



The Order of Japanese Names Should Be Truly Japanese — the World Will Get That

When Japanese names are rendered with Latin letters — that is, “romanized” — the given name comes first and the family name comes last. That is the reverse of the order in which the names are actually read in Japanese.

Now, some government officials, including Foreign Minister Taro Kono and Minister for Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Masahiko Shibayama are calling for the situation to be rectified.

It remains to be seen, however, whether or not the Japanese people are ready to accept such a switchover and abandon the habit ingrained over many years of using a Westernized format. Perhaps the Prime Minister's Office should take the lead in this regard.

The two ministers made their declaration at a May 21 press conference. Kono called on foreign media organizations to use Abe Shinzo (family name, given name) instead of Shinzo Abe, as is commonly written now, when writing about the Prime Minister. He noted that this is the order used for other Asian leaders, such as China's President Xi Jinping.

This proposal did not come out of the blue. As long ago as December 2000, an advisory group to the Minister of Education at the time issued a report recommending that, when the order of names are expressed in Romanized form, last names should come first.

The report noted that naming conventions are established based on cultural and historical backgrounds. It added that it was important to respect unique modes of presentation by introducing and explaining them.

Taking his cue from this perspective, Minister Shibayama declared that he wanted to get the word out about the need for revision. He added the cultural agency, which he is in charge of, would be encouraging the new usage by government agencies and others.

In response to the call from the language advisory group two decades ago, English-language textbooks have been adjusted so that the ones students study in Japan's junior high schools today use the traditional Japanese name order. Passports also have family name first and personal name second.

Nevertheless, not all government officials have reacted the same way to the proposal. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga, for one, has been cautious, saying: “We also have this long-accepted practice, and there are many factors to be taken into account.”

The English homepage of the Prime Minister's Office uses the order Shinzo ABE, with the family name capitalized. The foreign ministry English homepage does the same. Unless the Cabinet and other government offices achieve consensus on this point, the public is likely to be totally confused by the debate. to truly think internationally.

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Interestingly, when United States President Donald Trump presented a special trophy to the winning wrestler at the Summer Sumo Tournament, he read the name of the rikishi as “Asanoyama Hideki,” with his professional name first and given name second. Perhaps if Japanese athletes participating in the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics in 2020 are introduced by family name first and then given name, the practice will start taking root.

Nowadays we are enjoying more opportunities for interchanges that transcend barriers of differences in language. But for that to happen, mutual understanding of our traditional cultures is essential. Some experts in language teaching warn that giving short shrift to one's own culture while trying to adapt to please others is actually an obstacle to real understanding.

If Japan succumbs to a self-flagellating view of history, in which we turn our backs on our national flag and national anthem and display a wobbly stance concerning territorial issues, we will lose the trust of international society.

Changing the way Japanese names are expressed to foreigners to bring them in line with the actual situation offers a perfect opportunity to truly think internationally.

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姓名ローマ字表記 首相官邸から範を垂れよ

日本人の名前のローマ字の表記は、日本語通り「姓・名」の順で。河野太郎外相と柴山昌彦文部科学相が相次いでそう推奨した。長年染みついた欧米型「名・姓」の順で書く「国民の常識」は変わるだろうか。

両氏が発言したのは5月21日の記者会見だ。河野外相は、安倍晋三首相の名を例に「Abe Shinzo」と、「姓・名」の順で表記するよう海外報道機関に要請すると述べた。中国の習近平国家主席が「Xi Jinping（シー・ジンピン）」と表記されるようにアジアの首脳は「姓・名」の順で定着している。

提唱は唐突なものではない。19年前の平成12年12月、当時の文部相の諮問機関・国語審議会がローマ字表記を日本式に「姓・名」の順にするよう答申していた。

名前の形式は文化や歴史を背景に成立しており、固有の形式を尊重して紹介、記述されることが望ましいという提言だ。柴山文科相はこれを踏まえ、「周知を図っていきたい」と述べた。文化庁が行政機関などに要望していく。

国語審の提言などを受け、現行の中学の英語教科書では日本人の名前の表記について「姓・名」順で教えられている。パスポートも「姓・名」の順だ。

ただし受け止め方はさまざまで、菅義偉官房長官は「これまでの慣行もあり、考慮すべき要素が多々ある」と慎重だった。

首相官邸ホームページ（HP）の英語版は「Shinzo ABE」と姓を大文字で目立たせているものの「名・姓」順のままだ。外務省HP英語版も「名・姓」の順である。「閣内、省内不一致」では、国民が混乱する。

大相撲夏場所の表彰式でトランプ米大統領は、優勝した朝乃山英樹の名を「Asanoyama Hideki」と読み上げた。東京五輪・パラリンピックで日本選手が「姓・名」で紹介されれば、その定着が進むかもしれない。

言葉の違いを乗り越えて交流する機会は多くなっている。そこでは相互に伝統文化への理解が欠かせない。自国文化を軽視し、安易に相手の土俵にのぼることは、その妨げになると懸念する語学教育の専門家もいる。

国旗、国歌に背を向けるような自虐史観、領土について腰がひけた姿勢は侮られ、国際的信用も失う。呼称の変更は、真の国際性を考える契機ともなるはずだ。

出典:【主張】姓名ローマ字表記 首相官邸から範を垂れよ

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