

Linguocultural aspect of naming in the Korean anthroponymic tradition

Original study

Olga Kim,
Uzbekistan State World Languages University, Department of Korean Philology, PhD, Senior Lecturer, Uzbekistan.
tideson@mail.ru
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6036-7275>

Dr. Alexander Kim, Associate professor,
Department of international relations and public administration, Vladivostok State University (Russian Federation),
kimaa9@gmail.com
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6291-0945>

Ms. Tatiana Lebedeva, senior lecturer,
Far Eastern Federal University (FEFU) (Russian Federation). lebedeva.tvl@dvfu.ru
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-8091-9159>

Submitted: 05.12.2025; Accepted: 05.02.2026.

Abstract. The article is devoted to the linguocultural analysis of the system of personal names in Korean anthroponymy. The focus is on the features of the functioning of various types of names – official, everyday, ritual-religious and secondary (pseudonyms, names received at baptism, Buddhist initiation names). The name in these contexts performs not only identification, but also symbolic, sacred, communicative and status functions. The study examines the structural features of anthroponymic formulas, naming principles, system of values and norms, as well as cultural meanings attached to the name lexemes. It was pointed out that the Korean naming tradition was formed under the influence of shamanic, Buddhist, Confucian and Christian beliefs, which was reflected in the hierarchy, aestheticization and sacralization of a name. Particular importance is attached to the choice of characters, the number of strokes in them, the symbolism of numbers, fortune-telling and initiation rituals. In modern times, under the influence of Christianity, as well as the processes of globalization and socio-cultural transformation, there is an active use of Christian names, borrowings and individualized names reflecting confessional and cultural diversity.

Keywords: anthroponymy, Korean language, linguacultural studies, name, Buddhist names, Christian names, pseudonyms, Confucian tradition, cultural memory, identity.

INTRODUCTION

Naming in Korean culture is not only a means of personal identification, but also an important mechanism for representing cultural values, worldview attitudes, and religious traditions. Within the framework of the linguocultural approach, a name is considered as a symbolic unit that embodies a multi-layered “system of ethnic,

social, and spiritual identity” (Maslova 2001; Vorob`ev 1997; Polyuga 2004; Yanushkevich 2013).

In modern onomastics, a proper name is treated as a linguistic unit that primarily serves an individualizing function and is associated with a unique referent. Within the typological approach of V. van Langendonck (2007), proper names are viewed as a prototypical category, in

which anthroponyms, that is, people's proper names, occupy a central place. At the same time, the researcher emphasizes the functional and structural diversity of personal names, including officially established forms and unofficial variants that function in various communicative and social contexts.

In recent decades, interest in Korean onomastics has increased significantly. Different studies cover the issues of name structure (Park 2004), the influence of the Confucian tradition on the formation of anthroponymic models (Du 1988; Kang, Shin 1990), as well as modern trends in individualization and borrowing in names (Encyclopedia of Korean Culture). However, despite the accumulated empirical material, the linguocultural aspect of multiple naming – including official, everyday and religious names – continues to remain poorly studied. The phenomenon of the coexistence of various anthroponymic forms, each performing a specific function in the communicative and value systems of Korean society, requires particular attention.

To ensure terminological consistency, this study utilizes the list of key onomastic terms proposed by the International Council of Onomastic Sciences (ICOS). According to this terminology, a personal name is defined as a person's proper name in the broad sense, which in Korean tradition corresponds to the concept of 인명 [inmyeong] – personal name (Naver Korean Dictionary, s.v. “인명”).

An official personal name corresponds to the Korean term 성명 [seongmyeong] – the official name, which includes the family name and given name, used in legal and administrative contexts (Naver Korean Dictionary, s.v. “성명”).

This given name (first name) is related to the Korean term ireum [이름], which denotes a person's given name outside of their family name (Naver Korean Dictionary, s.v. “이름”).

Additional informal nominations (by-names) are represented in the Korean anthroponymic system, primarily by nicknames – 별명 [byeolmyeong], used in everyday communication and characterizing the social or personal characteristics of the name bearer (Naver Korean Dictionary, s.v. “별명”).

Hypocoristic forms (hypocoristics) partially overlap with colloquial and diminutive variants of the name, which in Korean tradition can be designated descriptively, without strict terminological fixation, through the term 애칭 [affectionate name] (Naver Korean Dictionary, s.v. “애칭”). In this study, the term pseudonym is used exclusively to denote a deliberately chosen fictitious name used in the public, literary, or professional spheres. In modern Korean terminology, this meaning corresponds to 필명 [pilmyeong], a literary (author's) pen name (Naver Korean Dictionary, s.v. “필명”). It is crucial that pseudonym (필명) is not equated with nickname (별명), as these types of anthroponymic nominations differ both in function (self-presentation in the public sphere vs. informal naming in everyday communication) and in status within

the personal name system. Moreover, the traditional, culture-specific category 호 (號) [ho], discussed further in the article, is interpreted as a special form of symbolic additional name, historically and functionally distinct from modern 필명 [pilmyeong], ensuring terminological precision and comparability of the analysis. The traditional Korean naming practices described in this article are considered well-known and have been repeatedly documented in linguistic and cultural studies.

Traditional Korean anthroponymy featured a multi-layered naming system, which has no direct equivalent in the modern English-language anthroponymic tradition. The name served not only as a means of identification but also as a marker of age, social status, normative politeness, and cultural maturity. At different periods in life, the same person could bear several types of names, functionally distributed across communicative and social spheres. Among the culturally specific forms is, first and foremost, taemyeong (a prenatal name), which serves a symbolic and protective function and nominates the future child as already included in the family and value system. The primary birth name, 명 / 본명 (myeong / bonmyeong), had official status, but its direct use in relation to an adult was restricted by etiquette. A special category was represented by 자 (字) [ja] – a courtesy name assigned to a man in adulthood as part of the Confucian coming-of-age rite and functioning in official, written, and ceremonial communication as a substitute for the primary name. An additional and fundamentally significant element of the system was the pseudonym 호 (號) [ho], which, unlike nicknames, represented a consciously chosen or bestowed nomination with a clearly expressed symbolic load and was used for self-representation in the intellectual, artistic, and philosophical spheres. Thus, the Korean naming tradition demonstrates a model of multiple anthroponymic identity, in which the name functions as a dynamic and multi-layered category, reflecting not only individual characteristics but also cultural norms, ritual representations, and social hierarchy, which fundamentally distinguishes it from the modern model characteristic of English-language anthroponymy.

The purpose of this study is to identify and describe the linguocultural features of naming in the Korean anthroponymic tradition, with an emphasis on the interaction of official, everyday and religious types of names.

Study objectives:

- to analyze the historical and cultural prerequisites for the formation of multiple naming in the Korean tradition;
- to describe the semantic, pragmatic and symbolic functions of official, everyday and religious names;
- to classify the types of anthroponymic models in Korean linguoculture.

The object of the study is the anthroponymic system of the Korean language. The subject of the study are the linguocultural characteristics of official, everyday and religious naming in the Korean anthroponymic tradition.

The scientific novelty lies in the linguocultural analysis of multiple forms of naming in Korea, including such practices as Buddhist and Christian naming, as well as the use of pseudonyms and prenatal name, which allows to reveal the symbolic and functional diversity of the name as an element of cultural identity.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological basis of this study is the linguacultural approach, which considers the name as a verbal sign that reflects ethnic stereotypes, value systems, worldview and the symbolic system of a specific culture (Maslova 2001; Vorob`ev 1997). Within the framework of this approach, a personal name is interpreted not only as a means of identification, but also as a representative of cultural memory and social identity, which makes it possible to identify the culturally determined functions of anthroponyms and trace the mechanisms of interaction between language and culture at the level of naming.

A combination of methods was employed in the study. A descriptive method was employed to systematize and classify anthroponymic material by name types (official, colloquial, religious, and additional) and by structural models of their formation. Semantic analysis aimed to identify the meanings, associative, and symbolic components embedded in various types of personal names. Word-formation analysis was used to describe productive derivational patterns in the Korean anthroponymic system. Comparative analysis was employed to compare the functions of various naming types and their pragmatic role in various sociocultural contexts. Moreover, in some parts we used hermeneutic method.

The study's material includes several sources. First, lexicographic sources were used to clarify the meanings and terminological interpretations of Korean anthroponymic units, including the Naver Korean Dictionary, which was used to verify the definitions of key terms. Second, academic publications on Korean onomastics and cultural history, including studies on the Confucian anthroponymic tradition and the practice of multiple naming, were used to describe traditional naming patterns and their cultural determinacy. Third, anthroponyms recorded in open electronic resources and specialized online platforms reflecting current naming practices in Korea were used to analyze contemporary naming trends. The selection of materials was based on frequency of use and typicality in the relevant sociocultural contexts. The choice of a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach is determined by the specific nature of the research object, which is located at the intersection of linguistics, cultural studies, and social anthropology, and allows us to consider the Korean anthroponymic system as a dynamic phenomenon formed under the influence of historical, cultural, and social factors.

RESULTS OF THE LINGUACULTURAL ANALYSIS

The conducted analysis showed that the Korean anthroponymic system is characterized by a high degree of sociolinguistic differentiation, reflecting cultural, religious

and communicative diversity. Within the framework of the linguacultural approach, the main types of naming were identified and characterized – official, everyday and religious – each having its own pragmatics, semantics and sociocultural function.

1. The historical and cultural prerequisites for multiple naming go back to the integration of traditional beliefs, Confucian and Buddhist philosophy, as well as the late influence of Christianity. These components formed a stable naming model, where the name is perceived not only as a means of identification, but also as a bearer of symbolic and sacred meanings.
2. Official naming was subject to the rules of hierarchy and aesthetics: the choice of a name often depended on the number of strokes in characters, the harmony of sound with the surname and family principles. The use of 돌림자 [dolrimja] – a common character reflecting family succession – was widespread.
3. Everyday naming is an emotionally charged and situationally motivated use of names within a family or close circle. Diminutives and nicknames reflecting the physical, behavioral or emotional characteristics of the child are often used.
4. Religious naming is manifested in the adoption of new names (Buddhist, Christian) during initiation or baptism rituals. These names record the spiritual identity of the individual and perform symbolic and normative functions within the religious community.
5. Lexical-semantic and word-formation models of the formation of temporary prenatal names, as well as Buddhist and Christian names, were revealed. The analysis showed that such names are constructed according to certain morphological patterns and carry a clear pragmatic and cultural load.
6. In modern Korea, there is a tendency towards individualization and repersonalization of names, active borrowing of the Western onomastic model, which is manifested in the growth of the number of phonetically adapted Anglo-American names, as well as in the change of names for socio-psychological or religious reasons.

Thus, the features of naming in Korean linguaculture revealed during the study indicate its deep-rootedness in the worldview system, its function as a tool of cultural transmission and identification, which allows to consider anthroponymy as an integral linguacultural phenomenon.

DISCUSSION

Naming in Korean culture is a complex and multi-stage process closely linked to the socio-cultural, philosophical-religious and political-historical transformations of the society. The change of historical eras – from the early period of the Three Kingdoms to the modern Republic of Korea – was accompanied by the evolution of anthroponymic practices: the structure of the name, the principles of its selection, the social function and even the symbolic load changed (Kim 2005; Lee 2011; Park 2004; Kang, Shin 1990; Oh 1989). These changes

reflected both internal processes, such as the strengthening of Confucian ethics or the influence of Buddhism, and external ones – for example, interaction with Chinese culture, Japanese colonization and Christian missionary activity. In this regard, it seems necessary to examine the system of Korean personal names through the prism of historical periodization, identifying the key stages of its formation and transformation. Such periodization allows not only to trace linguistic and cultural shifts in the naming system, but also to record changes in the perception of the name as a social and spiritual category. The main historical periods in which significant changes in the naming system in Korea occurred are the following:

- The Pre-Sino-Korean period (before the 1st millennium AD) – the original Korean naming system was formed, mostly without surnames (with the exception of the nobility) (Oh 1989). Personal names often consisted of three syllables (e.g., 미사흔, 사다함); there was no character recording of the clan; names were of a local, not clan, nature.
- The Sinicization stage (1st millennium AD – the end of the Silla kingdom) – the spread of Chinese-style surnames began, primarily among the Wangs and the aristocracy. Family lines were formed, recorded in genealogical registry (족보); disyllabic surnames (mainly of toponymic origin) appeared, especially in the states of Goguryeo and Baekje (Park 2004).
- The Mongol period (13th–14th centuries, Goryeo Kingdom) – the parallel use of Mongolian and Sino-Korean names was common among the nobility (Kim 2005). For example, King Gongmin (공민왕 (恭愍王), 1330–1374) had the Mongolian name Bayan Temür and the Sino-Korean name Wang Gi (王祺).
- The late medieval period (15th–16th centuries) – Chinese-type surnames and names began to spread among free peasants, while slaves (노비[nobil]) had no surnames until the abolition of serfdom in 1894 (Lee 2011).
- The Japanese colonial period (1910–1945) saw the implementation of a policy of forced Japanization of anthroponymy, aimed at forcing the Korean population to adopt Japanese forms of surnames and given names. The policy of establishing family designations and changing given names (“창씨개명” [ch’angssi kaemyōng]) was formally enshrined in two legal acts of the Japanese colonial administration. The first of these was the Act Amending the Joseon Civil Ordinance (Chosŏn minsaryōng), formalized as Governor-General of Korea Ordinance No. 20, 1939, which introduced the mandatory procedure for establishing the family name designation 씨 (氏) [ssi] based on the Japanese anthroponymic system. The second Act, “On the Family Name and Given Name of Koreans” – Governor-General of Korea Ordinance No. 20, 1939 (Joseon Government-General Ordinance No. 20, 1939), regulated the procedure for changing the family name (개씨 [gaessil]) and personal name (씨명 [ssimyeong]). Both acts came into force on February 11, 1940 (Governor-General of Korea 1939). For

example, the archival “Register of Temporary Military Personnel and Military Employees” (임시군인군속계 [Imssi gunin gunsokgye]), compiled in March 1945, records that 박정희 [Pak Chŏnghŭi] appeared under the name 다카키 마사오 (高木正雄) [Takagi Masao] (Hankyoreh 2005).

- The period after the liberation of Korea (since 1945) – the Name Restoration Order was adopted (1946), allowing Koreans to return to their national surnames and names. The following system consolidated: surname + two-syllable personal name; the surname passed down the paternal line, women keep the surname after marriage.
- Modern times – until 1995, in South Korea there was a ban on marriage between people with the same surname and from the same clan, despite the lack of blood relationship. After 1995, the ban was lifted, but this tradition is still partially preserved in the public consciousness (Kim 2005).

Traditional Korean anthroponymy involved a multi-stage naming system, in which a name was perceived not simply as a means of identification, but as a marker of age, social status, politeness, and even cultural development of the individual. Up to four types of names could be used throughout a person's life, each performing its own unique function.

태명 [taemyeong] – a prenatal name. This temporary name was given to a developing baby. It had no legal force, but performed an important psychological and symbolic function, nominating the future child as an already existing member of the family. Such names often carried aspirational or protective semantics, and the naming process itself was a ritual action aimed at protecting the future child and establishing an emotional connection between the child and his parents.

명 [myeong] or 본명 [bonmyeong] – primary name (birth name). This is the official name that was recorded in documents and used in everyday life and documentation. It corresponded to a name in the modern sense, but its open use was limited by politeness. For boys, the name was often chosen taking into account the principles of yin-yang harmony, the number of strokes in characters and other traditional criteria. Girls were also given names, but they were less often the object of public use.

자 (字) [ja] is the so-called “courtesy name” traditionally given to a man upon reaching adulthood, primarily in Confucian culture. In Sino-Korean tradition, this act occurred as part of the coming-of-age ceremony (관례 [gwanrye]), usually at age 20, and served as a formal sign of transition to adulthood. The name 자 (字) [ja] replaced the primary name (본명 [ponmyeong]) in formal, written, and ceremonial communication. It was considered unethical and impolite to call an adult male by his primary name, especially in a hierarchically organized society. For example, the courtesy name of the Joseon-era philosopher and statesman Yi I (이이, 1536–1584) was 숙헌 (叔獻) [Sukheon], which can be translated as “junior who brings offerings” (reflecting the Confucian virtues

of filial piety), and the reformer, philosopher, and scholar Jeong Yak-yong (정약용, 1762–1836) had the courtesy name 미용 (美鏞) [Miyong], “beautiful bell,” which can metaphorically mean a person whose word is weighty and beautiful.

In the Korean onomastic tradition, a special place was occupied by the category of pseudonyms – 호 (號) [ho], which acted as an additional name along with the primary name (본명 [ponmyeong]) and the courtesy name (자 (字) [ja]). Initially, this practice was formed under the influence of cultural norms that assumed the presence of two or more names (복명속 [bokmyeongsok]) and avoided direct naming (실명경피속 [silmyeonggyeongpisok]). Already in the Three Kingdoms era, cases of the use of pseudonyms were recorded, and in the Goryeo and Joseon periods they became a common phenomenon in the cultural and intellectual milieu.

A pseudonym could be given by the bearer himself, as well as by a teacher, parents, or friends. According to the classification accepted in traditional culture, there are two types of pseudonyms: 아호 (雅號) [aho] – “refined name”, typical for poets, artists, calligraphers, and 당호 (堂號) [dangho] – “family name”.

The principles of forming a pseudonym were formulated back in the 13th century by the outstanding thinker and writer Yi Gyubo (이규보(李奎報), 1168–1241, courtesy name – 춘경(春卿) [Chungyeong]). In his treatise “Opinions of the White Cloud Hermit” (“백운거사어록” [Baekungeosa-eoron]), he distinguished the following grounds: 1) place of residence or memories associated with it (소처이호 [socheo-iho]); 2) ideals to which one aspires (소지이호 [soji-iho]); 3) specific life circumstances (소우이호 [soi-iho]); 4) objects or images that have personal value (소축이호 [sochuk-iho]).

Historical examples include the diversity of names for one person: Yi Gyubo used six pseudonyms, including “백운거사” [Baekungeosa] – ‘White Cloud Hermit’, “자오당” [Jaodang] – ‘Hall of Introspection’, “사가재” [Sagajae] – ‘Abode of the Four Virtues’, etc. The most famous in this regard is Kim Jonghui (김정희(金正喜), pseudonym 추사 [Chusa] – ‘Autumn Historian’), a scholar and calligrapher of the late Joseon era, who is credited with up to 503 different pseudonyms, reflecting both the intellectual pursuits and the changing mood of the author. Some of them, such as “불노” [Bulno] – ‘Buddha’s Servant’ or “설우도인” [Seol-udoin] – ‘Snow Ox Hermit’, illustrate a philosophical bent; others – wordplay and literary ingenuity, such as “정희추사” – ‘Jonghui-Chusa’, with the rearrangement of the elements of the name.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, in the context of growing national consciousness, the practice of creating pseudonyms based on native Korean vocabulary has become widespread. Thus, the linguist Ju Sigyeong (주시경(周時經), 1876–1914) used the pseudonym 한힌샘 [Hanhinsaem] – ‘bright source’, the poet and philologist I Byeonggi (이병기(李秉岐), 1891–1968) used 가람 [Garam] – ‘river’, which symbolized the unification of all sources of knowledge and the spiritual striving for harmony. Such

names became an expression of national symbolism (Kang, Shin 1990).

Thus, a pseudonym in Korean linguoculture is not just a conventional name, but a multi-level form that performs symbolic, identification and communicative functions. It serves as a means of self-expression, marks belonging to a certain intellectual or artistic circle, and in some cases becomes an important element of representing a person in history and literature.

Today, in Korean culture, 자 [ja] and 호 [ho] have disappeared from everyday use, remaining only in the context of literature, art, religion, and stage names. However, the traditional 자 [ja] has been replaced by the modern practice of changing one’s name – 개명 [gaemyeong], often associated with the belief in the ability to change one’s destiny, improve one’s luck, or start a new life. This phenomenon can be interpreted as a transformation of the old cultural attitude toward a “second name” – not through a ritual, but through the choice and legal registration of a new name. The prenatal name (태명 [taemyeong]) is still used in family practice as a form of emotional connection with the child. Thus, modern naming in Korea maintains a connection with the historical multi-stage model, transforming it into new forms. Linguocultural specificity is manifested in the high symbolism of the name, its pragmatic, etiquette and fateful function, as well as in the preservation of the ritual perception of the name as part of personal identity.

In archaic Korean culture, which was heavily influenced by shamanism, a name was seen not just as a way to identify a person, but as a means of influencing destiny and a tool of magical protection. It was believed that the right name could ward off evil spirits and ensure the child’s health and long life. This is where the practice of giving “ugly”, “deceptive” or protective names came from (for example, 막둥이 [Makdungi] – “the last one”, 복순이 [Boksuni] – “bringing happiness”, 돌쇠 [Dolsoe] – “stone”), so that the spirits of illness or evil forces would not show interest in the child. The shamanic model of naming involved a spiritual intermediary – a shamaness or a shaman (무당 [mudang]) – who had the ability to interpret omens, appeal to patron spirits, and select a name in accordance with the expected destiny of the child. The name thus became the result of a sacred ritual and an expression of hope, protection, and predestination. Within this practice, onomastic taboos, rare sounds, symbolic reduplication, and onomatopoeia played an important role – as ways of creating a special magical structure perceived as a talisman.

These ideas were further developed in the later tradition of temporary naming of a child before its birth (prenatal name), where the ideas of protection, blessing, and sacred support continue to play a key role. Thus, shamanistic attitudes endowed the name with the functions of protection, spiritual connection, and determination of fate, exerting a long-term influence on the formation of the Korean onomastic system and its cultural ideas (Park 2004).

In modern Korea, unlike the official name that a child receives immediately after birth, a prenatal name is a means of expressing parental feelings, care, hope, and also an element of symbolic recognition of the child as a full-fledged member of the family even before birth.

Names such as 튼튼이 [Teunteuni] – ‘sturdy child’, 사랑이 [Sarangi] – ‘darling’, 복덩이 [Bokdeongi] – ‘lucky boy’, 꼬물이 [Kkomuri] – ‘baby’ reflect wishes for health, well-being, love and vitality. The choice of a prenatal name is based on the following criteria:

- semantic value: preference is given to names with a positive connotation and meaning associated with health, luck, happiness or beauty.
- phonetic expressiveness: the use of stressed consonants (된소리 [doensori]) and strong sounds (센소리 [sensori]), such as ㄱ [kk], ㄷ [tt], ㅃ [pp], ㅆ [ss], ㅈ [jj], ㅋ [k], ㅌ [t], ㅊ [ch], ㅍ [p]. Such sounds are believed to be better perceived by the fetus and have a beneficial effect on the development of hearing and the brain. Examples: 튼북이 [Ttuboki], 뽀뽀 [Ppuppu], 짱짱이 [jjangjjangi], 톨망이 [Ttolmangi].
- rhythm and euphony: Many prenatal names have a rhythmic repetitive structure and are easy to remember. This creates a positive emotional perception and ease of use.
- symbolic meaning: the name can reflect a wish or a prediction of the fate of the future child, forming a positive attitude in the minds of parents.

A special place in the practice of temporary naming is occupied by names formed on the basis of native Korean words: 단미 [Danmi] – ‘sweet and beautiful’, 라온 [Raon] – ‘coming joy’, 하람 [Haram] – ‘heavenly gift’, 도담 [Dodam] – ‘healthy and prosperous’, 아란 [Aran] – ‘beautifully growing’, 해솔 [Haesol] – ‘bright as the sun, strong as a pine’. Such names are often chosen for their semantic purity, natural imagery and symbolic content, which gives the practice of naming additional depth.

Prenatal names are formed according to several models:

- affixation: adding the suffix -이 [i] to an adjective or noun: 튼튼 (하다) [deundeun(hada)] ‘strong’ + 이 → 튼튼이 [Deundeuni] ‘strong boy’, 건강 [geongang] ‘health’ + 이 → 건강이 [Geongangi] ‘healthy boy’, 예쁜 [yeppeun] ‘handsome’ + 이 → 예쁜이 [Yeppeuni] ‘cute boy’;
- reduplication and onomatopoeia: 까꿍 [kkakkung] ‘cuckoo!’ + 이 → 까꿍이 [Kkakkungi] evokes associations with a cheerful, lively, playful baby; 쑥쑥 [ssuksuk] (imitation of the sound of rapid growth, stretching, as in the words 쑥쑥 자라다 [ssukssuk jarada] – ‘to grow quickly’) + 이 → 쑥쑥이 [Ssukssuki] is associated with energetic, rapid development; 뽀뽀 [ppoppo] ‘smack-smack’ evokes associations with tenderness, love, affection;
- metonymic derivation: 찰떡 [Chaltteok] ‘sticky rice cake’ symbolizes the unbreakable bond between mother and child, 별 [byeol] ‘star’ + 이 → 별이 [Byeoli]

‘little star’, 해님 [haenim] ‘sun’ + 이 → 해님이 [Haenimi] ‘little sun’;

- lexical-semantic transfer from words denoting qualities or states: 사랑 [sarang] ‘love’ → 사랑이 [Sarangi] ‘darling’, 축복 [chukbok] ‘blessing’ → 축복이 [Chukboki] ‘blessed’, 희망 [huimang] ‘hope’ → 희망이 [Huimangi] ‘little hope’.

The prenatal name in Korean culture performs multifaceted functions: it promotes the formation of an early emotional connection between parents and child (psychological function), reflects parental hopes, expectations and value systems (symbolic function), is used in everyday communication during pregnancy as a form of addressing the child (communicative function) and at the same time serves as a marker of traditional cultural ideas about health, natural harmony, spiritual purity and continuity of generations (cultural function).

In Korea, great importance is attached to the semantics of the official name, as it is believed that it can influence a person's destiny. Therefore, parents often consult name specialists (작명가 [jakmyeongga]) or use fortune telling (사주 [saju]) to choose the most auspicious name, taking into account the date and time of the child's birth. *Yin/yang*, the five elements, the time of birth, and the consonance of the first and last names are of great importance in naming. And of course, 수리 (數理) *numbers* and the meanings corresponding to these numbers are of no small importance. The *number* 수 (數) is the principle and wisdom of the world, so it was of the greatest importance during the Joseon Dynasty. Each number has its own characteristics, depending on which element of numbers it belongs to, *yin* or *yang*. A character with an even number of strokes is negative, and with an odd number, positive. In the case of Hangul, the number of strokes is easy to recognize from the order of writing, but in the case of Chinese characters it may be incorrect (Kim 2011).

Since Chinese characters are both a whole word and a syllable, and the fact that one character can consist of several basic radicals, it is important to know their etymology in order to avoid making a mistake when counting. The character 泳/변 consists of three basic radicals, but since the etymology of this word in Korean 수 is “number”, the correct number is 4, since the number of strokes in the word 수 is four.

When choosing a name, it should not be completely *yin* or completely *yang*, because it is believed that the relationship between the child and other people foreshadows the risk of disaster, accident or illness. To choose the right name, you need to harmonize it by mixing *yin* and *yang*. Thus, if *yin* is (●) and *yang* (○), then the name can be harmonized as follows: ① ● ○ ○; ② ● ● ○; ③ ○ ○ ●; ④ ○ ● ●. This arrangement of the *yin* and *yang* elements is considered good because it is harmonious. The name number is calculated as the sum of the part and the whole name, and not independently of each other. For example, 이 (李) (7) 미 (美) (9) 선 (仙) (5). The

number 16, which combines two characters (이李 (7) + 미美 (9)), embodies 청년기 (靑年期)¹ *youth* and *individuality*, the number 12 (이李 (7) + 선仙(5)) is the number symbolizing good luck in society, and in the number 21 (이李 (7) + 미美 (9) + 선仙(5)) Koreans saw general good luck in adulthood (Oh 1989).

The five elements (metal, wood, water, fire and earth), which together with the elements of *yin* and *yang* form the basis of Eastern philosophy, can balance or neutralize the negative meaning of numbers when naming.

Of particular interest is the phenomenon of personal names based on native Korean lexemes, without relying on Chinese characters. In the modern research tradition, there is active interest in the transformations of the perception and allocation of such names against the background of socio-cultural changes in Korean society.

The term 고유어 이름 [goyueo ireum] (or 순우리말 이름 [sunurimal ireum]) refers to a name based exclusively on native Korean vocabulary. However, the distinction between native and Sino-Korean names is not always clear. In a narrow sense, a native name consists entirely of native words, excluding the family name. In a broader interpretation, it is permissible to use rare Korean characters or to compose a name with latent semantics that allows both native and character readings. The same onomastic component can be written using both Hangul and characters. Moreover, a mixture of forms is observed: some native names are phonetically adapted to possible recording in characters for the sake of semantic completeness or dual interpretation.

In ancient times, only native names were used on the territory of the Korean Peninsula, they were recorded in chronicles using borrowed Chinese characters that reflected only the sound, not the meaning. Examples of such names can be found in “삼국사기” (“History of the Three Kingdoms”) and “삼국유사” (“Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms”). However, with the strengthening of Confucianism and the influence of Chinese onomastics, native names were gradually displaced, acquiring the status of “common people’s names”.

During the Joseon Dynasty, native names continued to be used among the lower classes, but with the spread of the examination system and the cult of education, Sino-Korean names (Encyclopedia of Korean Culture) finally came to dominate.

The periodization of the trends in the spread of native names can be presented as follows.

- Before the 1970s: native names were almost never used and were considered of little acceptability. Names composed of Chinese characters predominated.
- 1970–1983: passive spread of native names, primarily among girls. Prevalence did not exceed 10%.
- 1983–1994: active spread of native names. Popular names such as 한솔 [Hansol], 다솜 [Dasom], 도담 [Dodam] appeared.

- 1995–2005: decreased interest in native names, due to their stigmatization in public discourse. Such names were often perceived as non-standard or overly emotional.
- 2010–2015: a revival of interest. Native names become fashionable due to their sonority, semantic capacity, and uniqueness. Popular names include 서아 [Seoa], 도하 [Doha], 아린 [Arin].
- 2016–2025: native names become common, with their share reaching over 10%. Male onomastics are expanding, and the use of native names for boys is no longer uncommon.

The dynamics of the spread of native names in Korea in the second half of the 20th – early 21st century can be traced in a number of studies devoted to the socio-cultural transformation of onomastic practices (Kim 2005). Modern onomastic trends in the Republic of Korea associated with the growing popularity of native names, especially in the period from the 2010s to the present, are recorded in current reference and encyclopedic materials reflecting changes in the socio-cultural practice of naming (Encyclopedia of Korean Culture; Namu Wiki).

Research shows that native names are more common among girls. Among boys, their popularity has been growing since the mid-2010s. Age also influences perception: names that seemed “fashionable” in childhood may be perceived as inappropriate in adulthood. However, with the increasing use of native names among adults and middle-aged groups, this barrier is gradually being erased.

Moreover, there is a symbolic stratification of names: names with components like ‘혜’ [Hye], ‘자’ [Ja], ‘숙’ [Suk] are associated with the grandmothers’ generation, while native names (서아 [Seoa], 아린 [Arin], 지우 [Jiu]) represent the “new” and the “fashionable”.

South Korea’s legal system allows for the registration of names in both Hangul (한글) and Hanja (漢字). However, there are complications with native Korean names (고유어 이름), as many of them do not have direct Hanja equivalents. This makes it difficult to officially register them in their character form. In 1991, the Supreme Court published a list of Hanja characters permitted for use in personal names, which has since been expanded several times. However, if a particular Hanja is not on this list, the name must be registered in Hangul only.

However, the complexity of reconciling meaning, phonetics, and writing creates difficulties in registering native names in character form. Amendments to the family law have allowed for the use of mixed forms of notation, such as 김하늘(金하늘) [Kim Haneul], reflecting the hybridization of the modern onomastic space.

Contemporary Korean onomastics demonstrates a steady tendency to restore and rethink native names as a cultural symbol and expression of national identity. Their distribution reflects not only linguistic preferences, but also value systems related to individuality, aesthetics, and historical memory.

¹ Usually around the age of 20. From this moment, the body and mind develop most vigorously.

Table 1. Subjects and semantics of native names

Subjects	Names	Meanings
Nature: sky, light	하늘 [Haneul], 해님 [Haenim], 햇살 [Haetsal], 별 [Byeol], 새벽 [Saetbyeol], 달 [Dal]	Connection with the sky and light
Nature: earth, plants	가람 [Garam], 솔 [Sol], 들 [Deul], 꽃 [Kkot], 나무 [Namu], 앞새 [Ip-sae], 마루 [Maru], 바다 [Bada]	Stability, vitality, the beauty of nature
Seasons and weather	봄 [Bom], 가을 [Gaeul], 새봄 [Saebom], 여름 [Yeoreum], 겨울 [Gyeoul], 단비 [Danbi]	Renewal, hope, natural cycle
Feelings and virtues	사랑 [Sarang], 슬기 [Seulgi], 아름 [Areum], 보람 [Boram], 믿음 [Mideum], 기쁨 [Gippeum]	Ethical and aesthetic ideals
Family and relationships	다솜 [Dasom], 다소니 [Dasoni], 소담 [Sodam]	Closeness, warmth
Path, growth, movement	나길 [Nagil], 세움 [Seum], 키움 [Kium], 이룸 [Irum]	Development, purposefulness
Uniqueness and strength	으뜸 [Eutteum], 힘찬 [Himchan], 든솔 [Deunsol], 한울 [Hanul], 도담 [Dodam]	Masculinity, leadership, reliability
Tenderness and grace	고운 [Goun], 고은 [Goeun], 보라 [Bora], 소리 [Sori], 아라 [Ara], 슬아 [Seula]	Feminine aesthetics, poetry

Table 2. Word-formation models of native names

Model	Morphemic composition	Names
Monosyllabic	One root of a common noun	하늘 [Haneul], 바다 [Bada], 봄 [Bom], 사랑 [Sarang], 들 [Deul], 마루 [Maru]
Compounding	Two roots of a common noun	가람슬기 [Garamseulgi], 꽃가람 [Kkotgaram], 별빛 [Byeolbit], 한결 [Hangyeol]
Affixation	Common noun root + evaluative suffixes (-이 [i], -아 [a], -님 [nim])	다솜이 [Dasomi], 별님 [Byeolnim], 꽃님 [Kkotnim], 보미 [Bomi], 초롱이 [Chorongi], 하니 [Hani]
Reduplication	Repetition of onomatopoeic roots	도담도담 [Dodamdodam], 도란도란 [Dorangdorang], 랄라라 [Rarara]
Homophony/sound harmony	Compounding of roots based on euphony	나래 [Narae], 라온 [Raon], 루리 [Ruri], 아라 [Ara], 예나 [Yena]
Substantivization	Verb or adjective stem + suffix	이룸 [Irum], 나은 [Naeun], 지은 [Jieun]
Combination of native and Sino-Korean morphemes	Native root + borrowed root	슬찬 [Seulchan], 다은 [Daeun], 보라 [Bora], 예슬 [Yesle]
Semantic harmony	Surname and name	박꽃 [Park Kkot], 안빛나 [An Bitna], 김하늘 [Kim Haneul]

When choosing a name for a child, Koreans take into account the following rules: 1) the name must be unique; 2) avoid names consisting of one word; in cases where the name comes from a verb or adjective, it is preferable to add an affix or form a compound word; 3) it is better to choose the meaning of the name from words that are rarely used, but have a desired meaning, such as obsolete or dialect words; 4) a name can be composed of two lexemes or morphemes, by combining words with similar or complementary semantics, as well as by contraction or abbreviation, while ensuring euphony (for example, 아 [A], 미 [Mi], 나 [Na], 슬 [Seul], 해 [Hae], 리 [Ri], 라 [Ra], 알 [Al], 실 [Sil], 솜 [Som], 올 [Ol] and others are very beautiful for the Korean ear); 5) a name should be in harmony with a family name, since even if the name is chosen correctly, in combination with the family name the overall meaning can be negative (Park 2004). Let us consider

the subject, semantics and word-formation models of some native Korean names (see Table 1, Table 2):

Native Korean names cover a wide range of natural, ethical and aesthetic concepts that reflect the worldview and values of Korean culture. Among the most frequent semantic fields are images of nature, seasons, human feelings and relationships, as well as concepts of growth, strength and beauty.

Thus, names associated with the sky and light (for example, 하늘 [Haneul] – ‘Sky’, 해님 [Haenim] – ‘Sun’, 햇살 [Haetsal] – ‘Sunbeam’) symbolize sublimity, purity and aspiration. Lexemes denoting the earth, trees, flowers and water (가람 [Garam] – ‘River’, 솔 [Sol] – ‘Pine’, 나무 [Namu] – ‘Tree’, 바다 [Bada] – ‘Sea’, etc.) are associated with stability, natural beauty and connection with the native land. Images of the seasons and atmospheric phenomena (봄 [Bom] – ‘Spring’, 가을 [Gaeul] – ‘Autumn’,

새봄 [Saebom] – ‘New Spring’) carry ideas of renewal, hope and the natural cycle of life.

Names reflecting feelings, moral virtues and family warmth are widely represented (사랑 [Sarang] – ‘Love’, 아름 [Areum] – ‘Splendour’, 다솜 [Dasom] – Old Korean ‘Love’, etc.), which indicates a focus on interpersonal values. An equally important orientation is the semantics of the path, achievement and growth (이름 [Irum] – ‘Accomplishment’, 세움 [Seum] – ‘Exaltation’, 나길 [Nagil] – ‘Open Path’), emphasizing the desire for personal development. Names that contain meanings of strength and uniqueness (으뜸 [Eutteum] – ‘The Best’, 힘찬 [Himchan] – ‘Powerful’, 한울 [Hanul] – ‘The Great Vault of Heaven’) emphasize masculinity, leadership qualities and inner support, while names with components of grace (고운 [Goun] – ‘Graceful’ (from the adjective *to be beautiful, soft, kind*), 소리 [Sori] – ‘Melody’, 아라 [Ara] – ‘Wisdom’) express tenderness and feminine aesthetics.

The analysis of word-formation models of native names allows to identify several stable structures characteristic of Korean onomastics.

Firstly, single-component names are built on the basis of one common noun root reflecting natural or ethical categories (for example, 하늘 [Haneul] – ‘Sky’, 봄 [Bom] – ‘Spring’, 사랑 [Sarang] – ‘Love’). This model is the simplest and maintains a connection with the native semantics.

Secondly, the compounding model that combines two independent roots, often with natural or poetic concepts, is widely represented. This allows for the creation of figurative, harmonious names (가람슬기 [Garamseulgi] – ‘River and Wisdom’ (symbolizes the combination of fluidity, calmness, and intelligence); 꽃가람 [Kkotgarām] – ‘Flower and River’ (associated with natural beauty, tenderness, and vitality); 별빛 [Byeolbit] – ‘Starlight’ (semantics of light, hope, dream, romance), etc.).

Affixation with evaluative suffixes (-이 [i], -아 [a], -님 [nim]) emphasizes the emotional coloring of the name. Such names create a feeling of warmth and respect, they are often used to denote virtues or emotional closeness, and can convey tenderness, playfulness, or affection. Thus, the name 보미 [Bomi], from the word 봄 (“spring”) with the addition of the suffix -이, creates an association with lightness, youth, and freshness. The name 초롱이 [Chorongi], which is based on the root 초롱 (associated with the meanings of “light”, “radiance”), acquires an affectionate and bright sound thanks to the same suffix. The name 하니 [Hani] is formed from the shortened root 하ㄴ (from 하늘 “sky”) and the suffix -이, which gives it an ethereal, soft, and emotional connotation.

Such names are actively used in female anthroponymy, especially since the end of the 20th century, and continue to gain popularity due to their melody, symbolism and unique cultural code. The suffix model allows maintaining a connection with the native vocabulary, while introducing a modern sound and personal warmth into the name.

Reduplication is usually used to enhance emotional expressiveness or rhythmic harmony. Such names sound affectionate and melodic, especially in prenatal naming.

Homophony and sound harmony are realized through the selection of euphonious and smooth combinations of morphemes, often without reference to direct meaning (예나 [Yena], 아라 [Ara], 루리 [Ruri]). Such names strive for aesthetic integrity.

Substantivization involves the formation of names from verbal or adjectival stems by adding word-formation suffixes. This model gives the name the meaning of an action, process, or quality (이름 [Irum] – ‘Achievement / Fulfillment’ (from the verb 이루다 *to achieve, to carry out*); 나은 [Naeun] ‘Best’ (from the verb 낫다 *to be better*); 지은 [Jieun] – ‘Created’ (from the verb 짓다 *to build, to create*), another interpretation is also possible depending on the intentions of the parents and phonetics).

Of interest are also hybrid models that combine roots of native and Sino-Korean origin, for example: 슬찬 [Seulchan] ‘Wise and brilliant’ ← 슬 (from native 슬기 ‘wisdom’) + 찬 (Sino-Korean ‘radiance’, ‘worthy’, ‘outstanding’); 다은 [Daeun] ‘All virtuous’ ← 다 (native ‘all / whole’) + 은 (Sino-Korean ‘kindness’ or ‘mercy’); 예슬 [Yeseul] ‘Beautiful and wise’ ← 예 [ye] (Sino-Korean ‘beauty’, ‘politeness’, ‘etiquette’) + 슬 [seul] (from native 슬기 ‘wisdom’).

Finally, the semantic harmony between the family name and the given name creates poetic or metaphorical constructions in which the given name enhances the image given by the family name, for example: 김하늘 [Kim Haneul] ← 김 (金) [Kim] ‘gold’ + 하늘 [Haneul] ‘Sky’ (symbolically ‘golden sky’, ‘sublime origin’, ‘purity and height’); 안빛나 [An Bitna] ← 안 (安) [An] ‘peace’ / ‘tranquility’ + 빛나 [Bitna] ‘Shining’ (symbolically ‘the radiance of tranquility’).

Since the beginning of the 21st century, against the background of globalization and growing interest in multicultural identity, South Korea has seen an increase in the popularity of borrowed names, especially those of English origin. This trend is characteristic primarily of informal names, stage names, and names used in an English-speaking environment.

In most cases, such a name is chosen by the bearer (teenager or adult) in situations of international socialization, such as studying abroad, working for an international company, or actively participating in the global digital environment.

In some cases, the choice is initiated by parents, focused on the prospect of a child’s bilingual education and their future communication in a transnational context. Less frequently, an English-language name is suggested from outside, by foreign language teachers, employers, or native English speakers as an adapted form to facilitate intercultural interaction.

Selection criteria typically include euphony, ease of articulation, graphic clarity and recognizability, as well as semantic neutrality or positive symbolism. A significant requirement is phonetic compatibility with the Korean language system, ensuring the natural adaptation of the name when written in Hangul (see Table 3).

The table includes aggregated data from the website “baby-name.kr”. The interpretation takes into account the most frequently registered names, which in modern

Table 3. English borrowed names

Name (Hangyl / Latin)	Origin / Etymology	Semantics
Female 루나 [Runa] / <i>Luna</i>	Latin <i>lūna</i> → Eng. <i>Luna</i>	'Moon'
Female 제니 [Cheni] / <i>Jenny</i>	Welsh <i>Gwenhwyfar</i> → Eng. <i>Jennifer</i> → <i>Jenny</i>	'white/light'
Female 엘리 [Elli] / <i>Ellie</i>	Greek <i>Ἑλένη (Helénē)</i> → Latin <i>Helena</i> → Eng. <i>Ellen/Ellie</i>	'light'
Female 로라 [Rora] / <i>Laura</i>	Latin <i>laurus</i> → Eng. <i>Laura</i>	'laurel'
Male 노아 [Noa] / <i>Noah</i>	Ancient Jewish <i>נֹחַ (Noah)</i> → Greek <i>Νῶε (Nōē)</i> → Latin <i>Noe</i> → Eng. <i>Noah</i>	'peace; consolation'
male 레오 [Reo] / <i>Leo</i>	Latin <i>leo</i> → Eng. <i>Leo</i>	'lion'
male 리암 [Riam] / <i>Liam</i>	Ger. <i>Willahelm</i> → Eng. <i>William</i> → Irish <i>Uilliam</i> → <i>Liam</i>	'will + protection'

Korean practice are consistently perceived as Western/English-language borrowings.

According to baby-name.kr data for the period 2008–2026, the officially registered (출생신고 [Chulsaengsingol]) English-language graphic borrowings include 루나 [Runa] (1,547), 제니 [Cheni] (1,133), 엘리 [Elli] (467), 로라 [Rora] (366), and among male names, 노아 [Noa] (1,913), 레오 [Reo] (500), and 리암 [Riam] (189) (baby-name.kr).

Most names are secondary borrowings, in which English serves as an intermediary between the Korean anthroponymic system and earlier Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and Celtic sources (*Luna*, *Noah*, *Ellie*, *Liam*, etc.). This confirms the role of English as a global onomastic mediator, ensuring the translation of traditional European naming systems into national ones in a neutralized and culturally universalized form.

Semantically, borrowed names are characterized by a pronounced orientation toward universal, positively marked meanings that do not conflict with Korean cultural norms. These include nominations of natural objects (루나 [Runa] 'moon'), abstract values and states (노아 [Noa] 'peace, solace'), and symbols of strength and protection (레오 [Reo] 'lion', 리암 [Riam] 'will + protection'). Such semantic transparency facilitates the pragmatic acceptability of borrowed names and facilitates their integration into the Korean linguistic and cultural environment.

The phonetic and graphic adaptation of names indicates a tendency to consolidate short, mono- or disyllabic forms that correspond to the phonological limitations of the Korean language and modern preferences in anthroponymy. At the same time, borrowed names are perceived as stylistically neutral and novel, which enhances their appeal in the context of a global cultural orientation. The gender aspect deserves special attention: the analyzed material reveals greater variability and semantic abstraction in female names, while male names largely retain semantic components associated with strength, stability, and protection. This asymmetry reflects general socio-cultural patterns of the symbolic distribution of gender meanings in the personal name system.

Overall, the presented data allow us to conclude that English-mediated loan names in Korean anthroponymy

function not as direct calques, but as adapted and semantically optimized units that combine the prestige of global culture with the norms of the national linguistic tradition.

This onomastic practice demonstrates not only the influence of English-speaking culture, but also a desire for universality, softness of sound, and aesthetic adaptability. A name chosen in an international context should be euphonious, easy to pronounce for both Korean and global audiences.

Thus, borrowed names become an element of a new cultural code that combines local and global onomastic strategies. Their spread indicates a transformation of ideas about the prestige, identity and aesthetics of a name in contemporary Korean society (Native Korean Names).

Within the traditional onomastic system, based on Confucian and social and ancestral principles, the name reflects hierarchy, family affiliation and parental expectations. However, alongside this secular practice, a religious model of naming has also developed in Korean culture – Buddhist, in which the name has acquired a sacred character and has become an expression of spiritual rebirth, rejection of the worldly and embracing the values of Dharma.

The Buddhist name (법명/法命 [beopmyeong]) – “the name of the Dharma Law”, is the most important category of religious anthroponymy in Korean linguistic culture. It is given at the moment of joining the Buddhist tradition, whether it is taking vows (수계/受戒 [sugye]), joining a monastic order (출가/出家 [chulga]) or participating in ritual ceremonies. The process of assigning a Buddhist name is associated with a symbolic renunciation of the worldly self and a transition to another – spiritual – state of identity (Park 2004).

Buddhist names are mostly based on Chinese characters and contain deep philosophical and religious symbolism. The structure of names traditionally includes: two syllables for monks (e.g. 법륜/法輪 [beopryun] – “wheel of the Law”); three syllables are more often used in the names of lay women (e.g. 정신행/正信行 [jeongsinhaeng] – “correct faith and action”). The first syllable of the name often reflects affiliation with a monastery or teacher (a

Table 4. Semantics of Buddhist names

Buddhist name	Meaning
지광 (智光) [Jigwang] Light of wisdom	지 – wisdom, 광 – light; symbolizes an enlightened teacher
혜심 (慧心) [Hyesim] Heart of wisdom	혜 – intuitive wisdom, 심 – soul; indicates compassion
법륜 (法輪) [Beopryun] Wheel of Dharma	법 – teaching, 륜 – wheel; metaphorically about Buddha
삼소 (三笑) [Samsso] Three smiles	Harmony, joy (name of a lay person)
월광 (月光) [Wolgwang] Moonlight	Symbol of purity and inspiration
정신행 (正信行) [Jeongsinhaeng] Right belief and action	Reflection of adherence to canonical vows

Table 5. Names borrowed from the Bible

Name (Hangyl/English)	Source	Meaning
요셉 [Yosep] / Joseph 요섭 [Yoseop] / Joseph	Old and New Testaments	'(yes) God will add' / 'let (the Lord) add'
다윗 [Dawit] / David	Old Testament	'beloved'
한나 [Hanna] / Hannah	Old Testament	'mercy, grace' / 'favor'
시온 [Sion] / Zion	Biblical toponymy	'Zion' (a sacred toponym; in the biblical tradition – 'Jerusalem/City of David')
이삭 [Isak] / Isaac	Old Testament	'laughter; he laughs'
요한 [Yohan] / John	New Testament	'God is merciful' / 'The Lord has shown mercy'

similar principle is used in family names), while the second syllable individualizes the name, indicating spiritual qualities and ideals.

Typical character components include: 법 (法) [beop] – 'law, teaching of Buddha', 지 (智) [ji] – 'wisdom', 덕 (德) [deok] – 'virtue', 혜 (慧) [hye] – 'enlightenment', 광 (光) [gwang] – 'light', 일 (一) [il] – 'unity', 성 (性) [seong] – 'nature, essence', etc. Let us consider the semantics of some Buddhist names (see Table 4):

Buddhist names in the Korean tradition are selected either by a spiritual mentor or by the leader of the vow-taking ritual, and their formation is subject to certain onomastic and cultural-religious principles. Such names are based on:

- semantically loaded components, each expressing a certain religious and philosophical concept;
- philosophical and symbolic significance of the name, reflecting the key categories of the Buddhist worldview, such as karma, path, morality, virtue;
- linear continuity, which implies the presence of a common syllable (character) among the followers of one teacher, which emphasizes belonging to a certain monastic lineage;
- orientation towards ethical ideals and spiritual practice, due to which the name not only identifies, but

also serves as a constant reminder of the vows taken and the desire for enlightenment.

Modern lay people may also receive Buddhist names after the 수계/受戒 [sugye] (taking a vow) ritual, but they are generally not used outside the religious community. The exception is when a person changes their name officially to reflect a new identity (Du 1988).

Thus, the Buddhist name does not act as an arbitrary designation, but as the result of a symbolic initiation in which the linguistic form becomes the bearer of sacred meaning and spiritual identity.

The Buddhist name in Korean culture serves a multifaceted function, simultaneously denoting spiritual birth and the rejection of one's previous lay identity, serving as a form of religious conversion within the Buddhist community, cementing one's affiliation with the teachings of Buddha, and acting as a symbolic marker of spiritual discipline, morality, and the pursuit of enlightenment.

Along with the Buddhist tradition of naming, deeply rooted in the history and culture of Korea, Christian onomastic practice is also actively functioning in modern society, forming its own layer of religiously motivated names. These two systems coexist in parallel, reflecting confessional diversity and allowing us to identify

Table 6. Christian appellative names

Name (Hangyl)	Source	Meaning
사랑 [Sarang]	general language vocabulary	'love'
믿음 [Mideum]	general language vocabulary	'faith'
소망 [Somang]	general language vocabulary	'hope'
은혜 [Eunhye]	Christian vocabulary	'grace'
진리 [Jinri]	theological vocabulary	'true'

Table 7. Two-component acronyms and word-formation models of Christian names

Name (Hangyl)	Word-formation model	Interpretation
예은 [Yeün]	예(耶) [ye] – <i>Jesus</i> + 은(恩) [ün] – <i>grace</i>	'the grace of Jesus; divine mercy'
하린 [Harin]	하(하나님) [ha] – <i>God</i> + 린 [rin] – nominal formant	'belonging to God; child of God'
주원 [Juwŏn]	주(主) [ju] – <i>Lord</i> + 원(願) [wŏn] – <i>desire, vow</i>	'the desire/will of the Lord; aspiration towards God'
은지 [Eunji]	은(恩) [ün] – <i>grace</i> + 지(智) [ji] – <i>wisdom</i>	grace and wisdom
성민 [Seongmin]	성(聖) [sŏng] – <i>holy / Holy Spirit</i> + 민(民) [min] – <i>people</i>	'people of the Holy Spirit; God's people'
예준 [Yejun]	예(耶) [ye] – <i>Jesus</i> + 준 [jun] – <i>preparedness / superiority</i> (준 [jun] depends on interpretation: 準 'norm/order', 俊 'talented', etc.)	'prepared by God; excellence in Christ'
하은 [Haeun]	하(하나님) [ha] – <i>God</i> + 은(恩) [ün] – <i>grace</i>	God's grace
은율 [Eunyu]	은(恩) [ün] – <i>grace</i> + 율 [yu] – <i>harmony / 'charter, law'</i>	'harmony of grace; graceful order'
예지 [Yeji]	예(耶) [ye] – <i>Jesus</i> + 지(智) [ji] – <i>wisdom</i>	'wisdom in Christ; divine wisdom'
예진 [Yejin]	예(耶) [ye] – <i>Jesus</i> + 진(眞) [jin] – <i>truth / authenticity</i>	'truth in Christ; genuineness of faith'

differences in semantics, word-formation models, and linguacultural functions of naming.

Christian names in Korea generally do not replace the official personal name, but rather function as additional (religious) names used in church and community communication (Bang 2010). The choice of a Christian name is typically made within the framework of religious practice and is associated with the rite of baptism (Kim 2023). In most cases, the name is chosen by the child's parents (if baptism occurs in childhood) or by the bearer themselves upon converting to Christianity as an adult. In some cases, the choice is made on the recommendation of a pastor or clergyman, who may suggest a name associated with a biblical character, a Christian virtue, or a theological concept (Kim 2023). The selection criteria include the name's symbolic meaning, its correlation with Christian values, and its phonetic and graphic adaptability to the Korean linguistic system. The Christian name is recorded in church documents, but has no legal status and is used in parallel with the official name (Hwang, Lee 2021).

Contemporary Korean-Christian onomastics demonstrates a complex naming system that intertwines biblical tradition, the Sino-Korean character model, and the latest

trends in abbreviations (Park 2004). The names used by Christians in Korea are divided into three main groups: 1) proper names borrowed from the Bible; (see Table 5); 2) appellative nominations with spiritual content (see Table 6); 3) acronyms and word constructions derived from the conceptual base of Christianity (see Table 7). The meanings of biblical names in the tables are given in accordance with the data of biblical and onomastic dictionaries (Hanks et al. 2006; Bromiley 1982).

1. Names borrowed from the Bible

The semantics of these names are connected with specific characters of the Holy Scripture: 요셉 [Yosep] Joseph, 다윗 [Dawit] David, 한나 [Hanna] Hannah, 시온 [Sion] Zion, 이삭 [Isak] Isaac, 요한 [Yohan] John, etc. These names are used both directly and in a modified Korean form (for example, 요셉 [Yoseop] instead of 요셉 [Yosep]).

The group of appellative names based on Christian vocabulary is represented by names derived from common nouns with pronounced religious semantics. They function as nominations of desired spiritual qualities and simultaneously as markers of the family's religious affiliation.

2. Appellative names based on Christian vocabulary

The names 믿음 [Mideum] – ‘faith’, 소망 [Somang] – ‘hope’, 은혜 [Eunhye] – ‘grace’, 진리 [Jinri] – ‘truth’ reflect the basic values of the Christian religion. They are independent nouns and perform denotative and pragmatic functions: on the one hand, they denote the desired qualities of the child, on the other, they manifest the faith of the family.

Thus, appellative nominations with spiritual and religious content, functioning in the anthroponymic sphere, demonstrate a transition from general linguistic and theological vocabulary to purely onomastic units. However, this group does not exhaust the means of representing the Christian conceptual base in the system of personal names. Further expansion of anthroponyms is achieved through more formalized mechanisms, including acronymic formations and word-formation constructions derived from key Christian concepts and value dominants (see Table 7).

3. Two-component acronyms and word-formation models

Particularly widespread are names in which the first syllable is an abbreviated name of God or Jesus (예 [Ye], 하 [Ha], 주 [Ju], 은 [Eun], 성 [Seong]), and the second carries additional semantic or attributive meaning.

Word-formation analysis shows the productivity of the following models: 1) [divine component] + [benevolent quality] (예준 [Yejun], 하은 [Haeun], 은율 [Eunul], etc.); 2) [religious metaphor] + [semantic category] (예거 [Yegeo] – ‘the holiness of Jesus’, 예지 [Yeji] – ‘the wisdom of Jesus’); 3) repeating elements with modification of the second syllable create phonetically close, but semantically variable names: 예주 [Yeju], 예진 [Yejin], 예희 [Yehui], 은주 [Eunju], 은진 [Eunjin], etc.

In Korean Christian onomastics, there is a tendency to create unique and at the same time universal names that can be easily integrated into the linguistic and cultural environment, while maintaining religious markings. This reflects a combination of individualization, spiritual orientation, and linguistic creativity.

CONCLUSION

The conducted analysis showed that the system of personal names in Korean culture is a complex linguocultural phenomenon, reflecting not only identification and communicative functions, but also deep symbolic, sacred and ritual meanings. Korean anthroponymy was formed under the influence of shamanism, Confucianism, Buddhism and Christianity, which determined its structural multi-layeredness and semantic richness. In the onomastic space of modern Korea, official, everyday, religious and secondary names (including pseudonyms and prenatal names) coexist, each performing a certain cultural and pragmatic role.

The study pays special attention to the derivational models of Korean names, demonstrating the diversity of word-formation processes: affixation, compounding, reduplication, metaphorical and metonymic transfer, borrowing and semantic reinterpretation. These models

not only reflect the typological features of the Korean language, but also embody cultural attitudes associated with the concept of a name as a bearer of destiny, virtue and spirituality.

Fundamentally important to the Korean onomastic tradition is the presence of name types absent from Western culture, primarily the prenatal name, which functions even before a child's birth and serves protective, ritual, and prognostic functions. The use of such a name reflects the concept of personality as a process of formation that begins long before formal social identification and demonstrates the close connection between anthroponymy and mythological and ritual practices.

An equally significant feature of the Eastern, and particularly Korean, tradition is the principle of plurality of names, according to which the same person may bear different names throughout life depending on age, social status, life circumstances, religious affiliation, or communication situation. This variability of naming indicates a dynamic understanding of identity and fundamentally distinguishes the Korean anthroponymic system from the Western model, which is focused primarily on one legally fixed name, despite the fact that in Western cultures there are also additional forms of anthroponymic nomination (nicknames, pseudonyms, stage names), but they, as a rule, do not form such an institutionally and culturally fixed system of changing names at different stages of life.

Despite the influence of globalization processes, traditional naming principles persist in contemporary Korean onomastics, with a trend towards individualization, an increasing share of English and Christian names, and the use of temporal and symbolic names. Thus, anthroponymy continues to play the role of the most important marker of ethnocultural identity, reflecting the sociocultural dynamics, spiritual affiliation and historical continuity of Korean society.

REFERENCES

Sources in English

- Bromiley, G. W. (Ed.), 1982. The international standard Bible encyclopedia (Rev. ed., Vols. 1–4). Eerdmans.
Hanks, P., Hardcastle, K., Hodges, F. (Eds.), 2006. A dictionary of first names (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
Van Langendonck, W., 2007. Theory and typology of proper names. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Sources in Korean

- baby-name.kr, n.d. 이름 통계 [Name statistics]. Retrieved March 8, 2026, from: < <https://baby-name.kr/> >.
Du, H. 두희외, 1988. *Korean Name Encyclopedia*, [한국인 명자호사전], Kemyongmunhwasa 계명문화사
Encyclopedia of Korean Culture 한국민족문화대백과사전. Retrieved from: < <https://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/> >.
Hankyoreh, 2005, February 23. Document showing Park Chung-hee recorded as “Takagi Masao” discovered [In Korean]. Retrieved from: < https://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general >.

- Hwang, J. 황지민, Lee, J. 이지원, 2021. 가톨릭교회 오픈소스 기록관리시스템 구축 방안에 관한 연구 [A Study on the Development of Records Management System Using Open Source Software For Catholic Church]. 정보관리학회지, 38(1), 263–291, available at: < <https://doi.org/10.3743/KOSIM.2021.38.1.263>>.
- Governor-General of Korea, 1939. Ordinance No. 20 on Korean names [창씨개명 관련 법령]. Seoul.
- Kang, H. 강현규, Shin, Y. 신용호, 1990. *Study on Korean Names and courtesy name*, Kemyongmunhwasa 한국인의 자·호 연구, 계명문화사.
- Kim, H. 김혜정, 2005. *Cultural Anthropology of Naming* [이름 짓기의 문화인류학]. Seoul: Saemunsa 서울: 새문사.
- Kim, K. 김경미, 2023. The Pastoral Functions of Baptism in the Formation of Christian Identity: Evidence from the Worship of the Early Church [그리스도인의 정체성 형성을 위한 세례의 목회적 기능 — 초대교회 예배를 중심으로]. (Source: Dbpia)
- Kim, M.-t. 김만태. 2011. A study on the methods and characteristics of naming in modern Korean society: With a focus on the perspective of shamanic fortune belief [현대 한국사회의 이름짓기 방법과 특성에 관한 고찰: 기복신앙적 관점을 중심으로]. *Korean Journal of Religious Studies*, 종교연구, 65, 151–186.
- Lee, Y. 이영수, 2011. *Shamanism and the Life of Koreans* [무속과 한국인의 삶]. Seoul: Minsokwon 서울: 민속원.
- Native Korean Names 고유어 이름. Retrieved from: <<https://namu.wiki/>>.
- Naver Corporation, n.d. Naver Korean Dictionary. Retrieved January 30, 2026, from: <<https://ko.dict.naver.com>>.
- Oh, J. 오제봉, 1989. Publishing Chusa teacher's Nick-name Collection [추사선생야호집을 내면서], *Kalsuph* 갈숲, 27.
- Park, J. 박종환, 2004. Shamanism and Korean Names [무속 신앙과 한국인의 이름]. *Hakgukminsokhak* 한국민속학, 25, 57–82.
- Pang, S. 방상근, 2010. 18세기 말 조선 천주교회의 발전과 세례명 [Development of Joseon Catholic Church and baptismal names in the end of the 18th century]. 교회사연구, Research Journal of Korean Church History, 34, 63–91.

Sources in Russian

- Maslova, V. A., 2001. *Linguistics and Cultural Studies* (Лингвокультурология). Moscow: Academia.
- Polyuga, L. M., 2004. Cognitive Onomastics: Problems and Prospects (Когнитивная ономастика: проблемы и перспективы). In *Problems of Onomastics*, Vol. 2. Yekaterinburg: Ural State University, pp. 112–126.
- Vorob'ev, V. V., 1997. *Linguistics and Cultural Studies: Theory and Methods* (Лингвокультурология: теория и методы). Moscow: INFRA-M.
- Yanushkevich, V. I., 2013. *Language and Culture: Linguistic and Cultural Aspect* (Язык и культура: лингвокультурологический аспект). Almaty: Kazakh University.