

Provenance & Price *an article*

I have been asked to write an informal article on money! Money is a very touchy subject. But money makes the world go 'round and as our interest is the sword world, - with its buying and selling, it would seem appropriate. And a few points could probably use discussion.

There is a differential in values between the United States and Japan. Money itself swings widely and Japan's different economy is very real. Things cost more in Japan. Just as we, in the United States, have a difference in earnings and cost of living than, perhaps, Mexico. Swords cost more in Japan but for far more reason than economy. Swords that bring price are antiques with provenance. Provenance and price is at the head of the world sword market and one is not found without the other. Sales at all levels are inextricably linked to the high end, and unfortunately, rumors of dream prices tend to muddle things and slow the market because sellers on the lower end often do not understand some basic truths that fire the sword market, - our market. Low and high.

In the market, provenance produces price. Not smith, specifically.

The antique market demands that provenance be a proven history. This begins with KANTEI-SHO, but is recognition. It is recognition through history, - a history of recognition. This far supersedes mere "papers."

A valuable piece has value for which papers are readily written. High prices are paid for pieces with provenance but provenance is paid to valuable swords. Intrinsically valuable swords, - which may be smith.

A good example of this is the RAI KUNIHIDE offered here on page 15. This piece perfectly illustrates what Dr TOKUNO is describing in the last of this issue's TOKUNO interview concerning price. The sword has earned its market value not because it has been published nor for KANTEI-SHO, but the combination of particularly superior quality and production from such a well known artist which, along with a long history of recognition, creates a trustable provenance. Provenance translates value in the market place.

If this piece did not have this provenance it could not have its market. Some sword, thought to be a KUNIHIDE, could not possibly enjoy the same market. This difference in attainable price is our lesson.

A well known and quite considerate, Northeast collector and member of our collective sword community related a story about his own collecting career. He has been quite active right along, running ads and pursuing leads; and has, over the years, acquired a handsome collection.

He remembers avoiding the Japanese market with all their comparatively high priced swords in favor of getting the bargains that might be had right here. After some reflection, he now feels that he would have come out far better over the same time, with the same money, if he had bought those very superior pieces even with their seemingly high prices. He would have had better pieces and their value would be greater. Greater than the results of all his long efforts.

This is because value is not diminished when a piece is competing in the open market and might fetch a high price. In the stock market, wise money follows upside or downside without prejudice. Collectors who have unwittingly developed the habit of not buying unless at a "steal" are collectors without. They become losers in the long run. I think we can trust swords. They have intrinsic value that will never slide against any economy. As historical artifacts they will not only always be worth gold, their value will always increase over time.

High price in any market, however, always has been to provenance. Essentially, if we want to sell to the Queen of England, our piece has to be fit for a Queen. And, equally, if we hear of the Queen buying something somewhere, we must remember to keep sober. A thing is not a valuable thing unless everyone else says it is a valuable thing.

This is the true nature of market. It is favorable comparison in the open view by others. This is what dictates price and it goes to recognition. Someone, or those in the line of successive owners, shepherds a piece through time. It acquires recognition slowly. An unknown piece, even the undeniable work of a great master, is a wildcat and will be viewed with reserve in the market.

An owner, who stands at market, must account provenance. Provenance is the sum of all attributes and will equal the market level that awaits the sale of any antique. For swords, top price is SHO-SHIN (genuine), superior work, top condition and certainly KANTEI-SHO with provenance. As Dr TOKUNO says, "One must know this."