

IRENA KAŁUŻYŃSKA

CHINESE PERSONAL NAMING:
TOP TEN CHINESE GIVEN NAMES OF BABY GIRLS
BORN IN 2021

Abstract. The purpose of this paper is to discuss some linguistic and cultural aspects of the contemporary Chinese personal naming system. These aspects are crucial while analysing the top ten Chinese female given names as those of the highest occurrence among names of baby girls born and registered in 2021 in the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC). The analysis is focused on their lexical and associative meanings. The names are categorised according to the interpretation of the lexical meaning of the constituent lexemes/terms. Also, the repetitiveness of given names is analysed. The Chinese naming system has never restricted the inventory of possible given names, i.e. given names are supposed to be formed individually (a new name for a new person). However, in practice, many people make use of already existing given names (an old name for a new person). As a result, it happens that hundreds of millions of people in China have the same given name, which undermines these onyms' main purpose – to identify the referent.

Keywords: Chinese given names; Chinese female names; repetitiveness of Chinese names; semantic transparency of Chinese names; meaning of names

CHIŃSKIE NAZEWNICTWO OSOBOWE:
DZIESIĘĆ NAJPOPULARNIEJSZYCH IMION DZIEWCZYNEK
URODZONYCH W 2021 ROKU

Abstrakt. Celem tego artykułu jest omówienie niektórych aspektów językowych i kulturowych współczesnego chińskiego nazewnictwa osobowego. Aspekty te są istotne podczas analizy dziesięciu najpopularniejszych chińskich imion żeńskich jako tych o najwyższej częstotliwości występowania wśród dziewczynek urodzonych i zarejestrowanych w roku 2021 w Chińskiej Republice Ludowej (ChRL). Analiza tych imion dotyczy ich znaczenia leksykalnego i asocjacyjnego. Nazwy są kategoryzowane według przyjętej interpretacji znaczenia leksykalnego leksemów/terminów,

Dr hab. IRENA KAŁUŻYŃSKA, Associate Professor at the University of Warsaw, Faculty of Asian and African Cultures, Department of Sinology; e-mail: i.s.kaluzyńska@uw.edu.pl; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6043-5557>.

Articles are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

z których są zbudowane. Zwraca się również uwagę na problem powtarzalności imion. Chiński system nazewnictwa nigdy nie ograniczał inwentarza możliwych imion, a więc imiona mają być tworzone indywidualnie (nowe imię dla nowej osoby). Jednak w praktyce wiele osób korzysta z już istniejących imion (istniejące imię dla nowej osoby). W rezultacie zdarza się, że setki milionów ludzi w Chinach nosi te same imiona, co ogranicza główną funkcję onimów, jaką jest identyfikacja referentów.

Slowa kluczowe: imiona chińskie; chińskie imiona żeńskie; powtarzalność imion chińskich; semantyczna transparencja imion chińskich; znaczenie imion

INTRODUCTION

There are various schools and approaches in onomastic studies. The methods and principles of analysing personal names have been mainly elaborated by Western scholars. However, many theoretical and practical problems still await their scientific solution, which is important for the further development of the scientific description of personal names.

One of the major controversies concerns the meaning of personal names. Some scholars have denied that personal names as proper names have any meaning at all, while others, on the contrary, have claimed that their meaning-content is exceptionally large. Two eminent scholars, John Stuart Mill and Otto Jespersen, are often regarded as representatives of two opposite points of view. Mill's (1865, 52–56) opinion that a proper name is "an unmeaning mark", it is meaningless and functions only as a label marking an extralinguistic entity, has gained quite widespread acceptance in Western linguistics. However, Jespersen (1925, 64–71) held the opposite opinion, namely that proper names ideally have only one referent but the largest possible content of meaning, as those connoting the greater number of attributes. As the disagreement seems to arise from the difference in the definition of the concept of meaning, there have also been many attempts to build a bridge over these two opposite views (Kałużyńska 2002, 89–91; 2008, 14–16).

According to Nicolaisen (1974, 104), (cf. also Kałużyńska 2002, 91–93; 2008, 16–17; 2010, 125–28), it may be assumed that proper names can reflect three levels of meaning: (i) the lexical level, i.e. the dictionary meaning of the word or words comprising the name; (ii) the associative level, i.e. the reason or reasons why the particular lexical or onomastic items are used in the naming process; and (iii) the onomastic level, i.e. the identification of a name as the name of an entity. These three levels of meaning are treated in this paper as three kinds of the possible meaning of the analysed Chinese given names, i.e.

the lexical meaning, associative meaning, and onomastic meaning. Several Chinese terms are used for the concept of “meaning of names”, however there is a lack of clear definitions of the concept (cf. Kałużyńska 2002, 93–95). It seems justified to treat the Chinese term *míngzì hán yì* 名字含义 as ‘lexical meaning of given names’, and *míngzì yù yì* 名字寓意 as ‘associative meaning of given names’, because these two terms are nowadays consequently used by Chinese naming websites (cf. Buyiju-1). As the terms referring to the onomastic meaning of names are considered *zhǐ chēng yì yì* 指称意义 or *zhǐ dài yì yì* 指代意义 ‘identificational/identifying meaning’ (Kałużyńska 2002, 94).

The main function of given names and the reason for their existence in all languages around the world is the identification of referents. The lexical meaning of a name is therefore irrelevant respecting its functioning as a name, because a name without any lexical meaning can also function as a name. Therefore, for given names, it is especially significant that they have the onomastic meaning, even if they cease to have any lexical or associative meaning.

Western personal names are typically chosen from a fixed inventory of onyms, they are almost always opaque and unmotivated, and their lexical meaning is generally not readily available to the public. However, the lexical meaning of given names is vital in societies which do not treat names as mere labels referring to persons but usually perceive them as an essential part of the name bearers, e.g. in Chinese society.

In China it is generally believed that given names influence the bearers’ health, fortune, relationships, marriage, family, career, etc. The name is considered to be inseparable from the fate of its referent and not merely as a label or “an unmeaning mark” differentiating one person from another. In the Chinese lexicon there is no category of words reserved specifically for given names, all words (onyms included) are constructed from the same source of meaningful morphemes. In China, there has never been a fixed and limited set of appropriate given names to be chosen from. Indeed, the idea has always been to form/create given names individually by the processes of onymisation of appellatives and transonymisation of onyms from the Chinese language lexicon (Kałużyńska 2010, 125–27; 2016, 167–68).

As a result, Chinese given names are in most cases semantically transparent and motivated. Name meaningfulness plays an important role in the Chinese naming system. It is evident that semantically transparent names play various social and cultural roles in Chinese society, being descriptive, magic, commemorative, expressive, obligative, poetic, and the like (Kałużyńska 2010, 129–33). Considering names as not only labels helpful in the identification of

people but as almost real facts, enable the Chinese to express their culture-oriented desires by creating their given names in a deliberate manner; they usually pay much attention to their form and meaning. Traditionally, given names have been predominantly selected with attention paid to their semantic content, but also the phonoaesthetic value of syllables and the numerological characteristics of strokes and other elements of Chinese characters used to write them down (Kałużyńska 2008, 18; 2016, 166–67; 2023, 245–48).

Chinese given names are in most cases composed of one or two lexical items (morphemes or words). Most of these lexical items retain their lexical meaning when used in names. A combination of any two items usually represents a combination of their lexical meanings or signifies a new derived meaning. Most of Chinese names are not random combinations. They often have a certain underlying sense or significance, reflecting to some extent the associative level of meaning, i.e. the reason or reasons why the particular lexical or onomastic items are used in the naming process. However, it is often quite difficult to find out the true sense of some names, and sometimes “the true sense” is just based on guesswork (Kałużyńska 2016, 169–71). What is more, among Chinese given names, one can also find some terms or expressions from various philosophical, historical, and literary works, or at least some allusions to them. Their presence sometimes justifies treating these names as derived from quotations or sayings, and, in consequence, they cannot be considered as combinations of “free” lexical items. The problem also concerns the names being just reproductions of already existing given names, so-called shift-names, transfer-names or copied names (Kałużyńska 2002, 240–42).

It was and still is rather difficult to create a new and good given name in China. However, traditionally, name-masters have often helped people to select an appropriate name. Nowadays people can also seek advice on special websites devoted to personal naming. As previously mentioned, Chinese given names are theoretically intended to be formed or even created individually (a new name for a new person). However, in practice, many people make use of already existing popular given names (an old name for a new person), especially those of the famous past and present individuals, or simply fashionable names. As a result, it happens that hundreds of millions of people in China share the same given name. Due to the small number of Chinese surnames, it frequently occurs that millions of Chinese are called exactly the same. In this situation the primary role of onyms as identifiers is impaired.

1. ANALYSIS OF THE MEANING OF GIVEN NAMES AND CLASSIFICATION OF CHINESE FEMALE GIVEN NAMES

The lexical meaning of given names may be analysed from synchronic or diachronic points of view. From the synchronic perspective, the connection between the given name and the appellative vocabulary is usually restricted to the determination of the fact that there is some formal identity between an onym and an appellative. This formal identity is sometimes referred to as homonymy (homophony and homography), where homonyms are unrelated senses of the same phonological word, homographs are unrelated senses of the same written word, and homophones are unrelated senses of the same spoken word (Kuiper 1999, 55). Therefore, some given names that correspond to words current in the appellative vocabulary are considered homonymous with some appellatives, and it is possible to ascertain their meaning (or rather the meaning of appellatives these given names are homonymous with), irrespective of their etymological origin (Dalberg 1985, 132). From the diachronic point of view, the relationships between given names and appellatives (in the terms of their meaning) are considered to be etymological, concerning the origin and historical development of onyms as generally derived from appellatives or linguistic elements that were appellatives in some languages. In this paper the lexical meaning of given names is analysed from the synchronic perspective. The lexical items of names corresponding to the words present in the Chinese lexicon are considered to be homonymous with them and to have the same meaning.

Associative meaning of given names is very difficult to study because associations might arise individually, or in a community, they may be related to a language or culture, or they may be universal. Therefore, it is considered that the associative meaning of onyms includes “all the cognitive knowledge that certain linguistic elements provoke in the mind of a person or persons” (Kałużyńska 2008, 19–20).

Given names are usually categorised according to their semantic content. Most of the European and American semantic classifications may be divided into two main taxonomical types (Kałużyńska 2002, 95–96; 2008, 20–21). The classifications of the first type are word-semantic classifications, based mainly on the interpretation of the appropriate lexical meaning of given names (or rather of the elements they consist of). The classifications of the second type, known as name-semantic classifications, operate at the associative level of meaning and divide names according to the reasons why the particular lex-

ical or onomastic elements have been used in the naming process, emphasising that a particular word does not always function in the same manner.

The very detailed word-semantic classification performed by Kałużyńska (2008, 153–323) has revealed that three broad categories of lexemes cover the majority of semantic fields represented by traditional Chinese female given names (as the fourth category deals with “other lexemes”, causing various classification difficulties). These categories and their subdivisions are given below.

I. Standard given names with lexemes reflecting the status and material attributes of women, containing:

- terms of relationship,
- terms of rank or function,
- terms denoting space of life,
- lexemes denoting articles for daily use,
- lexemes denoting musical instruments,
- lexemes denoting dresses and fabrics,
- lexemes denoting personal ornaments,
- lexemes denoting cosmetics,
- lexemes denoting parts of body.

II. Standard given names with lexemes reflecting feminine softness and female aesthetic values:

1. Standard given names with lexemes describing female appearance and manners.
2. Standard given names with lexemes denoting some natural phenomena:
 - weather phenomena,
 - seasons of the year,
 - times of the day.
3. Standard given names with lexemes denoting natural objects:
 - orographic entities,
 - hydrographical entities.
4. Given names with lexemes denoting plants and trees:
 - flowers and plants,
 - trees.
5. Standard given names with lexemes denoting animals:
 - animals proper,
 - birds,
 - insects and fish.
6. Standard given names with lexemes denoting colours.

III. Standard given names with lexemes reflecting female moral, mental and intellectual values and actions:

1. Standard given names with lexemes reflecting moral qualities of women:

- kind, loving, gentle, good and refined;
- peaceful, stable, sedate;
- clean, honest, upright, and moral;
- respectful, reverent, obedient, and careful;
- happy and joyful;
- magnificent, prosperous, bright, and bold.

2. Standard given names with lexemes reflecting intellectual standards for women.

3. Standard given names with lexemes indicating mental activities and actions of women.

IV. Standard given names with other lexemes (terms denoting the order of birth, numerals, terms for norms and rules, geographical directions and locations, time markers, negators, pronouns, cyclical signs, proper names, etc.).

Some lexemes/terms belonging to the above-mentioned various categories and subcategories occur with a high frequency in female names of all the periods and can be considered as typical for female names in general. However, some terms broadly used in the past in China are rarely applied to name female offspring today.

The analysis of the most popular ten names of baby girls in 2021 tries to fit them into categories and subcategories of this classification.

2. THE TOP TEN CHINESE GIVEN NAMES OF BABY GIRLS BORN IN 2021

According to the report of the Ministry of Public Security of the PRC (*Zhi'an Guanliju*) there were 8,873,000 newborns in the PRC by December 31, 2021: 4,681,000 boys (52.75%) and 4,192,000 girls (47.25%). The monosyllabic names, that is, those names consisting of one word/morpheme/lexical item/character, accounted for 13.97%, and bisyllabic names constructed of two words/morphemes/lexical items/characters constituted 84.55%. The most popular ten names of baby girls in 2021 were as listed in the Table 1 below.

Table 1. The list of the top 10 baby girls given names in 2021 in the PRC

Rank	Name in Chinese characters	Pinyin transcription	Number
1.	若汐	Ruoxi	18,293
2.	一諾	Yinuo	16,884
3.	艺涵	Yihan	15,388
4.	依诺	Yinuo	15,208
5.	梓涵	Zihan	14,221
6.	苡沫	Yimo	13,352
7.	雨桐	Yutong	11,916
8.	欣怡	Xinyi	11,742
9.	语桐	Yutong	10,795
10.	语汐	Yuxi	10,573

The analysed Chinese given names are solely presented in their written form, as recorded in Chinese characters. The transcription of these names into pinyin (*pīnyīn* 拼音) is based on the pronunciation of the lexical items that make up the names. In Chinese dictionaries the lexical entries are mainly grouped according to the Chinese character as the graphical rendering of the lexical item, its pronunciation, grammatical status and meaning. Therefore, one lexical entry may contain several lexemes, as it groups forms that share graphical, phonological, and sometimes grammatical properties, but may differ in meaning, representing either polysemous or unrelated homonymous senses. Moreover, one Chinese character can serve as the graphical form for various lexical items having different pronunciation, grammatical status, and meaning (cf. Kałużyńska 2008, 158).

While analysing the lexical meaning of names, the terms/characters quoted in the paper are presented together with somewhat abbreviated semantic explications found primarily in *Pleco Chinese Dictionary (PCD)*, but also in *Xin Xiandai Hanyu Cidian* [A new dictionary of Modern Chinese] (XXHC). As the same Chinese character is often used to represent many lexemes, the lexemes considered as the most fitting for the particular category are listed first.

While dealing with the associative meaning of the analysed given names the paper makes use of the explications found on several Chinese Internet naming websites. The translation of these associative meanings into English is based on (PCD).

(1) Ruoxi 若汐:

ruò 若 ‘to seem, like, as, if’ (PCD); ‘as if, obedient to, like, to match’ (XXHC);

xī 汐 ‘night tides, evening ebbtide’ (PCD); ‘nighttide, Xi River’ (XXHC).

Likely lexical meaning: ‘like a night sea tide’.

The associative meanings of the name Ruoxi 若汐, according to the naming website Buyiju-1, are considered: *jinéng gāo* 技能高 ‘[having] high ability’, *zìxì* 仔细 ‘careful, attentive’, *wánměizhūyì* 完美主义 ‘[characterised by] perfectionism’, *sīlù kāikuò* 思路开阔 ‘broad-minded’, *tóunǎo línghuó* 头脑灵活 ‘quick-witted’, *yǎnguāng dùdào* 眼光独到 ‘[having] unique vision’, *chéngjiù fēifán* 成就非凡 ‘[having] outstanding achievements’.

Based on information by another naming website, Ximalaya-1, the name Ruoxi 若汐 “reflects that in the girls’ gentleness and softness there are great vitality and vigour 体现女孩温柔中带着活泼”. What is also important, this given name can be considered as a transferred name, because according to this online source the name originally comes from the main character of the internet novel *Ruoxi* 若汐 by Fengdan Bailu 枫丹白露. “The author in this novel hopes the main character’s life will be tranquil and calm, like the rising and falling sea tides 小说中就作者希望主角一生平安顺遂, 安静淡然, 像大海边起起落落的潮汐一样.”

The name Ruoxi 若汐 can be treated as belonging to the category “standard given names with lexemes reflecting feminine softness and female aesthetic values”, and the subcategory “standard given names with lexemes denoting natural objects”. The associative meanings suggest that the name reflects several various mental and intellectual values.

(2) Yinuo 一諾:

yī 一 ‘one, first, single, alone, only one, same, whole, all, throughout, every time, also, otherwise, concentrated, wholehearted’ (PCD, XXHC);

nuò 諾 [諾] ‘to consent, to promise, to keep promise, promise’ (PCD); ‘promise, to agree’ (XXHC).

Probable lexical meanings: ‘one promise, all promises, always keeping promises’.

The associative meaning of the name, according to Qidian-1, is the same as in the Chinese idiom: *yīnuòqiqiānjīn* 一諾千金 ‘promise worth a thousand pieces of gold – promise that can be counted on, a promise that must be kept’ (PCD). The name means that a person is *zhèngzhī* 正直 ‘honest; upright, de-

cent', *chéngxìn* 诚信 'honest and trustworthy'. The website page also recalls the poem by the greatest Chinese poet Li Bai 李白 (701–762) of the Tang Dynasty (618–906), entitled "After the chaos and separation, the grace of heaven flows to Yelang, recalling the old days, I write my thoughts and present them to Wei Taishou, Liangzai of Jiangxia", where one can find the verses "*Piàncí guì báibì, yīnuò qīng huángjīn* 片辞贵白璧, 一诺轻黄金", meaning "A word is as valuable as a white jade, a promise is as light as gold."

According to Buyiju-2, the suggested associative meanings of this name are the following: *shàncháng biǎodá zìjǐ* 擅长表达自己 'good at expressing oneself', *yōuyǎ* 优雅 'graceful, elegant, in good taste', *mǐnrui* 敏锐 'acute, keen, sharp', *zhōngchéng* 忠诚 'loyal, faithful, devoted', *zhèngzhí* 正直 'honest, upright, decent, fair-minded'.

The name Yinuo 一諾 is considered to belong to the category "standard given names with lexemes reflecting female moral, mental and intellectual values and actions", the subcategory "standard given names with lexemes indicating mental activities and actions of women".

(3) Yihan 艺涵:

yì 艺 [藝] 'skill, art, rule, norm' (PCD); 'skill, art, to plant, to grow' (XXHC); *hán* 涵 'to contain, to include, to embody, content' (PCD); 'to contain, to soak, to forgive, to immerse' (XXHC).

Probable lexical meanings: 'skilful content, artistic content, containing skill, containing art'.

According to the portal Baidu, Yihan 艺涵 is a personal name of a popular contemporary Chinese (PRC) actress and female performer.

According to the website Chachaoming, the name's associative meanings are: *duōcái duōyì* 多才多艺 'very talented, gifted in many ways', *yǒu nèihán* 有内涵 'having meaningful content, having good inner qualities', *xuéshí yuānbó* 学识渊博 '[having] broad knowledge', *cáihuá héngyì* 才华横溢 'overflowing with artistic talent, brimming with talent, [having] exceptional talent', *huópo kāilǎng* 活泼开朗 'vigorous, optimistic', *yìzhì jiāndìng* 意志坚定 '[having] strong will'.

The associative meanings of the name, based on the information of Buyiju-3, are described as follows: *pǐnwèi gāo* 品味高 '[having] high quality, '[having] good taste', *guānhuái biéren* 关怀别人 'showing loving care for others, expressing great concern for others', *qiángshì* 强势 '[having] powerful position', *qínmiǎn kěngàn* 勤勉肯干 'diligent, willing to do hard work'.

According to the website Mingzi, the associative meanings of the name are *xīndǐ shànliáng* 心底善良 ‘good and honest, kind-hearted’, *fùyōu zhìhuì* 富有智慧 ‘very wise’, *zuòshì wěnjiàn* 做事稳健 ‘steady acting’, *rényuán hǎo* 人缘好 ‘[having] good relations, popularity’.

The name Yihan 艺涵 is treated as belonging to the category “standard given names with lexemes reflecting female moral, mental and intellectual values and actions”, the subcategory “standard given names with lexemes reflecting intellectual standards for women”.

(4) Yinuo 依诺:

yī 依 ‘to comply with, to rely on, to depend on, being dependent on, to listen to, to yield to’ (PCD, XXHC);

nuò 谱 [諾] ‘to consent, to promise, to keep promise, promise’ (PCD); ‘promise, to agree’ (XXHC).

Probable lexical meaning: ‘complying with the promise’.

According to Buyiju-4, the associative meanings of the name are: *zhōngchéng* 忠诚 ‘loyal, faithful’, *fù xiǎngxiànglì* 富想象力 ‘[having] great power of imagination’, *bùqū bùnáo* 不屈不挠 ‘unyielding, unbending’, *xīnsi shènmi* 心思缜密 ‘careful, delicate’.

Based on the information of the portal Mumingwang-1, the associative meanings of the name are *kěkào* 可靠 ‘reliable, trustworthy’, *zhídé xìnlài* 值得信赖 ‘trustworthy’, *pǐnzhì gǎo* 品质好 ‘[having] good intrinsic qualities’, *chéngxìn* 诚信 ‘honest’, *xìnsǒu nuòyán* 信守诺言 ‘keeping promises, being as good as one’s word’.

The name Yinuo 依诺 is considered to belong to the category “standard given names with lexemes reflecting female moral, mental and intellectual values and actions”, the subcategory “standard given names with lexemes indicating mental activities and actions of women”.

(5) Zihan 梓涵:

zǐ 梓 ‘Chinese catalpa (*Catalpa ovata*), a tree that serves as a symbol of one’s hometown and whose wood is used to make various items’ (PCD); ‘Chinese catalpa, ovate catalpa, native place, home town’ (XXHC);

hán 涵 ‘to contain; to include, to embody, content’ (PCD); ‘to contain, to soak, to forgive, to immerse’ (XXHC).

Possible lexical meanings: ‘catalpa content, containing [good inner qualities like] a catalpa tree’.

According to Buyiju-5, the implied associative meanings of the name can be described as follows: *yǒnggǎn* 勇敢 ‘brave, courageous’, *zhōngchéng* 忠诚 ‘loyal, faithful’, *jùnqūxīn* 进取心 ‘[having] enterprising spirit, initiative’, *sīwéi mǐnjié* 思维敏捷 ‘quick-witted’, *tiānshēng wēiyí* 天生威仪 ‘[having] natural impressive and dignified manner’.

Based on Ximalaya-2, the name’s associative meanings are: *yǒu hánnyǎng* 有涵养 ‘having ability to control oneself’, *pǐndé gāoshàng* 品德高尚 ‘[having] good character’, *wánqiáng* 顽强 ‘indomitable, staunch, tenacious’, *dúlì* 独立 ‘independent, on one’s own’, *duì jiāxiāngde sīniàn* 对家乡的思念 ‘thinking about home and family’.

The name Zihan 梓涵 can be considered to belong to the category “standard given names with lexemes reflecting feminine softness and female aesthetic values”, and the subcategory “given names with lexemes denoting plants and trees”. However, the associative meanings suggest that the name reflects many moral, mental and intellectual values.

(6) Yimo 茵沫:

yǐ 茵 ‘Job’s tears, Plantago major, plantain’ (PCD); ‘Job’s tears, Chinese pearl barley’ (XXHC);
mò 沫 ‘foam, froth, saliva’ (PCD; XXHC).

Probable lexical meanings: ‘foam of Job’s tears, foam of plantain’.

According to Buyiju-6, the name’s associative meanings are considered as the following: *sīxiǎng jìnbiù* 思想进步 ‘[having] progressive thinking’, *jīnglì chōngpèi* 精力充沛 ‘full of energy, vigorous’, *wánměizhūyì* 完美主义 ‘[characterised by] perfectionism’, *cáizhì guòrén* 才智过人 ‘outstanding in ability and wisdom’, *chuàngzàoli* 创造力 ‘[having] creative power’.

Based on the website Exam, the associative meanings of this name are *piāoyì* 飘逸 ‘possessing natural grace’, *qīngxīn* 清新 ‘pure and fresh’, *chúnjié* 纯洁 ‘clean and honest’, *zìxìn* 自信 ‘self-confident’, *jiānqiáng* 坚强 ‘strong, firm’.

According to Ximalaya-3, the associative meanings of the name are: *zìxìnyǒuli* 自信有力 ‘self-confident, strong’, *xìnggé gāngyì* 性格刚毅 ‘resolute and steadfast’, *xiōngjīn kāikuò* 胸襟开阔 ‘broad-minded’.

Based on the information from Zidian, the associative meanings are considered as the following: *lǐngxiù qìzhì* 领袖气质 ‘[having] leader’s qualities’, *lèngjìng* 冷静 ‘keeping calm’, *zuòshì wěnjiàn* 做事稳健 ‘steady acting’, *lìqiáng* 力强 ‘strong’, *bùpà cuòzhé* 不怕挫折 ‘not afraid of disturbances’.

According to Mumingwang-2, the associative meanings of the name are *xīndī shànlíáng* 心底善良 ‘good and honest, kind-hearted’, *fùyōu zhìhuì* 富有智慧 ‘very wise’, *zuòshì wěnjiàn* 做事稳健 ‘steady acting’, *rényuán hǎo* 人缘好 ‘[having] good relations, popularity’, *yìzhì jiāndìng* 意志坚定 ‘[having] strong will’.

The name Yimo 茵沫 can be considered to belong to the category “standard given names with lexemes reflecting feminine softness and female aesthetic values”, and the subcategory “given names with lexemes denoting plants and trees”. The associative meanings suggest that the name reflects some mental and intellectual values and actions.

(7) Yutong 雨桐:

yǔ 雨 ‘rain’ (PCD; XXHC);

tóng 桐 ‘paulownia, Chinese parasol tree, phoenix tree, tung oil tree, wutong’ (PCD, XXHC).

Implied lexical meaning: ‘rainy paulownia’.

The suggested associative meanings, according to Qidian-2, may be described as follows: *zhǎngxiàng chūzhòng* 长相出众 ‘[having] outstanding features’, *měilìdòngrén* 美丽动人 ‘beautiful’, *wēnróuxìnì* 温柔细腻 ‘gentle and soft, exquisite’, *qīngxīn zirán* 清新自然 ‘fresh and natural’, *ānkāng* 安康 ‘in good health’.

According to Buyiju-7, the associative meanings are the following: *zhíjué qiáng* 直觉强 ‘[having] good intuition’, *xiǎngxiànglì fēngfù* 想象力丰富 ‘[having] rich imagination’, *gàiniànxìng qiáng* 概念性强 ‘[having] strong concept’, *xīndī shànlíáng* 心底善良 ‘good and honest, kind-hearted’, *fùyōu zhìhuì* 富有智慧 ‘very wise’.

Based on Mumingwang-3, the associative meanings of the name are: *xīndī shànlíáng* 心底善良 ‘good and honest, kind-hearted’, *fùyōu zhìhuì* 富有智慧 ‘very wise’, *zuòshì wěnjiàn* 做事稳健 ‘steady acting’, *rényuán hǎo* 人缘好 ‘[having] good relations, popularity’, *yìzhì jiāndìng* 意志坚定 ‘[having] strong will’, *jiānqíáng* 坚强 ‘strong, firm’.

The name Yutong 雨桐 can be considered to belong to the category “standard given names with lexemes reflecting feminine softness and female aesthetic values”, and the subcategory “given names with lexemes denoting plants and trees” or “standard given names with lexemes denoting some natural phenomena”. The associative meanings suggest that the name reflects physical, mental and intellectual values.

(8) Xinyi 欣怡:

xīn 欣 ‘glad, happy, joyful’ (*PCD, XXHC*);

yí 怡 ‘glad, joyful, cheerful, pleased’ (*PCD, XXHC*).

Probable lexical meanings: ‘joyful, cheerful, happy’.

According to Buyiju-8, the associative meanings of this name are: *shíyòngzhǔyì* 实用主义 ‘[characterised by] pragmatism’, *bǎohùyù qiáng* 保护欲强 ‘[having] strong desire of safety’, *yǒu zérèngǎn* 有责任感 ‘having strong sense of duty’, *pǐnxíng duānzhèng* 品行端正 ‘[having] proper behaviour’.

Based on Mumingwang-4, the associative meanings are: *shēngjībóbó* 生机勃勃 ‘full of vitality’, *lèguān* 乐观 ‘optimistic’, *kāilǎng* 开朗 ‘open and clear, optimistic’, *píng’ān* 平安 ‘safe’, *shùnlì* 顺利 ‘successful’.

The name Xīnyí 欣怡 is considered to belong to the category “standard given names with lexemes reflecting female moral, mental and intellectual values and actions”, the subcategory “standard given names with lexemes reflecting moral qualities of women, and the sub-subcategory “lexical items denoting such qualities as being happy and joyful”.

(9) Yutong 语桐:

yǔ 语 [語] ‘language, tongue, speech, set phrase; proverb, saying, sign, word, expression’ (*PCD, XXHC*);

tóng 桐 ‘paulownia, Chinese parasol tree, phoenix tree, tung oil tree, wutong’ (*PCD, XXHC*).

Possible lexical meanings: ‘paulownia of speech, paulownia of expression’.

According to Buyiju-9, the associative meanings can be described as follows: *mǐngǎn* 敏感 ‘sensitive’, *yǒu tóngqíngxīn* 有同情心 ‘having sympathy, compassion’, *réngé gāoshàng* 人格高尚 ‘[having] noble character, [having] moral integrity’.

Some interesting information can be found on the website Naminghall. The associative meanings of this name are: *cōngming* 聪明 ‘intelligent, clever’, *shànyú biǎodá* 善于表达 ‘good in expression’, *jīzhì* 机智 ‘quick-witted’, *jiānqiáng* 坚强 ‘strong, firm’, *bùqū bùnáo* 不屈不挠 ‘unyielding, indomitable’, *jiāndìng bùyí* 坚定不移 ‘firm and unshakable’, *yǒngwǎng zhíqián* 勇往直前 ‘marching forward courageously, advancing bravely’. The website also informs that the lexical items making up the name occurred in the same verses in five poems of the Tang Dynasty. However, these lexical items did not form a compound word.

According to Ximalaya-4, the associative meaning of the name is *wàn wù gēng xīn* 万物更新 ‘replace the old by the new, total renovation’.

Based on Mumingwang-5, the associative meanings of the name are: *yǒu bó’ài* 有博爱 ‘full of fraternity’, *xìngqíng wēnhé* 性情温和 ‘[having] gentle temperament’, *zuòshì wěnjiàn* 做事稳健 ‘steady acting’, *gǎnzuò gǎndāng* 敢作敢当 ‘[having] the courage to take responsibility for one’s own actions’, *yìzhì jiāndìng* 意志坚定 ‘strong-willed’, *yǒu nàixìng* 有耐性 ‘having patience, being patient’.

The name Yutong 语桐 can be considered to belong to the category “standard given names with lexemes reflecting feminine softness and female aesthetic values” and the subcategory “given names with lexemes denoting plants and trees”. It also may be classified under “standard given names with lexemes reflecting female moral, mental and intellectual values and actions”, the subcategory “standard given names with lexemes reflecting intellectual standards for women”.

(10) Yuxi 语汐:

yǔ 语 [語] ‘language, tongue, speech, set phrase, proverb, saying, sign, word, expression’ (PCD, XXHC);

xī 汐 ‘night tides, evening ebbtide’ (PCD); ‘nighttide, Xi River’ (XXHC).

Possible lexical meanings: ‘tides of speech, tides of expression’.

According to Buyiju-10, the associative meanings of the name are: *lǐxiǎnghuà* 理想化 ‘idealizing’, *jiānyì* 坚毅 ‘firm and persistent’, *shìyìnglì* 适应力强 ‘[having] high adaptability’, *cōngminglíngli* 聪明伶俐 ‘wise, quick-witted’.

Based on Mumingwang-6, the name’s associative meanings are: *huópo kāilǎng* 活泼开朗 ‘vivacious, open and clear’, *néngyán shànbiàn* 能言善辩 ‘eloquent, having the gift of the gab, good at speaking’, *wén cǎi* 文采 ‘[having] literary talent’, *qìshì* 气势 ‘[having] imposing manner, vigour’, *yìzhì jiāndìng* 意志坚定 ‘strong-willed’, *yǒu nàixìng* 有耐性 ‘having patience, being patient’, *xīndì shànliáng* 心底善良 ‘good and honest, kind-hearted’, *fùyǒu zhìhuì* 富有智慧 ‘very wise’, *zuòshì wěnjiàn* 做事稳健 ‘steady acting’.

The name Yuxi 语汐 can be considered to belong to the category “standard given names with lexemes reflecting feminine softness and female aesthetic values” and the subcategory “standard given names with lexemes denoting natural objects”. It also may be classified under “standard given names with lexemes reflecting female moral, mental and intellectual values and actions”,

the subcategory “standard given names with lexemes reflecting intellectual standards for women”.

3. REPETITIVENESS OF CHINESE GIVEN NAMES

Looking at the most popular female given names in the PRC in 2021, and comparing them with the top ten names of girls born in 2010–2019, and especially those bestowed in 2020, one can notice a common problem: many of these names are the same or very similar.

Among the top ten female given names in the years 2010–2019 (“Yichen, Yinuo huole”) are three given names from the list of the top ten in 2021, and four names are very similar in pronunciation and somewhat similar in meaning. The same names are the following: [1] Xinyi 欣怡, see (8); [2] Zihan 梓涵, see (5); [10] Yinuo 一諾, see (2). The similar names are: [3] Shihan 诗涵, see (5); [5] Zihan 子涵, see (5); [6] Zihan 紫涵, see (5); and [8] Yuhan 雨涵, see (3).

Among the top ten names of baby girls born in 2020 (“Yichen, Yinuo huole”), one can find seven names from the list of the top ten names in 2021: [1] Yinuo 一諾, see (2); [2] Yinuo 依諾, see (4); [3] Xinyi 欣怡, see (8); [4] Zihan 梓涵, see (5); [5] Yutong 语桐, see (9); [8] Yuxi 语汐, see (10); [9] Yutong 雨桐, see (7).

Among the 50 most frequently used terms/characters in female and male names in 2020 (“Yichen, Yinuo huole”) it is possible to find almost all the terms/characters occurring in the baby girls names registered in 2021. There are three exceptions: *mò*沫 ‘foam, froth, saliva’, see (6); *yǐ*苡 ‘Job’s tears, *Plantago major*, plantain’, see (6); *xī*汐 ‘night tides, evening ebbtide’, see (1) and (10).

The repetitiveness of the analysed given names causes problems. According to the portal Yeeyi,

there are many parents who name their children casually, and some even follow the crowd, which leads to the phenomenon that their children have the same name as many others. Now more and more people use “zi [梓]” and “han [涵]” as their names. There are often several Zihan in a class, and it is not evident which one is called
 有许多父母, 给孩子取名字是十分的随意, 甚至随大流导致孩子名字和他人重名的现象十分之多. 现在越来越多的人会使用“梓”“涵”这两个字作为名字, 经常一个班里面甚至会有好几个梓涵上课, 都不知道喊梓涵时喊的是哪一位. (“Zihan’ mingzi gang tuichao”)

According to the portal Sohu, “the popularity of the name Zihan [梓涵] surged nationwide in recent years. In some schools, there were many ‘Zihan’ even in one class, which made many parents very embarrassed ‘梓涵’ 现象在前些年风靡全国, 甚至有些学校中, 一个班里就有很多个‘梓涵’, 这让很多家长都十分尴尬)” (“‘Zihan’ yi chengwei guoqu shi”).

According to Ximalaya-5, “xin [欣] and yi [怡] both mean ‘happy’ or ‘to make happy’, so they are often chosen as names. Because of this, the name has a high repetition rate. And it also has its homophones, as Xinyi [心怡] and Xinyi [欣宜]. It is really shocking! 欣和怡都有高兴及让人高兴的意思, 因此常被选为人名. 也正因此, 这个名字的重名率太高了, 加之心怡, 欣宜之类同音词, 实在让人无语啊.”

Chinese given names tend to be repetitive due to several linguistic and cultural reasons (cf. Subramaniam 2015). It appears that the most important factors in this domain are set out below.

1. The inventory of characters used to write down Chinese words (proper names included) has been limited to 8105 since 2013. According to the provisions of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Public Security, and other relevant agencies, the names of newly named and renamed people should make use of the characters listed in the “Table of Common Standard Chinese Characters (*Tongyong guifan Hanzi biao* 通用规范汉字表)”, published in 2013 (Chaozhou Shi Gong’anj 2023). At present China’s population is about 1.4 billion. The limited choices of words/characters within a massive population can only produce many repetitive names.

2. The limited number of terms/characters used for given names is also caused by sociocultural restrictions on using some lexical items in personal naming, especially those denoting things and notions considered disgusting or “unlucky”, and searching for positive meanings of names/terms/characters. These restrictions lead to the frequent use of terms considered as the most appropriate or the most auspicious ones.

3. Many families choose names based on generational patterns (Kałużyńska 2015, 107–21), therefore certain terms/characters are passed down through generations.

4. Historical figures and literary references often influence naming conventions, leading to the reuse of certain names or terms/characters across several generations.

5. The tonal nature of the Chinese language means that even if characters are different, the pronunciation of a name may sound similar, contributing to the impression of repetitiveness.

6. Repetitive names can also be the result of the occurrence of naming trends (name fashions) as popular trends during a year or a brief period for choosing some particular given names.

CONCLUSIONS

The paper has discussed some linguistic and cultural aspects of contemporary Chinese personal naming practices in relation to the top ten Chinese given names of the baby girls born and registered in the PRC in the year 2021. The given names analysed stand for 3.3% of all female names bestowed in 2021. The research material contains only a few names but allows for several conclusions to be drawn.

The semantic analysis of names has dealt with the lexical meaning of the lexemes/terms of which these names are constructed. The names have been categorised based on the interpretation of their lexical meaning. According to the word-semantic classification of traditional Chinese female names, presented in the paper, it may be assumed that five names belong to the broad category “standard given names with lexemes reflecting feminine softness and female aesthetic values”, and five names belong to the category “standard given names with lexemes reflecting female moral, mental, and intellectual values and actions”. There are no names belonging to the category “standard given names with lexemes reflecting the status and material attributes of women”. It is possible that the reason for this situation is the desire to avoid the overt sex stereotyping in the domain of personal naming in the PRC, as the “unisex” seems to be nowadays a worldwide trend.

Attention has also been paid to the associative meaning of these given names as proposed by several Chinese naming websites. Reliance on these online sources can be misleading as interpretations are usually unscientific. Nevertheless, their role in promoting knowledge about names is growing and cannot be ignored. The associative meanings recommended by these Chinese websites suggest that all the names analysed reflect various positive aesthetic, moral, mental, and intellectual values. It appears that nowadays interpretations of the associative meanings of given names tend to be almost universal, focusing on the contemporary sense of a “good name”.

Chinese given names are supposed to be formed individually (a new name for a new person). However, in practice, many people make use of already existing given names (an old name for a new person). It appears that the phe-

nomenon of the repetitiveness of given names has intensified significantly in China in recent years. As a result, it happens that hundreds of millions of Chinese people share the same popular given names, which undermines the primary function of onyms, i.e. the identification of referents.

However, it still seems evident that given names, those newly created or simply shifted, are not treated by the Chinese society as purely onymic units whose sole function is to identify people. They rather play the role of semantically motivated lexical units more commonly used in the appellative sphere of the language.

REFERENCES

WEBSITES

Baike Baidu. Accessed December 5, 2024. <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E8%89%BA%E6%B6%B5/24190805>.

Buyiju-1. Accessed December 15, 2024. <https://xmcs.buyiju.com/ceming/226158-2f6t.html>.

Buyiju-2. Accessed December 15, 2024. <https://xmcs.buyiju.com/ceming/227471-2mm3.html>.

Buyiju-3. Accessed December 15, 2024. <https://xmcs.buyiju.com/ceming/212836-xfyn.html>.

Buyiju-4. Accessed December 15, 2024. <https://xmcs.buyiju.com/ceming/214787-zxne.html>.

Buyiju-5. Accessed December 15, 2024. <https://xmcs.buyiju.com/ceming/215359-e1ts.html>.

Buyiju-6. Accessed January 6, 2025. <https://xmcs.buyiju.com/ceming/155873-3upb.html>.

Buyiju-7. Accessed January 22, 2025. <https://xmcs.buyiju.com/ceming/247089-hwxc.html>.

Buyiju-8. Accessed January 22, 2025. <https://xmcs.buyiju.com/ceming/221549-1m3b.html>.

Buyiju-9. Accessed January 25, 2025. <https://xmcs.buyiju.com/ceming/221318-mqr2.html>.

Buyiju-10. Accessed January 25, 2025. <https://xmcs.buyiju.com/ceming/223325-0wmj.html>.

Chachaqiming. Accessed December 15, 2024. <https://m.chachaqiming.com/article/47381>.

Exam. Accessed 6 January, 2025. <https://www.examw.com/11427538.html>.

Mumingwang-1. Accessed December 15, 2024. <https://www.zi15.com/mingzihanyi/1641.html>.

Mumingwang-2. Accessed January 6, 2025. <https://www.zi15.com/mingzidafen/8862.html>.

Mumingwang-3. Accessed January 12, 2025. <https://www.zi15.com/mingzihanyi/896.html>.

Mumingwang-4. Accessed January 12, 2025. <https://www.zi15.com/mingzihanyi/1523.html>.

Mumingwang-5. Accessed January 15, 2025. <https://www.zi15.com/mingzidafen/8197.html>.

Mumingwang-6. Accessed January 15, 2025. <https://www.zi15.com/mingzihanyi/5534.html>.

Naminghall. Accessed January 15, 2025. <https://www.naminghall.com/nameReport?id=df0ee055386fb38a4ac9e502cfa1b4a3>.

Qidian-1. Accessed December 15, 2024. https://www.qidian.com/ask/qnjpekgrhfo?source=m_jump.

Qidian-2. Accessed January 6, 2025. https://www.qidian.com/ask/qrhosurzfe?source=m_jump.

Ximalaya-1. Accessed December 15, 2024. <https://m.ximalaya.com/ask/q7378703>.

Ximalaya-2. Accessed December 15, 2024. <https://m.ximalaya.com/ask/q6062345>.

Ximalaya-3. Accessed January 6, 2025. <https://m.ximalaya.com/ask/q9327693>.

Ximalaya-4. Accessed January 6, 2025. <https://m.ximalaya.com/ask/q9503521>.

Ximalaya-5. Accessed January 22, 2025. <https://m.ximalaya.com/ask/q7609709>.

Zidian. Accessed January 6, 2025. <https://zidian.qimingzaixian.com/name/o6k243103.html>.

LITERATURE

Chaozhou Shi Gong'anju. 2023. *Wei shenme xingming buneng yong shengpizi* 为什么姓名不能使用生僻字? [Why can't you use uncommon characters in your name?]. Accessed January 23, 2025. https://www.chaozhou.gov.cn/dwzsk/hj/content/post_3837003.html.

Dalberg, Vibke. 1985. "On Homonymy between Name and Appellative." *Names* 33 (3): 127–35.

Jespersen, Otto. 1925. *The Philosophy of Grammar*. George Allen & Unwin.

Kałużyńska, Irena. 2002. *Contemporary Chinese Place Names. Names of Administrative Divisions at County and City Level*. Peter Lang.

Kałużyńska, Irena. 2008. *Chinese Female Namings. Past and Present*. Agade.

Kałużyńska, Irena. 2010. "Semantically Transparent Given Names of the Han Nation." In *China Past and Present, New Polish Papers in Chinese Studies*, edited by Marcin Jacoby, Irena Kałużyńska, Dominik Mierzejewski, Józef Pawłowski, and Małgorzata Religa, 125–34. Wydawnictwo UW.

Kałużyńska, Irena. 2014. "Aksjologia a chińskie tradycyjne imiona kobiet." *Roczniki Humanistyczne* 62 (9): 9–25. <https://doi.org/10.18290/10.18290/rh.2019.67.11-1>.

Kałużyńska, Irena. 2015. "Traditional Chinese Generation Names." *Onomastica* 59:107–21. <https://doi.org/10.17651/onomast.59.6>.

Kałużyńska, Irena. 2016. "Linguistic Composition and Characteristics of Chinese Given Names." *Onoma. Journal of International Council of Onomastic Sciences* 51:161–86. <https://doi.org/10.34158/ONOMA.51/2016/8>.

Kałużyńska, Irena. 2023. "Chinese Horoscope and Personal Naming." In *Onomastics in Interaction with Other Branches of Science*, edited by Urszula Bijak, Paweł Swoboda, and Justyna B. Walkowiak, vol. 2, *Anthroponomastics*, 243–57. Wydawnictwo UJ. <https://doi.org/10.4467/K7446.46/22.23.19013>.

Kuiper, Koenraad. 1999. *Semantics: A Course Book*. Shanghai Waiyu Jiaoyu Chubanshe.

Mill, John S. 1865. *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive*. Vol. 1. Longmans, Green & Co.

Nicolaisen, Wilhelm F. H. 1974. "Names as Verbal Icons." *Names* 22 (3): 104–10.

Pleco. 2023. *Pleco Chinese Dictionary*. V. 3.2.90. Android. <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.pleco.chinesesystem>.

Subramaniam, Eshwar. 2015. "Why are Chinese names so repetitive?" *Quora* (forum), April 24. <https://www.quora.com/Why-are-Chinese-names-so-repetitive>.

“‘Zihan’ yi chengwei guoqu shi, 21 hou de mingzi geng ‘qipa’, zhe jie jiazhang tai hui wanle ‘梓涵’ 已成为过去式, 21 后的名字更 “奇葩”, 这届家长太会玩了 [“Zihan” has become a thing of the past. The names of those born after 21 are even more “weird”. This generation of parents is really good at playing].” 2023. Sohu, April 26. https://www.sohu.com/a/670366327_120877585.

Xin Xiandai Hanyu Cidian 新现代汉语词典 [A new dictionary of Modern Chinese]. 1992. Hainan Chubanshe.

“Yichen, Yinuo huole, quanguo zuixin baokuan mingzi chulu, lai kankan hai you sha 奕辰、一诺火了，全国最新爆款名字出炉，来看看还有啥 [Yichen and Yinuo are very popular, the latest popular names in the country are released, let's see what else].” 2021. Hebiwang, February 8. <https://www.hebitv.com/news/649770>.

“Yihán zhè liǎng zì de hán yì, Yihán zhè gè míngzì de hán yì jiěxī 艺涵这两字的含义，艺涵这个名字的含义解析 [The meaning of the two words Yihan, the meaning of the name Yihan].” 2020. Mingzi, July 15. <https://www.zi15.com/mingzihanyi/1330.html>.

Zhi'an Guanliju. 2022. “‘2021 nian quanguo xingming baogao’ fabu ‘二〇二一年全国姓名报告’发布 [‘The 2021 National Name Report’ released].” January 24. <https://app.mps.gov.cn/gdnps/pc/content.jsp?id=8349293>.

“‘Zihan’ mingzi gang tuichao, ‘lan dajie’ de zaici xilai, aoshi zhihu bu lijie ‘梓涵’名字刚退潮，‘烂大街’的再次袭来，老师直呼不理解 [The name ‘Zihan’ just faded away, and it is now ‘street-famous’ again. The teachers say they don’t understand].” 2023. Yeeyi, November 14. <https://www.yeeyi.com/news/details/2162701>.