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DIFFERENT, YET SIMILAR: GIVEN NAMES OF CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE AND TAIWANESE YOUNG WOMEN

This paper presents a comparative overview of basic characteristics of given names in Japan and Taiwan, and, based on an analysis of primary data, provides a closer look at names of Japanese and Taiwanese females born in the last decade of the twentieth century. The names are examined from the point of view of their length, structure, and especially their semantics. They are discussed in the context of the period, and also in respect to the culture-specific naming criteria as well as current name selection trends. The findings suggest that despite various differences at all levels of description the names are remarkably similar in the meanings they convey. Through the characters in which they are written, the names reflect, directly or through various associations or allusions, similar contemporary values, aspirations for and expectations of the named individuals, providing an unconventional insight into the two societies of the examined period.

Key words

given names; Japan; Taiwan; naming practices; name meanings; popular names

1. Introduction

Let us start with a brief glance at two given names: *Yating* 雅婷 and *Misaki* 美咲.¹ The former belongs to a Taiwanese woman born in the 1990s, the latter to a Japanese woman born in the same decade. At the time of their bestowal, both names were the most popular baby girl name in their respective countries.² However different the two names may seem, through the meanings of the characters used, 雅 (‘elegant, graceful’) and 婷 (‘pretty, attractive, graceful’) in the first name, and 美 (‘beauty’) and 咲 (‘to blossom, bloom’) in the second, they give a very similar impression of a woman of physical and inner beauty.

Given names reflect various developments, trends, and fashions in society, and provide interesting clues about family aspirations, lifestyle, and overall cultural values. This is even more true of Asian names written in Chinese characters, which can be viewed as “semantically motivated lexical units” (Kałużyńska, 2015, p. 86),

¹ The Chinese names in this paper are transcribed using the Hanyu Pinyin romanization system without tone marks. The Japanese names are transcribed using the Hepburn system of romanization. Long vowels are transcribed using the macron.

² For Taiwanese names see Ministry of the Interior, R.O.C. (2016); for Japanese names see Meiji Yasuda (2021).

conveying desired meanings through their graphic form, as in the above two examples. “Chinese names are intimately related to the meanings represented by Chinese characters” (Taylor – Taylor, 1995, p. 72). As Watson (1986, p. 623) points out, “[u]pon seeing a person’s written name, the beholder may comment on the beauty, the refinement, the auspicious connotations of the characters. As long as it is simply spoken, however, it is in a sense ‘just a name.’” The same can be said about Japanese names. The phonographic Japanese syllabaries, *hiragana* and *katakana*, “only record the phonological form of the name, whereas the characters make it possible to convey various meanings, create some interesting image, and express through the graphic form of the name desired aspirations and hopes for the child’s future” (Barešová, 2015, p. 6).

While the majority of existing literature on Asian names focuses on names in one particular culture, this paper compares given names in Taiwan and Japan. Chinese and Japanese are typologically distant languages, but both utilize a writing system based on Chinese characters. In both countries, naming one’s child involves a creative and rather complicated process, which emerges from particular ideas about the individual, and hopes and aspirations for his or her future, and is guided by culture-specific naming practices and criteria for name selection. Through an analysis of a specific sample of names – names of females born in the 1990s – this paper explores the semantic aspects of Chinese and Japanese names with the aim to find out what common ideas, aspirations, and values they convey, how these are expressed, and, consequently, what picture of a woman they give us.

2. Brief socio-historical background

Human needs, desires, aspirations as well as values of a particular society – important factors in name selection – change in time, reflecting changes in society. The 1990s, when the analysed names were bestowed, are often referred to as the Japan’s Lost Decade. The rapid economic growth which started in the mid-1950s, after the recovery from the lost war, and continued for several decades, abruptly ended at the beginning of the 1990s, followed by economic stagnation. Yet, Japan had grown to become an affluent consumer society, and, as the results of a poll conducted in May 1995 by the Prime Minister’s Office suggest, three out of four Japanese people were satisfied with their standards of living despite the economic slowdown (“Three of Four,” 1995). Throughout the 1990s the majority of people still supported the gendered division of work, i.e., that “husbands should work outside the home and wives should take care of their families” (Curtin, 2002). The late marriage and birth trends – the fertility rate dropped to 1.36 in 1999 (“Japan Fertility Rate,” 2021) – and the gradual change in life values influenced the way parents perceived their children, which can be seen also in the increased care shown in their name selection.

The development in Taiwan was in some respects similar. The return of Taiwan to Chinese hands after fifty years of Japanese colonization in 1945 was followed by a steep drop in the standard of living of the local population as well as a score of internal social, political, and economic tensions. Nevertheless, in the early 1960s, Taiwan also embarked on a path of economic reforms and industrialization, and experienced several decades of robust economic growth, which placed the island among “The Four Asian Tigers” and continued until the 1990s (“Taiwan GDP,” 2021). Increasing welfare was also accompanied by democratization, in particular after the mid-1980s. On the other hand, the period of economic growth is also characterized by a dramatic drop in fertility rates, which further continued in the 1990s – from 1.76 in 1990 to 1.6 in 1999 (“Taiwan Fertility Rate,” 2021) – and increasing women’s participation in labour force as childbearing presented smaller hindrance to career pursuit (Lee – Sun, 1995).

3. Given names and naming practices

3.1 The Chinese and Japanese writing systems

Before proceeding to the description of names in the two cultures, a brief note on their writing systems is needed. The Chinese use logographic Chinese characters (*hanzi* in Mandarin). While simplified forms of some characters have been used in mainland China, the Taiwanese use the traditional forms (cf. the word *hanzi* written in simplified characters as 汉字, and in traditional characters as 漢字). With few exceptions, each character represents a syllable, which is usually a morpheme.

The Japanese writing system combines adapted Chinese characters (*kanji* in Japanese) and two phonographic syllabaries (*hiragana* and *katakana*, collectively known as *kana*). Rather than syllable, mora is generally considered the basic phonological unit of spoken Japanese (e.g., Kubozono, 2002, 2015); one *hiragana/katakana* grapheme represents (with some exceptions) one mora.³ As a general rule, content words of native or Sino-Japanese origins are written in *kanji*. *Hiragana* is used for inflectional endings, particles, and other function words, and also for some content words which would otherwise be written with difficult or uncommon *kanji*. *Katakana* is used for non-Chinese loanwords, and also for onomatopoeic words, exclamations, specialized scientific terminology, for emphasis and some other specific purposes.

³ For example, the word *Nihon* (日本 Japan) consists of two syllables /ni.hon/ but three morae /ni.ho.n/, written in three hiragana graphemes, にほん.

3.2 Basic characteristics of Chinese and Japanese names

Contemporary Chinese and Japanese personal names consist of a family name (surname) and a single given name, in that order. Although estimates of the total recorded number of Chinese surnames range between approximately 6,000 to 8,000 (Lu – Millward, 1989, p. 265) and the most extensive dictionary of Japanese family names, *Nihon myōji daijiten* (Niwa, 1996), lists about 290,000 different surnames, the number of commonly used surnames in each society is currently much lower, which, as will be pointed out later, also affects given name selection. More than 96% of the general Taiwanese population uses one of the top one hundred surnames, and one in every two Taiwanese has one of the ten most frequent surnames (Ministry of the Interior, 2016). Similarly, 96% of all Japanese have among them only a small part – approximately seven thousand – of the existing surnames; a full third of the population uses one of the top one hundred, and about 10% have one of the top ten surnames (Power, 2008, p. C4–4). Yet the variety of Japanese family names is significantly greater than that of the Taiwanese, and they are also more diverse in their structure. While Chinese surnames consist of one or rarely two characters⁴ (Liao, 2000, pp. 43–44), the majority of Japanese surnames are longer; they are mostly composed of two, less frequently one or three, and rarely four characters (e.g., Sakata, 2006; Morioka, 2011).

Given names differ in length, too. Chinese given names consist of one or typically two characters, each representing one syllable/morpheme (Knappová, 2017, p. 651; Bauer, 1959, pp. 66–67).⁵ Japanese names vary between one and three characters, two-character compounds being most common. In addition to characters, Japanese names can also be written in one of the two syllabaries, or a combination of *hiragana/katakana* graphemes and a character. In fact, Japanese female names, unlike male names, which did not undergo any major orthographic changes, have largely shifted from *kana* to *kanji* in the first half of the twentieth century. Until the beginning of the last century, *kanji* appeared only in names of females with a higher social status, but after several decades names written in *kanji* gradually prevailed (Barešová, 2016, pp. 46–47). As to their phonological length, Japanese male names are usually two to four morae long, female names typically have two or three morae. The most common length for both male and female names is three morae (Barešová, 2016).

⁴ Throughout this text, “(Chinese) characters” will refer to *hanzi* in the context of Chinese names, and to *kanji* in the context of Japanese names.

⁵ In the mainland China, single-character names prevailed in the last several decades of the twentieth century (Lu – Millward, 1989, 275; Dai, 2006, p. C1), due to the one-child policy and ceasing use of generation names (for generation names see 3.4), but in the last decade the number of two-character names began to grow again, and, according to Louie (2007, p. 24) referring to the findings of Li (2005), “since 2000, the two-character name reached its former maximum of 90% of all names.”

3.3 Formal limitations to given names

Neither Chinese nor Japanese names are selected from an official name list but are usually newly invented. While the number of surnames is low, the number of given names is virtually unlimited. Yet, name selection is based on several generally acknowledged criteria, and there are also some official restrictions.

According to the Taiwan's Name Act, a name under which a person can be registered with the Household Registration Office must be written "using Chinese characters found in the Chinese etymological dictionary *Ci Yuan*, Chinese encyclopaedic dictionary *Ci Hai*, *Kangxi Dictionary*, or *Guoyu Cidian* compiled by the Ministry of Education" (Laws & Regulations Database of the Republic of China). The *Kangxi dictionary*, for example, contains over 47,000 characters, including graphic variants and rare or archaic characters, significantly more than people can commonly write or even read.⁶

In Japan, the characters permitted for use in names are limited to *Jōyō kanji* ('characters for common use'), and *Jinmeiyō kanji*, a specific list of additional characters which can also be used in names. During the examined period, that is during the 1990s, the former contained 1945 characters⁷ and the latter 284 characters (in 1997 increased to 285).⁸ Compared to Chinese names, the Japanese names seem to be quite restricted in terms of the selection of characters, yet the total of 2,229 or 2,230 characters permitted in names at that time allowed for ample combinations.

3.4 Name selection criteria

For many parents the selection of a given name for their child involves a demanding and time-intensive process, an elaborate interplay of phonological, semantic, and visual dimensions. The key factors to be considered include the sound (the name must be euphonic), the meaning of the characters, and the overall image the name evokes, as the same sounding name can give a very different impression when written in different characters. It is also generally acknowledged in both cultures that a name should avoid rarely used characters and be easy to write and pronounce, be well-balanced with the surname, unique within the family and among relatives, and socially appealing. When selecting a Chinese name, it is advised to

⁶ According to Taylor and Taylor (1995, p. 54), the command of 3,500 characters is considered sufficient for "common use or functional literacy."

⁷ The list of *Jōyō kanji*, which are regarded as necessary for functional literacy, to read newspapers and literature in Japanese, was increased to the present 2,136 characters in 2010.

⁸ Further extensions reflecting popular sentiment followed resulting in a total of 863 characters in 2017.

check the name for homophonous words with negative or otherwise inappropriate meanings (e.g., Kałużyńska, 2008; Liao, 2000).

In both cultures, names are viewed as governing the individual's fate. It is believed that a badly chosen name can cause misfortune in its bearer's future life (e.g., Chiu – Huang, 1986; Nakagawa, 1996; Tamiya, 2003; Li – Hsieh – Chang, 2016); in Taiwan, some people still believe that such misfortune can be reversed by changing the name (e.g., Liao, 2000; Chen, 2010). The practice of selecting, pre-selecting, or approving of the chosen name by a fortune-teller is established in both cultures but it seems to be especially widely spread in Taiwan. When asked about the origin of their name, many Taiwanese just reply that it was chosen by a fortune-teller. Among the various considerations and methods used in Taiwan, such as a fortunate number of strokes in the name (Li – Hsieh – Chang, 2016, p. 228), the harmony principle of *yin* and *yang* (Bauer, 1959, p. 57; Chiu – Huang, 1986) and the five-element theory (Watson, 1986, p. 622; Li – Hsieh – Chang, 2016, p. 228), the Japanese pay closer attention to the number of strokes in the name, making sure that the various combinations of characters used in the chosen name and the family name will result in “lucky numbers” (e.g., Nakagawa, 1996; Tamiya, 2003). Even those who do not particularly believe in this practice find it difficult to resist the influence of the countless fortune-telling publications, and recently also mobile applications and readily available websites, and, “just to make sure,” try over and over for an ideal combination.

Last but not least, an important factor affecting name selection that can be still observed in some Chinese families and thus should not be left out is the practice of sharing one character (or its part) in the names to mark members of the same generation.⁹ Such generation characters, usually referred to as generation names (e.g., Bauer, 1959; Zhu – Millward, 1987; Lu – Millward, 1989; Louie, 1998; Liao, 2000), are usually decided for a number of succeeding generations; they are taken from a sentence, line or paragraph of a proverb, poem or an essay (Sung, 1981, pp. 79–80; Louie 1998, p. 51), containing “praise for ancestors and hope for the longevity of the family” (Louie, 1998, p. 54).¹⁰ In Japan it is common to share a particular feature in the names of parents and children (in the past, especially in the names of sons, over several succeeding generations), which would be unthinkable of in mainland China and Taiwan, and also horizontally, among siblings.

⁹ According to Liao (2000, p. 90) this practice concerns mainly males, as females are expected to marry into other families; however, Louie (1998, p. 56) notes that “[i]n Taiwan, there is the trend for brothers and sisters to have the same generation name as a means of expressing family unity and gender equality.”

¹⁰ This practice decreased significantly in the second half of the twentieth century (e.g., Lu – Millward, 1989), although Li and Lawson (2002) report its rise in mainland China after the Cultural Revolution (1967–1976).

The special feature is usually one character (or its part), or set of characters (in the names of siblings) creating a meaningful whole, a particular sound, the use of *kana* (in female names), etc. A similar tendency can be seen in Taiwan where names of brothers or sisters within a nuclear family are “usually assigned according to a meaningful pattern” (Zhu – Millward, 1987, p. 18), creating a kind of psychological bond among them.

The name selection process, unless entirely taken care of by a fortune-teller or a name specialist, usually begins with the criteria the parents feel strongest about, and is then further guided by their other priorities. The resulting name is usually a unique choice which would only fit that particular child, often reflecting the time or circumstances of birth, expressing the parents’ wishes or aspirations for their child, and ensuring the child a good fate.

Traditionally, the name was chosen envisioning the adult individual and their future life. The prime emphasis was placed on characters, i.e., the name selection process started with choosing a combination of characters which were considered with respect to the other criteria, or in the case of Chinese names, the starting point was the generation character – if this tradition was established in the family – which was complemented with another suitable character. With the decreasing number of children and increasing attention paid to their raising in the last decades of the twentieth century, the sound of the name gained in importance and for a growing number of Japanese parents became the first thing to consider (cf. Tsuruta, 2003; Kobayashi, 2009). Parents often started thinking about the name well before the birth and especially from the perspective of addressing the child from their birth or even during pregnancy. As will be described later, this shift in the perception of the name’s role had a significant impact on the shape of Japanese names. A similar development has not been observed with Taiwanese names. This might be due to the fact that many Taiwanese are used to giving their child the so called “milk name” or “childhood name” (乳名, 小名) upon their birth, or even before, and deciding later on a formal given name. While this first name, typically making use of diminutives or reduplication and later often kept as a familial nickname, is chosen with regard to the child, the formal given name is chosen with regard to the grown-up individual.

4. The data

The analysed data consist of 3,153 names of Japanese females born in 1990–1999, and 1,902 names of Taiwanese females born within the same period. The former set comprises names of students enrolled at Gakushuin Women’s College in Shinjuku, Tokyo, born prior to 2000, collected by one of the authors during her visit in December 2019, and names of graduates (authors of graduation theses) collected from the 2012–2019 volumes of *Bulletin of Gakushuin Women’s College* on the

assumption that the name bearers were 22 years old at the time of their graduation and thus born within the examined period. Names of foreign students were excluded. The names of the graduates were listed in the source without their reading (phonological form). As many graphic forms can be found with more than one phonological form, the present data do not provide for an analysis of the phonological forms.

The names in the latter set were collected from yearbooks 2008–2017 of the Chin Chwang Commercial Vocational High School, located in Sanchong District of New Taipei City in northern Taiwan. The year of birth was again calculated from the year of graduation, assuming that secondary school students are generally aged 18 when leaving school. The class presentations varied in style; in some the sex of the students was explicitly stated, in some the male and female students could be distinguished by their characteristic uniforms. Names of individuals whose sex could not be determined with certainty were not included in the research.

5. Findings and discussion

In order to offer a more complex view of the two analysed sets of names, the description of the semantic aspects, which were our main interest, is preceded by a brief comparison of several other aspects in which the names were found different, yet similar.

5.1 Orthography, structure, and length of the names

Compared to Chinese, the Japanese script consisting of *kana* and *kanji* naturally provides for a greater orthographic variety. Nevertheless, as Table 2 indicates, names written in *hiragana*, which “has traditionally been considered a female script” and its use in names “feminine (*onna-rashii*)” (Barešová, 2016, p. 76), make up only 6.53% of the names, and the once common *katakana* and the combination of *kana* and *kanji* appeared in just a few cases (e.g., *Aina* アイナ, *Yuiko* ゆい子). The vast majority of the Japanese names make use solely of *kanji* characters, just as the Taiwanese names utilize *hanzi* characters.

Apart from the orthography, some diversity can be found in the structure and length. The Taiwanese given names are composed almost exclusively (98.9%) of two characters (Table 1). Unlike in mainland China, where single-character names are more commonly used, the occurrence of single-character names in our sample is marginal.

Table 1: Taiwanese female names

1 character	2 characters
1.10%	98.90%

The most common length of the examined Japanese names is also two characters (66.25%). More traditional names consist of one “core” character complemented by an end character,¹¹ the most common being 子 (e.g., *Momoko* 桃子), which is typically used at the end position and is not as much selected for its meaning but as a gender-specific name ending. Such pattern is not observed in Taiwanese names, although according to Kałużyńska, some Chinese names consist of “one root morpheme/word and an affix” (2016, p. 165). The character 子 does appear also in the Taiwanese set of names (see 5.4.3), but in a different way. While in modern standard Chinese it is commonly used as a nominal suffix (as in the word 孩子 *haizi* ‘child,’ pronounced as an atonic syllable), it occurred mostly in the first position in the analysed set of female names; it cannot be considered a suffix, nor an end character in the sense of the Japanese name structure.

In addition to the several traditional end characters, the Japanese set features a much wider range of characters at the end position. They are not typical end characters because they just as frequently appear in other positions, but still most of them represent a syllable (mora) which is at the end position considered gender specific. In fact, the nature of many of these names makes it clear that their creation started with the desired phonological form to which characters were assigned subsequently, as explained in 3.4.

Unlike the Taiwanese names, which are almost exclusively composed of two characters, the Japanese set also contains single- and three-character names. Single-character names had been typical for males, but in the 1970s they started appearing among the top ten female names in the Meiji Yasuda ranking, and, in the 1990s, three to five of the top ten names each year were single-character names (Meiji Yasuda, 2021). They make up 8.15% of the corpus. They are not numerous but some of them are quite popular. Slightly more frequent three-character names, usually referred to as the *ateji* or *manyōgana* type,¹² and also often with 子 at the end (e. g., *Mayuko* 麻由子), had grown in popularity in the second half of the twentieth century (Sakuma, 1969, p. 149), however, the 18.3% occurrence in the corpus actually already represents a downward trend.

Table 2: Japanese female names

1 character	2 characters	3 characters	<i>hiragana</i>	<i>katakana</i>	<i>hiragana</i> + <i>kanji</i>	<i>katakana</i> + <i>kanji</i>
8.15%	66.25%	18.3%	6.53%	0.19%	0.57%	0.00%

¹¹ Often called *tomeji* (止め字).

¹² In such names each mora is represented by one character, and compared to other types of names, these names always have only one particular reading.

Due to the wider possibilities of Japanese script, Japanese female names display more diversity in their orthography. In addition, they are more diverse in their structure and length. However, the majority of Japanese and Taiwanese names in the corpus look very similar, consisting of two *kanji* or *hanzi* characters, respectively.

5.2 A foreign dimension

As pointed out in Section 4, the presented data do not provide for a thorough analysis of the phonological form of the names, but it can be noticed that a considerable number of the Japanese names sound like names commonly used in Western societies, e.g., *Anna* (Anna), *Arisa* (Alisa, Alyssa), *Emiri* (Emily), *Erika* (Erika, Erica), *Juri* (Julie), *Karen* (Karen, Caren), *Mari* (Mary, Marie), *Marina* (Marina), *Nana* (Nana), *Reina* (Rayna, Reyna, Reina), *Riri* (Lily), *Risa* (Lisa), *Sara* (Sarah), etc. While some originated in Japan, independently of the Western versions (e.g., *Erika*), others are clearly inspired by Western culture (e.g., *Anna*, *Emiri*, *Sara*). A few of them are written in *kana*, but most of them in characters (e.g., *Marina* written as 麻里奈, 満理奈, 真里奈, 茉莉奈, 満里菜, 真利菜, 真梨菜, 真莉菜, 真里菜, 麻里菜), creating an appealing combination of a “foreign” sound and a “domestic” graphic form (Barešová, 2016, p. 35). The results suggest that one increasingly influential name selection criterion is for the name to sound natural in the West and identify the name bearer as part of global society (cf. Barešová – Pikhart, 2020).

This type of name can also be found in the sample of the Taiwanese names, but, unlike in the Japanese sample, they usually have just single occurrences: e.g., 安琪 (*Anqi*, resembles Angie), 安妮 (*Anni* → Annie), 绍琳 (*Shaolin* → Charleen), 雅琳 (*Yalin* → Irene), 巧妮 (*Qiaoni* → Jenny), 家安 (*Jiaan* → Joanne), 丽侠 (*Lixia* → Lisa), 曼娣 (*Mandi* → Mandy), 美璉 (*Meilian* → Marianne), 孟涵 (*Menghan* → Meghan), 佩綺, 沛綺, 佩淇, 佩琪 (*Peiqi* → Page), etc. Given the use of common characters in such names, the resemblance might also be an unintended coincidence.

A possible explanation why the phenomenon of choosing foreign-sounding names is not observed to such an extent among the Taiwanese names is that the Taiwanese have chosen a different path to achieve a similar goal. They seem to stick to more traditional-sounding names and adopt an additional English name, or more precisely, a foreign name, often somehow related to their Chinese name (e.g., Liao, 2000; Chen, 2015; Barešová – Pikhart, 2020), which can be observed also in other Chinese-speaking countries.¹³

¹³ Among ethnic Chinese in Hong Kong (e.g., Mathews, 1996; Li, 1997), Singapore (Tan, 2001), Macau (Cheang, 2008), and also mainland China (Lee, 2001; Edwards, 2006; Henry, 2012).

5.3 Uniqueness

Names in both sets are characterized by the uniqueness of character combinations. The set of 1,902 Taiwanese names contains 1,572 different names, i.e., the average occurrence of one name is mere 1.21. In other words, only 330 females out of 1,902 share a name with any other female within the corpus. The Japanese names display a slightly higher occurrence rate of 1.82; there are 1,734 unique graphic forms among the total of 3,153 names.

The length and structure of the Taiwanese names is quite uniform, but the Taiwanese can rely upon a greater pool of characters available for names. The Japanese compensate for a smaller number of characters by a greater variety of length and structure. Moreover, while one phonological form of a Chinese or Japanese name can be represented by different characters, some Japanese graphic forms can have two or even more phonological forms.

The uniqueness of a person's name is very important in Chinese society (e.g., Sung, 1981; Liao, 2000). This can be at least partially attributed to the small diversity of family names (as explained in 3.2). In Taiwan, having the same full name as someone else living in the same city or county, or working at the same workplace, is a good enough reason to become eligible for a legal change of name (Sung, 1981, p. 88; see also Liao, 2000).

Sung (1981, p. 88) also notes that the emphasis on distinct names is true especially for boys. Similarly, according to Blum (1997, p. 364), female names "typically come from a much reduced and stereotypical stock, compared to that for male names." This might have been true in the past when families paid more attention to names of their male offspring. As this study deals only with female names a comparison of male and female names is not possible; nevertheless, the analysed sample shows a great variety of both Taiwanese and Japanese female names, indicating the importance of this aspect in female names in both societies.

In Japan, a growing trend towards unique names which would reflect the individuality of the child became apparent in the 1980s (Kobayashi, 2009). This is related to the greater care given to the name selection, enhanced by an increasing number of maternity and naming publications. The monthly maternity magazine *Tamago kurabu* (Tamago Club), which has been issued since 1993, and the *Tamahiyō* maternity publications, both published by the Benesse Corporation, stressed as part of their marketing strategy that a given name is the first gift a child receives from their parents, and therefore it should be original and reflect the unique character of the child.

5.4 Semantic aspects of the names

Due to this great variety of character combinations, this study focuses on shared features and tendencies, and on individual characters rather than individual names.

Limiting the further analysis only to the characters that appear at least in 0.5% of the names,¹⁴ we obtain a group of 105 characters in the Taiwanese set (Table 3) and 77 characters in the Japanese set (Table 4).

Table 3: The most frequent characters in the Taiwanese name set¹⁵

1.	婷	6.47%	pretty, attractive, and graceful	54.	宇	0.89%	house; space, universe; manner
2.	雅	5.21%	elegant, graceful	55.	孟	0.89%	eldest among brothers or sisters; first in series; great, eminent
3.	怡	5.21%	happy, joyful, cheerful; harmony	56.	嫻	0.89%	a character used in ancient Chinese F names
4.	佳	3.94%	good, auspicious, beautiful, delightful	57.	筱	0.89%	dwarf bamboo; diminutive in person's name
5.	佩	3.10%	to admire, to respect; belt ornament, pendant; wear at waist, tie to the belt; respect	58.	晴	0.89%	clear weather, fine weather
6.	庭	3.05%	courtyard, spacious hall or yard	59.	秀	0.84%	beautiful, elegant
7.	欣	3.00%	happy, joyous, delighted	60.	芬	0.84%	fragrant
8.	雯	2.68%	cloud patterns, colouring of cloud	61.	臻	0.84%	to arrive, achieve, attain a high level
9.	涵	2.63%	to tolerate, be lenient, forgive	62.	萍	0.84%	duckweed; wandering
10.	慧	2.52%	bright, intelligent; intelligence	63.	靖	0.79%	quiet, still, peaceful, tranquil
11.	穎	2.37%	clever, intelligent, outstanding, bright	64.	巧	0.79%	skilful, ingenious, clever
12.	宜	2.26%	suitable, right, fitting, proper	65.	淑	0.79%	warm and virtuous, pure, charming
13.	萱	2.26%	daylily, <i>hemerocallis flava</i>	66.	晏	0.79%	peaceful, quiet
14.	思	2.21%	to think, long for, hope, wish	67.	瑋	0.79%	type of jade; rare, valuable
15.	文	2.16%	literature, writing; culture; knowledge	68.	華	0.79%	flower, Chinese
16.	好	2.16%	beautiful, fair, handsome	69.	吟	0.79%	to sing, hum; recite; type of poetry
17.	瑜	2.10%	flawless gem or jewel	70.	蓁	0.74%	abundant, luxuriant vegetation
18.	惠	2.00%	kind, kind-hearted, gracious	71.	婉	0.74%	gentle, graceful, amiable
19.	珮	2.00%	jade ornament	72.	琬	0.74%	the virtue of a gentleman; jade

¹⁴ The 0.5% limit was chosen based on subjective judgement with the aim to obtain a sufficiently-sized sample while, on the other hand, eliminating rarely used characters. Rather than working with two groups of equal size (for example, the top 100 characters), this method takes into account the greater variety of characters in Taiwanese names.

¹⁵ The percentages refer to the percentage of names in the respective set which include the given character. Each character appears in a name only once, except for 9 Taiwanese names consisting of two identical characters. As most names are composed of more than one character, the total adds up to more than 100%. In the few cases when the name consists of two identical characters, the character was counted only once.

20.	姿	1.89%	one's manner, bearing, appearance	73.	琳	0.74%	beautiful jade
21.	君	1.89%	sovereign, monarch, ruler, gentleman	74.	亭	0.68%	pavilion, erect, well-balanced
22.	瑄	1.89%	an ornamental piece of jade	75.	珈	0.68%	an ornament attached to a woman's hairpin
23.	靜	1.84%	still, silent, quiet, calm	76.	品	0.68%	character, quality, moral integrity; to savour
24.	芳	1.84%	fragrant; virtuous; beautiful	77.	湘	0.68%	Hunan province; name of a river
25.	家	1.79%	house, home, residence; family	78.	羽	0.68%	feather
26.	詩	1.68%	poetry; poem, verse, ode	79.	娟	0.68%	beautiful, graceful, elegant
27.	嘉	1.68%	excellent; joyful; auspicious; to praise	80.	儒	0.68%	a Confucian scholar; learned, erudite
28.	玉	1.63%	jade	81.	依	0.63%	to depend on; to accommodate a wish
29.	儀	1.58%	to admire, appearance, manner	82.	薇	0.63%	fern
30.	瑩	1.58%	lustre of gems; bright, lustrous	83.	宛	0.63%	to seem as if
31.	如	1.52%	like, such as; if	84.	俐	0.63%	active; clever
32.	郁	1.47%	sweet smelling, rich in aroma, luxuriant, elegant	85.	軒	0.63%	a small room or veranda with windows; high
33.	珊	1.42%	coral	86.	筑	0.63%	ancient lute; to build, building
34.	琪	1.37%	beautiful jade	87.	翊	0.58%	to assist, help; to respect
35.	于	1.31%	in, on, at; go to; surname Yu	88.	雨	0.58%	rain
36.	璇	1.31%	beautiful jade	89.	子	0.58%	child
37.	慈	1.26%	kind, charitable, benevolent	90.	珍	0.58%	precious, valuable, rare
38.	玢	1.26%	streaks in jade; gem	91.	育	0.58%	to give birth to, educate
39.	馨	1.26%	fragrant, aromatic; distant fragrance	92.	寧	0.58%	peaceful, tranquil, stable, quiet
40.	安	1.21%	peaceful, tranquil, calm, quiet	93.	云	0.58%	cloud
41.	鈺	1.21%	rare treasure	94.	旻	0.58%	sky, autumn
42.	茹	1.21%	to endure, bear; soft, tender	95.	妮	0.58%	little girl, cute girl
43.	心	1.21%	heart, mind, soul	96.	意	0.53%	thought, idea, mind
44.	真	1.21%	sincere, clear, pure, upright, true, genuine	97.	芷	0.53%	angelica (type of iris)
45.	潔	1.21%	clean, pure, honest, noble	98.	蕙	0.53%	species of fragrant orchid; pure
46.	芸	1.16%	art; talent, ability, craft, performance	99.	敏	0.53%	fast, quick, clever, smart
47.	蓉	1.16%	hibiscus	100.	韻	0.53%	musical sound; rhyme; charm
48.	伶	1.16%	nimble, bright, smart	101.	伊	0.53%	he, she, this, that
49.	樺	1.10%	birch tree	102.	韋	0.53%	tanned leather; surname Wei
50.	玲	1.10%	tinkling of jade; exquisite, bright	103.	淳	0.53%	honest (clean like water), simple
51.	柔	1.05%	soft, gentle, pliant	104.	汝	0.53%	you
52.	盈	1.05%	to fill; full, overflowing; surplus; complete	105.	甄	0.53%	to examine, discern
53.	美	1.00%	beautiful, pretty; pleasing				

Table 4: The most frequent characters in the Japanese name set

1.	子	15.16%	child, girl	40.	央	1.08%	centre, middle
2.	美	12.75%	beautiful	41.	綾	1.05%	design; figured cloth; twill
3.	奈	8.40%	Nara	42.	智	0.98%	wisdom, intellect
4.	里	7.77%	one's home town, native place	43.	華	0.95%	flower; splendid, gorgeous
5.	香	6.18%	fragrance, scent, aroma, perfume	44.	々	0.95%	an iteration mark
6.	菜	5.01%	greens, vegetables; rapeseed blossom	45.	遥	0.92%	distant, remote (in terms of time and place)
7.	真	4.31%	upright, honest	46.	音	0.92%	sound
8.	佳	4.19%	beautiful, good, excellent	47.	月	0.89%	moon
9.	理	3.81%	reason, principle, logic	48.	舞	0.89%	(to) dance
10.	彩	3.71%	colour, colourful	49.	桃	0.82%	peach
11.	沙	3.11%	sand	50.	悠	0.82%	everlasting, calm, serene
12.	由	3.04%	reason; significance; cause	51.	明	0.82%	bright, cheerful
13.	紗	2.98%	thin, light silk	52.	歩	0.82%	to walk, progress, advance
14.	優	2.89%	tender, kind, gentle-mannered	53.	緒	0.82%	beginning, end; cord, strap
15.	恵	2.89%	favour; blessing; grace; kindness	54.	日	0.79%	the sun; sunlight; day
16.	実	2.76%	crop, harvest	55.	茉	0.79%	jasmine
17.	希	2.35%	hope, wish, aspiration	56.	和	0.76%	harmony, peace; Japan, Japanese-style; calm, gentle, quiet
18.	梨	2.28%	pear tree, nashi	57.	李	0.76%	Japanese plum
19.	花	2.28%	flower, blossom	58.	杏	0.76%	apricot
20.	乃	2.25%	particle, I, myself	59.	祐	0.76%	(to) help
21.	衣	2.22%	garment, clothes, dress	60.	那	0.76%	beautiful
22.	織	2.16%	to weave; weaving; woven item	61.	樹	0.73%	trees, wood
23.	友	2.09%	friend	62.	貴	0.73%	noble, precious; to value; esteem, respect
24.	愛	2.09%	love, affection	63.	耶	0.70%	question mark
25.	莉	2.09%	jasmine	64.	知	0.63%	wisdom
26.	千	2.06%	thousand	65.	詩	0.60%	poem, poetry
27.	麻	2.06%	hemp, flax	66.	瑞	0.60%	happy, auspicious; fresh, youthful; lively
28.	紀	2.03%	history	67.	利	0.57%	advantage; benefit; profit
29.	有	1.81%	to possess, have; to exist	68.	海	0.57%	sea
30.	絵	1.81%	picture, drawing, painting	69.	裕	0.57%	abundant, rich; fertile
31.	咲	1.78%	to blossom, bloom	70.	万	0.54%	ten thousand
32.	穂	1.74%	ear/head of rice	71.	晴	0.54%	to clear up, be sunny
33.	未	1.59%	future	72.	絢	0.54%	brilliant fabric design
34.	夏	1.55%	summer	73.	陽	0.54%	sun
35.	萌	1.55%	sprout, bud	74.	津	0.54%	haven, port, harbour; ferry
36.	亜	1.40%	Asia	75.	江	0.51%	creek; inlet; bay
37.	加	1.36%	to add, increase, join	76.	結	0.51%	to tie, bind, join
38.	帆	1.36%	sail, sailing boat	77.	英	0.51%	beautiful, excellent, noble-minded
39.	早	1.11%	early, fast				

As explained above, while paying attention to the number of strokes and other important criteria, the name-givers often consciously evoke various ideas through the graphic form, most commonly their hopes and aspirations for the child. They may be expressed directly or through various poetic associations and symbolic meanings. It is therefore usually impossible to reveal all the intentions behind a particular choice of characters and correctly interpret their meaning, especially since the majority of both *hanzi* and *kanji* have multiple meanings. For example, 華 represents as distinct meanings as ‘flower’ and ‘China, Chinese culture.’ In addition, some characters are not used for the meaning they have on their own, but allude to a particular compound they are part of, which expresses the notion the parents wish to include in the name. For example, the meaning of the *kanji* 菜 is ‘greens’, ‘vegetables’, but its use in Japanese female names is usually motivated by the desire to allude to the word 菜の花 ‘rapeseed blossom’, associated with the spring season, a cheerful disposition, and other positive meanings (Barešová, 2015, 2016).

The characters, quite diverse in their meaning, are divided here into three larger groups: characters denoting qualities, traits, feelings, and emotions, those related to the natural world, and the third group of minor categories and individual characters that do not fit well into either of the two main groups. The main purpose of this division is to organize together conceptually related characters to provide some insight into what themes can be found in the names.

5.4.1 Characters denoting qualities, traits, feelings, and emotions

Through the selection of characters, the name givers can express particular perceived or anticipated aspects of the child. The most desired qualities reflected in these female names, both Chinese and Japanese, are **physical as well as inner (spiritual) beauty, refinement, gracefulness, and elegance**. The popular Taiwanese name mentioned in the Introduction, *Yating* 雅婷, is composed of the two most commonly used characters representing these qualities, which are at the same time the most frequent characters in the whole name set, and several other characters have similar meanings:

婷 (‘pretty, attractive, graceful’; 6.47%), 雅 (‘elegant, graceful’; 5.21%), 佳 (‘good, beautiful, delightful, auspicious’; 3.94%), 好 (‘beautiful, fair, handsome’; 2.16%), 美 (‘beautiful, pretty, pleasing’; 1.00%), 秀 (‘beautiful, elegant’; 0.84%), and 娟 (‘beautiful, graceful, elegant’; 0.68%).

Similarly, the second most frequent character in the Japanese names, 美, contained in the most popular name *Misaki* 美咲, comes from this category. It was outnumbered only by 子 (‘girl, child’), a traditional and still the most common end character in female names in this period (see 5.1, 5.2.3, and 5.4.3).

美 (‘beautiful’; 12.75%), 佳 (‘beautiful, good, excellent’; 4.19%), 那 (‘beautiful’; 0.76%), and 英 (‘beautiful, excellent’; 0.51%).

Intellectual qualities are also desired in both Taiwanese and Japanese girls. The Taiwanese set includes a greater variety of characters with meanings such as intelligent, smart, and knowledgeable, and the first three even rank among the top fifteen characters:

慧 ('bright, intelligent'; 2.52%), 穎 ('clever, intelligent, outstanding, bright'; 2.37%), 伶 ('nimble, bright, smart'; 1.16%), 巧 ('skilful, ingenious, clever'; 0.79%), 俐 ('active, clever'; 0.63%), and 敏 ('fast, quick, clever, smart'; 0.53%).

The Japanese names contain two characters denoting wisdom, 智 and 知, with a 0.98% and 0.63% occurrence, respectively, and a more popular 理 ('reason, principle, logic'; 3.81%), which is usually used in the meaning of smart, intelligent. The above listed 佳 and 英 refer, in addition to beauty, also to intellectual qualities.

Kindness, gentleness and amiability, another set of qualities appreciated in females, are directly represented in the Taiwanese names by:

惠 ('kind, kind-hearted, gracious'; 2.00%), 慈 ('kind, charitable, benevolent'; 1.26%), 茹 ('soft, tender'; 1.21%), 柔 ('soft, gentle, pliant'; 1.05%), 淑 ('warm and virtuous, pure, charming'; 0.79%), and 婉 ('gentle, graceful, amiable'; 0.74%).

The Japanese names contain two relatively frequent characters conveying similar qualities: 優 ('tender, kind, gentle-mannered'; 2.89%), and 惠 ('kind, gracious, blessed'; 2.89%).

Qualities such as being **peaceful, stable, and serene** are conveyed in the Taiwanese names by the following five characters:

靜 ('quiet, calm'; 1.84%), 安 ('peaceful, tranquil, calm, quiet'; 1.21%), 靖 ('quiet, still, peaceful, tranquil'; 0.79%), 晏 ('peaceful, quiet'; 0.79%), and 寧 ('peaceful, tranquil, stable, quiet'; 0.58%).

悠 ('everlasting, calm, serene'; 0.82%) and 和 ('calm, gentle, quiet'; 0.76%) appear in the Japanese names. 静 (the variant of the traditional Chinese 靜 used in Japan) and 安, which were commonly used in Japanese female names in the past, had only few occurrences.

Several characters denote qualities such as **honest, upright, and appropriate**. The Taiwanese set includes:

宜 ('suitable, right, fitting, proper'; 2.26%), 真 ('sincere, clear, pure, upright, true, genuine'; 1.21%), 潔 ('clean, pure, honest, quiet, noble'; 1.21%), 品 ('character, quality, moral integrity'; 0.68%), and 淳 ('clean like water, honest'; 0.53%).

The Japanese set contains only one, but it is a more frequent character with a similar meaning, 真 ('upright, honest'; 4.31%).

Several of the more commonly used characters refer to **mental and emotional states and processes, and also to various attitudes**; in the Taiwanese set these are:

佩 ('to admire, respect', 'belt ornament, pendant'; 3.10%), 涵 ('to tolerate, be lenient, forgive'; 2.63%), 思 ('to think, long for, hope, wish'; 2.21%), 姿 ('one's manner, bearing, appearance'; 1.89%), 儀 ('to admire', 'appearance, manner';

1.58%), 心 ('heart, mind, soul'; 1.21%), 依 ('to depend on, accommodate a wish'; 0.63%), 甄 ('to examine, discern'; 0.53%), and 意 ('thought, idea, mind'; 0.53%).

The Japanese set features:

希 ('hope, wish, aspiration'; 2.35%), 愛 ('love, affection'; 2.09%), and less frequent 貴 ('noble', 'precious', 'to value, esteem, respect'; 0.73%).

Another wish Taiwanese parents often express in the name is a desire for their daughter to be **happy and joyful**, and also to bring happiness to others, a wish that is not so often directly expressed in the current Japanese names.¹⁶ The most frequent characters in the Taiwanese names include 怡 ('happy, joyful', 'harmony'; 5.21%), 欣 ('happy, joyful, delighted'; 3.00%), and 嘉 ('joyful, auspicious'; 1.68%). The Japanese set contains 瑞 ('happy, auspicious, fresh and youthful, lively'; 0.60%), and 明 ('bright, positive, cheerful'; 0.82%); the latter, however, refers rather to a disposition than a mental or emotional state.

Given the multiple meanings of most Chinese and Japanese characters, these subgroups are rather fluid and one particular character may easily fit into several of them. While most of the characters refer to the girl's future disposition (e.g., a beautiful woman), some may also refer to the quality of her future life (e.g., a beautiful life).

5.4.2 Characters related to the natural world

Characters related to plants

Plant motifs have been popular in female names in many cultures. According to Liao (2000, p. 32), Taiwanese people like to name their daughters with grass or flower names. Names composed of characters denoting plants do not place so high in the popularity ranking: the top ten female names in Taiwan bestowed in 1991–2000 contain only one such character, 萱 ('orange daylily'). On the other hand, over 13% of the most frequently used characters in the name set denote particular plants or some of their prominent aspects, mainly their fragrance:

萱 ('orange daylily'; 2.26%), 芳 ('sweet-smelling'; 1.84%), 郁 ('good smelling, rich in aroma'; 1.47%), 馨 ('fragrant'; 1.26%), 蓉 ('hibiscus, lotus'; 1.16%), 樺 ('birch tree'; 1.10%), 筱 ('little slender bamboo'; 0.89%), 芬 ('sweet-smelling, fragrance, aroma'; 0.84%), 萍 ('duckweed'; 0.84%), 華 ('flower', 'Chinese'; 0.79%), 蓁 ('abundant, luxuriant vegetation'; 0.74%), 薇 ('fern'; 0.63%), 芷 ('angelica'; 0.53%), and 蕙 ('species of fragrant orchid'; 0.53%).

Similar to Taiwanese names, plants have always been present in Japanese female names, and in the 1970s they found their way to the most popular names and

¹⁶ Similar wishes are more frequently expressed in Japanese names through, for example, plant motifs.

kept increasing in popularity. In the 1990s, eleven such characters can be found in the top ten female names ranking by Meiji Yasuda (麻, 穗, 咲, 香, 桃, 茜, 萌, 葵, 花, 菜, 楓). Three of them, 茜 ('madder', also 'red colour'), 葵 ('hollyhock', also used in the meaning of 'sunflower'), and 楓 ('maple'), became popular single-character names but their total occurrence in the set of Japanese names is actually lower than the 0.5% limit needed for their inclusion in the following list of the most frequent characters:

香 ('fragrance, scent, aroma, perfume'; 6.18%), 菜 ('greens, vegetables', 'rape-seed blossom'; 5.01%), 实 ('crop, harvest'; 2.76%), 梨 ('pear tree, nashi'; 2.28%), 花 ('flower, blossom'; 2.28%), 莉 ('jasmine'; 2.29%), 麻 ('hemp, flax'; 2.06%), 咲 ('to blossom, bloom'; 1.78%), 穗 ('ear/head of rice'; 1.74%), 萌 ('sprout, bud'; 1.55%), 華 ('flower', 'splendid, gorgeous'; 0.95%), 桃 ('peach'; 0.82%), 茉 ('jasmine'; 0.79%), 李 ('Japanese plum'; 0.76%), 杏 ('apricot'; 0.76%), and 樹 ('trees, wood'; 0.73%).

Flowers and blossoms in general are appreciated for their beauty and used to express love and affection. Thus the characters 花 ('flower, blossom') in Japanese names and 華 ('flower', 'splendid, gorgeous') in both Japanese and Taiwanese names as well as most of the characters denoting particular flowers or (tree) blossoms (e.g., 萱, 蓉, 芷 or 蕙 in Taiwanese names and 菜, 莉, 梨, 杏 in Japanese names), and those related to flowers (e.g., 咲 and 香 in Japanese names and 芳, 郁, 馨, or 芬 in Taiwanese names), are used to evoke an image of a girl who is beautiful, lovely and adorable, gentle and affectionate. Characters representing various stages of a plant's growth, and also the character 樹 in the Japanese names create various associations with the child's quick and healthy growth and vitality.

Characters denoting plants are not only used to allude to obvious associations with human appearance and character qualities, but also for their less commonly known symbolism and meanings in the language of flowers (*hanakotoba* in Japanese) (Barešová, 2015; see also Barešová, 2018). The bright-yellow rapeseed blossoms are often chosen to evoke a positive, cheerful character. Jasmine refers to both human appearance (cute, pretty, lovely, and charming) and qualities (pure-hearted, graceful, refined, sensual, and amiable). Pear blossoms symbolize affection, charity, and benevolence (*ibid.*).

Some of the characters used in Taiwanese names make use of being homophonous with another, more common character. For example, 筱 (*xiao* 'little slender bamboo') is used in given names in the meaning of 小 (*xiao* 'small, little') with which it is homophonous. 萍 (*ping* 'duckweed') is used in female names because it is homophonous with 平 (*ping* 'peaceful/quiet'), and especially for its meanings in the compounds 平安 ('safe and sound') and 平坦 ('smooth') (Hui, 2002, p. 345 in Kałużńska, 2008, p. 227).

Additionally, a character denoting a particular plant may be also chosen to commemorate the girl's birth by reflecting the particular season or month, as flowers

and trees appreciated for their blossoms are usually associated with the part of the year in which they bloom. As Koehn (1952, p. 121) puts it, “[e]ach month has its flower, as does each of the Four Seasons.”

Characters related to gemstones

Jade has been the most valued gemstone for the Chinese and has played an important role in traditional Chinese culture. During the Han dynasty people believed that jade protected against disease and brought immortality to those wearing it. It was also believed that it could bring a good future (Jones, 2004, p. 4).

In addition to the character 玉 by which it is represented, there are hundreds of jade-related characters with 王/玉 as a radical.¹⁷ Many of those characters denote some specific kind of jade (瑜, 琳, 璋, etc.), while others represent related aspects, such as tinkling of jade pieces (玲), or even streaks in jade (玟), or various ornaments made of this precious stone (珮, 瑄, etc.).¹⁸

Until 1960, the character denoting jade, 玉, and 珠 (‘pearl/bead’) with the jade radical appeared among the top ten ranking female names; in the following decades two jade-radical characters appeared in the ranking: in the 1960s–80s it was 玲, in the 1980s and in the 1990s it was 珊 (‘coral’). 玉, 玲 and 珊 are among the most frequent characters in the analysed Taiwanese name set and there are thirteen others with meanings more or less closely related to jade or gems in general, or characters with jade as its component:

瑜 (‘fine jade, gem’, ‘virtue, excellence’; 2.10%), 珮 (‘jade ornament’; 2.00%), 瑄 (‘an ornamental piece of jade’; 1.89%), 玉 (‘jade’; 1.63%), 瑩 (‘lustre of gems’; 1.58%), 珊 (‘coral’; 1.42%), 琪 (‘fine jade’; 1.37%), 璇 (‘fine jade, beautiful jade’; 1.31%), 玟 (‘streaks in jade or gem’; 1.26%), 钰 (‘rare treasure’; 1.21%), 玲 (‘tinkling of jade pieces’; 1.10%), 璋 (‘type of jade, fine jade’; 0.79%), 琬 (‘fine jade’; 0.74%), 琳 (‘beautiful jade, fine jade’, ‘gem’; 0.74%), 珈 (‘jewellery’; 0.68%), and 珍 (‘precious, valuable, rare’; 0.58%).

In addition to the obvious associations of this ornamental mineral with beauty, refinement, and preciousness, the use of jade and jade-related characters in names may be also motivated by various other meanings and associations, such as talent, virtue, and fortune, drawn from various contexts of Chinese poetry and idioms, in which the concept of jade appears (for a detailed analysis of jade in Chinese idioms see Yang /2011/). Jade-related characters are probably also frequently used in names as a generation character/name, as these are often based on a line of a proverb or poem.

¹⁷ A radical is a graphical component of a Chinese character under which the character is listed in a character dictionary.

¹⁸ Technically speaking, not all of these characters fit the category of natural world, but it seems logical to treat them for the purpose of this study as one category.

The most popular gemstone found in the Japanese female names set is lapis lazuli, 琉璃. Both these characters of which the compound is composed appear in the names. Neither ranks among the most frequent characters (they became more popular later) but together they make up a 0.79% rate of occurrence. They refer to female beauty ('pretty as a jewel', 'pretty as the azure blue'), and are also used for the following association 'a gemstone is a treasure → the child is a treasure' (Barešová, 2016, p. 138). There are two more characters right below the 0.5% limit: 玲 ('sound of jewels', 'tinkling of jades') and 瑛 ('sparkle of jewellery', 'crystal'). The latter is used for the transparent colour of the crystal it denotes to express a pure heart, pure, honest character (ibid.).

The sky and heavenly bodies, weather phenomena

Both sets of the most frequent characters contain several characters related to the sky, including heavenly bodies and weather phenomena. In the Taiwanese names these are:

雯 ('cloud tints, colouring of cloud'; 2.68%), 晴 ('clear weather'; 0.89%), 雨 ('rain'; 0.58%), 旻 ('sky', 'autumn'; 0.53%), and 云 ('cloud, floating cloud'; 0.58%).

The Japanese names include:

月 ('moon'; 0.89%), 日 ('the sun, sunlight', 'day'; 0.79%), 晴 ('clear weather, to clear up, be sunny'; 0.54%), and 陽 ('sun'; 0.54%).

These characters create various associations with beauty and refinement (e.g., 月), positive, cheerful, and warm-hearted character (陽, 日, 晴). Another reason for the selection of 日 in Japanese names is the meaning of the compound 明日, 'tomorrow, future.' The sky (旻) is often associated with broad-mindedness and brightness. 雨 in Chinese names "symbolically denotes people ready to help others" (Xu and Xin, 1999, p. 382 in Kałużyńska, 2008, p. 211), and might be also used to supply (according to the five-element theory) the missing water element in the name. Another common motivation for the use of these characters in both cultures is remembrance of the moment the child was born.

Other characters related to the natural world

Traditionally, characters representing the seasons of the year have been used in both Taiwanese and Japanese names, but their use in the current name sets is marginal, except for 夏 ('summer'; 1.55%) in the Japanese names, and the above-mentioned 旻 ('sky', 'autumn'; 0.53%) in the Taiwanese names.

One more character in the Japanese names related to the natural world is 海 ('sea'; 0.57%), which became even more popular in the following decades (Barešová, 2016). It symbolizes a broad mind and big heart and, through various images of a beautiful sea, a summer sea, etc., is also associated with a beautiful heart.

5.4.3 Other characters

Characters related to the human world

Some of the characters that fall outside the two above categories are related to the human world or women in particular. Several of those used in the Taiwanese names denote a **person or a relationship**:

君 ('sovereign, monarch, ruler', 'gentleman'; 1.89%), 孟 ('eldest among brothers or sisters', 'great, eminent'; 0.89%), 子 ('child', 'fruit', 'seed', first terrestrial branch; 0.58%), 妮 ('little girl, cute girl'; 0.58%), and two pronouns, 汝 ('you'; 0.53%) and 伊 ('he, she, this, that'; 0.53%).

For instance, 君 evokes an image of a noble person with a good character,¹⁹ while 孟 refers either to birth order or an outstanding personality. The Japanese set also includes 子 ('child, girl'; 15.16%), which is used exclusively as an end character (see below), and 友 ('friend'; 2.09%), conveying an image of a friendly and amiable person.

Several characters refer to the girl's **future behaviour and achievements**: 臻 ('to arrive, achieve, attain a high level'; 0.84%), 翊 ('to assist, help', 'to respect'; 0.58%), 育 ('to give birth to, educate'; 0.58%) in the Taiwanese set, and 步 ('to walk, progress, advance'; 0.82%), 祐 ('(to) help'; 0.76%), and 結 ('to tie, bind, join'; 0.51%) in the Japanese. The characters may convey the desired meaning on its own, or in combination with another character in the name. For example, the name *Yizhen* 怡臻 can be interpreted as 'happy/harmonious and high-achieving' or 'to achieve happiness/ harmony.'

Characters related to **literature, music, and art** refer, in addition to their denotative meaning, to education, talent, and qualities such as refinement, intelligence and sophistication, or create various poetic images in combination with another character. In the Taiwanese set these are:

文²⁰ ('literature, writing', 'culture', 'knowledge'; 2.16%), 詩 ('poetry, poem, verse, ode' 1.68%), 芸 ('art', 'talent, ability', 'craft', 'performance'; 1.16%), 吟 ('to sing, hum, recite', 'type of poetry'; 0.79%), 儒 ('Confucian scholar', 'learned, erudite'; 0.68%), 筑 ('ancient lute', 'to build, building'; 0.63%), and 韻 ('musical sound', 'rhyme', 'charm'; 0.53%).

The Japanese names contain:

紀 ('chronicle, account, history'; 2.03%), 絵 ('picture, drawing, painting'; 1.81%), 音 ('sound'; 0.92%), 舞 ('(to) dance'; 0.89%), and 詩 ('poem, poetry'; 0.60%).

¹⁹ The concept of 君 as an ideal noble person was elaborated on in Confucius's *Analects*.

²⁰ This character used to be quite popular also in Japanese names in previous periods, but its occurrence in the sample from the 1990s is marginal.

Some thematic groups, such as characters related to **living space**, can be found almost exclusively in the Taiwanese names:

庭 ('courtyard, spacious hall, yard'; 3.05%), 家 ('house, home, residence', 'family'; 1.79%), 宇 ('house', 'space, universe', 'manner'; 0.89%), 亭 ('pavilion', 'to erect'; 0.68%), and 軒 ('a small room or veranda with windows', 'high'; 0.63%).

Again, these characters may be used for their denotative meaning – 家 referring to a happy family, home – but especially for various associations. For example, 宇 is associated through its meanings with broadmindedness, and also elegance and dignity. 亭 conveys the meaning 'well-balanced,' referring to a balanced personality. The only comparable character in the Japanese set is 里 ('one's home town, native place'; 7.77%), mainly used for its reading /ri/, but also to convey a wish for the girl to cherish and not to forget her home (Barešová, 2016, p. 161).

Proper names are another specific category found in the Taiwanese set. It includes a toponym, 湘 (Hunan province, name of a river; 0.68%), a character used in ancient female names, 嫵 (0.89%), and three surnames, 于 ('in, on, at', 'go to', surname Yu; 1.31%), 宛 ('to seem as if, similar', surname Wan; 0.63%), and 韋 ('tanned leather', surname Wei; 0.53%). While the three characters representing surnames also have other meanings – but are mainly used in names for their reference to mother's surname – many characters classified in other groups are also surnames.

Conversely, a group of characters in the Japanese set, which are not matched by similar characters in the Taiwanese set, are related to **cloth**:

紗 ('thin, light silk'; 2.98%), 衣 ('garment, clothes, dress'; 2.22%), 織 ('weave, weaving, woven item'; 2.16%), 綾 ('design', 'figured cloth, twill'; 1.05%), and 絢 ('brilliant fabric design'; 0.54%).

Especially the first of them, 紗, is considered very feminine and Japanese-like and is associated with refinement and elegance, and also a sensitive and delicate mind (Barešová 2016, p. 152).

Another type of relatively frequent characters used only in Japanese names are **numbers**, 千 ('thousand'; 2.06%) and 万 ('ten thousand'; 0.54%), traditionally associated especially with longevity.

A few remaining characters are diverse in their denotative meaning, but what they mostly have in common is their indirect reference to the quality of the girl's future life. These are: 盈 ('to fill, full, overflowing, surplus', 'complete'; 1.05%), 如 ('like, such as', 'if'; 1.52%), and 羽 ('feather'; 0.68%) in the Taiwanese names, and 彩 ('colour, colourful'; 3.71%), 帆 ('sail, sailing boat'; 1.36%), 遙 ('distant, remote'; 0.92%), and 裕 ('abundant, rich, fertile'; 0.57%) in the Japanese. 彩, for example, is used to wish the girl a positive, cheerful disposition as well as a gorgeous, colourful life. 盈 and 裕 express abundance and fulfilment; 帆 and 遙 allude to future possibilities.

Japanese end characters, and the ‘ateji’

Although the meaning of the characters is one of the key criteria for the selection of a name, a considerable number of the most frequent characters in the Japanese names are not used primarily for their meaning, but either as a typical end character or for its specific reading, often in foreign sounding names.

子 (‘child, girl’), read as /ko/, has been traditionally used in female names as an end character (○子, ○○子), as, for example, in *Natsuko* 夏子 or *Kumiko* 久美子 (for the development of 子 in female names see Barešová, 2020). Although the most common meaning of the character in modern Japanese is ‘child,’ originally it was used in female names not for this meaning but as an honorific suffix (Kida, 2002; Hashimoto and Itō, 2011). Having dominated female names for most of the twentieth century, the character experienced a significant drop in use in the 1990s; however, it is still the most frequent character in the examined set of Japanese names (15.16%), despite occurring exclusively in the last position of the name. 乃 (‘I, myself’, possessive particle; 2.25%), read as /no/, and 江 (‘creek, inlet, bay’; 0.51%), read as /e/, are other traditional end characters of female names (○乃, ○○乃; ○江, ○○江). Unlike 子, they are now less frequently chosen also for other positions in the name to match the desired sound, as, for example, in the names *Kanoko* 佳乃子 and *Erina* 江理雅.

These two names are of the so-called *ateji* or *manyōgana* type, quite frequent in the corpus. Their selection most likely started with a desired phonological form to which characters were assigned: one character to each mora. The following characters are used mostly in this type of names, some of them are foreign sounding.

亜 (‘Asia’; 1.4%) is used primarily for its reading /a/ (e.g., *Yuria* 由理亜, *Arisa* 亜里沙), 加 (‘add, increase, join’; 1.36%) for its reading /ka/ (e.g., *Kanako* 加奈子, *Yukari* 友加里), 奈 (as in Nara; 8.4%) for its reading /na/ (e.g., *Nanami* 奈々未, *Nana* 奈菜), and 沙 (‘sand’; 3.11%) and 早 (‘early, fast’; 1.11%) for their reading /sa/ (e.g., *Sayaka* 沙也加, *Saki* 早希). 央 (‘centre, middle’; 1.08%) and 緒 (‘beginning, end’, ‘cord, strap’; 0.82%) are used to represent /o/ (e.g., *Kaori* 加央里, *Nao* 奈緒). 利 (‘advantage, benefit, profit’; 0.57%) is part of various compounds, the meaning of which may be the motivation for the selection of the character, but it is mainly the sound /ri/ for which it is chosen (e.g., *Yurisa* 有利紗, *Erika* 絵利香). 津 (‘haven, port, harbour, ferry’; 0.54%) is used mostly for its reading /tsu/ (e.g., *Natsumi* 奈津美, *Natsuko* 奈津子). 耶 (question mark; 0.70%) is chosen to represent /ya/ (e.g., *Sayaka* 沙耶香, *Aya* 亜耶), 由 (‘reason’, ‘significance’, ‘cause’; 3.04%) is popular especially in female names to represent /yu/ (e.g., *Yuri* 由莉, *Sayuri* 彩由里), and 有 (‘possess, have, exist’; 1.81%) represents /yu/ or /yū/ (e.g., *Yukari* 有佳里, *Yūka* 有香).

While there are some Taiwanese names that consist of two identical characters, the Japanese instead make use of an iteration mark 々 (0.95%) as, for example, in the names *Nanako* 那々子 or *Nana* 奈々.

5.5 Summary

The above categories give us a basic idea of the nature of characters used in the two sets of names. Not all the characters are used primarily for their denotative or symbolic meaning. The Japanese set includes several characters that are used as traditional gender-specific end characters, and a larger number of characters that are used primarily for their sound. 子 /ko/, the most typical female end character, is at the same time the most frequent character in the analysed Japanese name set, but it should be noted that after a gradual decline in popularity in the previous decades it experienced a further drop during the 1990s, changing from a once prominent character to “one of many” at the beginning of the new millennium. The Taiwanese names do not make use of specific end characters indicating gender in the same way the Japanese names do, but some characters are considered gender-identifying (see, e.g., Slaměniková, 2018, 2019; van de Weijer et al., 2020).

Unlike the use of the traditional end characters in Japanese names, which is related to the more traditional method of name selection described above, the increased use of characters primarily for their sound (reading) is related to the more recent method of choosing the desired phonological form first and assigning characters to it, often irrespective of their meaning, paying attention to a favourable number of strokes, a pleasant overall image and other criteria. The sound of their child’s name is of major concern also for Taiwanese parents and the suitable characters are chosen with regard to the sound they represent, however, it generally is not the starting point in the name selection process. On the other hand, the choice of a particular character may be motivated, for example, by a fortunate number of strokes or the need to supply a missing element (according to the five-element theory) in the name rather than its meaning.

Leaving aside the characters that are used in the names primarily for other reasons than their denotative or symbolic meaning, the majority of the most frequent characters are one of two or three main types, respectively: names in the Japanese set mostly feature characters denoting 1) various qualities and traits, and 2) plants and their aspects. Three types of characters stand out in the variety of the Taiwanese set: in addition to the two types prevailing in the Japanese set, there are also jade and jade-related characters.

The two names mentioned in the Introduction, *Yating* 雅婷 and *Misaki* 美咲, were not only the most popular names in the respective cultures in the 1990s, but at the same time convey the most widely represented qualities in the name sets: beauty, gracefulness, and elegance. These qualities are accompanied by kindness and gentleness, peacefulness, and serenity, and also intelligence, which is particularly notable in the Taiwanese set, honesty, uprightness, and appropriateness. The girls are wished to have hope and wishes, be loving and loved. The Taiwanese names, more than the Japanese, also directly express the desire for happiness.

In addition to this direct expression, similar desired qualities are conveyed indirectly, through innumerable associations, especially with plants, and with jade in the Taiwanese names. In Japan, names featuring characters denoting the natural world marked a new trend in the 1990s (Makino, 2012, pp. 83–84), which is in female names manifested especially by characters denoting plants and their various aspects. Especially flowers, tree blossoms, and also various kinds of fragrance – the last being well-represented in the Taiwanese names – are very feminine; they evoke pleasant images and are naturally associated with beauty, elegance, kindness, and affection. Particular plants also represent various other character qualities and human values and are associated with a particular season.

The other abundant source of associations and symbolism in the Taiwanese names, even more prominent than plants, is jade. Being a highly valued gemstone in Chinese culture, jade is extremely rich in its symbolism, which, in addition to the obvious associations with beauty, refinement and preciousness, is employed to convey various other desired qualities.

6. Conclusion

As we have described in 3.4, the choice of names in each of the two cultures is determined by slightly different naming practices and criteria, but is always made with respect to the named individual, reflecting particular perceived or anticipated aspects, such as the child's physical appearance or desired character traits, wishes and aspirations concerning their future, time or circumstances of their birth, etc. Many of these meanings cannot be directly interpreted from the name and remain known only to the close family, satisfying their need for a well-thought-of, bespoke name, whose origin they could one day tell their child.

Personal and cultural values, reflected in parental expectations of their offspring, have been changing hand in hand with the changing life conditions, and the changing prevalence of certain names testifies to short-term influences as well as more fundamental changes in society. For example, in the first half of the twentieth century, common wishes reflected in Japanese female names included a desire for wealth, prosperity, and longevity whereas in the last decade of the same century, in affluent society with good medical care and high life expectancy, such wishes became rather infrequent. Just as rare, for instance, became moral qualities that had been commonly represented in female names before the war, such as virtuousness, faithfulness, obedience, and filial piety (Barešová, 2016). Similar reflections of changing social conditions and parental preferences in name selection were observed by Liao (2000) in Taiwanese society. The two cultures experienced a rapid economic development in the second half of the twentieth century, accompanied by a significant rise in the living standards and overall well-being, and also

changes in family structure and family values. The names bestowed in the 1990s to some extent reflect this reality.

Both Japanese and Chinese female names from the examined period are characterized by unique combinations of a wide variety of characters, suggesting that they were chosen with much care to fit the particular girl. While in Taiwan this effort is also partially motivated by the small number of surnames (3.2) on the one hand and a much greater stock of characters to choose from (3.3) on the other, in Japan it was strongly encouraged by a boom in maternity magazines and publications advising parents to choose an original name reflecting their child's unique individuality (Kobayashi, 2009). The significant drop in the number of children per family in both countries resulted in an increased care (including name selection) not only for sons but also daughters, implicating a greater appreciation for female offspring and women in general. Name selection reflecting the elevated position of children within the family rather than prospects of their future social life led in Japan to placing more emphasis on the sound of the name, which, unlike in the past, increasingly became a popular starting point for the name selection process (*ibid.*), adding to the overall variety of names. This shift from name selection based on the meaning of the *kanji* to name selection based on the sound and image that can be observed since the late seventies and eighties resulted in the use of many new *kanji* to match traditional as well as new, often foreign sounding names. Many of these new characters are related to the natural world, creating interesting images and relating to the child through various associations rather than their denotative meaning.

The characters used in Japanese and Taiwanese names are chosen for various reasons, with respect to various criteria. The most frequent characters denoting physical and character qualities immediately suggest what the two societies in the last decade of the twentieth century appreciated in women. Today's young Japanese and Taiwanese women born within the examined period were mostly envisioned to be beautiful, refined, and graceful in their appearance as well as character, kind and gentle in their behaviour, and also bright and intelligent. They were wished happiness and love. Various images of a girl who is beautiful, lovely and adorable, gentle, tender, precious or loved are evoked through characters related to the natural world, especially to plants and, in the Taiwanese names also to jade. The repertoires of both plant and jade-related characters are quite extensive, each character providing a slightly different meaning, possessing different symbolism, and representing a different sound. Moreover, plants refer to various seasons or even particular months to nicely match the named girl's time of birth. All these aspects make these characters perfect "building material" to satisfy the various criteria of contemporary name selection.

The studied Japanese and Taiwanese names display differences at various levels of description, which result from language as well as cultural differences. More-

over, very few of the names in the two sets are shared by two or more women, except for the most popular ones. Yet, if we look at them through the prism of meanings and associations for which the characters forming the names are used, we can see a similar general picture, just expressed through different means.

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ODLIŠNÁ, A PŘESTO PODOBNÁ: JMÉNA SOUČASNÝCH JAPONSKÝCH A TAIWANSKÝCH MLADÝCH ŽEN

Článek předkládá komparativní přehled základních charakteristik rodných jmen v Japonsku a na Tchaj-wanu a na základě analýzy primárních dat poskytuje vzhled do doby jmen japonských a tchajwanských žen narozených v poslední dekádě dvacátého století. U jmen je zkoumána jejich délka, struktura, a především sémantický význam. Studie jména zasazuje do dobového kontextu a bere do úvahy kulturně specifická kritéria výběru jmen i dobové trendy. Navzdory řadě rozdílů na všech úrovních popisu lze u jmen pozorovat pozoruhodnou podobnost, zejména co se týče významů, jež mají vyjadřovat. Prostřednictvím znaků, jimiž jsou zapsána, odrážejí – ať již přímo či pomocí nejrůznějších asociací či aluzí – podobné dobové hodnoty, aspirace a očekávání týkající se pojmenované osoby, a umožňují tak netradiční vzhled do uvedených společností v daném období.

Klíčová slova

rodná jména; Japonsko; Tchaj-wan; způsoby pojmenování; významy jmen; populární jména

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