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## Evaluating Contradictory Hypotheses on the Effects of Regional Differences in the Selection of Novel Naming Patterns in Japan

### *Overview*

Son's name *Tarō*, father's name *Ichirō*, mother's name *Hanako*—or daughter's name *Hanako*, father's name *Tarō*, mother's name *Yoshiko*: Look at any example of how to fill out a birth registration form in Japan, and there is a good chance that these names that will be used, as they are in *Ii Namae Netto* (2007) and *Jūminhyō Gaido* (2014).<sup>1</sup> Yet while these seem to be the most stereotypically Japanese names, none of these names are frequently given today. Most contemporary baby names do not include previously popular name-exclusive *tomeji* suffixes like *-ko* and *-rō*, but rather use *kanji* 'Chinese characters' in unusual ways. These trends have been widely taken up on both local and national media (e.g., Anonymous 2015 in the *Asahi Shimbun* Morning Edition; Inagaki 2013 in the *Mainichi Newspapers* Regional Edition/Aichi; Yasutane 2011 in the *Yomiuri Shimbun* Osaka Morning Edition), resulted in new books—both academic (Kobayashi 2009; Satō 2007) and non-academic (Makino 2012; Ito 2015)—and been large enough to result in several new words for names such as *kirakira nēmu* 'sparkly names' and *DQN nēmu* 'stupid/ill-educated names'.

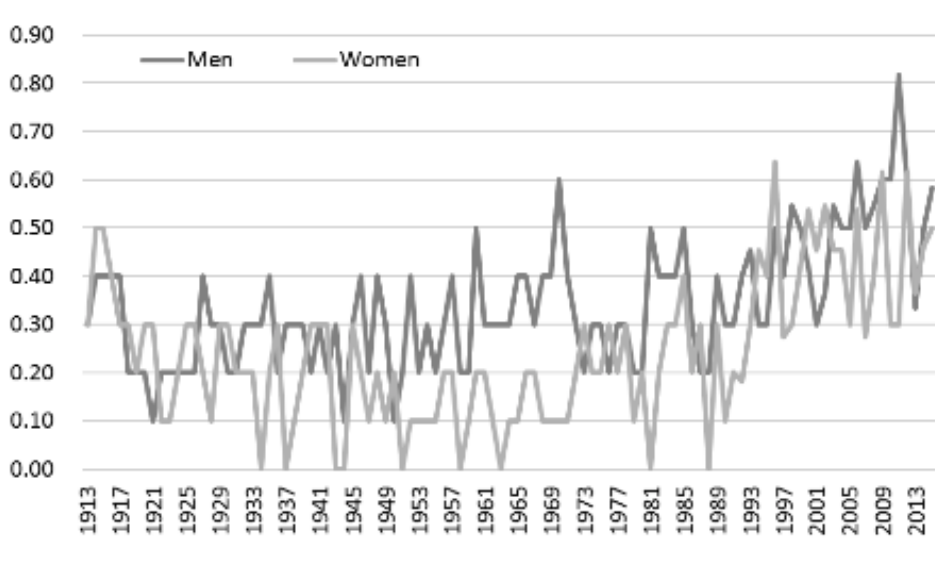
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<sup>1</sup> Editors' note: "Good name network" and "Resident card guide".

However, it is not clear whether these trends are really occurring on a national basis. Compared to the United States, where all names given more than five times in the previous year are released publicly (Social Security Administration, U.S.A. 2016), there are no large data sets in Japan, and the closely-protected nature of the *koseki* family registers' is such that they not likely become available in the future. This makes tracking changes in naming patterns very difficult, but popular criticism of new names and the reasons for these changing practices hint at potentially different distributions, suggesting regional variation is an important point to consider. By looking at data extracted from 12 municipal newsletters across Japan, this paper attempts to both bridge the current understanding on the extent and depth of these changes in naming practices, as well as providing insight into alternate ways of collecting data.

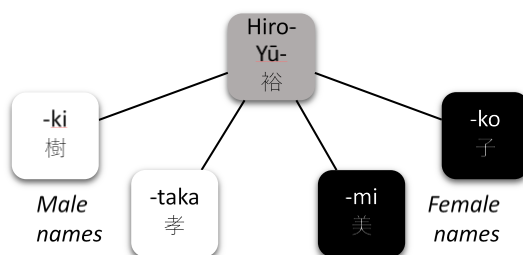
### *Changes in Japanese Naming Practices*

One of the quickest ways to appreciate how dramatically naming patterns have shifted is to look at historical changes in popular names. Using data from Meiji Yasuda Life Insurance (2015b; 2015a), which has made public the most popular names from each year since 1912, Table 1 shows the percentage of names which appeared in the top-10 compared with the previous year, or the turnover rate. A higher turnover rate indicates a smaller number of names carried over from the previous year; continued high turnover rates suggest that change is underfoot. Both men's and women's names had very low turnover rates in the early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, with women's particularly low: For several years (first in 1934, last in 1988), the turnover rate was zero, meaning that no new names breached the top-10. This changes in the 1990s, and the turnover rate—while not in its highest ever (0.82 in 2011 for men, 0.64 in 1996 for women)—is now consistently high from year to year. Given that a high turnover rate indicates more changes in the most popular names, this suggests that Japanese names are becoming more diverse, and generally speaks to the major changes that Japanese names have witnessed.



**Figure 1:** Turnover rate in top-10 most popular names, 1913 to 2015 (originally from Unser-Schutz 2016b).

Typically, Japanese names are written in *kanji*, although they may be written with the phonetic syllabaries *hiragana* and *katakana*. Japanese is relatively open to the creation of new names (Honda 2005), particularly through the use of *kanji* and structural elements. Prior to the 1990s, it was common to feature a *tomeji*, which are usually gendered. Figure 2 shows examples of these older types of names: With a single *kanji* base, read *Hiro* or *Yū*, at least six distinct names can be created by adding the common suffixes *-ko*, *-mi*, and *-ki* (*Hiroko*, *Hiromi*, *Hiroki*, *Yūmi*, *Yūko*, *Yūki*). In addition, for men’s names, an additional *kanji* with a two mora *nanori-kun* name-exclusive Japanese reading can be used to make another name (e.g., 裕孝 *Hiroataka*).



**Figure 2:** Example of typical name creation, pre-1990s.

A caveat must be made that many of these characteristics are relatively new. As Jugaku (1990) describes, *kanji* was not generally used for women's names until the Meiji period (1868-1912). Although it is often thought of as the typical ending for women's names, coming to close to 90% in some communities in the mid-1920s, *-ko* also used to be used exclusively by the aristocracy and upper classes (Komori 2002). Seemingly typical *tomeji* like *-mi* only began to appear in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century after this. The last century was a time of great change for men's names, too; previous to the Meiji period (upper class) men would have taken several names over their lifetimes, but restrictions against this initially created a jumbled situation, whereby different types of names that all would have been used in different contexts (childhood *yōmyō*; adolescent *wakana*; adult *jitsumyō*, etc.) were all being given to children as their only personal name (Yanagita 2014, 122–25). Men's names also then went through different *tomeji* trends, as well as distinctions based upon the length of names (Komori 2002).

However, generally the 20<sup>th</sup> century featured a trend towards the standardization of personal names. Laws passed in 1872 required individuals to choose only one name, and limited their ability to change their names, which went against previous practices of changing names over one's lifetime. Subsequent moves further limited freedom in naming, with the *kanji* usable in names first limited with family register laws in 1948, and the creation of the *jinmeiyō-kanji* 'kanji for names' in 1951. These legal changes limited how one could create new names, and it is easy to imagine that they acted as a frame for considering how to give names. Indeed, these restrictions were framed in terms of desirability of names to be *jōyō-hei'i* 'common and easy' and larger movements towards the democratization of Japanese writing (see Emmanji 2005 on the background and impetus for creating the *jinmeiyō-kanji*). As a result, by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century most popular names were similar, as observable in the low turnover rate and in structural and *tomeji* elements (Unser-Schutz 2016b).

More recently, there has seen a decline in the use of popular *tomeji* and other common elemental characteristics: The number of *-ko* names given has dropped off dramatically (Kobayashi 2001; Komori 2002), and names using numbers to represent birth-order have all but disappeared (Honda 2005). The number of *jinmeiyō-kanji* have increased, opening up

the pool of potential *kanji* used. These pre-1990s characteristics have been replaced by unusual uses of *kanji* (Tokuda 2004; Satō 2007), with new names commonly (1) mixing the types of *kanji* readings, e.g., using Sino-Japanese *on*, native Japanese *kun*, and name-exclusive *nanori-kun* in the same name; (2) using non-established *ateji* readings; (3) altering established readings; and (4) using *kanji* as blanks exclusively for their meanings, with no phonetic contributions (see examples in Table 1).

Orthographic form	Phonetic form	How kanji are read
		1) <i>Nanori-kun</i> : <i>mi</i> from ‘海’
海流斗	Minato	2) Altered <i>kun</i> : <i>na</i> from <i>nagasu</i> ‘流す’ 3) <i>On</i> : <i>to</i> from ‘斗’
		1) Altered <i>kun</i> : <i>mei</i> from <i>me</i> ‘芽’
芽美	Meimi	2) <i>On</i> : <i>mi</i> from ‘美’
		1) Altered <i>kun</i> : <i>koko</i> from <i>kokoro</i> ‘心’
心寧	Kokone	2) Altered <i>on</i> : <i>ne</i> from <i>nei</i> ‘寧’

Table 1: Examples of names using *kanji* in unusual ways.

Such non-standard uses make reading names less predictable, and there is a common belief that new names are difficult to read (Satō, 2007). *Kanji* generally have low phonetic transparency: It is not clear how to read *kanji* without sufficient context, making it sometimes unclear how to read any given name. However, names may have been easier to read prior to the current trends: Because there was more overlap in names before the current trends, previous experience was more useful when determining how to read names one encountered, which was assisted by structural elements like *tomeji*. Indeed, survey-based research shows that, compared with recent children’s names, their parents’ names—which generally followed the older patterns described here—are more consistently read (Unser-Schutz 2012).

These new types of names have been met with strong criticism, and their reception is generally negative. As reviewed in Unser-Schutz (2015), they are said to not function socially; are assumed to be a burden on

others who need to read them; and are thought to have a negative impact on children, particularly in delicate contexts such as interviews. The terms that have been created for these new names are particularly telling: *Kirakira nēmu* ‘sparkly names’, used sarcastically in criticism of choosing overly unique names, and *DQN nēmu*, from the internet slang *dokyun* (DQN) meaning stupid or ill-educated. As with the term *DQN nēmu*, the criticism of names has generally focused on *kanji* misuse, and problematizes parents’ ill-education (Unser-Schutz 2016a).

### ***Regional Variation and Naming Practices***

Names—and particularly surnames—can include a variety of information about their bearers’ origins, and in Japan, comparing contemporary and historical distributions of surnames can be used to give new insight on regionalization (Cheshire et al. 2014). However, surnames are far less susceptible to trends than personal names. In contemporary Japan, the only real changes that occur in surnames are through marriage. Married couples must have the same name; with no option to combine or create new names, one spouse must adopt the other’s. A limited number of names are added to the pool through international marriage and naturalization; when a Japanese national marries a foreign national, they may choose to use their partner’s name, and foreign nationals must adapt their name to the Japanese writing system when naturalizing (see Murphy-Shigematsu 2000). With these exceptions, however, there is generally no license to create new surnames. There are also no restrictions on the *kanji* used in surnames, since such restrictions post-date the establishment of the registering of surnames.

It is less clear how regional variation effects personal names. There are some obvious differences in ethnically, linguistically or culturally distinct groups, such as the Ainu; in the past there were also distinct naming practices in Okinawa, where the use of three naming systems (Okinawan names, Japanese names, and Chinese names) was common (see Ōtō 2012 on Ainu and Okinawan naming practices). Prior to the contemporary period, personal names may have had some similarities regarding regionalism as today’s surnames do amongst *wajin* Japanese. In the Edo period (1603-1868), when peasants were not permitted to use surnames publicly, “. . . commoners’ personal names functioned very much like family names,

a means to identify an individual according to group belonging and integrating him or her into the village structure. . . . Even personal names represent village social structure and hierarchy, and facilitated succession” (Plutschow 1995, 177). This role was largely eliminated following an 1875 law forcing all individuals to register a surname, and the larger patterns of standardization may have also lowered the potential ways and desires for more regional variation. Limitations on the *kanji* for names may have limited regional variation, since differences in community practices and uses of *kanji*—of which there are more than are sometimes assumed, as with Sasahara’s (2013) *hōgen kanji* ‘dialect *kanji*’—would have been greatly undermined. Having been situated as part of the democratization of Japanese writing, one goal of the *jinmeiyō-kanji* could be said to be limiting such variation.

Over time, however, there have been some important changes which might imply that regional variation is more acceptable now. As noted above, the *jinmeiyō-kanji* have slowly increased, with 12 updates to the list over time, all but nine occurring on or after 1990; as of the most recent updates, 862 *kanji* are on the *jinmeiyō-kanji* list, along with 2,136 on the *jōyō-kanji* ‘*kanji* for everyday use’, bringing the current number of *kanji* for names to 2,998, the highest since restrictions were first set in 1948. This seems to be motivated both by changes in desires and popular demand, as well as a lowered sense of need to limit *kanji* for practical administrative reasons in the digital age (see Emmanji 2005). Recent years have also seen a more positive attitude towards regional differences, and attitudes towards *hōgen* ‘dialects’ have become more receptive than they were in the early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (overviewed in Carroll 2013).

This suggests that people may be more open to expressing regional differences through names, and some regional differences have been admitted as reasonable motivation for changes in the *jinmeiyō-kanji*. In 1997, parents in Okinawa—also known as 琉球 *Ryūkyū*—tried to use the character 琉 in their newborn’s name. As this character was not included in either the *jinmeiyō-kanji* or the *jōyō-kanji*, the name was originally rejected. The parents then sued, and their claim that 琉 would, in Okinawa, substantially fit the requirements that *kanji* in names be easy and common was admitted. This ruling allowed them to use it in their child’s name, and lead to its being added to the *jinmeiyō-kanji* (see Yasuoka 2011 for details). The ruling could set precedence in future court

cases pressing to accept regional differences, and it is possible that such cases will come up again.

At least initially, it would seem that regional issues are not relevant in the current naming trends. In addition to the numerous newspaper articles noted above, *kirakira nēmu* have been taken up as popular topic on TV and other media, such as a featured corner on Fuji TV's popular *SMAP X SMAP* show on 23 February 2015, and they have been reported as being found in rural areas, too (Satō 2007). Looking at the reasons behind these trends, however, one finds contradictions on what to expect. On the one hand, the criticism towards new names is strongly concerned with issues of education and the appropriate use of *kanji*. This may be interpreted as at least partially a class issue (Unser-Schutz 2016a); if these hypotheses are correct, then the increased centralization of education in Japan into cities (Mock 2016) would suggest that rural areas should have more unusual names: If people are giving *kirakira nēmu* because they lack knowledge about appropriate *kanji* use, then they should be given more in areas where there are fewer educational opportunities. On the other hand, research suggests that the lack of consideration for how names are read is licensed partially because of changing consciousness of the public and private spheres (Kobayashi 2009), and their increase seems to be correlated with changing social values towards more individuality (Ogihara et al. 2015). Given that urbanization has transformed social ties in Japan (Akaeda 2011) and that urban areas tend to experience social change faster, this might suggest that more rural areas should have fewer unusual names. Properly assessing the distribution of new names would not only assist in clearing up these contradictions, but could also give insight into patterns of social change and regionalism in Japan.

### ***Current Survey***

To examine these issues, I analyzed the name patterns observed in 12 communities across Japan by examining the distribution of unusual names and overlap in names between communities. To do so, I followed Satō (2007) in using data from municipal *kōhōshi* 'newsletters'. *Kōhōshi* are newsletters produced by the local authorities that are usually delivered to members of the community for free, and which give information



about local events and issues. They often have columns on birth announcements and letters from parents; crucially, these columns usually include *furigana* ‘phonetic glosses’ (see Table 2), solving the problem of knowing names’ readings. Municipal newsletters are also useful because they potentially allow for the tracking of trends over time through back issues. I selected target municipalities based upon a survey of 1,020 newsletters on *Jichitai.com* (Unser-Schutz 2014a); of those, 50.39% included either birth announcements or letters from parents, and 97.28% of those had *furigana*. Table 2 shows an example of the kind of data obtainable: First started in November 2010, ‘Inochi no kizuna/A bond of life’ is a column running in *Kōhō Kyōtango/Kyōtango News* featuring pictures of children born in local hospitals, along with their and their parents’ names, their area, and a message from their parents.

Message	Name (Gender)	Month born / Birth weight	Parents' names	Area born
Genki ni umarete kite kurete arigatō Yatto aeta ne. Kono hi ga kuru no o tanoshimi ni matteta yo. Korekara yoroshikune.	山添大翔 <small>ひろと</small> (Boy)	January / 2,750g	Mother: 淳子 <small>じゆんこ</small> <i>Junko</i> Father: 宏明	Aminochō, Amino
Thank you for being born healthy We've finally met. We've really been looking forward to meeting you.				

**Table 2:** Example of data extracted from *Kōhō Kyōtango* from March, 2015 (readings only available for child's and mother's personal names; message translated by author).

I selected the largest municipality with the targeted data from each of the eight major areas of Japan and Okinawa, which, while often included as part of the Kyūshū region, is culturally and linguistically distinct (Table 3, Figure 3). I also included three additional municipalities from auxiliary studies (Unser-Schutz 2012, 2014b), including one rural and one medium-size Kantō municipality, given the importance of the Kantō region, which includes Tokyo, and one rural Hokkaidō municipality to complement the data from the much larger suburban municipality initially included for Hokkaidō.

I collected monthly issues from April 2013 to March 2016, extracting 1,573 names (female: 705, male: 868). All names were categorized by *kanji* use into either *more opaque*, meaning that they used *kanji* in ways that

made it unclear how they should be read and were thus potentially more difficult to read and unusual in form, or *more transparent*, meaning that it is clearer how they should be read because they do not mix reading types in unpredictable ways and/or use syllabaries. *More opaque* names included any name that mixed the types of *kanji* readings; altered or shortened versions of established readings; or used *ateji* readings. For the purposes of this study, readings which included the conjugating parts of verbs or adjectives that would normally be written in *hiragana* called *okurigana* (e.g., the *yui* of 結音 *Yuine*, a conjugated form of the verb *yu(u)* usually written 結<sub>い</sub>) were not considered alterations, nor were forms that used the roots of adjectives (e.g., the *waka* in 若羽' *Wakaba*, the root of the adjective *waka(i)* 'young'). For each municipality, I also calculated the number of different orthographic forms—e.g., different uniquely written names—and the number of different phonetic forms—e.g., different uniquely pronounced names—as well as the percentage of names seen more than once or the *repeat rate* for both forms.

It must be noted that in general, the 2014 newsletter survey showed a negative correlation between municipality sizes and names data, meaning that bigger municipalities tended not to have either target column. Bigger municipalities may not include them because of pragmatic reasons (there are simply too many children born each month to include them all); higher sensitivity to privacy concerns (as in Table 2, they often include detailed personal information); and a lowered sense of community concern (the desire to show the healthiness and attractiveness of the community by displaying its youngest members may not be as strong). As a result, the sample is somewhat skewed towards medium and small-sized municipalities; the additional data sets were also included in consideration of this.

Area	Prefecture	Municipality	Column type	Population
1. Hokkaidō	Hokkaido	Eniwa	Our Idol	69,200 <sup>*</sup>
2. Tōhoku	Iwate	Ichinoseki	Our Idol	121,473 <sup>§</sup>
3. Kantō	Ibaraki	Koga	Our Idol	144,338 <sup>§</sup>
4. Chūbu	Aichi	Toyokawa <sup>+</sup>	Our Idol	182,884 <sup>#</sup>
5. Kinki	Kyōto	Kyotango	Our Idol	57,009 <sup>*</sup>
6. Chūgoku	Okayama	Hayashima	Birth announcements	12,305 <sup>§</sup>
7. Shikoku	Kōchi	Tosa	Our Idol	27,956 <sup>#</sup>
8. Kyūshū	Kumamoto	Amakusa	Our Idol	84,350 <sup>#</sup>
9. Okinawa	Okinawa	Miyakojima	Our Idol	54,265 <sup>*</sup>
1. Hokkaidō	Hokkaido	Otobe	Our Idol	3,932 <sup>*</sup>
3. Kantō	Saitama	Ina	Our Idol	44,437 <sup>§</sup>
3. Kantō	Tōkyō	Oshima	Birth announcements	8,053 <sup>*</sup>

Table 3: Sample municipalities (Romanization follows municipalities' official websites).

<sup>+</sup>: Data for Toyokawa up to March, 2015 following discontinuation of column.

<sup>\*</sup>, <sup>#</sup>, <sup>§</sup>: Newest population data available as of mid-September 2016, specifically <sup>\*</sup>/as of end of August 2016; <sup>#</sup>/as of 1 August 2016; <sup>§</sup>/as of 1 September 2016.

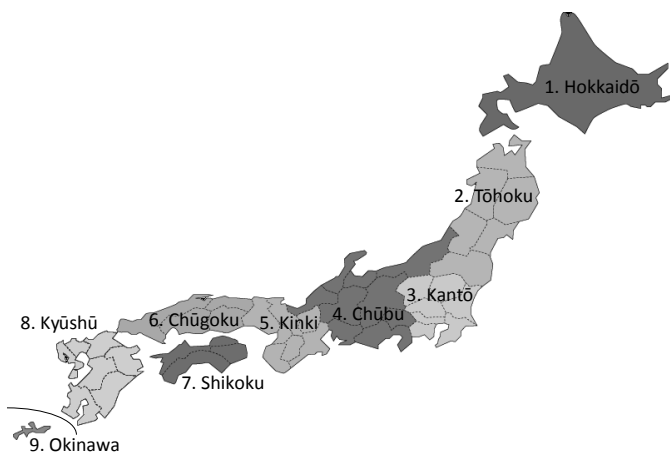


Figure 3: Map of regions of Japan (adapted from start-point.net).

## Results

### Repeat Rate of Names

Of the 1,573 names extracted, 1,309 or 83.21% featured unique orthographic forms, meaning that few names were written the same way twice. Of the 176 orthographic forms seen more than once, 17 were used only within the same municipality, and 160 were used within municipalities, with 22 of those also seen more than once within specific municipalities. The orthographic form most frequently seen were 陽向 and 湊. 陽向 was seen seven times in seven municipalities all read *Hinata* (female: 2, male: 5); 湊 was also seen seven times in seven municipalities, all for boys and read *Minato*. The highest repeat rate for any municipality was Hayashima, where 5.69% of orthographic forms were seen more than once. Three municipalities—Eniwa, Miyakojima and Toyokawa—had *no* names repeat; these were also the towns with the smallest individual samples, however, and there were no statistically significant differences between the municipalities ( $\chi^2(11) = 14.828$ , ns) (Table 4).

Municipality	Orthographic forms				Phonetic forms				Total names
	Repeats	1t	2t+	Unique	Repeats	1t	2t+	Unique	
Amakusa	2.64%	295	8	303	23.81%	176	55	231	311
Eniwa	0.00%	31	0	31	0.00%	31	0	31	31
Hayashima	5.69%	265	16	281	24.22%	169	54	223	298
Ichinoseki	2.68%	109	3	112	13.27%	85	13	98	115
Ina	3.70%	104	4	108	12.12%	87	12	99	112
Koga	2.00%	49	1	50	8.70%	42	4	46	51
Kyotango	2.17%	180	4	184	18.18%	126	28	154	188
Miyakojima	0.00%	47	0	47	6.82%	41	3	44	47
Oshima	2.90%	134	4	138	10.24%	114	13	127	142
Otobe	1.69%	58	1	59	11.11%	48	6	54	60
Tosa	0.60%	167	1	168	15.49%	120	22	142	169
Toyokawa	0.00%	49	0	49	4.26%	45	2	47	49
<i>Total</i>	<i>13.45%</i>	<i>1,133</i>	<i>176</i>	<i>1,309</i>	<i>40.08%</i>	<i>423</i>	<i>283</i>	<i>706</i>	<i>1,573</i>

**Table 4:** Number of unique orthographic and phonetic forms of names by municipality; *repeats*: percentage of names seen more than once; *1t*: number of names seen once; *2t+*: number of names seen two more times; *unique*: number of different names; *total names*: cumulative number of names.

In comparison, there were 706 unique phonetic forms, meaning that 44.88% of all the names were unique in pronunciation; this gap with the number of repeated orthographic forms suggests that the same phonetic forms were written by multiple orthographic forms. Of those 706, 283 were seen repeatedly, with 15 seen multiple times in one municipality and 268 seen in multiple municipalities, 112 of which were also seen multiple times in one municipality therein. The most common names were *Haruto* and *Yūto*. As predictable by the low repeat rate of orthographic forms, both phonetic forms were used 19 times with multiple orthographic forms: *Haruto* 12 forms (暖翔, 陽音, 遙斗, etc.) and *Yūto* 14 forms (優翔, 悠杜, 雄大, etc.). The municipality with the highest repeat rate was Hayashima (24.22%) followed by Amakusa (23.81%); as with the repeat rate for orthographic forms, the lowest were Eniwa (0.00%) and Toyokawa (4.26%). These differences were found to be significant ( $\chi^2(11) = 42.216$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $V = 0.181$ ), but both Eniwa and Toyokawa had much smaller samples than the others, and Cramer's  $V$  suggests that this effect is weak.

### *Distribution of Reading Types across Municipalities*

The overall percentage of names using *kanji* in ways which were less transparent and thus likely more difficult to read was 56.51%, demonstrating that this was a common phenomenon (Figure 4). In addition, although the range of names using unpredictable orthographic forms was between 45.16% (Eniwa) and 65.22% (Ichinoseki), suggesting some variation, it also shows that names using *kanji* for less transparent readings were common across municipalities and that, relatedly, no municipality had exceptionally low levels of unusual names. There were no statistically significant differences found between the municipalities regarding the distribution of difficult to read names ( $\chi^2(11) = 11.894$ , ns). Checking by gender, no significant difference was found between municipalities for men's names ( $\chi^2(11) = 8.451$ , ns); for women's names, the only significant difference ( $\chi^2(11) = 22.896$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $V = 0.180$ ) was between Kyotango (78.57%) and Tosa (53.57%), but Cramer's  $V$  again suggests this effect is weak.

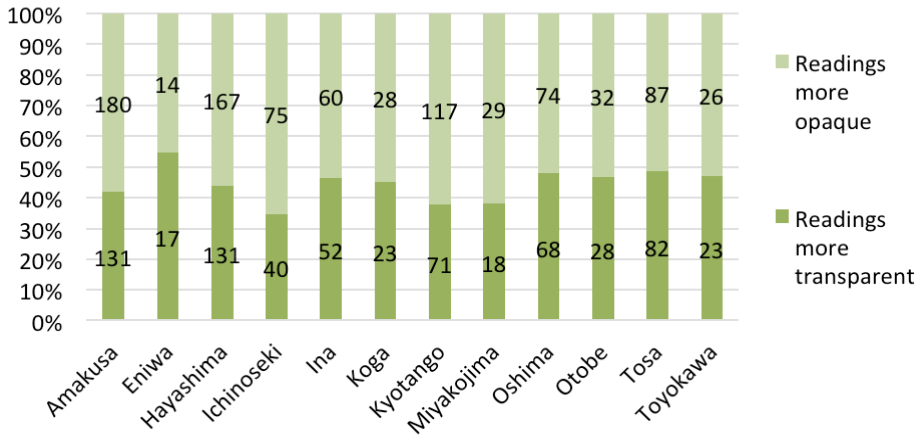


Figure 4: Distribution of names by municipality by use of kanji

## Discussion

In general, the results show that the distribution of names which use *kanji* in ways that make their readings more opaque—and by correlation, more difficult to read—is largely comparable across Japan. At over 50% of names on average, it is also clear that they are generally common, rather than exceptional. In addition, the low repeat rate for orthographic forms—both for individual municipalities and overall—suggests that variation is not higher *within* municipalities than *between*: Any given name one encounters is just as likely to be written differently if one looks at names from the same municipality, or from other municipalities. On the other hand, that the overall repeat rate for phonetic forms of names was higher than it was for any individual municipality suggests that a large number of common phonetic forms are seen throughout Japan. That is to say, although any given name encountered is likely to be different *orthographically* from other names encountered, there is a reasonable chance that it is *phonetically* the same as others. The higher repeat rate for phonetic forms than for orthographic forms also indicates that there are few default forms for writing a particular phonetic form of a name, but rather that the process of selecting *kanji* for any given name is highly personalized.

These results also show that neither of the competing hypotheses about whether rural or urban areas would feature more unusual names were upheld, since there were few significant differences between the municipalities regardless of size. Instead, it seems clear that these new types of unusual names are common throughout Japan, and that they are not obviously associated with a particular regional community. The scope of these trends suggests that people are being influenced in their selection beyond the limited experience they and their local family, friends or neighbors may have had. Importantly, while naming can be one way of connecting and involving both the newborn children and other family members into personal relationships, previous studies have suggested that there is currently a tendency to not involve people outside of the nuclear family in the naming process (Unser-Schutz 2014b), which is suggestive of changes in family relationships.

The parents of the youngest newborn generation, most of whom are likely too old still to have been born during the current naming trends, are also clearly not choosing names like those that the people around them have. This hints that they must be influenced by outside sources that go beyond regional boundaries. Kobayashi (2009) argues that one of the leading factors for the changes in naming practices was the publication of *TamaHiyo/Egg-Babies*, a popular baby naming book with its roots in *Tamago Kurabu/Egg Club* magazine. *TamaHiyo* is well known for its information on baby names, and it appears to have included some of the earliest encouragement to give unique names to one's children. Benesse, the publisher of *TamaHiyo*, continues to publish yearly baby name books, and the data they themselves collect through surveys on parents' naming choices have come to be an important resource for doing names research, such as with Ogihara et al. (2015). As Kobayashi notes, *TamaHiyo* was unique at the time because it included a wide variety of names that parents could use as reference, and because it also used those names to closely analyze the current trends and encourage parents to select timely names. By offering parents the ability to be trend-conscious, *TamaHiyo* offered a new way to think about choosing names, as well as framing them as a nation-wide issue beyond local communities.

These changes clearly speak of changes in how information is spread in contemporary society. There have never been as many resources promising parents that they offer the right way to select a name for their

child as there are today, from the myriad numbers of paper books on naming practices such as *Akachan no Namae Happi Kanji Jiten/Baby Name Happy Kanji Dictionary* (Seitoshu Henshūbu 2014) and *Kopi Raita ga Kangaeru Kodomo o Shiawase ni Suru Nazuke no Kotsu/Tricks to Names to Make Your Child Happy by Copy Writers* (Shimizu 2016), to websites such as *Onamae Jiten/Name Dictionary* (<http://name.m3q.jp>) and *Akachan Meimei Gaido/Baby Naming Guide* (<http://www.b-name.jp>). Such resources provide alternate channels outside of the family and local ties to select names; internet sources in particular, which are constantly being updated, likely push on the speed of change and raise consciousness towards trends.

### *Conclusions*

The results here have clearly established that the current problematized naming trends are being witnessed across Japan, which seems to be related to changes in how names are chosen and how quickly information can spread within contemporary society. There are some limitations to the current study, particularly the variation in data available for each municipality. This is expectable given the particular aims of the columns targeted: They are more common in smaller communities, which have fewer children to report on. To further the current analysis, I am now adding older data from back issues. In this paper I also did not look at whether the *kanji* used in each municipality were different. As with the Okinawa 琉 case, regional differences may not be expressed within the name as a whole. However, it should not be presumed to be a certainty: Having been added to the *jinmeiyō-kanji*, 琉 became available to people throughout the country, such that it was found 27 times in the current sample, only three of which were from Okinawa's Miyakojima. While these issues must be taken up in a different forum, the current study has also shown the viability of *kōhōshi* for research on regional differences and naming practices, and it is hoped that it will encourage the development and use of these resources for research.

Taking the question of regionalism to a higher level, on a final note it is interesting to note that similar shifts in naming practices can be observed in many other countries. The United States has also witnessed an increased diversity of names, and these changes have been shown to



correlate with increasing individualistic values (Twenge, Abebe & Campbell 2010), as Ogihara et al. have found in Japan (2015). Although one could point to Europe, and in particular France and Germany, as the forgers of the standardization of naming and registration as forms of regulating identity (overviewed in Caplan 2001), many countries there, too, have begun to relax their policies. Although France long regulated the names allowed to be given, since 1993 parents have been free to choose any name as long as it was not against the child's best interests (Blume 1995). The most important recent case has come out of Iceland, however, where a 2013 decision in favor of allowing a girl to use the name that her parents were not able to register because it was not on the list of names for women was framed as part of her rights under European human rights conventions (Helgason 2013), which may offer precedent for such movements in other European countries.

Within Asia, South Korea also seems to be going through similar changes. Like Japanese, the Korean language is relatively open to the creation of new names. Although today *hanja*—the Korean word for *kanji*—are not generally used to write Korean, many Korean names can be written in *hanja*, and like Japan, South Korea has a restricted list of *hanja* for personal names (Na 2014). Like Japan, South Korea is also a society in the midst of dramatic change; one can hypothesize that South Korean names are similarly transforming, and reports seem to support that. Names based upon native Korean morphemes (e.g., not *hanja*-based) have become more popular while the role of family members outside the nuclear family has lessened (Song 2014), hinting that South Korean and Japanese names are indeed going through similar transformations, but that they are not necessarily being expressed in the same ways. The fact that such transformations in naming practices can be observed across the globe strongly suggests that their investigation may be telling of some universal qualities of contemporary society; given their particular situational similarities, comparisons between contemporary naming practices in Japan and South Korea might offer especially compelling insights.

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