

THE DEVELOPMENT OF BIZEN CHOJI

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One of the most readily observable differences between the swords of Japan and those of other countries is the hamon pattern. Even the Nara Jidai (645-794) and earlier Jokoto (swords prior to hon-zukuri) have tempered edges as found on extant examples in the Shoso-in and other repositories providing an irrefutable chronology for dating these blades. Swords of this time period show suguha hamon with slight irregularities such as ko-gunome, notare and even ko-choji. With the advent of the Heian Jidai (794-1185), the hamon became more exuberant and complex, and the choji hamon began to become more observable and dominant. It is with this growth, especially in Bizen province, that the choji hamon came close to dominating the late Heian and Kamakura Jidai (1185-1336). This article will concern itself with the growth of the Bizen choji-ha, as no other school and hamon have ever been so nearly synonymous as to be considered a trademark.

The Bizen choji became very popular around the mid-Heian Jidai and continued, in various forms, until the present day. The earliest choji was only a component of a suguha with notare hamon, but at the high point of its development it came to dominate the hamon. The choji flourished during the Kamakura Jidai when not only the Bizen-den used it, but also the Yamashiro-den Rai kaji and Bitchu-Aoe kaji as well as numerous others. However, with the close of the Kamakura era and the onset of the dispute between the Northern and Southern Courts, the Nambokucho Jidai (1336-1394), the choji pattern gave way to the gunome, notare and midare (as well as hitatsura) of the popular Soshu-den.

Briefly stated, the following choji-ha reflect specific schools:

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| O-choji-midare: | Fukuoka Ichimonji and Nagamitsu of the Kamakura Jidai. |
| Saka-choji-midare: | Katayama Ichimonji. |
| Choji-midare: | Yoshioka Ichimonji, Oei Bizen Yasumitsu, Morimitsu and Norimitsu. |
| Ko-midare with Ko-choji: | Ko-Bizen work of the Heian Jidai. *1 |

Ko-Bizen School

From about the Nara Jidai, the choji-ha became either a hamon or a component of a hamon without any major affiliation to a province or school. It is not until the Ko-Bizen-den (c. 950-1250 [?]) that the choji-ha began to become more prevalent in hamon throughout Japan. The choji, as a pattern, is said to be copied after either clusters of daphne odora buds (Jinchoge) or the oil dripping from a lamp. In either event, the early choji is very small and compact. The Ko-Bizen choji of the Heian Jidai (794-1185) was flat and narrow in width composed primarily of ko-midare and nie-deki, with mixed amounts of ko-choji, ko-ashi, and some areas of yo. This combination presented an elegant and refined appearance befitting the court nobles who carried these swords.

Ko-Bizen Characteristics

- Ko-Bizen Masatsune: Hamon of ko-midare mixed with ko-choji, ashi, yo and nie form kinsuji, the hada stands out within the yakiba to present an active appearance.
- Ko-Bizen Tomonari: Hamon of narrow ko-choji ko-midare sprinkled with ko-nie and exhibiting ashi, inazuma and kinsuji.
- Ko-Bizen Yukihide: Hamon of ko-midare mixed with choji and some saka-gokoro-choji, ko-ashi, yo and kinsuji.
- Ko-Bizen Motochika: Hamon of varying width of choji-ba and ko-midare sprinkled with ko-nie and displaying kinsuji, ko-ashi and sunagashi.

Ko-Ichimonji and Fukuoka Ichimonji Schools

The Ichimonji-den, founded by Norimune circa 1180 A.D., were a splinter group of the Ko-Bizen-den, having set up shop in Fukuoka Bizen province. The "ichi" comes from their being granted use of the character representing "the best under the heavens" (tenka-ichi) when the Bizen Ichimonji kaji served the retired Emperor Gotoba-in (c. 1200). The Ichimonji kaji who attended the emperor are as follows: Norimune (1152-1214), Nobufusa (b. 1125), Muneyoshi, Sukemune, Yukikuni, Sukenari, Sukenobu, Kanemichi, Sanefusa, Yoshifusa, Tomosuke, Munetake, and Kanesuke. The earliest Ichimonji kaji worked with yaki-fukai hamon with exuberant choji, with areas of ko-choji, juka-choji (clumped) and crisp nioi-guchi in a suguha semblance, also exhibiting ko-midare, ashi and yo. During the mid to late Kamakura-Jidai the hamon became an active, almost "wild," combination of choji and o-choji mixture. The detectable difference between the Ichimonji and Rai choji is that the Rai choji is compacted to the point of appearing to be a midare of fine squarish nie.

Ko-Ichimonji and Fukuoka Ichimonji Characteristics

- Norimune (Ko-Ichimonji): Suguha based hamon which contains ko-choji, choji, ko-midare ashi and yo.
- Muneyoshi (Ko-Ichimonji): Hamon formed of ko-midare mixed with choji and ashi, the mono-uchi being more turbulent of o-choji midare and tobiyaki.
- Fukuoka Ichimonji Tamekiyo:
Style #1: Hamon of a quiet suguha with ko-choji and ko-midare of nioi with some ko-nie.
Style #2: Hamon of choji mixed with gunome of nioi with kawazuko and fukuro choji and sprinkled with ko-nie.
- Fukuoka Ichimonji Yoshifusa: Hamon of "wild" choji-midare mixed with juka-choji, ashi, a crisp nioi-guchi and fukuro-choji. Yoshifusa is considered a master of the exuberant choji hamon and his trade mark is the fukuro-choji seen in most of his work.
- Fukuoka Ichimonji Yoshimochi: Hamon of choji-midare with ashi, yo and ko-nie presenting a

"florid" choji-ha.

Fukuoka Ichimonji Sukekane: Hamon of choji-midare with a growing amount of gunome and an abundance of ashi and yo.

Yoshioka Ichimonji School

The Yoshioka Ichimonji-den was founded by the kaji Sukeyoshi toward the end of the Kamakura-Jidai. Like the Fukuoka smiths, the Yoshioka group gets its name because they settled in Yoshioka of Bizen Province. The Yoshioka-Ichimonji hamon was more dominated by choji than their Fukuoka counterparts. Their hamon was composed almost exclusively of o-choji midare with some togariba tendencies. The Yoshioka-den, most famous for Sukeyoshi and Sukemitsu, was short lived and seems to have faded out during the mid-Nambokucho Jidai as the Soshu-den became more prominent.

Katayama, Kamakura and Shochu Ichimonji Schools

These three splinter Ichimonji groups are discussed here together simply for the author's convenience, not because they belong together. The Katayama Ichimonji-den, founded by Fukuoka smith Norifusa, located themselves in Katayama of Bitchu Province. This group is known for a hamon of o-choji mixed with juka-choji, ashi and yo with dramatic saka-gokoro tendencies. This style of hamon greatly influenced the Nambokucho Bitchu Aoe kaji. The Kamakura-Ichimonji of Kamakura was founded by the Ichimonji smith Sukezane, who, together with Bizen Saburo Kunimune and Awataguchi Kunitsuna, founded the Soshu-den. Blades of the Kamakura Ichimonji school are composed of exuberant choji-midare in thick nioi sprinkled with ko-nie. Kunimune is known for his choji-midare hamon with "square" headed choji, saka-choji, kawazuko choji and shiroshimi. The Shochu Ichimonji school, of whom Yoshiuji is the most famous, are known for their narrow nioi hamon of ko-choji-midare mixed with some saka-ashi. By the end of the Nambokucho Jidai, the Ichimonji schools had ceased to exist, but their influence is felt to this day.

Ko-Osafune and Osafune Schools

The Osafune-den was founded by Mitsutada in 1230 at Osafune in Bizen Province. The splendor of the Kamakura Jidai can be seen in the magnificent Osafune-to of Mitsutada, Nagamitsu, Chikakage and numerous others. The Osafune-den made nioi-deki hamon of choji with gunome, kataochi-gunome (sawtooth zig-zag gunome). Considerable variation in the hamon pattern, often associated with much activity, can be observed in the blades of the Osafune group between 1230 and 1396 when the Oei Bizen Osafune group became prominent. It is around the time of Shodai Osafune Kanemitsu that choji became a letter component of Bizen-to, except for Fukkoto, whereas gunome and its variants became more popular.

Osafune Characteristics

Ko-Osafune Mitsutada: Hamon of compacted choji mixed with kawazuko, juka and o-choji and displaying ashi, yo, sunagashi, kinsuji and an active and exuberant

grain formation within the yakiba. Mitsutada's hamon, circa 1230, represents a choji dominant pattern.

- Nagamitsu: Hamon of evenly formed choji of an even width, a tight nioi-guchi, gunome, ashi and yo. Nagamitsu can be further identified by an orderly cluster of gunome all in a row.
- Osafune Kagehide: Hamon predominantly of choji with togari, haku and regular gunome tendencies, deep ashi and some clustering nie.
- Osafune Chikakage: Hamon of chu-suguha choji-midare with ko-choji and some saka-gokoro, saka ashi and nie.
- Osafune Motoshige: Narrow nioi hamon of ko-choji midare in saka-gokoro with uniform gunome in the mono-uchi, exhibiting the Soshu influence of Sadamune.

Hatakeda, Unkai and Schools Outside Bizen

Again, unrelated groups are taken together in an attempt to tidy up the Nambokucho days. The Hatakeda-den was founded by Moriie and exhibits a basic choji-ha of nioi, sprinkled with korie and showing some gunome. The Unkai-den founded by Unsho, together with Unji, exhibit hamon of ko-choji in suguha. The remaining outside groups display Soshu influence being composed of gunome-midare with some ko-choji and choji, bearing a slight resemblance to Shizu work.

Oei-Bizen Osafune Schools

The Oei-Bizen Osafune group represents a revival of sorts, whereby the overall quality of "sword-manufacture" was elevated. The blade sugata was quieted down considerably from the excesses of the Nambokucho period. This period also saw extensive conversion to the uchigatana, where the ko-waki-zashi and katana composed the daisho of the more typical late 16th and early 17th century samurai. The bright stars of the Oei group (1394-1427) were the so-called Osafune Sanmitsu: Moromitsu, Yasumitsu and Morimitsu. This is not to exclude Iesuke, Sanemitsu, Norimitsu, et al, all represented by multiple generations. The typical hamon of this period is represented by nioi-deki hamon exhibiting koshiriraki-gunome mixed with midare and choji, kinsuji, ashi and yo. One can hardly cover all of the Oei period "mitsus" as there are numerous kaji. These artists were also very prolific. Choji dominant hamon representative of Ichimonji and early Osafune works are seen alongside the serene shibui suguha hamon of Yasumitsu and others. These smiths represent a truly diverse and exciting period of the Bizen tradition.

Oei Bizen Characteristics

- Yasumitsu: Hamon of nioi-deki koshiriraki midare (wide valleys between the midare) with a togari semblance, mixed with choji-midare, gunome, ko-ashi, kinsuji and sunagashi.

- Morimitsu: Hamon similar to Yasumitsu except there is less choji, rounded midare, some gunome-choji with ashi, yo and kinsuji with ji-nie.
- Iesuke: Hamon of gunome-midare with "pointed" choji, ashi, yo of deep nioi, nie, kinsuji, sunagashi and inazuma.
- Sanemitsu: Hamon of basic gunome mixed with koshihiraki midare, choji, ashi and yo, some ko-nie and a "lustrous" nioi-guchi.

Sue-Koto and Early Shinto Osafune Schools

The Sue-Koto and early Shinto periods (1460-1650) were typified by such kaji as the generations of Katsumitsu (i.e., Jirozaemon), Munemitsu, Kiyomitsu, Sukesada and numerous others, too many to mention separately. The Bizen work of this period is best represented by koshihiraki-midare, togariba-gokoro and a somewhat distinct habuchi. Occasionally, choji appears as a component or even as the dominant portion of the hamon during this period of great turmoil (Sengoku-Jidai, Momoyama-Jidai, Sekigahara and the siege of Osaka Castle) but as chumon-uchi (made to special order) and rarely as kazu-uchi mono (mass produced items). Such works represent the bottom point of the Bizen tradition. One more notable group of this period who used choji, was the Shinto Okayama Masashige school. This group (circa 1620) made hamon of sugu-choji midare or choji-midare with distinct gunome and nioi-guchi.

Shinto and Shin-Shinto Yokoyama School

The Shinto Yokoyama-den was founded by the Osafune school smith Kozuke Daijo Sukesada who made blades with a distinct and rich choji pattern. Next to Kozuke Daijo, the best known Yokoyama kaji is Yokoyama Sukenaga (circa Tenpo). This school made blades of nioi hamon reminiscent of Koto times relying on many varieties of choji. These blades display koshi-hiraki midare, gunome, tight nioi-guchi, sunagashi and kinsuji. Other Shinto and Shin-Shinto era kaji also used the Bizen choji as trademark for their work. Such smiths included Naka Kawachi Kunisuke, Ishido-den, Taikei Naotane, as well as many others. The Shin-Shinto Yokoyama school is best known for the exact nature of its choji-midare, as most Shin-Shinto kaji show a hamon pattern which is restrained and overly conscious.

Yokoyama Characteristics

- Yokoyama Kozuke Daijo Sukesada: Hamon of a wide and complex choji, koshihiraki-midare; ashi and yo are seen with overall fine ko-nie.
- Yokoyama Sukenaga: Hamon of gunome-choji-midare with juka-choji, ashi, yo and sunagashi being present; koshihiraki-midare is also seen.

Final Stages of the Tradition

The Bizen style choji did not end with the Haitorei Edict of 1871, rather it continues through numerous Gendai tosho. Men such as Gassan Sadakazu (who copied Ichimonji-den), Fujiwara

Toshimitsu, the Yoshihara brothers, Yamada Kiyofusa, Horii Nobuhide and Tanetsuga, to name a few, have carried on the Bizen tradition and the noble choji-ha. The Bizen tradition today is immensely popular. Due to the in-depth study and experimentation of these dedicated tosho, once again the glories of the Ichimonji, Osafune and Yokoyama choji hamon live on in gendaito.

NOTES

*1 The preceding, and following, in no way is meant to delineate the choji-ha of the entire history of the Bizen-den. Rather, this article focuses on those "major" smiths whose work can readily be studied in numerous reference sources.

Glossary of Choji-ha

Ashinaga Choji:	choji hamon which exhibits ashi (legs) which are long.
Choji:	cloves.
Choji-midare:	clove pattern mixed with irregularities.
Fukuro-choji:	choji of bag or sack shape.
Futatsu-ba:	doubled clove pattern seen on Katayama Ichimonji work.
Gyaku-choji:	reversed cloves, i.e., slanted.
Juka-choji:	compacted cloves pattern.
Kawazuko-choji:	tadpole cloves pattern resembling "mushrooms."
Kengata-choji:	fist shaped cloves.
Ko-choji:	small clove pattern.
Mitsuzure choji:	tripled clove pattern.
O-choji:	large clove pattern.
Saka-choji:	slanted clove pattern directed toward the machi area.

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