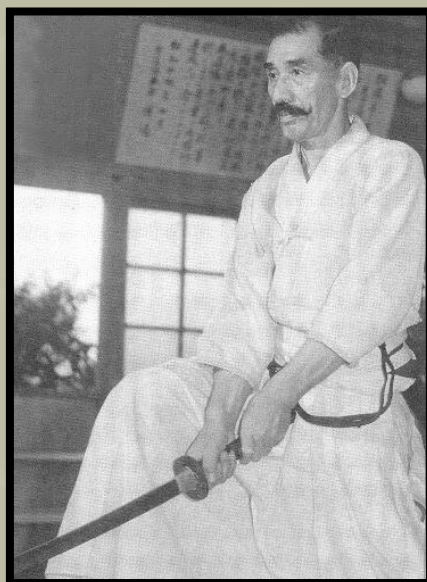




Nakayama Hakudō's Tachi Sword



The founder of the Musō Shinden-ryū (夢想神伝流) school, Nakayama Hakudō (中山博道 / なかやまひろみち・なかやまはくどう), possessed outstanding proficiency in multiple martial disciplines and was historically the first person to receive all three “master-level” titles in kendō (剣道), iaidō (居合道), and jōjutsu (杖術).

In addition to teaching at his own dōjō, he also served as an instructor at schools, within the police, and at private companies. For this reason, he became known as the “Sword Saint of the Shōwa era” (昭和の剣聖) and as “the last budōka” (最後の武芸家).

The Japanese sword owned and highly cherished by Nakayama Hakudō was forged by the renowned swordsmith Mori Yoshichika (森良近). It is worth examining why Hakudō chose this particular sword and how it came to be his personal and beloved weapon.

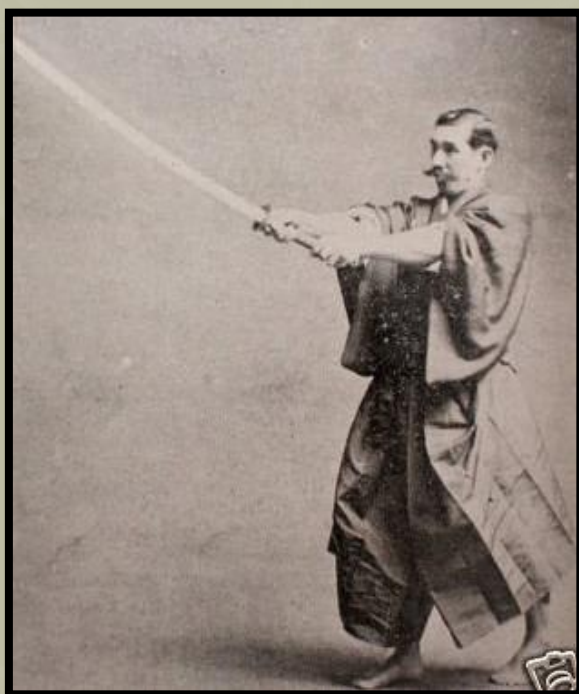
The Last Budōka: Nakayama Hakudō

The term kenshō (剣聖) refers to an individual of exceptional mastery in swordsmanship. Hakudō, however, was not only regarded as a “sword saint,” but also as a comprehensive budōka. The reasons for this are as follows.

Nakayama Hakudō was born in 1872 (Meiji 5) in the former Kaga domain (present-day Kanazawa, Ishikawa Prefecture) as the eighth son of Nakayama Gennojō (中山源之丞), who served as a clerical official (yūhitsu-yaku, 祐筆役) in the domain administration.

During his childhood, he was sent to Toyama Prefecture, where he encountered Master Saitō Michinori (齋藤理則) and learned the fundamentals of Yamaguchi-ryū kenjutsu (山口流剣術). He later received a documented list of teachings known as a mokuroku (1). This marked the beginning of Nakayama Hakudō's martial career.

After moving to Tokyo in 1890 (Meiji 23), he entered the Yūshinkan (有信館), where he studied Shindō Munen-ryū (神道無念流) under Negishi Shingorō (根岸信五郎).



Because of his short stature, he trained with exceptional intensity in order to compete with taller and stronger opponents. His efforts bore fruit, and at the age of thirty he was awarded menkyō kaiden (2), signifying full transmission of the school's teachings and qualifying him as successor to the Yūshinkan.

He subsequently attained menkyō kaiden in other schools as well and achieved a historically significant distinction. He became the first individual to be simultaneously awarded master titles in kendō, iaidō (居合術), and jōjutsu (杖術). This recognition led to his reputation as “the last budōka.”

Thereafter, he taught not only at the Yūshinkan but also at schools, within the police, and at private companies, training numerous students in the martial arts.

Nakayama Hakudō as the Founder of Musō Shinden-ryū

After receiving menkyō kaiden in Shindō Munen-ryū kenjutsu, Nakayama Hakudō studied jōjutsu techniques in the Shindō Musō-ryū Jōjutsu (神道夢想流杖術) system under Master Uchida Ryōgorō (内田良五郎).

In iaidō (居合術), he trained under Hosokawa Yoshimasa (細川義昌) and Morimoto Megumi (森本免久身). Through Hosokawa Yoshimasa, he learned the techniques of Ōmori-ryū and Shigenobu-ryū, also known as Hayashizaki Musō-ryū. From Morimoto Megumi, he acquired the forms of Hasegawa Eishin-ryū, receiving menkyō kaiden from both teachers.

Through many years of research and practical refinement, Nakayama Hakudō synthesized and unified the techniques of these various schools, creating the Musō Shinden-ryū (夢想神伝流) system, which became one of the most distinguished branches of the classical koryū martial traditions.

He first presented the system under the name Musō Shinden Battōjutsu (夢想神伝抜刀術) in 1939 (Shōwa 14) during a demonstration held at Miyazaki Jingū Shrine (宮崎神宮). The designation Musō Shinden-ryū became widely used only after his death.

Although Musō Shinden-ryū incorporates techniques from multiple traditions, an examination of its den'i (伝位 (3)), the ranks and skills transmitted through instruction, clearly illustrates the structure and levels through which mastery was conveyed.

Within the den'i system, Musō Shinden-ryū is organized as follows:

Shoden (初伝), the introductory level taught at the beginning of training, consists of the Ōmori-ryū (大森流) techniques transmitted by Hosokawa Yoshimasa.

Chūden (中伝), the intermediate level taught during the middle phase of training, is structured around the Hasegawa Eishin-ryū (長谷川英信流) system as transmitted by Morimoto Megumi.

Okuden (奥伝), the highest and most secret level of techniques, again taught by Hosokawa Yoshimasa, is based on the foundations of Shigenobu-ryū (重信流).

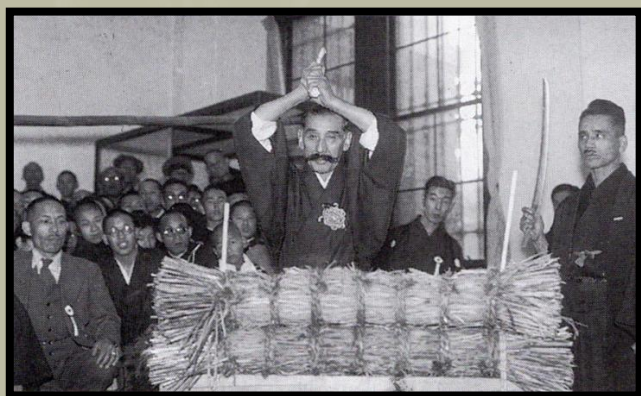
Musō Shinden-ryū continues to be actively practiced today alongside Musō Jikiden Eishin-ryū (無双直伝英信流) and accepts many students within the framework of the Nihon Iaido Renmei (日本居合道連盟).

The Japanese Sword Forged by Mori Yoshichika

Mori Yoshichika (森良近), sometimes known as Minamoto Yoshichika (源良近), was a Japanese swordsmith active during the Taishō and Shōwa periods. His real name was Mori Hisasuke (森久助). He produced distinctive Japanese swords renowned for their exceptional cutting ability and gained recognition after his blades were officially adopted by the Imperial Palace Guard (皇居護衛武官). Nevertheless, his work was not universally appreciated at first.

Rather than adhering strictly to traditional forms, Mori Yoshichika prioritized maximum cutting performance. He employed yōkō (洋鋼), Western steel, and used the muku-gitae (無垢鍛え) method, forging blades from a single type of steel. This approach initially met with skepticism.

Mori Yoshichika's swords were ultimately adopted by the Imperial Palace Guard following a well-known incident. On May 15, 1932 (Shōwa 7), the May 15 Incident (Gojūgo-jiken, 五・一五事件) occurred, during which young naval officers assassinated Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi (犬養毅). This tragic event revealed that the swords carried by the palace guards were insufficiently sharp or effective for defensive duties, prompting the need for truly high-performing blades.



At that time, the Shimazu princely family donated more than thirty swords, which were tested in the presence of Admiral Koyamada Shigezō (小山田繁蔵) and other officers.

The inspection was conducted by Nakayama Hakudō, who found that only a few of the swords demonstrated genuine cutting ability. Among the best-performing blades, he strongly recommended the sword forged by Mori Yoshichika.

Because Mori Yoshichika used Western steel, Hakudō's recommendation initially faced resistance. He persisted, and eventually the admiral authorized a test using a pig carcass.

The blade's cutting power proved so outstanding that it was immediately accepted and officially adopted. Mori Yoshichika subsequently became the official swordsmith to the Imperial Palace Guard, and his work came to be highly regarded.



The Tachi Owned by Nakayama Hakudō

This tachi was among Nakayama Hakudō's favorite swords. Blades forged by Mori Yoshichika are renowned for their exceptional cutting ability.

The blade displays a fine ko-itame hada (小板目) pattern with a smooth and even surface, similar to a sword by Hayama Enshin (羽山円真), which was also made using yōtetsu (洋鉄), Western steel. The similarity in workmanship is believed to result from the inclusion of Western steel during forging.

The blade features a small kissaki (切先) and a deep sori, characteristics that make it well suited for actual combat use and contribute significantly to its appeal.

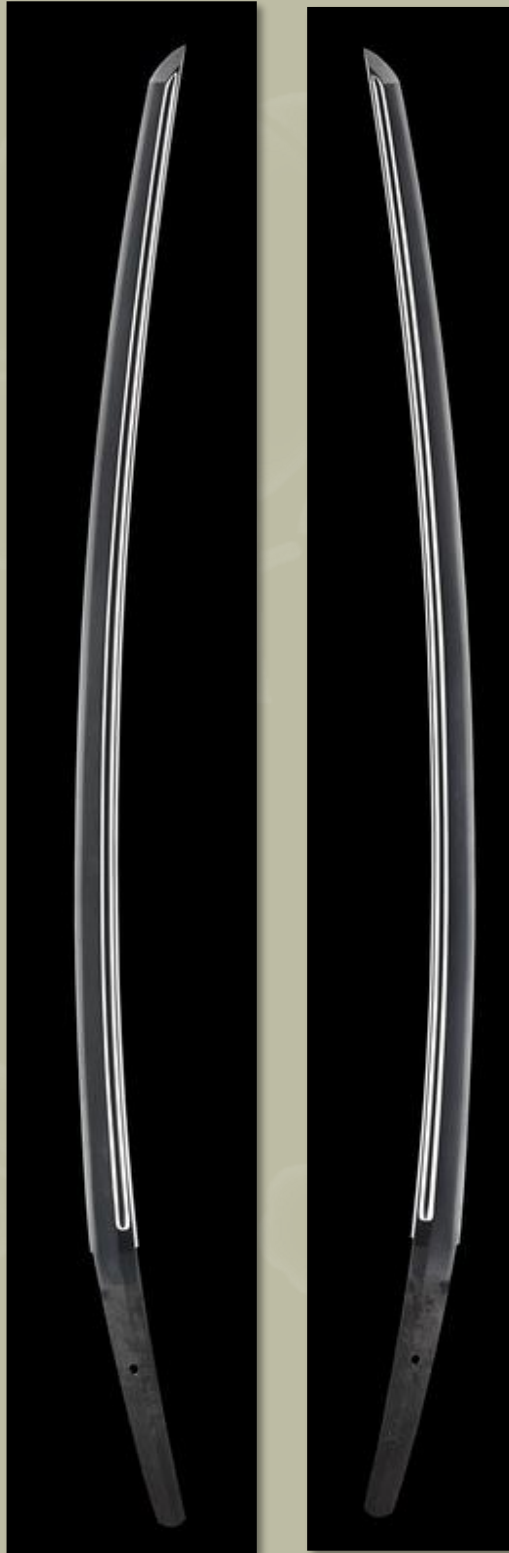
Specifications:

Mei (Signature): Mori Yoshichika, mid-autumn of Shōwa 3 (forged in autumn 1928).

Kantei Kubun (Appraisal Category): Hozon Tōken, a sword deemed worthy of preservation by experts.

Nagasa (Blade Length): 63.8 cm.

Provenance: Formerly owned by Nakayama Hakudō, founder of Musō Shinden-ryū; currently held by the Tōken World Foundation.



This translation was prepared using the following article as a reference: <https://www.touken-world.jp/tips/36520/>

Notes:

1. Mokuroku (目録) is an official document used in Japanese martial arts, especially within classical koryū schools, that records the techniques and knowledge acquired by a student. In short, it is a catalog of transmitted teachings and ranks.

2. Menkyō kaiden (免許皆伝) is one of the highest licenses in classical Japanese martial arts (koryū), indicating that the student has mastered all techniques and secrets of the school and is fully qualified to become a master.

3. Den'i (伝位) is a term used in classical Japanese martial arts (koryū) referring to the structured system of transmitted skills, techniques, and ranks, in other words, the stages through which mastery is conveyed.