

Naming Conventions in Tokyo's *rakugo* World

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Abstract

This paper explores naming conventions in *rakugo*, a Japanese stage art often translated as “Japanese storytelling”. *Rakugo* performers (*rakugoka*) receive stage names upon the start of their training. This stage name does not only show belonging to their own master, it also legitimizes their status, is proof of artistic lineage and grants authorization to perform. Upon the start of training (*deshi-iri*), the name is bestowed by the master and may again be changed at important career life stages, such as promotion to *futatsume* (start to mid-career performer) and *shin'uchi* (master) status. Some performers are given names of deceased performers as a sign of their skills and to show they will continue in the previous name holder's tradition.

This paper aims to show both naming structure and naming elements of stage names in contemporary Tokyo's *rakugo* community and further explores naming rights, naming criteria and differences at various career stages and possible re-naming factors.

Keywords: *rakugo*, *yose*, naming practices, training, name succession, *zenza*, *futatsume*, *shin'uchi*

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The very first performer to go on stage in any of Tokyo's *yose* 寄席 theatres is always the *rakugo* performer with the shortest career. As most audience members will not have seen him perform or might not remember his name, he introduces himself by stating both his own as well as his master's name:

“My name is Yoichi,
second apprentice of Ichinosuke.”

In the business world, business cards are proof for association with a company. In the *rakugo* world, a performer's name is proof of an artistic license, indicates artistic lineage and performers' relations and connections to each other. It is therefore important that we take a closer look at naming conventions in Tokyo's *rakugo* world.

Tokyo's *rakugo* world and its ranking

Along with *kōdan* 講談 and *manzai* 漫才 / 万才, *rakugo* 落語 is a Japanese stage art performed at the *yose* theatre. While often described as “Japanese storytelling,” stories are performed rather than told. Stories (*hanashi* 噺) are conveyed through

dialogue. A *rakugoka* 落語家 (*rakugo* performer) enacts all characters in the story, no matter the character's age, gender, profession or social standing. Originating in the artisan class of Japan's Edo period (1603-1868), its traditional stories are set in this very period. Their main characters are often fixed social types and stock characters, such as the carpenter who is always up for a fight, the up-right samurai, the spoilt merchant son or the devious courtesan. Some *rakugoka* create their own stories, set in either the past or present, but the majority of performers learn stories directly from senior performers, some of which reach back as far as the 17th century. Simply memorizing a *hanashi* does not give a person the permission to call themselves *rakugoka*. It is years-long training under a master that provides *rakugo* performers with access to the *yose* community which enables him¹ to learn *hanashi*. A young man (or increasingly, young woman) enters the world of *rakugo* to become a member of an artistic family. The young hopeful must find a master *rakugoka* of *shin'uchi* 真打ち rank (headliner status)

who agrees to take him in as disciple (*deshi* 弟子), vouches for him and ensures his *rakugo* education as his *shishō* 師匠. A *deshi* starts out at the rank of *minarai* 見習い (probationing apprentice; literally “learn by observation”). Once the young man has proven himself by working at his *shishō*’s home, he is registered with the Rakugo Kyōkai² and eventually promoted to *zenza*. As *zenza*, he receives a name and works at the *yose* every single day of the year without break – his main task is not to perform but to run the theatre backstage. After approximately three years of *yose* work he is promoted to the next rank, *futatsume* 二つ目, and no longer works backstage at the *yose*. A *futatsume* fends for himself. While some senior *rakugoka* might ask him to perform in their shows, he mainly makes a living by performing for patrons, organising his own shows or shows with peers. During the eight to 12 years as *futatsume*, he must find his own style and develop his own fanbase. Once the executives (*kanbu* 幹部) of the Rakugo Kyōkai decide it is time, a *futatsume* is promoted to *shin’uchi*. As *shin’uchi* he may headline the *yose* show and train *deshi* himself.

Zenza run the *yose*: they raise the curtain, bring out props, manage the time schedule, ensure all *shin’uchi* are well looked after in the *gakuya* 楽屋 (green room) and in return, the *shin’uchi* teach them the way of the *rakugoka*. *Yūgei* 遊芸 such as ikebana, i.e., arts which are not pursued with full-time commitment by the majority of their practitioners, stage arts such as *noh*, or martial arts such as *aikidō* ask the student only to learn under one master and students pay to learn from said master. *Rakugo* disciples, however, learn under a variety of *shishō* and do not pay for any part of their training. In fact, expenses are all taken care of by the *deshi*’s master and senior performers. The *shishō* vouches for a *deshi*’s behaviour, but the community as a whole works on the youngsters’ development.

In this community, during the early days of training, the stage name shows belongingness. Thus, when introducing themselves, *zenza* say both their own and their master’s name.

State of research regarding *rakugo*

In Japan itself, *rakugo* was long considered a lowly stage art. Choosing to become a *rakugoka* or *manzaishi* meant to move to the periphery of society (Ōtomo 2003: 86). Mass media helped to change *rakugo*’s image. Efforts of prolific critics Andō Tsuruo 安藤鶴夫, Iijima Tomoharu 飯島友治 and Okitsu Kaname 興津要 using the word *koten* 古典 (classic) to elevate *rakugo* to a ‘classic performing art/traditional performing art’ bore fruit, as the 1960s and 1970s saw a great number of books published on the topic of *rakugo* with major publishing houses.

In August 2008, Saijō of the Pia Sōgō Kenkyūjo estimated the size of the 2007 *rakugo* market to be close to 3,600,000,000 yen (Saijō 2008). With approximately 950 performers residing in Greater Tokyo, there are more *rakugoka* than ever in the history of the art. Morishige (2016) showed that the annual number of *rakugo* shows held in Tokyo had nearly tripled between 2005 and 2015. Despite the art’s popularity, few researchers have taken on the topic of *rakugo* (Morioka Sasaki 1990; Brau 2008). This paper is a first approach to introduce parts of the training processes inside the community of practitioners of Tokyo’s *rakugo* world. Insights about *rakugo*’s revived popularity—*rakugoka*’s rise from ill-reputed actors to media superstars—might provide a model to ensure the survival of arts and crafts in other corners of the world.

Receiving a stage name

“No matter how good you are at *rakugo*, if you don’t have a master, you’re an amateur.”
(Katsura Bunji 2014: 18)

Unlike *kabuki* or other arts, lineage in *rakugo* is not hereditary. For almost two hundred years, *rakugo* masters have taken in strangers and trained them in the art: the *rakugo* tradition is based on the professional, interpersonal relationship of *shishō* and *deshi*. The *shishō* thus bestows a *geimei* 芸名, a stage name, a name in the arts, on their *deshi*.

From the day they receive a stage name, *rakugoka* may name themselves as such by this name per association with their

shishō. Once *futatsume*, the performer's name is displayed on a *mekuri* めくり, the piece of paper announcing the *futatsume's* or *shin'uchi's* name on either stage-left or stage-right of the *yose*, so audiences can remember the performer's name. Less well-known *rakugoka* introduce themselves on stage by stating not only their own, but also their *shishō's* full name. They may be impacted by the *shishō's* reputation in both a positive and negative way. Bearing a popular *shishō's* name may help providing stage engagements (Tōkyō Kawaraban 1983: 5-6). On the other hand, if the *shishō* is thought to be unskilled or have a limited portfolio, his *deshi* (may) have a hard time fighting audience prejudices.

Starting training and gaining trust

By taking in a *deshi*, the *shishō* allows a complete stranger to have access to his home and family. He might have seen the young man in the audience of his solo shows – but mostly has not interacted with him before. The young man must gain his *shishō's* trust in order to cease being a stranger. In the early days of their relationship, a *shishō* may test his new *deshi* by having him run errands with the master's wallet and see whether both *deshi* and money return (Inada and Morita 2010: 44). Next to demonstrating passion, readiness and responsibility, the *zenza* must prove that he never inconveniences the master, considers him in his every action, by demonstrating his devotion with actions the *shishō* understands, apprehends and appreciates naturally (Tatekawa Shinoharu 2015: 137).

Name structure

Japanese names are produced in the order family name, given name. The same order is true for a *rakugoka's* name.

Before elaborating further, it should be mentioned that until very recently the choice of names was more fluid. Uemura (1965), Ryūtei Enji (1980), Shogeikonwakai/Osaka geinō konwa kai (1989) and Tachibana (1998) as well as biographies of Meiji and pre-Meiji *rakugoka* show that naming and *shishō-deshi* relationships were fluid in the past: a *deshi's* loyalty to one *shishō*

over the course of his career only developed post WWII. Shogeikonwakai/Osaka geinō konwa kai (1989) gives examples of *rakugoka* changing their names or changing their *shishō* and with it their name, both was not unusual – some even bought names from other performers (Yomiuri Shinbun 1894).

Evolving names

A *rakugoka's* stage name changes over the course of his career. Just like tadpoles evolve into frogs, lambs become sheep and fawn become deer, *rakugoka* receive different names throughout their career, or in the past have changed their names themselves. This practice stems from Japan's polyonomic naming system. Up to the 1870s, it distinguished mainly between the childhood name (*warawana* 童名) and the adulthood name (*seijinmei* 成人名). In the Edo period it was customary that craftsmen or merchants received new names at different stages of their life (Nagata 1999): Young boys in apprenticeship (*detchi* 丁稚) were called by their infant names which often ended with characters such as *-kichi* 吉 (auspicious) and *-matsu* 松 (pine) (Irie 1988: 11), preceded by a character taken from their real name: A boy called Kamejirō 亀次郎 would be called Kamekichi 亀吉 or Kamematsu 亀松, a combination of the first character *kame* (turtle, a symbol for longevity) and the name suffixes *-kichi* or *-matsu*. Once the apprentice was promoted to clerk and had outgrown his childhood name, a different *kanji*, often a number, was added to a character from his legal name, and he became Kamezō 亀藏 or Kameshichi 亀七. *Rakugoka* names today change at the three different stages of *rakugoka* life (*zenza*, *futatsume* and *shin'uchi*) and include similar naming patterns as shown below.

A *rakugoka's* surname – the *teigō*

A *rakugoka* name consists of two parts. The first part – the *teigō* 亭号, the family name in the arts – corresponds to the surname. *Teigō* are shared by all members of an artistic family (with exceptions³). However, the *teigō* itself does not determine relationships: there are several strands of the Katsu-

ra, San'yūtei and Shunpūtei families which parted ways several generations ago.

Teigō are also referred to as “house names” in English, as many end with the *kanji ya* 家 or *tei* 亭, signifying “house” and “building where people can rest” respectively. Minor *teigō* likewise end with characters implying buildings: *rō* 楼 (tower, turret, lookout), *sha* 舍 (hut; house), *ya* 屋 (shop), *dō* 堂 (temple, shrine, hall), *bō* 房 (chamber, room), *mon* 門 (gate). When talking about the master and his *deshi*, the expression *ichimon* 一門 (one gate) is used, again using a character related to buildings.

Today, the majority of *rakugoka* in Tokyo uses one of the six most widely applied *teigō* (Hayashiya, Katsura, San'yūtei, Shunpūtei, Tatekawa and Yanagiya⁴) and are thus not addressed by only their *teigō*. Top performers of an artistic family were referred to by their *teigō*, such as Enshō VI, who was referred to as the San'yūtei, and Hikoroku, who was referred to as the Hayashiya. This was possible due to the low number of performers at the time. The only performers today called by their *teigō* are those whose only other *teigō* bearers are their own *deshi*. Outsiders usually address *shin'uchi* either as “*shishō*”, or by the name, which was bestowed on them by their *shishō* and differentiates them from the other *rakugoka* in their house/artistic family, the *namae* 名前.

A *rakugoka*'s brand – his own name

“What? You don't like the name I give you?!”

“No sir, of course not!”

“Then Nūshō it is!”

“Thank you so much.” (San'yūtei Enjō 1986: 8)

The *shishō* along with his family decide on a *deshi*'s name (Kōriyama 1999: 27). The *shishō* may choose to consult his own *shishō* or his *ōshishō* 大師匠 (the *shishō*'s *shishō*). This practice is applied especially in the naming of the very first *deshi*. In later stages of the master's career, elder *deshi* may suggest names as well.

The naming process strengthens the bond between *deshi* and *shishō*, and some *shishō* provide the new apprentice with several options (Shunpūtei Ichinosuke 2019:

2), in order to let the *deshi* express his own personality. Lastly, there are also *shin'uchi* who take a more unconventional approach: In 2015, Koshira auctioned the right to name his first *deshi* on Yahoo Auction, Japan's most popular online auction website, for 251,000 yen (Tatekawa Koshira 2015; Deiri 2015).

Popular *kanji* in *rakugoka* names

Japanese native speakers recognize that *rakugoka* names are not legal names, as they follow different conventions. The above mentioned *kanji* signifying buildings (*ya* 家, *tei* 亭, *rō* 楼, *sha* 舍, *an* 庵, *ya* 屋) are rarely used in legal names and a first indicator for a *geimei*. *Namae* use different *kanji* and follow Edo period naming conventions. Unlike modern names, *rakugoka* names often use the Sino-Japanese reading of *kanji*. But it is first and foremost the choice of *kanji* which differs from typical Japanese legal names. Some are taken from nature, such as *kiku* 菊, *matsu*/ *shō* 松, *yanagi*/ *ryū* 柳, *eda*/ *shi* 枝, or include one-digit numbers. Most of all, many naming elements are not typically used in legal names such as *ko*/ *shō* 小, *en* 圓, *raku* 楽, *shō* 笑 or *sen* 扇 [see Appendix for a list with readings and meanings]. While the majority of legal names follow Japanese readings, male *rakugoka* names prefer the use of Sino-Japanese readings.

Receiving a *kanji* from one's *shishō*

A *rakugoka*'s *namae* shares one *kanji* or syllable with their *shishō*'s first name. The name signifies belongingness, clarifies the artistic lineage and explains their relation and connection to outsiders. The *deshi* of Shunpūtei Itchō 春風亭一朝 carry either the *kanji ichi* 一 (one) or the *kanji chō* 朝 (morning) (see Table 1).

Naturally, there are other *shin'uchi*, who learned under Ryūchō V like Itchō and have received the *kanji chō* 朝 – experienced audience members can quickly guess which *shishō* a young *rakugoka* might be related to, as his performance-style usually resembles his *shishō*.

Popular *kanji* suffixes

Zenza and *futatsume* names often include name suffixes which were employed for

Table 1: Itchō's *deshi* and their names.

Zenza name	Futatsume name	Shin'uchi name
朝吉 Chōkichi	朝之助 Chōnosuke	柳朝 Ryūchō
朝左久 Chōsaku	之輔 Ichinosuke	
朝也 Chōya		三朝 Sanchō
	左 Issa	
朝呂久 Chōroku	藏 Ichizō	
力 Ichiriki	朝之助 Chōnosuke	
朝太郎 Chōtarō	刀 Ittō	
花 Ichihana		futatsume at point of writing
猿 Ichien		
朝七 Chōshichi	朝枝 Chōshi	

boy's names during the Edo period, such as *-tarō* 太郎, *-saku* 作, *-kichi* 吉 or *-rō* 楼. Typical name suffixes for older *deshi* which are combined with one of the *shishō*'s *kanji* are *-ta* 太, *-taro* 太郎, *-(no)suke* 乃/之 輔/助/介, *-(no)jō* (之) 丞, *-hachi* or *-pachi* 八, *-zō* 藏, *-hei* 平, all signifiers of male names⁵.

A *shishō* with many *deshi* might want to clarify their order by adding counters both as pre- or suffixes to their names: *-ichi* (1 一), *-ji* or *-jirō* (2 二, 二郎), *-san*, *-san*, *-sō* or *-sabarō* (3 三, 三郎), *-shirō* or *-jirō* (4 四郎), *-go* (5 五), *-roku* (6 六), *-shichi* (7 七), *-hachi* or *-pachi* (8 八)⁶.

The zenza name

The word *zenza* 前座 is a compound of the logographs “before” 前 and “stage” 座, i.e. “performance before the main *kōza* 高座 (literally “high seat”, i.e. *yose* act)”. Despite being the performers with the least experience, *zenza* are the first to perform, functioning as opener. They are not considered to be part of the bill, neither mentioned in the program nor on the billing board. Their name is not on the announcement post (*mekuri*): The *mekuri* for all *zenza* reads *kaikōichiban* 開口一番 (opener). Alternatively, the *mekuri* stand is only installed on stage after the *zenza*'s performance.

Putting zenza in their place: demeaning names

Zenza names are simple and often based on the *shishō*'s first impression of the new *deshi*. They feature puns or word plays, as “somewhat strange names” are easier for audiences to remember (Kōriyama 1999: 26).

This can also be understood as a means to enforce the *zenza*'s position at the bottom of the hierarchy, so it is not unusual to give him a demeaning or derogatory name which trigger giggles in the audience (see Table 2). *Ojisan* おじさん and *Wakaba* わか馬 (currently *Kosen* V) looked older than their years when they joined the profession and received names meaning “old man” (*ojisan*) and “young leaf” (*wakaba* 若葉) respectively. *Enka* IV named his *deshi* *Arigatō* ありがとう and *Gozaimasu* ございます – the names can be combined to mean “Thank you very much”. *San'yūtei* *Koyūza* named his *deshi* *Iruka* いるか (Are you there?), *Omae* おまえ (you) and *Anta* あんた (you) – making it easier for him to call on them – “Iruka!”, “Omae!” and “Anta!” all implied that he wanted the *deshi* to come over. This however confused bystanders, when one of his *deshi* would talk on the phone: “*Moshi moshi omae dakedo, anta iru ka?*” もしもし、おまえだけど、あんた、いるか: “Hello, this is *Omae* (you). Is *Anta* (you) there?” (Nagai 2016: 23).

Names can also be contradicting. *Tatsujin* 辰じん received the *tatsu* 辰 (dragon) *kanji* from his master. In combination with the syllable *jin* his name became a homophone of “master/ expert” (達人) – an obvious contradiction to his *zenza* level of skills and experience.

A rakugoka specialty: word plays and puns

The *shishō*'s choice in name can also show their sense of humour and their originality and creativity. Some *zenza* or *futatsume* are named after places (*Meguro* or *Niigata*) or are homophone to other nouns: *Miruku* みるく (milk), *Suika* 粋歌 (watermelon), *Wasabi* わさび, *Kendama* 兼だま, *Tatsujin* 辰じん (expert), *Haitatsu* はい辰 (delivery). If a *shishō*'s name is homonym to a noun, *deshi* might receive related names:

Shinshō V who was a great *shōgi* lover gave his *deshi* the names *Kinsuke* 金助, *Ginsuke* 銀助, *Kakusuke* 角助, *Keita* 桂太, *Shinkoma* 志ん駒, and *Futarō* 歩太郎 (Kitamura and Tomita 2001: 17; Yanagiya Tsubame 2009: 43; Tatekawa Danshi 1990: 4), reminiscent of *shōgi*-chess pieces (*koma* 駒): *kinshō* 金将, *ginshō* 銀将, *kakugyō* 角行, *keima* 桂馬, *fuhyō* 歩兵. Still to this day many of his artistic descendants use the *kanji* 駒 in their names.

Table 2: *Shishō* and *deshi* naming examples.

<i>Shishō</i> name	Meaning /homonym of <i>shishō</i> 's name	<i>Deshi</i> 's <i>zenza</i> name	Meaning of <i>deshi</i> 's name	Connection
Tsubame V つばめ	Swallow 燕	Tonbo とんぼ	Firefly	Both creatures associated with summer
Sanshō さん生	<i>Zanthoxylum piperitum</i> /Japanese pepper 山椒	Wasabi わさび	Wasabi	Both spices
Tendon 天どん	Rice bowl with <i>tempura</i> on top 天丼	Gohantsubu ごはんつぶ	Rice grain	The <i>deshi</i> is only worth a tiny percentage of the <i>shishō</i>

Elements borrowed from legal names

Rather than showing belonging to the *shishō*, some choose to show the *deshi* is still connected with the non-*rakugo*-world: Some *zenza* names are formed by adding a *kanji* from the *deshi*'s legal name after the letter *ko* (小: small):

- Katsuyoshi 勝好 becomes Kokatsu 小勝
- Kajitani 梶谷 becomes Kokaji 小かじ.

If the *deshi*'s legal name does not naturally lead to a *zenza* name, the *shishō* might decide to choose one hoping to influence his character or skills accordingly - such as Konobu 小のぶ hoping his skills, popularity and personality would grow (*nobiru* 伸びる growth; Yanagiya Tsubame 2009: 44). Combining *ko* 小 with one *kanji* of the *shishō*'s name is a popular choice, especially in the Yanagiya family.

Receiving the *shishō*'s *zenza* name

One of the highest honours for a *zenza* is to receive the name his *shishō* used as *zenza* (Fujiwara 2015: 28-29). Similarly, some *mon* have traditional *zenza* names which are used across generations. These are considered *shussemei* 出世名, names whose bearers are expected to become very skilled and popular *rakugoka* in the future. In the Kokontei/Kingentei school Chōta 朝太 (used by Shinshō V, Shinchō, Shinsuke 志ん輔 and Shin'yō 志ん陽) is a *shussemei*. In the Kosan-*mon*, the name Kotake 小たけ has been used by a number of performers over generations (Kosan-ji X 十代目小三治, Korin 小りん, Sanza 三三). Hearing that a junior performer has received the *shishō*'s *zenza* name incites jealousy in senior *deshi* (Kokontei Shinchō Ichimon 2006: 94). The last name bearer may receive the right to bestow the name on his own *deshi* (*ibid*: 222).

Naming criteria for *futatsume* and *shin'uchi* names

Performers might change their name upon *futatsume* promotion – with this big step, *futatsume* names are often more elaborate than *zenza* names.

Shin'uchi promotion

Upon reaching *shin'uchi* status, *futatsume* consult their *shishō* regarding a name change. A name change can be an opportunity to start anew, especially if the *futatsume* is not yet very popular. Some *shishō* allow their *deshi* to propose and/or choose the new name themselves (San'yūtei Enjō 1986: 8-9), but his approval is always needed.

Some *shishō* might force the *deshi* to take on a new name, as everybody in his *mon* has names unrelated to the master (see endnote 3). If a *futatsume* has taken on a *shussemei* such as Kotarō, Kotake or Chōta, he has to pass it on upon *shin'uchi* promotion (Kokontei Shinchō Ichimon 2006: 97).

Figure 1 (Ippan Shadan Hōjin Rakugo Kyōkai 2020) shows the five *rakugoka* promoted in March 2021 – all five of whom changed their names. Both old name (in small letters) and new name (in bigger letters) are indicated. While Morioka and Sasaki (1990) state that a performer's name is changed upon promotion to *shin'uchi*, this is no longer true thirty years on. Today, with the increasing number of *rakugoka*⁷, successions of names are rare, and more *rakugoka* use the same name throughout their entire career or keep their *futatsume* name upon *shin'uchi* promotion (Tōkyō Kawaraban, 2009). As fans might even oppose a name change (Yushima de rakugo no kai 2017: 101), *rakugoka* might keep the name because they like it (Ippan Shadan Hōjin Rakugo Kyōkai 2000: 4), or hold on to their old name “for good luck” (Brau 2008:

144). Sometimes the name just takes on a different *kanji*, i.e. a homophone is chosen as a name. This enables audiences to still recognize the same name, while it “looks more important”. Kokontei Komaji, who was promoted in September 2018, changed his name from 駒次 to 駒治 – the pronunciation “Komaji” is the same. While certainly not the only argument against it, a name change could also mess up search engine results. In recent years, Sanza, Ichinosuke and Kochiraku have built their own brand around their names and have decided to not change the name they receive as *futatsume*. In the future, all three might at some point take on their master’s or, in case of Kochiraku, his father’s name.

Naming criteria: *yosemoji*

There is a variety of factors to consider when choosing a new name. Some *rakugoka* might even ensure the name passes a fortune-teller’s scrutiny (Kokontei Shinchō Ichimon 2006: 89). Of course, the name should not resemble any existing name too much and match the performer’s character. While meanings can be ambiguous, a name should be unambiguous in reading (Kokontei Shinchō Ichimon 2006: 92).

In case a *kanji* combination is used for the first time in *rakugo* history, the choice has to withstand a *yosemoji* calligraphy mas-



Figure 1: Poster announcing Rakugo Kyōkai’s 2021 *shin’uchi*.

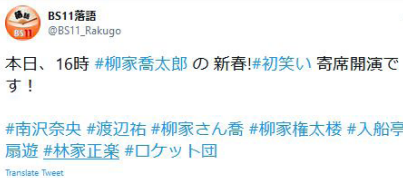


Figure 2: @BS11_Rakugo tweet from January 2 2021 announcing *rakugo*-show using *yosemoji*.

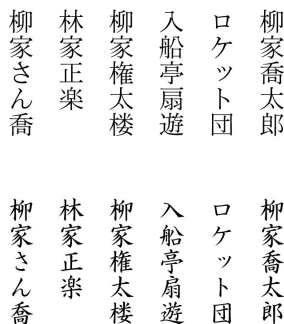


Figure 3: Reproduction of Figure 2’s image text using Minchō and Kaisho fonts.

ter’s scrutiny, to ensure that the characters can be written as *yosemoji*, one of the *edomoji* 江戸文字 calligraphy styles. *Yosemoji* are written with as little space as possible in between strokes of the character. Superstition goes that the less space there is between strokes, the more seats are filled in the auditorium – which makes them difficult to read for outsiders. Figure 2 is a screenshot of a tweet announcing a 2021 New Year *rakugo* programme on the BS 11 Channel (BS11 Rakugo 2021) – performers’ names are announced in *yosemoji*. In comparison, the top line of Figure 3 shows the same *kanji* shown in Minchō 明朝, one of the most common fonts in Japanese typography, used in newspapers and school textbooks. On the bottom line of Figure 3 are the characters in Kaisho 楷書, a font emulating handwriting. The density of the *yosemoji* calligraphy style is apparent, even with no knowledge of Japanese or Chinese.

The opinion of *yosemoji* calligraphy masters may be ignored. Sanza, whose name consists of two *kanji* signifying the number three 三三, was urged to take on a different name upon *shin’uchi* promotion (Hirose 2015: 41): Calligraphers argued it was impossible to write three parallel strokes without leaving any space in-between. He ignored them and performs under Sanza to this day.

Other instances instigating name changes

When a *shishō* dies and the *deshi* change to another *shishō*'s *mon*, *teigō* and even names are changed (Yoshikawa 1999: 188-189)⁸. A name change might also be instigated if the *shishō* succeeds another name (ibid: 84). Today, there are very few examples of *deshi* who are excommunicated and taken in by a different *shishō*, i.e., they enter a different *mon*. In my understanding, as *rakugoka* have become able to live off their performances without any side income (Yanagiya Kyōtarō 2016: 6), the *deshi-shishō* relationship has become more absolute.

In some cases, names are changed to not inconvenience the performer. San'yūtei Renshō was named Tamatamajō as *futa-tsume*, as he lived in Futakotamagawa at the time. However, as the word *tama* means 'balls', both the object used in football or tennis, as well as testicles, it hindered him from getting radio or TV engagements. His *shishō* Enjō granted his request and the name was changed to Meguro. Further, one of Sentatsu's *deshi* was called Tatsumaki 辰まき (tornado) and was renamed Tatsunoko 辰のこ (dragon child), as Sentatsu suggested potential audience members might have lost family members in a tornado.

Shūmei – inheriting fame

“The *gei* of each *rakugoka* disappears with his death. It does not remain in print or as a piece of art, it disappears right where it is created.”
(Kingentei Bashō 1976: 314)

Before spoken word could be recorded in print or in audio/video format, fame was limited to a performer's own life span. For generations, names of great performers were passed on, thus letting future generations know about their former holder's fame, popularity and art. This process is called *shūmei* 襲名 and can be found in a variety of Japanese arts⁹. In training, apprentices first learn how to preserve their master's skills (*shu* 守); they then break the form they have learned (*ha* 破) to finally break away (*ri* 離) to find their own style, which is called a performer's or artisan's *geifū* 芸風 (Yamada 2002: 166-168).

Taking on a *myōseki* 名跡 (famous name) means taking over the achievements of all previous owners, thus creating new opportunities for the person taking over the name. He might profit off the popularity, prestige and authority of the name's previous owner(s), creating an opportunity to attract audiences and improve his standing (San'yūtei Kinba 1981: 80; Yano 2016: 45). Audiences who know the previous owner feel connected to the name and support the new owner, providing a “psychological advantage” as the name “enhances his prestige in the eyes of the public by linking him with his illustrious predecessors, and on the other, it spurs him on to prove himself worthy of his new title” (Sweeney 1979: 39). Tsubame suggests it is “best to have somebody take on a name while he is still young and whose *gei* has not yet reached the level of the name's previous owner but is expected to eventually reach that same level” (Yanagiya Tsubame 2009: 142). Taking over a name can however also be a burden (Kojima et al 1982: 69): if the successor is not very skilled and/or popular, living up to the name exerts great pressure (Yano 2016: 39).

The older a name, the higher it is in rank (*kaku* 格). The rank, however, says nothing about a *rakugoka*'s authority in contemporary everyday life¹⁰. Older names or names which bore many skilled name holders are usually considered higher in rank, as they are usually names whose previous owners have taken an active role in developing the art and training younger *rakugoka*. Performers who take on big names are thus expected to develop both their skill, popularity and pedagogical point of view. They would not be chastised should they decide not to take on any *deshi*, but they would not be looked upon favourably.

If a *rakugoka*'s son is also a *rakugoka*, the name might be passed on to this son, but it is rare for a *rakugoka* to pass his profession on to his children. Names are passed on to *deshi* - preferably to the *sōryō deshī* 総領弟子 of deceased masters, i.e., the first *deshi* to train with the *shishō*. If a master did not have any *deshi* or his *deshi* are too old, too young or not skilled enough, a *rakugoka* in the same branch of a school may

take on the name, if he is considered to live up to the deceased master's skills. The succeeding performer does not need to be directly related¹¹.

The numbering of generations who use the same name—in English with Roman numerals—is not very straightforward. Sometimes performers who were not very popular under a name are not counted. Equally, the fourth person in succession of a name might be counted as five, as the syllable *shi* 四 (four) is a homophone for *shi* 死 (death) (San'yūtei Enjō 1986: 10). The number nine 九 *ku*, a homophone for *ku* 苦 (suffering), might also be left out. Someone even suggested that the first name holder of Shinsuke should go with V, because it sounded good (Tōkyō Kawaraban 1985: 5).

Naming rights in case of *myōseki*

A performer may neither declare a claim on a name of a deceased performer, nor does the *sōryō deshi* have automatic rights to succeed his master's name. Upon the death of its owner, a hereditary name, unless otherwise arranged, is “kept” by the deceased person's civil family, in most cases the widow or biological children, i.e., these can decide who takes over the name. A *rakugoka* might ask during his lifetime for the name to be handed to either his own association or a confidant well-versed in the world of *rakugo*. Should his family or descendants not be *geinin* themselves, they decide on his behalf so that the name does not die out. This is the case with the Ryūshi name. Years after Ryūshi VIII's death, his daughter handed over the name to the Rakugo Kyōkai. When Shunpūtei Shōtarō was set to be promoted to *shin'uchi*, his *shishō* Shōchō approached the *kanbu* of the Rakugo Kyōkai asking whether Ryūshi IX was a possibility. After a majority of the board had voted in favour, Shōtarō was officially contacted and it was confirmed he would succeed to the big name. After the decision was made, Shōtarō visited the living relatives of Ryūshi VIII and paid his respects at Ryūshi VIII's gravesite. As Koryūshi IX of the Rakugo Geijutsu Kyōkai is also a distant relative of the Ryūshi-line, he was informed of the revival

of the big name before the news went public (Shunpūtei Shōtarō 2020).

Ryūshi IX himself—only 39 years old at the publishing of this article—has asked his wife to hand back the name to the Rakugo Kyōkai upon his death so that a worthy successor shall be found, in order for future generations not to fight over its succession (ibid).

A big name in *rakugo* history:

The example of Shōzō

The succession to the Shōzō name shows all factors involved in the *shūmei* process very well. In May 1950, although originally a member of the Yanagi school, Yanagiya Kosan IV's *deshi* Chōkaro Baraku V took over the Hayashiya school's biggest name and became Hayashiya Shōzō VIII. Both Baraku V and Kosanji IX had been *deshi* of Kosan IV. Baraku V had joined in 1927 and Kosanji IX in 1933. Both Baraku and Kosanji are names whose bearer is expected to eventually take on the name Kosan, so both expected they would take on the name of Kosan after Kosan IV's death.

Bunraku VIII, at the time head of the Rakugo Kyōkai, bestowed the name Kosan V on the younger of the two candidates, Kosanji IX. As Baraku V was the elder, he was asked to “change his name to something appropriate” in rank (Tōkyō Kawaraban 1981: 8). As Baraku V, like the previous Shōzō-bearers, was well known for his *kaidanbanashi* 怪談噺 (ghost stories), it was proposed he take on the name Shōzō VIII (Yomiuri Shinbun 1980). Shōzō VII's son Sanpei I 初代三平 had become a well-known *rakugoka* himself, but felt his current style did not fit the big name and he was too well known as Sanpei so he agreed. Baraku V could take on the name Shōzō VIII. As a result, in May 1950, Shōzō VIII issued a written pledge to Sanpei I's wife and sons promising that the name Shōzō would only be used by the Yanagiya *mon* for one generation and would afterwards be returned. In September of 1950, Baraku V became Shōzō VIII (Yomiuri Shinbun 1980, Tōkyō Shinbun 1980, Yoshikawa 1999: 67-68).

Shōzō VIII honoured his promise of not letting any of his *deshi* use the *teigō*

Hayashiya upon their *shin'uchi* promotion, instead they became Shunpūtei or Tachibanaya (Yomiuri Shinbun 1980; Yamaguchi 1980; Tōkyō Kawaraban 1981: 8). When Sanpei I, son of Shōzō VII, died in 1980, Shōzō VIII declared that “for the repose of Sanpei’s soul” (*Sanpei-kun no kuyō ni* 三平君の供養に: Yomiuri Shinbun 1980; *butsu ni tai suru kuyō de atte* 仏に対する供養であって: Tōkyō Kawaraban 1981: 8) he returned the name Shōzō back to Sanpei I’s wife and son (Yomiuri Shinbun 1980) and afterwards would use Hikoroku as an *inkyōmei* 隠居名 (retirement name). Years later, in 2005, Sanpei I’s first son Kobuhei こぶ平 finally succeeded as Shōzō IX.

Disappearing names

Some names die a natural death. If a performer dies in a cruel way or goes through some great hardships, a name might die with its last owner. Taking on such names implies the new owner might have to bear a fate similar to its previous owner. An example is Ōshuntei Baikyō 鶯春亭梅橋 who died in 1955 at the age of 29. When a young performer called Ryūtei Kochiraku 柳亭小痴楽 took over his name, with the *teigō* Shunpūtei, and then died in 1984 at the age of 49, Tsuzuki Michio 都筑道夫, brother of Ōshuntei Baikyō I, commented that nobody shall take on the name of Baikyō from now on (Yano 2016: 47).

In cases where the family owns the name, there is a probability that a name will die out, as currently is the case with Enshō. Enshō VI decided to leave the Rakugo Kyōkai in 1978 over a fight regarding promotion criteria. Some *deshi* left with him, others did not. After Enshō’s death only the eldest *deshi*, Enraku, and his own *deshi* did not return to the Rakugo Kyōkai. On the day of Enshō’s funeral, his widow declared she would make sure that Enraku could never take on the name Enshō (San’yūtei Enjō 1986: 245). In past years, *deshi* from both the Rakugo Kyōkai and Enraku Ichimonkai associations attempted to succeed to the name, but the family blocked all suggestions.

Some naming rights have been passed on to stakeholders outside the *rakugo* world. The name Enchō is lost to the *rakugo* world,

as it is rumoured to be currently owned by anti-social forces, i.e., the *yakuza*. In an interview (Shunpūtei Shōtarō 2020), Shōtarō explained that it was not impossible to take on the name, but it required large amounts of money to be paid to the current owner.

Breaking with mainstream society and proof of artistic lineage

Joining the *rakugo* community is often described as leaving the *katagi* 堅気 world (Ōtomo 2003, 84), a word often used by people in the entertainment industry or the demi-monde to describe members of the mainstream society where people “make an honest and respectable living”. In today’s society, this use of word is not to signify that *rakugoka* make a dishonest living, but rather that they do not have a steady occupation. *Zenza* training makes young performers realize the clear boundary (*fushime* 境目) between mainstream society and their new world. It serves as a rite of passage that forces the young men to “re-structure themselves” (Ōtomo 2003: 98) and during which their status is between both worlds.

In order to be accepted as a full-fledged member of this “community of practice” (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998), the young man must accept its rigid hierarchy and endure illogical, unreasonable demands from his seniors (Tatekawa Danshi 1985: 267-269), such as being requested to take off his underwear (Ōtomo 2003, 90), being called to the *shishō*’s place only to be ordered to open a window (Inada and Morita 2010, 147-148) or the fridge (Hama 2007, 310), or watch people’s feet (Tatekawa Kiwi 2009, 117). In order to build his new *rakugoka* self, he must “kill his old self”, “his self-assertion” (Tatekawa Dankei 2018: 68), let “the *shishō* crush any unnecessary ego” (Tatekawa Shinoharu 2014), abandon any preconceived ideas (Hama 2007: 310) as well as “logic and thinking, his view of life and the world” (Ōtomo 2003: 89).

In other words, *zenza* are not taught how to perform *rakugo*, but rather taught how to behave and live as *rakugoka* (Inada and Morita 2010: 125). Tatekawa Danshi states that he felt pride and a *raison d’être* for hav-

ing overcome the barrier between the *rakugo* world and mainstream society (Tatekawa Danshi 1985, 168).

Even though *zenza* run the *yose*, they are not yet full members of the *rakugo* community of practice. They do not have a fixed place they belong in the green room (Ōtomo 2003: 94). Elder performers refer to them as “vermin” (*mushikera* 虫けら: Tatekawa Shinoharu 2015: 148; Yushima de rakugo no kai 2017: 108) or even “not human” (*ningen janai* 人間じゃない: Inada and Morita 2010: 56). This does not mean that a *shishō* despises or bullies his *deshi* as *zenza* are the lowest in the hierarchy and still on probation. Backstage, they work for all senior performers, absorb *hanashi* and learn how to behave as a *rakugoka* in the green room and take pains not to inconvenience anybody in doing so (Tatekawa Koharu 2017).

Should a *shishō* want to punish his *deshi*, he may threaten to take away his *deshi*'s name (San'yūtei Enshō and Hanson 1978: 143; Shunpūtei Ichiryū 1980: 171-172)¹² – culminating in expulsion not only from his *mon*, but the *rakugo* community as a whole. Once expelled, it is close to impossible to return to the *rakugo* world and restart training under another *shishō* (Watanabe 2010). However, all *rakugoka* in Tokyo undergo the same training, and senior performers know what *zenza*-life is like. This is why senior performers usually are lenient and accept *zenza* as part of their community even though *zenza* are technically not yet part of it.

It becomes apparent that receiving a *geimei* is a first step towards being accepted as a member of the *rakugoka* community: the young man abandons his old name and leads a heteronomous life as a *zenza*. His personality, his behaviour, his mannerism and even social standards are all recreated and restructured as a full-fledged member of the *yose*-performer community – as a *rakugoka*. The break with pre-*rakugoka* life is so strong that fathers whose sons have decided to join their fathers' profession no longer call them by their legal names from the day the sons receive their own stage name (Inada and Morita 2010: 92).

At the point of entry in the *rakugoka* community of practice, some *zenza* still have names that connect them with their former life, i.e., they still use a *kanji* from their legal name. As *futatsume*, most receive a *kanji* from their *shishō*, and as *shin'uchi*, some take up historic names which may connect them with up to ten past generations of *rakugoka* – thus taking up the responsibility to carry on the name and handing down the art for posterity. Looking at the various naming conventions, it is apparent that a *rakugoka*'s name functions as an important tool to allow a newcomer limited participation in the community of practice that is Tokyo's *rakugo* world. *En lieu* of a hereditary connection, receiving a stage name builds artistic lineage, builds community connection and provides performers with a license of authenticity.

Endnotes

- 1 As only 5% of Tokyo performers listed in Tōkyō Kawaraban (2019a) are female, this paper uses the male form unless specifically quoting a female performer.
- 2 This typical *rakugo* career is taking the Rakugo Kyōkai as an example, as it is the Tōkyō association with the greatest number of members. Decisions are made slightly differently in the three other schools. The Tatekawa-Ryū and Enraku Ichimonkai do not have fixed *yose* engagements but emulate the *yose* in regular events.
- 3 While some consider not taking on one's own *shishō*'s *teigō* as back luck (Tōkyō Kawaraban 1988: 6), there

- are some exceptions, such as some of Kingentei Bashō X's (1928-1982) *deshi*. Gokaidō Kumosuke 五街道雲助 kept this tradition – when his three *deshi* became *shin'uchi*, they took on different names.
- 4 *Teigō* were more diverse in the past: Enji VI counts as many as 303 different *teigō*, attributing the majority to the *jiyū minken undō* 自由民権運動, the Liberty and Civil Right Movement for democracy of the 1880s. As political speeches were forbidden, activists called themselves *rakugoka* to continue their activities from the stage (Ryūtei Enji 1980:199).
- 5 Out of the 581 Tokyo *rakugoka* listed in Tōkyō Kawaraban (2019a) only 12 female performers are *shin'uchi* at the point of publication. Another 19 are

zenza and *futatsume* alongside with a further three *zenza* mentioned on the associations' websites. As only five percent of *rakugoka* are female, general statements about naming conventions for female performers are impossible, the only tendency seen is that there are few names with Sino-Japanese readings. Many female *rakugo* names are written completely or partially in *hiragana* and often refer to things in nature, some even sound like actual names.

6 With the exception of the *kanji ichi* 壹 (one) and *en* 圓 (circle) old *kanji* character forms (*kyūji* 旧字) are not employed.

7 124 in 1965 (Yomiuri Shinbun 1965); 300 in 1974 (Yano 1974: 73) and 581 in 2019 (Tōkyō Kawaraban 2019a).

8 As mentioned above, in the past *deshi-shishō* relationships used to be looser. A still quite recent example is Bunraku VIII (1892-1971) who learned under three different *shishō*, and was even performing without master for a while (Teruoka 1969: 38-56).

9 *Kabuki* actors pass on their names to their first-born son, but as *rakugo* does not have hereditary lines

of performers, a *rakugoka* may, upon promotion to *shin'uchi*, succeed to the name of a deceased master. No academic survey has been conducted of *shūmei* in different creative genres, but the author found evidence for its observance also in art forms such as *wahori* 和彫 tattoo art (Yamauchi 2009), *kayabuki* 茅葺き roof thatching (Shiono 2010) and *yūzenzome-dying* 友禪染 (Moriguchi 1984).

10 In the past, there were many small theatres shared by a large number of performers and only the most skilled performers could headline a show. Likewise, only skilled performers took on *myōseki*, so naturally those with a big name were higher in rank.

11 Shunpūtei Shōtarō who took on Ryūshi IX in March 2021 is not related to the predecessor of the same name. Ryūshi VIII (1905-1959) and Shōtarō's common "ancestor" is Shunpūtei Baishi I 初代春風亭梅枝 (1819-1923), a *deshi* of Ryūshi I.

12 A *geimei* may be kept if the *shishō* decides to remove (*jomei* 除名) somebody from their *mon*, instead of excommunicating (*hamon* 破門) them (Tatekawa Kiwi 2009: 124-125).

Appendix

Kanji	Reading in <i>rakugoka</i> name	Meaning	Sino-Japanese or Japanese reading
菊	<i>kiku</i>	chrysanthemum	SJ
木	<i>ki</i>	tree	J
林	<i>hayashi rin</i>	grove, forest	J SJ
松	<i>matsu shō</i>	pine tree	J SJ
柳	<i>yanagi ryū</i>	willow	J SJ
枝	<i>eda shi</i>	branch	J SJ
梅	<i>bai</i>	plum tree	SJ
米	<i>bei</i>	rice	SJ
花	<i>hana ka</i>	flower	J SJ
馬	<i>ba</i>	horse	SJ
駒	<i>koma</i>	foal; (shōgi) piece	J
鯉	<i>koi ri</i>	carp	J SJ
鯛	<i>tai</i>	sea bream	J
蝶	<i>chō</i>	butterfly	SJ
鶴	<i>tsuru kaku</i>	crane	J SJ
亀	<i>kame</i>	turtle	J

燕	<i>en</i>	swallow	SJ
滝	<i>taki</i>	waterfall	J
風	<i>fū</i>	wind	SJ
一	<i>ichi</i>	1	SJ
三	<i>san</i>	3	SJ
七	<i>shichi</i>	7	SJ
八	<i>hachi</i>	8	SJ
九	<i>ku</i>	9	SJ
小	<i>ko shō</i>	small	J SJ
圓/円	<i>en</i>	round	SJ
楽	<i>raku</i>	fun	SJ
朝	<i>chō</i>	morning	SJ
遊	<i>yū</i>	play	SJ
歌	<i>uta ka</i>	song	J SJ
扇	<i>sen</i>	folding fan	SJ
福	<i>fuku</i>	luck	SJ
笑	<i>shō</i>	laughter	SJ
志	<i>shi</i>	aspiration,	SJ
金	<i>kin</i>	gold/ money	SJ
窓	<i>sō</i>	window	SJ
喬	<i>kyō</i>	(character for names)	SJ
玉	<i>tama gyoku</i>	jewel; beauty	J SJ

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