

Testing Japanese Swords

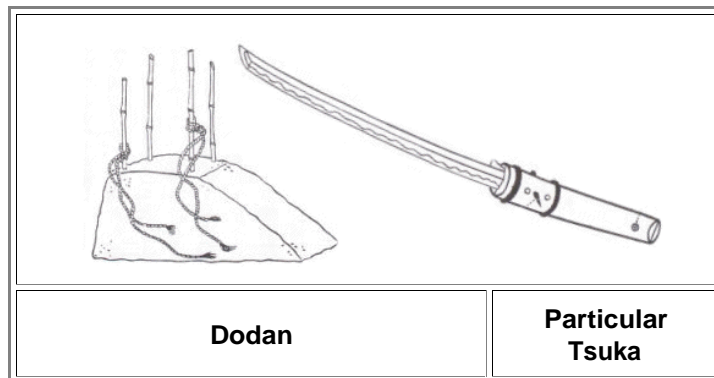
The following was downloaded years ago from a "Japanese Sword School" page that is no longer accessible. I have left most everything as it was and just changed the format a bit.

Wazamono

Wazamono means the swords which cut well. Tsuge who was a learned man of swords classified swords according to how cut well in 1797 (first half of Shinshintou). He classified in cooperation with a man who was a master swordsman and **Yamada Asaemon** who was a specialist of beheading They classified mainly Shintou because the most Samurai in this time used Shintou at ordinary times. **They classified swords into 4 group according to how cut well.** That is:

- **Saijyou-Oowazamono:** The sword cut off the part completely.
- **Oo-Wazamono:** The sword cut off the part about 90%.
- **Yoki-Wazamono:** The sword cut off the part about 80%.
- **Wazamono:** The sword cut off the part about 70%.

When they tried to see how well it cut, they chopped a man who was about 40 to 50 years old or a strongly-built man who attended to physical labor. Yamada family (for generations) judged how well the swords of the Tokugawa family cut, each Daimyou agreed to their request. This was their regular business. And they beheaded criminals; this was a side job. They got a dead body of a criminal and they judged how cut well the sword of Tokugawa family or each Daimyou by chopping the dead body.



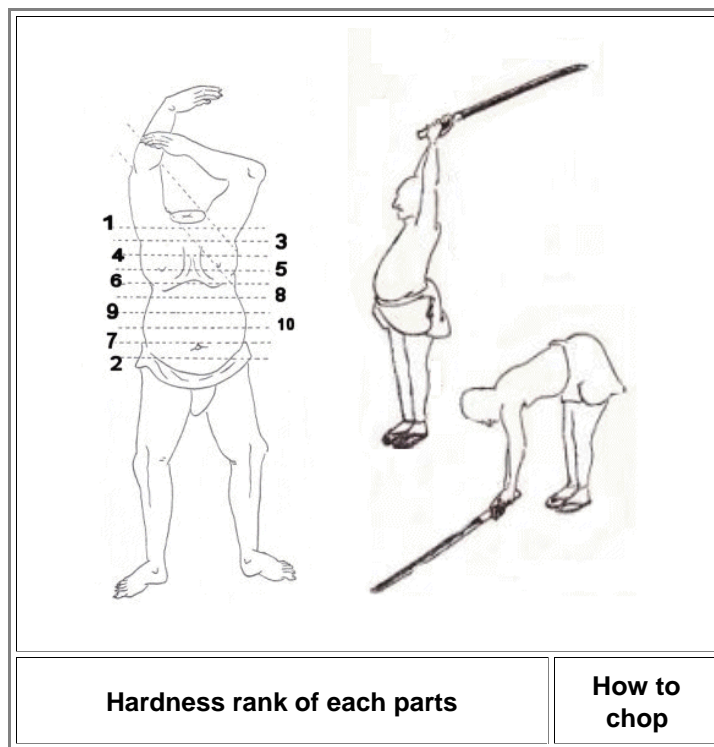
The Yamada style how to chop

They had three types of method to judge how cut well the sword. They are:

- **Iki-dameshi** was to chop a live man,
- **Sinin-dameshi** was to chop a dead body.
- **Katamono-dameshi** was to chop a hard thing like iron.

Yamada family judged by chopping dead body as mentioned above. They put both hands up of a dead body and made it lie down between bamboo sticks on **Dodan** (above picture) and chop around the armpit of body. They used **particular Tsuka** (= heft) like above picture when they chop. They named each part of a body, and the hardness is different for each part. I wrote the rank in order of the hardness. Please look at the picture below. Rank 1 is the most hard. They held Tsuka with both fists put together (normally detach both fists). It is said that if they hold like this, they can get up speed when they swing a sword downward. And they open legs to the breadth of shoulders and true up legs. They never open in front and behind.. And they hold a sword high over their heads. When the sword to swing down comes above head, they stretch elbow and swing down like draw a circle. They do not aim at body but Dodan. After they chop a body, their body fall forward.

They chop at the part over rank 4 (picture below) and classified as given above.



There are a lot of swords which engraved on Nakago (*the end piece inside the heft*) when and which parts the sword cut off. We call this **Saidan-Mei**. Please refer to "Highlight of Japanese sword" for details.

The engravement then may be like this:



From a scientific point of view (not to mention a human rights point of view) this sword performance measuring technique is far from being acceptable. It has several weak points:

- The result depends very much on the experimenters condition. Having a hang-over from the last night's partying may lead to a bad sword day. Being in rage because the girl friend has dropped him may result in more powerful whackings.
- The result depends very much on the conditions of the bodies to be violated. Size and state of decomposure would make a difference, for example.
- The result cannot possibly depend on the internal structure of the blade. Since you are not hitting something hard, the structure of the core cannot make a difference, for example.
- The result may depend on the sharpness of the blade. I'm saying "may" since we do not have any reliable data about the relation between cutting ability and sharpness besides that there is some difference between very sharp and dull. There are Internet videos on youtube that show the amazing cutting ability of a katana by running it through the customary rolled-up straw matre, followed by showing the same kind of cutting power with a relatively dull European sword, for example

Chopping of more than one head in one fell swoop was not exclusively a Japanese specialty, however, that could only be done with a Japanese type sword. Consider this picture:



**On the count of One, two , three, ...
Altarpiece of St. Nicholas, Nagyszalók, 1503.**

Source: Photographed 2015 in the National Galery Budapest, Hungary

- Chopping through bodies just for fun or to show the power of your sword also seems to have been a medieval pastime on occasion. The slaughter below (of course in the name of God) can be viewed in the Museum inside the old town hall in Leipzig; Germany



Demonstrating cutting power
[Full painting with explanation](#)
[Larger version of the picture above](#)

Source: Photographed 2018 in the "Altes Rathaus" Museum in Leipzig, Germany