

# Discovering Your Japanese American Roots: Family Name & Family Crest



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# Class Outline

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- Your Family Name: *Myoji*
- Your Family Crest: *Kamon*



## Tracing Your Japanese Family Tree: Where to Start

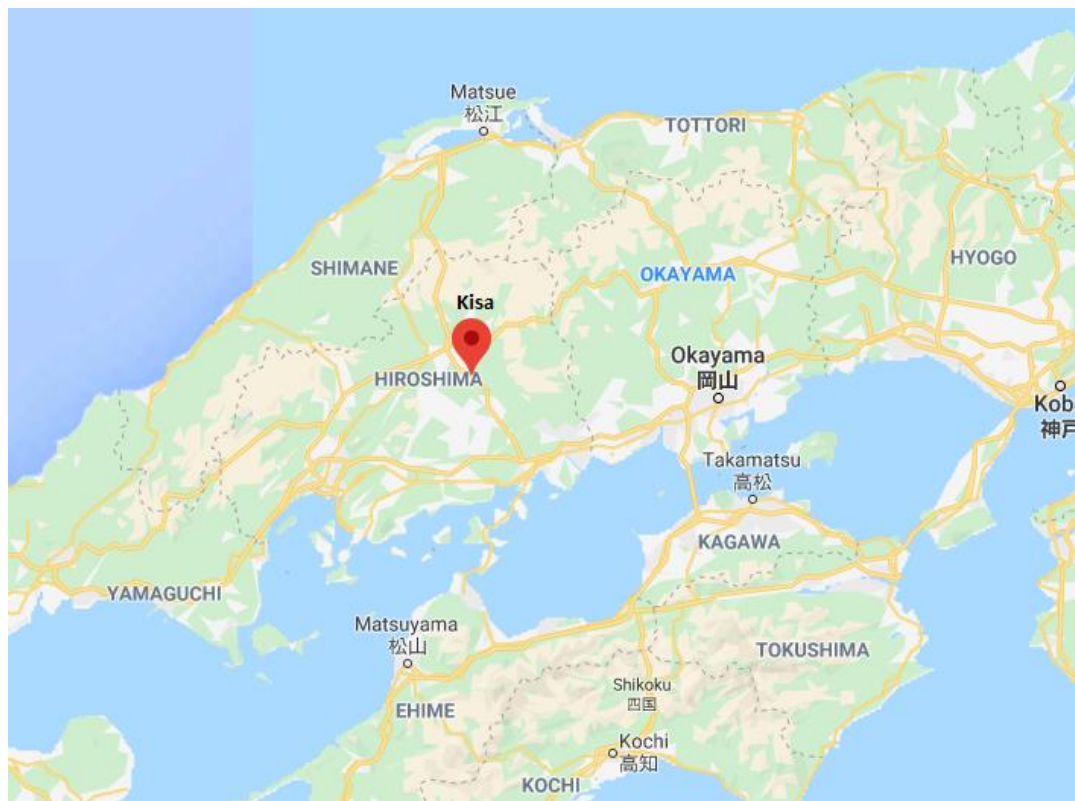
- Need to determine WHERE your ancestors came from
- Most of the first Japanese immigrants from the late 1800s came from rural areas and small villages
- History of the Japanese family is inseparable from the native village or town of their ancestors (*furusato* or hometown).
- Families tended to live in the same village for hundreds of years because of a lack of mobility and incentive to move



# Tracing Your Japanese Family Tree: Where to Start

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- Possible/probable that descendants are still living in the same area today
- Identifying the village (*mura*) or town (*machi, cho*) is key to discovering one's Japanese roots
- Prefecture (*ken*), e.g., Hiroshima, Kumamoto, is too large an area to be able to locate a family



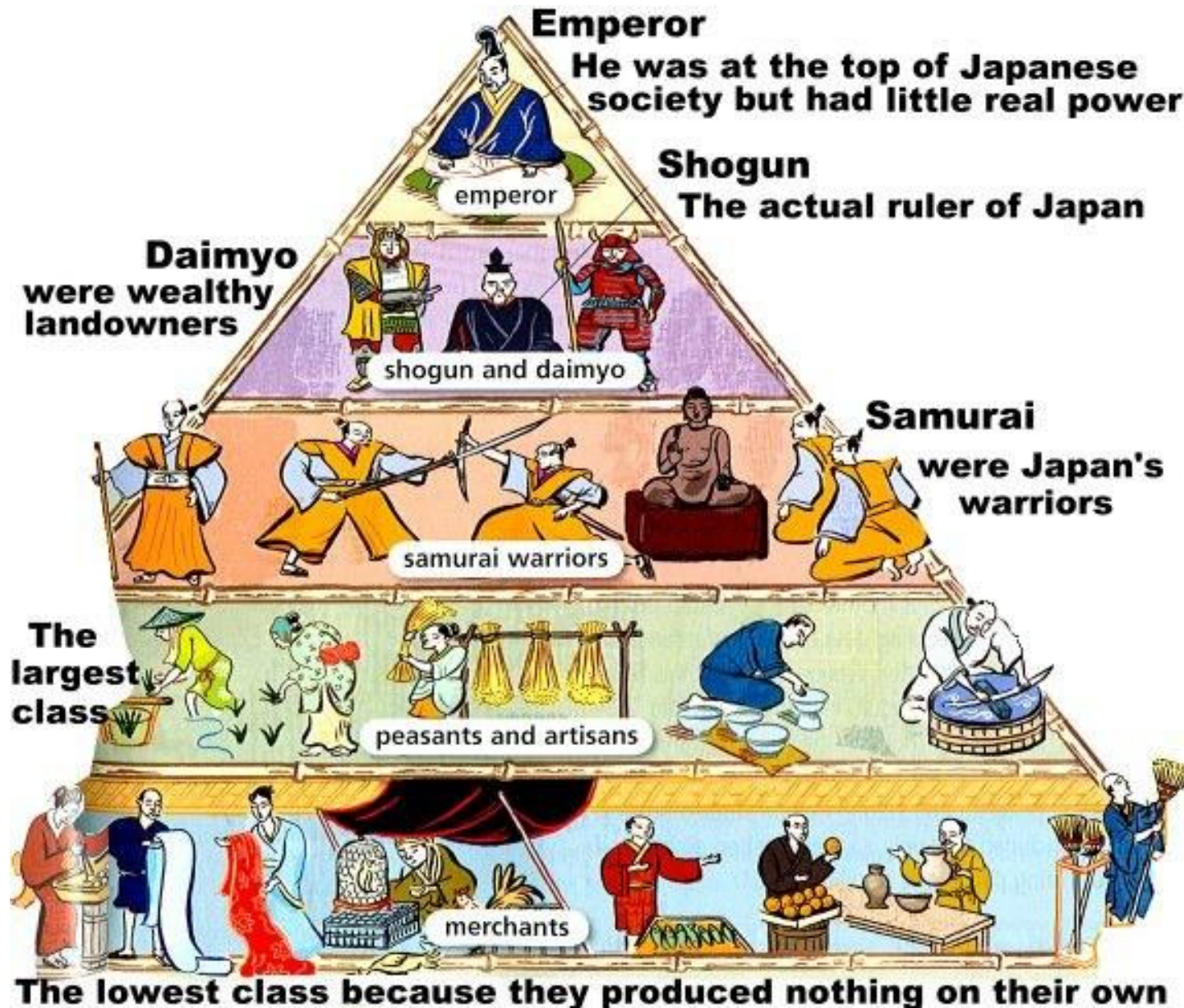


## Japanese Family Names: History

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- Japanese family names or surnames (*myōji*) are inherently linked to the origin and history of the family, and reflect the customs and norms of Japanese society
- Until 1870's, over 80% of the Japanese did not have family names
  - Having a *myōji* symbolized status/privilege/power, so for the most part, only the nobility and *bushi/samurai* had (allowed) family names
  - “Commoners” were banned from using family names but had personal names
  - As most of the first Japanese immigrants from the late 1800s came from rural areas and small villages, they probably were among those who did not have family names until 1870's

# Japan Feudal Society Hierarchy



<https://jwdsamuraiproject.weebly.com/early-history-of-feudal-japan.html>

## Japanese Family Names: History

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- Prior to 1870s, there were many different categories of names, which applied to different classes and groups of people (mostly male) and had different purposes
  - *ujina* – clan name; given or confirmed by emperors
  - *myōji* or *azana* – family name
  - *nanori* – personal/given “official name” reserved for nobility and *bushi/samurai* (warrior class)
  - *jitsumyō/jitsumei* – personal/given “true/real name”, formal adult name combined with *zokumyo*
  - *yōmyō/yōmei/domyo* – personal/given name to be used through childhood; conferred 6 days after birth
  - *zokumyō/kemyo/yobina* – personal/given name conferred at the *genpuku* (coming of age) ceremony, “common” or “ordinary” name
  - *tsūshō* – “middle name”
  - *hōmyō* – “Dharma name” conferred at Buddhist Affirmation Ceremony
  - *kaimyō* – Buddhist posthumous name given upon person’s death

## Japanese Family Names: History

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- Nobility and *bushi* often had title, office, or rank “names”
  - Official *bushi* name could consist of 5 names (family name, name indicating status in the Emperor’s court, original family name, family “grade”, personal name)
- Name Structure
  - During Heian (794-1185) and Kamakura Era (1185-1333), names of the nobility were in the form, Family Name *no* Personal Name, e.g., Minamoto no Yoritomo (“Yoritomo of the Minamoto”)
  - Later, the *no* was dropped, and the structure became Family Name followed by Personal Name
  - Japanese generally do not have middle names



## The Traditional Japanese Family and Household (*ie*)

- Until recently, in Japan, the “household” (*ie*), not the individual, was the basic unit of society
  - Household was more than just the family members living in the dwelling
    - Included non-related members
    - Household considered an economic unit as well



## The Traditional Japanese Family and Household (*ie*)

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- Roles & hierarchy based on gender (males higher than females), age (older higher than younger), and kinship (born in household higher than those born outside household) with a patriarchal (male) head
  - Common to have 3 generations of a family in the same household
  - Eldest son usually becomes head of family and takes over family business or farm
  - Other sons moved out and sometimes established “branch” households (*bunke*), subordinate to the main household (*honke*)
  - Daughters married into other families

## The Traditional Japanese Family and Household (*ie*)

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- Providing an heir/family successor was essential
- When family had no sons, the practice of “adoption” became common, and is still a practice in modern times
  - If family had only daughters, one (usually eldest) remained in the household and her husband became an adopted son (*muko yoshi*), or a young man was adopted to become the heir
  - If a family had no children, sometimes a daughter would be adopted (prefer from father’s paternal relatives) who would later marry a *muko yoshi*
  - *Muko yoshi* treated as if blood son of adopted family, but loses connection with natural family



## Your Japanese Family Tree: *koseki*

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- In 1871, the Family Registration law (*Koseki Ho*) made the *koseki* (full name: *jinshin koseki*) the legal document for individual identification and census, as all individuals were required to have a family name by law
  - *Koseki* is the legal proof of status as a Japanese citizen, and all citizens are listed in a *koseki*
- *Koseki* (戸籍) or “household registry” or “family registry” is an official record of the births, deaths, marriages, divorces, and adoptions for a household (also includes other information, such as criminal convictions)
  - Fulfills the role of birth certificates, death certificates, marriage licenses, etc.



# Japanese Family Name Origins

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- Since the vast majority of the population did not have family names, and they had to select one for their *koseki*, names were chosen for convenience, based on
  - estate, manor, and house names (*yago*)
  - town and village names (70,000+ villages in 1868)
  - geographical area names
  - “field names” (*myō* of *myōji* means “young rice plants”, also refers to piece of private land, which had names)
  - elements of nature
  - traditional/prestigious(samurai, clan) family names
  - family names of distant (higher class) relatives
  - occupations
  - guilds, collectives, associations
  - Selection by their local priests
- More than 80% derived from “place” names (*niwa*) or nature

## Japanese Family Name Origins

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- The phenomena of how most Japanese chose their family names could explain the following:
  - Higher occurrence of unrelated families with same name in same area (e.g., different families choosing the name of their town/village as their family name)
  - Unrelated families with same name in different areas (e.g., different families choosing a name related to a common element of nature and place, such as Yamada, which means “mountain rice field”)
  - Japan the greatest number of different family names of any country (over 100,000), with people predominantly from one ethnic origin (e.g., exclude USA)

# Japanese Family Name Origins

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- By comparison, other countries have far fewer names and a significant portion of their populations sharing just a few names
  - China has approximately 3000 different family names
  - Korea has less than 300 different family names
- Most people in your family tree will have different family names from their own anyway
  - Generally, only 2 ancestors each generation (paternal ancestors) will have the same family name as you
  - After 20 generations, you have over 2 million ancestors, but only 40 with the same family name

# The Meaning of Your Family Name

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- Japanese names usually chosen for specific meaning
- Determining the meaning and how it was chosen may provide additional information about family origins
- Japanese family names often consist of two *kanji* characters (sometimes 3 characters, 1 & 4 characters are rare; 1 character names often derived from Chinese)
  - For example,
    - Yamada 山田 : yama = mountain da = rice field => mountain rice field
    - Tanaka 田中 : ta = rice field naka = middle => middle of rice field
  - 30 of 100 most common family names contained *yama* or *da/ta*

Reference: Common Japanese Family Name 1st Characters (Xx-) and End Characters (-xx) attachment



## Some Common-Themed Family Names

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### ▪ *da/ta* – rice field/paddy

- Yamada – Mountain Rice Field
- Ikeda – Pond Rice Field
- Hamada – Beach Rice Field
- Morita – Forest Rice Field
- Fujita – Wisteria Rice Field
- Takeda – Bamboo Rice Field
- Matsuda – Pine Rice Field
- Shimoda – Lower Rice Field
- Murata – Village Rice Field
- Furuta – Old Rice Field
- Shibata – Purple Rice Field

### ▪ *yama* – mountain

- Yamada – Mountain Rice Field
- Yamashita – Mountain Under
- Yamaguchi – Mountain Entrance
- Yamamoto – Mountain Base
- Yamashiro – Mountain Castle
- Yamasaki – Mountain Slope

# The Meanings of Common Family Names

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## 10 most common family names in Japan

1. 佐藤 Sato  
Fujiwara of Sano (from Tochigi-ken)
2. 鈴木 Suzuki  
Bell Wood
3. 高橋 Takahashi  
High Bridge
4. 田中 Tanaka  
Middle of Rice field
5. 伊藤 Ito  
Fujiwara of Ise (from Mie-ken)
6. 渡辺 Watanabe  
Crossing the River
7. 山本 Yamamoto  
Foot of the Mountain
8. 中村 Nakamura  
Central Village
9. 小林 Kobayashi  
Little Forest
10. 加藤 Kato  
Fujiwara of the Kaga province

<https://japantoday.com/category/national/Gov't-statistics-reveal-most-common-Japanese-surnames-Sato-No.-1>

<https://www.patternz.jp/japanese-surnames-top-10-ranking-origin-and-its-meanings/>

Ref: 100 Most Popular Japanese Surnames attachment

# The Meaning of Your Family Name

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- Need to know how the name is (should be) written in *kanji*
  - “Meaning” of the combination of *kanji* characters may not be a literal translation of each character but represent a concept for which there is no exact English equivalent
  - *kanji* can be read/pronounced in different ways, resulting in different meanings and transliterations to *romaji*
    - e.g., 靖仁 can be read as either Seijin or Yasuhito
  - A name (*romaji*) may have several alternative ways of writing in *kanji*
    - e.g., for Saitō, there are over 100 different kanji for *sai* and over 200 for *tō*
    - Each variation has a different meaning
  - A name may not be the “true” *romaji* transliteration
    - Spelling may have changed to accommodate Western pronunciation; e.g., Morey instead of Mori

# Meaning of Hashizume

橋  
爪

Hashi = bridge

Tsume =  
fingernail,  
toenail, claw



- Meaning (according to relative): “End of the bridge” or “Near the bridge”
- 804<sup>th</sup> most common name in Japan

Name ranking search websites (need to enter kanji spelling)

<https://myoji-yurai.net/>

<https://www.kanshudo.com/searchn>



## Meaning of Munekiyo

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- Original family name was Muneshia (ca.1600s)
  - Taken from an estate name (yago)
- Name changed to Munekiyo
  - Unknown why it changed
  - Meaning is unknown; literal translation
- 17,999<sup>th</sup> most common name in Japan



Mune — main line of a family,  
religion, origin

Kiyo — pure, purify, cleanse

# Example Family Names from Different Origins

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## ■ *myō* (field names)

- Often auspicious names indicating longevity and abundance for the fields and the people who worked in them
- Often contain the element *tomi*, meaning “rich”; e.g., Shigetomi, Yasutomi, Hisatomi, Kunitomi (Country Abundance), Yoshitomi (Good Abundance), Tsunetomi (Always Abundance), Imatomi (Now Abundance), Inetomi (Riceplant Abundance)
- Also contain the element *yoshi*, meaning “good”; e.g., Yoshino (Good Field), Yoshitomi, Ineyoshi (Good Riceplant)



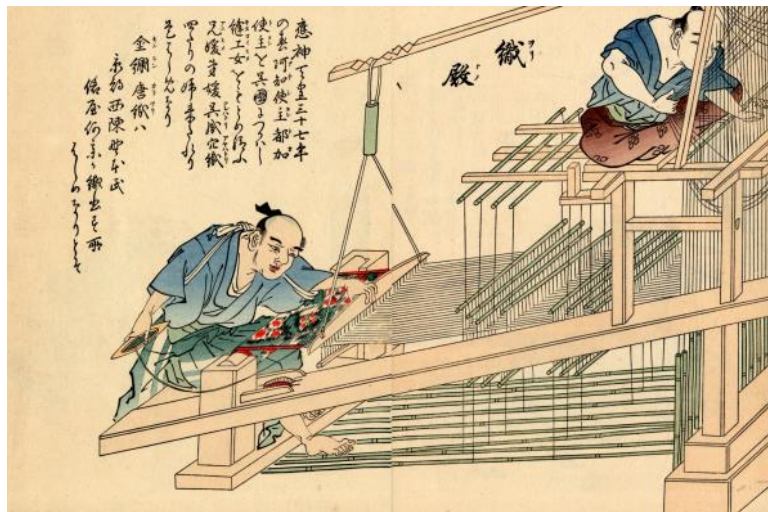
# Example Family Names from Different Origins

## ■ Occupation

- Merchants – *ya* appended to end of name, a common suffix for a shop or inn; e.g., Komeya (Rice Merchant), Yaoya (Greengrocer)



- Guild names – *be* appended to end of name; e.g., Amabe (Fishermen), Isobe (Seaweed Gatherers), Oribe (Weavers), Sakebe (Brewers), Hatori (Weavers), Yamabe (Mountain Wardens)





# Example Family Names from Different Origins

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## ■ Clan/*bushi* family names

- Some famous family names: Genji, Heike, Hojo, Ashikaga, Tokugawa, Matsudaira, Hosokawa, Shimazu
- Others: Kaga, Date, Maeda, Kuki, Asai, Shibata, Kato, Takeda, Saito, Honda, Ii, Tanuma, Ōka, Miyamoto, Suwa, Hattori, Chosokabe, Ukita, Mori, Ishida, Fukushima, Oda, Kuroda, Hachisuka, Okubo, Watanabe, Takigawa, Murakami



# Personal Names

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- Even more complex than family names
  - Usually consist of 1-3 kanji characters
    - Could choose from over 2000 kanji characters
  - Pronunciations and writings (and associated meanings) vary widely
    - e.g., Yūki could be written in 52 different ways
  - Structure and types of characters commonly used for personal names have changed over the past 100 years
- Choosing a personal name based on
  - Belief that the personal name determines a person's fate and personality
  - “Lucky” number of kanji character strokes
  - “Balance” with family name in meaning and pronunciation
    - e.g., the 森村 (Morimura, Forest-Village) family may avoid naming their daughter 樹里 (Juri, Tree Hamlet) because of the semantic similarity of the two names.

Seasonal characters would likely not be mixed, such as the surname 秋葉 (Akiba, Autumn Leaves) paired with 夏帆 (Kaho, Summer Sails).

## ■ *Bushi* Personal Names

Japanese males often received a personal name at 3 stages of their life

1) *yomyo/domyo* (youth name) – to be used through childhood; conferred 6 days after birth

- Usually ended with suffix -maru (round, chubby)/-maro/-o/-waka (e.g., Zenichimaru)
- Also common to use positive character traits (e.g., Takeshi = brave)
- Sometimes one character of grandfather's name is used as part of the grandson's name (e.g., Eikichi, the grandfather, passes the "Ei" character to Eisaku)

# Personal Names

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## ▪ *Bushi* Personal Names

2) *Zokumyo/tsusho/kemyo/yobina* – conferred at the *genpuku* (coming of age) ceremony (usually when they were 16 years old)

### ▪ Used numerical order of birth

- Tarō/Ichirō = 1<sup>st</sup> son
- Jirō = 2<sup>nd</sup> son
- Saburō = 3<sup>rd</sup> son
- Shirō = 4<sup>th</sup> son
- Gorō = 5<sup>th</sup> son
- Rokurō = 6<sup>th</sup> son
- Shichirō = 7<sup>th</sup> son
- Hachirō = 8<sup>th</sup> son
- Kurō = 9<sup>th</sup> son
- Jurō = 10<sup>th</sup> son

### ▪ Modified by descriptive adjectives

- Daigorō = big 5<sup>th</sup> son
- Ryōichi = good 1<sup>st</sup> son

### ▪ Modified by suffixes that refer to titles

- -emon (guard title), -zaemon, -ji, -zo, -suke (deputy governor), -be
- e.g., Kuemon, Hikozaemon, Goemon, Heiji, Heizo, Kinnosuke, Kanbe, Hyobe, Denbe, etc.



# Personal Names

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- *Bushi* Personal Names

3) *Nanori/jitsumei* – “true name”, formal adult name combined with *zokumyo*

- Usually consist of 2 kanji characters
- Common practice for father or godfather to “grant” one kanji (1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup>) from his name to the son for his *zokumyo*
  - e.g., Yori- and Yoshi- are characters in Minamoto (major clan in feudal Japan), resulting in names Yoritomo, Yorinobu, Yorimasa, Yoshitsune, Yoshiie, Yoshichika, Yoshinaka

# Female Personal Names

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- Names often ended with –hime (“child of the sun”), -me, -iratsume
  - Male names used the same “root”, but ended with –maro or –hito
  - e.g., female Akame, male Akahito
  - Some common female “root” names: Asa, Aya, Ishi, Kishi, Kuni, Kura, Saki, Saya, Tatsu, Chiyo, Toki, Toshi, Toyo, Tora, Nami, Hisa, Hime, Maki, Masu, Mana, Momo, Yuki, Yoshi, Yori
- Adopt maternal grandmother’s name
- Suffix –gozen often used for wife of a *bushi*, e.g., Shizuka-gozen
- Names for noble women often ended with –ko (“child”) or –hime (different kanji from hime above, means “princess”) by Heian Era (794-1184)
- Names for women of bushi class used the honorific “o” prefix during the Muromachi Era (1333-1573) and often ended with the common name of a father or husband
  - e.g., O-Natsu-Seijūrō
- After Meiji Era (1868-1912), -ko suffix became popular for all women; also –yo (“generation”)(e.g., Kazuyo) and –e (e.g., Chie)

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## Japanese Family Crest (*kamon*)

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- Traditional patterns that symbolize families/family names
- Since *kamon* are tied to the family/family name, its use and adoption parallels the family names
- Heian Era (794-1185)
  - Originated by nobility as a family symbol
  - Created designs and put on their belongings (clothing, furniture, carts)
- Kamakura Era (1185-1333)
  - Samurai families/clans began using for identification on battlefield
  - Created designs for their battle flags to prevent confusion on the battlefield and to help the warriors recognize their own company or the enemy
  - Also used for encampment curtains and on battle items (weapons, armor, helmets, saddles)

# Japanese Family Crest (*kamon*)

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- Edo Era (1603-1867)
  - “Common” people began using
    - Peasants, merchants, and artisans
    - Not formally permitted to have one (or family name)
  - Used for identification and decoration
  - Many families of all classes adopted new or modified (more elegant) designs, as this was relatively peaceful time
- Meiji Era (1868-1912)
  - Became popular among all families
- Post WWII (1945-)
  - As traditional families have changed, importance of *kamon* has diminished
  - Mostly used for ceremonial occasions

## *Kamon* Origins

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- Practically all families have one, but not unique to your family or family name
- There is no government registry or laws that govern the use or ownership of *kamon* (with 1 exception)
- Reasons for chosen design are varied
  - Related to something about your ancestor
  - Related to locality in which ancestor lived
  - Symbol of good fortune
  - Bestowed by lord as gift to those who served him
  - Transferred to family by marriage
  - Borrowed from important, well-respected family
  - Other special meaning relating to your family
  - Simply made up or chosen based on personal preference

# Kamon Origins

- Appears in several items
  - Ceremonial or formal dress (usually kimono, both men's and women's)
  - Gravestones
  - *Noren* (curtain)
  - Family *ihai* (mortuary tablets)
- Your relatives in Japan are the best source





## *Kamon* Symbolism

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- Different types of symbolism of *kamon*
  - Patterns – different groups of people (e.g., nobility, samurai, merchants) preferred different types of patterns
  - Family name identification – some designs were linked to family names (e.g., *sakura* (cherry blossom) tied to Sakurai family)
  - Auspicious – some designs symbolized good fortune, longevity, good health, prosperity, happiness, etc.
  - Commemoration – some designs represented an important event in the family's history (e.g., 2 cranes appearing before a victorious battle)
  - Warrior spirit – samurai preferred designs that symbolized their warrior spirit, such as those with weapons or armament (e.g., swords, bows, arrows, armor), or brave animals (e.g., hawks, lions, tigers)
  - Religious – symbols from Buddhist, Shintō, Confucian, or Christian traditions
  - Superstitious – symbols of good luck charms

# Hashizume *kamon*

- Hashizume family *kamon* is *tachibana* (Mandarin orange)
- Inherited from Minami family (“First” wife’s family of Hashizume family line)
- In a historical fable, it is referred to as the sacred tree planted in the land of eternity. Tachibana clan adopted it as their family crest.<sup>1</sup>
- Evergreen tachibana (Japanese inedible citrus) is the symbol for “eternity”. Trees endure falling snow and grow well even in winter; for that, Japanese people often refer to people with dignity, virtue and modesty as “tachibana-like”.<sup>2</sup>
- Used by famous samurai Naomasa Ii (1561-1602)
- Also used by other samurai families: Obayashi, Kuze, Udagawa, Matsuidaira, Yukushiji, Matsumura



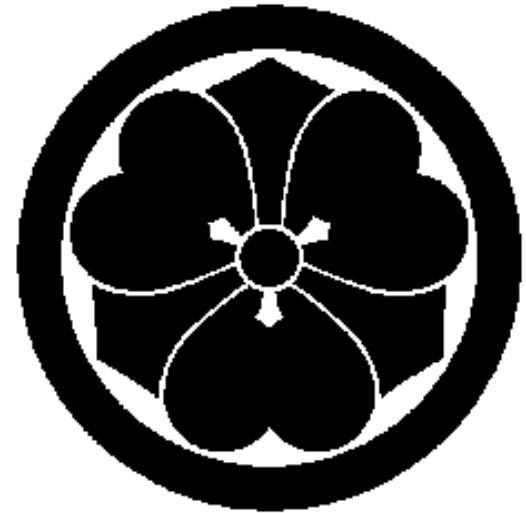
<sup>1</sup>Takamori Ikuya (Translator) and Jeff Huffman, Jeff (Contributor), *Family Crests of Japan*, New York: ICG Muse (2001), p. 66.

<sup>2</sup><http://japanese-kimono.net/samurai-kamon/>

# Munekiyo *kamon*

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- Munekiyo family *kamon* is *katabami* (Wood Sorrel) with swords
  - Sword blades between the leaves
- Plant signified prosperity<sup>1</sup>
- Popular design among samurai families, with and without sword blades
- Munekiyo family goes back at least to 1600s, and were told that ancestors were samurai

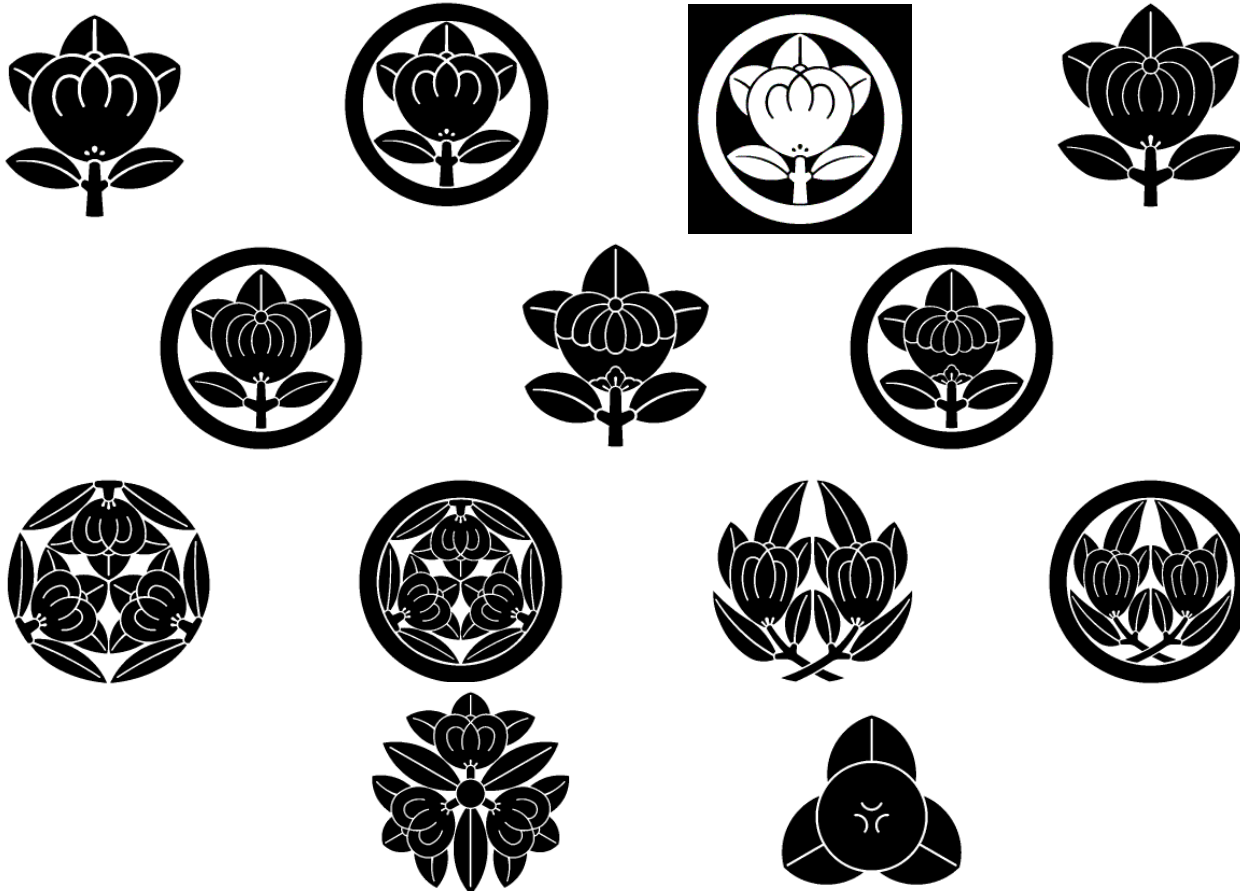


<sup>1</sup><http://japanese-kimono.net/samurai-kamon/>

## *Kamon Variation*

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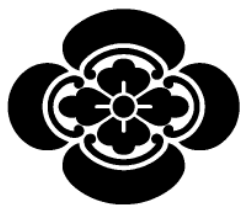
- Many variations of same basic design, e.g., a flower design in a circle is distinct from the same design without a circle, but only one is your family's true *kamon* (designs are considered monochrome, i.e., color is not part of the design)
  - Variations created as new families were created (e.g., 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> sons got married)



# Kamon Popular Designs

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- 1000's of different designs, including variations
- Major categories: plant, animal, nature, architecture, object, design, *kanji*
  - Plants



*Mokkō* (Japanese Quince/melon)



*Kiri* (Paulownia)



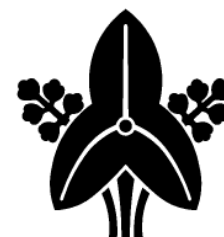
*Tachibana* (orange blossom)



*Myōga* (Japanese ginger)



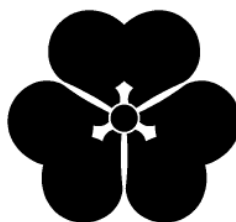
*Kashiwa* (oak)



*Omodaka* (arrowhead plant)



*Tsuta* (ivy)



*Katabami* (wood sorrel)



*Fuji* (Wisteria)

# Kamon Popular Designs

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## ○ Animals



*Tsuru* (crane)



*Taka no ha* (hawk feathers)

## ○ Nature



*Mitsu boshi* (three stars)



*Nami* (wave)

## ○ Architecture



*Torii* (gate)



*Igeta* (well frame)

## ○ Object



*Ya* (arrow)



*Ōgi* (fan)

## ○ Design



*Tomoe* (swirl)



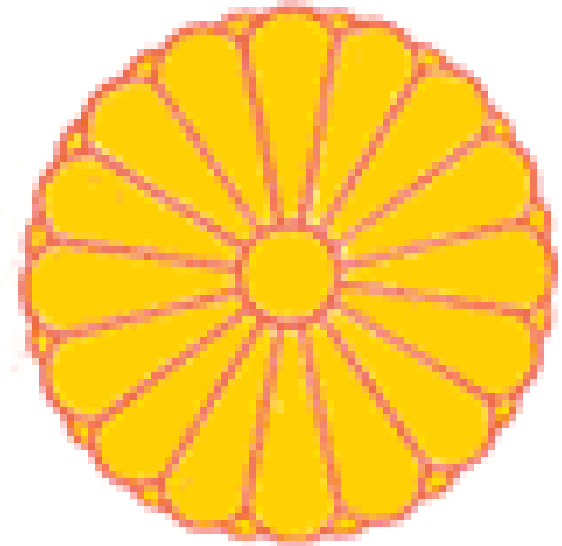
*Hishi* (rhombus)

## Some Famous Families' *Kamon*

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### Chrysanthemum (*kiku*)

- Imperial family has exclusive use of *jurokugiku* (16 petal chrysanthemum) by law (1869)
- Chrysanthemum also symbol and national emblem for Japan as it resembled the sun's rays
- Imperial branch families can choose variations of this design for their *kamon*
- Popular design among nobility in Heian Era (794-1185)
- In addition to being admired for it's beauty, it represented long life





## Some Famous Families' *Kamon*

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### Wisteria (*fuji*)

- Admired for its beauty and fragrance, nobility held wisteria-viewing parties starting in the 900s
- Fujiwara (which means “field of wisteria”) clan was one of the most powerful families during the Heian period (794-1185)
- Wisteria also used for the Fujiwara “branch” families (Kato, Goto, Ando, Ito, Naito), as their family names also contained the fuji kanji character



## *Kamon* for Females

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- Traditionally, women used the *kamon* associated with their family name; i.e., for unmarried women, their maiden family, for married women, their husband's family (if husband not a *yoshi*)
- Women could also choose their mother's family's *kamon*

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