

*The following is a translation of an article taken from Token Sugita's website (www.token-net.com) it was written by Nobuo Nakahara sensei a kantei-shi of the Hon'ami tradition. Nakahara sensei is the author of the book due to be published in English later this year: *Katana Kantei—Facts and Fundamentals*.*

Suriage

The lengths of swords differ depending on various factors such as fencing schools, period of manufacture, or personal preference of the owner. It is possible to shorten the length of swords. However, you cannot make them any longer. For instance, when a blade is shortened, the process cannot be performed from the point section; it has to be done from the hilt section (nakago). This process is known as suriage.

The most important question is: was suriage to the sword in question *really* necessary? One must be able to recognise a sword with a fine shape, as opposed to an ineptly shortened one. From the typical images in books on Japanese swords, many people think that swords are just simply shortened. However, when suriage is performed, not just the length of the cutting edge, but also the depth of the ha and thickness of the blade must be considered—thus creating a difficult challenge.

Additionally, if the blade is shortened considerably, part of what was the blade section now becomes the new nakago. What does this mean to the part of the blade becoming the new nakago shape if it is thinner than the original nakago? When constructing the new nakago shape, this thickness must be compensated for, or the nakago will not fit snugly into the tsuka of the koshirae. This is because the thickness of the nakago tapers from the end of the polish (togi damari) to the nakago-jiri. This is illustrated in this simple diagram (diagram A). When you look at diagram A, both sides have not been filed equally, particularly on one side. If there is an original signature only on one side, then the steel on the opposite side can be adjusted. If the center line of the nakago is not adjusted after suriage it may move in the tsuka. This can be soon be remedied without any problems by bending the nakago back to the central position to compensate for the removed steel. The case of trying to save the mei on both sides is a difficult task. If possible, the best-case scenario would be to preserve the whole inscription on one side. If this cannot be done, then both sides must be adjusted little by little. Consequently, the niku-oki and the line of the shinogi will change quite drastically. In the worst-case situation, everything apart from the maker's name would have to be sacrificed.

The major premise is to try to preserve the condition and as much of the original nakago (inscription, patina, niku-oki, mekugi-ana) as possible. Therefore, in the case of an old tachi with a nakago that has deep sori, even if the sori is adjusted the main principle would be to try to keep as much of the original nakago as possible.

Of the many extant suriage blades that can be found, the next thing to be taken into

account is the occasional case of a suriage blade with a bo-hi. Here I explain the indications of extant osuriage blades with hi that continue into the nakago on both sides. By using these many clues—the length, width, depth of the hi and the shape of the hi-saki, first we have to ascertain if it really has been shortened. If a sword with a hi has been shortened (as in diagram B), the location, shape, width and depth of the hi-saki will also change. Because the sashi-ura of the nakago in diagram B has been heavily adjusted by filing, the width and the height of the shinogi on the sashi-omote is different from those of the sashi-ura. This is illustrated in diagram B where the hi has been erased completely in the area between points B and C. Furthermore, in order to correctly perform suriage, the original togi-damari had to be finely adjusted (between points B and D) on the sashi-omote. Also, you can see the left ridge of the hi between points B and D has moved to the right. Additionally, from below point A to the nakago-jiri, the remains of the original nakago are distinct.

There are many blades with a well-executed osuriage. When you look at the nakago, it is well shaped and proportioned. The nakago-jiri are always either kiri-jiri, or a gentle kuri-jiri, and traces of the original mekugi-ana are commonly found. The old patina, shape, niku-oki would have been carefully adjusted. Also, the nakago-jiri would never be kengyo-jiri. Also, it goes without saying that the height and width of the nakago shinogi will be different on both sides, as in the diagram. Bearing this in mind, you will be able to identify a poorly executed suriage, as the shape of the nakago will without fail be badly shaped. If the file marks on both sides are at the same angle, and the shape and length of the hi are completely the same on both sides this is likely an attempt to raise the price of a blade by pretending to be suriage (this does not include ato-bori hi).

When blades are adjusted by suriage, the hardest part is the removal of the original hamon because of the effects that it can cause. You can read up on this in my article on *Good Examples of Suriage Nakago*. Also, you can find further information in the section *Osuriage, or Ubu Nakago?*

The main principle for the term suriage, (as defined from long ago) is used for shortened blades when the original mei still exists (apart from gakumei). The term osuriage is used for greatly shortened blades when the inscription has been lost. For more on this please read the section on *Mumei Blades*.

Nobuo Nakahara

(Translated by Paul Martin)

(刀身を上から見た図)

(磨上の時、斜線部分を切り取りそして銘のない方を削る) ↓



Diagram A

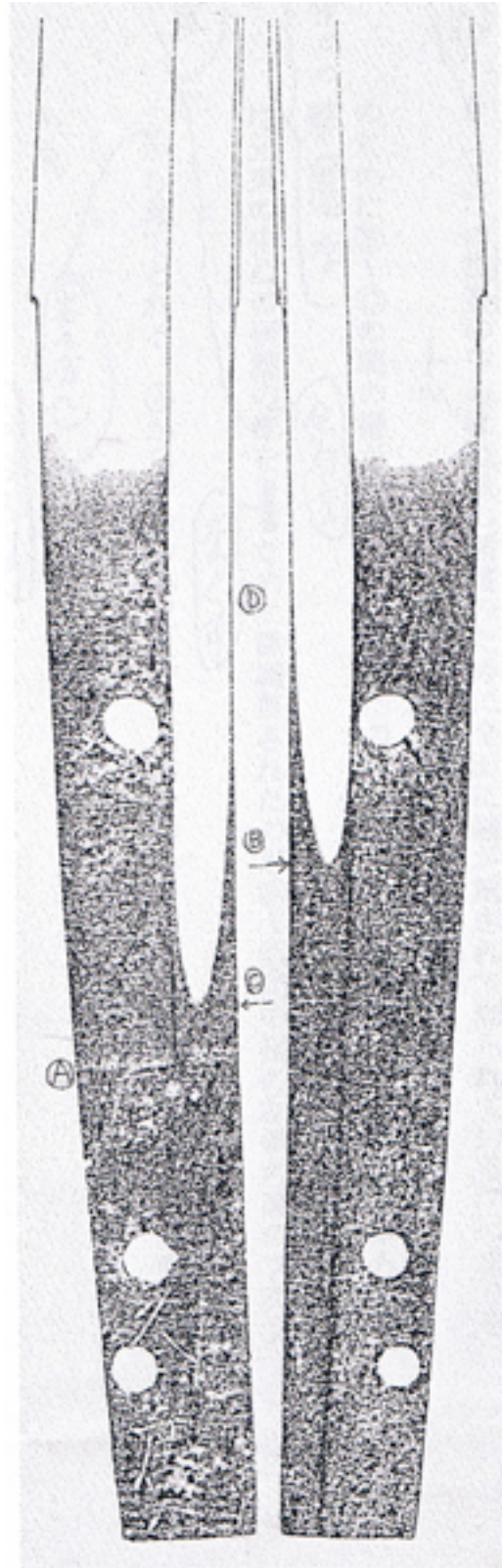


Diagram B

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