Use Arrow Keys to Navigate

Meigaku: Designing and Documenting Japanese Names

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Japanese Phonology & Orthography

JAPANESE PHONETIC ORTHOGRAPHY

N	W	R	Y	M	H	N	T	S	K	vowel	
ん	わ	ら	や	ま	は	な	た	さ	か	あ	A
	ゐ	り		み	ひ	に	ち	し	き	い	I
		る	ゆ	む	ふ	ぬ	つ	す	く	う	U
	ゑ	れ		め	へ	ね	て	せ	け	え	E
	を	ろ	よ	も	ほ	の	と	そ	こ	お	O

With the exception of ん "syllabic N", each *kana* character in the chart represents an optional consonant followed by a mandatory pure vowel similar to the Spanish counterpart. HOWEVER, the reading for some consonents depend on the vowel.

Japanese Phonology & Orthography

- Paleo-Japanese is believed to have had strictly C-V phonology.

- Japanese is isochronos.

- Japanese has NO stress accent.

- Japanese has pitch accent.

Japanese Phonology & Orthography

- **H** transforms to a **P** which is represented by a small circle similar to a degree mark immediately after the root *kana* character. For example, ぱ is read PA.

- **H** transforms to a **B** which is represented by two marks similar to a double quote immediately after the root *kana* character. For example, ば is read BA.

- A stop-consonant is represented by a small っ following the preceding *kana* and can not initiate a word. This is romanized by repeating the consonant.

- A small ょ (yo) following a *kana* ending in an I sound replaces the I with a a yo.

Japanese Phonology & Orthography

- Double length vowels are believed by many to have originally had a medial **H** or **W** sound. These are represented orthographically in old manuscript. However, this is controversial. Currently, these are not used. It is unknown exactly how long ago these were in use. Further, the Jesuits often recorded an initial **Y** sound for words and names beginning with a vowel. These initial **Y** sounds heard by the Jesuits were not recorded by the Japanese. Generally speaking, published Japanese onomastic sources omit medial consents for repeated vowels.

Japanese Phonology & Orthography

- Modern Japanese occasionally sub articulates vowels. Some English speakers mishear this and believe that the vowel has changed vowel. For example, a sub-articulated or partially sub-articulated ɪ may sound to English speakers like the ɪ in the English word "it". The initial vowel in this English word was not present in Japanese until possibly the last few decades. Recently, Japanese has been importing phonology from English in order to accommodate loan words and neologisms constructed from English word fragments.
- Similarly, English speakers may mishear or fail to replicate other Japanese vowels.

Caveat

Avoiding names by using styles of address, job titles, other titles, kinship terms, &c. is a long standing practice in Japan. For example, a Japanese may address a stranger as older or younger brother or sister. They may address a policeman by one of the words for policeman. They may address or refer to a fish monger as "Sakayana-san" or something like that, but nobody thinks of these as names. There are also modes of address which do not terminate in "san" in modern Japan. For example, "sensei" is a form of address all by itself. Further, very famous people such as high ranking sumo wrestlers will not have "san" tacked onto the ends of there names when being talked about. You can in principle at least tack "san" after "neko" when talking about a feline. "san" is neither premodern, nor a title, nor an office.

Japanese Name Structures

- Male members of the *kuge* (imperial aristocracy)
- Female members of the *kuge* (imperial aristocracy)
- Male members of the *buke* (military class)
- Female members of the *buke* (military class)
- Names for Buddhist monks and nuns
- Names in Religion for lay people
- Artistic Names

The -no- Controversy

Many members have encountered -no- being inserted into premodern Japanese names. The chances for making a mistake when doing this are extremely high. Dr. Keneth Richards who was a professor of Classical Japanese at the University of Toronto claimed that the correct use of medial -no- is very difficult.

- -no- rarely appears in the actual written form of the names where it conventionally appears.
- -no- generally appears as part of a title such as *nokami* which is an imperial provincial governor.
- -no- typically appears in conjunction with an *uji* (clan) name which were the names of imperial aristocrats. -no- does not appear in the names of members of the *buke*.

Places where "no" Occurs

- Where it is the normal reading of a component *kanji* of a name such as the family name Uno 宇野 (manor-field).
- Following an initial single *mora* noun with *kun-yomi* (native Japanese) reading in di-thematic family names such as: Kinoshita 木下 (tree-below) and Ino'ue 井上 (well-above).
- Connecting an *uji* name with a given name for *kuge* (members of the imperial aristocracy) such as 源頼朝 Minamoto no Yoritomo. Not appropriate for samurai.
- Immediately prior to or at the beginning of a title or office such as 守 such as 越後守 Echigo-no-kami (imperial governor of Echigo). This explicitly claims a title.
- Connecting an *uji* (macro kinship group) with a *kabane* (chieftain position for that kinship group) such as 源朝臣 Minamoto no Asomi. This explicitly claims a title.
- Claiming *uji* leadership or other perogative based on *uji* membership by placing the family name prior to the *uji* name. For example, Tokugawa no Minomoto 徳川源 emphasizes nobility due to *uji* primacy. This suggests status and should be avoided.
- Specifying a branch of an uji. Seiwa-genji 清和源氏 refers to all those who claim descent from Emperor Seiwa through a rusticated prince who took the name 源 Minamoto. This pattern is never used in names.

Kuge Males - Buke Males

Kuge (imperial aristocracy) Name Structure

<imperial title/office> <Uji name> no <nanori>

Buke (military class) Name Structure

<family name> <common name> <nanori>

We have examples of father-son pairs where the son of a kuge official entered the military class!

Uji Names - Family Names

Uji Names

- *Uji* are the highest level kinship category.
- *Uji* still exist and were not at all the same thing as the "clans" of the Sengoku Period or under the following *baku-han* system of the Edo Period.
- Creation of new *uji* was regulated by the imperial government over 1200 years ago. Only the emperor could declare a new uji and bestow a name upon it.
- We have the names for all *uji* which were created. Nobody in the Society should create a new *uji* name.
- After commoners lost the right to a family name, the *uji* names were the prerogative of the *kuge* class.

Uji Names - Family Names

Family Names

- Families are a local kinship group in Japan, but do not necessarily represent any sort of blood relationship. Rather, families were more defined by cohabitation. In modern Japan, family registries maintained by the government are still on the basis of residence although it is possible for students to remain on their parents' family registry while attending school. Nobody in the Society should create a new *uji* name.

Uji Names - Family Names

Family Names

- In Premodern Japan, family names were typically created under either of two circumstances: A) By the "rusticated" offspring of a *kuge* aristocrat or the "rusticated" offspring of a member of the imperial family. B) By the offspring of *buke* of an existing *buke* family. In either case, this change typically accompanied a change in residence.
- Both *uji* names and family names are most typically di-thematic generic toponymics such as Ogawa 小川 (lit. small river), Fujiwara 藤原 (lit. wisteria field), and Kinoshita 木下 (lit. beneath the tree).

Uji Names - Family Names

Family Names

- One variant of this are rusticated members of the imperial family who join on of the imperial *uji* such as the Minamoto or the Taira. In some contexts, these *uji* names are preceded by a reference to the emperor from which they claim descent. For example, the 清和源氏 Seiwa-Genji are a 源 Minamoto group which claim common descent from Emperor Seiwa. Both 源 Minamoto and 平 Taira are names bestowed upon former members of the imperial household when then demoted from membership in the household.

Uji Names - Family Names

Family Names

- Consequently, the hypothetical name:

<div align="center">

徳川源芳太郎家康

Tokugawa no Minamoto Yoshitarou Ieyasu

</div>

Asserts that a member of the *buke* whose *nanori* is Ieyasu and his *yobina* is Yoshitarou is a member claims to belong to a cadet family of the Minamoto *uji* called Tokugawa. Explicitly including Minamoto is making a claim to high status within the *uji*.

Uji Names - Family Names

Family Names

Typically, when the *uji* was explicitly stated, then a *kabane* (ancient title) such 朝臣 *ason* follows the name of the *uji* with a medial *-no-*. Originally, only the head of an *uji* could attach the *kabane* for the *uji* to the name of the *uji*. Thus, the following individual may be claiming to be the head of the Minamoto *uji*.

徳川源朝臣芳太郎家康

Tokugawa Minamoto no Ason Yoshitarou Ieyasu

Constructing Family Names

- Family names are most frequently di-thematic (two *kanji*) generic locatives which do not make supernatural claims.
- Single *kanji* and three *kanji* names exist, but are comparatively rare. Single *kanji* names such as typically have at least three *mora* (time unites).
- Single *kanji* names are frequently *kuge* names and are therefore the names of *uji*.
- Leading themes modify succeeding themes. Consequently, Kawakami 川上 (river up) would mean "up river" while Kamikawa 上川 (up river) would mean "upper river". Both names are currently extant, but Kawakami is much more common than Kamikawa.

Constructing Family Names

- Families were not necessarily biogically related. Rather, families were groups sharing a common residence.
- Family names should take *kun-yomi* (native Japanese) readings.
- There are a few names which take *on-yomi* (Sino-Japanese) readings. This group primarily consists of variants on 藤 wisteria such as 斎藤 Saitou, 内藤 Naitou, 加藤 Katou, and 佐藤 Satou. However, these are fairly irregular.
- The final substantive element of a family name should be a noun.
- Modifiers can be either a noun, a verb, or a native Japanese adjective.

Constructing Family Names

- Family names should be based on on ordinary topographic features.
- Directions can be specified either before or after the root topographic feature.
- Directions (e.g. base, mouth, tail, up, down, &c.) which precede the root topographic nature locate the topographic feature.
- Directions (e.g. base, mouth, tail, up, down, &c.) which follow the root topographic nature locate the residence relative to the root topographic feature.
- Single *mora* initial nouns in two *kanji* names are typically followed by -no- as in the name 井上 Inoue (above the well). Otherwise, nouns are simply agglutinated.

Constructing Family Names

- Native Japanese adjectives can be used as modifiers, but not as terminals.

- Native Japanese adjectives are inflected into their nominal form when used as names. This is typically achieved by deleting the い at the end of the adjective. This is how we produce names like Hayakawa 早川 (fast river).

- Some *kanji* such as *o* 小 (small) and *oo* 大 (big) have specialized nominal form readings.

- Similarly, verbs can be inflected into *rentaikei* 連体形 (attributive form) and agglutinated as modifiers to root nouns. However, this is a much less common pattern than nouns and adjectives serving as modifiers.

Asserting Uji Membership

Without Pretense

Common Use Names

Male members of the *buke* class appear to have ALWAYS had common use names. These were frequently based on birth order. In many cases, these birth order names could be prefixed with a reference to *uji* membership. These references typically took Sino-Japanese readings instead of native Japanese readings for the *kanji* used to write them.

徳川源太郎太郎家康

Tokugawa Gentarou Ieyasu

Asserting Uji Membership

Without Pretense

Simply adopting a *kuge* identity with a *kuge* name also avoids pretense as members of the *kuge* were expected to enter either civil service or *uji* service and essentially work their way up the hierarchy. Their rank would be explicitly specified as would be their official title. Both members of the *kuge* and the *buke* typically sought employment. Technically, even the emperor was appointed.

橘家康

Tachiba'na no Ieyasu

Nanori
A Perogative of the *Kuge & Buke*

- *Nanori* 名乗り were the perogative of male members of the 公家 *kuge* (aristocratic) and 武家 *buke* (military) classes.
- Typically dithematic with *kun-yomi* 訓読み (native Japanese) readings. *Nanori* should be auspicious.
- Lineal descent can be indicated by a shared *tsuji* 通字 such as Hito- 仁 which is typically the terminal *kanji* in *nanori* of male emperors and princes.
- Ordinarily the *tsuji* can switch sides between generations.
- Affiliation can be represented by the added *kanji.*

Women

- Women maintained separate residences in classical Japan.
- Husbands and lovers visited women in their quarters.
- As late as the Kamakura Period, women were often inheriting property in preference and family headship in preference to their brothers.
- Consequently, it appears that aristocratic women of this period would form *uji* based names such as:

藤原高子

Fujiwara no Takako

Structure of Feminine Personal Names

- Another common pattern was a repeated simple theme which names such as 茶々 Chacha (lit. tea-tea). Note that 々 is the *kanji* repetition symbol.
- Some thematic elements such as Midori 緑 (lit. greenery) or composite themes such as Miyuki 深雪 (lit. deep snow) or 美雪 (lit. beautiful snow) are sufficiently long in and of themselves that a name terminating element is not needed. Observe that the examples in this category have three *mora*.

Structure of Feminine Personal Names

- Women progressively lost status after the middle of the Kamakura period. Women were now living with and dependent upon their husbands. Eventually, women came to have names with the structure:

    <family name><personal name>

Structure of Feminine Personal Names

- <theme><terminal> names ending in: 賣 -me, 女 -me, 姫 -hime, or 子 -ko.
- Note that there is reason to believe that in Old-Japanese **M** and **K** were gender markers marking respectively the feminine in *musume* 娘 daughter and the masculine in *musuko* 息子 son. And in the name of the female god Izanami and the male god Izanagi. (Note that K transforms to G by being voiced following there preceding vowel.)

Structure of Feminine Personal Names

- Terminal elements attached to mono-thematic names appeared over time. This produces names like 明子 Akiko. These terminals are given in approximate chronological order of appearance

  1. 賣 -me
  2. 姫 -hime (Although -hime may have become a free form, it is not currently allowed by the College of Arms.)
  3. 女 -me
  4. 子 -ko
  5. The prefix お attached to typically mono-thematic names lacking a name forming terminal appeared last. This pattern appeared during the Sengoku Period at the end of the Muromachi Period.
  6. None of these patterns completely died out prior to 1601.

Structure of Feminine Personal Names

- There is a fairly small collection of discrete feminine names which appear to date to antiquity. These may be written in several ways with different imputed meanings. A Collection of these names including 緑 Midori and 美由紀 Miyuki appear in a separate table in *Name Construction in Mediæval Japan* - Revised Edition.

- There are also a number of names such as 茶々 Cha-cha which repeat a single thematic element.

Names in Religion

- Both men and women could enter religion.
- Men and women pursuing a religious vocation lost their family name or *uji* name. *Shukka* 出家 (lit. leave the house) is one of the several words for Buddhist monk/priest or entering the priesthood.
- Laypeople could formally take Buddhist precepts and add a name in religion to their other names.

武田 大膳 大夫 晴信 入道 信玄

Takeda Daizen no Daibu Haru'nobu Nyuudou Shingen
Haru'nobu is a *nanori* and Shingen is a name in religion.
Daizen no Daibu is a type of office
Nyuudou means "entered the path"

Names in Religion

- Names in religion are most typically dithematic and take Sino-Japanese *on-yomi* readings. An exception is names ending *-ami* 阿弥 which is a reference to the Amida Buddha of the Pure Land sects.
- Laws during the Muromachi Period attempted to keep monks and priests in their monasteries and temples. This decreases the likelihood of being named after a temple or other geographic location during this period.
- Zen monks had two names: *<azana><imina>* The *azana* may resemble a locative often with a type of building as the substantive element.

Names in Religion

梅山 聞本

Baisan Monpon

Apricot-Mountain Listen-Root

明庵 栄西

Myou'an Eisai

Bright-Hut Standing-Up-the-West

Using NCMJ Rev. Ed.

1. Determine which type of name you wish to design. Which class will the name belong to? What is the gender? What is the general time frame?
2. Look up an appropriate name structure in Chapter Four of NCMJ. Write down the structure at the top of the identification section of the name form, and cite your source.

Japanese: Male member of the military class.
<family name><yobina><nanori>

NCMJ Rev. Ed. Page 5 ff.

Using NCMJ Rev. Ed.

1. Either choose an attested family name from the name index in NCMJ Rev. Ed. Or construct an appropriate family name. We will construct a name.

2. Your client likes bears and lives near a mountain. Howabout "bear mountain"?

3. Mountain is the substantive element and described by bears. Japanese puts substantive elements last. So the structure of our proposed family name must be:

<bear>+<mountain>

4. Using the Semantic Index of the Thematic Dictionary

Kuma 熊 (bear) NCMJ Rev. Ed. p. 172

Yama 山 (mountain) NCMJ Rev. Ed. p. 145

Using NCMJ Rev. Ed.

1. Our client is the third child in his family and would like to use that in his *yobina*.
2. Our client likes obscure *uji* and denies to claim affiliation with the Kiyohara *uji*.
3. Look up the prefix for Kiyohara in NCMJ Rev. Ed. 37.
4. Look up the root yobina for third son in the section on number in NCMJ Rev. Ed. starting on page 211.

<Kiyohara Prefix>+<Third Son>

SEI 清 Tsuushou for Kiyohara Uji NCMJ Rev. Ed. p. 172

Saburou 三郎 (mountain) NCMJ Rev. Ed. p. 145

Seisaburou 清三郎

Using NCMJ Rev. Ed.

1. Our client admires someone who is either a historical person or a member of the Society. Great! Let's use an element from their nanori as part of our client's nanori.
2. Suppose our client wishes to invent a *nanori* from scratch. Great! Now is the time to explain that Japanese *nanori* ar not spirit quest names. They should be auspicious, but that is about it.
3. Suppose our client has a friend whose *nanori* is 信長 Nobunaga. Great! Pick either *nobu* or *naga*. Fortunately, either will work in this case. Our client decides he likes *nobu* and wants it to go second which is the substantive element. Nobu is attested in NCMJ Rev. Ed. p. 233,

Using NCMJ Rev. Ed.

1. We now have half of our client's *nanori*. We can either use a second affiliation as already discussed to contribute a second element to modify *nobu*, or we can pick on sui generis.
2. *Nobu* 信 *means* "belief" or "faith".
3. Let's pick *Hisa* 久 which means "longtime".

Constructed *nanori*: Hisanobu 久信

Hisa- (longtime) attested prototheme
NCMJ Rev. Ed. p. 119.
-nobu (faith/belief) attested deuterotheme
NCMJ Rev. Ed. p. 233,

Using **NCMJ Rev. Ed.**

We have just constructed and documented a name appropriate for a male member of the *buke*.

熊山 清三郎 久信

Kumaya Seisaburou Hisanobu

Hopefully our client likes it, an nobody else has grabbed it. In either case, we have lots of avenues to "fix" the name.

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