

Fine Sukashi Tsuba of Windblown Pine (Matsukaze 松風)
by David Stiles

This is a short article discussing a fine iron openwork (sukashi 透) Japanese sword guard (tsuba 鐔) that was once in the collection of the famous Japanese author and tsuba expert, Dr. Kazutaro Torigoye of Okayama, Japan. To begin the discussion of the tsuba and the calligraphy on the wooden storage box I will introduce Dr. Kazutaro Torigoye.

Dr. Torigoye is best known in the United States as a coauthor with Robert E. Haynes of the English book Tsuba An Aesthetic Study which is an English translation done by Mr. Haynes of Dr. Torigoye's original book: Tsuba Geijutsu-Kō (鐔芸術考). The translation of this large Japanese book was undertaken when Mr. Haynes was a student of Dr. Torigoye in 1961.

The calligraphy found on lid of old wooden Japanese sword fitting storage boxes were among the earliest forms of written description and at times an attribution or appraisal. This was the general practice before the formal written appraisals on paper of the NBTHK and NTHK commonly seen today. In Japanese the term is Hakogaki (箱書き). Hakogaki were and are still coveted, and seen by many collectors to enhance value. Illustration 1 displays both the front and backside of the lid of the wooden storage box used to hold the sukashi tsuba.

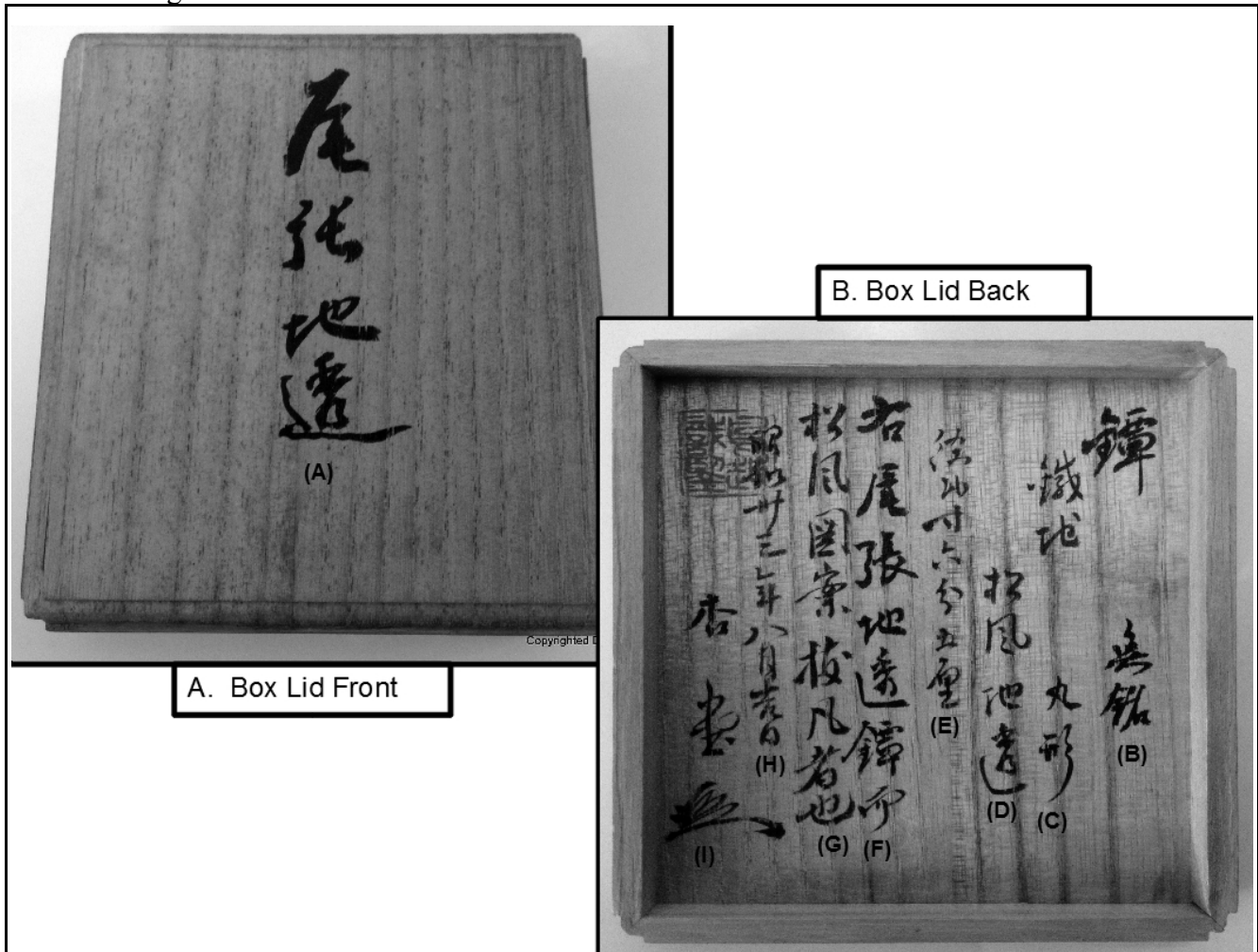


Illustration 1: Hakogaki written on the lid of the wooden storage box signed and stamped by Dr. Kazutaro Torigoye.

The translation into English of the Hakogaki is as follows. The translation is broken into vertical columns and labeled with different Roman letters starting with the front side of the lid going from top to bottom and right to left as Japanese text is traditionally written.

- A) Owari positive openwork.
- B) Tsuba, unsigned.
- C) Made of iron and of round shape.
- D) Windblown pine trees in a positive openwork design.
- E) Tsuba diameter using the old Japanese measurement system is approximately 8 cm.
- F) Owari positive openwork tsuba.
- G) The tsuba is of excellent workmanship and the design is windblown pine Matsukaze (松風).
- H) Date of the Hakogaki: an auspicious day in August 1958.
- I) Dr. Kazutaro Torigoye personal stamp, art name (Kyodo 杏堂), and cypher.

After a systematic analysis of the workmanship, I agree with Dr. Torigoye's attribution that the tsuba is an excellent example of work produced by the Owari Sukashi school during the early part of the Edo Period, likely from the beginning of the Genna era to the start of the Kanbun era (1615-1661).¹ The glossy smooth texture and dark wet purplish black patina are characteristic of iron produced in Owari (尾張) and Mikawa (三河) Provinces.¹ Because this tsuba was produced at the end of the Owari Sukashi school production period, the elaborate composition and highlights done with a very fine chisel are somewhat reminiscent of the master Hayashi Matashichi (林又七) work of the Genroku era (1688-1704).¹

The tsuba has positive openwork designs (ji-sukashi 地透) highlighted nicely with fine chisel carvings (kebori 毛彫) of more than just windblown pine trees as discussed on Dr. Torigoye's brief description in the Hakogaki.² The tsuba also has a picturesque ji-sukashi design of ocean waves, headdress (eboshi 烏帽子), and wagon wheels.

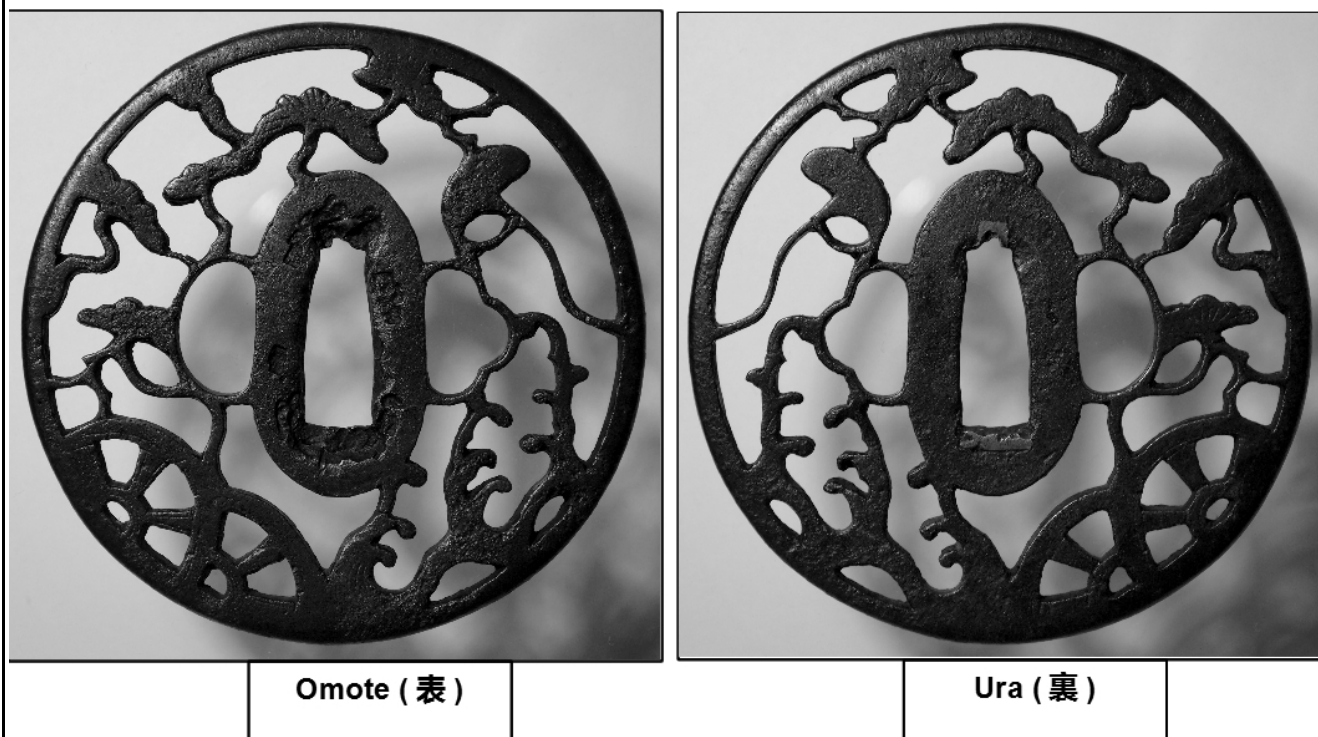


Illustration 2: This is a composite view of the front (omote 表) and back (ura 裏) of the Owari ji-sukashi tsuba. The measurements are 8.1 cm round with a thickness of 4.8 mm at the rim and 5.0 mm near the center.

After wondering what this openwork composition was referring to and if there is a story associated with it, I posted photographs of the tsuba on the Nihonto Message Board, tosogu section: <http://www.nihontomessageboard.com/>.

Both friends and fellow collectors on the message board were able to provide some useful information about the openwork design of this tsuba. What I found the most interesting was the meaning of the whole composition. The theme of this tsuba is from the Noh Play entitled Matsukaze (松風). In the Noh play, a monk meets two beautiful sisters who turn out to be ghosts. They are divers and collect sea brine in their cart near a windy pine shore (the cart and windy pines are among the few stage props in this play). One of them, Matsukaze, wears a man's cloak and eboshi of the sisters' beloved (Yukihira). I believe that one of the popular themes from the play is the allusion of soaking the cart wheels to keep them from drying out and cracking to describe soaking one's heart to keep it from breaking. This tsuba and others with this motif would have been enjoyed and recognized by Noh enthusiasts. The following is taken from the website <http://www.the-noh.com>, about the Noh play Matsukaze (松風), the theme of this tsuba.³

“One autumn evening, a traveling (Buddhist) monk visits Suma Bay (near Suma Ward in present-day Kobe City). He notices on the shore a (mysterious) pine tree which seems to have a story. When he asks a villager about the story, the villager tells him that it is a grave marker for two young

diver sisters, Matsukaze and Murasame. After the monk recites a sutra and prays for the comfort of their souls, he decides to ask for lodging at a salt-making hut and waits for the return of the owner. Then, two young beautiful women, who have finished working under the moon, taking water from the sea, come back to the hut with a cart.³

The monk asks them for accommodation for one night. After they enter the hut, the monk recites the poems of Ariwara no Yukihiro, who had some tie with the place, and explains that he has just consoled the souls of Matsukaze and Murasame at the old pine tree. The women suddenly begin to sob. Asked the reason, the two women reveal their identity: they are the ghosts of Matsukaze and Murasame, who were loved by Yukihiro. They tell their memories of Yukihiro and their love with Yukihiro which was ended by his death.³

The older sister, Matsukaze, wears Yukihiro's kariginu-style kimono and eboshi headdress because she misses him so much. Indulging herself in the memory of her love, she eventually becomes partly mad, takes the pine to be Yukihiro, and tries to embrace the tree. Although Murasame tries to calm her sister, Matsukaze burning with love passionately dances and continues as if expressing the passion of her love in dance. When day dawns, Matsukaze asks the monk to offer a memorial service for the one who is suffering from the obsession. The two divers then disappear in the monk's dream. Only the wind traveling in the pine trees is left, singing like the sound of a passing shower (Murasame).

Originally this drama was called "Shiokumi (Sea Salt Laving)" and was composed by the master, Kiamii. Kannami revised it as "Matsukaze Murasame," which was further revised at a later date by Zeami to "Matsukaze." This is a piece for autumn. Since ancient times it has been one of the most popular Noh dramas, with Yuya, which is a piece for spring, as shown by the expression "Yuya and Matsukaze are like a bowl of rice." (Or "Yuya, Matsukaze, and a bowl of rice." It is a metaphor meaning that people never tire of these two pieces, just as they never tire of eating rice.)³

In "Matsukaze," the expression of the sentiment of love vividly catches our attention. Her emotional changes, like heaving waves (depicted on the tsuba), create unparalleled entertainment. Beginning with the scene in which Matsukaze and Murasame shed tears as they yearn after their past, the story continues to the kuse, the scene in which Matsukaze holds the memento of Yukihiro and reminisces. Matsukaze, wearing Yukihiro's commemorative kimono, believes a pine tree to be Yukihiro, and the drama leads to the dances of chū-no-mai and ha-no-mai. Matsukaze gradually becomes emotional, revealing her love completely and indulges herself in ever stronger affection. Underneath the emotions she expresses is the refined and restful atmosphere of the third-group Noh supported by the well-recognized status of this piece. A profound tension exists at the bottom of this piece.³

Preceding these scenes, the drama describes a fantastical scene in which beautiful women lave and carry the moon in the water on an autumn evening. You will be able to forget the annoyance of this world for a while when you soak yourself in the love story of this mugen-noh which is set in a single scene."³



*Illustration 3: "Ariwara no Yukihiro and the two brine women, Murasame and Matsukaze", an 1886 woodblock print by Yoshitoshi.*⁴

This now explains why Dr. Torigoye describes the openwork design on this tsuba simply as Matsukaze “windblown pine” on the Hakogaki. Any fan of Noh would recognize the picturesque designs on the tsuba as referring to “Matsukaze” the famous play revised into its current form by the playwright Zeami Motokiyo in the 15th Century.⁴

Acknowledgments

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