

THE INAKA SMITHS

Albert Yamanaka

There are the five traditional schools, Yamato, Yamashiro, Bizen, Sôshu and Mino. Outside of these five main traditions or schools, there were a few men working in other places who sometimes followed one of these traditions and sometimes were somewhat different. The popular term for these workers in inaka or country smith.

One of the first is the Kinbô or Kanefusa School. Actually Kinbô is the better reading. The blade of the Kinbô School generally looks like a Bizen blade or a Mino blade. They worked in the fifth or Sengoku period.

The Kinbô were an offshoot from the very late Tegai School of Yamato. But the very late Tegai had already deteriorated so much from the original Yamato tradition that we see this school following more the popular style of the time, mostly taken from the Bizen and Mino styles which, during the Sengoku Period, had the most numerous smiths.

Most of the blades of this school we see are sun-nobi tantô about one shaku or a little over, or about wakizashi length. Sometimes they are hirazukuri. On occasion you may find blades that resemble Sôshu style.

After the Kinbô, there is another school, the Kagashiro School of Kawachi province, who also worked in Bizen and Mino styles. Kawachi is right next to Osaka in Settsu province.

Kinbô and Kagashiro are in the Kinai or Home Provinces. Other Inaka smiths were scattered throughout Japan.

In Ise we see the Muramasa School. Muramasa [村正] was a student of Heianjô Nagayoshi [平安城 長吉]. He made both tantô and katana, but he is better known for his tantô. His katana are about 2 shaku, 2 sun, and his tantô are sunnobi, about 1 shaku. The width of the blade is a little greater than usual for his time.

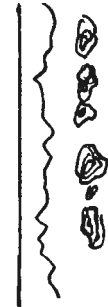
His hamon is characterized by being primarily notare. This would be considered to be mainly notare because the primary stroke would be a notare, but in the valley of the notare, it becomes a suguha, with the peaks of the midare becoming a hako midare or box midare. A description of his works appears in a number of books.



The next school we will discuss is the Shimada School of Suruga province, which is on the Tôkaidô toward the Edo side. The katana are of late Bizen style, but the tantô are of late Sôshu style, especially those of Sukemune [助宗], the

most famous smith of this school. His tantô sometimes resemble the tantô of Muramasa, that is, he has the valley of the notare becoming sugu-ha.

In Musashi province, we have the Shimohara School, who worked in the late Sôshu style, however, among a very few of their works we find copies of the Early Sôshu style. One of the characteristics of this school is that their hada is Ô-mokume.



You may have notices that I have been moving from the Kinai along the Tôk-aidô toward Musashi. Next we will go up to Mutsu province around the Sendai district. Here we find the Hôju, and the Gassan Schools. The most important characteristic of these two schools is that their hada is ayasugi.

From here we go toward the Japan Sea side until we come to Etchu Province. Here we find the Uda School. The Uda smiths did just about everything that was done during their time, the Sôshu, the Bizen, the Mino styles. This makes it pretty hard to put your finger on any one set style that these people followed. Each piece must be studied for itself since none is a representative work.

In the next province, Kaga, we come to the Fujishima School. They worked in Mino, Bizen, and Sôshu styles, too.

You have to remember that these so-called "country" smiths did so many types of work because they did not have a strong tradition to follow and so they followed whatever style was popular at the time.

We come next to Hôki province where we have the Hiroyoshi School. These people worked in late Sôshu style.

In Bungo Province in northern Kyûshû we see the Takada School who did a mixture of Bizen and Mino.

I have been talking about the lesser smiths outside of the Gok-aden, but there were, sometimes, great smiths in these outlying "districts." Gô Yoshihiro [郷義弘], of Etchu, I think you all know, was one of the ten students of Masamune [正宗]. There are no known works by Yoshihiro that are signed. He made only tachi, as far as we know. And, since he died very young, there are very few of his works in existence. There is an old saying that "one never sees a ghost or a work of Yoshihiro." One hears about them all the time, but one never actually comes across one. This was a popular saying in Tokugawa Japan because all Gô had become so famous by the Tokugawa period that all the so-called known attributed works by Yoshihiro had already found their way into the collections of the great Daimyô. The common run-of-the-mill soldiers, even though they carried swords, had never even seen such a work.

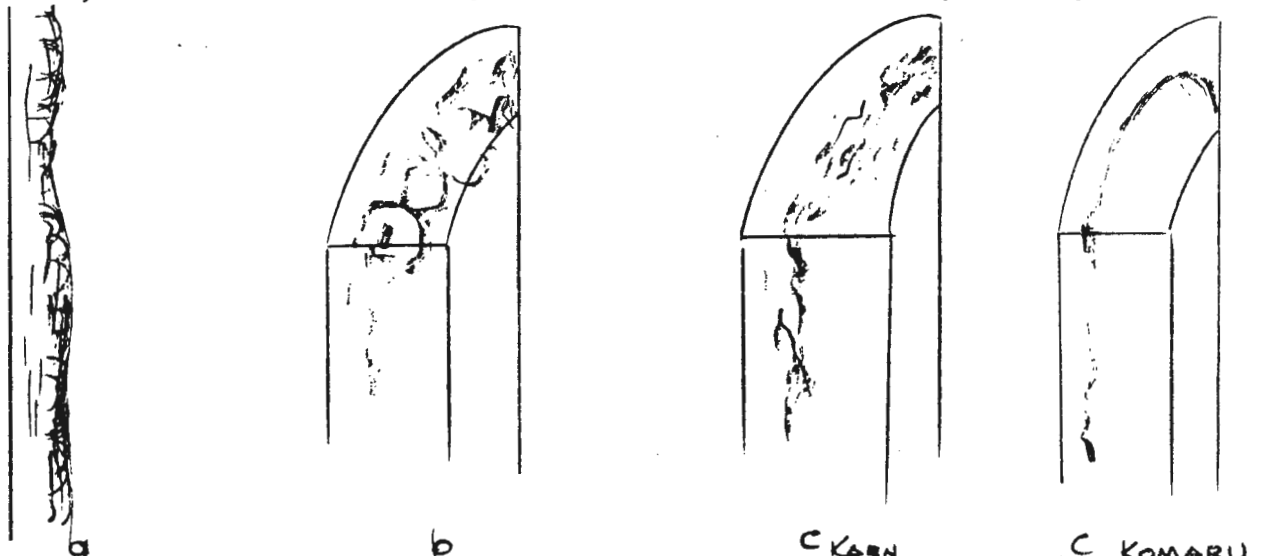
Now Yoshihiro, being a student of Masamune, worked in the late Kamakura and early Yoshino periods. During that time they were still making tachi. A few years later, when the katana and wakizashi came into being, as we know, almost all of these long tachi were cut down and made into katana. It seems that most Yoshihiro tachi were very

long. When they were shortened, his signed work lost the signature. His work was so popular and so famous that all the generals wanted to carry his blades, but in altering them to the current style, they were all cut down. There are no known works of his with a signature. However, there are old oshigata of his signatures so we know that he did sign.

There are records of these famous blades in the records of the so-called Meibutsu. I plan to go into this more thoroughly some other time, but I'll just mention this now. I'm not sure of the exact date but about the middle of the Edo period or a little earlier, the Tokugawa shôgun ordered the house of Honnami to make an investigation and come up with a catalog of the known, famous blades. I don't know how long they took (I remember it was in the Kyôhō era, 1760), but they came up with this thick catalog of blades that were in the collections of all the famous daiymo. In that list of the meibutsu there are about seven or eight Gô. All these Yoshiro had a name like, say, Bretnor Gô. One of the most famous is the Inaba Gô, another is the Tomita Gô. Gô is another name for the hamlet in which Yoshihiro worked in Etchu province.

The Meibutsu Cho was the forerunner of a couple of variations of this list with additions and subtractions. I have a recent copy of this Meibutsu Cho that I started to translate about three years back. Perhaps I can finish it one of these days, I hope.

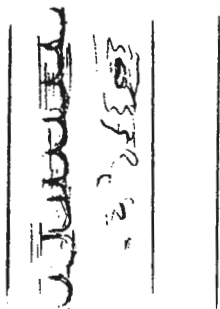
The blades of Yoshihiro we see now are generally in the 2 shaku, 3 or 4 sun length and the sori is very shallow. Other than that, the width, the thickness and everything else is still perfectly in proportion



even though it has been shortened. It also retains the perfect balance a katana should have. The hamon is ônotare (a), wide suguha. (I don't know why we're talking about this, it is very unlikely that we'll ever see one of these.) The jitetsu is exceptionally fine. The characteristic of the bôshi is ichimai (b), not always, but this is one of the main characteristics. There are komaru and kaen (c).

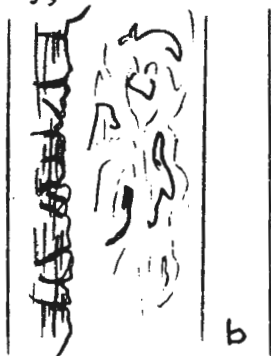
There is another smith in Etchu who was also a student of Masamune, Norishige [則重]. This man's work is practically all tantô. He made some katana, but he is mostly known for his tantô. Contrary to Gô,

since almost all of his work are tantô, they are almost all signed. His shape is takenoko-zori, bamboo shoot, and the boshi has fukura unless the blade has been damaged so much they had to cut it down. A work of this class was usually very well cared for, however.



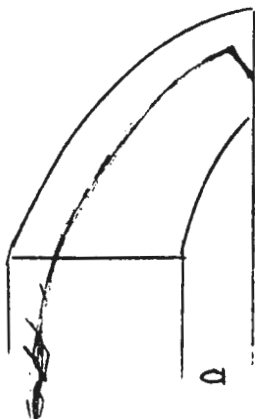
Sanekage [貞景] was a student of Norishige in Etchu province. He also worked mostly in tantô. His work mostly resembles Norishige's. His yakihaba is a little narrower than Norishige's and the gunome in his blades becomes more uniform (a). In Norishige you had something like that (b). You have ashi in here as well as matsukawa hada.

In Bitchu you have the Aoye School. Aoye is divided into the Ko-Aoye, the Chu-Aoye and the Sue-Aoye or early, mid and late Aoye. The Ko-Aoye worked around the same time as the Ko-Bizen, that is, around the early Kamakura and before in the late Heian. The difference in Aoye is that the chôji is sake chôji or reverse chôji. Everything the Aoye did in hamon are saka or the reverse of the usual slope.

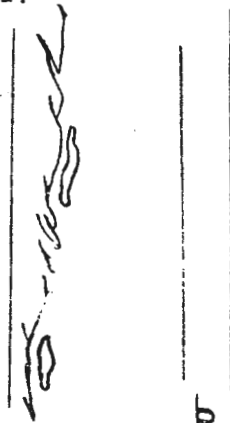


In Chû-Aoye, this was carried on, but the line is more of a suguha where in Ko-Aoye the line has more variation.

This is the so-called Aoye bôshi (a). It is called the nezumi ashi or rat feet. You will find, someplace along the ji, the sumihada, which is the core skin coming through. That portion will look black compared to the rest of the blade. In general, the hada is komokume. Also, during this Chû-Aoye time, you have the Katayama Ichimonji, who did pretty much the same as a combination of the Ko-Aoye and the Chû-Aoye; however (b), that nioi outside of the line of the hamon will be seen at one or two places along the line. This is called "kumo-no-uata," which is a characteristic of Aoye. This will be in nioi. The older blades as in Bizen are a combination of nioi and nie, but primarily nioi.

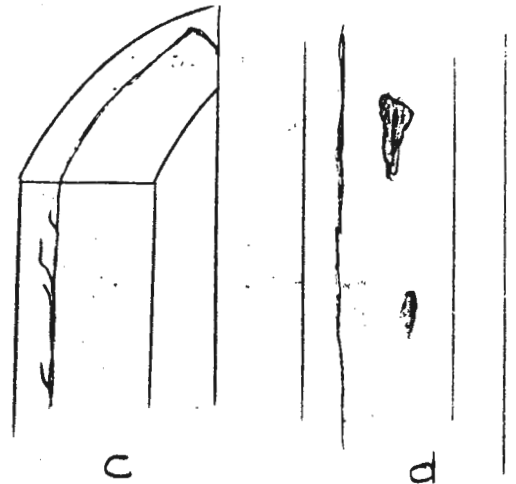


They always follow this bôshi, that is, in coming into the bôshi, the line goes pretty straight and then abruptly comes down (a). Also, you always have that sumitetsu. This is, in this case, partly a flaw, but also partly a characteristic. The fact that the core shows is a flaw in itself, but it is also a characteristic. It occurs because they used such a thin outside skin, and when you consider the time from the Kamakura period until now, naturally the blade has been polished and you have to expect some kind of sacrifice.



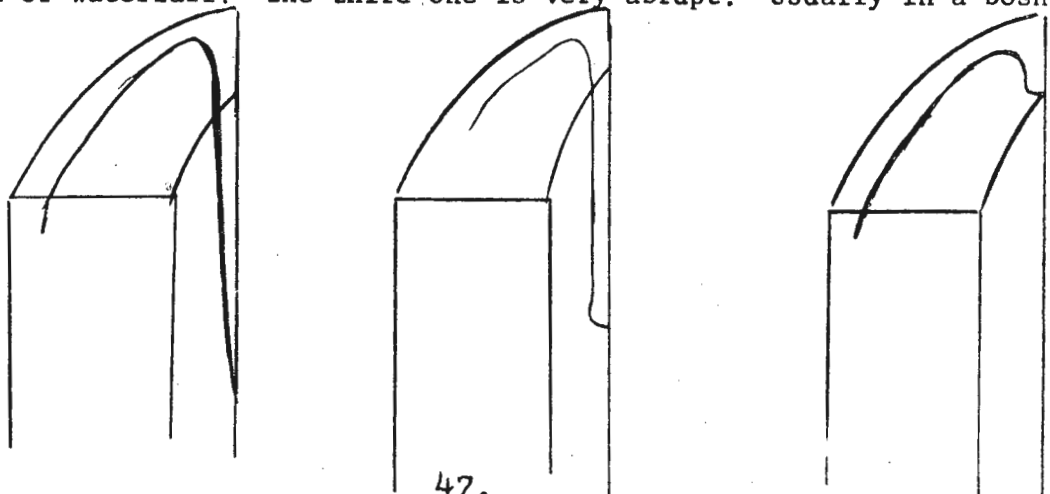
Of course, it did not show originally.

The late or Sue-Aoye work becomes much inferior to the early or mid Aoye work, as is usually the case with the later work in any school, but they always worked with this saka chōji and the characteristic bōshi



is always present. In Bingo province you have the Mihara School. They also ran for a number of years and they also are divided into the Ko-Mihara, Chu-Mihara and Sue-Mihara or early, mid and late Mihara. Ko-mihara resembles the suguna of the Chu-Aoye (c). Also (d) that sumitetsu is even more evident than in Aoye blades, but in Mihara the skin (this is very difficult to understand) is hada ga tatsu. It means literally that the skin stands up, which means that where in Aoye the skin is very, you might say, subdued, in the case of Mihara it's, shall we say, pronounced. This is hard to explain. It doesn't actually mean that the skin is rough, but it gives a feeling of that. I don't know if you follow me or not. This is something that you'll never learn without seeing blades of this quality. The blade gives you the feeling of rough texture in the steel, but it is not something you could touch or measure. You would never find this quality in blades of the top artists of history. This hada ga tatsu is found generally in mediocre blades, but not necessarily, because sometimes in old Mihara you find pretty good blades.

Mihara is also very easy to tell by the bōshi. The middle one is called "tora-ano-o" or tiger tail. The first one is called taki no otoshi or waterfall. The third one is very abrupt. Usually in a bōshi



from any other province, they are always gentle. This is one of the easiest ways of telling Mihara blades. Then in the midare part (this is supposed to be Bizen). In the case of Bizen, the midare is always irregular. In the case of Mihara, the peaks of the midare are always more or less uniform.

In Suô province, you have the Niô School. Niô smiths worked from the fourth period on. They resemble either Bizen or Yamato Tegai. That is, they worked in two different styles. They are more adept in their work of the Tegai style (suguha) than in what they tried to do in Bizen style.

Also, when you find a Niô blade, the kasane is always a little exaggerated; the blade is a little thicker than what it should be to balance the rest of the blade.

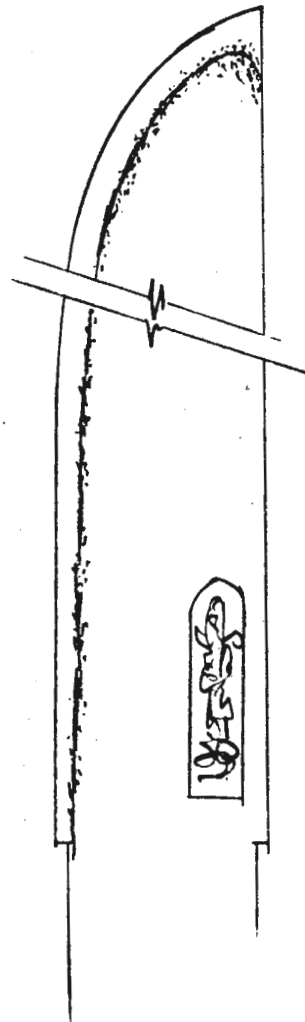
The most famous of the Niô smiths, Kiyotsuna [二王清綱], made carvings of Niô in the hitsu of his blades. He did not do this in all of his tantô. Niô is the guardian warrior at the entrance of the Buddhist temple on each side of the outer gate. He stands with his mouth open and his arms framed like he was going to gobble up somebody. That is Niô.



MINO OR
BIZEN MIDARE



MIHARA
MIDARE



Excerpts from: THREE YEARS IN THE LAND OF THE TYCOON

by Sir Rutherford Alcock, the first British Emissary to Japan.

INTRODUCTION by David Pepper

Note: The above book by "Her Majesty's Envoy Plenipotentiary to the Court of the Tycoon" was published in 1863 in two volumes and describes Alcock's experiences in Japan in the late 1850's, a very turbulent time in Japanese history.

Because this year has so much significance for the people of the United States, there is some danger that the great Bicentennial may completely overshadow a centennial of great importance to all Society members. If it were not for this event of 100 years ago, it is questionable whether the JSS/US would exist at all - we might be collecting Persian scimitars or Indian arrowheads instead.

I refer of course to the HAITOREI, the edict which in effect brought the true end of feudal Japan. Its final results are well known - for the samurai it meant loss of the exclusive right to wear swords, and in addition, loss of hereditary incomes from the government. Those who knew no trade or skill beyond military training had to find the most menial jobs, or starve. This and the great anti-feudal feelings abundant at the time caused many people to open up their storehouses and sell their treasures. The now outmoded swords and armour were often first to go. Scores of them left Japan for Europe and America, some tied in bundles like so much firewood. From this point on, you know the story.

Exactly a hundred years ago, there were samurai walking the streets of Japan. Within a few months, such a sight would have been a part of the dead past. Those foreigners who were in Japan prior to 1876 had a unique opportunity to observe feudal society in action. In reading Alcock's rather unfavourable description of the samurai one must remember that he was being exposed to some of the worst elements of that class, and at a time when anti-foreigner sentiments were running high. From the time that Perry first landed at Uraga, there were movements to establish an anti-barbarian faction. At the time Alcock was writing, this was an established fact - small in number but very active. It must also be remembered that times were tough in the last years of the Tokugawa Bakufu; especially for many of the samurai. Big cities like Edo were filled with "Lonin", as Alcock calls them. There were many plots afoot to undermine the Tokugawa, and those masterless samurai who did not actually become robbers were often involved in such subversive activities.

I have included two descriptions of murders with the express purpose of reminding readers what deadly and effective weapons katana were. Such gruesome accounts supply information which could not be gained from studying the controlled experiments of TAMESHIGIRI, and perhaps serve as a reminder to us, - handle Nihontō with respect and care! More than a few collectors carry the scars of a moment of negligence, and they are by no means always beginners.

FIRES - THE SAMURAI (Chapter V, p.127)

(In part) A good-humored and contented, as well as a happy race, the Japanese seem, whatever may be their imperfections, with the one important exception of the military, feudal, and official caste - classes I might say, but they are not easily separable; indeed, it seems doubtful whether there be a civil class, since all of a certain rank are armed with two formidable weapons projecting from their belt; swords, like everything else in Japan, to our worse confusion, being double, without much or any obvious distinction between military and civil, between Tycoon's, officers', and Daimios' retainers. These are the classes which furnish suitable types of that extinct species of the race in Europe, still remembered as "Swash-bucklers" - swaggering, blustering bullies; many cowardly enough to strike an enemy in the back, or cut down an unarmed and inoffensive man, but also supplying numbers every ready to fling their own lives away in accomplishing a revenge, or carrying out the behests of their Chief. They are all entitled to the privilege of two swords, rank and file, and are saluted by the unprivileged (professional, mercantile, and agricultural) as SAMA, or Lord. With a rolling straddle in his gait, reminding one of Mr. Kinglake's graphic description of the Janissary, and due to the same cause - the heavy projecting blades at his waist, and the swaddling clothes round his body - the Japanese SAMURAI or YACONIN moves on in a very ungainly fashion, the hilts of his two swords at least a foot in advance of his person, very handy, to all appearance, for an enemy's grasp. One is a heavy two-handed weapon, pointed and sharp as a razor the other short, like a Roman sword, and religiously kept in the same serviceable state. In the use of these he is no mean adept. He seldom requires a second thrust with the shorter weapon, but strikes home at a single thrust, as was fatally proved at a later period; while with the longer weapon he severs a limb at a blow. Such a fellow is a man to whom all peace-loving subjects and prudent people habitually give a wide berth as they can! Often drunk and always insolent, he is to be met with in the quarters of the town where the tea-houses most abound, or returning about dusk from his day's debauch, with a red and bloated face, and not over steady on his legs, the terror of all the unarmed population and street dogs. Happy for the former when he is content with trying the edge of a new sword on the quadrupeds; and many a poor crippled animal is to be seen limping about slashed over the back, or with more hideous evidences of brutality. But at other times it is some coolie or inoffensive shopkeeper, who, just as mercilessly cut down at a blow. This does not quite accord with Koempfer's of Thunberg's account of the perfect order and respect for the law maintained throughout Japan, nor the first impressions of later writers as to the universal respect for the canine race; but a long residence in the Capital revealed many things still more opposed to the generally received accounts.

PROTEST - MURDER OF RUSSIANS (Chapter XI, p.219)

(In part) Count Mouravieff took up his residence at a large temple, having landed with a guard of 300 men fully armed and equipped. Shortly afterward I heard that some of his officers, in walking through the city, had been annoyed and insulted, and one morning he came to breakfast with me, arriving late, and looking as if something untoward had occurred. In a few moments he told me he had just received some deplorable intelligence from Kanagawa. An officer, with a sailor and a steward of one of the Russian ships, had been on shore about 8 o'clock the previous evening to buy some provisions, and on their way to the boat, close to the principal street, in which many of the shops were still open, the party was suddenly set upon by some armed Japanese, and hewn down with the most ghastly wounds that could be inflicted. The steward, though mortally wounded it was feared, still lived, having, after the first onset, succeeded in rushing into a shop. The other two were left in a pool of blood, the flesh hanging in large masses from their bodies and limbs. The sailor was cleft through his skull to the nostrils, half the scalp sliced down, and one arm nearly severed from the shoulder through the joint. The officer was equally mangled, his lungs protruding from a sabre gash across the body, the thighs and legs deeply gashed. The ruffians, it appears, were not content with simply killing, but must have taken pleasure in cutting them to pieces. All three, unfortunately, were unarmed, but numbers of people were either in sight or in the close vicinity. Was it, then, a mere highway robbery, with murder as an accompaniment, or was it an act of hatred and revenge? It is said that one or more officials had been dismissed, on the complaint of General Mouravieff, for insults offered to some of his own officers a day or two before. This seemed to offer a possible clue to the assassins, but nothing had been heard of them.

Here, without the slightest provocation and away from the capital, three unfortunate men had been set upon and butchered in the most savage manner. What was the motive, and who were the perpetrators? It was difficult to imagine they could be common highwaymen and robbers - "Lonins", as brigands are called in this country, including all the criminal classes who have no fixed abode, employment, or lord, disbanded soldiers, disgraced and unclassed retainers of the Daimyos, deserters, etc. It is difficult to attribute the act to any of these for purposes of plunder, because, although they did carry off a money-box the steward had with him, it was found on the road to Kanagawa. There, it contained only foreign coins, which they may have thought too dangerous property and nearly useless to them after such a deed. It is believed that the parties had come down to Kanagawa from Yeddo. This is certain, by the depositions of the steward and of the officer, who did not expire until some of his companions had reached the spot, that one or more of the attacking party wore the two swords distinctive of an officers rank in Japan. A sandal was left on the ground, which, by its make, proved the rank of the wearer to be above that of a coolie. A vest, too, had been torn off, but with no distinguishing badge or mark; and a piece of a broken sword was found by the bodies - all useful means of tracing the assassins.

THREE YEARS IN JAPAN (Chapter XVI, p.300)
(The attack on the Dutch)

(In part) On the 26th I was roused from my sleep at four o'clock in the morning by the arrival of an express from H. M. Consul at Kanagawa, with intelligence that about eight o'clock in the evening, two captains of Dutch merchant vessels in the harbor had been slain in the main street of Yokohama - a repetition in all its leading circumstances and unprovoked barbarity, of the assassination perpetrated on the Russians. They had been set upon in the dark, and head and limbs had nearly been severed from their bodies, as though butchers has assailed them with their cleavers. One had his shoulder nearly cut through, besides gashes across head, face, and chest, any one of which must have been fatal. The second appears to have seized the sword with his left hand, which, drawn through his grasp, had severed three of the fingers; and, still struggling, he must have warded off the next blow at his head with his right hand, and run nearly a hundred steps from his butchers, as the hand was found at that distance from his body. He also was frightfully mangled. Where was this to end? This was the fourth assassination in eight months, and six lives had been ruthlessly sacrificed. First a Russian officer and servant, next a servant of the Consul of France, then my linguist (both slain in open day), now two Dutch captains.

More on the attitude of the day, reflecting the dislike of the foreigners who had brought about such change.....

THE SAMURAI (Chapter V, p.129)

(In part) I met in the "tokaido" many officers, some in groups and others alone, armed with their two swords (about as dangerous and deadly weapons as men can well possess), and evidently intoxicated. They were drunk in various degrees, but all - the best of them - were in a state utterly unfit to be at large in a great thoroughfare, or trusted with weapons by which they might in an instant inflict fatal wounds or grievous injury. In such circumstances I have frequently observed before that they are not only insolent, and as a general rule offensive in their gestures and speech when they meet foreigners, but are very prone to put themselves directly in the path, and either dispute the passage with an air of menace, or sometimes even attempt to strike either horse or rider.

As brutal and bloody as these various accounts seem, one must look at them as a reflection of the times. Such accounts give us an insight into the depressing attitude of the samurai of that era, who were destined to extinction. What a spine-tingling sight it must had been to come face to face with a RONIN of that time, full of resentment towards the "foreigners".....a wide berth was indeed in order!