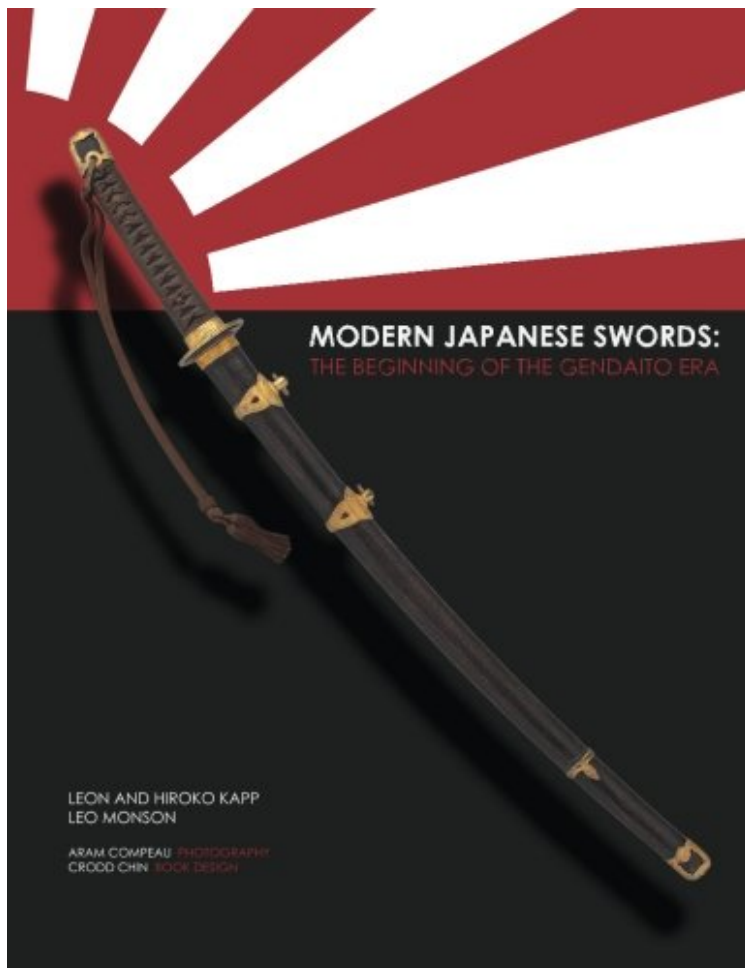


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## Modern Japanese Swords: The Beginning of the Gendaito era

**Mr Leon Kapp, Ms Hiroko Kapp, Mr Leo Monson : Modern Japanese Swords: The Beginning of the Gendaito era** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Modern Japanese Swords: The Beginning of the Gendaito era:

11 of 11 people found the following review helpful. Left wanting...By chris a bowen While I commend the efforts of anyone who takes the time to actual publish a book, I was, frankly, disappointed with this publication. I had hoped for some new research and scholarship since much has been discovered regarding swords of this period over the last 20 years, but instead, saw little new insight and several old and erroneous opinions presented, seemingly oblivious to new research in the field. I had also hoped for a more detailed survey of the players and events which shaped and helped define the swords of this period; what little was mentioned was mostly glossed over. The yearly sword making contests sponsored by the Ministry of Culture, the Rikugun Jumei Toshō program, the Chuo Token Kai, Minatogawa Jinja, Toyama Mitsuru, Araki Sadao, Arisugawa no Miya, and many others who sponsored and patronized the craft, all deserved detailed mention. The book could have benefited greatly from better editing and proofreading. The scholarship

left a bit to be desired as well as there were many factual errors which could have easily been avoided with a bit more rigorous research. For example, the Rikugun Jumei Tosho program instituted by the Imperial Army mandated the use of tamahagane for swords made by Jumei Tosho under Army contract. These were rigorously tested and inspected and stamped with a star. War era documents, as well as modern Japanese publications have proved this conclusively, yet the author still stipulates that the star stamp indicates non-traditional manufacture. We know several star stamped swords have passed NBTHK shinsa. This is a major flaw in the publication. There were likewise several errors in the blade section: Enomoto Sadayoshi was not the father of the Ningen Kokuho smith Amada Akitsugu; Miyaguchi Yasuhiro used the mei Kunimori on blades made of yo-tetsu (Western steel), not those made at the Okura Tanrenjo which was not, as stated, the "Black Dragon Society Forge" (the forge at Toyama Mitsuru's estate is often mistakenly called this as he was a founder of the Kokuryukai - translated as the "Black Dragon Society"). The early Showa smith Yanagawa Naohiro was not a student of Taikei Naotane. Yoshihara Kuniie is not known to have made "very long swords". War era smiths are repeatedly said to have made swords with "simple" hamon yet this is not consistent with the record. Funbari is repeatedly misused in reference to a narrowing of the blade to the point (it is a narrowing in the first 6-8 inches of the blade)... Comments made about Horii Toshihide/Hideaki's use of cannon steel indicate that the author isn't familiar with the common technique smiths use called "oroshi-gane" to adjust the carbon content and condition non-tamahagane steels for use in blade making. Given the hundreds of smiths from this period, I wish more of them would have been given their due, rather than show 3-4 blades by the same smith. Early, important period smiths like Hayama Enshin, Monji Masatsugu, Ikkansai Shigetoshi, Horii Taneaki, Watanabe Kanenaga, and the like, weren't even mentioned. I also couldn't help but wonder why pictures of post war swords and smiths were used in the book when the title of the book purported to be on smiths from the beginning of the gendai era. It would have been nice to have seen more photos of period smiths and swords instead. I don't want to be completely negative- the book, caveats aside, is a nice intro to the period. It just could have been much more satisfying...3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. The revival and appreciation of gendaito, Japanese swords made from 1868 to 1945 By Joe Pierre The appreciation of Japanese swords (nihonto), as primarily instruments of killing, is best understood within the framework of centuries of constant warfare spanning the history of Japan. Accordingly, the quality and artistic merit of nihonto over time has varied according to the supply, demand, and economics of war, with periods of intense fighting when war chest coffers were running low often resulting in low quality mass-produced blades. As a result, among aficionados of nihonto, there have been no more maligned swords than those of the Showa period, beginning in 1926 and running through World War II when Japanese swordmaking increasingly turned to non-traditional materials and techniques of mass production. With Imperial Japan's ultimate defeat and surrender in 1945, swordmaking was prohibited and discontinued altogether as the country became a pacifist nation such that swords of this era were regarded as an unpleasant reminder of a violent and humiliating past. This book, *Modern Japanese Swords: The Beginning of the Gendaito Era*, illustrates how in more recent years, swords made in the past century have been increasingly viewed with a more forgiving eye, gaining greater acceptance and appreciation as art objects. The authors, Leon and Hiroko Kapp, have already contributed to this movement with a similar book published in 2002, *Modern Japanese Swords and Swordsmiths: From 1868 to the Present* (co-authored with Yoshindo Yoshihara, a 4th generation Japanese swordsmith well known here in the West), but here the focus is more narrowly on Japanese swords made between 1868 and 1945 rather than those made after sword-making was revived as an artform starting in 1953. This paperback volume starts with a concise review of the relevant history of Japan during these years, beginning with the peacetime Haitorei Edict of 1876 that prohibited the wearing of swords in public and extending into the formation of the Yakakuni Forging Association and the Japanese Research and Forging Association, two organizations of swordmakers that were formed to revitalize the making of quality and functional swords in preparation for war on an international scale. The book then turns to a discussion of the different types of steel used during this period, ranging from the smelting of sand iron to make traditional steel (tamahagane) to the salvage of puddled steel from the likes of railroad tracks. Different steels and production methods can be recognized through close-up examination of the steel grain (jigane) and through the identification of stamped markings on the finished blades, with several macroscopic photographs of fine differences in jigane as well as a table of wartime stamps and a discussion of their meaning presented by the authors. With that history and perspective established, the next 100 pages of *Modern Japanese Swords* shifts to 51 specific examples of individual swords, with two full pages devoted to each. Each blade has a short description of the maker and the blade itself, measurement specs, and photos of the full-length blade, its fittings (typically military mountings, when available), and close ups of both sides of the tang (nakago). The featured blades are key examples from many of the more famous and well-reputed makers of the gendaito era, including three generations of the Gassan family (Sadayoshi, Sadakazu, and Sadakatsu), Yoshihara Kuniie (as well as one modern blade by grandson Yoshindo Yoshihara), Miyairi Akihira (a National Treasure), Kasama Shigetsugu (arguably the most hallowed gendaito smith), Nagamitsu (a prolific smith of the era) as well as a Mantetsu sword (made from Manchurian railroad steel) and even one example of an unsigned (mumei) blade fashioned from non-traditional methods. Overall, the photography is quite good, although aside from several close-up photos of the steel grain, most of the swords do not have close-up photos of jigane and surface patterns (hada). Overall, *Modern Japanese Swords*:

The Beginning of the Gendaito Era is an excellent companion to the authors earlier work, Modern Japanese Swords and Swordsmiths: From 1868 to the Present (the book reviewed here adds Leo Monson as a co-author, without Yoshindo Yoshihara from the earlier volume). Though there is some overlap in terms of history, the focus of each is really on Japanese swords made during two distinct halves of the past century, which the authors like to characterize as gendaito (modern swords) and shin-gendaito (new modern swords). As such, Modern Japanese Swords: The Beginning of the Gendaito Era is a somewhat unique volume focusing on gendaito (Tom Kishidas now out of print book about Yasakuni Swords and John Sloughs Oshigata Book are exceptions, but have a different focus). Since gendaito often represent an opportunity to own a real samurai sword at a relative bargain (i.e. starting at a few hundred dollars), this is an excellent book for beginning collectors interested in dipping their feet into the world of nihonto. It also fills an important historical gap for all nihonto enthusiasts who until recently have neglected gendaito swords. Kudos to the authors for helping us move past old prejudices about these blades.0 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy shawn matthew kountzBadass

The modern era of Japanese swords began with the Meiji restoration in 1868. The demand for new swords fell drastically, and by 1876, there was almost no work for most sword smiths. However, with the expansion of Japanese military organizations, a new demand for traditional swords developed and this became very important by around 1930. As a result of this, there was a large increase in the number of swords being made, and there was an effort to train many new sword smiths. The major groups and people involved in these efforts are described here. In addition, there was a strong emphasis on making fully traditional Japanese swords, and all of these smiths tried to conform with these demands. However, there was not enough of the traditional Japanese steel called tama hagane to meet the demand, and consequently, not all swords were fully traditional, although most did appear to be fully traditional. Almost all of the swords made at this time were also mounted in functional mountings which were suitable for use at this time. These swords are shown and described along with the steel used in their construction, their shapes and hamon. Examples from some of the the most prominent smiths are shown and briefly discussed, and the major schools and groups of sword smiths working at the time are also described. This was the beginning of the Gendaito period for Japanese swords which began with the beginning of the Meiji period at the end of the feudal period. However, these early Gendaito are different in many respects from the traditional Gendaito made after WWII ended in 1945.