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## FROM EVERGREENS TO BLOSSOMS: THE CHANGING PLANT MOTIFS IN JAPANESE FEMALE NAMES\*

In the last few decades, flowery female names have surged in popularity in Japan, along with other nature motifs, reflecting desired qualities and aspirations. Although plant motifs have always been found among female names, the popularity of particular plants has been changing, and some once common names have fallen into disuse, lacking any appeal to the modern Japanese. This paper examines plant motifs and their symbolism in recent female names compared to names bestowed a century ago, and discusses how these changes in plant selection reflect the changes in the values and priorities of Japanese society.

### Keywords

Japanese given names, kanji, language of flowers, name-giving trends, plant motifs

### Introduction

Contemporary Japanese given names are usually not selected from some limited stock of existing names, but rather are formed as a unique paring of phonological and graphic forms, guided by various criteria. Through the Chinese characters (*kanji* in Japanese) chosen for the graphic form of the name the name givers can convey desired meanings and evoke various images and associations. While the creation of a particular name depends on personal preferences, education and other individual factors, given names also reflect the period in which they were bestowed, revealing social attitudes and values, especially the hopes and aspirations typical for parents at that time, as well as fashionable trends.

As has been previously pointed out in various studies (e. g., Honda, 2005; Makino, 2012; Barešová, 2015; Barešová, 2016), recent Japanese names have been dominated by *kanji* relating to the natural world, such as plants, animals, stones, the land and the sea, the sky and heavenly bodies, natural phenomena such as the weather and seasons of the year, etc. These *kanji* are often chosen not for their primary meaning, but rather for some image they evoke. For example, 空 means 'sky', which evokes largeness and in names usually symbolizes broad-mindedness and big-heartedness. 海 ('sea') creates similar images.

A number of the most popular *kanji* that appear in current female names signify plants (trees and flowers) or particular parts (a blossom, a bud, a leaf, fruit), or even one of their characteristics (fragrance, blooming), which are used to allude to

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various associations with human appearance and character (Barešová, 2015, p. 5). Plant motifs have always been found among female names, but the popularity of particular plants has been changing, and some once common names have fallen into disuse, lacking any appeal to the modern Japanese. This paper compares plant motifs and their symbolism in recent female names to those in names a century ago, and discusses how these changes in plant selection reflect the changes in the values and priorities of Japanese society.

### Description of the data

The first set of names analyzed in this study contains 941 female names bestowed between 1872 (when the comprehensive Family Registry was established) and 1907, collected from the website *Nihon no chōjusha*,<sup>1</sup> a database of Japanese centenarians. The second set contains names of girls born 2008–2016, collected from the website *Bebī karendā* [Baby Calendar]<sup>2</sup> and its older versions. Each of these 4,806 entries comes with a short commentary by the parents. This background information often reveals details of the name selection process, such as the motivation and main criteria for the selection, as well as the intended interpretation.

### Basic characteristics of Japanese female names

The modern Japanese writing system employs a combination of adopted logographic Chinese characters (*kanji*) and two syllabic alphabets (*hiragana* and *katakana*), collectively known as *kana*. In addition, it makes use of the Latin alphabet and Arabic numerals. *Kana* is a phonographic script, while *kanji* are mostly morphographic, i.e. they represent morphemes that convey a particular meaning.

A Japanese given name can be written in *kanji*, *kana*, or some combination of the two, but cannot include letters from the Roman alphabet or Arabic numerals. Current female names are usually three-mora (less frequently two-mora) long, written in one to three *kanji*, most frequently two. *Hiragana*, which has been traditionally considered feminine, is used mainly in a limited number of popular names, and *katakana* is quite rare.

The *kanji* permitted for use in names are regulated, and it is not possible to register a name written in other than the permitted *kanji*, of which there are currently almost three thousand. Although not all of them are suitable for names, this still allows almost limitless combinations. For example, one of the currently most popular female names, *Hana*<sup>3</sup> ('flower, blossom'), can be found with more than

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<sup>1</sup> Available at: <http://datacollectionsite.web.fc2.com/> (last retrieved 2017-07-18).

<sup>2</sup> Available at: <https://baby-calendar.jp/> (last retrieved 2017-11-11).

<sup>3</sup> The names in this paper are transcribed using the Hepburn system of romanization, which follows English pronunciation. Long vowels are transcribed using the macron.

forty different graphic forms, including 花, 華, 羽夏, 羽那, はな, 花奈, 華奈, 波奈, 花南, 羽菜, 晴菜, 陽菜, 葉奈, 花菜, 英奈, 華菜, and 華那. The first two, 花 and 華, have the meaning ‘flower’, thus corresponding with the meaning of the phonological form, but, for instance, the third graphic form, 羽夏 (‘wing(s)’ + ‘summer’), has nothing to do with flowers. Similarly, a particular graphic form can be found with various phonological forms. For example, the currently popular graphic form 結菜 is read *Yuna*, *Yuina* or *Yūna*. This method of assigning *kanji* to the phonological form based purely on their phonological or semantic relationship enables parents to create a name that is both popular and unique.

The key factors considered during the name selection/creation process include the sound, the meaning of the *kanji*, and the overall image the name evokes. The name is not usually considered only on its own merits, but also in respect to the family name and also in respect to numerology, particularly the number of strokes. Other factors involved include the uniqueness of the selected name within the family, but with some relationship to the names of the child’s parents, grandparents and/or siblings, and a socially appealing and interesting name. Parents usually begin the selection process with their most important criteria and then try to accommodate their other priorities as well (Barešová, 2016, p. 33). As one would expect, this can sometimes be a painstaking process.

In the second half of the nineteenth century the situation was quite different. The majority of female names were simple two-mora names written in *kana*, although around the turn of the century, writing female names in *kanji* became increasingly common. Since Japanese has numerous homonyms, the meaning of a name could be ambiguous, unless written in *kanji*. For example, the name *Asa* could mean ‘morning’ but also ‘hemp’. When considering possible meanings, the following works, published at the time or shortly after the time from which the names come, were consulted: “Japanese Female Names” by Lafcadio Hearn from 1905 (originally published in 1900), “Japanese Female Names of To-day” by Suzuki Sakaye from 1916–17, and *Japanese Names and How to Read Them: A Manual for Art Collectors and Students* by Albert J. Koop and Hogitarō Inada, published in 1923. While it is not possible without further information to determine whether a particular *Asa* in the corpus was meant as ‘hemp’ or ‘morning’, it is at least possible to verify that both interpretations were common at that time.

### Plants found in the first set of names

Female names bestowed in the last decades of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century originate in words denoting abstract notions as well as concrete objects, including human virtues and other personal qualities, life conditions, numbers and order, time, plants, animals, materials, geographical names and features of the landscape, household and other objects, art and literature, etc. (Barešová, 2017, p. 49–50). Names denoting plants represent one of the most numerous groups.

**Table 1:** Plants found in the first set

Plants and their occurrence			Examples of names <sup>4</sup>
1.	<i>matsu</i> (松)	‘pine’	32 <i>Matsu, Matsue, Matsui, Matsuno, Matsuo, Matsuyo, Komatsu, Omatsu</i>
2.	<i>kiku</i> (菊)	‘chrysanthemum’	20 <i>Kiku, Kikue, Kikumi, Kikuno</i>
3.	( <i>m</i> ) <i>yume</i> (梅)	‘plum (blossom)’	17 <i>Komume, (M)yume, (M)umeno, Umeyo</i>
4.	<i>take</i> (竹)	‘bamboo’	13 <i>Take, Takeno, Takeyo</i>
5.	<i>hana</i> (花)	‘flower, blossom’	10 <i>Hana, Hanae, Hanako</i>
6.	<i>asa</i> (麻)	‘hemp’	5 <i>Asa, Asae, Asano</i>
7.	<i>yone</i> (米)	‘rice-grains’	5 <i>Yone, Yoneno</i>
8.	<i>maki</i> (榎/榿)	‘podocarp’	4 <i>Maki, Makie, Makiyo</i>
9.	<i>sasa, shino</i> (篠)	‘bamboo grass’	4 <i>Sasayo, Shino</i>
10.	<i>sugi</i> (杉)	‘Jap. cedar (Cryptomeria)’	4 <i>Sugi, Sugino, Sugiyo, Osugi</i>
11.	<i>yae</i> (八重)	‘double (-petalled)’	4 <i>Yae, Yaeko, Yaeno</i>
12.	<i>tane</i> (種)	‘seed’	3 <i>Tane</i>
13.	<i>tsuta</i> (蔦)	‘ivy’	3 <i>Tsuta</i>
14.	<i>fuyo(o)</i> (芙蓉)	‘cotton rose (Hibiscus mutabilis)’	2 <i>Fuyo</i>
15.	<i>kaya</i> (萱 or 榲)	‘miscanthus’ or ‘Jap. nutmeg tree (Torreya nucifera)’	2 <i>Kaya</i>
16.	<i>ryū</i> (柳)	‘willow’	2 <i>Ryū</i>
17.	<i>yuri</i> (百合)	‘lily’	2 <i>Yuri</i>
18.	<i>azusa</i> (梓)	‘catalpa tree’	1 <i>Azusa</i>
19.	<i>ine</i> (稻)	‘rice plant’	1 <i>Ine</i>
20.	<i>kuwa</i> (桑)	‘mulberry (tree)’	1 <i>Kuwa</i>
21.	<i>nae</i> (苗)	‘seedling, sapling, shoot’	1 <i>Nae</i>
22.	<i>sakura</i> (桜)	‘sakura, cherry (blossom)’	1 <i>Sakura</i>
23.	<i>sumire</i> (菫)	‘violet’	1 <i>Sumire</i>

This table presents all the plants and their parts identified in the older names, listed in the order of their frequency. It offers some flowers (chrysanthemum, cotton rose, lily and violet) and tree blossoms (plum blossom, cherry blossom), some deciduous trees (willow, mulberry tree, catalpa tree), and especially a variety of evergreen plants (pine, bamboo, bamboo grass, Japanese cedar, podocarp, ivy, and Japanese nutmeg tree). There are also some crops (rice grains, rice plant, and hemp) and some names denoting parts of plants (flower/blossom, double-petalled blossom, seed, and seedling).

<sup>4</sup> As these old names are mostly written in *kana* they are provided here only in transcription.

## Plants found in the second set of names

Nowadays, there are some popular names whose phonological forms clearly denote plants, such as *Hana* ('flower, blossom'), *Sakura* ('cherry blossom'), *Momo/Momoka/Momoko* ('peach'), *Sumire* ('violet') and *Yuri* ('lily'), but it is much more common to find plant motifs in the graphic form of the names. The phonological form is frequently created as a mere combination of pleasant-sounding syllables, often resembling foreign names, to which suitable *kanji* are assigned. Let us, for example, consider the name *An* 杏. The *kanji* in which it is written has the meaning 'apricot', *anzu* in Japanese. But the phonological form of the name corresponds to another reading of the *kanji*, resembling the foreign name *Ann* (although *Anzu* can be found in the corpus as well). Similarly, the *kanji* compound 杏花 means 'apricot flower', *kyōka* in Japanese, but as a female name this graphic form can be found with the foreign-sounding phonological form *Anna*.

The following table lists all the *kanji* signifying plants found in the latter corpus. Their frequency/popularity is partly determined by the ability to match desired phonological forms. For example, the popularity of the first two *kanji* is influenced by the fact that they can be read /na/ and /ka/, respectively, which are currently the most popular end syllables of female names. However, the plant symbolism and the images they create play a significant role in the selection as well.

As the Japanese can choose from almost three thousand *kanji*, the occurrence of even the most popular *kanji* is not particularly high. However, it should be noted that the first 15 *kanji* of the 43 related to plants rank among the 50 most frequent *kanji* in the corpus.

**Table 2:** Plants found in the second set

Kanji denoting plants and their occurrence			Examples of names
1.	菜	'rapeseed blossom'	263 杏菜 <i>Anna</i> , 陽菜 <i>Haruna/Hina</i> , 月菜 <i>Runa</i>
2.	花	'flower, blossom'	261 愛花 <i>Aika</i> , 穗花 <i>Honoka</i> , 百花 <i>Moka</i> , 結花 <i>Yuika</i>
3.	莉/萊	'jasmine'	216 愛莉 <i>Airi</i> , 莉愛 <i>Ria</i> , 莉音 <i>Rio(n)</i> , 萊棧 <i>Mao</i>
4.	咲	'to blossom, bloom'	173 咲希/咲輝 <i>Saki</i> , 咲那 <i>Sana</i> , 咲優/咲結 <i>Sayu</i>
5.	香	'fragrance, scent, perfume'	150 明日香 <i>Asuka</i> , 香恋/香玲 <i>Karen</i> , 美香 <i>Mika</i>
6.	桜/櫻	'sakura, cherry (blossom)'	118 美桜 <i>Mio</i> , 里桜 <i>Rio</i> , 桜 <i>Sakura</i> , 櫻子 <i>Sakurako</i>
7.	華	'flower, splendid, gorgeous'	98 愛華 <i>Aika</i> , 華楓 <i>Kaede</i> , 梨華 <i>Rika</i> , 一華 <i>Ichika</i>
8.	梨	'nashi, pear tree'	86 愛梨 <i>Airi</i> , 梨愛 <i>Ria/Rina</i> , 梨咲 <i>Risa</i> , 由梨 <i>Yuri</i>
9.	実	'crop, harvest, fruit'	85 愛実 <i>Ami/Manami</i> , 実愛 <i>Mia</i> , 実咲 <i>Misaki</i>
10.	柚	'yuzu (Citrus junos)'	81 柚愛 <i>Yua</i> , 柚衣 <i>Yui</i> , 柚花 <i>Yūka/Yuna</i> , 柚春 <i>Yuzu</i>
11.	芽	'bud, to sprout/ spear'	67 彩芽 <i>Ayame</i> , 芽寿 <i>Ibuki</i> , 芽彩 <i>Mei</i> , 結芽 <i>Yume</i>
12.	杏	'apricot'	63 杏/杏音 <i>An</i> , 杏珠 <i>Anju</i> , 杏梨 <i>Anri</i> , 優杏 <i>Yūa</i>

13.	葵	‘hollyhock, sunflower’	61	葵/葵依 <i>Aoi</i> , 陽葵 <i>Himari</i> , 優葵 <i>Yuki/Yūki</i>
14.	葉	‘leaf’	57	青葉 <i>Aoba</i> , 葉奈 <i>Hana</i> , 葉瑠 <i>Haru</i> , 彩葉 <i>Iroha</i>
15.	穗	‘ear of rice’	55	穗華/穗香 <i>Honoka</i> , 花穗 <i>Kaho</i> , 菜穗 <i>Naho</i>
16.	桃	‘peach (tree)’	33	桃杏 <i>Moa</i> , 桃萌/桃々 <i>Momo</i> , 桃仁香 <i>Monika</i>
17.	萌	‘sprout, burst into bud’	33	萌美 <i>Megumi/Moa</i> , 萌衣 <i>Mei</i> , 萌依子 <i>Meiko</i>
18.	麻	‘hemp’	25	麻衣 <i>Mai</i> , 麻希 <i>Maki</i> , 麻琴 <i>Makoto</i> , 麻桜 <i>Mao</i>
19.	果	‘fruit’	24	果穗 <i>Kaho</i> , 果音 <i>Kanon</i> , 凜果 <i>Rinka</i> , 輝果 <i>Ruka</i>
20.	蘭	‘orchid’	15	美蘭 <i>Miran</i> , 蘭 <i>Ran</i> , 結蘭 <i>Yuara</i> , 優蘭 <i>Yura</i>
21.	莓	‘strawberry’	13	莓 <i>Mai</i> , 莓子 <i>Maiko</i> , 莓那 <i>Maina</i> , 莓紗 <i>Maisa</i>
22.	栂	‘autumn foliage, birch, maple’	8	春栂 <i>Haruka</i> , 帆栂 <i>Honoka</i> , 栂 <i>Momiji/Kaede</i>
23.	柑	‘citrus, orange’	9	柑凧/柑那/柑七/柑奈/柑菜 <i>Kanna</i> , 柑琳 <i>Karin</i>
24.	堇	‘violet’	6	堇/堇礼/早堇 <i>Sumire</i>
25.	梓	‘catalpa tree’	5	梓/梓沙 <i>Azusa</i>
26.	椰	‘type of tall evergreen tree’	4	葉椰 <i>Kanna</i> , 心椰 <i>Kokona</i> , 真椰 <i>Mana</i>
27.	芭	‘banana’	4	芭音 <i>Hanon</i> , 菜々芭 <i>Nanaha</i> , 優芭 <i>Yūha</i>
28.	芙	‘lotus; cotton rose (芙蓉)’	5	芙采 <i>Fūa</i> , 芙槻 <i>Fuzuki</i> , 芙羽莉 <i>Fuwari</i>
29.	樺	‘birch’	2	樺音 <i>Kanon</i> , 樺恋 <i>Karen</i>
30.	茅	‘miscanthus reed’	3	茅依 <i>Chiori</i> , 依茅花/依茅佳 <i>Ichika</i>
31.	芹	‘parsley’	3	芹迦 <i>Serika</i> , 芹愛/芹菜 <i>Serina</i>
32.	薰	‘send forth fragrance, fragrant’	2	薰 <i>Kaoru</i> , 薰穗 <i>Yukiho</i>
33.	椰	‘coconut tree’	2	紗椰 <i>Saya</i>
34.	榎	‘hackberry (Celtis sinensis)’	2	明日榎 <i>Asuka</i> , 榎恋 <i>Karen</i>
35.	松	‘pine tree’	1	松菜 <i>Matsuna</i>
36.	梅	‘plum’	1	乎梅 <i>Koume</i>
37.	芦	‘reed, bullrush’	1	萌芦 <i>Mero</i>
38.	枝	‘branch, twig’	1	七枝 <i>Nae</i>
39.	榛	‘hazelnut’	1	榛乃 <i>Haruno</i>
40.	槲	‘podocarp’	1	小槲 <i>Komaki</i>
41.	木	‘tree’	1	木乃香 <i>Konoka</i>
42.	種	‘seed’	1	種夏 <i>Shuna</i>

The plants listed include a number of particular flowers and tree blossoms, such as the rapeseed blossom, jasmine, sakura or cherry blossom, hollyhock and sunflower, and some fruit trees appreciated for both their blossoms and fruit, such as pear, apricot, yuzu and others. There are two *kanji* with the meaning ‘flower’, both ranking among the top ten. In addition, there are also *kanji* representing various stages of a plant’s growth, or otherwise related to plants.

Because the first set of names is mostly in *kana* and the later set is mainly in *kanji*, it is not really possible to make a meaningful statistical comparison between

the two, but it is easy to see that the plants that rank high in the first table, such as the pine, chrysanthemum, plum and bamboo, are rare in the second set of names or do not appear in it at all. The only exception is *hana* ('flower, blossom'). The name *Hana* was common as a female name a hundred years ago and recently it has been one of the most popular names. The *kanji* 花 ('flower, blossom') and 華 ('flower, splendid, gorgeous'), as mentioned above, are very popular, too.

### Parents' aspirations reflected in the names

As mentioned earlier, Japanese given names are chosen or created based on particular ideas relating to their bearers, wishes and aspirations concerning their future, in relationship to the time of their birth, etc. The desired meanings are expressed either directly, through words or *kanji* denoting the particular meaning, or indirectly, using words or *kanji* which express them through various associations or symbolism. Plants, in addition to being often associated with a particular season of the year, represent various character qualities and human values.

The first set of names features non-blossoming plants, mainly evergreens. The most frequent is pine, which symbolizes longevity, good fortune and steadfastness (Baird, 2001, p. 61), and was used in names to wish the newborn girls long and healthy life. Other winter-resistant evergreen plants, such as *maki* ('podocarp'), *sugi* ('Japanese cedar'), *take* ('bamboo') and *tsuta* ('ivy'), similarly represent health, longevity and constancy. The late-flowering chrysanthemum is also a popular symbol of long life (Hearn, 1905, p. 137). So is the plum, which often appears with the pine and bamboo as the three symbols of winter (Baird, 2001, p. 66). In a period with limited medical care and high infant mortality, parents sought to bless their children with good health and longevity. Therefore, rather than flowers that soon wither winter-resistant evergreen plants were more commonly used in names. With increasing living standards these hardy plants gradually disappeared from female names.

While *hana* ('flower, blossom') was probably used for its aesthetic appeal, particular flowers and blossoming plants were used to symbolize various moral values and character qualities rather than to allude to beauty (Hearn, 1905, p. 137). This is not surprising considering that Confucianism was the dominant ideology at that time. For example, the plum is a symbol of perseverance and strength and also represents feminine virtue, the bamboo stands for fidelity, the cedar for moral rectitude, the willow for docility, gentleness and physical grace. Lily is a symbol of purity, the hemp of straightforwardness (Ibid.).

Virtues, health and longevity that seem to be the main motivation behind the selection of names denoting plants were, actually, at that time the most common aspirations expressed in female names in general. In addition to names that expressed such qualities directly, names denoting plants expressed them indirectly,

through the plant's symbolism. While, for example, the name *Hisa* ('long time, eternity') expresses the desire for long, healthy life directly, the name *Matsu*, meaning 'pine', expresses the same desire through the plant's symbolism. In other words, names denoting character qualities, moral values and virtues and names denoting plants were often motivated by similar aspirations for the newborn.

Unlike the old names, currently bestowed names are dominated by flowers and blossoms. Parents usually choose *kanji* signifying various plants to allude to obvious associations with human appearance and character qualities, but, as apparent from the explanations in the corpus, also for their less commonly known symbolism and meanings in the language of flowers, or *hanakotoba* in Japanese.

The explanations in the corpus show that the parents' selection of many of the *kanji* signifying various flowers and blossoms is motivated by very similar aspirations desired for their daughters. Flowers and blossoms are usually appreciated for their beauty, they bring people joy and are used to express love and affection, and thus the *kanji* 花 ('flower, blossom') and 華 ('flower, splendid, gorgeous') as well as most of the *kanji* signifying particular flowers or blossoms (e.g., 菜 'rapeseed', 莉 'jasmine', 桜 'sakura', 梨 'pear', 杏 'apricot'), and also those related to flowers, such as 咲 ('to bloom') and 香 ('fragrance'), are used to evoke an image of a girl who is beautiful, lovely and adorable, affectionate, gentle, tender, and who is loved like flowers.

This creates a nice parallel with qualities that are expressed in currently bestowed names directly. The top three *kanji* in the corpus signifying human qualities are 愛 ('love, affection'), 美 ('beautiful') and 優 ('tender, kind, gentle-mannered').

This image common to most flowers and blossoms is enriched by the specific associations or symbolism of each particular plant.<sup>5</sup> The bright-yellow rapeseed blossoms or the sunflower are often chosen to evoke a positive, cheerful character. *Matsurika*, in English known as Arabian jasmine, refers to both human appearance (cute, pretty, lovely, and charming) and qualities (pure-hearted, graceful, refined, sensual, and amiable). The small white or pink flowers of sakura symbolize kindness, gentleness, physical as well as spiritual beauty (grace, refinement and elegance). Pear blossoms symbolize affection, charity and benevolence. The meaning of yuzu in the language of flowers, which is also frequently mentioned in the corpus, is 'healthy' and 'beautiful'.

The following two pairs of examples demonstrate how the same plant motif, the rapeseed blossom in (1a) and (1b) and jasmine in (2a) and (2b), are chosen for their general associations, and for their specific meanings in the language of flowers:

<sup>5</sup> The meanings of individual plants in the Japanese language of flowers mentioned in the following descriptions come from the explanations in the corpus and were also checked with several online *hanakotoba* dictionaries. For a more detailed description see Barešová (2015).



- (1a) Parents named their daughter born in 2011 *Hina* 姫菜 (‘princess’ + ‘rapeseed blossom’) wishing for her to grow up to be sweet and lovely like a flower.
- (1b) Parents named their daughter born in 2011 *Yūna* 結菜 (‘to tie, bind, join’ + ‘rapeseed blossom’). They chose the second *kanji* because rapeseed is the mother’s favorite flower and in the language of flowers it means ‘lively, energetic’.
- (2a) Parents named their daughter born in 2012 *Ria* 莉愛 (‘jasmine’ + ‘love’) wishing for her to be a girl who is sweet and adorable like a flower.
- (2b) Parents named their daughter born in 2009 *Marina* 茉莉奈 (‘jasmine’ + ‘Nara’). They wanted a cute feminine name featuring a flower, and decided for jasmine, because in the language of flowers it means charming and amiable.

In addition to *kanji* signifying particular plants, there are also *kanji* representing various stages of a plant’s growth, again creating various associations. A bud, a leaf or an ear of rice usually allude to quick and healthy growth and vitality. The old names *Tane* (種 ‘seed’) and *Nae* (苗 ‘seedling, sapling’) were probably motivated by similar aspirations. Rice (the ear of rice), crop and fruit are associated with fruitful life and prosperity. The old name *Yone* (米 ‘rice grain’) was also associated with wealth (Hearn, 1905, p. 118).

Parents select *kanji* signifying a particular plant not only to express various aspirations for their child, but also to commemorate their child’s birth, as flowers and blossoming trees are usually associated with the season or even particular month in which they bloom. Similarly, the bud and the leaf (usually understood as fresh green leaves) are associated with the spring and early summer, while the fruit and crop with the autumn.

## Conclusion

Names denoting plants can be found among female names of any generation, but their variety has been changing over time, reflecting the changes in the values and priorities of Japanese society. Many of the plants identified in the older names are winter-resistant evergreen plants, representing the importance of health and longevity in an era of high infant mortality and poor living conditions, whereas today such names are rare. Moreover, these vigorous plants, and indeed plants of all sorts, used to be selected primarily for the Confucian virtues and other moral values they symbolized. This is in stark contrast to the flowers and trees appreciated for their blossoms and fruit chosen today, which give us a much different picture of the qualities appreciated in a contemporary woman. In addition to their specific symbolism, the plants that appear in current names are used to evoke an image of a girl who is beautiful in her appearance as well as character, adorable, affectionate, kind, and gentle-mannered, and who also has a blossoming unique personality.

The current popularity of flowery names is part of the overall trend of selecting *kanji* that will nicely complement the chosen phonological form, providing pleasant images and expressing the parents' aspirations through various associations and symbolism, while at the same time fulfilling any other prioritized criteria, including a favorable number of *kanji* strokes, in their search for perfect name to fit their child. The various meanings the parents include in the name through various associations or even the language of flowers usually stay known only within the family, satisfying their need for a custom-made name perfect in all aspects, whose origin they can one day explain to their child.

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## **OD STÁLEZELENÝCH ROSTLIN KE KVĚTŮM: ROSTLINNÉ MOTIVY V JAPONSKÝCH ŽENSKÝCH JMÉNECH**

V posledních několika desetiletích jsou v Japonsku obzvláště populární ženská jména s přírodními, především rostlinnými motivy, jež prostřednictvím nejružnějších asociací a symboliky vyjadřují představy a přání rodičů vůči jejich dcerám. Ačkoli rostlinné motivy nalezneme v ženských jménech každé generace, popularita jednotlivých rostlin se s dobou mění a některé, dříve ve jménech zcela běžné motivy ze současných jmen téměř vymizely. Tento článek se zabývá rostlinnými motivy v současných ženských jménech ve srovnání se jmény volenými zhruba před sto lety a na základě toho si všímá, jak se mění hodnoty a priority japonské společnosti.

### **Klíčová slova**

japonská rodná jména, jazyk květin, rostlinné motivy, trendy ve volbě jmen, znaky

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