What's In a Name?

Papa Chris Clarke

The following is a considerably expanded and edited version of an email exchange between Yudansha Don Romard and Papa Chris in early December explaining a few of the intricacies of understanding historical Okinawan names as they appear in our research and reading. It is by no means comprehensive. I have included several citations of sources where more information can be found.

Romard: Dear Papa Chris, I've taken up again my research into the genealogy of both styles of Okinawan karate that I study. Browsing Amazon, I happened upon a book that describes the following: Andreas Quast, *Oni Oshiro*. (2016). It says, "…instructor, Uhugushiku No Tan Mei, was a descendant of Uni Uhugushiku's family ". These two quotes use family names that only differ by one letter. Is it possible they are talking about the same person? Best, Don

Papa Chris: To simply answer your question, yes, undoubtedly these refer to the same name. "Gushiku" or "gusuku" is the Okinawan equivalent of "Shiro." (城) So you often have people referred to by apparently different names, like *Gusukuma* Shimpan, aka *Shiroma* Shimpan; (城間) same person. Uhugusuku (with or without another "h") is the same as Oshiro (大城), a long and distinguished name in Okinawan martial arts meaning the Big Castle or Great Castle. The "h" is often a matter of preference as different native speakers can slur the "s" into a sound like "sh."

Another reason for confusion in making out Okinawan names is that so many Okinawan surnames are the same--maybe a few dozen well known names—and not all of those with the same surname are related. The website "Japan Truly" (19 Most Common Okinawa Family Names - Japan Truly) lists 19 most common names on Okinawa and their derivations. Another excellent article can be found at Okinawan name - Wikipedia or here Okinawan surnames | Name Archive Wikia | Fandom. Here is a table showing about how many Okinawans share the most common 10 surnames.

1. 比嘉 (Higa) Appx.50,800 people.
2. 金城 (Kinjō) Appx.50,300 people.
3. 大城 (Ōshiro) Appx.46,900 people.
4. 宮城 (Miyagi) Appx.36,700 people.
5. 新垣 (Arakaki, Aragaki, Shinoaki) Appx.29,900 people.
6. 玉城 (Tamashiro, Tamaki) Appx.28,700 people.
7. 上原 (Uehara) Appx.27,200 people.
8. 島袋 (Shimabukuro, Shimabuku) Appx.24,400 people.
9. 平良 (Taira) Appx.21,900 people.
10. 山城 (Yamashiro) Appx.18,400 people.

Until roughly the mid-1800s, commoners were not allowed to have a "last" name (surname or family name). Only *samure* and noble classes (those with a *koseki*, 戸籍, or written lineage) had a family name. These families were called *keimochi* (系持).

Surnames. These "upper class" family names (*myoji*, 苗字 or 名字; *uji,* 氏, or *sei* 姓) were often associated with a job or position, not actually a family per se (called "toponyms"). For example, many of the "last names" came from the fief they held from the king. Most of the names that end with *-shiro*, represent a castle for which the family was responsible, or had been historically. E.g., Yamashiro (Mountain Castle), Tamashiro (Tama Castle), Kinjo (Jo is another word for castle, so the Gold Castle). Oshiro (the Big Castle). Miyagi (宮城), another name of a Castle, *gi* being another pronunciation of *gusuku/shima*). Miyagi can also be pronounced Naagusuku.

Others *keimochi* names are or appear to be place names, usually the place from which the family came or the area in which it held official position, e.g. Motobu, Chatan, Chinen, Uehara, Aragaki (or Arakaki) and Shimabukuro (or Shimabuku). Because fiefs, castles, and official positions were limited, many of these names eventually began to be handed down from one generation to the next.

Personal names. Each Okinawan, commoner to king, traditionally would have a childhood name (warabi-naa, 童名). "They were the oldest component of Okinawan names as, like people in mainland Japan, the inhabitants of Ryukyu islands did not originally have names for families, clans or lineages. They were used as official names during the early era of the Ryukyu Kingdom." (<u>Okinawan name - Wikipedia</u>.) Commoners generally kept these names through their lives while among upper classes they were used only by family and intimate friends. A limited number of these names was used and they were often recycled after skipping a generation.

Adult names. Upon reaching adulthood, members of the *keimochi* class assumed an adult name (*nanui*, 名乗) in the Japanese style. These names consisted of two characters. According to Chinese tradition, the first character was shared by all male members of the same generation of the family (*nanui-gashira*, 名乗頭). So the personal names of brothers and first cousins would all begin with the same character. These characters were often selected sequentially from a poem handed down through the family and/or written by an early ancestor or some other venerated text, each generation getting the first character of their name from the next character in the poem after the last generation.

In the Okinawan context, however, this tradition unfolded a little differently. The use of a common first character reportedly was adopted in 1689-1690 when the Okinawan government first ordered that lineages (*koseki*) be compiled for Peichin-ranked families. The character was handed down from generation to generation. The family progenitor of the Motobu family, for

example, was Prince Motobu Chohei (本部朝平, 1655–1687). Thus in the Motobu family, generations later Choki's father was Choshin; his three sons were Choshin (different "shin" character), Choyu(朝勇), and Choki(朝基). The influential Choyu's sons were Chomei and Chomo. Choki's three sons were Choko, Choso, and Chosei. (I apologize that I was not quickly able to locate all the *kanji* for the names. All contained the "cho" character, but each had a different second character, even if they were sometimes homophones.)

Interestingly, the "*cho*" character was also given to Kiyan Chotoku (喜屋武 朝徳, 1870-1945). Kiyan was born into the ninth generation of the Motonaga/Motobu family, a collateral relation to the Motobus, but was adopted into the Kiyan family which had no male heir. Kiyan's eldest brother was Choho (朝輔), the second son was Chohitsu (朝弼), and Chotoku was the third son. His father was Kiyan Chofu (喜屋武 朝扶), a high-ranking official under the last king of Okinawa. See (Motobu Naoki, The Motonaga House of the Princely Shō-clan | by Motobu Naoki | Motobu-ryu Blog | Medium and Motobu Naoki, "Motonaga Chōtoku: Kyan Chōtoku's real name," Motobu-ryu Blog, Sep 24 2023, https://medium.com/motobu-ryu-blog/motonaga-ch%C5%8Dtoku-kyan-ch%C5%8Dtokus-real-name-66275d00ad5e.)

Other personal names. Educated upper class Okinawans might also have two or more other personal names. During one's lifetime, for example, an educated or upper class Okinawan might follow the Sino-Japanese tradition of changing his personal name to reflect a change in status or take a pen-name. One famous example of this related to karate is Funakoshi Gichin (船越 義珍)adopting the pen-name of Shoto (松濤), waving pines, from which his students created the name of their style, Shotokan.

Chinese-style names. Nobles (male members of the Peichin class) would also have a three-character Chinese-style name. "In 1689 *Keizu-za* or the Board of Genealogies (系図座) was established and all the Pechin lineages were ordered to compile genealogical records. In 1690 the royal court assigned one-character *shii* or Chinese surnames to all registered lineages." (Okinawan name - Wikipedia). These were used for genealogical purposes in the *koseki* and for formal correspondence. Lineages in the Peichin class were identified by the combination of the Chinese-style *shii* and the Japanese-style *nanui-gashira*. Since either of those names might be used by several families, both were necessary to nail down exactly what a Peichin's ancestry was.

Thus, for example, Kiyan Chotoku's father (Chofu) was also known by the Chinese-style name of Sho Ishin (向 維新, Xiang Wexin in Mandarin). The originator of the House of Motobu whose Prince Motobu Chohei (1655–1687) was also known as Sho Koshin 尚弘信.

Titles and honorifics. Many "names" we see commonly in martial arts history aren't actual names at all but consist of a family name and some honorary title or nickname. Aji, Peichin, Satunshi, Chikundon, are all ranks, not names. Direct use—especially verbally—of an upper class man's personal name (*nanui*) was considered rude, so often such a person was only referred to by their family name and rank. Thus a number of karate ancestors are sometimes

referred to as, for example, Sakugawa Satunushi (his rank), whereas his actual name was Sakugawa Kanga.   Aragaki Tsuji Peichin's name was actually Aragaki Seisho.

For some karate ancestors, their personal name has been lost in time and they are only remembered by their surname and rank. The personal name Takahara Peichin (高原 親雲上, 1683-1760), a reputed teacher of Sakugawa, for example, apparently has been lost, as has the name of Kiyuna Peichin, a student of Matsumora Sokon. (Motobu Naoki, "Kiyuna Pēchin Senior Disciple of Matsumura Sōkon," Motobu-ryu Blog, https://medium.com/motobu-ryu-blog/kiyuna-p%C4%93chin-9e7bceecfc32.)

Some Okinawan upper-class members were referred to by their "house" name, i.e., the name of their aristocratic household, the Dunchi (殿内) or Udun (御殿). "While the households (and the residences themselves) of the royalty and aristocracy of the _anji_ and above were known as _udun_ (御殿), and those of middle- and lower-ranking aristocrats as _dunchi_ (殿内), the lowest ranks of aristocrats, along with commoners, simply called their households _yaa_ (家)." (Ryukyuan names - SamuraiWiki (samurai-archives.com, Motobu Naoki, "Udun" (in Portuguese), Motobu-ryu Blog, https://medium.com/motobu-ryu-blog/udun-8806ed754ea9 and Andreas Quast, "Tunchi (Okinawa)", Posted on March 10, 2020 on https://ryukyu-bugei.com/?p=8608.)

Following is a table of court ranks in descending order.

- _Wōji_ (王子)
- _Anji or Aji_ (按司)
- _Uwekata_ (親方)
- _Peechin_ (親雲上)
- _Satunushi-peechin_ (里之子親雲上)
- _Satunushi_ (里之子)
- _Chukudun-peechin_ (筑登之親雲上)
- _Chukudun_ (筑登之)[4]

Some masters of the distant pass are known to us only as So-and-so _Tanme_ (meaning "respected elder" for upper classes) or _Usume_ (same but for commoners), or _Bushi_ (warrior). Thus the personal name of Kiyuna Tanme or Kiyuna Peichin, active around 1900, has been lost. (In search of Kiyuna Tanmei | Thekaratepage.com). Kuniyoshi (1848-1926) is generally referred to as Tanme or Bushi, though his name, Shinkichi, is known.

Nicknames. Some Okinawan martial artists have become known more by a nickname than their actual personal name. Sakugawa Kanga is often known as Sakugawa Tode (Chinese Hands). Motobu Choki was often called Motobu Saru (Monkey) for his agility. Matsumura Sokon and

Kuniyoshi Shinkichi were known as Bushi (warrior). Shimabuku Tatsuo, founder of Isshin-ryu, adopted Tatsuo (Dragon Man) as his personal name, which was actually Shinkichi.

Some nicknames can refer to personal characteristics. Sometimes these can be seen as cruel by Westerners, but in Sino-Japanese societies, referring to someone as "Fatty" or "Shorty" does not necessarily carry the same sense of insult or rudeness as it does in the West. Thus, Kiyan Chotoku was known as Chan Migwa, Chan being an alternate pronunciation of Kiyan and Migwa reportedly meaning Small-eyed. Another intriguing account suggests it actually referred to Kiyan as One-eyed because he had lost or was blind in one eye.

Pronunciations. You can also have numerous variations of the same "last" name, pronunciation often being a matter of personal preference or locale: Higa (Fija, Fiija), Kaneshiro (Kinjo, Kanagusuku), Oshiro (Ufugusku, Uhugusuku, Uhugishiku...), Miyagi (Miyashiro), Shimabukuru (Shimabuku), and Aragaki (Arakaki, Shingaki, Niigaki). The latter was used in Funakoshi's books to refer to Aragaki Seisho, etc. In addition, many characters can have more than one pronunciation in Japanese. Itosu Ankoh's name (糸洲 安恒) can also be pronounced as Itosu Yasutsune. (See for example, Motobu Naoki, "Shimabukuro or Shimabuku? Controversy over the pronunciation of Okinawan surnames," https://medium.com/motobu-ryu-blog/shimabukuro-or-shimabuku-f7334167a9d4.)

Following is a table that shows some of the common variations on common Okinawan surnames.

Kanji	Name
比嘉	Higa, *Fija*, *Fiija*
金城	Kaneshiro, Kinjō, *Kanagusuku*
大城	Ōshiro, *Ufugusuku*
宮城	Miyagi, Miyagusuku Miyashiro, *Naagusuku*
新垣	Arakaki, Aragaki, Shingaki, Niigaki, *Arakachi*
玉城	Tamaki, Tamashiro, *Tamagusuku*
上原	Uehara, *Wiibaru*
島袋	Shimabukuro, *Shimabuku*
平良	Taira, *Teera*
山城	Yamashiro, *Yamagusuku*

(Source: Okinawan name - Wikipedia)

In short, the subject of names in Okinawa and Japan is quite complicated. Even the above summary does not exhaust the topic. For more information, one can start with the citations above, as well as Ryukyuan names - SamuraiWiki (samurai-archives.com), Andreas Quast, "Outline of Ryūkyūan Genealogy, by Dana Masayuki (Okinawa International University)," Posted on May 5, 2016 on https://ryukyu-bugei.com/?p=6348) and with the many other postings by

Andreas Quast (Andreas Quast | Ryukyu Bugei 琉球武芸 (ryukyu-bugei.com) and Motobu Naoki,), Motobu-ryu Blog, https://medium.com/motobu-ryu-blog.