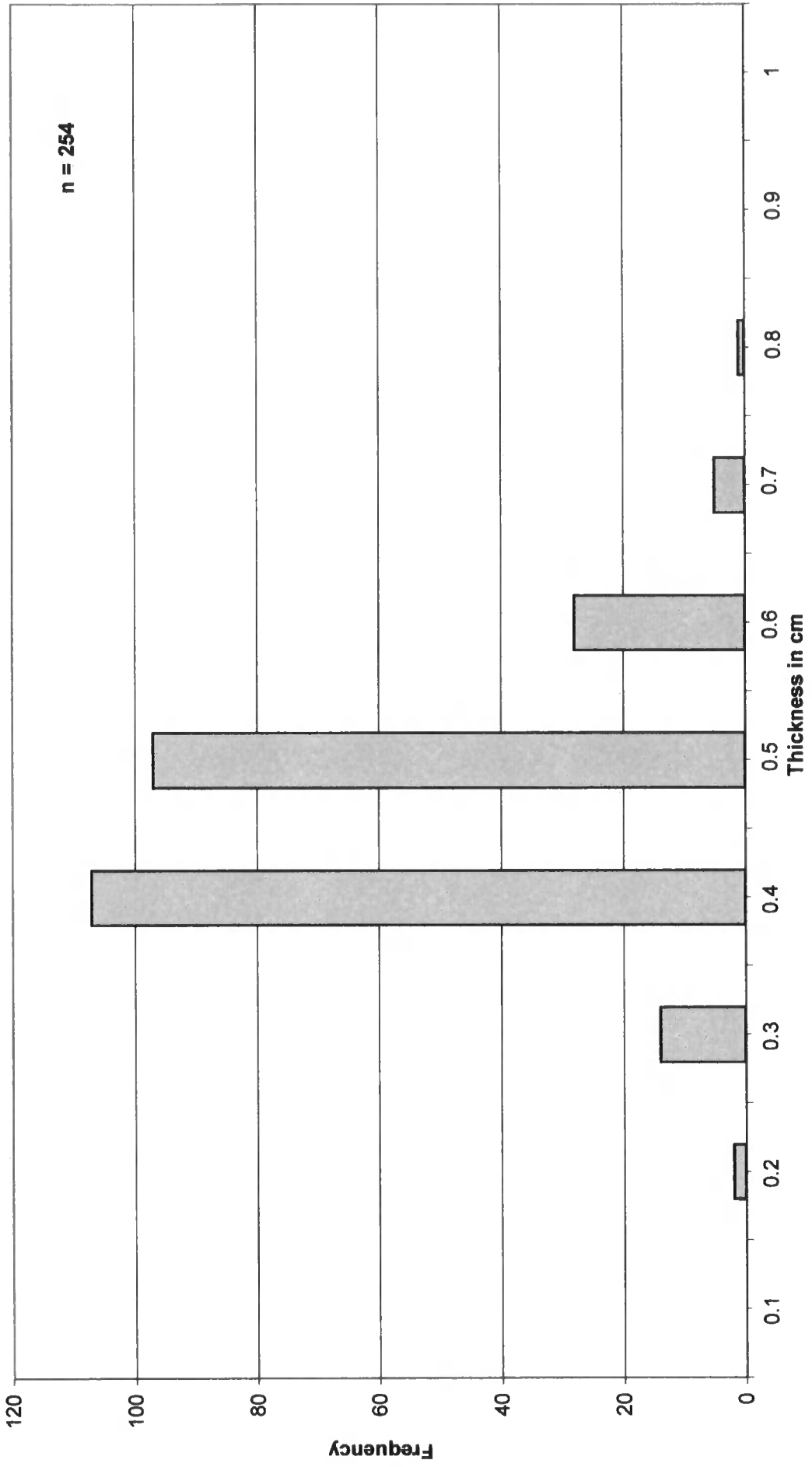
This approximation of sizes is confirmed by an examination of the matching, *daishō* pair in the Royal Armouries — XXVI S 158 and 159. The larger of this pair measures 7.4 cm in height × 6.6 cm in width and the smaller 7.0 cm in height × 6.4 cm in width. These measurements, if identified on Figs 3 and 4 — where they are marked ^ — will be seen to fall quite closely together within Gunsaulus' two averages, and to blur the distinction between the two types. It would, indeed, be very hard to label with any confidence either of these two tsuba as being for a *katana* or a *wakizashi* if it were to be seen in isolation from its partner.

The alternative possibility that Gunsaulus' figures are flawed, also needs to be addressed. These figures were presumably obtained by the examination of the whole range of tsuba in the collection of the Chicago Field Museum — a total of 746 artefacts — but unfortunately the author fails to state the criteria that she used to define these three size-groups prior to averaging their measurements: they can very difficult to differentiate, each from the next. Thus, for example, it is impossible to distinguish between a large *wakizashi* tsuba and a small *katana* one. Apart from the use of frequency/distribution histograms or of height/width scatterplots, it is difficult to imagine a satisfactory method of separating accurately a large number of tsuba into their appropriate groups.

Such an exercise is a simple one if the tsuba are mounted on blades, but mounted tsuba constitute a tiny proportion of most museums' collections. Equally, if two tsuba constitute a *daishō*, the selection of the smaller of the pair as being for a *wakizashi* and the larger for a *katana* is not difficult; but such a pair of any group is uncommon and of the Namban group, incredibly scarce. Neither can the presence of a *hitsu-ana* (or even of two) be considered as indicating a tsuba from a particular size-type, since these occur on tsuba of all types. The only other method is that of selecting *wakizashi* tsuba intuitively, on the basis of their apparently smaller size — a flawed and unacceptable one, since it involves arbitrarily selecting the smaller tsuba and subsequently measuring them in order to confirm that they are indeed smaller.

Presumably Gunsaulus' 'averages' are arithmetical ones although her results, given to only a one-figure decimal place, might cause one to wonder.

Fig. 5: Histogram of Thickness of Tsuba and Frequency - Namban Group



By recording the height and width measurements of an arbitrarily selected group of 1,045 mixed tsuba, as listed in the better sales-room catalogues, it has been possible to test Gunsaulus' conclusions. These measurements were plotted as frequency/distribution histograms for height and for width (see Figs 7 and 8). The resulting charts demonstrate interesting differences from comparable charts based entirely upon the measurements of a group of Namban tsuba (see Figs 3 and 4):

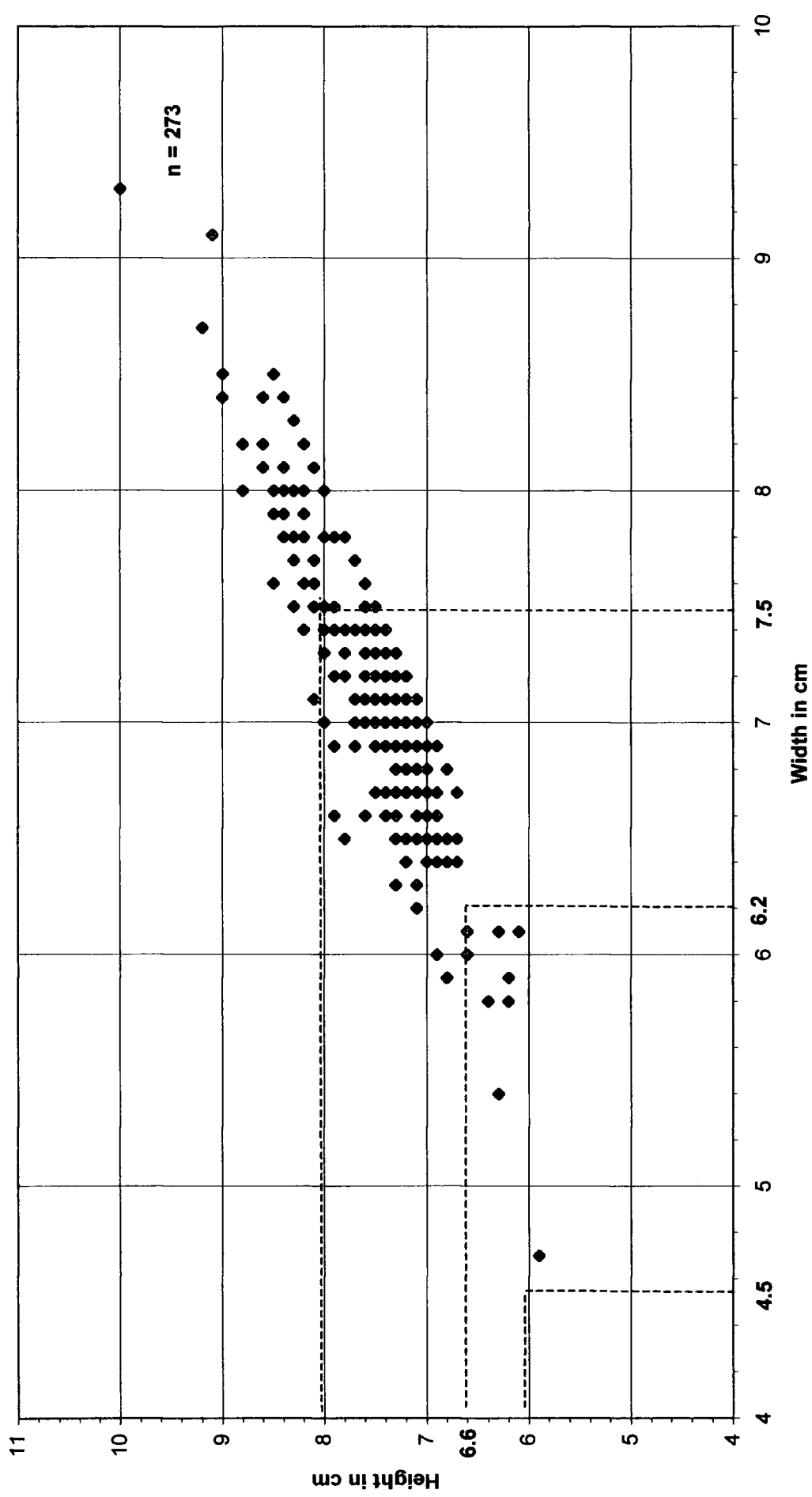
- The long negative tail, representing measurements in the region of 5.5 cm in height and of 3.5 cm in width, probably represents a small number of *hamidasbi* tsuba — these are small tsuba for mounting on *tantō*, with open *bitsu-ana* that are in continuity with the *mimi*. The openwork of Namban tsuba is not readily adaptable to the *hamidasbi* form, which is confined to *ita-tsuba*.<sup>103</sup>
- The long positive tail, representing measurements in the region of 11.5 cm in height and of 10.5 cm in width, represent either large *ō-dashi*, worn over the shoulder in disposable scabbards, or are from large swords that were made for votive purposes. *O-dashi* were popular during the civil wars of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and thus predate the Namban group by several centuries. With the possible exception of two auriculate tsuba of outstanding quality — one, M315-1916 in the Victoria and Albert Museum (see Plate 9) and the other, 0.814 in the Ashmolean Museum — Namban tsuba intended for votive purposes are seldom seen. Presumably this is because such tsuba were, of necessity, made as special commissions and were of a correspondingly high quality.
- The arbitrary charts are much less clearly multi-phasic than are the Namban ones. The explanation for this apparent loss of the three size-groupings in a mixed collection of tsuba may be an indication that each of the schools tended to favour a particular range of sizes. Certainly the size of a tsuba varied with its period of manufacture, larger tsuba being worn when larger swords were fashionable.

A height/width scatterplot of this arbitrary group — not illustrated in this presentation — demonstrates an even greater contiguity between the three size-groups than does the corresponding chart of the Namban group.

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<sup>103</sup> *Ita-tsuba* are tsuba of solid plate construction.

Fig. 6: Scatterplot of Width and Height of Tsuba - Namban Group



These charts of this arbitrary group all reinforce the doubts concerning Gunsaulus' figures. It remains very difficult to understand how she obtained, from a mixed group of tsuba, the figures that she quotes as the average measurements of *katana*, *wakizashi* and *tantō* tsuba.

### 3.3. WEIGHT ANALYSIS

The variation in the weights of Namban tsuba is very wide, ranging as it does in this series from 40 to 212 grams. A histogram of weight/frequency (see Fig. 9) gives a modal value of 104 grams, but the very wide range of values on the ordinate of this chart — with a standard deviation of 26.28 grams — greatly reduces its impact.

A scatterplot of weight/width of these tsuba (see Fig. 10) demonstrates considerable heterogeneity. There is some measure of positive correlation between the two values, albeit with a concentration of points in a central block and with some scatter at the two extremes; it is, indeed, logical to anticipate some measure of correlation between the size of a tsuba and its weight. Attempts to relate these weights to thickness, to width or to thickness fail to produce anything other than a complete thickness width dissociation, however (see Figs 11, 12, and 13).

The measurement of the thickness of a Namban tsuba presents some logistical problems. While the measurements of height and width are very easy to quantify, that of thickness is more difficult and depends on a number of factors. Lenticular and cup-shaped guards make this measurement very difficult, and the presence of a thickened *mimi* leaves the student little alternative to calculating the average of the two measurements. Additionally, because of the irregular surfaces of this group of tsuba, their thickness can probably only be reliably measured to a single decimal point of a cm.

There are also a considerable number of factors that confuse any statistical analysis that is based upon weight. Some of these are discussed below.

### 3.4. AN OVERVIEW OF STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Although this attempt to use descriptive analysis in the study of a group of tsuba has proved, for a number of reasons, to be of limited value, it has also been a useful exercise. Consideration of the results leads to a number of interesting observations:

- The positive correlation between height and width is due to the characteristically discoid shape of all tsuba, whereby an increase in one of these measurements will be associated with an increase in the other. These are both continuous variates, there being no clear distinction between the three subdivisions representing the three sizes of tsuba. While it is a truism that *tantō* tsuba are the smallest, *katana* tsuba the biggest and those intended for *wakizashi* somewhere between the two, any specific tsuba may be either a 'small big one' or a 'large little one'.

That the variation in width is less than the variation in height is demonstrated by the slope of the correlation, as demonstrated in Fig. 6. This is not a surprising revelation, since the width of a tsuba has a considerable effect upon the angle at which the handle of its sword is carried across the wearer's abdomen. Apart from considerations of appearance and balance, the height of its tsuba has little effect upon the function of the sword. Thus one can anticipate that any increase in the size of an *uchi-gatana's* tsuba will be reflected more in its height than its width.

- The range of variation of the thickness of this group of tsuba is very small. In the present series this is only 0.4 – 0.7 cm, with a single example outside this range at 0.8 cm, and the standard deviation is only 0.09.
- Conversely, the weight of Namban tsuba is extremely variable, with a range of 40 – 212 grams in this corpus and a standard deviation of 26.28. The many reasons for this wide variation in the weight of tsuba include the following:
  - Both the size and the thickness of the tsuba are obviously important factors in the determination of its weight.
  - The size of *hitsu-ana* is variable and their number can range from zero to two.
  - A *nakago-hitsu*, especially if it has been altered either from, or to, a rectangular form, can result in a measurable loss of weight.
  - The degree of openwork can vary very widely and this, also, can have a considerable effect upon the weight.
  - The density of the metal used in its manufacture will clearly affect the weight of the finished product.

Thus the measurement of the surface area of a tsuba and of its thickness will give only a poor indication of its volume and  $\frac{\text{weight}}{\text{surface area} \times \text{thickness}}$  only a poor indication of the density of its metal. Only by measuring the volume of an inert substance that is displaced by a tsuba can a true measure of that tsuba's volume be obtained. This is particularly applicable to tsuba of the Namban group by reason of their convoluted form and extensive openwork.

Collectors of tsuba generally have no difficulty in intuitively labelling an isolated tsuba as being either for a *tanto*, a *wakizashi* or a *katana* and, in many instances, this labelling of size-groups is probably correct. This decision may sometimes be guided by the construction of a distribution curve or of a height/width scatterplot, but the likelihood of this is greatly increased if such charts are based on a selection of tsuba of the same school and period. The limitations imposed by the use, for this purpose, of a wide range of different tsuba have already been demonstrated. But even under ideal circumstances, there will inevitably be some examples that will fall into a 'no-man's-land' between the three size-groups, and there is no way of labelling these with any degree of certainty.

An associated question mark hangs over the interpretation of the frequency histograms illustrated in Figs 3 and 4, which may both be interpreted as being either bimodal or trimodal in form. Thus Fig. 3 may be seen as demonstrating two modal values at 6.2 and 7.2, or as having a third at 8.2. Similarly Fig. 4 may have two, at 5.8 and 7.0, with a possible third at 8.0. Since the largest of these modal values will be assumed to represent *katana*, with the smaller values representing the smaller size-groups, such a distinction clearly has far-reaching implications upon the perceived distribution of these size-types.

The author has several reasons for his personal conviction that these histograms are, in fact, bimodal:

- The corpus on the right of the charts represents tsuba with modal values of a height of 5.2 cm and a width in the region of 5.8 cm; these are too large to be *tanto* tsuba. If these are therefore *wakizashi* tsuba, the corpus to the right of this **must** represent a single, *katana* group.

- The scatterplot shown on Fig. 6 indicates possible size-group divisions at heights of 6 cm and 7 cm and widths of 5 cm and 6.2 cm, possibly separating *tanto* and *wakizashi*. But the main group, ranging from 6.2 – 8.6 cm, and possibly representing *katana*, gives no indication of further sub-division.
- Intuitively, the examination of a large corpus of Namban tsuba suggests that the majority is of *katana* tsuba and that *wakizashi* tsuba constitute a relatively small minority.

But, be this as it may, it is difficult to see how a definitive answer to this question can ever be obtained.

It appears that — with the single exception of Gunsaulus' possibly flawed, 1923 calculation of arithmetical averages — this is the only descriptive analysis of Japanese sword guards to have been attempted: further statistical investigations are clearly long overdue.

Fig. 7: Histogram of Height and Frequency of Tsuba - Arbitrary Sample

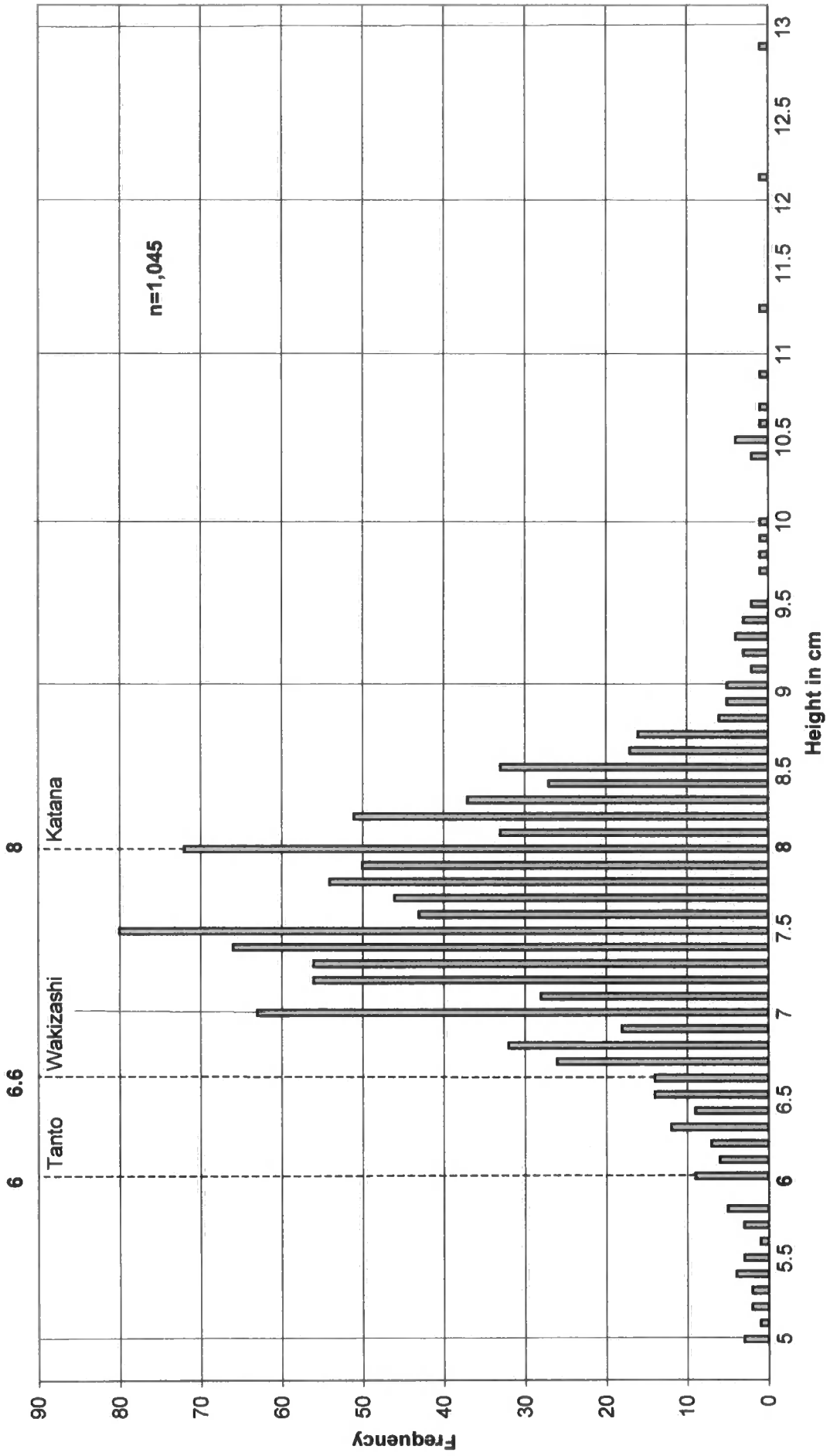


Fig. 8: Histogram of Width and Frequency of Tsuba - Arbitrary Sample

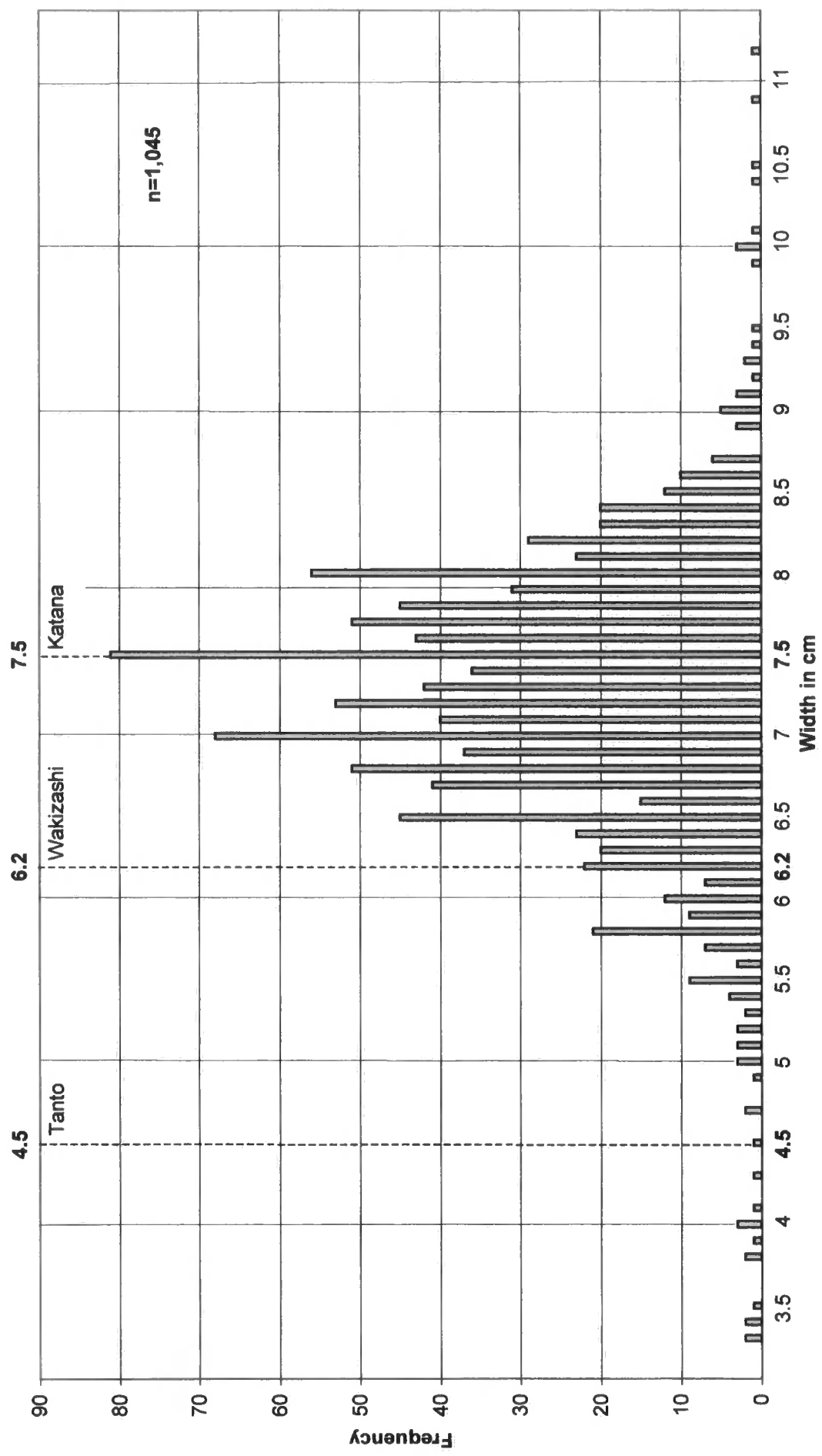


Fig. 2: Histogram of Weight and Frequency - Namban Group

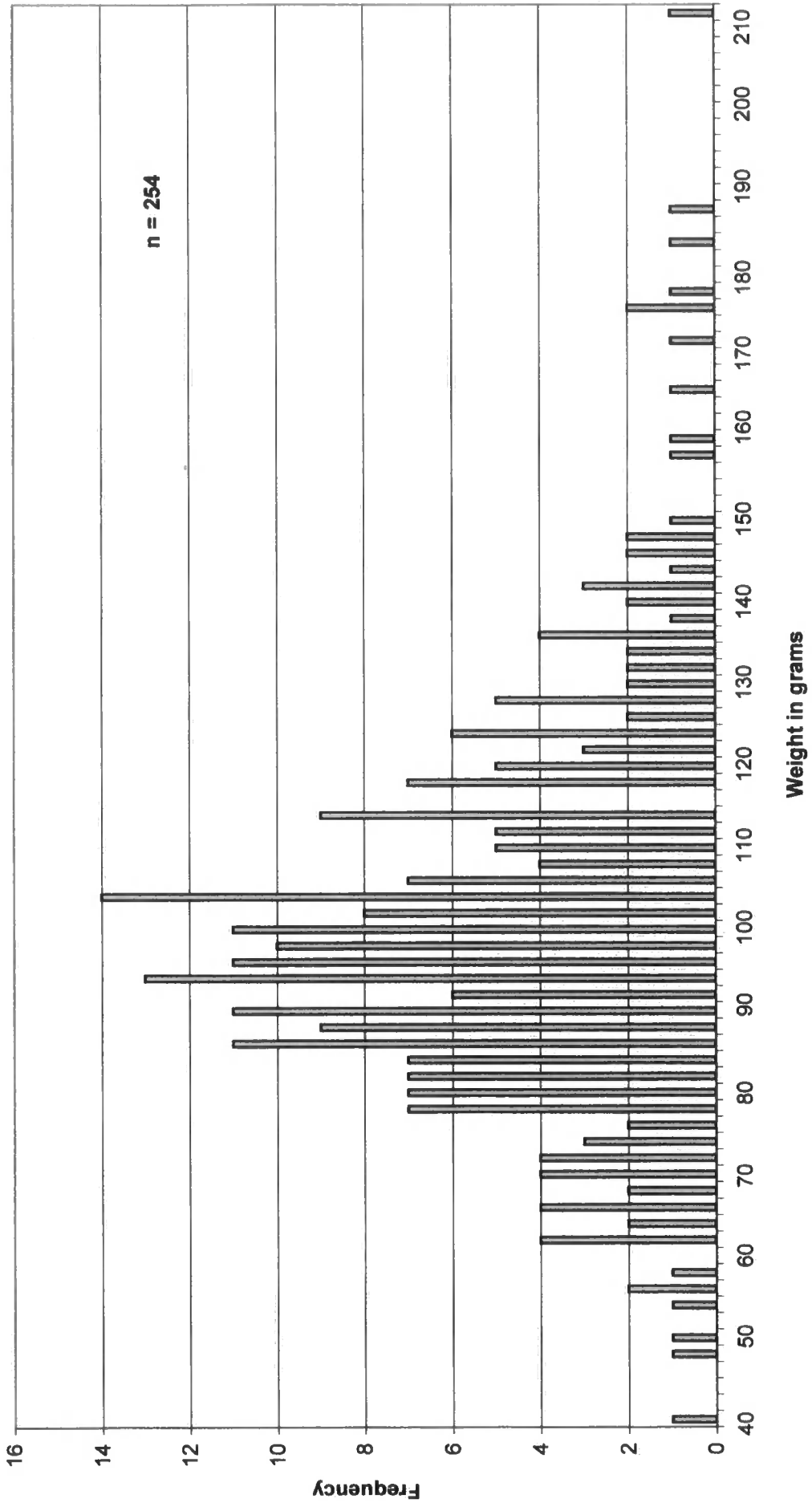


Fig. 10: Scatterplot of Weight and Width of Tsuba - Namban Group

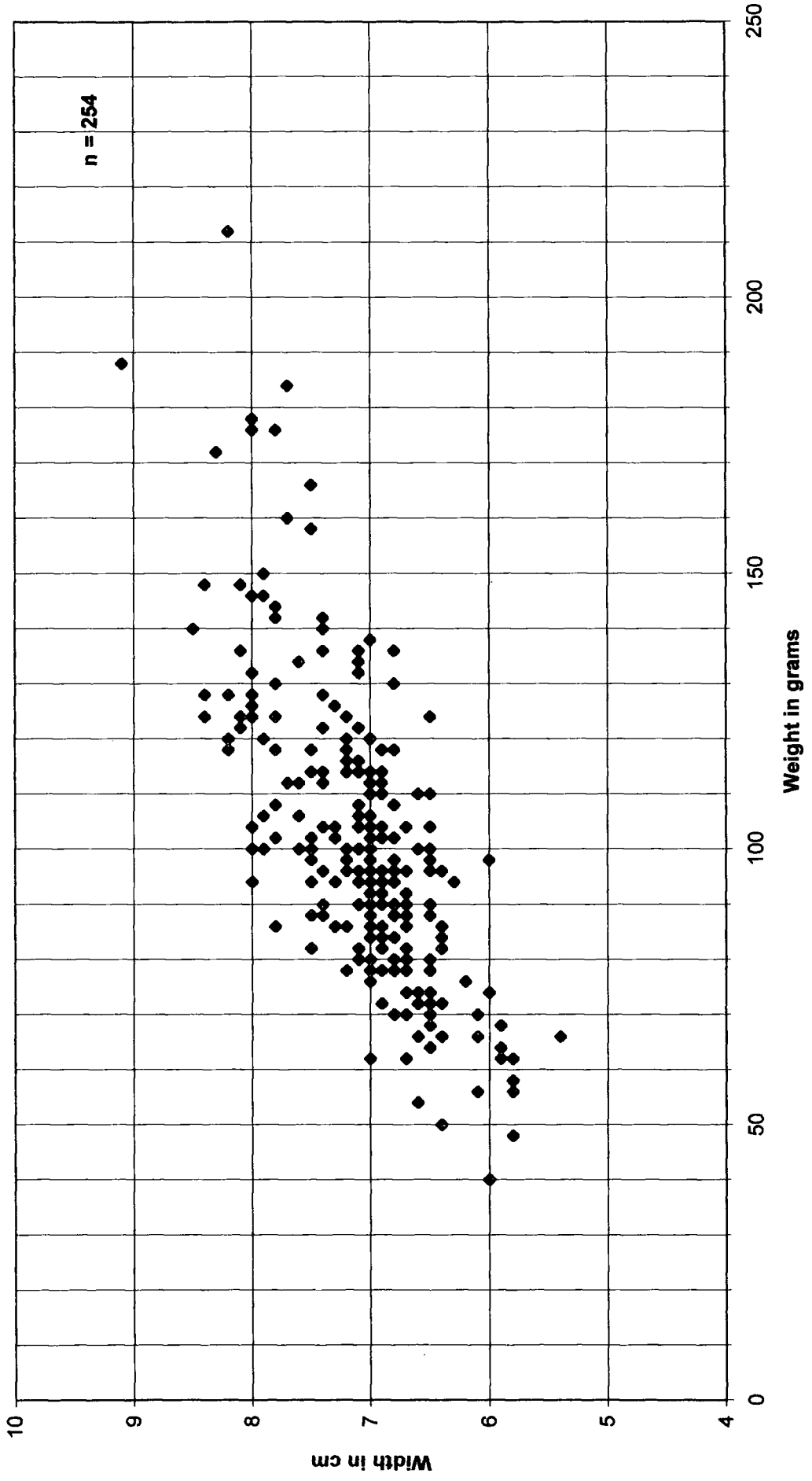


Fig. 11: Scatterplot of Weight and Thickness of Tsuba - Namban Group

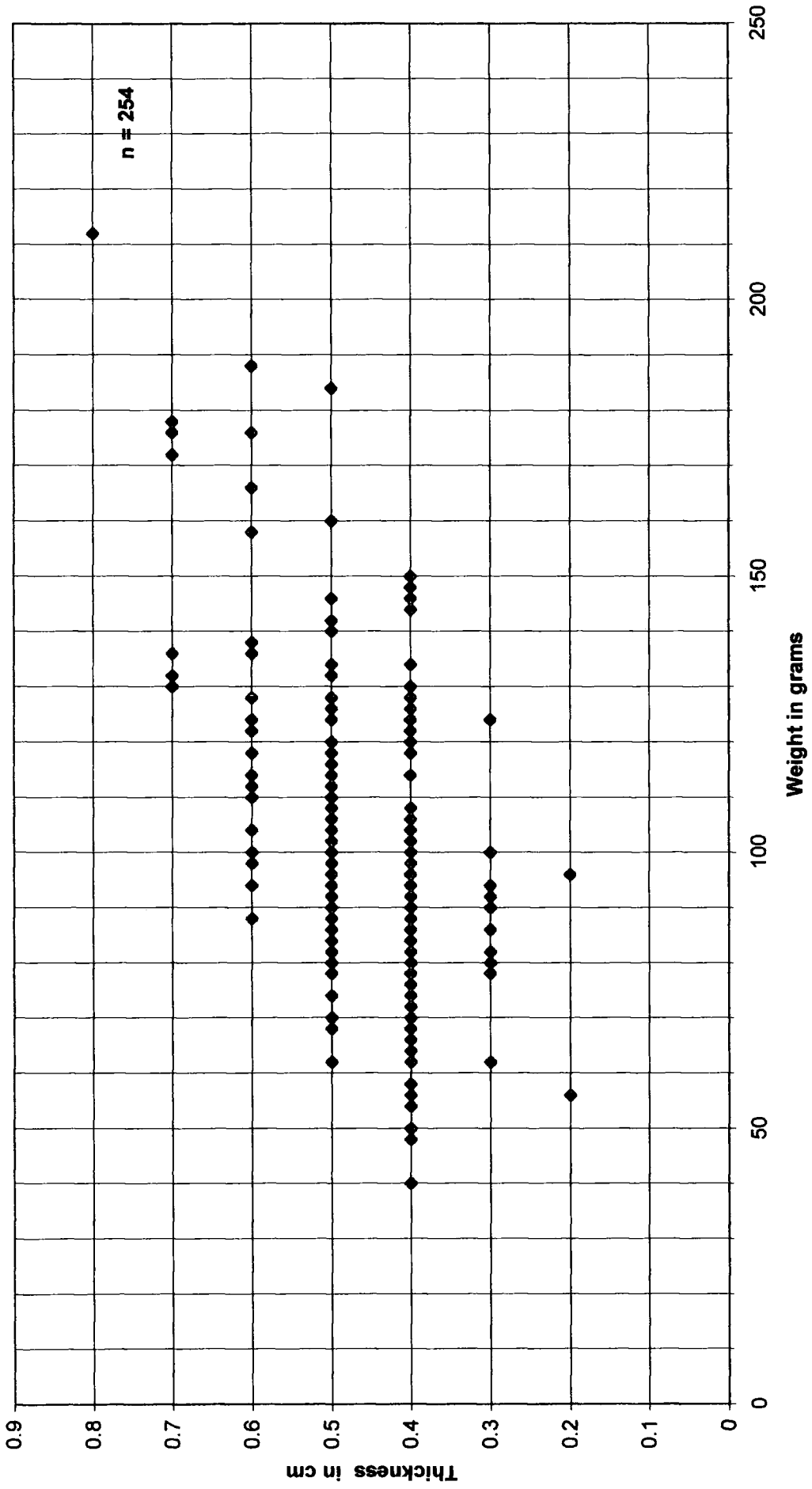


Fig. 12: Scatterplot of Weight against Width / Thickness - Namban Group

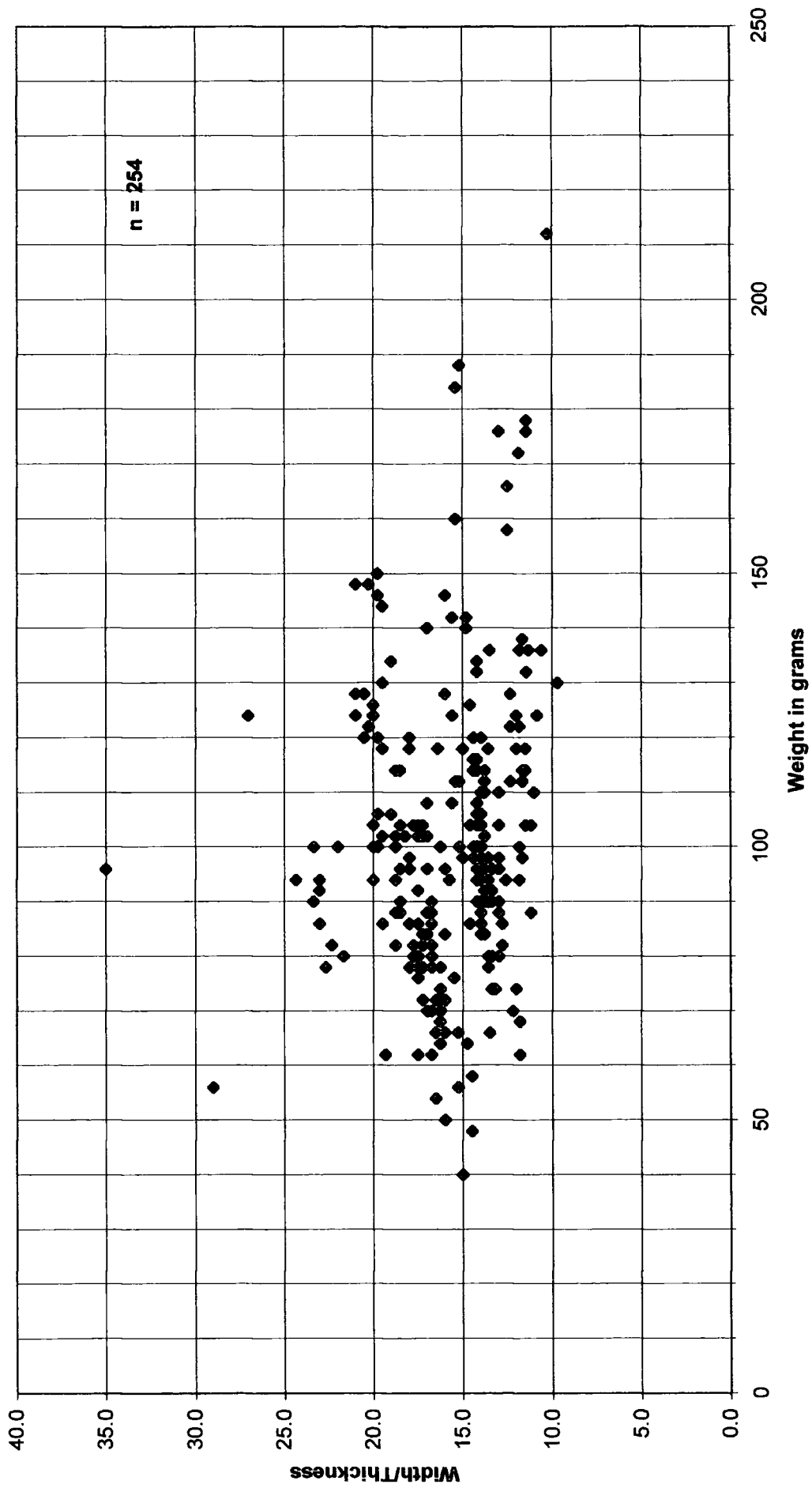
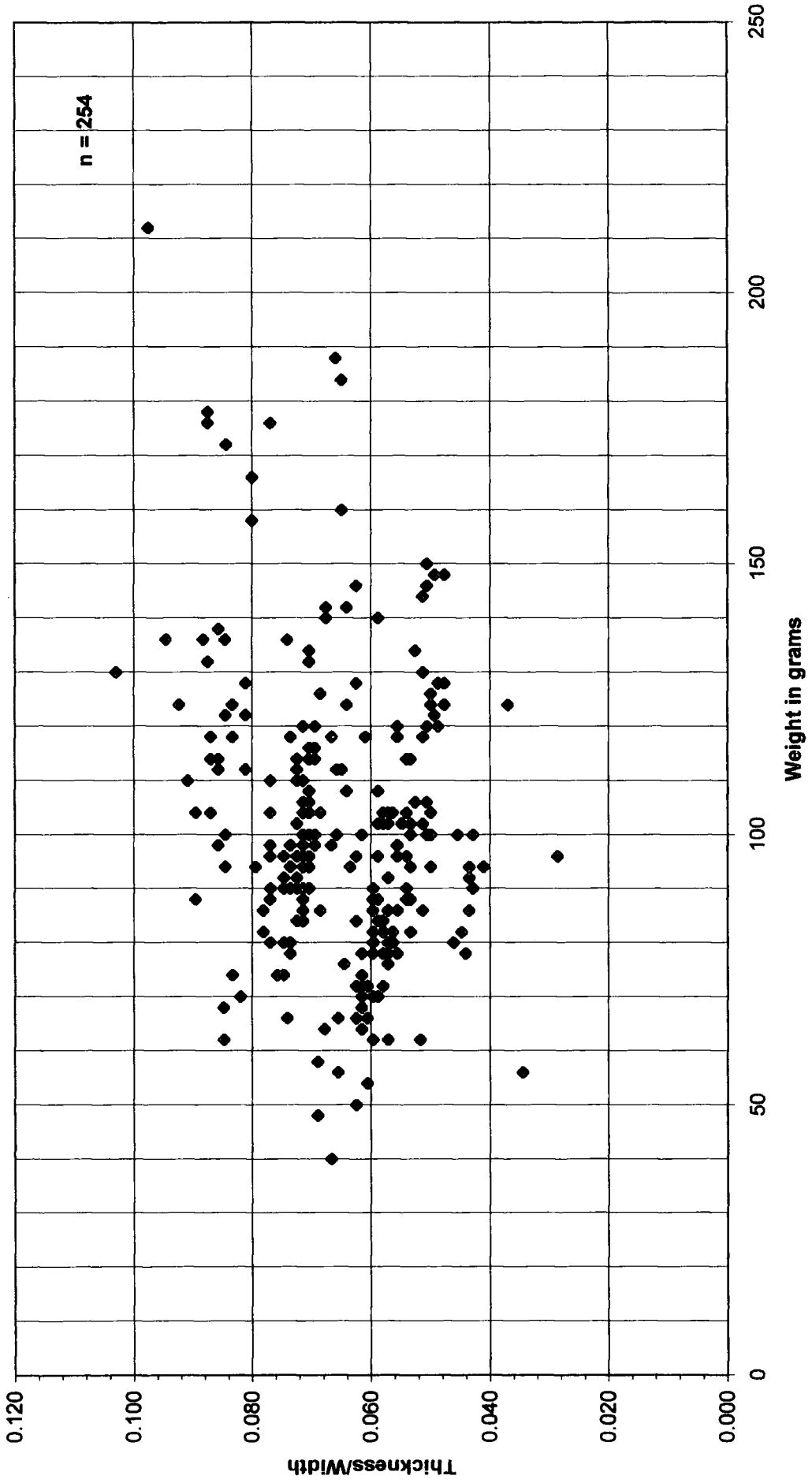


Fig. 13: Scatterplot of Weight against Thickness / Width - Namban Group



### 3.5. THE PHYSICAL EXAMINATION OF NAMBAN TSUBA

Very little research work has been done on the structure and composition of tsuba. Early methods of analysis necessitated the removal of a considerable quantity of the artefact as a sample, either for chemical analysis or for polishing and etching prior to microscopy. This resulted in appreciable damage to the object, and such techniques were thus only applicable to examples of little value and of doubtful veracity — certainly not to artefacts of museum quality.

As early as 1970, a number of physical methods of chemical analysis were being used increasingly by archaeologists. These included optical emission spectroscopy; atomic absorption spectroscopy; X-ray fluorescence spectrometry; and neutron activation analysis. One of the main advantages of these techniques is that they necessitate the removal of only small samples, and thus cause only slight damage to artefacts. Indeed, the use of a ruby laser as the excitation source in the first of these techniques makes it truly non-damaging. The fourth, also, is a non-damaging technique provided that the artefact is small enough to be contained, in its entirety, in a standard metal container measuring 3 cm in diameter × 10 cm in height;<sup>104</sup> such a restriction clearly excludes tsuba.

Modern physical techniques, specifically laser micro-spectral analysis and atomic absorption spectral analysis, have been used by Prof. Dr Richter of the Institut für Technologie der Mallorei, in Stuttgart, for the chemical analysis of *shoki kinkō menuki* — *menuki* of the first kinkō period (1400 – 1450).<sup>105</sup> The base metal of these was shown to be an alloy comprising 70% partially refined copper and 25% silver — an alloy of unknown origin and different from the 75/25 alloy, known in Japan as *oborōgin* and often used for sword decoration during the Edo period.

Increasingly sophisticated and non-invasive, physical techniques of analysis are rapidly being developed for use in archaeological research.

In considering the relevance of such techniques to the future study of Namban tsuba, their following limitations need to be considered:

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<sup>104</sup> Tite (1972), *Methods of Physical Examination in Archaeology*, p. 275.

<sup>105</sup> Heckmann (1996), *Kodōgu*, p. 20, M1.

- The initial promise of non-destructive analysis turns out to be rather disappointing. Laser optical emission spectrometry fulfils this promise, but atomic absorption and X-ray fluorescence spectrometry both necessitate the removal of, admittedly small, samples. Similarly, because of the size and form of tsuba — as discussed above — this limitation also applies to neutron activation analysis.
- A further disadvantage of these techniques has been described by Dr Wagner, who states:

...such methods...tell a good deal about the surface of the artefact, and this information can be useful in discussing the possible structure and composition in the interior, but destructive methods are still necessary for anything like certainty concerning the interior. (Wagner (2000), Personal Communication.)

More specifically, when the decarburisation of iron has taken place, a gradient exists as a result of the removal of the carbon from the surfaces of the artefact.

- Considerable doubt exists regarding the composition of the iron of Namban tsuba. During the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, even some sword blades incorporated namban iron. It is extremely likely, in view of the extensive importation of iron into Japan during that period, that tsuba of this period were made of a variable mixture containing native iron admixed with some imported and some recycled iron. Under such circumstances, it is improbable that chemical analysis of this group would provide any meaningful grouping of the results.
- The problems associated with attempts to date Namban tsuba have already been discussed. It is possible that the very scarce examples of imported Chinese tsuba of this group might be identified and found to have a distinctive composition. By far the majority is extremely difficult to date, and the rationalisation of the chemical analysis of the group is thus rendered very difficult.

These last two points are covered by observations made by Koop. Written as long ago as 1935, in relation to the chemical analysis of ancient Chinese bronzes, they are as relevant today when applied to Namban tsuba. He observed:

To judge the date of a bronze by an analysis of its metal would require (a) a knowledge of the alloy proportions in use at different periods, and (b) the examination and analysis of a sufficient number of extant pieces, the dating of which is for one reason or another certain. As to (a) we have no records worth taking into account; as to (b), the number of these "dated" pieces is as yet so small that the time is not by any means ripe for the desired investigation. (Koop (1935), "Bronzes and Cloisonné Enamel" in *Chinese Art*, p.74.)

Thus, in spite of the promises offered by the so-called 'non-destructive' physical methods of chemical analysis, the limitations of these techniques are still considerable. These limitations, together with the dearth of supportive information about the dating of the Namban group of tsuba and the linking of their chemical and structural composition to their age, mean that — as stated by Koop — for them also '...the time is not by any means ripe for the desired investigation'.

**T**he limited use of scanning electron microscopy for the investigation of the gilding techniques used on this group of tsuba is discussed on pp. 96 and 97.

## PART II

## 4. NAMBAN SEPPA-DAI

### 4.1. DECORATIVE SEPPA-DAI

One of the most constant of the defining characteristics of the Namban group of tsuba is to be found in the shape and the ornamentation of its *seppa-dai*. While these decorative features are by no means confined to tsuba that are 'Namban' by Ogawa's definition, they feature mainly — but not exclusively — on those guards that also demonstrate other evidence of a foreign influence. Thus, wave-like incisions are sometimes seen on the *seppa-dai* of Hizen guards of the Mitsuhiro type — although probably not on genuine examples of these artists' work. Cartouche-shaped *seppa-dai* feature on some Hirado guards of the Kunishige type, as do gold *nunome*, chrysanthemoid-shaped ones on Jakushi style guards. Even Kenjō guards from Awa sometimes have square *seppa-dai*, outlined by linear, gold *hira-zōgan* — a 'true inlay' technique. But such decorative *seppa-dai* are not confined exclusively to guards demonstrating general evidence of a foreign influence. They are occasionally seen, as an isolated example of this influence, on conventional tsuba of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, thus demonstrating how widespread was the appeal of the Namban style.

The reason behind the development of these decorative *seppa-dai* on the Namban group is not known. Hamilton suggests that it is because they were "made outside Japan where the oval shape and function of the Seppa Dai were unknown".<sup>106</sup> This statement is very difficult to accept for a number of reasons, however. The Chinese were exposed to the Japanese sword well before the latter part of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and it has been claimed:

...during the Muromachi period Japanese swords were the most important goods exported to China, almost 1,130,000 being sent there during the century after 1450. (Fukasawa (1998), *Ainu Archaeology as Ethnohistory*, p. 64.)

With this degree of exposure to the Japanese sword immediately preceding the export of Namban tsuba to Japan, the Chinese were certainly familiar with its features. Neither is it likely that the Dutch East India Company undertook the manufacture of tsuba for export to Japan without being thoroughly familiar with the market. Indeed, decorative *seppa-dai* may have been a later refinement, introduced in Japan onto locally made guards. They may have been intended simply to increase the attractiveness of these

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<sup>106</sup> Hamilton (1975), *The Peabody Museum Collection of Japanese Sword Guards*, pl. XXVII, no. 1.

'over the counter' purchases, but there was already in Japan a strong tradition of tsuba being made as *shūremono*, and the majority of these were without this decorative feature.

The presence of such *seppa-dai* introduces a number of unanswered questions. It would be interesting to know at what stage in the development of this group these decorative *seppa-dai* first appeared. Were they present on any early guards that were imported from China and India, or were they introduced by the Japanese onto later, locally made, copies? The difficulty in dating these guards clearly presents a problem in answering such questions. In this context it is interesting to note that, in his *Catalogue of the Collection in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston*, Ogawa illustrates a tsuba that was made by a Chinese artist (Ch'ang Lo-chaio) in Nanking in 1667, and was clearly intended for the Japanese market. This has a conventional *seppa-dai* that bears an inscription in Chinese and is free from any decoration.<sup>107</sup>

The introduction of *seppa-dai* of a rounded-square shape might well have had its origin in China. It may be of some relevance to note here that the hilt of the Chinese sword, like the metallic mounts at its upper and lower ends, is shaped as a slab-sided rectangle with rounded corners, and such hilts would have conformed to similarly shaped *seppa-dai*.

#### 4.2. NAMBAN SEPPA

The *seppa* are thin washers, normally of copper and variable in number, that sit on both surfaces of the mounted tsuba. It is relevant to note that these are unique to the Japanese sword: on the Chinese sword, the step in the blade is in immediate contact with the lower surface of the guard, with no intervening *habaki* (collar) or *seppa*. There is sometimes a *seppa-dai* only on the upper surface of the guard, which is commonly the sole decorated surface, and here the lower end of the handle also makes direct contact. Thus, for the Chinese, the presence of a decorative *seppa-dai* did not present any problems: for the Japanese, however, it was a different matter. For them the initial step away from the conventional, oval shape of the *seppa-dai* was a radical one, since this new feature would have instantly become visible below the *fuchi* — the ferrule at the bottom of the sword hilt — and must, surely, have been covered with similarly shaped *seppa*.

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<sup>107</sup> Ogawa (1987), *Japanese Swords and Sword Furniture in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, no. 354, p. 354.

The author has never personally seen any evidence of this, although he has had described to him a *katana* with a pair of cartouche-shaped *seppa*.<sup>108</sup> This sword was also fitted with an unmatching Namban tsuba but, when mounted, the 'points' of the *seppa* did not obtrude by more than an eighth of an inch and would have matched many correspondingly decorated tsuba. Such a *seppa* would have augmented the appearance of a tsuba with a decorative *seppa-dai* but would not, in any way, have corresponded to a conventionally shaped *fuchi*.

It is true that decorative *seppa* are frequently seen on World War II, *shin-guntō* swords as worn by the armed forces but these, in the present context, are not comparable. Military swords are worn suspended from the belt, edge downwards, and are thus mounted as *tachi*. Their *seppa* are a development of the traditional *ō-seppa* (lit. 'large *seppa*') of this type of sword, and not of the ordinary *seppa* of the *uchi-gatana*, worn edge uppermost through the *obi* of the kimono. The *tachi*, the slung sword worn with armour or as part of formal attire, would have had no relevance to that stratum of Japanese society that utilised Namban tsuba — this would have worn *uchi-gatana* exclusively.

*Seppa* being such disposable items, the scarcity of square or of cartouche-shaped examples does not necessarily discount their co-existence with Namban sword guards. Conversely, a number of tsuba are to be seen with square *seppa-dai* whose wear on their decorative surface clearly indicates the quite prolonged fitting of conventionally shaped, oval *seppa*.

#### 4.3. AN ATTEMPT AT A CLASSIFICATION OF DECORATIVE SEPPA-DAI

It is possible to attempt some form of classification with regard to the shapes of decorative *seppa-dai* and even to surmise, to some extent, a possible developmental path through the numerous variations in their shape (see Fig. 15).

Early tsuba, such as the Ko-tōshō and Ko-katchūshi groups — those of the early sword smiths and armour smiths — had their *nakago-bitsu* as a simple opening in the *hira* of the guard, with no clearly defined *seppa-dai*. This applies similarly to all solid plate — and *moyō-sukashi*<sup>109</sup> — tsuba, although a slightly raised oval area is frequently

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<sup>108</sup> Smith (1999), Personal Communication.

<sup>109</sup> The terms *moyō-sukashi* and *ji-sukashi* are used to indicate openwork guards where the images are depicted in negative or positive silhouette respectively. The former are essentially solid-plate guards with decorative openings, while the latter feature more extensive openwork in their design.

seen as a decorative feature on the former. The necessity for defined *seppa-dai* arose with the introduction of *ji-sukashi*<sup>110</sup> guards of other groups in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, when a solid area was required to provide extra support for the *nakago* — the tang — of the blade. Such an area is clearly essential on all Namban tsuba because of their extensive openwork and the subsequent, inevitable weakening of the edge of the *nakago-hitsu*. Only on auriculate tsuba,<sup>111</sup> with their solid central plate, are simple *hitsu* feasible in this group. Corresponding as it does both to the shape of the *fuchi* above the tsuba, and of the *kuchigane* — the mouth of the scabbard — below it, the conventional, oval shape chosen for the conventional *seppa-dai* was the obvious one. Only the decorative edge of the brass *seppa* would normally be visible on the mounted sword, thus presenting a 'neat' appearance to the observer.

At some stage along this putative developmental path the square *seppa-dai* appeared, thus forming a second 'stem'. These oval and square shapes are both seen to become progressively complex in their respective paths, the square *seppa-dai* acquiring, like the oval one, first rounded and then ogee<sup>112</sup> corners before developing convoluted and cartouche shapes. It seems probable that the square *seppa-dai* was quite an early development, since tsuba that might possibly have their origins in China in the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, are occasionally to be found demonstrating this feature.

An example of such a tsuba is illustrated in the sale catalogue of the Professor Oscar Björk collection. This sale included a number of Namban tsuba, grouped together with the Hizen, Hirado and Jakushi schools. One of these is illustrated and described:

- 256 Iron, openwork, two dragons in scrolls, covered all over with silver nunome, except the dragons' heads, which are gold nunome, rihitsu plugged with lead, very old specimen (Ex. Hayashi), Plate VI. (Glendining & Co. Ltd. (1923), *Catalogue of the Professor Oscar Björk Collection*, p. 18, no. 256.)

This lot, including a second and indifferent tsuba, fetched the then incredibly high sum of five guineas — no doubt this was due, in part, to its provenance.

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<sup>110</sup> See <sup>109</sup> above.

<sup>111</sup> This sub-section of the Namban group of tsuba is dealt with in detail on pp. 100 et seq.

<sup>112</sup> Ogee: showing in section a double, continuous S-shaped curve.

Examination of the rather poor photograph reveals a very crude, openwork guard with only a token undercutting. It appears to have a heavy, square *mimi* and the design, clearly symmetrical, is unrecognisable apart from a possible *tama* jewel at the top. Their lead filling makes it difficult to be certain, but the *ryō-hitsu* are probably not contemporaneous. The use of lead for this purpose need not necessarily be an indication of early alterations, however, since the low melting point of this metal made it ideal for filling the convoluted margins of many of the Namban *hitsu-ana*. This tsuba, possibly an early, imported example of this group, has a *seppa-dai* that is square, but is sufficiently small to be covered by a conventional, oval *seppa* and *fuchi*.

Some of these square *seppa-dai* incorporate a 'fortification' design (see Fig. 14), and this may feature gold *nunome* decoration. Where such a design is present, it may combine very easily with contemporary *hitsu-ana* to present an attractive feature. An example of such a combination is illustrated on Plate 6.

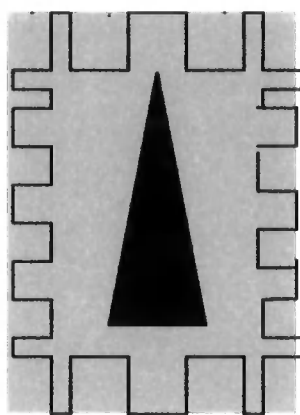


Fig. 14

Diagram of Square *Seppa-Dai* with Fortification Pattern

There is no prospect of attributing these variations in the shape of *seppa-dai* to a particular chronological window. It is, however, reasonable to suppose that the introduction of increasingly complex shapes, ultimately to become almost 'gothic' in their design, represents a progression along a time scale extending between the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**I**t is interesting to note that the *seppa-dai* illustrated in columns III to IX on Fig. 15 are cartouche-shaped and might, from their associations with architecture and furniture

design, instinctively be considered to demonstrate a Western influence. They are, in fact, *mokkō-gata* and *aoi-gata*, the latter exhibiting the traditional shape of the hollyhock leaf.

Rawson describes the artistic use of the lotus flower as a framing motif, as dating in China from the Tang period (618 – 906 AD); it first appeared as mirrors, cast in the shape of the blossom and described as 'bracket-shaped'.<sup>113</sup> This shape could very simply be modified by the addition of extra lobes or by "depressing the point of a bracket and enlarging its lobes",<sup>114</sup> and these designs were adopted for use on porcelain and lacquer-work in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The export of such work led to familiarity in Japan with these designs, and their later use on the *seppa-dai* of tsuba is an easy route to surmise.

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<sup>113</sup> Rawson (1984), *Chinese Ornament: The Lotus and the Dragon*, p.125.

<sup>114</sup> Rawson (1984), loc. cit.

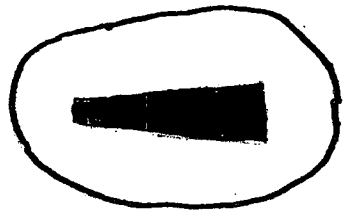
Fig. 15

Diagrammatic Representations of Various Decorative Seppa-dai

Index of Provenances

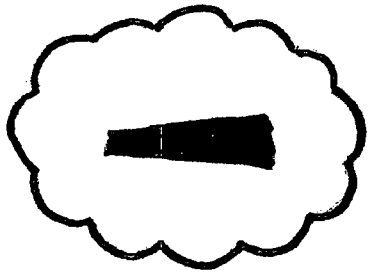
N.Ts.	Shigeta (1998), <i>Namban Tsuba: Yearning Design</i> .
Hawk.	Joly (1910), <i>Japanese Sword Fittings: a Descriptive Catalogue of the Collection of J.C. Hawksshaw, Esq.</i>
Dur.	The collection of the Oriental Museum, Durham.
Laing	The collection of the Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle.
B'ham	The collection of the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.
V&A	The collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

I



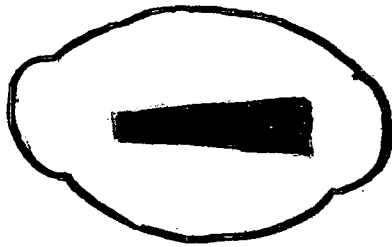
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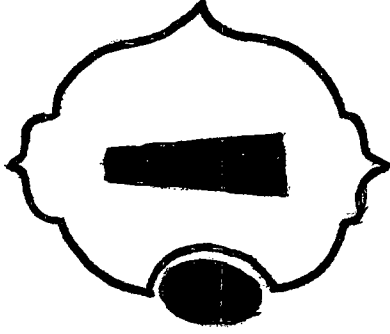
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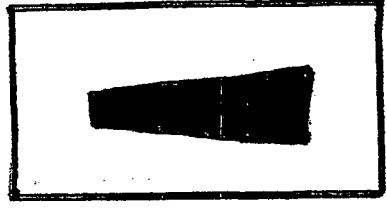
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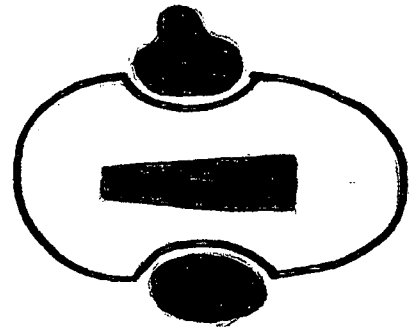
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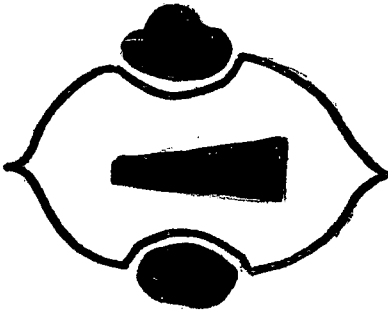


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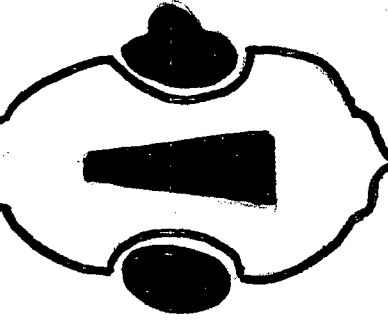
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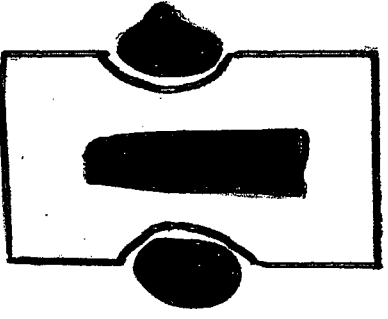
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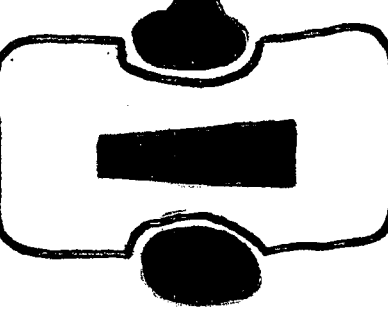
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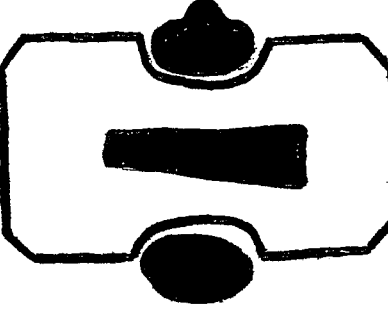
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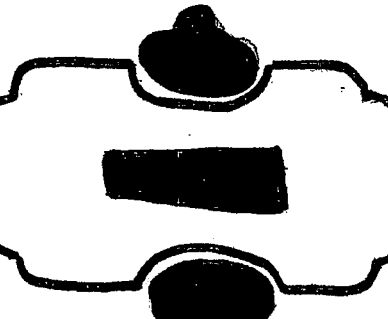
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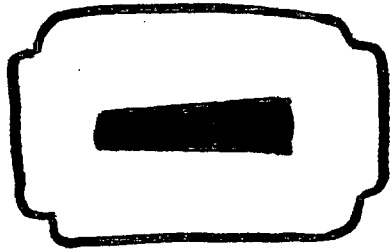


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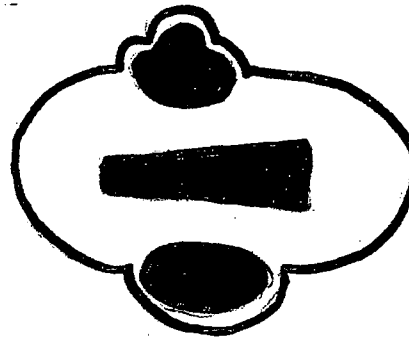
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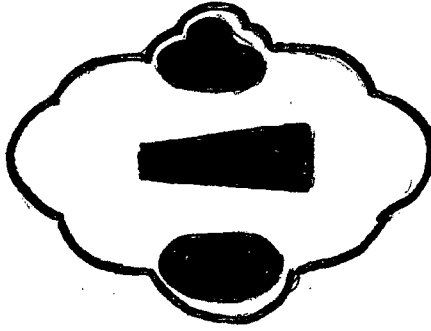


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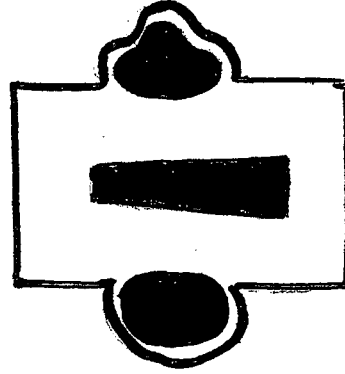
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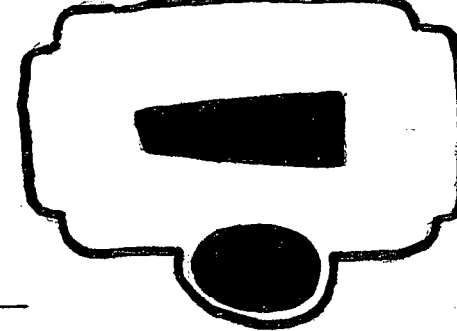
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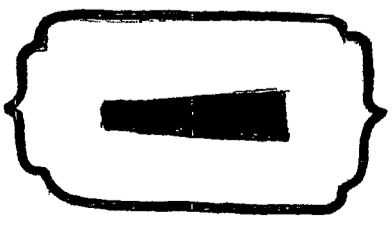
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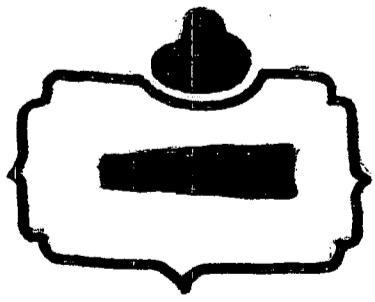
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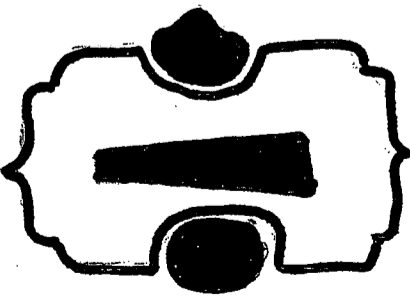
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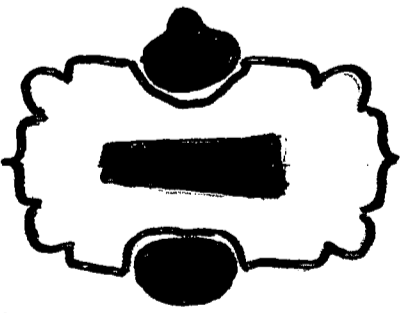
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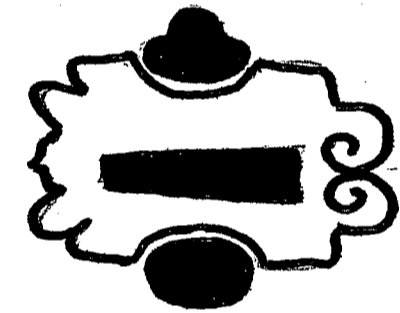
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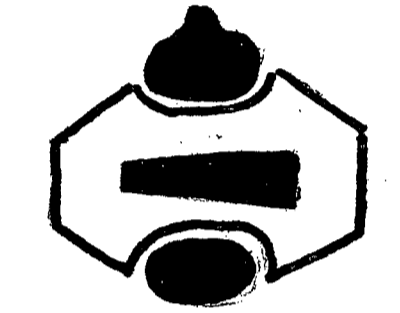
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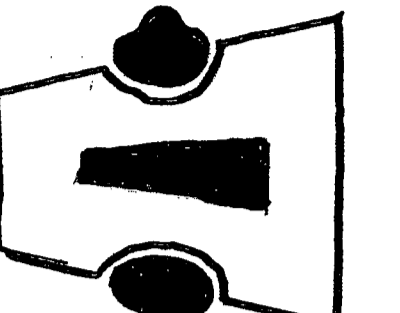
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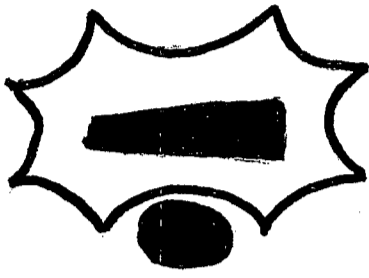
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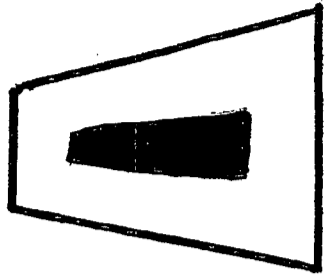
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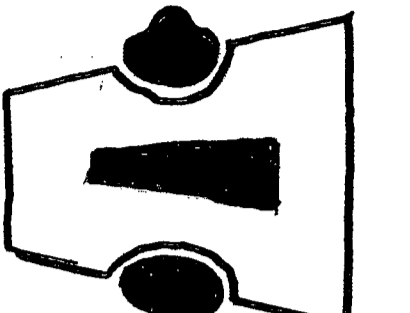


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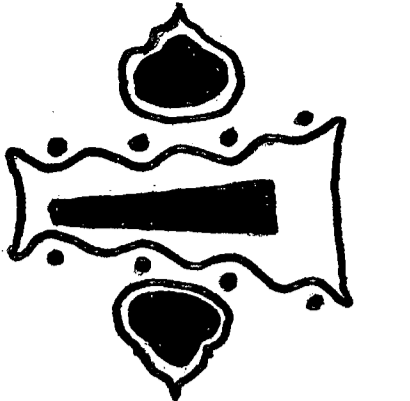
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V&A M.192-1911



Dur. O.384

(a)

(b)

(c)

N.Ts. 15

N.Ts. 46

XIX

XX

XXI

XXII

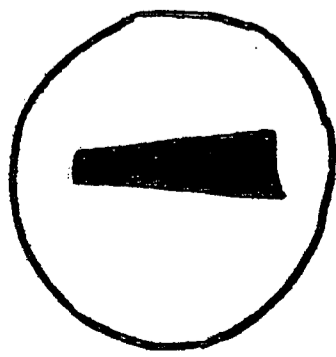
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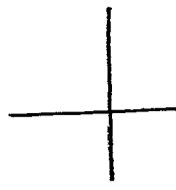
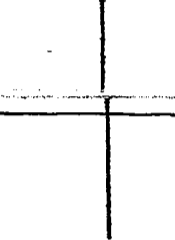
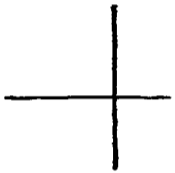
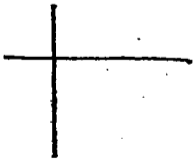
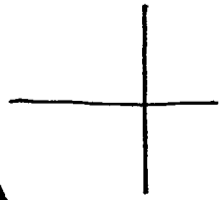
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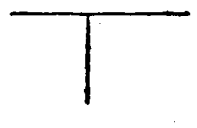
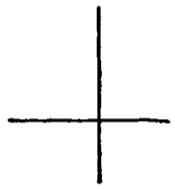
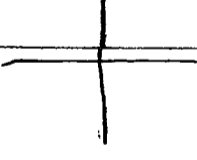
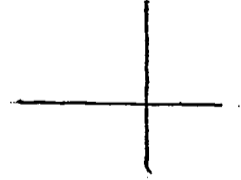
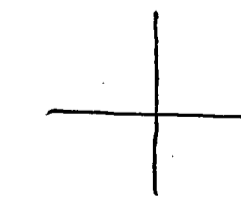


(a)

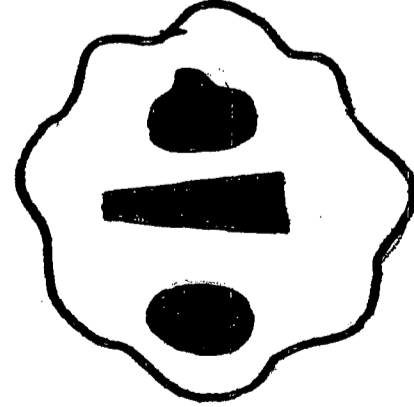
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(b)



(c)



N.Ts. 48

#### 4.4. ORNAMENTAL TECHNIQUES ON NAMBAN SEPPA-DAI

These variably shaped *seppa-dai* are often further ornamented with a variety of designs incorporating *kebori*<sup>115</sup>, *usuniku-bori*, gold — and much less commonly silver — *nunome-zōgan* techniques. Since this ornamented area forms a platform for the *seppa*, it is obvious that only low-relief decoration is practicable. Also, the presence of this decorative detail clearly precludes the presence of any inscription on this area — a factor constantly contributing to the difficulties encountered during the study of this group of tsuba.

The examination of a number of tsuba of this group shows the many designs that feature on these decorative *seppa-dai* to be extremely variable: some nevertheless fall into a number of easily recognisable categories. After plain, undecorated *seppa-dai*, stylised wave-like patterns (*seigaiha-moyō*) are the most consistently recurring design. Incised circumferential and radial lines are also seen, as are both irregularly incised lines and *mokume* texturing. Figurative designs are numerous and include, amongst many others, affrontées dragons, sometimes with gold *hira-zōgan* eyes and a gold *tama* jewel, and seaweed designs. The remainder is so disparate that any attempt at an overall classification of them is impracticable; once the main groups are removed, there are almost as many variations as there are tsuba remaining.

##### 4.4.1. THE SEIGAIHA DIAPER DESIGN

Diapers are motifs used for the decoration of flat surfaces. Sir Francis Piggott describes these as comprising "interlacing lines, repeated at regular intervals, or by a series of crossing lines which divide the surface into a number of spaces".<sup>116</sup> In order to qualify as diapers, these designs need to be composite — rather than independent — decorative motifs applied to the surface. Piggott also emphasises the importance of texture, the engraved lines giving life to the design by means of light reflections. Diapers also need to be infinitely enlargeable in all directions in order to cover the required surface. The application of a diaper design to the blank, flat space of the *seppa-dai* is a logical artistic development — more puzzling are its late appearance in tsuba design, and the very frequent choice of the wave form.

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<sup>115</sup> *Kebori*: fine, linear chasing without the loss of any of the decorated metal.

<sup>116</sup> Piggott (1910), *Studies in the Decorative Art of Japan*, pp. 21 and 22.

The *seigaiha*<sup>117</sup> diaper is surprisingly consistent in its design, comprising interlocking arcs of a circle, each of which consist of from five to twelve concentric lines (see Fig. 16). When used on *seppa-dai*, the design is simply transected by the *nakago-bitsu*. This diaper appears as a decorative feature on a *mokkō-gata* iron tsuba that is illustrated in Helen Gunsaulus' catalogue of the collection of the Field Museum in Chicago. The obverse of this guard is covered with what the author describes as "the 'Korean wave pattern', more properly a Chinese diaper pattern representing waves".<sup>118</sup> This tsuba, attributed to the 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> century, has now lost much of its original, gold *hira-zōgan* decoration, but this is clearly an earlier application of the motif.

It would be interesting to know where, and when, this wave diaper first appeared in Japanese art. Allen illustrates what she describes as "the most famous pattern, *seigaiha* (waves from the blue ocean)" and ascribes it to either the Nara (710 – 794 AD) or Heian (794 – 1185 AD) periods.<sup>119</sup> This particular illustration, with seven circumferential arcs, is identical to that found on many Namban *seppa-dai*.

It has been suggested that the term '*seigaiha*' initially referred to a form of *gagaku* — Japanese traditional music and dance.<sup>120</sup> This was originally the local music of the Seikai region in China, where the repeated pattern of waves used on the costumes for dancing the *seigaiha* was also called by the same name.

By the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, this diaper can be assumed to have lost any of the significance that it may once have had, and to have been considered rather as simply 'a pretty pattern'. It is, however, not unreasonable to suppose that the adaptation of this design for use on tsuba might well have originated in an area with strong maritime associations.

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<sup>117</sup> *Sei* = blue: *Kai* = ocean: *Ha* = wave.

<sup>118</sup> Gunsaulus (1923), *Japanese Sword Mounts in the Collections of the Field Museum*, pp. 38-39, pl. IV, no. 1.

<sup>119</sup> Allen (1990), *The Designer's Guide to Samurai Patterns*, pp. 125 and 126.

<sup>120</sup> Kunihiro (2000), <http://www.pro.or.jp/~fuji/classiccrane-eng.html>

This reference incorrectly refers to 'kagaku' — science — rather than using the correct spelling of 'gagaku'.

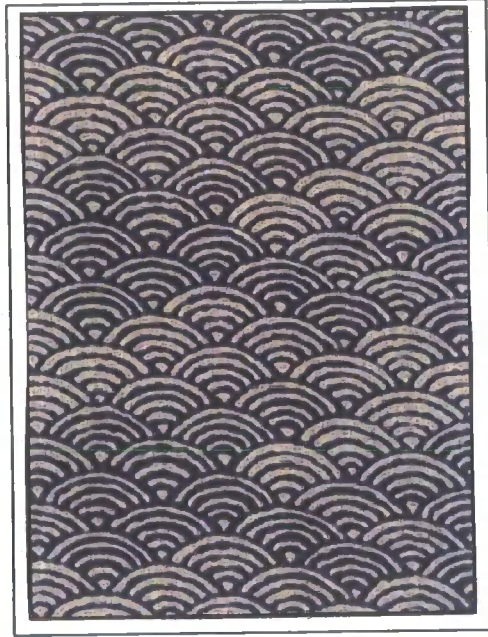


Fig. 16

An Example of the Seigaiha Diaper

## 5. NAMBAN HITSU-ANA

### 5.1. CONVENTIONS CONCERNING KODZUKA AND KOGAI

The Japanese conventions appertaining to the mounting of *kōgai* and *kodzuka*<sup>121</sup> on their swords are still little understood.

The accepted convention, as perceived by Western observers, is that these were only carried on the smaller weapons — the *wakizashi* and the *tantō* — and never on the long swords — the *tachi* or *katana*. The Marquis de Tressan was dogmatic in his assertion that *katana* tsuba never have two *hitsu-ana*.<sup>122</sup> Robinson acknowledges that "a *kodzuka* or a *kōgai*, or even both, *may very occasionally* [italics added] be found on a sword mounted as a *katana*",<sup>123</sup> but all students are familiar with their frequent presence on the latter, even if the *tachi* remains inviolable.

It might be presumed that these adornments appeared on fighting blades only after these lost their original function and became purely decorative, but this would be quite wrong. Sasano illustrates several 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century Ko-katchūshi and Ko-tōshō tsuba with original *hitsu-ana*,<sup>124</sup> and these are *hangetsu-gata* ('half moon' shaped). Sasano affirms that such tsuba were made for use with the *katana*<sup>125</sup> and thus, where single, these openings are seen to be positioned on the *ura*<sup>126</sup> side of the *nakago-hitsu*. It is likely that they would nevertheless have been intended for a *kōgai*, since the conventional *subama-gata* ('island' shaped)<sup>127</sup> *kōgai-hitsu* had yet to be introduced<sup>128</sup> and the *kodzuka*

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<sup>121</sup> The *kodzuka* and *kōgai* are two accessory implements that may be carried in the scabbard of a Japanese sword. The former is the handle of a small utility knife, the *kogatana*, and the latter a skewer-like implement used for tidying the hair.

<sup>122</sup> Tressan, Marquis de (1910 – 1912), *Bulletin de la Société Franco-Japonaise de Paris, Vol. XXVIII*, p. 57.

<sup>123</sup> Robinson (1961), *The Arts of the Japanese Sword*, p. 69.

<sup>124</sup> Sasano (1994), *Japanese Sword Guards Masterpieces from the Sasano Collection: Part One*, nos. 3, and 38-44.

<sup>125</sup> Sasano (1994), *ibid*, p. 11.

<sup>126</sup> *Ura* and *omote* refer to the non-dominant and the dominant side respectively of a sword or of its constituent parts — the latter is normally that part seen when the sword is worn in the intended fashion.

<sup>127</sup> *Subama-gata* translates literally as 'beach that sticks out into the ocean' shape.

<sup>128</sup> Sasano (1994), *op. cit*, p. 14.

probably featured only very rarely on swords prior to the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>129</sup>

Surprisingly, *ryō-hitsu* may even be present on both tsuba of a *daishō* pair, although this would suggest an excess of equipment — the equivalent, perhaps, of carrying two pocket-knives and two combs! But it is well known that such a 'doubling up' occurred — a fact that is easily confirmed by a brief examination of illustrations of accepted *daishō*.<sup>130</sup> The number of these is too small to draw any statistical conclusions, but it is apparent that, of those *daishō* with a *kodzuka* in the *wakizashi*, more than half have both a *kodzuka* and *kōgai* mounted in the accompanying *katana*.

Changes in both fashion and function have caused tsuba both to have their original *hitsu-ana* filled with *umagane*<sup>131</sup> when these were no longer required, and to have later *hitsu-ana* cut into tsuba that were originally without them. But any tsuba with such apertures, either original or later additions, can clearly be assumed to have been mounted at some stage in its existence with the corresponding accessory implements.

## 5.2. CONTEMPORANEOUS HITSU-ANA

The term 'contemporaneous *hitsu-ana*' is understood to refer to those *hitsu-ana*, intended for the accommodation of a *kōgai* and/or *kodzuka*, that were present at the time of the tsuba's manufacture.

The scarcity of such original *hitsu-ana* among guards of the Namban group has already been commented upon, as has the frequent occurrence of those resulting from later modifications to these guards, but the reasons for these findings are unknown. Although it has been suggested that tsuba of this group were manufactured for lower-class samurai, thus having no requirement for a *kōgai* or *kodzuka*, the frequent alterations to these tsuba demonstrate that there was clearly a need for them to include this feature. It is unlikely that such modifications to locally made guards became necessary because of changes in fashion; the period of popularity of tsuba of the Namban group was sufficiently short to discount this as an explanation. But, whatever the reason, it is

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<sup>129</sup> Sasano (1994), *Japanese Sword Guards: Masterpieces from the Sasano Collection, Part One*, p. 14.  
Robinson (1961), *The Arts of the Japanese Sword*, p. 69.

<sup>130</sup> Tokyo National Museum (1997), *Illustrated Catalogue of Tokyo National Museum: Sword Mountings*, pp. 40-51.

<sup>131</sup> *Umagane*: metal inserts used to fill a hole, such as the *hitsu-ana* of a tsuba or defects in the metal of a blade.

difficult to understand the failure of metalworkers of this group to originally incorporate *bitsu-ana* in their guards, at the time of their manufacture.

The absence both of *kōgai* and *kodzuka* from swords mounted as *tachi* is generally acknowledged. *Han-dachi* mountings<sup>132</sup> may be found on any weapon that is not a true *tachi* and such a mounting, being based on the *tachi* stereotype, might also be logically assumed not to carry these accessory implements. Although occasional exceptions are found to this rule, it seems to have been generally observed.

These 'half-tachi' mountings were especially popular during the Bakamatsu period. Occurring at the end of the Edo period, this time coincided with the increasing popularity of Namban tsuba but there is no supporting evidence to suggest that Namban tsuba were originally intended to be worn with this 'half-tachi' mounting. Neither are *mokkō-gata* and *aoi-gata*, which were especially favoured forms for this *koshirae*,<sup>133</sup> often found among the Namban group of sword guards. Whatever the reason for this scarcity of contemporaneous *bitsu-ana*, those on most Namban tsuba are generally later, and relatively unskilled, modifications.

One remarkable tsuba in the Higgenbotham collection, at the Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle, has solved the problem of such later modification in an ingenious fashion, and is illustrated on Plates 4 and 5. This beautifully crafted tsuba has one functional *bitsu-ana*. In addition to this, the maker has created the rim for a second and has filled it with a continuation of the openwork that is present on the remainder of the *hira*. If a second *bitsu-ana* were to be required, it could easily be created by the removal of this filling.

C.R. Boxer describes and illustrates a similar example in an article discussing the European influence on Japanese sword fittings.<sup>134</sup> In a tsuba of a modified auriculate form (see Fig. 20(c)), the auricular plate on the *ura* side has a functional, square *bitsu-ana*, surrounded by a rope-like rim. On the *omote* side is a similar, potential *bitsu-ana*, filled with an oblong panel bearing the letters 'EA' in relief. The significance of these letters is

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<sup>132</sup> *Han-dachi* mountings: (lit. 'half-tachi' mountings): a sword, worn through the *obi* as an *uchigatana*, but with — excepting the suspension rings — the mountings of a *tachi*, or slung sword.

<sup>133</sup> *Koshirae*: the term for the entire mounting of a sword, including the non-metallic parts such as the hilt and scabbard.

<sup>134</sup> Boxer (1930), *European Influence on Japanese Sword-Fittings: 1543 – 1853*, p. 168 and pl. 14.

quite unknown, but the removal of this solid plate would have created a second functional *bitsu-ana*.

The scarcity of contemporaneous *bitsu-ana* is complemented by a corresponding scarcity of Namban *kodzuka* and *kōgai*. A few such examples have been described with openwork decoration, and the sale catalogue of the collection of the late Henri L. Joly illustrates one such *kodzuka* as lot no. 578. This is described as "iron, dragon and scroll, Namban work, set over a foil in *shakudō*<sup>135</sup> frame (Plate III)",<sup>136</sup> thus suggesting a coloured, metallic foil backing to show off the openwork of the piece.

The lack of evidence concerning the appearance of a sword that has been fully mounted in the Namban style has also been commented upon. Tsuba of this group may have been mounted in conjunction with *kodzuka* and *kōgai* that were disparate, or were part of a *mitokoro-mono* (matching *kodzuka*, *kōgai* and *menuki*) or even of a *soroe-mono* (a matching set, excluding the tsuba). In this context it should be remembered that the tsuba has traditionally been considered, together with the *habaki*, as a part of the blade rather than of its fittings. Collectors seek, as treasured rarities, en suite mounts that include the tsuba, but these did not become fashionable until the Edo period. Purists should therefore experience no difficulty when the tsuba of a sword fails to 'match' the fittings.

For the general collector, the decision as to whether or not the *bitsu-ana* of a tsuba are contemporaneous with the *hira* is an important, as well as a very difficult, one. The age and attribution of the guard; the general balance and continuity of the design in relation to the apertures in it; and the patination of the edges of these apertures are but some of the many factors that need to be taken into account. Even then, the final decision may be uncertain. For the Namban enthusiast this process is considerably simplified, since the characteristic openwork of this group is not easily adapted to later modifications. As a result of attempts to follow the features of this design, and to avoid sharp and unsightly edges, later *bitsu-ana* are usually irregularly shaped and their edges do not correspond on the two opposing surfaces of the tsuba. These faults apply

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<sup>135</sup> *Shakudō*: an alloy of copper, containing a small proportion of gold: a pickling process imparted to this alloy a rich, violet-black patina.

<sup>136</sup> Glendining & Co., Ltd (1921), *Catalogue of the late Henri L. Joly Sale*, pp. 46 and facing 20, no. 578.

particularly to the more stylised design of the *subama-hitsu*, conventionally intended for the *kōgai*.

The openwork of Namban guards means that, for optimal appearance and practicality, *hitsu-ana* that are contemporaneous with the *hira* need to incorporate a solid rim. This feature cannot be reproduced when later alterations are made to a guard, and its presence is a reliable indication of originality. The careful examination of such a feature is essential, however, since skilfully executed inserts, added as part of a later modification, can quite easily be overlooked during a casual inspection.

The shape of original *hitsu-ana* of this group is similar to that found generally among Japanese sword guards. Thus, where both of these openings exist, the *kōgai-hitsu* is generally *subama-gata* (trefoil shaped) and placed at the *omote* position, while the *kodzuka-hitsu* is *hangetsu-gata* (oval shaped) and placed at the *ura*. Tsuba are often found that have two *subama-hitsu*, and these apertures are commonly wide and unremarkable in their appearance: one of these would have been intended for a *kodzuka*. Tsuba with two *hangetsu-hitsu* also exist. The conventional aperture for the *kōgai*, designed to accommodate the ear-cleaning lug, was introduced in the latter part of the 15th century,<sup>137</sup> long before Namban tsuba began to appear in Japan, and it is thus probable that both of these stylistic variations are purely statements of fashion.

Wide *hitsu-ana* are a feature of Shōami tsuba, as is the presence of two *subama-hitsu*, and these features on a Namban tsuba may be an indication of a Shōami provenance. Aizu has already been cited as an active centre for the local manufacture of these sword guards. A district in the province of Iwashiro, and situated in the northern part of Honshū, this was the base of the Aizu-Shōami group of metalworkers. The reputation of these artists declined in the late Edo period, when they became known for the "over production of coarse manufacture [sic] or the making of so-called counterfeits and imitations".<sup>138</sup> This group was probably the source of many of the later, locally made Namban tsuba.

All of the above observations concerning *hitsu-ana* are equally applicable to auriculate tsuba, in which these apertures are situated in the auricular plates.

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<sup>137</sup> Sasano (1994), *Japanese Sword Guards: Masterpieces from the Sasano Collection, Part One*, p. 14.

<sup>138</sup> Ogura and Kuwabara (1935 – 36), *Nihon Tō Kōza, Vol. 6, Kodōgu part I*. Translated by Watson (1994), p. 92.

Unlike those of conventional Namban tsuba, however, these are never enclosed by an extension of the *seppa-dai* because of the position of the latter in the central plate (see Fig. 17). In order to enclose the *hitsu-ana*, such an extension would have to bridge the interface between the central and auricular plates — something it seems never to do. Thus the auricular plates are consistent in remaining discrete elements of the auriculate guard.

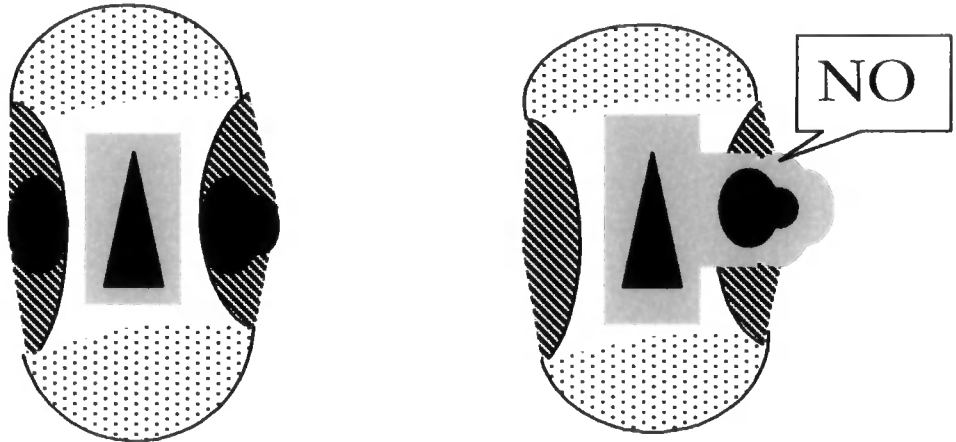


Fig. 17

Failure of the Seppa-Dai to Enclose the Ryō-Hitsu  
of Auriculate Guards

## 6. HIRA AND MIMI DESIGN OF NAMBAN TSUBA

### 6.1. HIRA DESIGN

Any tsuba included under the heading of the Namban group must exhibit the openwork by which this group has been defined. This is intricate work of widely varying competence, often incorporating extensive undercutting that may, in extreme examples, result in a finished product resembling a disc of worm-eaten wood. In order to support the Namban label, such work requires to be extensive and, with the exception of the *seppa-dai* and *mimi*, to occupy the entire body of the conventional tsuba and the lateral plates of the auriculate type. Where this openwork feature consists only of inserts on a solid plate guard, it may be described as 'demonstrating a Namban influence', but a point exists at which the borderline between these two types inevitably becomes blurred.

Decorative designs of this type feature on very early Chinese bronzes, and Joly affirmed his belief that "there is no need to seek for a dubious resemblance to the arms of Portugal as have certain authors", pointing out that such designs were produced long before the Portuguese traded with Japan or India.<sup>139</sup> They also appear on Indian and Persian weapons, and Joly goes on to describe a saddle in the M.A.W. Paul collection from either Nepal or Bhutan, which featured variable dragons depicted in the Namban style and finished in *nunome*.<sup>140</sup> Interestingly, there is a 17<sup>th</sup> century Tibetan saddle in the collection of the Royal Armouries in Leeds — XXVI H 30 — which demonstrates an identical decorative technique and even features, on the deep and vertical cantle, two affrontées dragons with the *tama* jewel. Such findings have posed a question as to where this style originated — from China and thence into India and Persia, or vice versa. Joly asks:

Is the Namban style derived from weapons of Northern India and Southern Tibet? Did the influence of this art... follow the Buddhist caravans many centuries before the 16<sup>th</sup>? Or did it remain latent until new contacts with India by way of sea routes, or the frequent trade with China during the Ming dynasty, awoke it? (Joly (1914), *Note sur le Fer et le Style Namban*, p. 3.)

Such a question is beyond the scope of this study, however.

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<sup>139</sup> Joly (1914), *Note sur le Fer et le Style Namban*, p. 2.

<sup>140</sup> Joly (1914), loc. cit.

If one accepts China as being the origin of these imported Namban tsuba, another question is posed. Chinese sword guards have always been of cast bronze, as have all the other mounts, and the production in China of iron tsuba represents a remarkable change in tradition. These appear to have been produced purely with a view to the demands of the Japanese market and such a dedicated export programme suggests a considerable degree of organisational skills and adaptability in 16<sup>th</sup> century Chinese commerce.

**N**ewman, a retired Engineer Commander in the Royal Navy, explains in some detail the process of undercutting:

When the tendril pattern was transferred to the forged disc, the craftsman drilled holes wherever he had the opportunity and opened these holes until they corresponded to the outline of the pattern. Working from both sides he chiselled the crossing tendrils and then with a drill and saw he cut a slot between them. Now, heating the small area concerned, he levered the tendrils apart, raising them higher than the position they were to occupy finally. He was then able to smooth and shape the two inner sides. When a strip or rod of iron is lifted the upper side is stretched so that it is impossible to press it back into its original position. He, therefore, curved it sideways a little and pressed it back into its final place. (Newman and Ryerson (1964), *Japanese Art: A Collector's Guide*, p. 236.)

Newman goes on to state: "these tsuba were admired more for their ingenuity of construction than their beauty...but there can be no doubt that they sold readily".<sup>141</sup>

Such decorative techniques obviously had, to some degree, a detrimental effect on the strength of the guard and reduced its effectiveness as a protective fitting on the sword. This was not a problem with locally made, Edo period, examples since these served an increasingly decorative function. But the Momoyama period at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century — coinciding as it did with Hideyoshi's successful campaign to unify the whole of Japan and his failed invasion of Korea — demanded effective weaponry. One might expect to find evidence of this functional need on imported tsuba of the earlier period, with heavier construction and reduced perforations, but such evidence is not forthcoming.

In the midst of this decorative detail, solid images are usually dispersed — the significance of symmetrical and asymmetrical dispersal has been discussed in an earlier section (see p. 17). The rendering of these images varies widely according to the quality

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<sup>141</sup> Newman and Ryerson (1964), *Japanese Art: A Collector's Guide*, p. 236.

of the work, from the most basic of *kebori* detail, through *usunuki-bori*, to the most detailed of *marubori* — three-dimensional 'carving in the round'. Occasionally these images are appropriate to the background design — fish amid marine vegetation; dragons amid clouds; the *hō-ō* (the mythical phoenix bird) amid *karakusa* scrolling vines — but this is by no means always the case. Frequently the selection of the openwork design appears to be random and to bear little relation to the 'theme' of the guard.

The presence of Christian symbolism on tsuba that were produced during the period of Jesuit evangelism in Japan has already been discussed (see p. 7). That this symbolism may also be occasionally found on tsuba of the Namban school is somewhat surprising since, even during the period of their maximum popularity, Roman Catholicism remained effectively suppressed in Japan and the symbolism on Namban tsuba is essentially Buddhist.

One tsuba, M.194-1931 in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, evidences such a Christian influence, nevertheless, and is illustrated on Plate 6. The *seppa-dai* is square, with a 'fortification' decoration that incorporates both *ryō-hitsu*, that for the *kōgai* has *shakudō umagane* and for the *kodzuka*, *shakudō sekigane*.<sup>142</sup> Surrounded by *karakusa* scrolls, two affrontées dragons face not a golden *tama* jewel but an orb, surmounted by a golden cross. On either side of the *hira*, opposite the upper extremities of the *ryō-hitsu*, two crosses have been given emphasis by gilding. The Christian symbolism on this tsuba is very striking.

### 6.1.1. THE DRAGON AS MOTIF

Dragons are by far the most common image on Namban tsuba, and these are frequently affrontées with the presence of the *tama* jewel, interposed between them at the top, resulting in a symmetrical design. Occasionally, other images are represented and these may include cranes, *shishi* (the stone lion), the *hō-ō* and fish. Additionally, the author has had described to him, by its previous owner, a Namban guard depicting two European figures amid the appropriate undercutting and openwork.

Rawson suggests that "a creature with a long wriggling body scaled with diamonds, a large head and pair of short horns" was the first recognisable dragon in

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<sup>142</sup> *Sekigane*: soft metal inserts that may reduce the size of a *nakago-hitsu* or act as liners in a *hitsu-ana* to protect the *kōgai* and *kodzuka* from the harder metal of the tsuba.

Chinese art.<sup>143</sup> Appearing in the later Shang dynasty (1700 – 1050 BC), it may have provided the template for the earliest representation of a dragon; Rawson quotes its heart-shaped upper jaw and diamond patterning as evidence for this supposition.

From at least the Han period (206 BC – 220 AD), when the dragon became associated with the Emperor of China and appeared on regal robes, its artistic depiction has undergone little change, either in China or Japan.<sup>144</sup> Behrens, in an article written by him and presented posthumously to the Japan Society, observes how there is a "want of uniformity [that] the Japanese have given to the form of the dragon in their applied art, though...in their pictorial art no such variety appears to exist".<sup>145</sup> He suggests that the variability encountered in Japanese glyptic art may be explained by "the fact of [sic] the former being less fettered by convention than the latter".<sup>146</sup> Certainly the dragon seen on Namban tsuba demonstrates this wide variability in its form. The affrontées chimeras with the *tama* jewel may gradually convert to a skeuomorphic form, with the limbs degenerating and the whole approaching a design closer to that of two vertically facing scroll-forms beneath the dragons' heads. Equally, the dragon may be either scaled, or of the 'smooth' variety with only rudimentary limbs. This latter form serves as a reminder that the Greek word δράκων (*drakōn*) originally referred to any large serpent, and that the dragon of mythology is practically indistinguishable from the snake.<sup>147</sup>

The earliest images of dragons did not have wings; these are a feature that appeared a little before the Han dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD).<sup>148</sup> They have since become mere flammiform appendages — ribbon-like attachments to the dragon's trunk at the junctions of the fore and hind limbs — and, on tsuba, these are commonly gilded.

**T**he depiction of two dragons facing a ball or a flaming spiral is also a very ancient motif, both in China and Japan. One of the many constant features of

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<sup>143</sup> Rawson (1984), *Chinese Ornament: The Lotus and the Dragon*, p. 93.

<sup>144</sup> Rawson (1984), *ibid*, p. 95.

<sup>145</sup> Behrens (1913), *Thoughts on Dragons*, p. 111.

<sup>146</sup> Behrens (1913), *loc. cit.*

<sup>147</sup> Behrens (1913), *Thoughts on Dragons*, p. 101.

<sup>148</sup> Behrens (1913), *ibid*, p.110.

conventional dragons is the presence, under their lower jaws, of a pearl.<sup>149</sup> When two facing dragons are depicted, the two jewels seem to be replaced by a single one, and an element of competitiveness is thus introduced. This symbolism has been interpreted in a number of ways. Thus, in China, the Buddhistic interpretation is that of the dragons "striving for the pearl of perfection that grants all desires".<sup>150</sup>

In Japan the dragon is associated generally with the water element — it brings (or denies) rain and lives amongst waves and clouds — and Gunsaulus describes the ball carried before the dragon in the Dragon Festival, held annually on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the first month, as representing thunder.<sup>151</sup> Conversely, de Visser cites a Chinese picture in which two dragons face a fiery, spiral-shaped ball, beneath which is written the caption "a couple of dragons facing the moon".<sup>152</sup> This he identifies as the most favourable interpretation of this motif.

The true significance of the jewel is thus still undecided — the pearl of perfection, thunder, or the moon — but this Chinese symbolism has featured on the Namban group of tsuba for almost 300 years.

The symmetry of design, comprising a dragon on either side of the *tama* jewel above, is commonly maintained below by a presentation of the character of *shou* ('long life'); one of the swastika characters; or a lotus flower. The latter two have obvious Buddhistic connotations. The right-handed swastika (the *migi-manji*), a Buddhistic symbol for 10,000, is also reproduced on the breast of figures of the Buddha as representing eternal happiness.<sup>153</sup> Chamberlain comments how Buddhists see, in a lotus flower growing out of the mud, a simile for "a virtuous man dwelling in a wicked world" and he identifies a very close connection between the lotus and Buddhism:

Buddha is figured standing on a lotus, gold and silver paper lotuses are carried at funerals, tombstones are often set on an inverted lotus-flower of stone as their base, lotus-beds often surround shrines built on islets. (Chamberlain (1902), *Things Japanese*, p. 304.)

Thus Buddhist imagery persists in the Namban group of tsuba.

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<sup>149</sup> Edmunds (1934), *Pointers and Clues to the Subjects of Chinese and Japanese Art*, p. 328.

<sup>150</sup> Gunsaulus (1934), *Japanese Sword Mounts in the Collections of the Field Museum*, p. 74.

<sup>151</sup> Gunsaulus (1934), *ibid*, pp. 74 and 75.

<sup>152</sup> de Visser (1913), *The Dragon in China and Japan*, pp. 103-108.

<sup>153</sup> Koop and Inada (1960), *Japanese Names and How to Read Them*, p. 218.

### 6.1.2. THE KARAKUSA AS MOTIF

The range of background subjects on Namban tsuba is large but is often ideally suited to the typical Namban treatment. Thus the *karakusa* (or 'scrolling vine') is easily identifiable, with its tangled and interwoven vegetation, and is by far the most common. This is not always the case, however, and sometimes the intricate scrollwork is quite simply a conceit on the part of the artist and not immediately identifiable.

The *karakusa-moyō* appears frequently in early Chinese Art, and was adopted in Japan in the sixth to the eighth century AD, along with the introduction of Buddhism. It is an arabesque diaper in the form of floral scrolls, its name comprising two Chinese characters. The first of these, KARA, is the *kanji* for Tang China; the second, KUSA, indicates grasses, or the pattern of intertwining vines.<sup>154</sup> These *kanji* are commonly seen jointly transcribed as 'Chinese grasses' but this does not adequately describe the design, which depicts long, flexible, vine-like tendrils with regular offshoots. These combine to form an impenetrable, arabesque design that is quite unlike that produced by straight, unbranching grasses.

Numerous variations exist of this diaper and each of these has its own name, depending upon the pattern and style. One of the most widely used patterns in this early period in Japan was the *nindomon-karakusa*, which used the Japanese honeysuckle-vine as its motif (see Fig. 18), and this design has been traced from ancient Egypt, through Greece, Rome, Central Asia and China before it reached Japan.<sup>155</sup>

It has been suggested that the *karakusa-moyō*, initially associated with Buddhistic worship, later became adopted by the ruling classes of Japan and, by the Edo period, was in universal use. At this time, for various reasons, the different social groups favoured certain of the very large selection of patterns that were available to the Japanese artisan:

The "karakusa" patterns from long ago were patterns expressing the direct connection to Buddhism....It was a sublimely respectful pattern. Although it was used as a pattern for the dignitary 1000 years later, it became the pattern used on the futons of ordinary people....Patterns have been liked for their different appearances according to the circumstances and status. An example being the wives of the "samurai", who recognised the "kogiku", "takanohana", "matsuba", and "chadogu"

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<sup>154</sup> Watson (2000), "Glossary" in <http://www.afuresearch.com/glossary.html>

<sup>155</sup> Shi-Bo-Ri Japan Museum (2000), "Traditional patterns: Karakusa-moyō" in [http://www.shibori.co.jp/tec/t\\_pat/t\\_pat\\_3.html](http://www.shibori.co.jp/tec/t_pat/t_pat_3.html)

patterns as those of high quality. As for the wives of the merchants, they felt that the "asa-no-ha", "chidori", "gan", and "yae-kikko" patterns reflected purity. The merchants themselves liked the selection of "watsunagi", "yoshiwara-tsunagi", "ajirogumi", "bishamon-kikko", and "kutsuwa" patterns for their being both influential and ostentatious. (Shi-Bo-Ri Japanese Museum (2000), "Traditional patterns: Karakusa-moyō".)

It is an interesting observation that, of the many *karakusa* designs available to them, the makers of Namban tsuba almost exclusively favoured that of the vine.



Fig. 18

An example of a Karakusa-Moyō

## 6.2. MIMI

Because of the essential openwork nature of all Namban tsuba, their *mimi* are invariably solid. The ingenuity and imagination of this group of workers have resulted in a wide variety of designs, comparable in their range to that of their decorative *seppa-dai*.

Commonly the rim has a 'beaded' appearance, supposedly representative of the *kiku* — a stylised chrysanthemum blossom — but often too 'busy' to be anything other

than purely token. The petals are seldom the required number of eight, 16, 32 or 64 — they often give the impression of having been repeated until the available space around the rim had been adequately filled — and are purely decorative in their function. The excesses of later work are exemplified in the conceit of rims, ornate and pierced, that may even enclose small, metallic beads that produce a rattling sound when the tsuba is shaken.

The possibility that this beaded rim may not be entirely floral in its origin needs to be considered, even if this suggestion is subsequently discounted. A somewhat similar rim is seen in tsuba of another type, when it represents not the chrysanthemum blossom but the rosary: not surprisingly, these are known as *juzu* tsuba, this being the Japanese word for a rosary. Sometimes, two small tassels off the main circlet complete this rim, and the number of beads therein seems to be variable. Students may recall that an example of such a tsuba created a record when, with an ill-judged and inappropriately low pre-sale estimate of £280-380, it fetched the incredible sum of £13,000 at an auction held by Christie's, in London, on 4<sup>th</sup> March 1986.<sup>156</sup>

The rosary motif may be a reference to Nichiren (1222 – 1282 AD), the founder of the Buddhist sect that is named after him, who is reputed to have travelled with his rosary hanging from the *tsuka* — the hilt — of his sword.<sup>157</sup> It may equally have been of relevance to a samurai of Christian beliefs, the rosary being common to both religions.<sup>158</sup> In this respect, the number of beads depicted on tsuba is variable and of little help. Illustrations of three such tsuba were examined: in the first there were 30 beads in the outer ring and 24 in the inner (making in total the Buddhistically significant number of 54); and in the other two 32+32 and 30+25 respectively. The Roman Catholic rosary has five 'decades', or sets of ten beads, each decade being separated from the next by a larger bead. A small string holding a crucifix, two large beads and three small, joins the two ends of the rosary — a total of 60 beads. The Buddhistic rosary consists of 108 beads of equal size, although there are also rosaries of 54 or 27 elements.<sup>159</sup> Thus the invariable presence of a crucifix on the Christian rosary may be the sole indication on a

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<sup>156</sup> Beckett (1986), "Record for a Sword Guard" in *Daily Telegraph*, 5<sup>th</sup> March, 1986.

<sup>157</sup> Smith (1998), *Myths and Legends of Japan*, p 44.

<sup>158</sup> Edmunds (1934), *Pointers and Clues to the Subjects of Chinese and Japanese Art*, p. 255, states: "when in the early sixteenth century Saint Francis Xavier and his Jesuit companions arrived in Japan, they found that: 'The Japanese pray on beads as we do...'"

<sup>159</sup> Heckmann (1995), *Tsuba*, T24.

tsuba of its wearer's religious convictions, and this may have been omitted for reasons of personal discretion.

Generally being dated to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, these *juzu* tsuba are attributed to the mountain priests on Mount Haguro.<sup>160</sup> They would have had no relevance to the large numbers of warrior monks who became thoroughly militarised in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries and, as *yambushi* ('mountain warriors') in their base in the monastery of Hiyeizan, were a constant menace to the peace of the capital. These latter monks had lost all militaristic significance by the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The rosary as a motif is always depicted in *marubori*, with a three-dimensional depiction of the beads. This is quite unlike the beaded rim of the Namban guards, which are more likely to be chrysanthemoid in their inspiration. But whatever the origin of this beaded rim, it is a feature that appears to be a Japanese development and thus to be confined to those tsuba that were locally made.

Inspection of the illustrations of Namban tsuba, taken from collections that were formed at the beginning of the century, reveals a number that possibly conform to the concept of earlier, imported pieces. These are coarse in their execution and have a thicker fabric. A pitted surface is common, but symmetry of design is not necessarily a feature. Sometimes an outstanding feature of these is the presence of a wide, round *mimi* which may be of pipe-stem structure and which imparts a definite Chinese 'feel' to the guard. Pipe-stem rims do not feature prominently on Japanese sword guards. Those of the Kō-Katchūshi group may have large, rounded rims (*kan-mimi*) and it has been supposed that these are hollow. This supposition — an acknowledgement of the armourers' undoubted craftsmanship in iron — has never been confirmed although, with modern technology, it should not be difficult to do so.

Tsuba no. 696 in the catalogue of the Georg Oeder collection;<sup>161</sup> tsuba no. 695 '30, illustrated on pl. XX1 of the catalogue of the collection of the City of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery;<sup>162</sup> and tsuba no. 323, illustrated in the catalogue of the Dr Edouard Mène collection,<sup>163</sup> are all examples of tsuba with *kan-mimi*. In all of

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<sup>160</sup> Tomitaro (1980), "Appreciation of Masterpieces" in *Token Bijutsu*, Summer 1980, no. 5, interleaves.

<sup>161</sup> Vautier (1915), *Japanische Stützblätter und Schwertzieraten, Sammlung Georg Oeder*, p. 83.

<sup>162</sup> Hancock (n.d.), *Catalogue of Tsuba in the Permanent Collection of the City of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery*, p. 114, pl. XX1.

<sup>163</sup> L'Hôtel Drouet (1913), *Catalogue des Armures Japonaises Composant la Collection du Dr Edouard Mène*, p. 77.

these, the presence of a *mimi* of this type may be an indication of an early Chinese provenance. The construction of a hollow, pipe-stem rim is, however, an extremely sophisticated metalworking technique and is unlikely to have been utilised in the manufacture of the later, mass-produced copies of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Some such guards are occasionally found with *kan-mimi*, but the overall quality of these pieces, together with their relatively heavy weight, suggests that these rims are, in fact, solid.

### 6.3. THE GILDING OF NAMBAN TSUBA

Gold decoration on Namban *hira* is common, and is often profuse. Hawley describes, in some detail, the various methods that have been used to affix gold to Japanese sword fittings<sup>164</sup> and, of the methods he describes, only three appear to be relevant to this group of tsuba:

- The first of these — and by far the most common — is *nunome-zōgan* and this is easily identified. The frequent thinness of the gold overlay, combined with its partial loss due to rusting of the underlying iron, result in the cross-hatching of the base commonly being visible.
- The second, *hira-zōgan*, is used only sparsely on this group of tsuba and is generally confined to minutiae, such as the eyes of dragons, on better quality work.
- Finally, an overlay of brightly burnished gold is occasionally found as an alternative to *nunome-zōgan*. Forming a thick, raised and featureless area of gilding on the surface of the tsuba, this appears to be relatively resistant both to wear and to underlying rust. These features suggest some form of mercuric gilding, both the presence of burnishing and its resistance to wear making the alternative possibility of *kanagaki* — a process of gilding that used a mixture of gold powder bonded with *urushi* lacquer.<sup>165</sup> — extremely unlikely.

Ogasawara, in describing this group, states that "in addition to delicate arabesque or scroll openwork, these pieces often use cloth-texture or flat inlay."<sup>166</sup> By 'cloth-texture'

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<sup>164</sup> Hawley (1992), *The Application of Gold on Japanese Sword Fittings*, pp. 1-8.

<sup>165</sup> Harding (1993), "Early Menuki" in Syz, *The Henry D. Rosin Collection of Japanese Sword Fittings*, p. 105.

<sup>166</sup> Ogasawara (1983), *Sword Guards and Fittings from Japan: the Collection of the Museum of Decorative Art, Copenhagen, Vol 1*, p. 14.

he clearly means *nunome-zōgan*, but 'flat inlay' is open to several interpretations. It could be taken to mean *hira-zōgan*, but one is tempted to believe that it refers to a mercuric gilding process. Commonly referred to in English as 'fire-gilding', this process was outlawed in England by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century because of the extremely poisonous nature of the mercury vapour it releases.<sup>167</sup>

Michaelson describes this fire-gilding as "a chemical process whereby gold is dissolved in mercury to make a paste that is then applied to the object to be gilded":<sup>168</sup> a related process is used to create silver/mercury amalgam fillings for use in dentistry.

Hawley states that, in Japan, the gold was reduced to a powder by beating it into thin sheets of foil — thicker than those used as gold leaf — and cutting these into small pieces with scissors. It was then mixed with mercury in a crucible and heated to combine the two materials, any excess mercury being extruded by squeezing the final mixture in a paper twist. The resulting amalgam was rubbed well into the surface to be gilded and the artefact gently heated. The mercury was thus vaporised, leaving a golden covering that was finally burnished. Five or six such applications were required: the resulting fumes were very poisonous, and the workers must have worn some form of protective mask.<sup>169</sup>

This process was discovered in China during the Warring States period (480 – 221 BC)<sup>170</sup> and was widely used in Japan in the Heian period (794 – 1185 AD), where it was known as *yakitsuke*.<sup>171</sup> It is a much simpler and less skilled process than is *nunome-zōgan*. The latter is an integral part of the tsuba's construction, the cross-hatching of the iron base being an extension of the artistic input; it is thus the artist who dictates the distribution and extent of the overlay. Conversely, even though it required repeated applications of the mercuric paste with its subsequent light heating, *yakitsuke* is a process that can be carried out by unskilled workers after the modelling of the tsuba has been completed. Thus it is not surprising that it commonly gives the impression of having

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<sup>167</sup> Long (2000), "The Treatment of False Gilding: A Case Study" in *Gilded Metals: History, Technology and Conservation*, edited by Drayman-Weisser, p. 320.

<sup>168</sup> Michaelson (1999), *Gilded Dragons*, p. 48.

<sup>169</sup> Hawley (1992), *The Application of Gold on Japanese Sword Fittings*, p. 2.

<sup>170</sup> Michaelson (1999), loc. cit.

<sup>171</sup> Harding (1993), "Early Menuki" in Syz, *The Henry D. Rosin Collection of Japanese Sword Fittings*, p. 105.

been rather 'splashed about'. Indeed, the examination of a number of Namban tsuba suggests that this method of gilding was a cheaper and less highly valued method than was *nunome-zōgan* (see p. 27).

An alternative method of achieving a similar end-result is described by Oddy.<sup>172</sup> In this, gold foil is applied to a surface that has been previously amalgamated with mercury, and heat is then applied to drive off the mercury. The thickness of the final gold deposit depends upon the quantity of gold foil used and upon the presence of sufficient mercury on the surface to dissolve the gold. The end result of this method is indistinguishable from that achieved by *yakitsuke*.

Some doubt is cast upon the presumed use of mercuric gilding on Namban tsuba by Hawley's statements that "...the surface...had to be a soft metal or alloy as it will not work on iron" and that "the higher [the] percentage of copper in the alloy, the better the gold adheres".<sup>173</sup> Indeed, when it is applied directly onto iron, the amalgam "runs off like water on waxed paper".<sup>174</sup> Nevertheless, a modification of these gilding processes would have enabled their use on iron artefacts.

Anheuser affirms — by electron microprobe studies of 16<sup>th</sup> century, gilded plate armour — the presence of a layer of copper between iron or steel objects and the applied gold.<sup>175</sup> The adequate adhesion of such a layer of copper was possibly achieved by applying it as a dilute, aqueous solution of cupric sulphate or nitrate, the latter being slightly acidified with nitric acid. Prior to the application of the gold amalgam paste, the object was heated and then quenched in ethanol to reduce the copper oxide that forms on the surface of the copper. In this way, "a firmly adherent gilding of high quality" was ensured.<sup>176</sup> This adherent copper layer may be in part responsible for the apparent resistance to rust of the iron underlying such gilding.

It may be possible, by further research, to confirm the use of fire-gilding on Namban tsuba. Northover suggests: "if there is copper present in sufficient quantity it should

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<sup>172</sup> Oddy (1991), "Gilding of Metals in Japan" in *Conservation News*, Number 45, July 1991, pp. 37 and 38.

<sup>173</sup> Hawley (1992), *The Application of Gold on Japanese Sword Fittings*, pp. 2 and 3.

<sup>174</sup> Anheuser (2001), Personal Communication.

<sup>175</sup> Anheuser (1996), *An Investigation of Amalgam Gilding and Silvering on Metalwork*, pp. 42 and 43.

<sup>176</sup> Anheuser (1996), *ibid*, pp. 67 and 68.

be possible to detect its presence and measure its thickness using the scanning proton microprobe...." <sup>177</sup> But Anheuser seriously doubts that such a copper layer — perhaps as thin as only a few 100 nm — could be identified through the gold with the proton microprobe. He prefers the use of an optical microscope to detect evidence of copper plating along an edge — or in a damaged area — of the gilding and of a scanning electron microscope to identify the presence of mercury. <sup>178</sup>

If the presence of copper were to be confirmed, it could confidently be viewed as an indication of the tsuba's preparation for subsequent mercuric amalgam gilding. Since electroplating with the noble metals was not perfected in the West until the 1840s, <sup>179</sup> it is improbable that such a copper foundation could have been applied on Namban sword guards preparatory to this latter process.

The presence of mercury would thus be irrefutable evidence of the use of mercuric gilding on Namban tsuba, but would not enable a chemical distinction to be made between fire-gilding and cold mercury leaf gilding, since both methods retain a detectable amount of mercury in the gold. <sup>180</sup> Cold mercury gilding involves the application of the mercury to the surface of the artefact, and its subsequent cleansing in order to leave only the thinnest of films. Gold leaf sticks to this film of mercury and no heating is required, but the gold overlay resulting from this process — thin, and discoloured by the underlying quicksilver — is unlikely to be of relevance in the present context.

Such positive results — practically attainable by the use of non-destructive techniques — would be relevant even if obtained from a single artefact of only indifferent quality. They would, at the same time, introduce some questions concerning the use of this gilding technique. Initially thought to be a simple and unskilled process, mercuric gilding appeared to be a logical component of the rapid and cheap production techniques that characterise most Namban tsuba. Now known to have necessitated the application of a

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<sup>177</sup> Northover (2001), Personal Communication.

<sup>178</sup> Anheuser (2001), *An Investigation of Amalgam Gilding and Silvering on Metalwork* pp. 67 and 68.

<sup>179</sup> Child (1993), "Modern Electroplating and Electrofinishing Techniques" in *Metal Plating and Patination*, edited by La Niece and Craddock, p. 298.

<sup>180</sup> Oddy (1993), "Gilding of Metals in the Old World" in *Metal Plating and Patination*, edited by La Niece and Craddock, p. 178.

secure copper base, followed by the repeated application — and heating — of gold amalgam up to six times in order to achieve the final result, it seems a less obvious choice for the gilding of Namban tsuba.

The gold decoration of Namban tsuba, however applied, is usually very badly rubbed. There is no evidence, however, that their makers — as did some makers of earlier, solid plate iron guards — practised techniques of 'built-in antiquity'. Inlay techniques such as *hotsure-zōgan* ('frayed' inlay) and *mushiku-zōgan* ('worm-eaten' inlay) were used by other groups, particularly those of the Higo schools, to give an impression of antiquity, either to the whole guard or to an object depicted upon the guard.<sup>181</sup> This effect is exemplified in the 17<sup>th</sup> century masterwork by Hayashi Matashichi, featuring a design of broken fans and falling cherry blossom.<sup>182</sup> Unlike such guards, the Namban group of tsuba must often have been startlingly bright when they were first purchased.

The more desirable *nunome-zōgan* commonly displays far greater wear than does mercuric gilding. This is probably either because the increased propensity of this group to rust destroys the tiny hook-like, iron projections that secure the gold overlay of the former, or because of their absence due to the use of casting to prepare the base (see p. 135). Conversely, in the absence of moisture, the copper underlay or the gold/mercury amalgam may serve, in some way, to protect the iron base upon which the gilding has been applied. In the presence of moisture, however, the contact between the iron and the copper triggers a process whereby the copper becomes the anode in a galvanic cell. Such electrochemical corrosion of the iron loosens the gold overlay.<sup>183</sup>

Namban *mimi* may also feature gold decoration. Commonly this is simply an extension of the exuberance demonstrated on the *hira*, but where this is a diaper design, executed in *nunome* on a square rim, it may be a reflection of the enthusiasm of the Shōami schools for such a decoration of the rim, and suggest an Aizu-Shōami provenance.

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<sup>181</sup> The Metropolitan Museum of Fine Art (1975), *Momoyama: Japanese Art in the Age of Grandeur*, p.131, no 78.

<sup>182</sup> Illustrated in Satō (1990), *The Japanese Sword*, pl. 96, p. 146.

<sup>183</sup> Anheuser (1996), *An Investigation of Amalgam Gilding and Silvering on Metalwork*, p. 47.

Corfield (1993), "Copper Plating on Iron" in *Metal Plating and Patination*, edited by La Niece and Craddock, p. 282.

There are exceptions to this extensive gilding, and Namban tsuba are occasionally found with no evidence of their ever having had any gold decoration. Such tsuba are generally of good quality, being made of a better iron with a reduced tendency to rust, and demonstrating quite extensive and skilled chiselwork. The iron plate may be lenticular in profile. Commonly, these tsuba feature none of the popular Namban motifs — neither the affrontées dragons nor the *karakusa* diaper — and, while the openwork is extensive, the undercutting often is minimal; they may not, in fact, be of the Namban group at all. Their characteristics suggest a possible Būshū provenance, although the work of this latter school commonly incorporates sparing gold decoration.

## 7. AURICULATE NAMBAN GUARDS

**auricular**, *a.* and *sb.*

**A.** *adj.* 6. Shaped like an auricle.

**auriculate**, *ppl.* *a.*

Furnished with auricles or ear-like appendages.

Simpson and Weiner (1989),  
*The Oxford English Dictionary*, p. 790.

While in no way wishing to change a convention whereby the term 'auricular' has been used by armourers for many centuries, tsuba in the following section are described, in keeping with the above definitions, as being 'auriculate' in shape and as possessing two 'auricular' plates.

### 7.1. THE GENERAL FORM OF AURICULATE TSUBA

Auriculate guards are a distinct sub-section of the Namban group of Japanese tsuba. They conform to our current definition of this group, both in the openwork and undercutting of their auricular plates, and by reason of their initial manufacture outside Japan and subsequent importation and copying. Although numerically small, this sub-section is of interest both historically and artistically. Supposedly based upon the design of the Iberian sword guards that were introduced into Japan during the Momoyama period,<sup>184</sup> they are invariably Namban in their detail and demonstrate a strong Chinese influence. They may be made either of iron or of the brass-like alloys, bronze and *sentoku*,<sup>185</sup> the frequency of these soft metal alloys being considerably greater among this sub-section than among the Namban group in general.

Essentially bilobar in form, these guards are very formalised in their design, and comprise two clearly defined lateral plates which, shaped like the human ear, are the reason for their descriptive name. These are thin discs of the undercut and interwoven scrollwork, which has already been noted as an identifying characteristic of the Namban

<sup>184</sup> Syz (1994), *Masterpieces from the Randolph B. Caldwell Collection: Japanese Sword Fittings*, p. 50, no. 34.

<sup>185</sup> *Sentoku*: a brass-like alloy that acquires a soft yellow patina after being submitted to a pickling process.

group of guards, and are separated from one another by a thinner, central segment of solid metal, bi-concave in shape (see Fig. 19) and variable in size. If small, this may constitute the entire *seppa-dai*; if larger, it may contain a defined and variously shaped area for this purpose. In common with many Namban tsuba, this area is often decorated with either an engraved or a *nunome* design. Plates 7 and 8 illustrate examples of this sub-group of tsuba; the first is of iron and the second of *sentoku*, and both demonstrate these characteristic features.

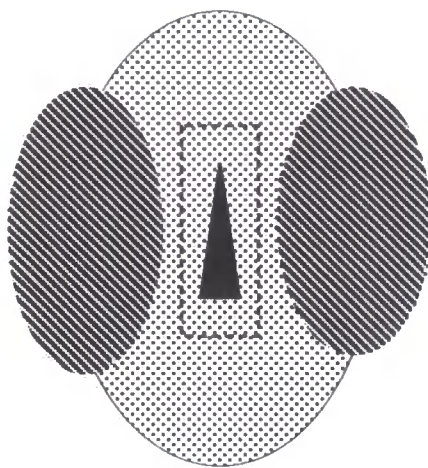


Fig. 19

Diagrammatic Depiction of Auriculate Guard

The central plate commonly terminates at its top and bottom in a zoomorphic head — that of a *taotie*. A mask-like image, Loveday describes this as being characterised by a pair of eyes; a wide central ridge representing a nose; an upper jaw; and two front paws. The brow commonly has two domes, and may possess a pair of horns. Such images are described as first appearing on Chinese bronzes of the early Shang period (1600 – 1050 BC), and are a recurrent theme in Chinese Art.<sup>186</sup> Their presence on these guards is a further, clear indication of the strong Chinese influence upon this sub-group. Similar images may also be repeated on the outer aspects of the two auricular plates of the guard, where their purpose — unlike that of the upper and lower ones that serve to define the central plate — is purely decorative.

The standard of workmanship found amongst this sub-group of tsuba is often quite high and is occasionally outstandingly so. That illustrated on Plate 9, from the

<sup>186</sup> Loveday (1990), *Chinese Bronzes*, p. 16.



collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, is an example of work of such high quality. The body of this guard is of *sentoku*, is beautifully carved and is slightly cupped in profile. The auriculate plates are delicately worked in iron and are inset into this base. Work of this quality may well have been intended for votive use.

### 7.1.1. 'SWAN-NECK DRAWER HANDLES'

The auricular plates are sometimes decorated on their outside edges with a solid device — a feature described by Syz as being "framed by European swan-neck drawer handles".<sup>187</sup> It is not clear whether this phrase is intended to be purely descriptive or to be indicative of a further European influence, but the presence of this framing around the auricular plates can, with very little imagination, be identified with such handles. This is particularly so where the 'handle' is expanded at its centre, commonly to accommodate a further *taotie*.

Brass catalogues of the 18<sup>th</sup> century feature in many museum archives. For commercial reasons, these catalogues seldom acknowledge the printer or the date of printing, but are known to contain examples ranging in their dates from 1730 to 1780.<sup>188</sup> Swan-neck furniture handles feature prominently in catalogues of this period and, if this particular design feature should ever be confirmed as reflecting a European influence, these would be an invaluable aid to the dating of auriculate guards. Any such guard demonstrating this influence could then be confidently attributed to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but such an assumption conflicts with other aids to dating. Syz's example has a *Tokubetsu Kichō* certificate attributing it to the Momoyama period (1573 – 1603): this is more than a century earlier than the introduction of this style of brassware on European furniture, and the acceptance of such a European influence would call into question the dating of many of these guards.<sup>189</sup>

Dower has suggested that handles (*kan*) may rather be a later, abstract version of the *mokkō* design — resembling a cross-section through a melon or cucumber — that was imported from China in the latter part of the sixth century.<sup>190</sup> This design was extensively used in Japan on court costumes during the period of close ties between

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<sup>187</sup> Syz (1994), *Masterpieces from the Randolph B. Caldwell Collection: Japanese Sword Fittings*, no. 34, p. 50.

<sup>188</sup> Schiffer (1978), *The Brass Book*, pp. 413 et seq.

<sup>189</sup> For a further discussion concerning doubts over the attribution of these tsuba to the Momoyama period, the reader is referred to pp. 106-110 below.

<sup>190</sup> Dower (1971), *The Elements of Japanese Design*, pp. 114 and 140.

Japan and T'ang China (618 – 906 AD):<sup>191</sup> its presence on tsuba with a Chinese influence is not at all surprising.

An unusual variation on this 'drawer handle' theme is seen on an auriculate tsuba owned by Mike Hickman-Smith of the Northern Tō-Ken Society. On this, the arched bodies of scaled, fish-like creatures form the thickened, lateral edges of the auricular plates. Joined at their open mouths, their dorsal surfaces face laterally and their bifurcated tails curve inwards toward the *seppa-dai*. Although without legs, one must assume that these creatures, since they appear to possess rudimentary ears and also hold a gold sphere in their conjoined mouths, are in fact affrontées dragons — the "dragons like fish" described by Behrens.<sup>192</sup> This is a theme that is repeated in the high quality, openwork carving of the remainder of this guard.

Coincidentally, Syz's tsuba is interesting also in its VOC details. Apart from these being the reverse of the usual orientation — having the upper cypher, rather than the lower, an inverted VOC — the lower one is the mirror image of this, with the 'o' and the 'c' in reversed positions (see Fig. 20). This echoes the reversed 'И' that is occasionally seen on carving by illiterate European craftsmen, and one presumes that it was carved by a craftsman who was unfamiliar with the European letters.

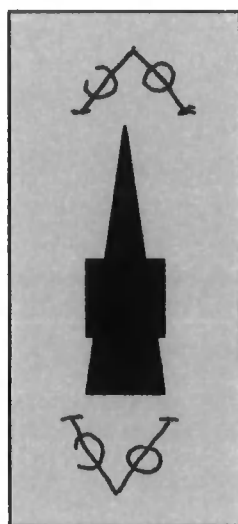


Fig. 20  
Diagram Showing Unusual  
Configuration of VOC Cypher

<sup>191</sup> Hawley and Chappelle (1976), *Mon: the Japanese Family Crest*, p. 18.

<sup>192</sup> Behrens (1913), *Thoughts on Dragons*, p. 112.

The presence of the two auricular plates results in a tsuba that is essentially *mokkō-gata*, but this form may be progressively modified to a circular form (*maru-gata*) and the distinction between auriculate and conventional Namban tsuba may thus become increasingly blurred. In this context, it is important to remember that attempts to classify tsuba post-date the production of those artefacts, which do not always conform to subsequently imposed rules. It is tempting, among these variations in form, to identify a gradual evolution from the *maru-gata* tsuba — with a *seppa-dai* and ill-defined *taotie* — to a final, and fully evolved, auriculate pattern. To do this would probably be a mistake, however. If, as seems likely, the Iberian sword guard was introduced into Japan in its fully evolved form, these borderline forms are more probably later, locally made adaptations of that original design, from (a), through (b) and (c), to (d) (see Fig. 21). Nevertheless, that point at which a tsuba ceases to be called 'auriculate' and becomes one demonstrating 'an auriculate influence' will always remain a matter of personal judgement.

The tsuba illustrated on Plate 10 does not present us with any such problem. Its auriculate influence is quite plain to see, but there is an absence of any openwork on the auriculate plates and it is probably Būshū in its provenance. It is clumsy, crude work and the reversal of the lower *taotie* has had a detrimental effect upon its balance by giving it a very 'bottom-heavy' appearance.

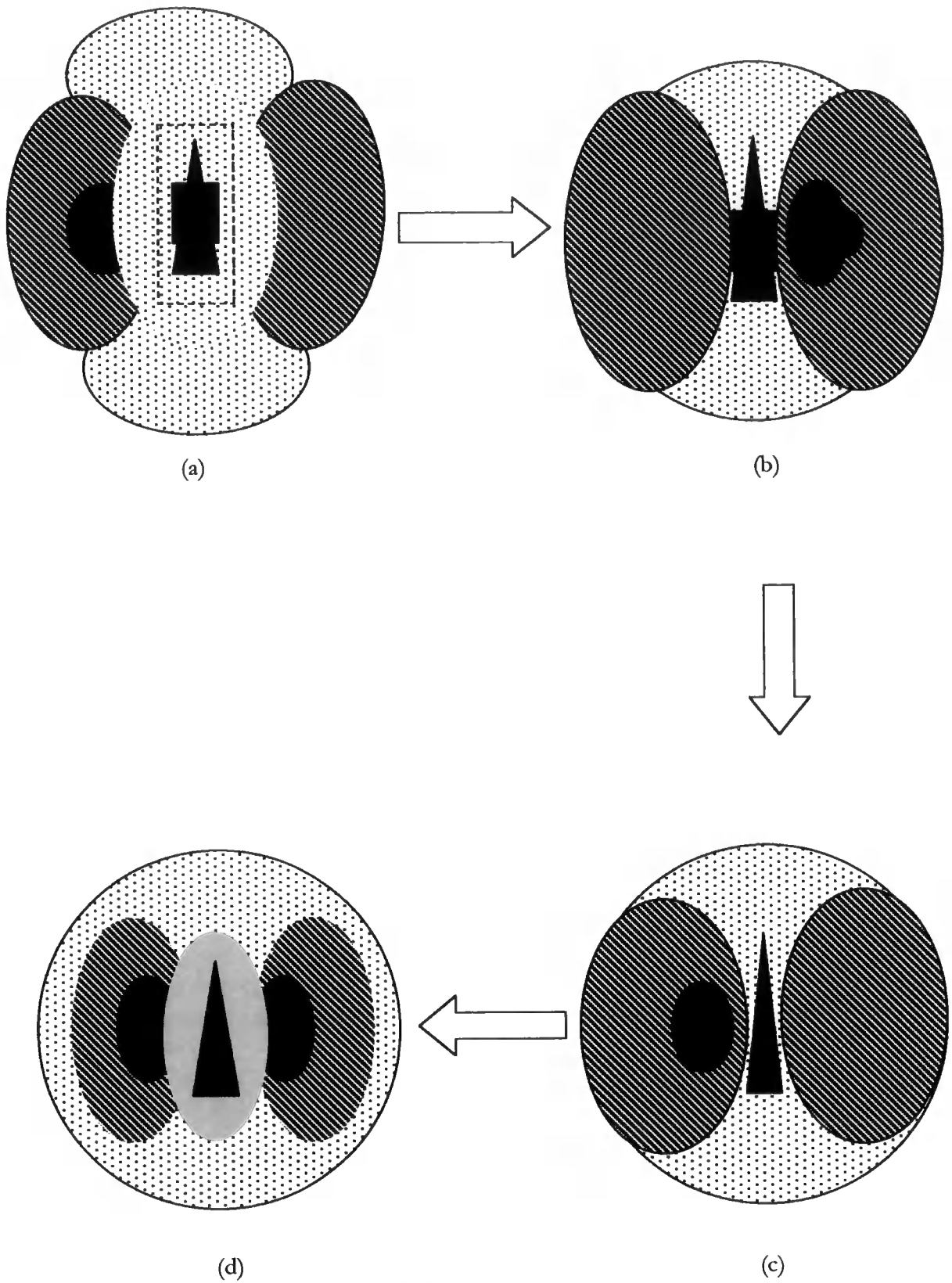


Fig. 21

Diagram Showing Progressive Modifications of the Auriculate Form

## 7.2. CHINESE AND EUROPEAN INFLUENCES UPON AURICULATE TSUBA

The influence of early Chinese bronzes on the openwork of conventional Namban tsuba has been described earlier. The *taotie* on auriculate guards are also indicative of a strong Chinese influence; but the frequent co-existence of these influences in this sub-section poses a number of questions. The European guards originally introduced into Japan demonstrate no evidence of exposure to a Chinese influence, and this leads one to question from whence this influence arose. It is unlikely that these guards were originally introduced into China, after inexplicably bypassing Japan, and were subsequently exported into Japan as Chinese modifications. Why then do those auriculate guards that bear the VOC logo, were manufactured by the Dutch East India Company and were subsequently exported to Japan, always demonstrate this Chinese influence? And why are guards of this type, and of Japanese origin, not found without it?

Study of the type of sword guard likely to have been introduced into Japan by its European traders during the Momoyama period leads to some surprising conclusions. By the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the wearing of civilian swords had become general throughout Europe, and it is probable that the early European arrivals in Japan were wearing such swords. It is quite likely that they also carried left-hand daggers — the simultaneous use of both weapons was a fencing fashion retained by the Spanish until well into the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>193</sup> The swords carried would have been rapiers, and these had developed increasingly elaborate hilts "made up of all sorts of combinations of cups, shells and loops".<sup>194</sup> Wilkinson describes how "almost every variety of shell and counter-guard [was] adopted by one nation or the other and then exported and fused with other national styles...".<sup>195</sup> There was, however, an absence of any solid, discoid guard: since the rapier, with its heavy blade, was used as much for slashing as for thrusting, there was little need for such protection. The hand of its wielder was completely enclosed within this metallic basketwork, which ultimately consisted of as many as seven rings, and these weapons must have seemed a strange

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<sup>193</sup> Wilkinson (1970), *Edged Weapons*, p. 46.

<sup>194</sup> Stone (1961), *A Glossary of the Construction, Decoration and Use of Arms and Armour*, p. 526.

<sup>195</sup> Wilkinson (1970), *op. cit.*, p. 41.

innovation to the Japanese, being in complete contrast to the simple, open hilt of their own swords. There is no evidence to suggest that these early rapiers had any influence upon the development of the tsuba.

That such elaborate hilts featured on the swords that were worn by the early Portuguese arrivals in Japan can be confirmed by the study of contemporaneous *namban byōbu* — the decorative Portuguese, six-fold screens that were produced by the Kanō artists. Several of these, while lacking in attention to detail, clearly demonstrate the curlicues of the fashionable European sword hilts, which must have been a source of fascination to the Japanese artists.<sup>196</sup> The composition of a number of these screens is examined in detail in *The Namban Art of Japan*, but the photographic reproductions of these are too small to provide the further detail required to reinforce these findings.<sup>197</sup>

Unfortunately, the popularisation of the use of wood-block printing in the 1660s by Moronobu (1631 – 1694), who pioneered the *Ukiyo-e* — pictures of the floating world — school of printmaking,<sup>198</sup> came too late to depict this period in Japan's history: such images would assuredly have been most instructive. Equally, the distinctive block-prints produced in Nagasaki that depict these foreign arrivals can be traced back to only 1645.<sup>199</sup>

A small plate, often pierced and elaborately decorated, appeared at the base of these rings early in the 17th century and, during the next 50 years, this counter-guard was to increase progressively in size.<sup>200</sup> Ultimately it was to form the cup hilt which, very popular in Spain and its areas of influence, continued in use well into the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Its enlargement did not immediately produce a complete cup, however, but rather formed two semicircular shells, leaving a small space between them at the back

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<sup>196</sup> Elisseeff (1985), *Art of Japan*.

*Landing of the Portuguese* by Kanō Naizen (1570 – 1616), pp. 308 and 309, fig. 137.

*The Portuguese Landing at Nagasaki*, pp. 310 and 315, figs. 138 and 139.

*Departure of Foreign Ship for Japan* by Kanō Naizen, p. 456, fig. 436.

*Arrival of Foreign Ship at Nagasaki* by Kanō Naizen, p. 457, fig. 440.

<sup>197</sup> Okamoto (1972), *The Namban Art of Japan*, pp. 124-133.

<sup>198</sup> Yoshida (1978), *Ukiyo-e: 250 Years of Japanese Art*, pp. 27-29.

<sup>199</sup> Hosono (1978), *Nagasaki Prints and Early Copperplates*, p. 32.

<sup>200</sup> Wilkinson (1970), *Edged Weapons*, p. 46.

and front, which was filled by a decorative insert.<sup>201</sup> This original counter-guard is the first evidence of a possible source of a European influence upon the Japanese tsuba.

The rapier, a heavy weapon that was used exclusively for slashing, slowly evolved into a lighter sword — the small sword. This had a much lighter blade and, being used solely for thrusting and without the need for the overall protection of the hand, a much simpler hilt. It appeared in the third decade of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and gradually replaced the rapier.<sup>202</sup> The counter-guards of these later swords consisted of an elliptical plate or of two conjoined 'shells' and, in the collection of the Royal Armouries, there are numerous examples that demonstrate a remarkable similarity between such guards and Japanese tsuba of the auriculate type. Indeed, most European small swords of this period seem to have developed along similar lines, and all of them have identical features. Some of these guards even have a thickened rim, which may be the forerunner of the 'European swan-neck drawer handles' that have been discussed earlier (see pp. 102-103) and are a common feature on auriculate tsuba. They are invariably lightweight, and comprise a solid plate. None of them demonstrates the openwork that signals a Namban influence.

Wilkinson describes the two shell guards of 17<sup>th</sup> century small swords:

...[they] made a distinct and clear figure-of-eight shape, but in the 18<sup>th</sup> century the 'waist' tended to become wider as the spaces were filled in with decoration, and the shells were beginning to acquire the oval shape which came into fashion later. (Wilkinson (1970), *Edged Weapons*, p. 58.)

We thus begin to see the appearance of a fashion in European sword guards that is increasingly identifiable as a possible influence upon the development of the auriculate guard.

Also in the collection of the Royal Armouries are four European swords of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (IX.919, IX.1353, IX.1383 and IX.2637). Three of these are small swords with regular European blades; IX.1353 is a hanger with what appears to be a cavalry blade.<sup>203</sup> Bearing the VOC cypher, these hilts were manufactured by the Dutch East India Company in Dejima and exported thence to Europe. There has been some debate as to whether the company exclusively exported such hilts and scabbard mounts, having

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<sup>201</sup> Wilkinson (1970), *Edged Weapons*, p. 44.

<sup>202</sup> Wilkinson (1970), *ibid*, p. 52.

<sup>203</sup> Bottomley (2000), Personal Communication.

them mounted on blades and scabbards in Holland, or whether they were assembled in Dejima and exported as complete swords. Puype discusses this question in some detail and concludes, convincingly, that both routes were followed.<sup>204</sup>

Whilst these swords, with their hilts and shell-shaped counter-guards of *shakudō*, show clear signs of their Hizen origin, there are again no indications of any Namban influence upon them.

The probable influence of European swords upon the development of the auriculate sub-group may be summarised thus:

- The earliest European swords to be seen in Japan would have been rapiers, and it is unlikely that these, with their intricate basketwork hilts, had any influence on the development of the auriculate guard in Japan.
- Early in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, European swords began to feature a small, solid counter-guard that constitutes a possible early influence on this development.
- After the third decade of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, small swords would have been increasingly introduced. Many of these had shell-shaped guards and other decorative features that were to become increasingly easily identifiable as an influential source.
- No Namban designs are evident on the solid plates of these European guards. Even the openwork seen on the later, cup-shaped guards of rapiers, and intended both as a decorative and a lightening feature, is very formal, classical and two-dimensional — quite unlike the Namban concept. The appearance of this latter style of decoration on the derivative guards, with the introduction of the *taotie* and of openwork and undercutting techniques on the auricular plates, would seem to have been the result of a superadded Chinese influence. This influence may have been introduced at first hand, in China itself or, at second hand, in Japan or India.

This sequence thus places the introduction of possible European 'models' into Japan as possibly well into the 17<sup>th</sup> century — certainly after the end of the Momoyama period — and causes one to seriously question any attribution that dates

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<sup>204</sup> Puype (1996), *The Visser Collection, I (ii)*, cat. no 567, pp. 194-197.

auriculate guards earlier than this. One such guard is beautifully illustrated in a catalogue of masterpieces from the Caldwell collection. It is described as being:

... accompanied by a certified box by Sasano Masayuki and by a Tokubetsu Kisho certificate number 03, issued by the N.B.T.H.K. [The Society for the Preservation of Japanese Art Swords], dated Showa 55 (1980)... (Syz (1994), *Masterpieces from the Randolph B. Caldwell Collection: Japanese Sword Guards*, no. 34, pp. 50 and 51.)

This certificate describes it as "Momoyama period" but, in the absence of any European models in this period, should one not, for 'Momoyama', read 'Edo'? Or did the inspiration for the auriculate guard come not from the European sword but rather from another, earlier and as yet unidentified, source?

Neither does this sequence explain the enigmatic absence, in Japan, of any solid plate, shell-shaped guards that are derived from the European model and lack any evidence of this Chinese influence.

### 7.3. ALTERED NAKAGO-HITSU ON AURICULATE GUARDS

It is interesting to note the frequency with which the *seppa-dai* of all Namban guards demonstrate alterations to their original *nakago-hitsu*. Such alterations were obvious in almost every one of the tsuba examined and, in the remainder, might possibly have been present. These take the form both of copper *sekigane* and of chisel and hammer marks that all serve to alter the original outline of the *nakago-hitsu*. It should be remembered, however, that Namban tsuba were sold as *shiiremono* and that, as such, they would have initially required modification, after their purchase, before being fitted onto a sword. Thus such alterations do not always necessarily indicate the remounting of a tsuba onto a second, or subsequent, blade.

Altered *nakago-hitsu* also occur on auriculate tsuba, and these often result in a varying combination of rectangular and triangular apertures that suggests a change of use of the tsuba at some stage in its existence. Such radical alterations to the form of the *nakago-hitsu* appear to occur almost exclusively on those guards that give indications of manufacture, outside Japan, by the East India Company. They are much less common in association with a gradual adaptation to a *maru-gata* form or with decorated *seppa-dai* — both of which are considered to be indications of a later, local manufacture.

Chinese swords have flattened tangs (see Plate 11) — not unlike those of their Japanese equivalent — although they are secured in the hilt by being hammered

over the outside of the pommel. Thus the presence of a rectangular aperture on a tsuba cannot be an indication of its use on a Chinese sword. Chinese pole-arms may be fitted with guards, as may also some parrying bars (*tie jian*) and, since both of these have tangs of a rectangular form, they are a possible provenance of such guards. The mounts on Chinese weapons are invariably of cast bronze, however, and there is no evidence of the use of iron in China for such a purpose. This fact repeatedly poses questions when the putative Chinese origin of Namban tsuba is considered.

There is also considerable evidence of the manufacture, in Japan, of inferior quality pole-arms for export to Siam (now Thailand) and Korea. These, with crudely fashioned blades, rectangular *nakago* and lacking *habaki*, are superficially attractive. They are fitted with decorative mounts, which are commonly silver, and a matching set of such weapons — probably intended for equipping a group of palace guards — is in the collection of the Royal Armouries. Such items may have provided an alternative source of tsuba with rectangular *nakago-bitsu*.

When an altered *nakago-bitsu* is present in association with the normal, elongated and featureless *seppa-dai* (see Fig. 22), this may theoretically be for one of four reasons:

- (i) The original maker may have created a square *nakago-bitsu* as a 'blank' aperture on a *shūremono*, intending it for later alteration prior to fitting onto a blade. (A certain logic can be recognised in this since the common, token, triangular *nakago-bitsu* seldom adapts easily to a specific tang.)
- (ii) A tsuba with a *nakago-bitsu* for a Japanese sword may have been later modified for a Chinese pole-arm or *tie-jian*. Apart from on these three groups of weapons, simple discoid guards are otherwise seldom seen.
- (iii) The reverse of this scenario may exist wherein a square *nakago-bitsu*, originally for a pole-arm or *tie-jian*, has been subsequently modified for a sword.
- (iv) A combined *seppa-dai* may have originally been constructed in order to make the artefact suitable for use in an 'either/or' situation.

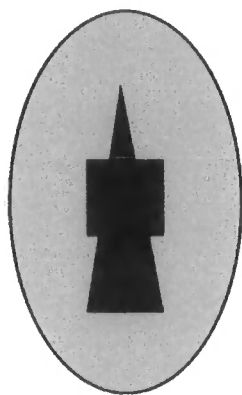


Fig. 22

Diagram of an Altered Nakago-Hitsu (a)

In 1997, at a meeting of the Northern Tō-Ken Society, a tsuba was presented which clearly demonstrated its Chinese influences. Constructed of well-forged iron and with a shiny, black patina, it featured a *taotie* at its upper and lower poles, while the auricular plates on either side consisted of undercut scrollwork. The *nakago-hitsu* was originally square and the *seppa-dai* was undecorated apart from a narrow, *usunuki-bori* box that surrounded this aperture. This box had been broached on its upper and lower sides when the *hitsu* was later converted to the conventional, triangular form typical of a Japanese tsuba (see Fig. 23). The meeting concluded that this object had probably been originally made for mounting on a Chinese pole-arm, and had subsequently been modified for use on a Japanese sword.

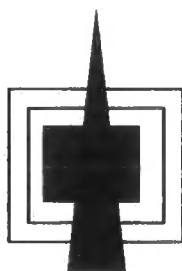


Fig. 23

Diagram of Altered Nakago-Hitsu (b)

In this instance, the presence of the surrounding, decorative box unequivocally demonstrated the chronology of the changes to the *hitsu*, but such a feature is seldom present to assist the student.

The presence of contemporaneous *hitsu-ana* is also of some assistance in clarifying the sequential modification of the *nakago-hitsu*. Presumably a guard with such a feature was originally manufactured for use on a Japanese sword and its presence, together with that of a modified *nakago-hitsu*, may be an indication of its subsequent alteration in the alternative direction — from sword to pole-arm.

#### 7.4. THE DUTCH EAST INDIA COMPANY

In 1602, the amalgamation of six separate Dutch trading companies that were involved in trade with the Far East led to the formation of the Dutch East India Company. This was a government-supported corporation with its headquarters in Amsterdam and a 17-man governing board.<sup>205</sup> Until 1799, when the Dutch government revoked its charter and took over its debts and possessions, this was the greatest mercantile corporation in the world.<sup>206</sup> After the exclusion of Spain and Portugal from Japan in 1639, this company held the sole trading rights with that region, the reason for its success there probably being the absence of the strong religious ethos that had characterised the presence of both the Portuguese and the Spanish. Although this had initially strengthened the hold in Japan of these two countries, it had finally led to their downfall.

It is true that England soon came to regret the premature closure of its agency in Hirado and had made several attempts, in 1627 and 1663, to renew its relations with Japan. In 1672, possibly because of the marriage in 1663 between Charles II of England and the Portuguese Princess Catherine of Breganzan, these were finally denied.<sup>207</sup> But that the Dutch monopoly in Japanese trade was never a secure one is demonstrated by the fact that, in 1673, the company was instructed to prepare three of its warehouses in

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<sup>205</sup> Goodman (2000), *Japan and the Dutch: 1600 – 1853*, p. 10.

<sup>206</sup> Boxer (1988), *Dutch Merchants and Mariners in Asia*, Preface.

<sup>207</sup> Boxer (1988), *Dutch Merchants and Mariners in Asia*, sect. iv, p. 166. This author goes on to describe how the *Bakafu*, having prohibited any exhibition of the cross under pain of death, presented the English with a problem in 1672 regarding their flag, depicting the cross of St George. This was eventually retained as a "mere civil distinction...having no inference to religion...". Interestingly, this same cross, defaced by Cromwell during the Commonwealth period (1649 – 1660) with the harp of Ireland, would probably have met with no such objection in Japan.

Dejima: these had been prematurely allocated to English traders, who were subsequently refused permission to land in Japan.<sup>208</sup>

The Dutch East India Company frequently marked its products with the VOC cypher of the company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie) in which the 'C', with incorrect serifs, may sometimes look like a 'G' (see Fig. 24).

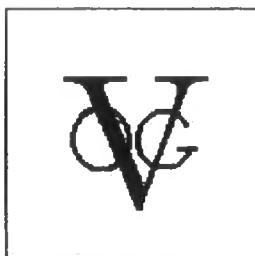


Fig. 24

Cypher of the Dutch East India Company

Auriculate guards often bear this cypher on their *seppa-dai*, commonly duplicated, and engraved in *kebori*. The upper emblem is normally seen as being 'the right way up' and the lower as inverted, the apices of the V's thus facing towards the centre of the *seppa-dai*. This is not invariably so however, the orientation occasionally being reversed. Sometimes the cypher appears as part of the decorative design on the central plate, placed between the *taotie* and the *seppa-dai*, when it should be considered simply as such. But where it is rendered in *kebori*, and would normally be hidden from sight by the *seppa* of a mounted sword, such a cypher can confidently be considered as a reliable indication of a guard's provenance.

Each of the Company's chambers had its own flag — that of the hometown, defaced with the VOC cypher and, above it, the initial of the town. Thus 'A', 'D', 'E' and 'H' represented Amsterdam, Delft, Enkhuizen and Hoorn respectively. Either an 'M' or a 'Z' above the cypher represented Zeeland (in Middelburg) or, alternatively, a 'Z' above together with an 'M' below (see Fig. 25). Only the unadorned VOC is found on tsuba of this group; to find, on a guard, a cypher with the additional detail would be a

<sup>208</sup> Boxer (1988), *Dutch Merchants and Mariner in Asia*, sect. iv, p. 165.

very informative discovery, identifying as it would the chapter involved in its manufacture.

Is the presence of the VOC cypher, in association with either a square or a triangular *nakago-hitsu*, an indication that, during their original manufacture in India, the former were made for export to China and the latter to Japan?

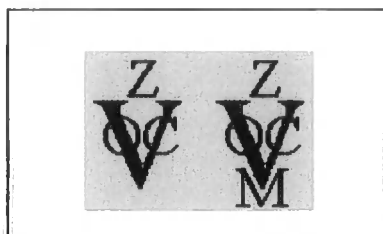


Fig. 25

Cyphers of the Zeeland Chapter of the Dutch East India Company<sup>209</sup>

Not infrequently, when both of these features are present, a VOC logo may be partially obliterated at its apices by a modified *nakago-hitsu*. This can provide a possible, and alternative, indication of the latter's original shape; but it must be realised that the simple elongation of an existing triangular *nakago-hitsu*, prior to refitting on a sword, may produce damage similar to that resulting from a change of use.

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<sup>209</sup> Sensen (1999), "Dutch East India Company chambers" in <http://www.flagcentre.com.au/fotw/flags/nl-indch.html>

**PART III**

## 8. NAMBAN IRON

The confusion that is encountered concerning the rôle played by namban iron during the study of this group of tsuba has already been referred to in the Introduction (see pp. 5 and 6).

This iron has been described by Joly as having been imported into Japan from Java and Malaya — even from as far afield as Northern India — and as being quite distinct from the native Japanese iron, both analytically and physically.<sup>210</sup> Unfortunately, by his superficially trivial insistence upon referring to it as 'Namban' Joly causes his reader to doubt whether he is referring to this generic, foreign iron in general or to some specific example of this, to which he has arbitrarily appended the upper case 'N'. Even in his translation of Appendix III of *Honcho Gunkikō*, Joly persists in referring to 'Namban Tetsu' in such a manner.<sup>211</sup>

Iron has been obtained in Japan from very early times by the smelting of red, iron-containing sand. The earliest blast furnaces in China have been dated to the first century BC<sup>212</sup> and, in Japan, the province of Kibi — divided into those of Bitchū, Bizen and Bingo at the end of the seventh century AD — was an important source of iron in the Kofun period (300 – 700 AD).<sup>213</sup> Since, because of transport considerations, iron sand was smelted in close proximity to its source, the number of provinces involved in the production of iron suggests that this iron sand was widely available throughout the country. Thus the iron and steel used by the native metalworkers was generally of local origin: it was also of a remarkable degree of purity.

Utilising their passion for numerical lists, the Japanese named 11 provinces that produced iron, judging the quality of their product as first, second, third and fourth

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<sup>210</sup> Joly (1914), *Note sur le Fer et le Style Namban*, p. 1.

<sup>211</sup> Joly and Inada (1962), *The Sword and Samé*, pp. 69-80.

The authors of this book spell *samé* with an acute accent over the final letter; this is quite unnecessary, since *samé* is a Japanese — not a French — noun.

<sup>212</sup> Barnes (1993), *China, Korea and Japan: The Rise of Civilisation in East Asia*, p. 150.

<sup>213</sup> Nandris (1999), "The Swordsmiths of Japan: Part 1" in *The Tō-Ken Society of Great Britain: Programme 184*, p. 4.

grade (see Table 4). It is likely, however, that other provinces produced iron, if only in small quantities and for purely local use.<sup>214</sup>

FIRST	SECOND	THIRD	FOURTH
Izumo Harima	Bitchu Bingo Sendai Hiroshima	Hōki Mimasaka Iwami Hyuga	Tajima

Table 4

Table Showing the Grades of Iron Produced in Japan by the Various Provinces<sup>215</sup>

### 8.1. A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO IRON TECHNOLOGY<sup>216</sup>

Pure iron, although it does not occur naturally in the pure state, has a high melting point of 1537°C: this is a temperature that is well outside those of 1100 – 1200°C that were obtainable in the furnaces of the bronze and pottery workers.

Iron is unique as a metal in that carbon is soluble in it, and the addition of relatively small quantities of carbon considerably alters its qualities. Thus wrought iron, containing less than 0.15 per cent by weight of carbon, has a melting point of 1157°C or less while cast iron, with 1.7 – 5.0 per cent of carbon, has a melting point of 1300 – 1100°C. Steel, with 0.15 – 1.7 per cent of carbon, has a melting point that falls mid-way between these two. This carburisation of iron may occur even when the metal is heated in the solid state and thus, by the addition of carbon during the smelting process, the melting point of iron is made readily attainable. This also enables the production of the three forms of the metal — wrought iron, steel and cast iron — each with its different carbon content and with quite different physical qualities.

<sup>214</sup> Joly and Inada (1962), op. cit, p. 76.

<sup>215</sup> Compiled from Joly and Inada (1962), *The Sword and Samé*, p. 74.

<sup>216</sup> During the preparation of this section, in addition to the sources quoted, Wagner's (1993) *Iron and Steel in Ancient China* has been referred to extensively.

Iron smelting was very much a cottage industry in Japan, and the traditional method of smelting remained unchanged for many centuries.<sup>217</sup> The *tatara* furnace, possibly introduced into Japan from Manchuria, by way of the Korean peninsula in the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> centuries AD,<sup>218</sup> remained the main method for its production up to the time of the Meiji Restoration, and continued to be used commercially until as late as 1925. Initially in widespread use throughout Japan by small groups of metal workers, technological improvements to the *tatara* led to their progressive centralisation. By the end of the Edo period, because of its plentiful supply of good quality iron sand and of charcoal, 80 percent of all Japanese steel was being made in the Shimane area.<sup>219</sup> Even to this day, this area is utilised to a very limited extent by the Society for the Preservation of Japanese Art Swords. Using a site that was used between 1933 and 1944 for the forges at the Yasakuni Shrine, a *tatara* was reconstructed by the Society in 1975, specifically for the production of small quantities of iron intended for the purpose of making *gendaitō* — modern sword blades.

The process of obtaining iron by the heating of iron-bearing sand was a very simple one. Iron sand was collected from the sides of mountain streams, preferably in places where the water flow was in the region of 0.5 – 0.6 metres per second.<sup>220</sup> Repeated sluicing, using straw mats, separated the heavier, iron-bearing sand, which sank to the bottom and was collected. This activity was well suited to the local peasants, since it requires:

...no special tools or skills, is outdoor work, requires less physical strength than mining and involves no danger. Thus it is well suited as a sideline production for peasant families in isolated regions. (Wagner (1985), *Dabieshan...*, p. 28.)

Very crude furnaces were used for the smelting process, consisting of V-shaped troughs built of common clay. These were rectangular in shape, measuring approximately five feet in width, 15 feet in length and four feet in height, with walls some ten inches thick.<sup>221</sup> Bottomley describes them as commonly being built into the side of a hill for ease of charging, and covered with a temporary shed to provide some shelter for the

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<sup>217</sup> Gowland (1915), *Metals and Metal Working in Old Japan*, pp. 58-60.

<sup>218</sup> Kapp and Yoshihara (1987), *The Craft of the Japanese Sword*, p. 62.

<sup>219</sup> Kapp and Yoshihara (1987), loc. cit.

<sup>220</sup> Geerts (1883), *Les Produits de la Nature Japonaise et Chinoise*, p. 527.

<sup>221</sup> Kapp and Yoshihara (1987), *The Craft of the Japanese Sword*, p. 63.

workers.<sup>222</sup> The winter months were frequently utilised for smelting, since they freed large numbers of farm workers for such work.

At the bottom of the clay walls were holes for the introduction of a blast of air through bamboo bellow pipes fitted with iron nozzles. Initially worked by hand, these bellows were modified in the Edo period to enable pumping by continuous foot action.

The completed pit was filled with alternate layers of charcoal and iron sand and was worked continually for a period of three to four days. After this time, the furnace walls were too damaged by the heat to be of any further use and were broken down; the fire raked out; and bloom was found to be adhering to the sides of the *tatara*. After this bloom had been collected, the workers reconstructed the furnace in a single day and smelting recommenced. The continuous use of the *tatara* in this way enabled seven such operations to be carried out in a month.<sup>223</sup>

Iron obtained by this process achieved a degree of purity that was far superior to that being produced in industrial quantities by factories in the West, and this purity was probably largely because of the continued use in Japan of charcoal as a fuel. As a result of afforestation around the furnaces in Europe, the use of coke had replaced that of charcoal. Oil furnaces had been introduced in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century and, by the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, oil was almost exclusively used as the source of heat in the iron industry.<sup>224</sup>

In 1889 Church investigated the chemical composition and hardness of what he described as "three typical guards....No. i was a rough guard of the latter part of the 17th century; No. ii belonged to the 18th century; No. iii to the first half of the 19th".<sup>225</sup> The results of these analyses — the former performed by Mr Arnold Philip of the Royal Engineering College and the latter by Mr Thomas Turner of the Mason College — were as follows:

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<sup>222</sup> Bottomley and Hopson (1996), *Arms and Armour of the Samurai*, pp. 60-62.

<sup>223</sup> Geerts (1883), *Les Produits de la Nature Japonaise et Chinoise*, p. 530.

<sup>224</sup> Geerts (1883), *op. cit.*, pp. 531 and 532.

<sup>225</sup> Church (1894), *Metal Work Part II: The Furniture of the Sword*, p. xxv.

Element	i	ii	iii
Carbon	0.029	0.046	0.057
Silicon	0.046	0.079	0.070
Phosphorus	0.039	0.046	0.046
Sulphur	0.003	0.006	0.004
Copper	trace	trace	trace
Iron (by difference)	99.883	99.823	99.823
Hardness	19°	15°	18°

Table 5

Analysis of Three Iron Tsuba of the 17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries  
(expressed as percentages of the total mass)

It will be seen that all of these iron samples show a remarkable degree of purity of between 99.8 and 99.9%. The percentage of phosphorus is a little higher than might be expected in a pure sample of local iron (see Table 6), but guards such as these, of the 17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, might well have been admixed with some imported iron. A high phosphorus content, in the region of 0.4 per cent, also has a direct hardening effect upon iron while at the same time inhibiting its carburisation.<sup>226</sup> It is thus also possible that phosphorus may have been intentionally added to the iron for this purpose.

The range of 0.029 – 0.057% of carbon shows all the samples to be, by definition, of wrought iron. Church remarks that, with a hardness of only 15 – 19°, all of these guards could be cut with a penknife: the equivalent hardness of a good razor-steel on the same scale would be 60°.<sup>227</sup>

**T**he *tatara* system utilised only iron sand, iron ore being used commercially in the blast furnaces, which appeared surprisingly late in Japan considering their early use in China. This system was essentially a method for the direct manufacture of wrought iron, although small quantities of steel were also produced. With adequate quantities of charcoal, however, sufficient carburisation occurred to also produce a certain amount of

<sup>226</sup> Tite (1972), *Methods of Physical Examination in Archaeology*, p. 334.

<sup>227</sup> Church (1894), *Metal Work Part II: The Furniture of the Sword*, pp. xxv-xxvi.

cast iron. Thus the *kerā* — the mass of bloom produced by the *tatara* smelting method — comprised three types of iron, each with different proportions of carbon, in different parts of the mass. The upper surface consisted of very pure iron with little or no carbon, called *tama-begane*, and it is this iron that was especially sought for the manufacture of Japanese sword blades. The centre of the *kerā* was low-carbon wrought iron, and the base *zuku* — the fraction with a high carbon content.<sup>228</sup> This *kerā*, being soft, was easily broken into small pieces by pounding or by cooling in water, and was then sorted into its component parts.

After a period of three or four days, 13,300 kilograms of iron sand and 14,000 of charcoal produced an average output of "2,000 kilos de d'acier brut, 1,500 kilos de fonte au fond de four et 700 kilos de fonte brue eoulée."<sup>229</sup> This is the equivalent of a total of 4,200 kilos of iron, of which 3,500 are *tama-bagane* and *kerā* and the remainder *zuku*. This quantity represents an output of 30% of the raw materials used. By adjusting the variables of the furnace — the nature of the sand, the intensity of the heat, the duration of the smelting operation and the amount of air produced by the bellows — the maintenance of a high output of wrought iron could be ensured.

The nomenclature of iron is far from satisfactory in its modern context. Historically based, it is derived from the early smelting methods and uses of the metal. Thus cast iron is so named because it was originally obtained as the molten metal that was run off from the furnaces and cast in moulds; wrought iron was suitable for working; and steel was a stronger metal, obtained by the addition of a small quantity of carbon to the latter.

Due to advances in metalworking, these definitions no longer apply and, since the qualities of the metal and of its two alloys are still essentially defined by their degree of carburisation (see p. 118), a new nomenclature based upon their metallurgical features and carbon content is clearly preferable. Rooted as it is in history, the present nomenclature is unlikely to be amenable to change, however.

Iron is not ideally suited for casting, and white cast iron is second only to steel in this lack of suitability. Due to its shrinkage of 4 – 5.5 per cent by volume; its tendency to evolve gases from the smelted metal, thus producing gas holes in the mouldings; and its

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<sup>228</sup> Fukusawa (1998), *Ainu Archaeology as Ethnohistory*, p. 113.

<sup>229</sup> Geerts (1883), *Les Produits de la Nature Japonaise et Chinoise*, p. 530.

extreme brittleness and hardness, rendering it unworkable with files or chisels, white cast iron is of very limited use. Conversely grey cast iron, obtained by the addition of trace elements to the smelt and by the controlled cooling of the moulding, is one of the easiest of casting metals. In modern technology, the addition of silicon to the smelt reduces the evolution of gases and the formation of gas holes in the mouldings. The resulting casts are soft and can be easily filed or chiselled, but grey cast iron is only suitable for coarse mouldings.

However, for many hundreds of years the carburisation of grey cast iron, enabling its conversion into malleable cast iron,<sup>230</sup> had been well known and such a process was described in 1734 by Emanuel Swedenborg as being familiar to Chinese and Japanese metalworkers.<sup>231</sup> While unsuited to the mass production of larger articles because of the amount of time the process demands, decarburisation would have been easily applied to the production of a limited number of smaller articles such as moulded tsuba.

The moulding of artefacts such as tsuba was thus a readily attainable process long before the popularity of the Namban group of tsuba became established. Conversely, the degree of commercialisation of the iron-producing process by this time leads one to presume that the tsuba makers would have obtained their iron from industrial manufacturers in ingot form. This would probably have already been decarburised commercially by a 'fining' process in order to convert the cast iron into its malleable cast iron form — a form well capable of being wrought into tsuba.

## 8.2. THE IMPORTATION OF IRON INTO JAPAN

The importation of iron into Japan from Korea is described in writings of the early part of the third century AD.<sup>232</sup> Local production was taking place in Japan only a few centuries later than this, however, and it is probable that a period occurred, prior to the development of self-reliance, when there was an overlapping of these two sources.

Around 1600, the Dutch started to import iron into Japan, probably with its origins in China, Korea, and India. This imported iron was valued partially for qualities

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<sup>230</sup> Interestingly, Bessemer initially adopted the term 'malleable iron' to describe the end product of the industrial decarburisation process that he introduced in 1856, but the metal obtained by this process — containing up to approximately 0.2 per cent of carbon — was, in fact, a form of steel and was subsequently renamed 'mild steel'. (Gale (1977), *Iron and Steel*, pp. 8 and 13.)

<sup>231</sup> Swedenborg (1734), *De Ferro*, p. 194. (French translation by Swedenborg (1762), pp. 115 and 116.)

<sup>232</sup> Barnes (1993), *China, Korea and Japan: The Rise of Civilisation in East Asia*, p. 216.

that differed from the native iron but also, simply because it was different. Writing in 1800, Kōzan describes how:

...steel known as NAMBAN HYŌTAN HAGANE is imported by the Dutch in gourd (HYŌTAN) shaped masses the three kinds of iron HIN (guest) TETSU, JŌ (ingot) TETSU and KEI (thorn) TETSU...are certainly not indigenous to Japan and may possibly be identical with the NAMBAN material. (Kōzan (1800), *The Manufacture of Armour and Helmets in 16C Japan*, p. 24.)

In 1930, Boxer described two ingots of imported iron in his possession. The first, a piece of *Namban-tetsu*, was of double-gourd shape and dated to the Keichō period (1596 – 1614); analysis had shown it to be of cast iron. The second, a long, oval-shaped ingot of *Go-tetsu* of a similar period — the *kanji* for 'Go' being that for the Wu province of China — was shown to be of steel.<sup>233</sup>

In a publication in 1909, Joly referred to a tsuba that bore the inscription 'Namban Go Tetsu Wo Motte'. The *kanji* for 'Go' in this instance was not that for China but for the number 'five'.<sup>234</sup> This indicated that five different kinds of metal — *Rio-tetsu* (bright iron), *Ren-tetsu* (wrought iron), *Kataki-tetsu* (hard iron), *Nebaki-tetsu* (tough iron) and *Yawarakanaru-tetsu* (soft iron) — were mixed to make the tsuba in question.<sup>235</sup>

These three references would all seem to indicate that the term 'namban iron' was used in a generic sense and referred not to any specific type of foreign iron but rather, in general, to a variety of such irons.

Steel was a consistent import into Japan in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, both by the Dutch and the English. Jacques Specx of the Dutch East India Company, visiting the shōgunal court for the first time in 1610, is reported as having presented Tokugawa Ieyasu with 200 ingots of steel and Tokugawa Hidetada with 100 pieces.<sup>236</sup> Cock's diary makes frequent references to the importation of steel into Japan, both from India and from England:

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<sup>233</sup> Boxer (1930), *European Influences on Japanese Sword Fittings: 1543 – 1853*, p. 177.

<sup>234</sup> Boxer (1930), loc. cit.

<sup>235</sup> Kozan, "Katchu Seisakuben" cited in Joly and Inada (1962), *The Sword and Samé*, p. 75.

<sup>236</sup> Münsterburg (1896), *Japans Auswärtiger Handel von 1542 bis 1854*, p. 175.

On May 22, 1621, the Dutch and English made a joint presentation which included '1 faggott of steele' to the Daimyō of Satsuma...and on May 23 the English presented two visiting...Shōgunal commissioners with '2 faggottes bar steele'. (Cock's "Diary", quoted by Boxer (1930 – 31), *European Influence on Japanese Sword Fittings: 1543 – 1853*, p. 178.)

Another author, writing under the same name and initials as C.R. Boxer but almost 60 years later, lists the merchandise that was traded with Japan by the Dutch East India Company between the years 1772 and 1773 and these lists make interesting reading. Included among these exports were the expected large quantities of gold and of "refined bar-copper, course [sic] copper and copper cash", together with porcelain and lacquer-ware.<sup>237</sup> The imports included tin; the anticipated large quantities of silks and of various spices; English cloth and Spanish leather; together with ray-fish skins, presumably for use in the preparation of *same* for sword hilts. There appears to have existed, also, an almost insatiable need for quicksilver — surely this was not used solely for mercuric gilding and silvering processes — but, surprisingly, iron in its ingot form is not mentioned.<sup>238</sup> Admittedly, random articles of iron such as "anchor stocks" are listed and these might have been imported with a view to their smelting, and recycling.

The only conclusion that may be drawn from these lists is that, during this short, specific period of trade with Japan, iron imports were relatively insignificant — if they existed at all. Coincidentally, the concurrent absence of silver among the exports lends support to the suggestion that Japan had, by this time, become seriously depleted in this metal as a result of her trade with Europe.

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, iron imports were considerable. Geerts reports that, in spite of the abundance of local iron deposits, Japan produced only 5,000 tons of iron in 1882 and imported an average of 11,000 tons per annum over the preceding ten years.<sup>239</sup> This reliance upon trade, mainly with England and Belgium, he attributes in part to "le mauvais état des chemins...dans les districts mineurs".<sup>240</sup>

References to the use of this foreign iron began to appear on artefacts. Sword tangs of the 18<sup>th</sup> century often bear such inscriptions, and Fuller and Gregory describe

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<sup>237</sup> Boxer (1988), *Dutch Merchants and Mariners in Asia*, Appendix IV, pp. 195-199.

<sup>238</sup> Boxer (1988), *ibid*, Appendix III, pp. 184-194.

<sup>239</sup> Geerts (1883), *Les Produits de la nature Japonaise et Chinoise*, p. 489.

<sup>240</sup> Geerts (1883), *ibid*, p. 540.

two such examples.<sup>241</sup> One is inscribed 'Tan Namban Tetsu Ken Kore Wo' ('forged this sword with foreign iron'); the other 'Wo Motte Namban Tetsu' ('using foreign iron'). Similarly inscribed are three tsuba illustrated in the Oeder catalogue, none of which demonstrates any evidence whatsoever of foreign influence upon its design.<sup>242</sup> Two of these are inscribed 'Wo Motte Kōmō Tetsu Kore' ('this was made using foreign iron'); the other 'Namban Tetsu Iru Kore'. Interestingly, the word 'Iru' is commonly found on bronzes and, being translated as 'to heat' or 'put into', its presence here may thus be an indication that a casting method was used to create this tsuba. Because of the extensive decorative inlay that would have been required for its completion, its Soten style did not easily lend itself to such a process, however.

The question of to what extent namban iron was used for the manufacture of Namban tsuba is presently an impossible one to answer. Unfortunately these tsuba bear no such convenient inscriptions, and the use of foreign iron in their manufacture must be identified solely by their examination — a very difficult task. The absence of any pieces that might be used as reference material also presents considerable problems. Additionally, the extensive *sukashi* work over the entire surface of the work renders impractical any detailed visual examination of the base metal. Such an examination is only possible on unworked areas — unornamented *seppa-dai*, *mimi*, and the interior surfaces of the various *hitsu* — and is simplified in those relatively uncommon examples with heavier rims, generally a feature of earlier tsuba. But one is left with the conclusion that, at the present time, the isolation of any tsuba of this group that are made of foreign iron is not a feasible proposition.

The suggestion that Namban tsuba made of this foreign iron have a 'moist black' patina and a 'fibrous' texture is purely apocryphal. Such appearances are equally likely to be due either to differences in the manufacturing techniques, in the patination processes used or, more probably, to a combination of both factors.

Professor Tawara Kuniichi's researches, in the early 1900s, into the composition of samples of namban iron preserved in Japan led him to the conclusion that there were two distinct types but, unfortunately, his methods are not revealed:

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<sup>241</sup> Fuller and Gregory (1985), *The Oshigata Book*, pp. 56 and 142.

<sup>242</sup> Vautier (1915), *Sammlung Georg Oeder*, pp. 58-59 and 90, nos. 477, 478 and 758.

- (a) Namban iron in the form of flat, elliptical ingots (and of gourds), [that] is identical to Wootz.<sup>243</sup>
- (b) Namban iron in the form of bars [that] came from an unknown foreign source".

(Joly (1914), *Note sur le Fer et le Style Namban*, p. 11)

Both of these differed from the locally produced metal in the extremely high degree of purity of the local product, wherein the total percentage of impurities may be as low as 0.1 – 0.2 per cent. Of particular significance is the quantity of phosphorus present in the various samples, which may be from four to ten times higher in the imported iron (see Table 6).<sup>244</sup> Interestingly, it will be noted that the degree of carburisation in both of these namban samples is in the region of 1.6 per cent and that both are thus, by definition, of steel.

ELEMENTS	LOCAL IRON	NAMBAN IRON	
		(a)	(b)
Carbon	?	1.60	1.58
Manganese	?	0.009	0.017
Silicon	?	0.08	0.016
Phosphorus	0.001 - 0.003	0.076	0.011
Sulphur	?	0.003	trace
Iron	99.8 - 99.9	98.243	98.376

Table 6

Table Showing the Presence of Impurities in the Various Types of Iron,<sup>245</sup>  
(expressed as percentages of the total mass)

<sup>243</sup> Wootz is the name given to a type of steel that was produced in northern India, its carbon content of 1 – 2 per cent being attained by the decarurisation of cast iron (Tite (1972), *Methods of Physical Examination in Archaeology*, p. 241).

<sup>244</sup> Joly and Inada (1962), *The Sword and Samé*, p. 69.

<sup>245</sup> Compiled from unknown publication by Tawara (1913) and cited by Joly (1914) in *Note sur le Fer et le Style Namban*, p. 1.

It is reasonable to suppose that tsuba manufactured in China or in India were made of the appropriate, foreign iron. Whether either, or both, of these imported irons actually featured in the manufacture of locally made Namban tsuba may, in the absence of scientific analysis, never be definitely confirmed — this in spite of apocryphal assertions in the literature as to its use.<sup>246</sup>

Hancock, in his catalogue of the collection of tsuba in the Birmingham Museum, lists 65 Namban tsuba, of which 43 are acceptable as such by our current definition; the remainder falls into various groups that include, amongst others, Hizen and Būshū. Of these 43, he selects four (690 '30, 701 '30, 718 '30 and 725 '30) as being: "Made with southern barbarian iron of great hardness".<sup>247</sup> Unfortunately, the most careful inspection of these four tsuba fails to reveal any apparent reason for Hancock's selection of these, specifically, as being the ones made of namban iron.

It is possible that namban iron truly had qualities that were especially suited to this style of metalworking. Be that as it may, it seems highly probable, in view of the extensive importation of foreign iron into Japan during the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and the mass production of Namban tsuba, that many — if not most — of these contain a variable proportion of this foreign iron. The acknowledgement of this premise, together with the absence of any realistic database of the group, suggests that the question 'were Namban tsuba made with namban iron?' is presently best answered by the reply 'probably always, to a lesser or greater extent'.

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<sup>246</sup> Gunsaulus (1923), *Japanese Sword-Mounts in the Collections of the Field Museum*, p. 74.

Young (unpublished manuscript), *A Handbook of the Tsuba and Sword Mounts of Old Japan*, p. 111.

<sup>247</sup> Hancock (n.d.), *Catalogue of Tsuba in the Permanent Collection of the City of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery*, pp. 113-118.

## 9. THE APPLICATION OF CASTING METHODS TO TSUBA

### 9.1. CASTING TECHNIQUES

Casting in metal is a process whereby an object is created by the pouring of molten metal into a preformed receptacle. The resulting object, on cooling, takes up the form of the container, or cast, into which it was poured. Von Shroeder divides the various methods of casting into three main groups; these he calls the 'open' form, the 'closed' (or multiple) form and the 'lost' (or lost wax) form.<sup>248</sup> The first of these, and the earliest form of casting, probably involved the use of a natural, or artificially made, hollow in a stone.<sup>249</sup> At a later stage, the development of a two-piece mould would enable the casting of objects by the closed form, with two properly finished sides and a resultant reduction in the amount of hand finishing required. The third method has traditionally been called the 'lost wax process', but von Shroeder comments, "the only substance which is not lost is the wax, which can be collected and subsequently used again and again".<sup>250</sup> On this basis, he prefers the term 'lost form' to the traditional one of 'lost wax'.

The closed method, using a clay piece-mould technique, was known in China prior to the Shang dynasty and hollow vessels of cast bronze, such as *ding* and *you* — dating from the Zhou dynasty (1122 – 249 BC) — may be seen in many museum collections. It was also by such a method that musical instruments, weapons, mirrors, girdle hooks and the various types of hollow vessels, both for religious and secular use, were produced.<sup>251</sup> The lost-form process occurs relatively late in Chinese bronze casting technology, being more extensively used in the Near East. Not surprisingly, evidence exists in Japan of the extensive and prolonged use of both methods of casting, the lost-form process again being a relatively late development.

The metal used for such work was invariably bronze, which was subsequently patinated, both artificially and as a result of burial in tombs. Not only did this alloy adapt admirably to casting techniques; its imperishable nature also made it suitable for the making of objects that were to be handed down as family heirlooms or were

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<sup>248</sup> von Schroeder (1981), *Indo-Tibetan Bronzes*, pp. 14 and 15.

<sup>249</sup> Koop (1935), *Bronzes and Cloisonné Enamels*, p. 74.

<sup>250</sup> von Schroeder (1981), *op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>251</sup> Koop (1935), *op. cit.*, pp. 76-82.

intended for religious purposes. The other soft metal alloys, such as *sentoku* and *shakudō*, are equally suitable as casting materials. Iron also can produce satisfactory castings, provided that care is taken to avoid the bubbling and shrinkage that readily defile unskilled productions.

The method of casting that concerns us here is the 'cire perdue', or 'lost form', technique. Feddersen describes this process, whereby a replica of the required object is created in beeswax.<sup>252</sup> Where the object to be cast is large, the high cost of the beeswax and of the casting metal — together with the problems associated with casting large, solid objects — necessitates the production of a core that approximates to the shape of the object to be cast.

Protruding wax bars are attached to the wax replica, which is then encased in a cast consisting of successive layers of fine, foundry sand, the ends of these bars being left protruding beyond the cast. The wax is melted out, the attached bars creating a variable number of air vents, the number of which depends upon the intricacy of the piece being cast. Molten metal is poured into the space left by the wax, while the air is expelled through these vents. When the sand mould is broken, a highly detailed replica of the wax model is thus obtained.

This method is capable of producing a finished object of such decorative detail that very little hand finishing is required. Only the removal of the protruding metal bars resulting from the vent holes, and such refinements as inlay and polishing, are necessary.

Unfortunately the production of a model in beeswax, preparatory to the casting process, is a work-intensive and highly skilled job. Moreover, the wax model needs to be remade each time, being necessarily destroyed by the process. This drawback can, however, be readily overcome by the production of a matrix, which may be of a more easily worked material such as wood. Such a matrix can be repeatedly used and requires no special skills for its production. By pressing warm pieces of wax onto this sample image, a negative matrix may be created and, by repeating this process, a positive impression obtained from this. In such a manner, the two faces of a tsuba could then be joined together and used to create a wax replica of the original.

Because of the high output and the low production costs of this group of tsuba, it is probable that such a method as this was the one used for the production of many Namban tsuba.

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<sup>252</sup> Feddersen (1962), *Japanese Decorative Art*, p. 95.

Casting has never been considered to be an inferior craft in Japan, and some cast artefacts are acknowledged to be great works of art. Temple and hand bells are greatly valued and the mirror (*kagami*) especially treasured — indeed one is included in the Three Sacred Regalia of Japan. It is apparent that casting techniques were not considered to be necessarily inferior to those of hand forging and it is more likely to be a question of 'horses for courses' — bronze is for casting and iron is for forging. Certainly its readily attainable melting point; ease and accuracy in casting; and adaptability to post-casting refinements make bronze an ideal metal for this purpose. Conversely, iron is only of limited value in this respect.

## 9.2. THE CASTING OF TSUBA

It is acknowledged by Japanese authorities that cast tsuba exist. *Kagami-shi* tsuba — supposedly manufactured in the mid 13<sup>th</sup> to the mid 14<sup>th</sup> centuries by mirror makers — are a highly appreciated group,<sup>253</sup> and in the *Illustrated Catalogues of the Tokyo National Museum* is an illustration of a tsuba by Ietsugu that is described as a "cast copper guard of the 18<sup>th</sup> century".<sup>254</sup>

In spite of this, there appears to be a reluctance to acknowledge that the casting of *kodōgu* was accepted generally as a route to their manufacture. Joly, in a quite uncharacteristically reticent manner, ventures tentatively into this subject while discussing later imitations of the Kamakura type of tsuba:

... which often give one the impression of malleable ironwork rather than of true chasing. This may appear a bold statement to some, but I would beg readers to remember that *Yamagane*<sup>255</sup> tsuba were cast and that much of the Ashikaga work in relief exhibits accuracy of symmetry on opposite sides which may be attributed to the use of moulds... (Joly and Tomita (1916), *Japanese Art and Handicraft, Part II*, p. 110.)

Indeed, it is difficult to believe that metalworkers of the *tsubakō*'s skill would persist in 'doing things the hard way' if there were an easier, and equally satisfactory, route to the same finished product. It must be acknowledged that such 'shortcuts' are more likely to have been practised by the *machibori* than by the *iebori*.

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<sup>253</sup> Sasano and Saito (1982), *Tosogū nō Kanshō*, pp. 33-36.

<sup>254</sup> Tokyo National Museum (1979), *Illustrated Catalogues of Tokyo National Museum: Sword Guard*, p. 166, no. 530.

<sup>255</sup> *Yamagane*: a crude, unrefined copper.

Better quality castings, in respect of finer surface detail; a reduction in bubbling; and the elimination of air spaces, could be ensured by the application of pressure during the moulding process. This is easily achieved either with steam — created by the application to the molten casting, under pressure, of a wet pad — or by the use of a simple centrifugal system. It is possible that such technical refinements were combined with the lost-form casting process for the production of some Namban tsuba.

This may be an opportune time to review the statement that one of the Yagyū craftsmen, at the request of a fencing master, "put a number of guards in a mortar and pounded them as hard as he could": the ones that were left unmarred were then selected for use.<sup>256</sup> This statement has been generally discounted because of doubt concerning its veracity and the belief that the Japanese warrior did not rely upon the strength of his tsuba for his defence. There are a number of factors in support of this latter supposition:

- Joly states that "both before and probably during the Gempei period" (1160 – 1185 AD) the use of tsuba of black lacquered leather or rawhide was popular.<sup>257</sup> These persisted as late as the 16<sup>th</sup> century, predominantly for use on *tachi*, but Harris illustrates an *uchigatana* of the 16<sup>th</sup> century with a leather tsuba.<sup>258</sup> There appears to be some doubt as to whether the name '*neri tsuba*', applied to such mounts, refers to those made entirely of leather or also to those with additional metallic support — either external as *dai-seppa*, internal as a strengthening insert; or as *mimi*.<sup>259</sup> Certainly, the first group can have afforded little protection to the owner, and very few have survived the passage of time.
- In the early 1600s, Yagyū Jubei Mitsutoshi, the most famous of all the Yagyū warriors, defended his choice of a 'soft' copper tsuba by stating that he had "never yet relied on a sword guard for protection".<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Sasano (1972), *Early Japanese Sword Guards: Sukasbi Tsuba*, pp. 17 and 18.

<sup>257</sup> Joly (1912), *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Collection of G.H. Naunton, Esq.*, p. xix.

<sup>258</sup> Harris and Ogasawara (1990), *Swords of the Samurai*, pp. 70 and 71.

<sup>259</sup> Joly and Tomita (1916), *Japanese Art and Handicraft, Part II*, pp. 98 and 101.

<sup>260</sup> Sasano (1972), *op. cit.*, p. 17.

- In the light of the respect in which the owner held both blade and tsuba, it is highly improbable that they would have been permitted to clash, the one against the other, during conflict. Indeed, while it is common to find chipped edges on blades, possibly resulting from the conventional use of the opponent's *mune* — the ridged back of the blade — for parrying blows, it is most exceptional to find evidence of sword cuts on tsuba. Nevertheless, one such tsuba is illustrated in a publication that illustrates a selection of sword guards from the collection of the Vancouver Museum.<sup>261</sup> It is described as having broken bars on the left side of the *seppa-dai*, due to a sword cut.
- Joly states:
 

Tsuba were never entirely looked upon as a potential protection by the swordsman, the tip of the blade<sup>262</sup> was the most important part of the whole weapon, and it acted both for attack and parry. (Joly (1912), *Catalogue of the Naunton Collection*, p. xix.)
- Uesugi Kenshin (1530 – 1578) popularised among his followers the carrying of swords with *koshirae* of the *aikuchi* type, with no tsuba at all.<sup>263</sup>

Newman believed that the main function of the tsuba is to maintain the balance of the sword, to adjust its centre of gravity and to angle the *tsuka* away from the bearer's body in order to enable an "unhurried and graceful grasp to be made". He goes on to conclude:

...tsuba are known in the West as sword guards and, as long as we remember the real facts, that is as good a name as any other. (Newman and Ryerson (1964), *Japanese Art: A Collector's Guide*, p. 229.)

Can this supposed action by one of the Yagyū craftsmen be viewed rather as a method of eliminating from a selection of tsuba those that had been moulded instead of forged and, perhaps, taken as confirmation that the casting of tsuba was acknowledged to exist?

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<sup>261</sup> The Vancouver Museum (1993), *The Soul of the Samurai: a Selection of Sword Guards from the Vancouver Museum*, no. 31, pp. 77 and 116.

<sup>262</sup> By 'the tip of the blade' the author is unlikely to mean the *kissaki* — the point section — but rather the *monouchi* — that part of a blade where the maximum force is created when the blade is in motion; this is an area extending some 15 cm proximal to the tip of the blade of a long sword.

<sup>263</sup> Satō (1978), *The Japanese Sword*, p. 83, pl. 53.

It is certain that moulded tsuba, being more brittle than their forged counterparts, would be more likely to have been damaged by this pounding in a mortar.

### 9.3. THE CASTING OF NAMBAN TSUBA

Theoretically, Namban tsuba are ideally suited to manufacture by the 'lost form' method of casting. They were largely mass-produced *shiiemono*, and the convoluted undercutting and scrollwork that characterise this group are easily reproducible by such casting techniques. Indeed, to produce such work by a hand-carving process could be considered technically difficult and economically impractical.

But, having reached this conclusion by deduction, is it possible to identify, by the examination of examples of this group, any indications of the use of casting methods in their production? Such indications will include the presence of one or more of the following features when the tsuba are examined under a bright — preferably tungsten — light, and a magnification of at least  $\times 20$  — preferably  $\times 30$ .<sup>264</sup> During such an examination, it will be appreciated that the more extensive the hand finishing used, the more difficult it will be to find evidence of prior casting.

- The surface of a cast guard will give the impression of granularity and porosity, and 'sand bubbles' may be present. Conversely, the heating and hammering processes involved during the working of the metal leave a surface that is relatively smooth and featureless on magnification. Such granularity is most easily seen on plain, undecorated surfaces, but facets of the chisel-work, where cast, will demonstrate a similar porous surface. Where an inscription on the *seppa-dai* has been cast, similar features will be seen on the facets of the *kanji*: such features are lost on chiselled surfaces of the metal, which are smooth.

Where these features are present, they are sometimes considerably diminished — but never completely lost — over the surface of the *seppa-dai*. It is possible that this is the result of the common heating and hammering of this area in order to effect alterations to the *nakago-hitsu*, prior to its fitting onto a sword.

- Where chiselling has occurred, the edges of this are sharp and clean, and are sometimes seen to be burred. The casting of such features results in a loss of this 'crispness'.

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<sup>264</sup> Dodd (2001), Personal Communication.

This loss of crispness may also be seen when the cross-hatching of the base in preparation for the gold overlay of *nunome-zōgan* is examined. Hancock asserts that the secure attachment of this overlay is due to the minute iron 'teeth' that are formed at the intersection of these incised lines.<sup>265</sup> While the cross-hatching is easily reproducible by casting, these additional 'teeth' are not, and their absence may be partially responsible for the frequent separation, in this group, of such overlay.

- The chiselling of a relatively hard surface such as iron will show a 'stepping' — this is caused by the resistance of the metal against the force used to work it — and curves so produced will not show the smooth regularity that is produced by the incision of a wax matrix. Additionally, the base of such incisions may be squared as a result of the use of a blunt instrument to model the wax.
- Any featureless surfaces of a cast tsuba will demonstrate a smooth irregularity, with an absence of any hammer marks.
- 'Feathering' may be seen on the opposing surfaces of any openwork; its presence is an absolute indication of casting.
- The examination of the deeper fissures may reveal the presence of granules of the 'investment' material, representing remnants of the mould retained in the fissures of the casting. Occasionally, small clusters of a carmine-red material are seen but, if this is such material, it is not known why it should be red in colour, since fine foundry sand was supposedly used for the moulds. Subsequent patination processes may possibly explain this staining, but the Assistant Conservator at the Laing Art Gallery has raised the possibility of this material being remnants of jewellers' rouge:<sup>266</sup> its granularity and colour lend credence to this suggestion. Whatever its composition, this material is extremely difficult to remove.
- Where a tsuba has been worked, the facets of any *hitsu* will be flat and at right angles to its surface. This is due to the flattening effect of the files used to smooth them, and the use of these files also produces a vertical texturing of their surface. When cast, these facets tend to present a rounded surface and often have horizontal, rather than vertical, texturing.

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<sup>265</sup> Hancock (n.d.), *Catalogue of Tsuba in the Permanent Collection of the City of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery*, p. 27.

<sup>266</sup> Wilson (2001), Personal Communication.

The initial study of the tsuba examined during the preparation of this thesis identified several that are obviously the result of a casting process.

Tsuba O 384, in the collection of the Oriental Museum at Durham, demonstrates a number of features that indicate such a process. Its symmetrical design of affrontées dragons, with a *tama* jewel above and a swastika motif below, is in a very low relief and has no visible chisel marks on its surface. The tsuba measures 6.9 cm in height × 6.4 cm in width, and the openwork consists of rather simple perforations. Some 'feathering' is present in these, and there is a complete absence of any undercutting. The tsuba is only 0.4 cm in thickness and has the unusually low weight of 84 grams, compared with an average weight of 102 grams. The appearance of the metal, both in its colouration and the shine on its unpatinated areas, is that of a brown bronze. Surprisingly, this tsuba reacts strongly to a magnetic force, but Wagner describes a precedent, occurring seven to six centuries BC in Southern China, for the admixture of as much as 34 per cent of iron to bronze, possibly as a method of increasing the supply of the more expensive alloy.<sup>267</sup> Iron was also a common inclusion in naturally occurring copper ore<sup>268</sup> and either of these factors, applying in Japan in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, may explain the magnetic properties of this bronze tsuba.

A very similar example is found in tsuba J 10317, from the Higgenbotham collection, in the Laing Art Gallery. This is identical to the preceding tsuba in the details of its design and manufacture, but is considerably smaller in its size — measuring only 6.2 cm in height × 5.8 cm in width. It is equally thin, weighs only 58 grams and is clearly made of iron.

Tsuba 723 '30 in the Birmingham Museum's collection is a sad example of an obviously cast tsuba. It has already been recognised that the difficulty in identifying such examples is proportionate to the amount of trouble that has been taken over the finishing of the artefacts after their casting is completed. The smoothing of rough edges; the addition of modelling and of *kebori* detail to the exposed surfaces; and the cross-hatching preparatory to *nunome* inlay are all work-intensive exercises, calling for a variable amount of skills. In this tsuba, none of these have been exercised — roughened edges persist where two matrices were joined; menisci of cast metal remain,

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<sup>267</sup> Wagner (1993), *Iron and Steel in Ancient China*, pp. 129-131.

<sup>268</sup> Barnes (1993), *China, Korea and Japan: The Rise of Civilisation in East Asia*, p. 149.

creating some blind openings; there is a complete absence of any surface modelling; and random splashes of gold overlay suffice for its decoration.

The examination — with a light and with powerful magnification — of a corpus of Namban tsuba leads one to the surprising conclusion that a very high proportion of them are the result of a casting process.

In order to confirm this conclusion, a group of 29 arbitrarily selected Namban tuba was examined and each tsuba was graded according to the presence of four indicators of casting, as follows:

1. The presence of surface granularity and porosity, with or without 'sand bubbles'.
2. The presence of investment material — a residue of a red, granular nature was discounted.
3. The presence of 'feathering' in the openwork.
4. A lack of crispness in the incised areas.

Several of the other possible indicators were excluded from this exercise on the basis that they are likely to occur only infrequently in this group. Thus, featureless surfaces are seldom seen on Namban tsuba as, with the exception of *nakago-bitsu* and *ryō-bitsu*, are discrete *bitsu*. Commonly, the first of these two exceptions are subjected to later modifications, and the second are later additions.

It will be appreciated that 1, 2 and 3 are absolute indications of casting. Conversely, 4 is a relative indication; it is a matter of individual judgement and, therefore, a much more subjective decision. These findings were entered on data sheets (see p. 187), and the results are shown on Table 7.

It is seen from this exercise that every one of the tsuba of this group that was examined demonstrated clear evidence of casting. Clearly, it cannot be concluded from this study that all Namban tsuba are produced as a result of a casting process, but it does demonstrate that, in any collection of Namban tsuba, a very large proportion of them will be moulded.

This finding may lead students to the conclusion that such results are not surprising, merely reflecting the generally accepted concept of this group as being mass-produced and of poor quality. However, the subsequent examination by the author of

his own collection, comprising a wide range of qualities within assorted groups of tsuba, also indicated a surprisingly high proportion of moulded tsuba therein. It is therefore suggested that the high incidence of moulded tsuba in the Namban group should, perhaps, rather be considered to be an indication for the similar examination of other groups of tsuba as a comparative study.

Such a study would be strictly non-invasive, but one of its limitations would be the need for it to be carried out on museum artefacts of a recognised high quality in order to obviate the accusation that any pieces found to be cast were, a priori, of an inferior quality.

TSUBA	INDICATORS OF CASTING			
	1	2	3	4
27 15 1934	+	-	+	+
212 15 1937	+	+	+	+
296 15 1936	+	-	+	+
482 15 1951	+	-	-	+
J 7626	+	-	+	+
J 7633	+	-	+	+
J 7637	+	+	+	+
J 7639	+	-	+	+
J 7640	+	-	+	+
J 7644	+	-	+	+
J 7645	+	-	+	+
J 10202	+	-	+	+
J 10203	+	-	+	+
J 10204	+	-	+	+
J 10206	+	-	+	+
J 10208	+	-	+	+
J 10211	+	-	+	+
J 10213	+	-	+	+
J 10222	+	-	+	+
J 10223	+	-	+	+
J 10225	+	+	+	+
J 10227	+	-	+	+
J 10228	+	-	+	+
J 10229	+	+	+	+
J 10231	+	-	+	+
J 10316	+	-	+	+
J 10321	+	-	+	+
J 10322	+	-	+	+
J 10518	+	-	+	+

Table 7  
Table Showing the Presence of  
Indicators of Casting in an Arbitrary  
Group of Namban Tsuba

## 10. ADDITIONAL NAMBAN KODOGU

### 10.1. DAISHO PAIRS OF TSUBA

It will have become apparent to the reader that this work is focused on individual tsuba, and that it is largely by these that the Namban group of metal workers is recognised. A true *daishō* pair of matching tsuba is a rare finding in any school; even those labelled, by the oxymoronic phrase, as an 'associated pair' are uncommon. Amongst Namban sword guards, either finding is exceptional, and the reasons for this are cause for thought.

The absence of inscriptions in this group has already been noted and, although the identification of a matched pair of tsuba is not dependent upon the presence of matched inscriptions, these may be of help where doubt would otherwise exist. It may also be that such a large number of superficially similar tsuba were produced by this school that matched pairs, having become separated during their passage through various salesrooms and dealers, they have never been identified and reunited. But it is more likely to be because such pairs were simply neither sought nor made.

Having noted this scarcity, it is appropriate to comment upon the existence of a *daishō* pair of Namban tsuba in the collection of the Royal Armouries in Leeds. This pair, XXVI.S 158 and 159, comprises a *katana* and *wakizashi* tsuba of hexagonal form, measuring 7.4 cm in height × 6.6 cm in width; and 7.0 cm in height × 6.4 cm in width respectively. They have beaded *mimi* and unsigned *seppa-dai* of a modified rectangular form. The design of the *hira* is that of the ubiquitous affrontées dragons, and both the undercutting and the gold overlay are of good quality. The four *hitsu-ana*, although irregular in outline, follow the design of the *hira* so closely that they are almost certainly original (see Plate 8).

In spite of the duplication of the *hitsu-ana*, this is apparently a true *daishō* pair. They are, however, unusual in their similarity of size and, when plotted on a scatter plot of height/width (see Fig. 6), both fall well within the main scatter area representing *katana* tsuba. If it were not known to be one of a pair, the smaller of the two would probably have been identified, on the basis of its size, as for a *katana* rather than for a *wakizashi*. This leads one to wonder whether the apparent dearth of Namban tsuba for the smaller swords might possibly be explained by their relatively larger size.

Another matched pair of tsuba is illustrated in WM Hawley's photographic record of tsuba in the hands of Southern Californian collectors. Making due allowance

for the very poor quality of the photographs, tsuba nos. 617 and 618 — in the possession of Hartley at the time of publication — appear to differ only in their size.<sup>269</sup> They are primitive in appearance, and the crude openwork design, featuring what are probably affrontées dragons with a *tama* jewel, is symmetrical. The *mimi* are wide, square and bear a *kebori* fretwork design. Once again, the tsuba for both the *daitō* and the *shōtō* have what appear to be original *ryō-bitsu*.

No conclusions can be reached as to the absolute size of these tsuba, since Hartley gives no indication of the scale of the photographs, but they are probably full size — the illustrations measure 7.6 cm in height × 7.4 cm in width; and 7.0 cm in height × 6.8 cm in width respectively. The relative sizes of the *wakizashi* and *katana* illustrations will be constant, however, and at 1:1.2 this is considerably smaller than that of Gunsaulus' general group of 1:1.6.<sup>270</sup> Once again we see a reduction of the differential in size between these two groups of Namban tsuba.<sup>271</sup>

## 10.2. EN SUITE MOUNTING

In this context, it is even more unusual to identify an en suite set of tsuba and *fuchi-gashira* in the Namban style. Those *fuchi* and *kashira* that can be confidently identified as Namban are generally of iron and, while exhibiting the various overall designs that we have seen on tsuba of this group, are often rendered in *shishiai-bori* — sunken relief — on a solid background and with an absence of perforations. Gold overlay features quite prominently and, unsurprisingly, the *fuchi* are without inscription.

Namban *fuchi-gashira* are usually conventional in shape, although the artistic licence that characterises this group resulted in some unconventional designs, such as *hachi-gata* (helmet shaped) *kashira*, and *tobi-gata* ('door groove' shaped) and *tsuboguchi-gata* ('jar mouth' shaped) *fuchi*. The *terjō-gane*<sup>272</sup> of *fuchi* of this group are commonly of iron rather than of the generally much-preferred copper.

Taking into account the rather 'flashy' appearance of these mounts, with their profuse gold decoration, one presumes that the *kashira* were probably fitted with

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<sup>269</sup> Hawley (1968), *Tsubas in Southern California*, p. 126.

<sup>270</sup> Gunsaulus (1923), *Japanese Sword Mounts in the Collections of the Field Museum*, p. 33.

<sup>271</sup> See pp. 38 and 41 of this present article for further comments regarding these relative sizes.

<sup>272</sup> *Terjō-gane*: the base of the *fuchi*, generally of copper, with a triangular opening for the tang of the blade.

copper-gilt *shitodo-me* — the eyelets on either side of the *kashira* for the accommodation of the hilt binding.

There is a pair of *fuchi-gashira* in the author's collection (WAY 255.29.1939) that conforms to the Namban concept. These are in a polished, russet iron with a matching, *shishiai-bori* depiction of a three-toed dragon amid *karakusa* vines. The eyes and flamiform appendages of the dragon have a gold overlay decoration. The *kashira* is helmet shaped, with a solid central crest and a grooved lower rim — the *shitodo-me* are missing. The *fuchi*, with matching, grooved upper and lower rims, is of conventional shape and has an iron *tenjō-gane* that is uninscribed.

Plates 13 and 14 illustrate a *fuchi* and a *kodzuka*, both of iron and of conventional Namban design. The former is a mass of *karakusa* scrolls and is set on a removable gold lining that shows off the openwork to advantage. The latter is a plate depicting skilfully carved dragons amid scrollwork. It is set in a gold case that again shows off the openwork. Similar details feature on a pair of *fuchi-gashira* and on an unusually large *kodzuka* — an *ō-kodzuka* — both to be seen in the Copenhagen Museum of Decorative Art (III.T.69.22 and III.U.n/a). Both components of the former pair are similarly set on removable gold linings, and the latter is again gold-cased.

In the context of paired *fuchi* and *tsuba*, an octagonal Namban *tsuba* in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum (M.765-1931) demonstrates a very unusual feature. The oval *seppa-dai* has been hollowed out on its *omote* surface, leaving an oval, box-like recess with vertical sides. Due to the unusual thickness of this guard — no less than 0.6 cm — this recess is quite deep, and its floor is perforated by a conventional *nakago-hitsu*.

The significance of this finding becomes apparent when this *tsuba* is compared with another (M.752-1931), not of the Namban group and bearing the inscription 'Shimomura Yoshishige Owari'

. In this example, an identical excavation of the oval *seppa-dai* contains a tightly fitting *fuchi* whose walls project one eighth of an inch above the surface of the *tsuba*. This has scalloped edges and is not easily removed from its partner. Sadly, the associated *kashira* is missing and its form therefore unknown. Presumably the recess in the first *tsuba* had a similar function and, quite clearly, such a design feature obviates the need for *seppa* on the *omote* surface of the *tsuba*.

One possible reason for the scarcity of the smaller examples of Namban sword fittings may be the distressing tendency of all of the work of this group to easily rust. This rusting process would have been particularly destructive of the more delicate work of the smaller mounts, and would have rapidly rendered these unsalvageable. The use of inferior iron; of poor patination techniques; or more probably a combination of both faults, may have caused this. This tendency to rust is most noticeable in the earlier work of the group and may be responsible also for the shortage of such tsuba: better steel appears to have been used in later work.

The paucity of en suite Namban mounts causes one to wonder what was the original appearance of a sword mounted in this style. Considering the existence of a large number of such tsuba, it is surprising that they are seldom actually seen on a mounted sword. Their frequent association with later *hitsu-ana*, together with the presence of serially altered *nakago-hitsu*, can both be considered as evidence that, at some period, Namban tsuba were extensively used and were not purchased simply as artefacts.

Dealers and private collectors have habitually swapped tsuba among the swords in their collections in an attempt to find a combination that pleases both their eye and their pocket. This regrettable practice has produced a self-perpetuating cycle of alterations, with the result that only those swords with the most immaculate provenance may be assumed to be as their original owners intended. The remainder, whose present owners have seldom had the opportunity to study such rarities, conform to a purely personal — and often Western — concept of what 'looks good'. They frequently bear ill-fitting tsuba, the sole function of which would be as metallic rattles.

The presence on a sword of associated or matching fittings discourages this interchange of tsuba. This is because of an understandable reluctance to split such a group — *fuchi-gashira* are technically much more difficult to refit than are tsuba. Conversely, the presence of undecorated *fuchi-gashira*, especially those of plain iron, encourages it by reason of their neutrality. The scarcity of matched fittings in the Namban style has already been discussed and this scarcity, by facilitating the practice of 'tsuba swapping', may thus be partly responsible for the shortage of such mounted swords. Alternatively, this shortage may simply be an indication of a style that rapidly went out of fashion.

The exhibition of *dōgane*, a broad collar of metal around the middle of the sword hilt, was briefly popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Found chiefly on the less conventionally

mounted short swords, these commonly featured 'the dragon and sword' or 'the two dragons' as decorative motifs.<sup>273</sup> Their use as mountings obviously precluded the coincidental use of *menuki*, but there is no evidence for the association of this specific *kodōgu* with Namban mountings.

It may be that these highly decorative tsuba were worn with plain iron *fuchi-gashira*, which have rusted or have been discarded, because of their superficially uninteresting appearance, as being of no value to the collector. Alternatively, and more probably, they may have been simply added to a sword with its remaining mounts left undisturbed.

The form of Namban *menuki*, if such artefacts existed, can only be surmised — washer-like iron rings; or decorative iron discs, perhaps with a beaded edge? Forms such as these would have been relatively easily produced, whereas equally appropriate dragon forms, carved in relief, would have involved much more labour-intensive work.

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<sup>273</sup> Gilbertson (1898), *The Decoration of Swords and Sword Furniture*, pp. 7 and 8.

## 11. A SEARCH FOR A SOLUTION

During the preceding chapters, a number of enigmas related to the Namban group of tsuba have been encountered; it is an interesting exercise to seek a possible resolution of some of these.

Prior to the Meiji Restoration, Japanese society was divided into four classes — the samurai (or warrior-gentry), the peasantry, the artisans and the tradespeople.<sup>274</sup> The study of Japanese swords is based almost exclusively on the paired weapons that were worn by the samurai class. Although it is known that large numbers of the other classes also wore swords, very little mention is made of this fact in the literature, and Japanese swords continue to be generally referred to as 'samurai swords'. This class wore their paired swords as of right, but doctors, as members of the artisan class, had acquired a considerable social standing — and merchants a considerable wealth — during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. At this time, even the peasants were wearing a sword.

The Haitōrei edict of Meiji IX (1877) prohibited the wearing of swords by any persons, except for the single sword worn by the military and police when in uniform. This was effectively the last in a long line of edicts that attempted to control the carrying of swords and to restrict the length of their blades. Prior to this final edict, many similar attempts at control have been recorded:

In Kenchō II (1250), Hōjō Tokiyōri prohibited ordinary people from carrying long swords.

In Tensho XVI (1588), Toyotomi Hideyoshi attempted to obtain the surrender of their swords from common people by announcing his intention to build a Daibutsu Temple in Kyōto with the steel obtained from them.

In Genna VIII (1623), Tokugawa Iyetada prohibited common people from wearing swords.

In Kwanyei XVII (1640), Tokugawa Iyemitsu prohibited the attendants of Bujin from carrying *tachi*.

In Kwambun X (1670), Tokugawa Iyetsuna issued regulations restricting the length of a *tachi* to 2' 8" 9"<sup>275</sup> and of *O-Wakizashi* to 1' 8"<sup>275</sup> — anyone carrying a longer sword was liable to punishment.

In Tenna III (1683), Tokugawa Tsunayoshi reiterated the prohibition against common people wearing a long sword but permitted

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<sup>274</sup> Chamberlain (1902), *Things Japanese*, p. 93.

<sup>275</sup> Note: ' = 1 *shaku* (11.93 inches) = 10 *sun*  
" = 1 *sun* (1.19 inches) = 10 *bu*  
" = 1 *bu* (0.119 inches) = 10 *rin*

them to wear a *tantō*. Musicians and painters, even when of the samurai class, were prohibited from carrying a long sword.

In Kwansei X (1798), anybody carrying a sword of more than 1' 8" in length was liable to punishment. This length was later reduced to 1' 5". (Joly and Inada (1962), *The Sword and Samé*, p. 136.)

That these earlier attempts at control were far from successful is demonstrated by comments written by Hakuseki (1657 – 1725) on this subject, in the early part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century:

... the whole of Japan has been full of people carrying weapons, especially now, when swords are carried even by those who are not Samurai [like *No* (peasants), *Kō* (carpenters), *Shōko* (merchants)]. Although the custom to carry weapons is not lawful for those who are not military people, either in Japan or in China, truly it is not a good custom. (Hakuseki (n.d.), *Honcho Gunkikō*, Book VIII, Section 29', quoted in Joly (1962), *Sword and Samé*, p. 56.)

It has been estimated that, in 1877, there were approximately two million samurai in possession of some five million blades.<sup>276</sup> Added to this latter number were those that were made for the merchant class "who, becoming prosperous during the Tokugawa shōgunate (1603-1868), established the custom of wearing a sword by the side of the *koshisage* (writing outfit) in their belts".<sup>277</sup> Boxer, without giving the appropriate references, quotes 'other Japanese writers' as stating that "Namban tsuba were usually worn by doctors".<sup>278</sup> This is not a surprising observation when one considers the high esteem in which the Japanese held the Dutch physicians; any outward sign of a connection with the foreigners would have increased their standing in the community.

Thus, while we have no idea of the actual numbers, it is probable that, at the height of their popularity, the non-samurai wearers of swords enthusiastically sought Namban tsuba. Equally, judging by the large number of Namban *shūremono* that were produced in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, it is apparent that the popularity of these guards was not confined to *gaijin*, doctors and merchants but included also the samurai class.

**K**nowledge of the form of such non-samurai swords is very sparse; certainly the wearing of a pair of swords — the jealously guarded prerogative of the samurai

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<sup>276</sup> Gunsaulus (1923), *Japanese Sword Mounts in the Collections of the Field Museum*, p. 9.

<sup>277</sup> de Tressan (1910 – 1912), *L'Evolution de la Garde de Sabre Japonaise*, Vol. XXV, p. 43.

<sup>278</sup> Boxer (1930), *European Influences on Japanese Sword Fittings: 1543 – 1853*, p. 160.

— would be out of the question. We also know that the length of such swords was limited. It is likely that only *tantō* were permitted, and it is probable that there was some 'loss of face' involved in being seen to carry these shorter swords. Collectors will be familiar with the deception engendered by a short sword of rather flashy appearance, mounted in a *saya* (scabbard) that is solid in its lower portion and considerably longer than is necessitated by the blade carried within it.

It is acknowledged that *tantō* are commonly far less conventional in their mountings than are the longer swords. Often having carved wooden *tsuka* and either lacking *fuchi-gashira* or having ones that are appropriate to the *koshirae*, they do not display the rigid formality of the *tachi* and *katana*. Whether or not such unconventional short swords were mounted with *kodzuka* and *kōgai* is not known — certainly these are commonly found together on regular *tantō*.

It is safe to assume that the blades of these short swords were not generally of a high quality, and this is probably the reason for the relative neglect of such *tantō*. Their owners certainly had the wealth required to purchase high quality blades — probably more so than did many of the samurai of the same period — but the function of their swords was mainly a decorative one. Neither did they have a centuries-old tradition of blade connoisseurship to guide them in their selection.

**H**aving some appreciation of the rôle of the peasant, artisan and merchant classes in establishing the popularity of Namban sword furniture, to what extent does this enable us to rationalise some of the enigmas associated with the group? Inevitably, any such attempts at rationalisation will be purely conjectural and, as such, open to valid criticism.

- If the production of Namban tsuba was the first example of the mass production of fittings catering for the non-samurai classes, the sudden appearance of decorative and ornamented *seppa-dai* is more easily understood. These would have been refreshingly different, as were the Namban designs, from the stereotyped format of existing tsuba. Once these were accepted, the development of increasingly complex forms was a natural progression. It must also be remembered that these classes did not have centuries of tradition to follow and possibly wanted to 'make their own mark'.

- The restrictions enforcing the wearing of short swords may have resulted in the intention to make these appear to be longer than they were. A blurring of the distinction between the three groups of tsuba may have thus resulted, with larger *tantō* tsuba and smaller ones of the *katana* group.
- If the *tantō* carried by this group of wearers were mounted without *kodzuka* and *kōgai* — and this is not known — this would explain the absence of *ryō-hitsu* on many of these guards. These, when present, are commonly later modifications, possibly added as Namban tsuba were adopted by the samurai class. This would also explain the absence of Namban *kodzuka* and *kōgai*.
- The merchant and artisan classes would certainly have had no use for *daishō* pairs of tsuba, and the mounting of the Namban group of tsuba predominantly on *tantō* may also partially explain the lack of *fuchi-gashira* in this style. *Kodōgu* are frequently less conventional — and en suite fittings less common — on the shorter swords.

Thus it is seen that the increasing wealth and status of the merchant and artisan classes, during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, occurred at the same time as did the surge in popularity of the Namban group of sword guards. This may have been purely coincidental but, if the great popularity of this group was explained — at least in part — by extensive, non-samurai purchases, this may explain the relative absence of *hitsu-ana* and the dearth of other fittings. It may also, if rather less convincingly, help to explain the blurring of the distinction in size between the various classes of tsuba of this group.

## CONCLUSION

## 12. CONCLUSION

We have seen how the definition of Namban tsuba has changed over the passage of 100 years. Instead of including, as it once did, any tsuba bearing evidence of a 'foreign influence', Ogawa's recent intervention has redefined this group as an homogenous entity, with defining characteristics and a connected provenance.

At the same time, the term 'Namban influence' has now acquired a new meaning. This term once indicated evidence of a foreign influence in the design of a tsuba, but this is a feature now better called 'foreign influence' (either East or West), or 'namban influence' (with a lower case 'n'). A Namban influence can now be understood to indicate the inclusion on a guard of features that are characteristic of the Namban group of tsuba, and decorative *seppa-dai* may be considered but one example of such a feature.

Another example of Namban influence is illustrated on Plates 15 and 16. Both of these guards are essentially of solid plate construction. The first, (WAY 295.15.1939) and probably Hizen in origin, bears four panels of undercut and interwoven scrollwork; the second (J 10370), possibly by one of the Būshū workers, has a solid, chocolate-brown *hira* with bilateral panels of decorative scrollwork, outlined with gold *nunome*. The techniques displayed on all of these panels are identical to those found on the *hira* of Namban tsuba.

It is an interesting observation that the scrollwork on such examples is commonly of a high quality as, indeed, is the general standard of workmanship. Also, that the *seppa-dai* of such guards, although they are commonly of a conventional shape and are unornamented, are seldom inscribed by the maker. It is not certain where, exactly, examples such as these stand on the Namban timescale, but the quality of their workmanship suggests that they were manufactured in the later part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Clearly a point may be reached where an increase in the amount of decorative detail on such guards could blur the distinction between their actual provenance and a Namban one. Certain guards of a modified auriculate form might also present such a problem, were it not for the fact that an obvious auriculate derivation generally places them firmly in the Namban group.

The presence of a decorative *seppa-dai* on a guard that demonstrates no other evidence of a Namban influence is quite commonly found, and it is apparent that, in the

late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, a considerable number of schools were affected by the universal popularity of this group of tsuba.

**D**uring the preparation of this thesis, the defining characteristics of this group of tsuba have all been studied in some detail. Two aspects of these characteristics — the possibility that mercury amalgam gilding was used as an alternative method to *nunome-zōgan* in their decoration, and that casting methods were widely used in their production — have opened interesting windows onto possible, future study.

The preparation necessary to enable the use of fire-gilding on iron raises some doubts in the author's mind over its apparent use for the decoration of Namban tsuba. The prior application of a copper foundation is required in order to ensure the secure bonding of the gold to the iron, and these doubts arose because this priming with copper — combined with the repeated application and heating of the gold amalgam that are necessary to ensure an adequate gilding — does not appear compatible with the rapid and relatively unskilled output that is often associated with this group of tsuba. The analysis of selected Namban tsuba, in order to confirm the occasional relevance of mercuric gilding to this group, is suggested.

**T**he revelation that casting was extensively used for the production of Namban tsuba came as a surprise to the author — this in spite of Dr Oliver Impey's assertion to him that such was the case.<sup>279</sup> Doubtless, many students will discount this finding as being unique to this specific group, and will justify it by pointing out the low status generally given to these guards. Should it not rather be considered to be indicative of the need for a search for similar signs of the casting process in other groups of tsuba?

**O**gawa's proposal has not met with universal and unqualified acceptance. The term Namban has long been understood by students of Japanese artefacts to be indicative of a foreign influence — commonly a Western one. To isolate a small group of artefacts from this general understanding, and to apply — to them alone — a different definition, clearly presents a number of problems.

It is a valuable exercise for students of tsuba to review their own collections and to redefine those guards that were previously lumped together, often without a lot of

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<sup>279</sup> Impey (2000), Personal Communication.

thought, as Namban. Many of these, seen afresh, may now be reclassified under their own schools. But it is a completely different scenario for the directors of museums that are dedicated to Namban artefacts; they cannot discard more than half of their collections of tsuba solely on the basis of this proposal. Additionally, they have centuries of traditional teaching behind them to support their conservatism.

Students should have no problem in accepting this schism, but will need to define their own position in respect of those Japanese sword guards called Namban. The author hopes that, by this stage, his personal enthusiasm for Ogawa's intervention has been made clear, and his reasons for this enthusiasm justified.

Hopefully, students will also have no problem in accepting the entitlement to **H**serious study of this group of tsuba. Many factors combine to make this a challenging and rewarding group; the problems associated with attribution are but one of these. Additionally, for a student beginning a study of *kodōgu*, this group is a good introduction to the disciplines required and, with care, good examples are obtainable relatively inexpensively.

These factors, together with the extreme popularity of Namban tsuba in Edo Japan and their widespread influence upon most of the schools of makers of sword fittings, confirm such an entitlement. It has been stated that Namban tsuba "...were welcomed by the public, which likes novelties, and there is the impression that they suddenly overwhelmed a generation":<sup>280</sup> this popularity alone justifies such study.

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<sup>280</sup> Homma and Sato (1935 – 36), *Nihon Tō Kōza: vol. VI, Kodōgu, part I*, translated by Watson (1994), p. 179.

**ENDMATTER**

### 13. PLATES

Plate 1

Laing Art Gallery TWCMS J10204

Height 7.3 cm: Width 6.8 cm

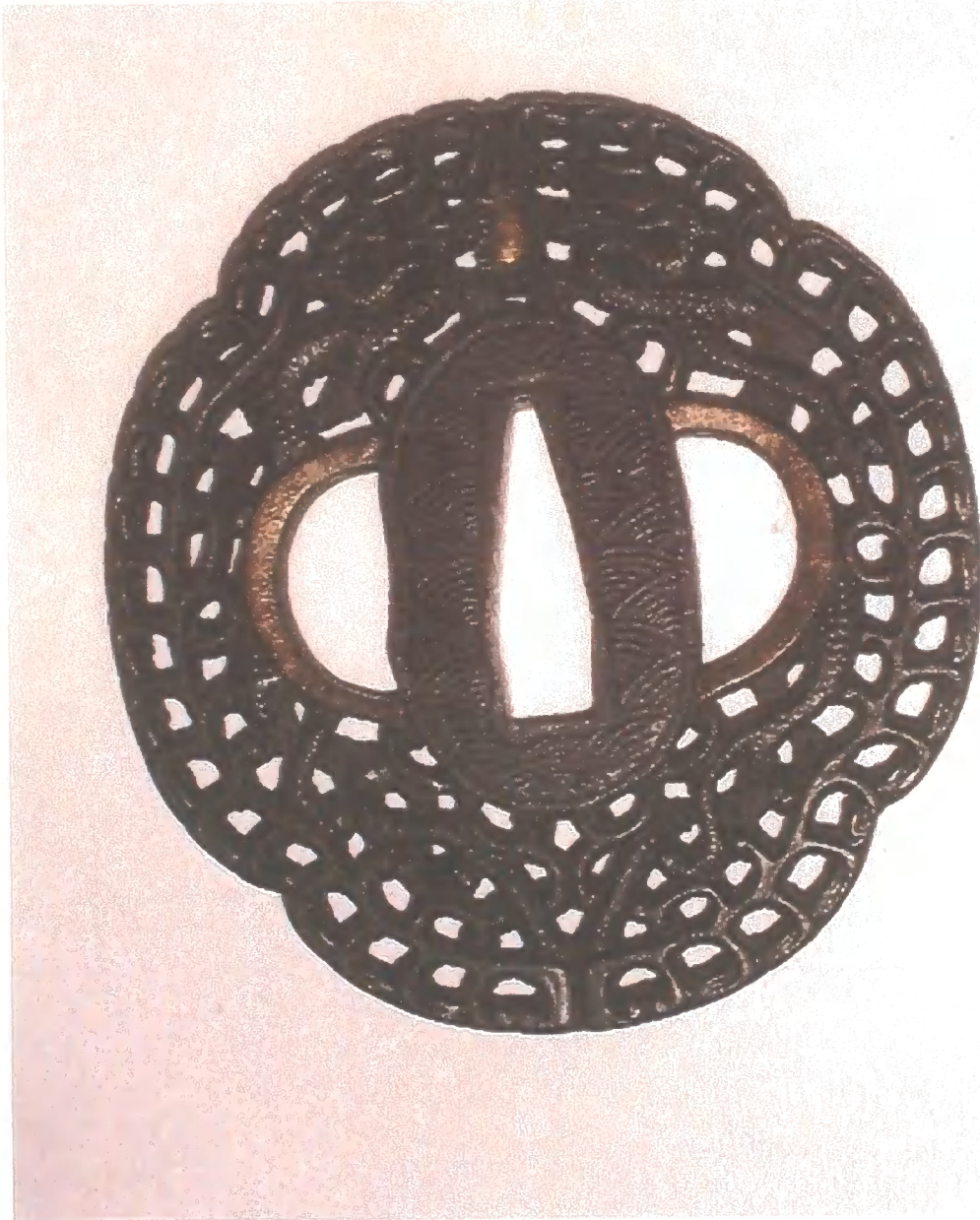


Plate 2

Laing Art Gallery TWCMS J10201

Height 7.3 cm: Width 7.0 cm



Plate 3

Laing Art Gallery TWCMS J10215

Height 7.4 cm: Width 7.0 cm



Plate 4

Laing Art Gallery TWCMS J10214

Height 7.5 cm: Width 7.5 cm



Plate 5  
Laing Art Gallery TWCMS J10214  
Height 7.5 cm: Width 7.5 cm

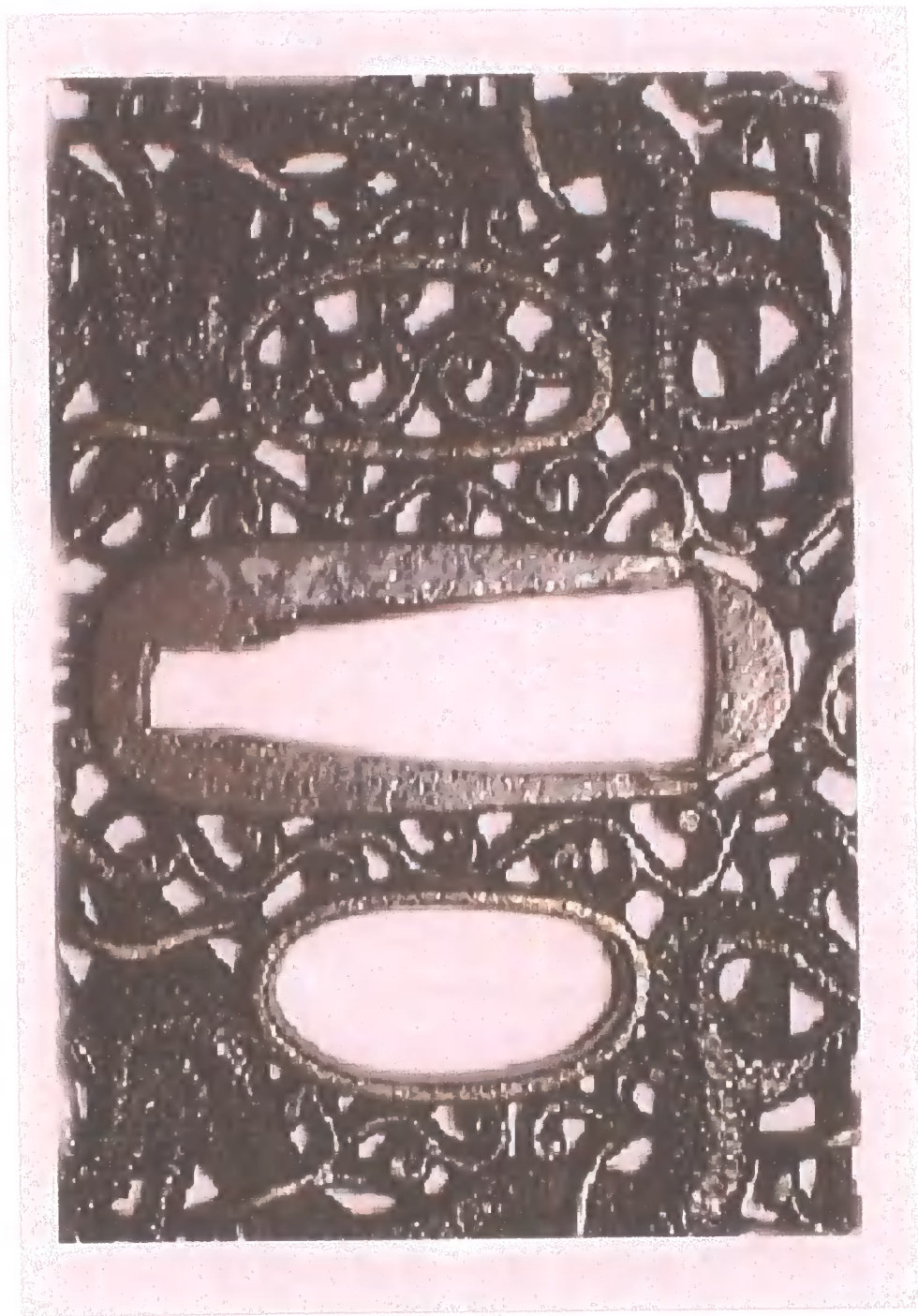


Plate 6

Victoria and Albert Museum M194-1931

Height 7.4 cm: Width 7.2 cm



Plate 7

Liverpool Museum 42.9.476

Height 7.3 cm: Width 6.9 cm



Plate 8

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery 684.'30

Height 7.3 cm: Width 6.8 cm



Plate 9

Victoria and Albert Museum M315-1916

Height 7.6 cm: Width 7.4 cm



Plate 10  
Victoria and Albert Museum M.257-1916  
Height 8.3 cm: Width 7.4 cm



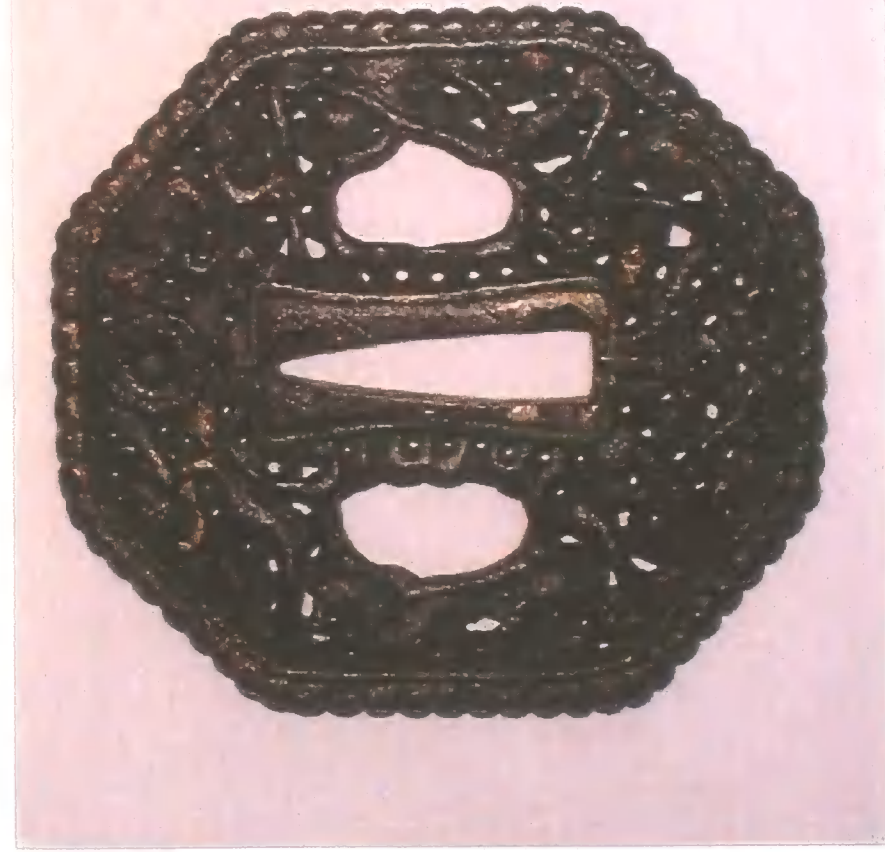
Plate 11  
Liverpool Museum DP Temp 3885 (China)  
Height 7.6 cm: Width 7.0 cm



Plate 12  
Royal Armouries, Leeds

XXVIS.158

Height 7.4 cm: Width 6.6 cm



XXVIS.159

Height 7.0 cm: Width 6.4 cm



Plate 13

Victoria and Albert Museum M.409-1911

Length 3.8 cm: Width 2.5 cm: Height 1.4 cm



Plate 14

Victoria and Albert Museum M.779-1931

Length 9.8 cm: Width 1.4 cm



Plate 15

Author's collection WAY 295 15 1939

Height 7.4 cm: Width 7.1 cm

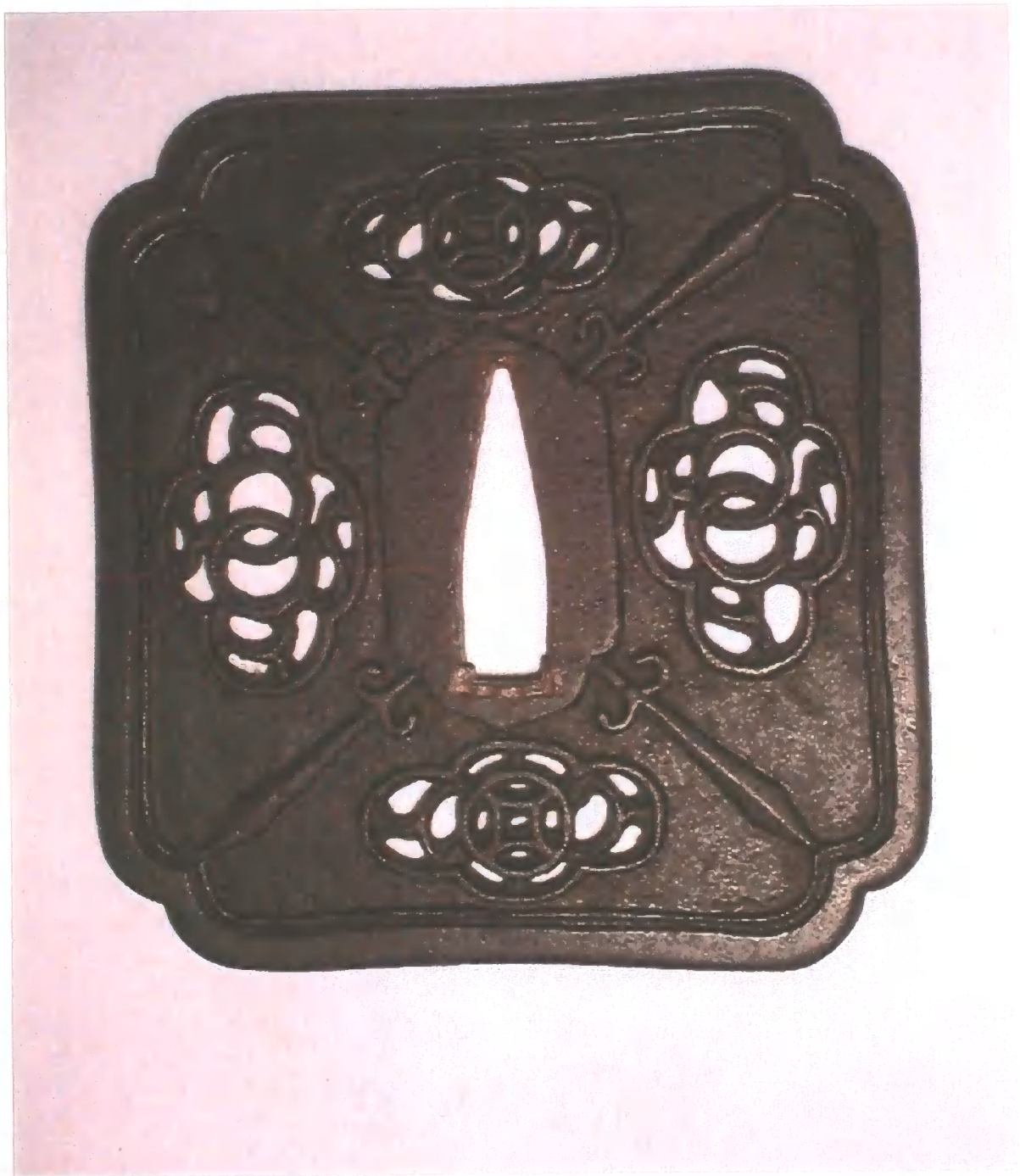


Plate 16

Laing Art Gallery TWCMS J10370

Height 8.4 cm: Width 8.4 cm



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## 15. APPENDIX

### 15.1. LIST OF NAMBAN TSUBA EXAMINED

In the lists given below, *fuchi* are labelled (F), *kashira* (K), *kodzuka* and *kōgai* (Ko): unless otherwise specified, the artefacts listed are tsuba.

Those artefacts shown in **bold** type are illustrated on the Plates on pp. 154 – 169.

#### (a) Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne

##### A.H. Higgenbotham collection

<b>J 10201</b>	J 10221
J 10202	J 10222
J 10203	J 10223
<b>J 10204</b>	J 10224
J 10205	J 10225
J 10206	J 10226
J 10207	J 10227
J 10208	J 10228
J 10209	J 10229
J 10211	J 10231
J 10212	J 10238
J 10213	J 10317
<b>J 10214</b>	J 10318
<b>J 10215</b>	J 10319
J 10217	J 10321
J 10219	J 10322
J 10220	

##### W.P. Brevis collection

n/a.	J 7633
J 3621	J 7634
J 7362	J 7635
J 7364	J 7636
J 7605	J 7637
J 7606	J 7638
J 7607	J 7639
J 7608	J 7640
J 7609	J 7641
J 7610	J 7642
J 7611	J 7643
J 7612	J 7644
J 7613	J 7645
J 7614	J 7646
J 7615	J 7647
J 7616	J 7648
J 7617	J 7649
J 7618	J 7650
J 7619	J 7657
J 7620	J 7658
J 7621	J 8901
J 7622	J 8902
J 7623	J 8904
J 7624	J 8907
J 7625	J 8909
J 7626	J 8910
J 7627	J 8911
J 7628	J 8912
J 7629	J 8915
J 7630	J 8916
J 7631	J 8917
J 7632	J 8918

#### (b) Author's collection

WAY 27.15.1934
WAY 212.15.1937
<b>WAY 295.15.1939</b>
WAY 296.15.1936
WAY 482.15.1951

(c) Royal Armouries, Leeds

XXVI S 158

XXVI S 159

(d) Liverpool Museum

R. Hibbert collection

DP Temp 3885 (China)

42.9.92

42.9.242

**42.9.476**

42.9.706

Holden collection

53.101.44

(e) Maidstone Museum and Art Gallery

Walter Samuel collection

MNEMG:122.1979.295

MNEMG:122.1979.399

MNEMG:122.1979.403

MNEMG:122.1979.427

MNEMG:122.1979.439

MNEMG:122.1979.441

(f) Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery

Sir Charles Hyde, Bt. collection

677 '30            701 '30

679 '30            702 '30

681 '30            703 '30

682 '30            710 '30

683 '30            711 '30

**684 '30**            712 '30

685 '30            713 '30

686 '30            714 '30

687 '30            715 '30

690 '30            716 '30

691 '30            717 '30

692 '30            718 '30

693 '30            719 '30

694 '30            720 '30

695 '30            721 '30

696 '30            722 '30

697 '0             723 '30

698 '30            725 '30

699 '30            726 '30

700 '30            728 '30

Mrs J. Feeney gift

91 '10-14

91 '10-16

A. F. Osler bequest

66 '03-15

66 '03-28

Wm. Bragge gift

1806 '85-3

(g) Oriental Museum, Durham

O 384

n/a.

**(h) Victoria and Albert Museum, London**

**W. L. Hildburgh collection**

<b>M.194-1931</b>	M.764-1931
M.745-1931	M.765-1931
M.746-1931	M.766-1931
M.747-1931	M.767-1931
M.748-1931	M.769-1931
M.749-1931	M.770-1931
M.752-1931	M.771-1931
M.753-1931	M.772-1931
M.754-1931	M.774-1931
M.755-1931	M.775-1931
M.756-1931	M.776-1931
M.760-1931	M.777-1931
M.761-1931	<b>M.779-1931(Ko)</b>
M.762-1931	M.782-1931
M.763-1931	M.789-1931

**Hawkshaw collection**

M.180-1911  
M.182-1911  
M.183-1911  
M.192-1911  
**M.409-1911(F)**  
M.526-1911(Ko)

**William Alexander collection**

M.195-1916  
**M.257-1916**  
**M.315-1916**

**Other provenances**

n/a  
1409-1888  
1421-1888  
M.889-1910  
M.75-1919  
M.63-1924  
M.1147-1926  
M.63A-1924

**(i) British Museum, London**

OA+3291	TS.19	1948.11.27.15	DA+3292
OA+3293	TS.20	1948.11.27.161	DA+3295
OA+3300	TS.21	1981.1.28.16	DA+3298
OA+3303	TS.22	1981.1.28.22	DA.3296
OA+3308	TS.25	1981.1.28.68	DA.3299
OA+3562	TS.26		BA+3257
OA+3563			IS.23
OA+3564			
OA+3565			
OA+3566			
OA+3568			
OA+3570			

**(k) Museum of Decorative Art, Copenhagen**

**Halberstadt collection**

III.S.68.12	III.T.69.21
III.T.69.15	III.T.69.22(FK)
III.T.69.16	III.T.69.23
III.T.69.17	III.T.69.24
III.T.69.18	III.T.69.25
III.T.69.19	III.U.n/a(K)
III.T.69.20	III.V.72.5

**(j) Ashmolean Museum, Oxford**  
**Sir Arthur Church collection**

O.792	O.805
O.793	O.806
O.794	O.807
O.795	O.808
O.796	O.809
O.797	O.810
O.798	O.811
O.799	O.812
O.801	O.814
O.802	O.815
O.804	O.816

**Other provenances**

1956.2673  
1956.2674  
1962.173  
n/a  
n/a  
n/a

15.2. SAMPLE DATA SHEETS.

REF. NO:	Museum/Book:			
	Accession No:		Collection:	
SHAPE	Maru-gata	Tate-maru-gata	Mokko-gata	Other - specify
METAL	Iron		Other - specify	
MIMI	Describe:			
SEPPA-DAI	Ornamented: Yes/No			Diagram:
	Surface Decoration: Yes/No			
	Inscribed: Yes/No			
RYO-HITSU	Original/Later No. present:	0	1	2
NAKAGO-HITSU	Alterations: Yes/No	Specify:		Diagram:
HIRA Notes on symmetry, degree of undercutting and piercing, design components, etc.				
MEASUREMENT S in cms	Thickness at Seppa-dai		Height Width	
WEIGHT In grams	Thickness at Mimi			
PHOTOGRAPH				
OTHER COMMENTS				

REF. NO:	Museum/Book:	
	Accession No:	Collection:

1.	The presence of surface granularity and porosity, with or without 'sand bubbles'	
2.	The presence of investment material	
3.	The presence of 'feathering' in the open-work	
4.	A lack of crispness in the incised areas	

COMMENTS:

### 15.3. GLOSSARY OF JAPANESE AND CHINESE TERMS

All of the Japanese and Chinese words that are printed in *italic* script in the text are defined below:

- Aikuchi* (lit. 'fitting mouth'): a sword without a tsuba, the mouth of the *saya* meeting the *tsuka* directly and without the intervention of a tsuba.
- Aoi-gata* (lit. 'hollyhock-shaped'): having the shape of a hollyhock leaf replicated, circumferentially, four times.
- Asbi* (lit. 'feet'): a pair a sling-bands, of pear-shaped outline, for the attachment of suspensory straps to the scabbard of a slung sword.
- Bakafu* (lit. 'tent government'): a military power structure headed by the *shōgun*, who was 'invested' with his power by the Emperor.
- Daimyō* (lit. 'great name'): a territorial lord , possessing a fief of not less than 10,000 bales of rice and exercising almost unlimited power within his domain.
- Dai-seppa* Large, decorative *seppa*, found only on swords mounted as *tachi* or as *han-dachi*.
- Daishō* A pair of swords, comprising a long and short sword, as worn traditionally by a samurai.
- Daitō* The long sword of a *daishō* pair — a *katana*.
- Ding* A Chinese, three-legged food vessel of cast bronze.
- Dōgane* A broad collar of metal around the middle of a sword hilt, replacing the more traditional hilt binding.

<i>Fuchi</i>	A flat band of metal, encircling the hilt adjacent to the tsuba — the 'ferrule'. Together with the <i>kashira</i> , this commonly forms an en suite pair called the <i>fuchi-gashira</i> .
<i>Gagaku</i>	Traditional Japanese music and dance.
<i>Gaijin</i>	A derogatory Japanese term referring to a foreigner from Europe.
<i>Gendaitō</i>	Modern sword blades, made using the traditional materials and methods of forging.
<i>Habaki</i>	The 'collar' of the blade. Normally of copper, it ensures the snug fit of the blade in the <i>saya</i> and prevents friction between the two, with subsequent damage to the blade.
<i>Hachi-gata</i>	(lit. 'helmet shaped'): a form of <i>kashira</i> .
<i>Hamidashi</i>	A mounting for a <i>tantō</i> , having a small tsuba with open <i>hitsu-ana</i> that are in continuity with the <i>mimi</i> .
<i>Han-dachi</i>	(lit. 'half- <i>tachi</i> '): a sword worn thrust through the <i>obi</i> but mounted with the <i>kodōgu</i> of a <i>tachi</i> , or slung sword, the <i>ashi</i> being replaced by a <i>kurikata</i> .
<i>Hangetsu-gata</i>	(lit. 'half-moon shape'): the conventional, oval shape of the <i>kodzuka-hitsu</i> .
<i>Hira</i>	The basic, metal plate comprising the tsuba.
<i>Hira-zōgan</i>	True inlay, wherein the resulting surface of the inlaid material is level with that of the base metal.
<i>Hitsu</i>	Any aperture, or 'hole', in a tsuba.

<i>Hitsu-ana</i>	An opening at the edge of the <i>seppa-dai</i> of a tsuba that accommodates the <i>kōgai</i> or <i>kodzuka</i> when either of these is present.
<i>Hō-ō</i>	The mythical phoenix bird.
<i>Hotsure-zōgan</i>	(lit. 'frayed inlay'): an inlay technique, utilised mainly by the Higo schools, that gives the impressions of wear and of age.
<i>Iebori</i>	(lit. 'family carving' or 'house carving'): sword-fittings makers under the patronage of the <i>shōgunate</i> or of a <i>daimyō</i> .
<i>Ita-tsuba</i>	Tsuba of solid-plate construction.
<i>Ji-sukashi</i>	Openwork, with the object depicted in a negative silhouette.
<i>Juzu</i>	A rosary: this appears to apply equally both to those of Buddhistic and of Christian origin.
<i>Kagami</i>	A mirror.
<i>Kagami-shi</i>	Cast bronze tsuba, reputedly manufactured by the makers of mirrors in the mid-13 <sup>th</sup> to the mid-14 <sup>th</sup> centuries.
<i>Kan</i>	This image, representing a handle, may be an abstract derivative of the early <i>mokkō</i> design.
<i>Kanagaki</i>	A method of gilding, using a mixture of gold powder bonded with <i>urushi</i> lacquer.
<i>Kanji</i>	Japanese written symbols derived from the Chinese language.
<i>Kan-mimi</i>	A hollow, 'pipe-stem' rim.

- Karakusa* (lit. 'Chinese grasses'): a 'scrolling vine' diaper. For further details regarding its origin, see pp. 90 et seq.
- Kashira* (lit. 'head'): the pommel-cap, situated at the proximal end of the sword hilt.
- Katana* A long sword, normally of more than two feet in blade length and worn thrust through the *obi*, with its edge uppermost.
- Kebori* A decorative technique whereby a line is chased on the surface with no removal of any of the constituent metal.
- Ken* The straight, two-edged sword of the Dolmen period and the precursor of the curved, single-edged sword of the present time.
- Kera* A mixed bloom of iron produced by the *tatara* smelting method and comprising different proportions of carbon in different levels of the bloom.
- Kiku* A stylised chrysanthemum blossom, commonly used as a *mon*.
- Kinkō* (lit. 'gold worker'): a term referring to decorative sword fittings, commonly of the softer metallic alloys.
- Kodōgu* A term including all of the metallic mounts of the sword, but excluding the non-metallic parts such as the *saya* and *tsuka*. Some purists insist that this term should not include the *tsuba*.
- Kodzuka* (lit. 'little hilt'): the hilt of a small companion knife — the *kogatana* — that may be carried in a slot in the *ura* side of the scabbard.
- Kodzuka-bitsu* An opening in the *tsuba* through which passes the *kodzuka*.

<i>Kōgai</i>	An accessory, skewer-like implement that may be carried in a slot in the <i>omote</i> side of the scabbard and was reputedly used to rearrange the wearer's hair.
<i>Kōgai-hitsu</i>	An opening in the tsuba through which passes the handle of the <i>kōgai</i> .
<i>Kōgatana</i>	The small utility knife, carried in a slot in the <i>saya</i> of the Japanese sword; its handle is called a <i>kodzuka</i> .
<i>Kōmō(jin)</i>	(lit. 'red-haired people'): a term used to refer to the Dutch immigrants.
<i>Koshirae</i>	The complete mounting of a Japanese sword, including the <i>saya</i> and <i>tsuka</i> .
<i>Koshisage</i>	Writing outfit, carried suspended from the <i>obi</i> .
<i>Ko-Katchūshi</i>	(lit. 'old armour maker'): tsuba made in the 14 <sup>th</sup> – 16 <sup>th</sup> centuries by armour makers. These are solid-plate guards with sophisticated designs in negative silhouette, and are characterised by raised rims.
<i>Ko-Tōshō</i>	(lit. 'old sword smith'): tsuba made in the 12 <sup>th</sup> – 16 <sup>th</sup> centuries by sword smiths. They are thinly hammered, solid-plate guards pierced with one or two simple designs in negative silhouette.
<i>Kuchigane</i>	Metallic band strengthening the mouth of the <i>saya</i> .
<i>Kurikata</i>	(lit. 'chestnut-shaped'): a projection situated at the upper end of the <i>omote</i> side of the scabbard of an <i>uchi-gatana</i> . It prevents the sword from slipping through the <i>obi</i> , and has a slot through which passes the <i>sageo</i> .

<i>Machibori</i>	(lit. 'street carvers' or 'town carvers'): sword-fittings makers who worked from studios in the towns, and were unprotected from normal trade pressures.
<i>Maru-bori</i>	Three-dimensional 'carving in the round'.
<i>Maru-gata</i>	(lit. 'round shape'): a form of tsuba.
<i>Mekugi</i>	A bamboo peg securing the <i>nakago</i> within the hilt of the sword.
<i>Menuki</i>	A pair of 'hilt ornaments', situated one on either side of the hilt and partially covered by the hilt binding. Originally these covered the ends of the <i>mekugi</i> , but now serve a decorative purpose, and improve the hands' grip on the sword.
<i>Migi-manji</i>	The right-handed swastica — a Buddhistic symbol.
<i>Mimi</i>	(lit. 'ear'): the rim of a tsuba.
<i>Mitokoro-mono</i>	(lit. 'three place thing'): a uniform set of fittings for a sword, comprising the <i>menuki</i> , <i>kōgai</i> and <i>kozuka</i> .
<i>Mokkō-gata</i>	Mokkō-shaped — supposedly representing the cross-section through a melon or cucumber.
<i>Mokume</i>	A decorative, wood-grain effect.
<i>Mon</i>	A heraldic badge used as a family crest on clothing, and during battle.
<i>Monouchi</i>	That part of a blade where the maximum force is generated when the blade is in motion; this is an area extending approximately 15 cm proximal to the tip of the blade of a long sword.
<i>Moyō</i>	A pattern or design.

<i>Moyō-sukashi</i>	Openwork, with the depicted object shown in a positive silhouette.
<i>Mune</i>	The burnished ridge on the back of the blade.
<i>Mushikui-zōgan</i>	(lit. 'worm-eaten inlay'): an inlay technique, utilised mainly by the Higo schools and supposedly resembling worm-eaten paper.
<i>Nakago</i>	The elongated, triangular tang of a Japanese sword.
<i>Nakago-bitsu</i>	The triangular aperture at the centre of the tsuba, through which passes the tang of the blade.
<i>Namban byōbu</i>	The six-fold screens, featuring the arrival of the Portuguese into Japan, which were produced in the Momoyama period by the Kanō school of artists.
<i>N.B.T.H.K</i>	Nihon Bijutsu Tōken Hozon Kyokai (The Society for the Preservation of Japanese Art Swords).
<i>Neri tsuba</i>	Leather tsuba: there is some doubt as to whether this term refers only to those tsuba made entirely of leather, or includes also those with metallic strengthening.
<i>Nibon-tō</i>	The study of the Japanese sword.
<i>Nindomon</i>	Japanese honeysuckle vine.
<i>Nunome(-zōgan)</i>	A decorative technique whereby metal is hammered onto an iron surface on which have been engraved criss-cross lines. The intersections of these lines create tiny, hook-like processes that secure this overlay.
<i>Obi</i>	An article of Japanese dress — the sash worn over a kimono.

- Oborōgin* An alloy comprising 75% copper and 25% silver and often used for Japanese sword decoration during the Edo period.
- O-dachi* (lit. 'large tachi'): an outsize, long sword. Popular during the civil wars of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, it was carried in a disposable scabbard, slung by straps over the back.
- O-kodzuka* An unusually large *kodzuka*. The size of *kodzuka* is surprisingly consistent: of 36 in the author's collection, 24 measured 9.7 - 9.8 cm in length and 1.4 - 1.5 cm in width. *O-kodzuka* may measure 11.2 cm in length and 2.0 cm in width.<sup>281</sup>
- Omote* A term used to describe the 'dominant' side, or aspect, of a sword or its parts. It normally refers to that aspect seen when the sword is being worn in its intended way.
- O-seppa* (lit. 'large seppa'): traditionally associated with the tsuba of *tachi* and covering a variable area of their decorative surface.
- Ryō-bitsu* The term used to describe a pair of *bitsu-ana*.
- Sageo* A length of braided cord, which passing through the *kurikata*, secures the *uchi-gatana* in the *obi*.
- Saya* The scabbard of the Japanese sword.
- Seigaiha* (lit. 'blue-ocean-wave'): a wave-like diaper design. It is also said to refer to a form of music and dance originating in the Sekai region of China (see pp. 76 et seq.).
- Sekigane* Soft metal fillings sometimes found in the tsuba, either as liners in the *bitsu-ana* to protect the *kōgai* and *kodzuka* from the harder metal of the tsuba, or to alter the size of the *nakago-bitsu*.

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<sup>281</sup> Kuwabara (date unknown), *Tōken Kinkō Gaisetsu, Part I*, p. 385.

- Sentoku* A brass-like alloy that acquires a soft yellow pigmentation after being submitted to a pickling process.
- Seppa* A pair (or several pairs) of copper washers, placed over the tang, above and below the tsuba.
- Seppa-dai* (lit. 'washer-stand'): a slightly raised and normally oval area, surrounding the *nakago-hitsu* of the tsuba, on which rest the *seppa* and where any inscription is normally found.
- Shakudō* An alloy of copper with a small, variable proportion of gold; it is converted to a rich, violet-black colouration by a pickling process.
- Shin-guntō* The traditional form of the Japanese sword as worn by the armed forces after the 1930s.
- Shūremono* An 'over the counter' product — not commissioned.
- Shippō* A decorative technique involving the use of vitreous enamels.
- Shishi* Stone lions, possibly derived from the 'lion dogs' of the Chinese Imperial family.
- Shishiai-bori* (lit. 'complexion carving'): a carving rendered in sunken relief — *intaglio* *relievato*.
- Shitodome-ana* Openings on either side of a *kashira* to accommodate the hilt binding.
- Shitodo-me* A pair of decorative eyelets, normally of copper-gilt, in the *shitodome-ana* on either side of the *kashira*.
- Shoki Kinkō* The first *kinkō* period (1400 – 1450).

<i>Shotō</i>	The short sword of a <i>daisshō</i> pair — a <i>wakizashi</i> or a <i>tantō</i> .
<i>Shou</i>	A Chinese character representative of 'long life'.
<i>Soroe-mono</i>	(lit. 'uniform thing'): a complete set of uniform <i>kodōgu</i> for a sword, but excluding the tsuba.
<i>Suhama-gata</i>	(lit. 'beach that sticks out into the ocean'): the conventional, trefoil shape of the <i>kōgai-hitsu</i> .
<i>Sukashi</i>	Openwork.
<i>Tachi</i>	A long sword, by definition worn suspended by slings from a belt.
<i>Tama</i>	The sacred jewel of legend, commonly depicted as the attribute of dragons.
<i>Tama-hagane</i>	The best grade of Japanese iron: the top portion of the <i>keru</i> , it contains very little carbon and is the grade selected for the making of Japanese swords.
<i>Tantō</i>	A short sword of dagger form, and normally less than one foot in blade length.
<i>Taotie</i>	(Chinese: t'ao-t'ieh): a chimeral mask found as a decorative motif on early Chinese bronzes.
<i>Tatara</i>	A traditional type of Japanese furnace, used to produce iron by the smelting of iron-bearing sand.
<i>Tate-maru-gata</i>	Oval shape, with the vertical diameter slightly longer than the transverse one.

<i>Tenjō-gane</i>	The plate, normally of copper and forming the base of the <i>fuchi</i> , with a triangular aperture for the tang of the blade; it normally bears the inscription, when one is present.
<i>Tie-jiān</i>	(Chinese): Chinese parrying sticks.
<i>Tobi-gata</i>	(lit. 'door-groove' shape): a form for a <i>kashira</i> .
<i>Tokubetsu Kichō</i>	'Especially precious': a ranking awarded by the N.B.T.H.K. (see above) to a blade or <i>kodōgu</i> .
<i>Tosogu</i>	See <i>Kodōgu</i> .
<i>Tsubashō</i>	A master tsuba craftsman.
<i>Tsuboguchi-gata</i>	(lit. 'jar-mouth' shape): a form for a <i>kashira</i> .
<i>Tsuka</i>	The hilt of the Japanese sword.
<i>Uchi-gatan</i>	A term covering any sword that was carried, edge uppermost, through the <i>obi</i> .
<i>Ukiyo-e</i>	(lit. 'pictures of the floating world'): a school of artists that, appearing in Japan in the 17 <sup>th</sup> century, created realistic images of the actual world of their day.
<i>Umagane</i>	Metal used to fill a hole such as the <i>bitsu-ana</i> of a tsuba, or defects in the metal of a blade.
<i>Ura</i>	The opposite aspect to <i>omote</i> .
<i>Urushi</i>	The raw material — a milky sap from the lacquer tree — from which traditional Japanese lacquer is obtained.

<i>Usunuki-bori</i>	Low-relief carving.
<i>Wakizashi</i>	The shorter sword of a <i>daisbō</i> pair; worn thrust through the <i>obi</i> with the edge uppermost, it is normally of from one to two feet in blade length.
<i>Wootz</i>	This is the name given to an iron that was produced in northern India, and possibly also by Malayan forgers.
<i>Yambushi</i>	(lit. 'mountain warrior'): heavily militarised Buddhist monks who, in the 14 <sup>th</sup> and 15 <sup>th</sup> centuries, were a threat to the stability of the country.
<i>Yakitsuke</i>	A mercury-amalgam gilding process.
<i>You</i>	A Chinese three-legged wine vessel of cast bronze.
<i>Zuku</i>	That portion of the <i>kera</i> , obtained from the smelting of iron in a <i>tatara</i> furnace, which is high in carbon content.

