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The Art of Japanese Sword Polishing

By Setsuo Takaiwa, Yoshindo Yoshihara, Leon Kapp, Hiroko Kapp

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To understand Japanese sword polishing is to understand the Japanese sword. Down through the years, the great sword connoisseurs in Japan have been sword polishers. A swordsmith can spend a large amount of time forging a classic sword, but refining and bringing out its final shape, color, and texture so that all the details of the steel and hamon (the temper line) are clearly visible is the responsibility of another craftsman-the sword polisher. An experienced polisher can tell immediately by whom a blade was made, so distinctive is each smith's work and so vital is such knowledge to the skilled polisher.

The Art of Japanese Sword Polishing is the first book in English to examine in great detail the polisher's techniques-skills it often takes up to ten years of apprenticeship to master. It illustrates the methods, materials, and tools used for this process. But the book's true aim is to enable the reader to fully appreciate the beauty of a well-crafted Japanese sword. As readers learn both how the sword polisher enhances the beauty of the blade and how he handles the problems of coaxing out its finest qualities through polishing techniques, they will come to a deeper understanding of the fine art of making the Japanese sword and will be able to purchase or collect swords with greater pleasure.

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Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #2469737 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Kodansha USA
- Published on: 2006-04-21
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 7.50" h x .70" w x 10.30" l, 1.98 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 192 pages

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