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Feminization in Names: Historical Phonological Shifts across 18 Regions in Four Continents (1880–2023)

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Abstract

The evolution of gendered naming has been widely examined, yet most studies focus on single languages or limited cultural contexts. This study broadens that scope by analyzing the phonological evolution of gendered names across six countries—Korea, Bangladesh, the United States, Britain, Canada, and Australia—spanning 143 years (1880–2023). Using official national and subnational name series for 18 units, the design combines nationwide data with decade-relative contrasts between hyper-urban and traditional regions, employing top-name lists as proxies for cultural salience. The analysis identifies consistent main effects of culture, time, and region type. Male names show a historical decline in plosive-final forms, whereas female names display a persistent predominance of vowel-final endings. These patterns indicate a cross-national, though not universal, trend toward phonological feminization of names, reflecting the interplay of modernization, urbanization, and evolving gender ideologies. By integrating a comparative, cross-national, diachronic and regional perspectives, this study shows how language evolves alongside shifting gender norms and how naming practices embody both recurrent sound-symbolic tendencies and culturally specific trajectories of change. The scope remains limited by the concentration of Anglophone cases and binary gender classifications.

Keywords: cross-national, feminization, phonology, gender, naming trends, onomastics, personal names

1. Introduction

Names are cultural artifacts that encapsulate societal norms, linguistic structures, and gender conventions, offering a lens for observing societal transformations (Barešová & Machů 2025; Ackermann & Zimmer 2021; Needle & Pierrehumbert 2018; Chen 2015; Barry & Harper 2003; Alford 1988). Research has revealed both universal and culture-specific patterns in the phonological characteristics of names (Kim & Go 2024; Kim & Obasi 2023; Kim et al. 2022; Ackermann & Zimmer 2021; Barry & Harper 2003; Cai & Zhao 2019; Cassidy et al. 1999).

Building on this foundation, this study examines historical phonological shifts in gendered names, focusing on final plosive consonants (*b, d, g, p, t, k*) and final vowels (*a, e, i, o, u*) across 18 regions in six countries—Korea, Bangladesh, the United States, Britain, Canada, and Australia—spanning four continents and covering data from 1880 to 2023. These countries were selected for geographic diversity and for the availability of official name series at national or subnational levels. Where national files were unavailable (Canada and Australia), we derived national series by aggregating provincial/state datasets with continuous reporting. The design comprises 18 units—per country: nationwide, hyper-urban, and traditional—each with a population exceeding 100,000. Region assignments were evaluated by decade (1880–2023) against contemporaneous national benchmarks, and coding was verified by native-speaker assistants. Patterns are interpreted as cross-national within the sampled contexts.

Region classification followed four operational criteria: (1) official administrative designation; (2) continuous annual reporting for diachronic comparison; (3) demographic significance (population > 100,000, or indicators such as density or growth); and (4) sociocultural contrast between modernization and tradition. "Hyper-urban" refers to the most urbanized and socioeconomically central unit for a given decade, while "traditional" denotes the least urbanized area with slower demographic and cultural change. These classifications are decade-relative: hyper-urban areas are not always capitals, nor are traditional areas purely rural. For example, British Columbia was selected over Nova Scotia as Canada's traditional region—not because it is less urban overall, but because it offers a continuous, decade-level dataset spanning the full study period (meeting criterion 2). Country-specific regional assignments are listed in table 1.

Onomastic studies have long explored the intersection of phonology and names, with specific phonological traits often signaling gender distinctions. Examples include plosive-final patterns in male names (e.g., *David* [English], *Hyeon-sik* [Korean], *Rakib* [Bengali]) and vowel-final patterns in female names (e.g., *Chloe* [English], *I-seo* [Korean], *Fatima* [Bengali]). Mutsukawa (2014) explored Japanese names, highlighting the use of heavy syllables in male names and open syllables in female names. Sullivan and Kang (2019) demonstrated that phonological features like syllable count, sonorants, and final vowels are strong gender markers in English and French names. These features are accessible not only to native speakers for gender assignment but also extend to unfamiliar or non-native names, suggesting a broad, language-nonspecific awareness of these patterns. Barry and Harper (2003) identified vowel endings as markers of female gender in English names. Ackermann and Zimmer (2021) found cross-linguistic correlations in

gendered phonological patterns, many of which are linguistically disparate countries. Furthermore, Kim et al. (2024) emphasized the consistent role of vowel endings as female markers across cultures. Kim and Go (2024) extended this work, analyzing consonant clusters and final vowels in names from Korea, Bangladesh, Britain, and the U.S. They found consonant clusters prevalent in male names and final vowels strongly indicative of female gender, particularly in Indo-European languages like Bengali and English.

Recent studies highlight the emergence of gender-neutral naming practices in Japan, reflecting broader cultural and social shifts. Researchers have noted a decline in traditional female name endings such as "-ko", and the growing use of non-gendered names among younger generations. Phonological features remain central to gender perception in names, yet evolving norms around masculinity and femininity are increasingly influencing naming trends (Unser-Schutz 2016; Barešová 2020; Ngai et al. 2024; Barešová & Mach, 2025). Studies also show the emergence of gender-neutral naming practices. Barešová (2020) noted the rise of non-gender-specific names in Japan due to cultural shifts, while Unser-Schutz (2016) documented the decline of "子 (/ko/)" endings in female names since the 1980s. Ngai et al. (2024) used machine learning to classify gender in Japanese names, finding that phonological features like the suffixes "-ko" and "-mi" are crucial indicators of female gender. Consistent with these findings, recent research on Japanese high school students demonstrates that gender norms evolve alongside cultural change, with shifting perceptions of masculinity and femininity gradually manifested in naming practices (Barešová & Machů 2025).

This study advances prior research by broadening both its geographic and temporal scope. Whereas prior work often focuses on single countries or limited periods, the present study analyzes data from 18 regions in six countries across four continents (1880–2023). Such an extended design enables the investigation of long-term phonological shifts in relation to evolving gender norms, positioning naming practices within the intersection of phonological form, cultural change, and gender conventions—an area that remains underexplored in onomastic research. By examining cross-cultural and regional variation in plosive-final and vowel-final names, the study traces how these phonological features track broader societal transformations in gender norms. Consistent evidence of declining plosive-final patterns in male names and stable or increasing vowel-final patterns in female names would further extend and corroborate earlier findings (Barešová et al. 2024; Ngai et al. 2024; Kim & Go 2022; Barešová 2020; Unser-Schutz 2016). Building on prior evidence that plosive-final and vowel-final names function as salient, cross-linguistically comparable gender markers (Barry & Harper 2003; Cassidy et al. 1999; Sullivan & Kang 2019; Ackermann & Zimmer 2021), the study frames these associations as probabilistic and context-dependent rather than universal, and introduces the following research questions:

(1) How do trends in vowel-final and plosive-final forms in gendered names vary across cultures and regions?
(2) How have these trends evolved over time in relation to broader shifts in gender norms and naming practices?

2. Methods

2.1 Data Collection

To address the research questions, this study analyzed the top 20 most popular first names per decade for each gender across six countries: Korea, Bangladesh, Britain, the United States, Canada, and Australia, spanning from 1880 to 2023. These top-20 lists are employed as proxies for culturally salient and frequently used names within each gender category, rather than as definitive indicators of gender marking. The data consist of first names officially recorded in government registries, sourced from publicly available datasets provided by national or provincial authorities (see table 1).

The final dataset comprises 5,560 first names[1] from six countries—Korea, Bangladesh, Britain, the United States, Canada, and Australia—spanning the period from 1880 to 2023. For each country, the top 20 male and female names per decade were extracted from official government registries. For the purposes of this study, "Britain" here refers specifically to England and Wales (Barrow 2012). Data for Canada and Australia were compiled from consistently available provincial and state-level records. The Korean dataset includes only names registered at birth, and excludes legally changed names.

The sampling strategy followed four principles: (1) top-ranked 20 names reflect prevailing naming preferences; (2) a fixed number of names per decade enables systematic comparison; (3) public name data are typically limited to the most popular entries; and (4) consistent formatting across countries facilitates both cross-linguistic and diachronic analysis. Table 1 provides an overview of the datasets, including countries covered, time spans, regional breakdowns, and total name counts.

Table 1a: Overview of National, Hyper-Urban, and Traditional Naming Data by Region and Period (1880–2023)

Country	Hyper-Urban Area	Traditional Area
Korea (1940–2023)	Seoul (1940–2023)	Gyeongnam (1940–2023)
Bangladesh (1990–2022)	Dhaka (1990–2022)	Khulna (1990–2022)
Britain (1900–2022)	Greater London (2000–2022)	Wales (2000–2022)
United States (1880–2023)	New York State (1960–2023)	Nebraska State (1960–2023)
Canada (1920–2023)	Ontario (1920–2022)	British Columbia (1920–2022)
Australia (1950–2022)	New South Wales (1960–2022)	South Australia (1960–2022)

Note: The following data sources were used: United States—Social Security Administration; Britain—Office for National Statistics; Korea—Supreme Court of Korea; Bangladesh—government name records; Canada—provincial vital statistics agencies for six English-speaking provinces (Nova Scotia, British Columbia, Ontario, Alberta, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan); Australia—state/territory Registries of Births, Deaths and Marriages (New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, Victoria, Northern Territory). Full citations appear in the references.

Table 1b: Number of Names Investigated by Nation and Region.

Country	Nationwide	Regional	Number
Korea	360	720	1,080
Bangladesh	160	320	480
Britain	520	120	640
United States	600	560	1,160
Canada	440	880	1,320
Australia	320	560	880
Totals	**2,400**	**3,160**	**5,560**

As shown in table 1a, the investigated overall time-span for the countries, hyper-urban areas, and traditional areas are 1880-2023; 1920-2023, and 1920-2023, respectively. While the region-type classification followed the four operational criteria mentioned above, the hyper-urban units represent the most urbanized and socioeconomically central administrative areas. By comparison, the traditional units represent the least-urbanized contrasts among eligible units for that country and decade. For the conceptual interplay of culture, time, and region type, see Section 2.3. In table 1b the total number of names analyzed for each country is provided. The data is divided into two sub-groups: nationwide and regional. As can be seen, the subtotals per country range from 480 in Bangladesh to 1,320 in Canada, with a cumulative total N of 5,560 names across all countries.

Table 2: Top 20 First Names by Decade in Korea, Bangladesh, Britain, the USA, Canada, and Australia (2020–2023)

Top 20 Male Names	Top 20 Female Names
A. *Korea* 이준 (I-jun), 서준 (Seo-jun), 도준 (Do-jun), 하준 (Ha-jun), 은우 (Eun-u), 시우 (Si-u), 지호(Ji-ho), 예준 (Ye-jun), 유준 (Yu-jun), 이안 (I-an), 선우 (Seon-u), 수호 (Su-ho), 도현 (Do-hyeon), 연우 (Yeon-u), 로운 (Ro-un), 주원 (Ju-won), 민준 (Min-jun), 우주 (U-ju), 건우 (Geon-u), 준우 (Jun-u)	서아 (Seo-a), 하윤 (Ha-yun), 지안 (Ji-an), 지아 (Ji-a), 이서 (I-seo), 아윤 (A-yun), 서윤 (Seo-yun), 아린 (A-rin), 하린 (Ha-rin), 시아 (Si-a), 지우 (Ji-u), 지유 (Ji-yu), 하은 (Ha-eun), 수아 (Su-a), 유나 (Yu-na), 나은 (Na-eun), 서연 (Seo-yeon), 예나 (Ye-na), 서우 (Seo-u), 채아 (Chae-a)
B. *Bangladesh* আরিফ (Arif), ফারহান (Farhan), সামি (Sami), আসিফ (Asif),আয়ান (Ayaan), ওমর (Omar), জিদান (Zidan), রহিম (Rahim),সালমান (Salman), ইমরান (Imran), মাহির (Mahir), রাফি (Rafi), হামজা (Hamza), আদনান (Adnan), নাইম (Naim), রাকিব (Rakib), হাসান (Hasan), তারেক (Tareq), জুবায়ের (Jubayer), সিয়াম (Siam)	ফাতেমা (Fatima), আয়েশা (Ayesha), তসলিমা (Taslima), সুমাইয়া (Sumaiya),সায়া (Saia), ফারিয়া (Faria), জান্নাত (Jannat), মরিয়ম (Mariam),মুসরাত (Musrat), রাফিয়া (Rafia), মেহজাবিন (Mehjabin), আনিকা (Anika), নাদিয়া (Nadia), সানজিদা (Sanjida), রোকেয়া (Rokeya), শিরিন (Shirin),রাইসা (Raisa), তাসনিম (Tasnim), ফারজানা (Farzana), জারিন (Zarin)
C. *Britain* Noah, Oliver, George, Muhammad, Arthur, Leo, Oscar, Harry, Archie, Theodore, Freddie, Henry, Jack, Theo, Charlie, Alfie, Thomas, Finley, Jacob, Arlo	Olivia, Amelia, Isla, Ava, Lily, Ivy, Mia, Freya, Florence, Isabella, Willow, Sophia, Rosie, Grace, Poppy, Elsie, Sienna, Emily, Ella, Daisy
D. *The USA* Liam, Noah, Oliver, Elijah, James, William, Benjamin, Lucas, Henry, Theodore, Mateo, Levi, Alexander, Michael, Sebastian, Daniel, Jack, Mason, Ethan, Owen	Olivia, Emma, Charlotte, Amelia, Sophia, Ava, Isabella, Mia, Evelyn, Harper, Luna, Camila, Sofia, Elizabeth, Gianna, Eleanor, Abigail, Scarlett, Ella, Emily,
E. *Canada* Liam, Noah, Oliver, Theodore, Jack, Lucas, Benjamin, William, Leo, Levi, Hudson, Owen, James, Ethan, Henry, Lincoln, Jackson, Wyatt, Maverick, Alexander	Olivia, Emma, Charlotte, Amelia, Sophia, Ava, Isla, Lily, Evelyn, Harper, Ellie, Abigail, Nora, Hazel, Chloe, Ella, Emily, Ivy, Scarlett, Mia
F. *Australia* Oliver, Noah, Leo, William, Jack, Henry, Charlie, Thomas, Theodore, Hudson, Lucas, Elijah, Levi, Archie, James, Luca, Liam, Alexander, Harrison, Oscar	Charlotte, Isla, Amelia, Olivia, Mia, Ava, Grace, Matilda, Ella, Willow, Lily, Harper, Isabella, Ivy, Sophie, Sophia, Chloe, Ruby, Evie, Sienna

Note: Names in each cell are ordered by popularity rank from left to right and top to bottom. For the Korean data, the birth name database was used as the government also maintains a separate database for changed names. This choice was made because none of the top 20 changed names surpass any of the top 20 birth names in frequency.

Table 2 presents the top 20 most popular birth names for males and females across six countries—Korea, Bangladesh, Britain, the USA, Canada, and Australia—for the most recent period, 2020–2023 (2020–2022 for Britain), offering a detailed view of current naming trends as these years represent the latest entries in our dataset. For non-English languages, names are provided in their native scripts alongside Romanized transliterations in parentheses to facilitate cross-linguistic comparisons. The Bengali and Korean names were Romanized following standardized systems: the National Library at Kolkata Romanization for Bengali and the Revised Romanization of Korean for Korean. For example, the Bengali name শারমিন is Romanized as

Sharmin and transcribed in IPA as [ʃɑɾmin]. This dataset captures both international and culturally specific naming trends. The full dataset and technical documentation including the complete dataset referenced in table 2, regional data breakdowns, and pre-processing scripts are accessible in an online repository hosted on GitHub (see Endnote 1).

2.2 Data Analysis

After names from non-English-speaking countries were Romanized for analytical purposes, all of the name data were analyzed based on two primary phonological features of male and female first names: final plosives and final vowels. These features were examined using (orthographic) representations rather than IPA transcription, because orthography remains more stable than pronunciation across 143 years, and historical records rarely provide phonetic transcriptions. Prior onomastic research has shown that orthography can reliably capture gendered naming trends at scale (Barry & Harper 2003). Given the potential evolution of pronunciation over this period, a letter-based approach ensures consistency in analysis. Final plosives were defined as the consonant letters (*b, d, g, p, t, k*) at the end of names, while final vowels referred to the vowel letters (*a, e, i, o, u*) appearing at the terminus of names. Importantly, sonorants such as *ng*, while phonetically occupying the same position, were not classified as final plosives in this analysis. This methodology provided a robust framework for exploring shifts in phonological patterns and cultural preferences, allowing for both cross-cultural and historical analysis. We clarify the scope of the present study: it targets final phonemes, using spelling as a tractable proxy at scale. While Needle and Pierrehumbert (2018) examine morphemes, our question concerns segmental phoneme-final patterns; we therefore treat plosive-final and vowel-final tendencies as probabilistic cues rather than categorical rules.

In Korea, names are typically composed of two syllables, with each syllable carrying an individual meaning. Therefore, when counting final plosives and final vowels, occurrences were not only recorded at the end of the entire name but also at the end of each syllable. For example, in the Korean male name *Seok-hyeon* 석현, the final plosive [k] was counted once, while in the name *Su-ho* 수호, the final vowel [u] and [o] were counted twice. Similarly, in the female name *Suk-ja* 숙자, both a final plosive [k] and a final vowel [a] were counted once each. However, for names in other countries where individual syllables do not convey separate meanings, only the phonological feature at the end of the entire name was counted. For instance, in the Bengali male name *Rakib* রাকিব, the final plosive [b] was counted once, and in the female name *Nadia* নাদিয়া, the final vowel [a] was counted once.

For Korean names, different data values were used in the *t*-tests and correlation tests due to the distinct purposes of each analysis. *T*-tests, aimed at examining gender differences within a single country, utilized syllable-level data by counting each syllable individually. In contrast, correlation tests, designed to compare historical trends across countries, required data to be adjusted for equity and validity. To achieve this, syllable counts in Korean names were averaged by dividing the total counts by two, which is the number of syllables in each name, ensuring comparability with naming conventions in other countries.

2.3 Statistical Analysis

To examine gender-based and temporal variation in phonological features, we employed two statistical methodologies: independent-samples *t*-tests and Kendall's tau-b correlation analyses. Together, these techniques addressed both cross-sectional gender differences and diachronic trends in naming conventions. Independent-samples *t*-tests were conducted to compare the mean occurrences of final plosives and vowels between male and female names across six countries and their respective regional categories (national, hyper-urban, and traditional). Kendall's tau-b was used to assess monotonic associations between time (by decade) and the frequency of these phonological features, thereby capturing historical shifts in gendered name markers. Effect sizes were calculated to assess practical significance. For *t*-tests, Cohen's *d* was reported; for correlation analyses, Kendall's tau-b values were interpreted directly. All analyses produced sample means (*M*), standard deviations (*SD*), and sample sizes (*N*) for each region and decade, where *M* represents the arithmetic mean, *SD* the dispersion of values, and *N* the number of observations.

In large-scale diachronic and cross-national onomastic research, modeling statistical interactions among cultural, temporal, and regional variables is often constrained by non-independence and uneven longitudinal coverage. Prior work (e.g., Gries 2017; Baxter & Croft 2016; Hilpert 2013) shows that modernization, urbanization, and cultural diffusion co-vary over time, making higher-order interactions difficult to interpret. Following established approaches (Barešová et al. 2024; Ackermann & Zimmer 2021; Barry & Harper 2003), we therefore emphasize main effects of culture, region type, and time, and interpret their interplay conceptually. Operationally, we report independent-sample t-tests for main-effect contrasts across culture and region

type and Kendall's τ-b for long-run temporal trends. We do not estimate statistical interactions; instead, we note plausible pathways: cultural context conditions how region type (hyper-urban vs. traditional) shapes naming (e.g., schooling/media diffusion, borrowing norms), and both evolve over time. As urbanization and culture co-evolve, region-type contrasts may attenuate or reverse across cohorts. Formal multi-level/interaction modeling is reserved for future work once balanced longitudinal coverage is available.

3. Results

The results revealed the gendered distribution of phonological features in names, along with their historical and regional variations. Final plosives and final vowels were analyzed in male and female names across six countries to identify gendered associations. The historical trends in these features demonstrate temporal changes across regions. The analyses employed t-tests to examine gender differences within regions and correlation tests to assess historical trends across countries. After each subsection's statistical results, a new 'Interpretation' paragraph is inserted to summarize the main effect and provide plain-language implications.

3.1 Gendered Use of Final Plosives and Final Vowels across Cultures

The results of the analysis revealed significant gender differences in the occurrence of final plosives across all six countries: Korea, Bangladesh, Britain, the United States, Canada, and Australia.

Table 3a: Gender Differences in the Occurrence of Final Plosives in Male and Female Names across Six Countries (1880–2023)

Country	Gender	Mean	SD	N	t(df)	p	Cohen's d
Bangladesh	M F	0.14 0.04	0.35 0.19	80 80	2.26 (123)	.026	0.36
Britain	M F	0.24 0.05	0.43 0.22	260 260	6.34 (385.82)	< .001	0.56
USA	M F	0.25 0.04	0.43 0.20	300 300	7.64 (416.54)	< .001	0.62
Canada	M F	0.20 0.03	0.40 0.16	220 220	6.03 (288.57)	< .001	0.55
Australia	M F	0.16 0.01	0.36 0.08	160 160	5.09 (173.95)	< .001	0.57
Korea	M F	0.04 0.16	0.21 0.37	180 180	-3.70 (281.4)	< .001	0.40

Table 3b: Gender Differences in the Occurrence of Final Vowels in Male and Female Names across Six Countries (1880–2023)

Country	Gender	Mean	SD	N	t(df)	p	Cohen's d
Bangladesh	M	0.10	0.30	80	-11.67	< .001	1.86
	F	0.78	0.42	80	(143.39)		
Britain	M	0.13	0.33	260	-10.31	< .001	0.90
	F	0.51	0.42	260	(450.97)		
USA	M	0.06	0.24	300	-13.23	< .001	1.07
	F	0.48	0.50	300	(427.50)		
Canada	M	0.05	0.21	220	-12.54	< .001	1.04
	F	0.50	0.50	220	(292.80)		
Australia	M	0.11	0.31	160	-11.73	< .001	1.31
	F	0.64	0.48	160	(270.80)		
Korea	M	0.67	0.55	180	-3.44	< .001	0.37
	F	0.88	0.59	180	(356.42)		

Note. Values represent gender (M for male and F for female), the mean, standard deviation (*SD*), sample size (*N*), *t* statistic with degrees of freedom (*df*), probability (*p*), and effect size (Cohen's *d*) for gender differences in the frequency of final plosive and vowel endings. Positive *t*-values indicate greater occurrence in male names (M > F), while negative *t*-values indicate greater occurrence in female names (F > M).

Tables 3a and b present the results of independent-samples t-tests comparing the frequencies of final plosive and vowel endings in male and female names across six countries. In most datasets, gender-based phonological contrasts were statistically significant and cross-culturally consistent. Male names exhibited higher frequencies of final plosive endings in all countries except Korea, with moderate to large effect sizes (Cohen's *d* = 0.36−0.62), corroborating the association between closed, stop-final structures and masculine sound symbolism. Data from Korea revealed a distinct pattern, with a notably high prevalence of plosive endings in female names[2]. This divergence reflects the enduring influence of Sino-Korean morphological elements, such as *-suk* (숙), which has traditionally been associated with feminine virtue. Conversely, female names consistently favored vowel-final forms (*p* < .001 in all cases), accompanied by large effect sizes (Cohen's *d* = 1.0−1.8), underscoring the perceptual salience of open, resonant endings as markers of femininity. Taken together, the results in table 3 suggest a robust main effect of gender across cultures: when time period and regional category are held constant at the descriptive level, plosive-final forms occur more frequently in male names, while vowel-final forms predominate in female names. These results indicate a main effect of culture: holding time period and region type constant at the descriptive level, plosive-final patterns occur more frequently in male names, whereas vowel-final patterns occur more frequently in female names.

3.2 Phonological Trends in Naming: Temporal Shifts in Male and Female Names

As confirmed in Section 3.1, final plosives were strongly associated with masculinity and final vowels are with femininity across all six countries. Building on this finding, this section explores the historical trends in the use of final plosives in male names and final vowels in female names over time in Korea, Bangladesh, Britain, the United States, Canada, and Australia. In addition to nationwide trends, regional comparisons are presented, examining hyper-urban areas and traditional areas to investigate how sociocultural and regional factors influence naming practices.

Figure 1 provided the historical trends in the frequency of final plosives in male names across the six countries, with subfigures delineating nationwide, hyper-urban, and traditional areas. In each subfigure, the light solid lines represent trends for individual countries, while the bold solid line represents the average trend. The regression lines demonstrated the temporal decline, with R-squared values reflecting the strength of this association.

Figure 1 reveals a consistent decline in the frequency of final plosives in male names across all six countries, except in the traditional regions of Bangladesh. Subfigure 1a (nationwide) shows a substantial reduction over time, with an R-squared value of 0.62. Subfigure 1b (hyper-urban areas) presents an even stronger trend (R^2 = 0.79), while subfigure 1c (traditional areas) yields an R-squared value of 0.99, indicating a highly struc-

tured decline despite greater variability across regions. The only notable deviation is observed in Bangladesh's traditional areas, where plosive-final patterns persist. Minor fluctuations elsewhere do not affect the overall trend. In contrast, the frequency of final vowels in female names has increased steadily over time across all regions, with more rapid shifts in hyper-urban and nationwide datasets compared to traditional regions.
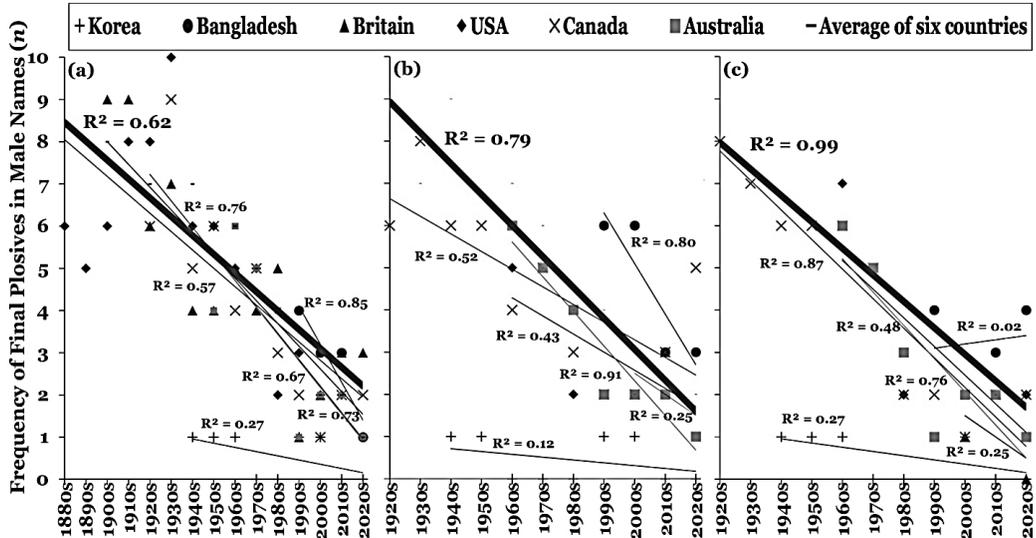
Figure 1: Linear regression curves illustrating a decrease in final plosive occurrences in male names over decades in (a) nationwide (1880–2023) (n = 60), (b) hyper-urban areas (1920–2023) (n = 40), and (c) traditional areas (1920–2023) (n = 40). *N* denotes the number of aggregated observations at the region-decade level (not individual names); by design, this is smaller than the underlying micro-records.

Figure 2 illustrates an overall increase in the frequency of final vowels in female names across all six countries, with notable variation by region. Across subfigures, thin lines represent national trends, and the bold line shows the average. Subfigure 2a (nationwide) shows a moderate upward trend, with an average R^2 value of 0.19, indicating a relatively weak association. This lower R^2, compared to stratified regressions, reflects the effects of aggregation, as cross-decade composition shifts introduce greater heterogeneity. Subfigure 2b (hyper-urban areas) reveals a more pronounced trend, with an R^2 value of 0.89, suggesting a strong temporal association. Subfigure 2c (traditional areas) yields an R^2 value of 0.84, indicating a slightly less steep but still evident increase. Overall, the findings suggest that the use of vowel-final forms in female names has grown steadily over time, with faster changes occurring in hyper-urban and national-level data than in traditional regions. These results indicate a main effect of time: the historical series indicates a global shift away from traditionally male phonological markers (e.g., plosive-final male names) toward more female ones (e.g., vowel-final female names), with faster change in more urbanized settings. This pattern is consistent with modernization and globalization, while local cultural retention remains visible across cases.
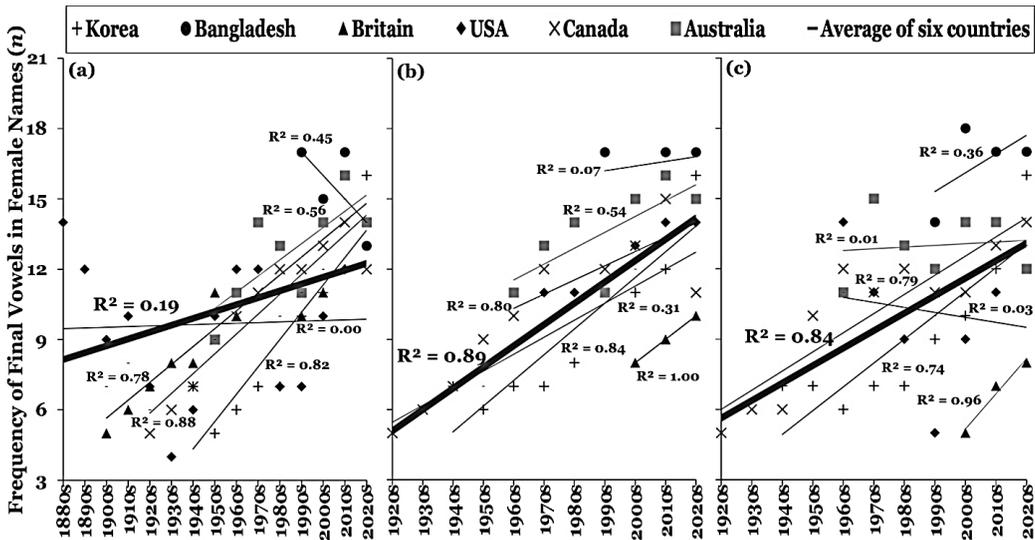
Figure 2: Linear regression curves illustrating an increase in final vowel occurrences in female names over decades in (a) nationwide (1880–2023) ($n = 60$), (b) hyper-urban areas (1920–2023) ($n = 40$), and (c) traditional areas (1920–2023) ($n = 40$). *N* refers to the number of aggregated observations by region and decade (not individual names). In panel 8a), the aggregation of national-level data increases internal heterogeneity, resulting in a lower R^2 value, whereas the subgroup analyses in (b) and (c) yield higher R^2 values due to reduced variance.

3.3 Historical Trends and Regional Variations in Final Plosives and Final Vowels in Gendered Names

A correlation test was conducted to examine the historical trends in the occurrence of final plosives in male names and final vowels in female names over time. This analysis aimed to investigate how this phonological feature evolved over decades within each country and region. By calculating Kendall's tau-b[3] correlation coefficient, this analysis provides insights into the strength and direction of these trends, enabling a more nuanced understanding of temporal changes in naming practices. This method was chosen because of its suitability for analyzing ordinal data with ties prevalent in historical datasets spanning multiple periods.

Table 4 summarizes Kendall's tau-b correlation coefficients, reflecting historical trends in the frequency of (a) final plosives in male names and (b) final vowels in female names across nationwide, hyper-urban, and traditional areas in six countries: Korea, Bangladesh, Britain, the United States, Canada, and Australia. These coefficients align with the trends illustrated in figures 1 and 2, offering robust statistical confirmation of the observed patterns.

For final plosives in male names, in table 4a, the nationwide data reveal consistently negative correlations, with the overall tau-b value across all countries being significant at $r = -.67$, $p < .01$. As shown in figure 1a, this decline indicates a significant reduction in the use of final plosives in male names over time. Hyper-urban areas displayed a similar trend, with an overall tau-b value of $r = -.81$, $p < .01$, indicating the accelerated decline in urban contexts, as illustrated in figure 1b. Interestingly, traditional areas showed some variation, with Bangladesh exhibiting a positive, albeit non-significant, correlation ($r = .18$), deviating from the general negative trend observed in other countries. However, across all traditional areas, the overall tau-b value remained significantly negative at $r = -.84$, $p < .001$, consistent with figure 1c.

Table 4a: Kendall's Tau-b Correlation Coefficients for Historical Trends in Final Plosives in Male Names (1880–2023) where N=140.

	Korea	Bangladesh	Britain	USA	Canada	Australia	Across 6 countries
Nationwide							
N	9	4	13	15	11	8	15
r, Tau-b[b]	-.45	-.91	-.67**	-.63**	-.76**	-.64*	-.67**
Hyper-urban area							
N	9	4	3	7	11	7	11
r, Tau-b	-.30	-.82	-.33	-.35	-.60*	-.93**	-.81**
Traditional area							
N	9	4	3	7	11	7	11
r, Tau-b	-.45	.18	-.33	-.41	-.84**	-.75*	-.84***

$* p < .05;$ $** p < .01;$ $*** p < .001$

Note: 140 = 27 decades of Korea (9 decades x 3 regions) + 12 decades of Bangladesh (4 decades x 3 regions) + 19 decades of Britain (13 decades of nationwide + 3 decades x 2 regions) + 29 decades of USA (15 decades of nationwide + 7 decades x 2 regions) + 33 decades of Canada (11 decades x 3 regions) x 22 decades of Australia (8 decades of nationwide + 7 decades x 2 regions)

Table 4b: Kendall's Tau-b Correlation Coefficients for Historical Trends in Final Vowels in Female Names (1880–2023) where *N*=140

	Korea	Bangladesh	Britain	USA	Canada	Australia	Across 6 countries
Nationwide							
N	9	4	13	15	11	8	15
r, Tau-b	.84**	-.55	.76***	.07	.90***	.62*	.39*
Hyper-urban area							
N	9	4	3	7	11	7	11
r, Tau-b	.88**	.24	n/a	.82*	.62**	.65*	.90***
Traditional area							
N	9	4	3	7	11	7	11
r, Tau-b	.79**	.18	n/a	-.05	-.76**	.05	.80**

$* p < .05;$ $** p < .01;$ $*** p < .001$

Note: Correlation coefficient of the relationship between decade and the quantity of each phonological property for male and female respectively. The correlation analyses were not applicable (n/a) if the data were not enough to be analyzed. Asterisks * for statistically significant differences are based on the correlation test between decade and the frequency of the phonological feature.

For the final vowels in the female names in table 4b, the results show a contrasting upward trend. Nationwide data demonstrate a significant increase in the frequency of final vowels, with an overall tau-b value of $r = .67$, $p < .01$. As shown in figure 2a, this increase is most pronounced in Korea ($r = .84$, $p < .01$) and Canada ($r = .90$, $p < .001$). Hyper-urban areas further amplified this trend, with an overall tau-b value of $r = .81$, $p < .01$, as shown in figure 2b, where rapid urbanization appeared to contribute to the prevalence of final vowels in female names. Traditional areas also exhibited an increase, with an overall tau-b value of $r = .84$, $p < .001$, despite variations noted in Bangladesh ($r = .18$) and the United States ($r = -.05$), showing weaker or non-significant correlations.

These results indicate a main effect of region type. Region type shows a contrast consistent with the overall trend toward phonological feminization, although the magnitude and tempo of change vary by culture and historical period. We do not claim statistical interactions here; rather, we note these contingencies as interpretation and identify formal interaction modeling as future work.

4. Discussion

This study examined how the phonological features of gendered names, specifically final plosives (*b, d, g, p, t, k*) in male names and final vowels (*a, e, i, o, u*) in female names, evolved across six geographically diverse countries. By exploring nationwide and regional patterns from both historical and cross-cultural perspectives, the findings provide crucial insights into the relationship between phonology and shifting societal gender norms.

4.1 Insights into Cross-Cultural Phonological Trends

This study addressed two research questions: (1) How do trends in vowel-final and plosive-final forms in gendered names vary across cultures and regions? and (2) How have these trends evolved over time in relation to broader shifts in gender norms and naming practices? By analyzing historical trends, regional variations, and intra-national comparisons across six linguistically diverse countries, the findings provide nuanced answers to these questions.

For the first question, the results revealed consistent cross-cultural patterns in the use of final plosives and vowels as gender markers (Section 3.1). Final vowels were significantly more prevalent in female names across all six countries, reaffirming their association with femininity. Final plosives were more frequent in male names, signifying masculinity. These findings align with those of Barry and Harper (2003) and Sullivan and Kang (2019), who emphasized the commonality of gendered phonological markers. However, Korea presents a well-attested exception: the traditional use of Sino-Korean letters in female given-name elements—e.g., *suk* 숙 'virtuous', realized as /k/ in coda position—yields plosive-final female forms[4]. This apparent divergence reflects culturally specific morphological choices associated with femininity and remains consistent with the broader association between phonology and gendered semantics, aligning with Mutsukawa (2014) on the role of cultural–linguistic context in naming practices.

Furthermore, intra-national comparisons showed that both hyper-urban and traditional areas within Korea and the United States exhibited similar gender-specific phonological patterns. These results align with those of Kim and Go (2024), who found minimal regional variation within countries, suggesting that national cultural norms outweigh localized differences. Such convergence may also reflect the standardizing influence of national media, education systems, and digital platforms, which disseminate shared cultural norms across regions. In addition, the gradual loosening of gender roles in modern societies—where rigid boundaries between masculine and feminine traits have increasingly blurred—has further reduced lifestyle contrasts, reinforcing the standardization of naming practices across hyper-urban and traditional regions (The Times, 2025).

For the second question, the historical analysis highlights a gradual decline in final plosives in male names (figure 1) and a concurrent rise in final vowels in female names (figure 2), particularly in hyper-urban areas (figure 2b). These changes suggest a shift from overtly male phonological markers and a growing prominence of traits associated with femininity. This trend aligns with the findings of Barešová et al. (2024) who observed a decline in male markers in Japanese names, whereas female markers persisted. Furthermore, this study corroborates the work of Kim and Go (2022), who documented the historical simplification of Korean names in response to globalization, emphasizing pronunciation ease and internationalization. This reduction in complex consonant sequences and rise in phonetically simpler vowel patterns align with broader trends toward more unmarked, internationally adaptable phonology (often vowel-final, open-syllable profiles). These findings support Barešová and Machů's (2025) argument that societal modernization, particularly transformations in gender ideology, influences the phonological evolution of naming conventions not only within Korea but also across other linguistic and cultural contexts.

In summary, this study demonstrates that gendered phonological markers in personal names remain statistically robust across cultures and regions, revealing both global regularities and localized adaptations. These tendencies persist even amid a general stylistic convergence toward more unmarked forms. Our findings extend Barry and Harper's (2003) English-based evidence of vowel-final feminization and plosive-final masculinity to a cross-national, diachronic dataset; confirm Sullivan and Kang's (2019) observations of vowel-final feminization in non-English contexts; and complement Ackermann and Zimmer (2021) by showing that cross-national tendencies coexist with culturally specific divergences, such as the Korean case.

The observed decline of plosive-final male names and persistence of vowel-final female names correspond to broader transformations in gender ideology, reflecting the softening of traditional masculinity and the resilience of feminine sound symbolism, in line with theoretical accounts of changing masculinities and femininities (Anderson 2009; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005). We interpret these trends as cross-national within the sampled contexts rather than universal, consistent with evidence from Japanese naming studies showing that global naming patterns intersect with, but remain shaped by, local sociocultural dynamics (Barešová & Machů 2025; Barešová et al. 2024).

4.2 Challenges and Directions for Broader Comparative Studies

Despite its new empirical findings on feminization from available large-scale data, this study has some limitations that merit careful consideration. First, Bangladesh constitutes a localized deviation, most evident in the traditional region, where the shift away from plosive-final male names and toward vowel-final female names is attenuated relative to other regions. We do not advance a causal claim; possible explanations include cultural naming conventions and data-coverage limits (1990–2022). We therefore interpret this deviation cautiously within the cross-national sample.

Second, although this study spans six geographically dispersed countries, its concentration on Indo-European and East Asian language families and reliance on top-name lists inevitably constrain the generalizability of the findings. Future research should expand to underrepresented linguistic families (e.g., Afro-Asiatic, Dravidian) and incorporate indigenous and minority naming systems to provide a more comprehensive account of global naming practices.

Additionally, this study did not extensively address the influence of socio-political factors on naming conventions. Investigating how the shifting aesthetics of naming, the diffusion of shared values through media and education, and the influence of political narratives and historical events shape naming trends could provide valuable insights into the sociocultural underpinnings of these practices. Future studies should further examine how large-scale social transformations—such as migration, colonization, and technological innovation—have influenced the evolution of naming patterns. These investigations could incorporate multi-variable or mixed-effects modeling to evaluate how culture, time, and region type interact with changing gender roles and societal norms to shape naming conventions. Because cultural, temporal, and regional dimensions of naming data are historically correlated, full interaction modeling within the present dataset would risk conflating interdependent effects. Consistent with established practice in historical linguistics and onomastics, the current study therefore emphasizes main effects while interpreting possible interactions conceptually and identifying multi-level modeling as a productive avenue for future research.

Finally, these datasets adhere to binary gender classifications, limiting our ability to analyze non-binary or gender-ambiguous names (e.g., *Taylor, Jordan*). Where usage varies over time, gender labels were assigned by majority usage within each decade and language. These limitations underscore the need for more inclusive datasets and community-level studies, and for extending the analysis beyond plosive-final and vowel-final patterns to other phonological features—such as the consonant–vowel ratio, syllable structure, stress placement, or tone—that may further illuminate the interaction between phonology, culture, and gendered identities. Our conclusions are therefore scoped as cross-national within the sampled contexts and as one phonological dimension of feminization.

5. Conclusion

This study investigates the phonological characteristics of gendered naming across six culturally and linguistically diverse countries, focusing on cross-cultural patterns and historical trends. Utilizing open-access data spanning 143 years, the research offers insights into the evolution of naming practices and their societal implications. The findings confirm that male names frequently feature final plosives, whereas female names predominantly end in vowels, indicating consistent cross-cultural patterns. Nonetheless, regional variations are evident. Sino-Korean traditions have influenced Korean naming practices, diverging from Indo-European patterns. Intra-national comparisons reveal that hyper-urban and traditional regions exhibit similar gender-specific phonological markers, suggesting that national cultural norms outweigh localized differences.

Historically, the analysis reveals shifts in phonological markers, including a decline in final plosives in male names and an increase in final vowels in female names over time. These changes correlate with broader societal transformations such as the loosening of rigid gender roles, accelerated public visibility of women, modernization, and globalization particularly in hyper-urban regions. Naming practices thus serve as linguistic indicators of evolving gender ideologies.

Our results contribute to the fields of onomastics, sociolinguistics, and gender studies by demonstrating that cross-linguistic analysis reveals both recurring tendencies and cultural deviations. The findings have implications for cultural heritage preservation, computational name-generation systems, and gender representation monitoring. Future research opportunities include expanding the study to underrepresented linguistic families and examining additional phonological features and socio-political factors. The study is limited by its focus on six countries—four of which are English-speaking—and the absence of non-binary naming categories. This study demonstrates that gendered phonological markers in names reflect and shape societal values, enhancing the understanding of how naming conventions evolve with society.

Notes

[1] A website with supplementary materials for this article is located at https://github.com/phonomastics/Names-Feminization

[2] In many countries, final plosives (*b, d, g, p, t, k*) are more frequently associated with male names, reflecting a phonological trend linked to masculinity. However, in Korea, this pattern is reversed, with plosive-final forms appearing more in female names. This trend reflects mid-twentieth-century naming practices (1940s–1970s), when male names often ended in *-ng* (e.g., *Yeong, Jeong*), while female names ended with *suk* (e.g., *Yeong-suk*), yielding the plosive *-k*. These patterns were influenced by Sino-Korean letters, emphasizing semantic meanings in names, with *suk* denoting 'virtuous' or 'graceful' in female names. Although this distribution diverges from the broader cross-cultural trend, the underlying mechanisms remain consistent with gender marking. This Korea-specific practice, rooted in Sino-Korean semantic letters, demonstrates how phonological trends and sociocultural factors shape naming conventions. A concise summary is provided in the main text (Section 4.1).

[3] Kendall's Tau-b was selected over Pearson's correlation due to the dataset's limited sample size, non-normal distribution, and the prevalence of tied ranks, making it more suitable for evaluating monotonic associations in historical naming patterns.

[4] Sino-Korean naming conventions use Chinese characters (Hanja), with male names favoring consonant-final forms to suggest strength, and female names favoring softer patterns symbolizing grace or virtue. These norms have shaped gendered phonological patterns in Korean names.

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No AI tools or technology were used to conduct the research or generate new information for this article. However, the authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) to refine academic expressions on multiple dates in 2025 with the prompt: *"Edit and proofread this passage for an academic journal paper".*

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