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Mismatched Name: Exploring the Meaning When Chinese Parents Give Their Daughters Masculine Name

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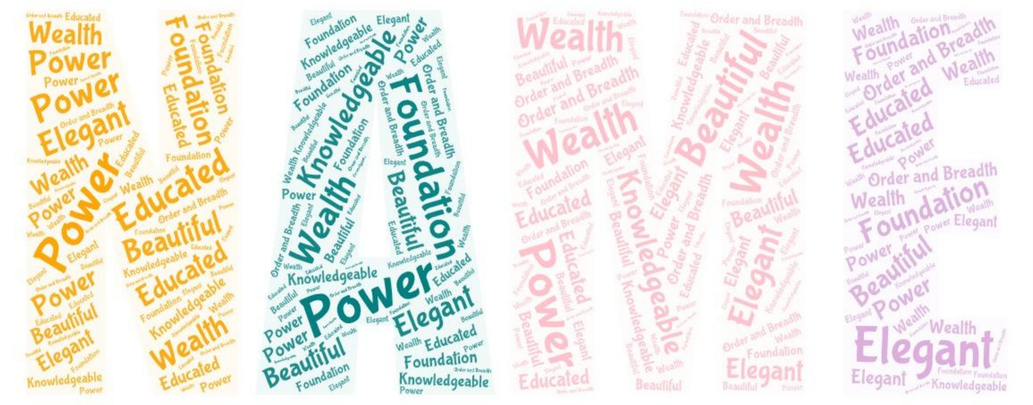
Mismatched Name: Exploring the Meaning When Chinese Parents Give Their Daughters Masculine Name

By: Zeqi Chen



Research Question: This study interviewed women with male names in China to understand their interpretations of their names and the gender perceptions behind the names in contemporary Chinese society.

Background: The strict logic of patrilineal inheritance and the clan system led to a patriarchal society from ancient China and a deep-rooted cultural preference for sons over daughters. Names, as figurative symbols of blood ties and hierarchical order, have become one of the main ways for parents to express their expectations for children. The inconsistency between male names and female gender is contrary to the general rule that parents express blessings in their children's names.

Methods: The researcher recruited Chinese interviewees using a snowball sampling method. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes and were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide. Questions explored how interviewees understand the meaning of their names, parents' reasons for giving their daughters male names, their parents' son preference conception, and perceptions of their own names. I analyzed transcripts converted from interview records to identify themes related to the name and gender identity.

Participants: 15 masculine names, 5 feminine names

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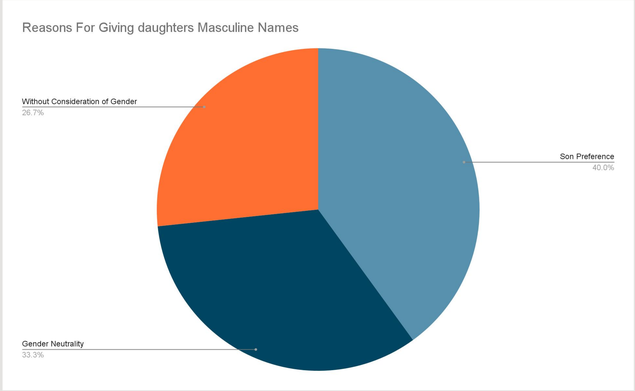
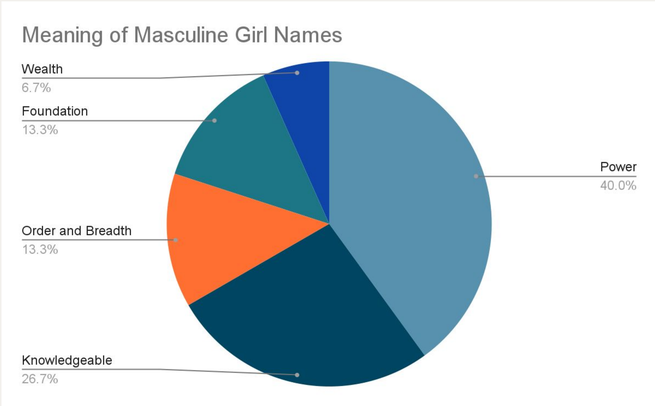
Research Analysis



Parents who give their daughters masculine names do not differ significantly in their education level, but rather reflect geographical characteristics.

Masculine female names present two opposing gender trends in contemporary China.



Masculine names with patriarchal meanings highlight male physical characteristics.

Masculine names with gender neutrality highlight masculinity that is not in line with traditional femininity.

Names & Life Experience: In analyzing the interview transcript, mismatched names are associated with childhood experiences of school violence and later ways of naming themselves on social media. The mismatched names are also indicative of life experiences at various stages in addition to gender perceptions.

Parent Motivation & Name Acceptance: In economically developed large cities, masculine female names reflect parents' de-gendered educational philosophy and gender-neutral tendencies;

In cities that are not sufficiently developed economically, socially masculine female names reflect parents' patriarchal beliefs in their desire to have sons.

The reasons for masculine names affect the child's acceptance of the name and gender identity.

Females have a high acceptance of masculine names given for gender-neutral reasons and perceive themselves as gaining masculine strength, while on the contrary, females reject masculine names given in favor of sons and express strong female gender identity.

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