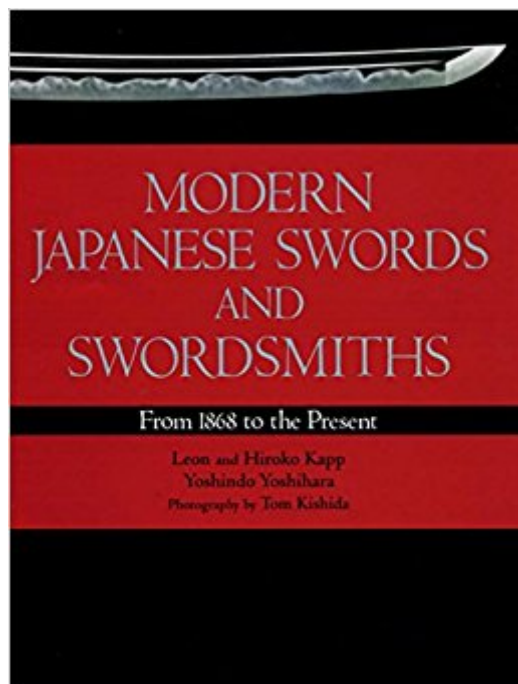




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Modern Japanese Swords And Swordsmiths: From 1868 To The Present



Synopsis

The lineage of the Japanese sword can be traced back over a thousand years, and throughout its long history the sword has emerged as one of Japan's most durable cultural assets. Part of its mythical appeal lies in the unique harmony of its historical roles as deadly hand-held weapon, embodiment of the samurai spirit, and powerful symbol of warfare. The types of sword that have been made, their forging methods, and the styles of blade have been influenced by historical events and shaped by developments in the means of combat, giving rise to five distinct periods and a host of styles and schools. The most recent period, gendaito, began in the late nineteenth century, during Japan's drive to modernize its military forces. The demand for traditional swords all but disappeared, and many schools and styles became virtually extinct. In this authoritative new book, Leon and Hiroko Kapp, together with leading swordsmith Yoshindo Yoshihara, coauthors of the bestselling *The Craft of the Japanese Sword*, describe this most recent period of sword history, and present the work of key craftsmen active today. Through a detailed chronicle of major events in the modern sword world, the authors illustrate the developments in sword-making, its movement into artistic spheres, and the challenges swordsmiths have faced over the last century. Many of today's smiths seek to revive the ancient arts of sword forging, and at the same time create a vital and meaningful artistic role for the sword in a modern context. In part three of this book, the authors present informative interviews with twenty-two modern smiths, who demonstrate how the blade's aesthetic power derives from a symmetry of the sword's basic elements—steel, shape, and texture—and this harmony affords the blade a singular and delicate beauty. Part four widens the scope beyond swordsmiths to include perspectives from other experts involved with gendaito, from martial arts practitioner to metallurgist. The book also includes comprehensive and intricate lineage charts of the major historical schools. The heightened aesthetic sense that characterizes the contemporary sword and its production has ushered in what can be categorized as a distinctly new era of sword history—shin-gendaito. Throughout this book the authors make a compelling argument for the introduction of this new term, which can more accurately reflect the dynamic changes that have taken place in this most modern chapter of sword history. Lavishly illustrated with rare historical photographs and works of the best smiths, including Living National Treasures, this will be essential reading for the student and connoisseur alike, as well as readers interested in skilled craftsmanship in general.

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Customer Reviews

[from the book] Revival of Gendaito [from "The First Half of the Twentieth Century," Part 2] The traditional Japanese sword was thought to exemplify the spirit of Japan, and in the military it was felt that all officers should carry a traditional sword. However, the supply of old swords available for this purpose was very small, since few traditional swords had been made since 1876, and very few were being made by the beginning of the Showa era. During the Meiji era, with the Japanese military rapidly expanding, swords were needed to supply to new military personnel, though, as noted, the sword's role was largely symbolic and subordinate to that of the gun. Since it was not practical or economical to produce the required number of swords with traditional methods, swords were mass-produced -- stamped and ground, or forged out of cheaper modern steel. These factory or mill steel swords often had hardened edges or hamon, and appeared to be very similar to traditional swords. These blades, called Murata-to, appear to be the first effort to make a mass-produced economical substitute for traditional Japanese swords. The name comes from Murata Tsuneyoshi (1838-1921), a General in the Japanese army famous for making primarily guns. Owing to the shortage of swords in the wake of the Haitorei, he turned his talents to sword-making for the military. Murata-to is the collective name given to gunto made under his supervision, using the results of his innovative research into oil quenching techniques, and blending different kinds of foreign steel with native tamahagane. Murata-to were used extensively during the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), but they were not considered to be the equal of a handmade traditional sword. In the early Showa era, since there were very few orders for traditional swords in Japan, there was not a large number of active swordsmiths. In order to stimulate new production of

'traditional' Japanese swords to supply the officers of the military, Araki Sadao, Chief of Staff, and General Yamaoka Shigeatsu, who were keen sword enthusiasts, decided it was necessary to train more swordsmiths. They established the Nihonto Tanren Kai, the Japanese Sword Forging Association, on the grounds of Yasukuni shrine in Tokyo in 1933. Miyaguchi Yasuhiro (or Toshihiro), a student of Kasama Shigetsugu, and Kajiyama Yasunori, a student of Yokoyama Hiroyoshi, were chosen to be the heads of the new forging organization. The students they accepted were trained as apprentices. When a student's skills reached a level appropriate for him to be considered a swordsmith, he was given a mei, a swordsmith's name, which had as its first character yasu, from Yasukuni shrine. This work continued until 1945, when the war ended. By then the Yasukuni smiths had produced 8,100 strictly traditional blades made from tamahagane without the use of any power tools. This group was also notable because they developed their own distinct style, and built and operated their own tatara smelter to produce tamahagane. Another effort was begun in 1933 to revive the production of, and interest in, traditional Japanese swords and to train more swordsmiths. Kurihara Hikosaburo, a member of the Japanese Diet, was asked by Saito Makoto, the prime minister, Toyama Mitsuru, and Uchida Ryohei to take action to increase the number of trained swordsmiths capable of making traditional Japanese swords. In response to this request, Kurihara set up and organized the Nihonto Tanren Denshu Jo, the Japanese Sword Forging Workshop, and advertised all over Japan to recruit students. This organization was located initially on the grounds of the former estate of Katsu Kaishu, an important figure in the Meiji Restoration. The major center of sword production in the early Showa era was the town of Seki in Gifu prefecture, which had a long tradition of sword-making. Probably about seventy percent of wartime sword production in Japan was in Seki. Two types of swords were produced in this period: fully traditional Japanese swords made from tamahagane, and nontraditional swords made from factory or mill steel. The overall shape and appearance of both types of swords was very similar, but the nontraditional swords were called Showa-to, or "Showa era swords." This term distinguished them from traditional swords, and they were not made from tamahagane. Many of these Showa-to have a stamp on their tang to indicate that they are nontraditional blades. Showa-to were produced in very great numbers during the war period to meet the large demand for swords. They could be produced for a cost, in time and materials, far below that required for traditional swords. In contrast to the Nihonto Tanren Kai and Kurihara's Nihonto Denshu Jo, which only made traditional swords from tamahagane, the bulk of sword production in Seki consisted of Showa-to (only approximately six percent of Seki's production consisted of traditional swords). An overwhelming number of swords was produced there from 1940 to 1945; their quota from the military was approximately 18,000 swords per month. These

three sword-making areas -- the Nihonto Tanren Kai, the Nihonto Denshu Jo, and the town of Seki -- were the source of the most important swords made in this period and are indispensable to the modern history of the Japanese sword. They are discussed in the next few sections. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

LEON KAPP is a cell and molecular biologist working in the San Francisco Bay area. He has spent a considerable amount of time studying Japanese swords with the swordsmith Yoshindo Yoshihara. HIROKO KAPP is a correspondent for the Tokyo-based Senken Shinbun news organization. The Kapps live in San Rafael, California. YOSHINDO YOSHIHARA is a swordsmith who is ranked among the top sword craftsmen in Japan. His family has been making tools and swords for several generations, and his son is also a swordsmith who now works with him in Tokyo. The Kapps and Yoshindo are the authors of *The Craft of the Japanese Sword*, which describes how a Japanese sword is made and finished. TOM KISHIDA is a professional photographer living and working in Tokyo. He worked with the authors on their last book, and he has been photographing swordsmiths and their work for more than twenty years. His acclaimed Japanese-language book, *Yasukuni Toshō*, is widely recognized as the definitive study of Yasukuni smiths.

Not sure what some of the reviewers expect who had some negative things to say about the book?? This is an incredible book that tries to do a lot, and generally succeeds. If for no other reason, the valuable insights from the 28-interviews make this book worthwhile on their own. If you have ever considered buying a Gendaito (modern era) blade, or simply want to learn more about the intimacies of Japanese blades, this is a great book. All the photos are b/w but of excellent quality. There are some historical images of swords, craftsmen, shinto priests, and soldiers. I like the image of the Akabane arsenal taken by US forces showing a mega-stockpile of seized gunto (swords). There are many photo examples of very high quality blades, many made by the craftsmen who are interviewed. There are also some hand drawn figures showing details like kissaki (sword tip) and hamon (temper line), and the various types of sword styles and curvatures that will help educate anyone new to the subject or act as a quick reference for those of us who space something out from time to time. For the beginner there are detailed chapters on the parts of a sword and the history of development. For anyone planning to travel to Japan to invest in a new blade, this is an excellent resource for comparing the different styles of craftsmanship and the processes involved in making and buying a sword. This is one of my favorite sword books out of many. I also recommend "The New Generation of Japanese Swordsmiths" by Tamio Tsuchiko as a companion to this book. Both

are outstanding but see my review for that book as there are a number of redundant interviews, which for me was not a problem.

the book has lots of info and has exceeded my expectations , i bought it for specific info re a smith and there is 13 pages dedicated too the grand father of gendia smith,,

An in depth treatment of modern Japanese Swords and Swordsmiths the 20th Century.

Very happy with the purchase and the service, thanks

good book for reference if you are into Japanese swords

Very good book, easy to read and full of comprehensive information, a good starting point in the Japanese sword world.

Book lacked new information from their previous book. Not enough swords, too many interviews. What happened to the sword smith before WWII.

Art historians have long recognized Kondansha as one of the premier publishers of books on Japanese art and artifacts, and this publication lives up to their excellent reputation. As a long-time Japanese sword collector and enthusiast, and owner of every known book in English on the Japanese sword, I was delighted that this book contains a wealth of information I didn't previously know. That in and of itself makes it a valuable treasure. I was moreover pleased that the book starts at the beginning, providing excellent background and references to help the beginner. I strongly recommend it to all my sword students, and to anyone interested in collecting, and more important, understanding the modern Japanese sword (Gendaito). The book, while very well written, does have several redundancies and a few circular references that are no doubt in part due to it being a first edition. But in most cases it is simply because the authors have a specific purpose in mind: the unabashed promotion of the traditionally-made modern Japanese sword as an object of art. The book takes a strong stand, contrary to the thinking of much of the sword-collecting world, that only Koto swords (mid Heian to 1596) have true artistic and collectible value. The book presents a powerful case for the value and craftsmanship of the modern Gendaito, set against the context of the history of Japanese swordmaking and backed up by trusted and incontrovertible sources. Of

course, it does not exhort modern machine-made mass-produced blades, but rather it explains (in detail) how many thousands of WW II and modern blades were made in the traditional way, and clears up many misconceptions about what is a true and valuable Gendaito blade. While many of us will still delight in finding Koto and Shinto era blades, now we have a context for appreciating equally well the finest Gendaito. This is certainly required reading for anyone who intends to collect Japanese swords, and especially if you prowl eBay!

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