

Hadôri and Sashikomi

by

Jon Bowhay

I would like to discuss and give my views on the *Hadôri* and *Sashikomi* forms of complementing the *Hamon* in the *Shiage* process. Such an article as this is of value because many people seem to be much confused about what both styles are, their purpose and the merits of each.

The *Sashikomi* form of dealing with the *Hamon* involves following the physical shape of the main portion or, in Japanese, the *Kuroiha* (the "black" portion of the *Hamon*, simply the darkest part of the main tempered area) quite exactly. It is of a technical nature by and large that does not allow for the great diversity of *Hamon* such as the secondary *Nie*, *Nioi*, and in general the *Hataraki*, around and within the *Hamon*. *Sashikomi* is primarily of value in dealing with *Hamon* that have a very tight *Nioiguchi*. I must mention here that the period of construction of a blade may also play a strong role in the decision to do *Sashikomi* or to do a more modest *Hadôri*.

The *Hadôri*, as the name implies, means to take or follow the *Hamon*. But unlike *Sashikomi* there is no attempt to follow slavishly the superficial outline of the *Hamon* without taking into consideration the great diversity that usually exists in the *Hamon*. In dealing with the *Hamon* following the *Hadôri* style, a *Togishi* must more carefully take into account *Hada*, its color and the texture of its forging. The *Hamon* with both its basic shape and the implications of secondary *Hataraki* in and around the *Nioiguchi* must be considered well.

When I mention the implication of secondary *Hataraki* in and around the *Nioiguchi*, I mean specifically in regard to how much of this should or should not be included within the *Hadôri*. Please remember that the whitening and physical outline of the *Hadôri* itself is done by the *Togishi*, and making a pleasing balance between *Ji* and *Ha* and *Sugata*, or shape of the blade, rests ultimately with him. It is therefore of utmost importance that he has an understanding of the artistic aesthetics of the particular blade he is polishing. This understanding depends on how well he has internalized all past experiences of polishing various swords, also the personal character of that *Togishi*, his personal and private aesthetics. Herein lies the reason for my own preference of the *Hadôri* over the *Sashikomi* in most - but definitely not all - cases.

Artistically there are infinite possibilities in interpreting the *Hamon* in *Hadôri*. Each *Togishi* will interpret the *Hamon* differently. There are most certainly boundaries of good taste involved here as in any art form, especially one with a long tradition. But still there is much opportunity for the *Togishi* when doing the *Hadôri* to raise his work above mere technical skills and conventions.

Restoring the blade to its original form during the *Shitaji* is very important. Well honed techniques are necessary here. The *Shitaji* is however technical tactile skill. *Shiage*, on the other hand, combines technical skills and artistic sense if the final total polish is to be a success.

Physically the *Hadôri* will outline the *Hamon* and go slightly above the *Hamon* proper to reveal or exclude secondary activity around the *Hamon* as aesthetics dictate. Because in the *Hadôri* we have the freedom of choice we must be quite careful to choose a theme whether *Gunome*, *Notare*, *Midare*, or a combination of these if necessary. It is important even in mixing several shapes to maintain the basic theme. We must also decide how deep or shallow to go above the *Hamon*. There are many criteria for making these decisions, such as how dark the *Jihada* is. If the *Hada* has natural darkness it may be good to make the *Hadôri* a bit more shallow and play down the whiteness a bit. With such

a high *Hamon* to begin with, it may be best to keep the *Jihada* lighter in color in the previous *Nugui* step, or the whiteness and depth of the *Ha* may be overpowering.

In cases of a shallow *Hamon* or one with a shallow *Nioiguchi* and/or less secondary activity around the *Hamon*, the reverse may be right. That is, a slightly darker *Hada* may be desirable, if it has dark qualities to begin with.

We can consider taking full advantage of whatever activity there is in and around the *Hamon* to deepen the *Hadôri*. However, in taking advantage of the space activity around the *Hamon* or trying to deepen the effect of the *Hadôri* on especially a rather low lying *Hamon*, a *Togishi* without adequate skills or aesthetic understanding will go too deep. This is quite common among even rather competent *Togishi* as is the converse of going too shallow and in effect "killing" the beauty of the *Hamon*'s shape, brilliance and activity. Both cases are often seen, but I must caution that this question of how deep or shallow to take the *Hamon*, and how to bring out the highlights of the *Jihada* in relation to the *Hamon*, is one that even among *Togishi* there is not always agreement. It is a question of taste on a very fine order.

When viewing polishes of mediocre or poor quality, such fine points are rather meaningless as such polishes effectively mask the intrinsic workmanship of the blade anyway.

My wish in writing this is to bring out one of the problems a *Togishi* faces in restoring a sword and give my own views as a *Togishi* as to why the *Hadôri* in my estimation is generally superior. I can only present the above as my own preference. Others will doubtless have their own thoughts on this subject and this is what makes art. The quest, the search for art will, if conducted seriously and without self-serving motives, make art.

A narrow totalitarian viewpoint can only produce hacks, not artists, and will ultimately consign any artistic endeavor by such narrow people to the realm of provincial folkcrafts. It will never produce art or thinking that transcends national and ethnic boundaries. Taking this a step further, it may be well for Japanese society, which tries to class everything in it as "uniquely Japanese" and thus unfathomable to the non-Japanese, to consider that this very effectively will build a barrier to understanding between Japan and other countries. Thus real respect and understanding will always elude them. It only allows the proliferation of shallow, warped views and stereotypes.

I have lived most of my life between two cultures, and it seems to me that all too many people are satisfied with such views. They are self-serving and expedient. This is especially true for the government in Japan in forming public opinion. But this falls under the heading of that vast genre of writing of *Nihonjinron* and not under the heading of art. Yet I think one can see the very subtle but dynamic relation between art and social views. That is how the width and breadth of a society or lack of it can be so very debilitating to art and much else as well.

On this note, I will cease these musings, because at this moment I have a very large *Shinshintô* sitting in the *Katanakake*, begging to be restored to its original health and well-being.