



During the June exhibit and sword show sponsored by the TOKEN STUDY GROUP of Chicago, Illinois area, the writer had the pleasure of recording an interview with Mr. MORIHIRO OGAMA of the NBTHK. Attending this session were JSS/US members Roy Hashioka, Dean Hartley, R. B. Caldwell, myself and a friend, Jack Landis of St. Louis. Roy Hashioka presented the questions to Mr. Ogawa in Japanese and then translated the answers back to the group in English.

An Interview with

Mr. Morihiro Ogawa (NBTHK)

Transcribed by R. C. Hartmann (JSS/US)

- Mr. Hashioka: Where is your home in Japan?
- Mr. Ogawa: I am originally from Saitama Prefecture, just north of Tokyo. I am 24 years old and a bachelor. In my family I have a sister and an older brother.
- Mr. Hashioka: When did you become interested in swords?
- Mr. Ogawa: I started to become deeply interested during my first year of high school. I was encouraged and prompted by a Mr. Akimoto (from Saitama Prefecture). He is one of the men who passes on the Juyo Tokens.
- Mr. Hartley: How many men are on the Juyo Board?
- Mr. Ogawa: Twelve or thirteen, depending on the society.
- Mr. Hartley: Is this a simple majority or a unanimous decision?
- Mr. Ogawa: Majority vote.
- Mr. Hartley: What is required for a blade to be accepted for Juyo shinsa?
- Mr. Ogawa: The blade must already have GREEN PAPERS. The reason for this is, the board does not want any old blade coming in and taking up valuable time. They want some blades that have already passed a certain grade before it is looked at for Juyo.
- Mr. Hartmann: Is this judging conducted in the Nation Museum?
- Mr. Caldwell: No, it is done at the NBTHK at Yoyogi. This is separate from Ueno Park which is the National Museum.

- Mr. Hashioka: Is your family interested in swords?
- Mr. Ogawa: Yes, we have a family collection, collected by my father. We have a number of Juyo Token. These include a koichimonji, a Go-Yoshiro - a ghost!
- Mr. Hartley: What is it they say, you see a Yoshiro and a ghost about the same number of times?
- Mr. Ogawa: This Yoshihiro was at one time in a Matsudaira collection. It has a gold attribution. We also have a 1st generation Ryokai.
- Mr. Caldwell: There is a man in Chicago at this time, a Mr. Soichiro Miyazaki, whose mother owns a Ryokai which is a Juyo Token. He will be in Chicago for several years and is studying here. (Miyazaki family also have a Meibutsu Rai Kunimitsu. They have the foremost collection of Yasuchika tsubas. Meibutsu tanto "Shiokawa" Rai Kunimitsu.)
- Mr. Hartley: How long did you study under Dr. Honma and Dr. Sato, Ogawa-san?
- Mr. Ogawa: About seven years. Before that it was with Mr. Akimoto.
- Mr. Hartley: Have you found a representative number of good swords in the U. S.?
- Mr. Ogawa: I have seen one that would be a Juyo Bijutsu, but am not at liberty to say where. The owner asked that it not be publicized. Eventually, he hopes to donate it to the Japanese government.
- Mr. Hartmann: What are you studying towards - polishing swords, kantie of swords?
- Mr. Ogawa: I have studied polishing, just enough to see if the polisher did a good job. I am not a polisher myself, but can judge a good polish from a bad one.
- Mr. Hartley: Can you issue orikami?
- Mr. Ogawa: No, I do not issue papers.
- Mr. Hartley: Many people ask how one becomes authorized to issue orikami - who says you can or cannot issue papers?

- Mr. Ogawa: You work yourself up in the ranks of the word societies, and when you are TOP MAN, you can issue orikami. When your colleagues and peers recognize that you are a good man, then your judgment is accepted.
- Mr. Caldwell: To elaborate on your question, Ron, Mr. Ogawa is working on what is equivalent to his Master's or Doctorate Degree, studying under Dr. Honma and Dr. Sato. He is now studying towards higher degrees, studying at the most advantageous place.
- Mr. Ogawa: We acquire a degree in Fine Arts and then can major in katana.
- Mr. Hartley: Are there any Gaijin (foreigners) studying in Japan at this time for this type of thing?
- Mr. Ogawa: There is a Mr. Victor Harris - English - who is probably back in England now.
- Mr. Harley: Are you surprised by the number of interested people here who study katana?
- Mr. Ogawa: Yes, I am surprised at so many people being deeply interested in katana here. Do not depend on the books alone, when you see a good blade, really study it! You can't learn it all from books, you must get such blades into your hands and really look at it.
- Mr. Hartley: This reminds me once before, I was in Tokyo and I went to Ueno Park. Dr. Sato showed me kokō blades and in just one afternoon you could recognize things that the books described, but if you had not seen it first hand you would not recognize it.
- Mr. Hartmann: This is what has really bothered me since I have become deeply interested in swords. In my area it is truly difficult to see many swords, let alone really good blades! After studying all the books and papers available, I still find myself unable to recognize some of the more basic "good" characteristics in a blade, such as good or bad nioi and nei, chikei, kinsuji, inazuma - and can only guess that what I am looking at is really this.

- Mr. Ogawa: I have been around the states now for forty days and have seen many swords. I have looked at some of the English texts and have found many errors in them. There are many really good Japanese texts by Drs. Honma and Sato, and other texts coming out all the time. It would be good to get English translations of these.
- Mr. Hartmann: Our society has been seeking out some good texts to include into our translation program and would welcome any suggestions along these lines.
- Mr. Hartley: I have a full collection of NBTHK Bulletins and can read only 1/100th of what is in them, enough to read a small part of what is there. What is really needed is someone to translate particularly the parts that are in error in the English texts.
- Mr. Hashioka: Are there any polishers available in Japan?
- Mr. Ogawa: There are not many first class polishers around. The time one must wait for a polish is usually about one year, so don't expect too much.
- Mr. Caldwell: There are these scrolls - full length rubbings of blades - which Mr. Sato insists must be perfect. These would be great for translation. These are called KONZON OSHIGATA - there are four scrolls which are magnificent. The NBTHK Bulletin comes out every once in a while with a cover page which is a full length tracing of a particular blade. These cover pages put together comprise these scrolls. They are perfect and nobody doubts them and therefore they are better than any texts around.
- Mr. Hartley: How long will you be in the States before you return to Japan?
- Mr. Ogawa: One year for sure. I hope to travel around the country and see all there is to see (swordwise) and also to record what is to be seen, the good things! This record will enable all collectors to know what is available for viewing and therefore can learn from these swords.

I am going to look around and try to locate as many good swords as possible, ones that have been put away and forgotten for years. I would like all collectors to look around and to try and let me see all the blades which are to be seen - no matter what they think of them - I would still like to see them personally.

- Mr. Hashioka: What is the best blade you have seen at this show?
- Mr. Ogawa: A 2nd generation Tegai Kanenaga owned by Mr. Wysocki (JSS/US member).
- Mr. Hartmann: If you come to St. Louis sometime, I am sure we could show you some nice blades. There are not too many to be found, but there are some which are considered to be rather good blades. Our local Art Museum has a very interesting collection of tsuba which was set up years ago by Dr. Hoopes to serve as a study collection. At present, it is in storage but can be viewed by requesting permission thru the Oriental Arts Department - a Mr. Richard Cleveland. They also have several blades, but I have not seen them.
- Mr. Ogawa: American collectors should really have a Shin-sa-in come to Chicago, Dallas, California, etc., who would request a slight charge just to defray expenses.
- Mr. Caldwell: This would be no problem. We could get together a thousand pieces easily!
- Mr. Ogawa: If perhaps a man of Dr. Sato's caliber would come to the States, many hidden swords would come out. This would not only be an education for all of us, but would save some blades which may otherwise be lost forever.

At the conclusion of this interview, Mr. Ogawa was sincerely thanked on behalf of the JSS/US. In appreciation, the attending officers bestowed the privilege of becoming Honorary Member of the Japanese Sword Society/U.S. Morihiro Ogawa is a very sincere and dedicated student of the sword, deeply interested in sharing his knowledge and in helping other collectors to learn more of katana. I am sure that he will be assisted in his search for the location of swords by all the members, and that he will be graciously welcomed by all collectors across the States.

R. C. Hartmann