

*Edo Avant Garde*  
**ABOUT JAPANESE NAMES AND THE WAY THEY ARE WRITTEN**

Japanese names prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century can seem to be complicated and difficult to determine what is a family name, what is a given name, and what is an art name or Buddhist designation, just to name a few of the possibilities.

Generally speaking, the following will apply in the film *Edo Avant Garde* and the accompanying teaching materials. It also, of course, applies to Japanese in general.

**For the average person** both in the past and now, the family name is usually given first, followed by given name. Example: Matsumoto Kenjirō. Here, Matsumoto is the family name.

**Painters and other artists** often listed their school or studio first, with their art name afterwards. Example: Utagawa Kuniyoshi. Utagawa is the name of a school of woodblock printmakers and painters, and Kuniyoshi is the artist's art name (known as *go* in Japanese and pronounced like it looks!). The other school name often cited in the teaching materials is Kano (also written Kanō).

This gets confusing when some artists use their family name along with an art name or given name. Ogata Kōrin is an example of this practice. The family name is Ogata, and one of the names that he used was Kōrin. This is the name that appears most commonly in reference to this artist.

Artists will often be given an art name that uses one of the characters from their teacher's name. Thus, Utagawa Kuniyoshi gave Utagawa Yoshitoshi, one of his students, the "yoshi" character from his own art name.

Artists also either adopt or are given more than one name. Sometimes, as in the case of one well-known 19<sup>th</sup> century print designer and painter, Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849), many art names are used. Hokusai changed his name frequently, when his life circumstances changed and as he passed various year milestones.

Buddhist monks and priests often are given Buddhist names that are not the same as their given name.

The general rule of thumb is that:

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century and later, you would refer to a person by their family name. For example, Matsumoto Kenjirō should be referred to as Mr. Matsumoto. You don't ever call a Japanese person by their given name when speaking to or about them unless they have given you permission to do so. It is considered too intimate or personal to use the given name. (That said, most Japanese in the U.S. will ask you to use their given name in American style.)

Earlier than the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, artists in particular are referred to by their art name (*go*) or the name that is listed second. For example, Ogata Kōrin is usually referred to as Kōrin.

Utagawa Kuniyoshi is commonly called Kuniyoshi. You will see instances of this throughout the teaching materials.

Some good resources for learning more about the Japanese language can be found on the Japan:PITT website, also known as *Japan: Places, Images, Times & Transformations*.

URL: <https://www.japanpitt.pitt.edu>

See in particular the section on language: <https://www.japanpitt.pitt.edu/essays-and-articles/language>