



ITEM# UJKA466

SOLD

A KO-KONGOBYÔE [MORITAKA] KATANA

UNSIGNED, CHÛ-KOTÔ NAMBOKUCHÔ PERIOD (ENBUN ERA: 1356~1361)

Swordsmith:	Chikuzen Ko-Kongobyôe [Moritaka] Katana
Measurements:	Length: 74.1cm (o-suriage) Sori: 1.3cm Moto-haba: 3.17cm Weight: 940g
Jihada:	Well-forged standing out itame-hada mixed with mokume-hada, plentiful chikei
Hamon:	Bright hoso-suguha with ko-midare, kinsuji and sunagashi
Certificate #1:	NBTHK Tokubetsu Hozon (sword Worthy of Preservation)
Certificates #2:	NTHK-NPO Yûshûsaku (as sword designated as Masterwork)
Certificate #3-5:	NTHK-NPO Kanteishô (koshirae, menuki and tsuba certified as Authentic)
Authentication:	Sayagaki by Nozomi-san (shodô artist)
Included:	Shirasaya, Daruma koshirae, fabric bags, stand, kit, printed description

This Nambokuchô period powerhouse of a katana has been certified to the **Ko-Kongôbyôe school** with the NTHK-NPO organization awarding the blade with Yûshûsaku and attributing the blade to swordsmith **Moritaka**. The Kongôbyôe smiths were highly respected for the harmonization of technical skill and spiritual discipline, embodying the ethos of warrior-monks. *Jihada* lovers will appreciate the standing out *itame* interspersed with *mokume*, and lively *chikei*. The *hamon* is a *suguha* base with small *midare* elements, enhanced by visible *kinsuji* and *sunagashi*. Its commanding Edo-period *koshirae* features fittings adorned with Buddhist motifs such as a *vajra*-hilted *ken* and the watchful eye of *Daruma*, evoking the school's mountain origins, spiritual resolve and stoic strength.

Saki-kasane: 4.3mm [^]

Moto-kasane: 6.9mm

Kissaki: 4.53cm

Saki-haba: 2.26cm

Nagasa: 74.1cm

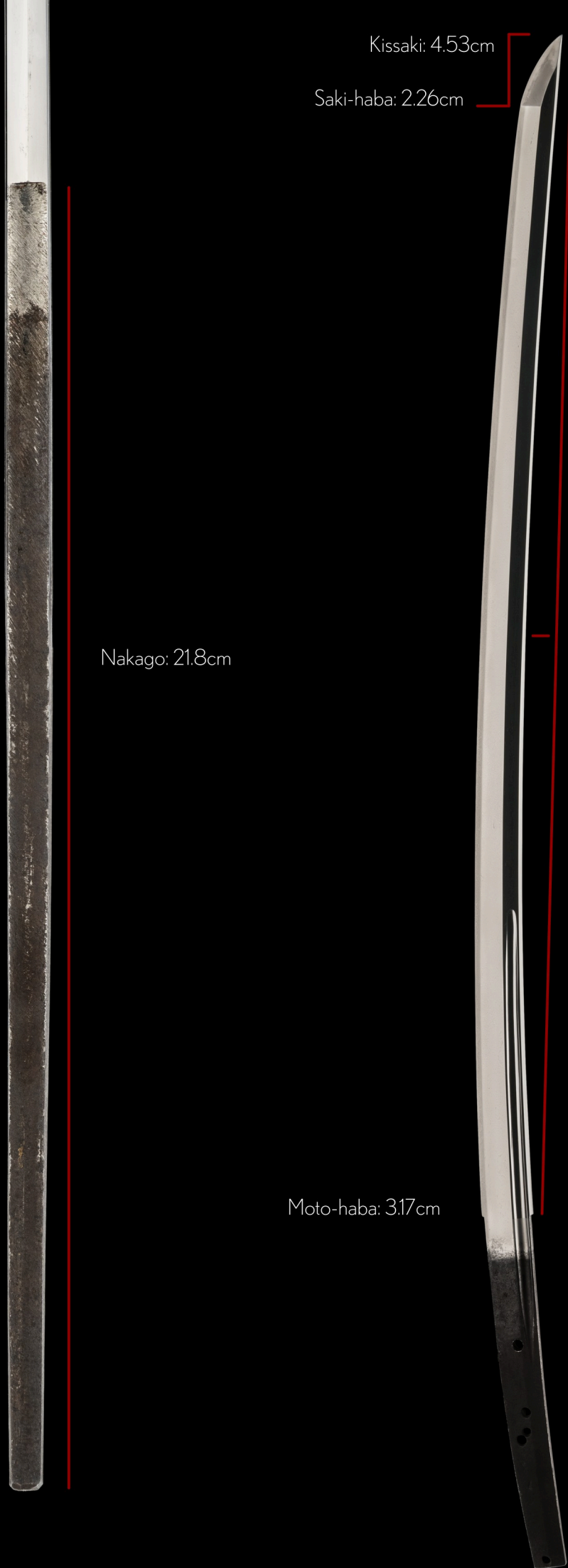
Nakago: 21.8cm

Sori: 1.3cm

Omosa: 940g

Moto-haba: 3.17cm

Mekugi-ana: 5



This simply awesome katana has been certified **Tokubetsu Hozon** to the *Ko-Kongôbyoe* school by the NBTHK with the NTHK-NPO sword organization taking it a step further, awarding the blade with their highest honours of *Yûshûsaku* (Masterwork) and attributing the blade to a specific swordsmith: *Moritaka*. The *Kongôbyôe* school is believed to have originated from a *yamabushi* (mountain ascetic) named *Morikuni* (盛国), who forged swords near *Mt. Hôman*, a site of religious significance associated with esoteric Buddhism. His son *Moritaka* carried forward this tradition, and successive generations continued to use the name *Moritaka*, becoming known for their resilient blades that were built foremost with battle in mind.

The *Kongôbyôe* smiths were regarded not only for their technical skill but also for their spiritual discipline, embodying the ethos of warrior-monks. Their works were deeply rooted in the martial needs of the *Kyûshû* region during times of political unrest, including the Mongol invasions. Their swords are often characterized by solid construction, restrained elegance, and practical strength, which made them popular with warrior elites. While many of their blades were unsigned, their distinctive style – centred on robust geometry, conservative temper lines, and quiet refinement – has allowed experts to attribute works reliably within the school.

This powerful and heavy blade is a fine example of the *Nanbokuchô* period style. The *jigane* is a well-forged *itame* of large grain with interspersed *mokume*, standing out with prominent *ji-nie* and lively *chikei*. The *hamon* is a *suguha* base with small *midare* patterns, enhanced by visible *kinsuji* and *sunagashi*, creating a subtle interplay of light and movement along the edge. The *nakago* bears five *mekugi-ana*, indicating repeated remounting across eras – evidence of its long functional life as a weapon rather than a mere decorative piece.

Its impressive Edo-period *koshirae* is decorated with mother-of-pearl and features a gold-coloured *tsuka-ito* and *sageo*, creating a formal yet commanding appearance. Fittings are adorned with Buddhist motifs such as a *vajra-hilted ken* and *Daruma*, evoking the mountain ascetic origins of the *Kongôbyôe* tradition. These religious symbols emphasize the spiritual resolve and stoic strength embodied in both the smiths and the swords they produced.

Feel the energy!



Location: *Chikuzen province*
School name: *Ko-Kongôbyôe*
Swordsmith: *Moritaka* (first generation)

ô-suriage nakago (greatly shortened tang)
kiri-yasurime (horizontal file marks)

current hole

The five *mekugi-ana* (peg holes) indicate that this blade has undergone five separate periods of *suriage* (shortening). The lowest hole, located near the current tang end, is the oldest and was made following a first *ô-suriage*.

While many *ô-suriage* blades retain only a single peg hole, the presence of multiple holes on this piece suggests it was not preserved for display, but remained in practical use. Each shortening likely reflected the needs or preferences of successive owners, adapting the sword's mounting to suit actual combat use.

The oldest one

The image displays two Japanese sword blades (katana) against a black background. The blade on the left features a single, deep, wide groove running down its center, which is a koshi-bi. The blade on the right has two parallel grooves, one on each side of the center, which are futasuji-hi. Both blades have several circular holes (mekugi-ana) along their length. Red arrows point from the text descriptions to the specific groove patterns on each blade.

A *koshi-bi* (腰樋), a type of groove carved into the lower part of a sword blade, typically running along one side from the base (*nakago-moto*) upward toward the middle of the blade.

Futasuji-hi (二筋樋), or "twin grooves," a pair of parallel grooves carved symmetrically along both sides of the blade.

保 存
06202406



No 1023244

鑑 定 書

一 刀

無 銘 (古 金 剛 兵 衛)

長 二 尺 四 寸 四 分 半

右は當協會に於て審査の結果特別保存刀剣と
鑑定しこれを証する

令和六年八月二十三日

公益財団法人日本美術刀剣保存協會



香川県 教育委員会
第 25453 号
昭和60年11月21日

NBTHK Tokubetsu Hozon
Certificate of Designation

A sword designated as *Especially Worthy of Conservation*
by the Society for the Preservation of the Japan Art Sword

Issued in the 6th year of Reiwa (2024), August 23rd

One, Katana

Mumei (unsigned)
Ko-Kongôbyôe

Nagasa (length)
2-shaku 4-sun 4-bu han (74.1cm)

Nihon Bijutsu Token Hozon Kyokai
(NBTHK)



捺 査 印 員	備 考	寸 法	拵 え	中 心	図 柄 り	鑑 子	刃 紋	下 地	鍛	造り 込み	銘 文	第一二九六〇号
   	延文頃			目釘穴 五個 鍔 切り	表腰樋樋々流り 直調掃け一通る	細直刃、小乱れ交り、金線砂流し入る			板目金交り、地景入り肌立	鑄造り、庵棟、大磨り、古	無銘	
										棟		

NTHK-NPO Yûshûsaku Certificate of Authenticity

This katana was designated as *Yûshûsaku* (Highly Excellent Masterwork)
by the Non-Profit Society for the Preservation of the Japanese Sword

One, Katana

Mumei (unsigned)
Den Chikuzen Kongôbyôe Moritaka

Nagasa (length)
2-shaku 4-sun 4-bu amari kore ari (74.1cm)

Issued in 6th year of Reiwa (2024), December 15th

Nihon Token Hozon Kai
(NTHK-NPO)

*This sword has reached the highest level of honour at the NTHK-NPO.
Four judges have stamped their names to the certificate.



無銘
Mumei
Unsigned

古金剛兵衛
Ko-Kongôbyôe
Ko-Kongôbyôe

時代延文頃
Jidai Enbun goro
Around Enbun period (1356~1361)

刃長貳尺四寸四分半有之
Hachô 2-shaku 4-sun 4-bu han kore ari
Blade length 74.1 cm

令和七乙巳年卯月吉日誌之
Reiwa nana kinoto-midoshi Uzuki kichijitsu kore o shirusu
Written on a lucky day in the fourth month in the seventh year
of Reiwa era during the Year of the Snake (April 2025)

The origin of Ko-Kongôbyôe



Mt. Hôman



Kamado Shrine



yamabushi

Mt. Hôman in Chikuzen was a sacred center for *yamabushi* (mountain ascetics) and the site of intensive *Shugendô* practice. At its base lies *Kamado Shrine*, a spiritual landmark deeply tied to the ascetic tradition.

It is in this environment that the *Kongôbyôe* school, founded by *yamabushi*-smiths, took root – combining martial craftsmanship with religious devotion. *Moritaka*, the school's principal figure, is commemorated by a stone monument near the shrine, attesting to his legacy as a master swordsmith and spiritual practitioner.



刀工金剛兵衛源盛高発祥之地

Birthplace of *Kongôbyôe* Minamoto Moritaka





A powerful *Nambokuchô* period *kissaki* with a *hakikake* (sweeping) *boshi*.

itame-hada

A close-up photograph of a Japanese kissaki (dagger) blade. The blade is dark and polished, showing a fine, scattered grain pattern known as itame-hada. The edge of the blade is curved and sharp, with a sweeping boshi (edge) that is characteristic of the hakikake style. Two red arrows point to the blade: one points to the itame-hada pattern, and the other points to the hakikake boshi. The background is dark and out of focus.



A close-up photograph of a Japanese sword blade, likely a katana, showing the mokume-hada (cloud-like) and inazuma (mini bolts of lightning) patterns. The blade is dark and polished, with a bright reflection of light on the right side. The background is black.

mokume-hada

inazuma, mini bolts of lightning

The *jihada* proudly showcases large pools of *itame* and *mokume-hada* that can be seen even in the hardened *yakiba* area.



Wow. Now that is *jihada*.



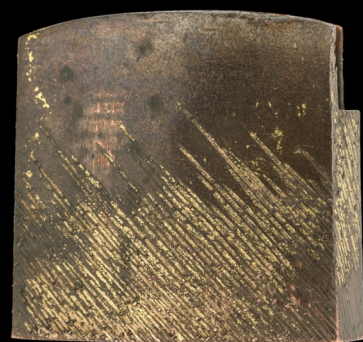
sunagashi

kinsuji

*A hamon based on suguha with
ko-midare , kinsuji and sunagashi.*



Shirasaya
(protective scabbard)

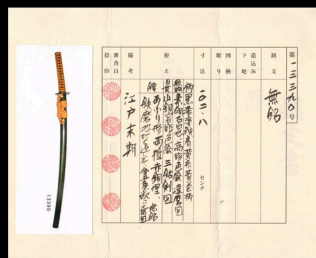


copper *habaki* with
rainfall filemarks

*Aogai-mijin-nuri saya
uchigatana-koshirae*
(青貝微塵塗鞘打刀拵)

*Uchigatana-koshirae
lacquered with
mother-of-pearl decoration*

Crafted during the
Late Edo period
(1780~1868)



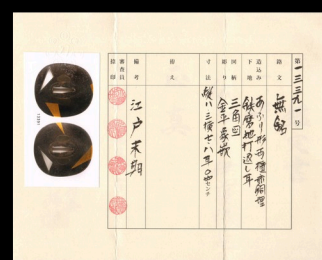
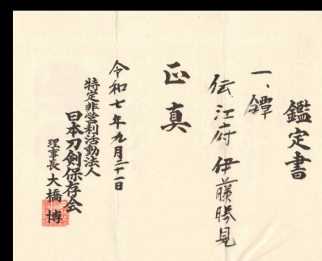
NTHK-NPO Kanteisho
Certificate of Authenticity



This *tsuba* was crafted by *Itô Katsumi* (伊藤勝見) in the late *Edo* period. Born in 1829, *Katsumi* was trained in metal engraving under *Tanaka Kiyotoshi* (田中清寿). In 1860, he succeeded as the 10th head of the *Itô* family in Edo, producing fittings for both the *Tokugawa Shogunate* and the Imperial Household.

The *tsuba*'s primary motif is a triangle – not a mere geometric figure, but one rich in spiritual meaning. It is thought to represent the *Threefold Awakening* (*sangaku*) in Buddhism: hearing the *Dharma* (*mon*), contemplation (*sô*), and realization (*shû*). As this piece accompanies a sword forged by a *yamabushi* swordsmith, the triangle may reflect the ascetic path toward enlightenment – where spiritual practice and martial readiness are inseparable.

Through both symbolism and execution, the piece resonates with the inner strength and clarity pursued by warrior-monks.





(reverse)



goko-rei



sanko-zuka



mokugyo

This *fuchi* is signed by *Toshihisa* (利寿), likely a minor and little-known metalworker. It features Buddhist motifs including a wooden fish (*mokugyo*), a three-pronged vajra handle (*sanko-zuka*), and a five-pronged ritual bell (*goko-rei*), each holding symbolic meaning in Esoteric Buddhism:

Mokugyo: A sutra-chanting instrument symbolizing alertness and the ongoing path to enlightenment.

Sanko-zuka: A three-pronged vajra handle representing spiritual force and the cutting of illusion.

Goko-rei: A ritual bell with a five-pronged vajra grip, evoking the five wisdoms and spiritual awakening.

These motifs reflect the sword's roots in *yamabushi* culture and its embodiment of disciplined spiritual power.



(Toshi) 利

(hisa) 寿

(kaô) 花押



Kashira
depicting *Daruma*

Bodhidharma, known in Japan as *Daruma Daishi*, was a 5th-6th century Indian monk credited with bringing Zen Buddhism to China and, by extension, to East Asia. A symbol of unwavering spiritual focus and perseverance, he is often portrayed as a stern, bearded figure in deep meditation.

In Japanese culture, Bodhidharma inspired the creation of the *Daruma doll* – a round, red, limbless figure weighted at the bottom to return upright when tilted. This design reflects the Zen teaching of resilience: “Fall seven times, rise eight.” The *Daruma doll* has become a popular symbol of determination, goal-setting, and recovery, embodying the same stoic spirit that made *Daruma Daishi* a revered icon among monks and warriors alike.



Daruma Daishi

Daruma doll



The *tsuka* (hilt) is wrapped in a *hishi-maki* style using gold braids over *samekawa* (ray skin) that has been lacquered in black.



sanko-ken

Menuki (decorative grips on the hilt) depict a vajra-hilted sword (*sanko-ken*), an iconographic weapon associated with *Fudô Myôô*, the Immovable Wisdom King.

As *Fudô*'s sword cuts through ignorance and delusion, the motif symbolizes spiritual strength, unwavering resolve, and protection – qualities deeply revered in the martial and ascetic traditions.



Fudô-Myôô





Congratulations David.

Warm regards,
Pablo