TRADITION AND CHANGE: NAMING PRACTICES IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN AND TAIWAN

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This chapter explores commonalities in current naming practices in Japan and Taiwan, focusing on whether they have changed over the last two or three generations, and what general social trends they reflect. Based on data obtained from interviews with ten Japanese and ten Taiwanese parents, it provides a glimpse into the actual process of name selection in these two societies. The analysed examples of the naming process displayed some tendencies unique to each society (such as proceeding from the sound to the graphic form in Japan, and from the characters to the sound in Taiwan), and some tendencies common to both societies (such as weakening links among names within the extended family and increased parental control over the process). Similar tendencies in the naming process in Japan and Taiwan manifest similar general social trends in both societies, such as the growing independence of the nuclear family.

Keywords: given names, naming practices, namegivers, Japan, Taiwan, fortune-telling, Chinese characters, nuclear family

1. Introduction

> Even in the twenty-first century in the Taiwanese metropolis of Taipei, it is not unusual to come across stalls of fortune-tellers who provide various services, including assistance with choosing an auspicious name. Several dozen such fortune-tellers can be found hidden from the heat of the streets in an underground hall adjacent to the subway station, across the street from the popular Longshan Temple in Taipei's Wanhua District. Judging from several early evening visits by one of the authors, they seem to have few customers, but according to one of the fortune-tellers present, more people use his name selection services today than in the past.

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Names are often said to reflect various trends in society; understanding social development can help us understand and explain the name trends of a particular period. At the same time, analyzing names and naming practices can help reveal or evidence more general changes in society. Naming a child is a complex process that involves various actors, such as parents, grandparents, friends, fortune-tellers, register clerks, etc. It is governed and influenced by numerous factors, including legal limitations, conventions, name selection methods, and the various criteria and preferences of the namegivers. Naming practices are culture-specific, and they change over time. This chapter explores naming practices in contemporary Japan and Taiwan – two countries with a long history of mutual contact and influence. Interviews with ten Japanese and ten Taiwanese parents, describing a total of thirty-seven name selections, were conducted to gain a better understanding of the actual process of name selection (or creation) in these two cultures over the last decade or two. The analysis reveals interesting cultural similarities and differences, and illuminates what such a name selection process can look like, what attitudes the interviewed parents take towards traditional practices, and what they find important in terms of their children's name choices. The findings are discussed in the context of ongoing changes in society and the family unit in particular.

As Barešová and Janda (2022) noted, the formal structure of personal names is similar in both societies, consisting of a family name (surname) and a given name. Taiwanese family names are formed by one, exceptionally two characters, while given names are usually composed of two characters, exceptionally of only one. Japanese surnames vary between one and four characters and given names between one and three. Two characters are the most common length of Japanese given names as well as surnames.

The selection of Japanese and Taiwanese names is not limited by any official list of approved names. The only legal limitation concerns orthography. Japanese names must be written in *kanji*[1] (adapted Chinese characters used for writing Japanese), one of the two syllabaries, *hiragana* or *katakana*, or their combination. The *kanji* that can be used in names at present include 2,136 *jōyō kanji* (i.e., characters for common use) and 863 *jinmeiyō kanji* (i.e., additional characters which can also be used in names). Taiwanese names are required to be written in Chinese characters (*hanzi*), but there are no restrictions to their selection as long as they are one of the several dozen thousand characters listed in major dictionaries. A minimum of legal restrictions and the great variety of Chinese characters[2] allow

[1] Japanese words are transcribed using the Hepburn system of romanization. Long vowels are transcribed using the macron. Chinese words are transcribed using the Hanyu Pinyin romanization system without tone marks.

[2] "Chinese characters," or just "characters," will refer to *hanzi* in the context of Chinese names, and to *kanji* in the context of Japanese names.

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for virtually unlimited possibilities in both societies, although obviously not every possible combination is suitable for a name.

For both Japanese and Taiwanese names, the main criteria usually considered include the sound (the name must be euphonic), the meaning of the characters, and the overall image the name evokes, as the same name can give a completely different impression when written in different characters. The resulting name should avoid rare characters, be easy to write and pronounce, be well-balanced with the surname, and be unique within the family and among the recipient's relatives.

One of the limiting factors in the otherwise relatively free scope of name selection are generation characters, i.e., characters showing the generation relationship, which were traditionally used in names in regions with strong Chinese Han influence, including Taiwan. A generation character – often referred to as a generation name (e.g., Bauer 1959; Zhu and Millward 1987; Lu and Millward 1989; Louie 1998; Liao 2000) – is usually included as the first character of the given name and indicates "the generation position of its bearer in the family hierarchy" (Li and Lawson 2002, 4). Interestingly, such characters are not decided by the child's parents, but rather by one of the ancestors and passed down through generations in genealogy books, *zupu* (族譜), *jiapu* (家譜), or *zupu* (祖譜) (e.g., Sung 1981; Louie 1998). A generation character is intended to be given to siblings in a nuclear family and other members of the broader family of the same generation, i.e., cousins. In a survey conducted by Liao (2000, 89) among 100 Taiwanese university students born in 1980–1982, 21% of males and 18% of females still had a generation name. Louie (1998, 56) pointed to a trend in Taiwan to have the same generation name for brothers and sisters "as a means of expressing family unity" and reflecting "present-day social attitudes regarding gender and equality."

In both cultures, names are traditionally believed to have the power to influence their bearers' fate (e.g., Nakagawa 1996; Tamiya 2003; Tanaka 2014 for Japanese names; Liao 2000, Kałużyńska 2008; Li, Hsieh, and Chang 2016 for Chinese names). The various practices and methods used to ensure a good fate involve a fortunate number of strokes (needed to write a name), cosmological characteristics at the date and time of birth, beliefs related to the Chinese Zodiac, Celestial Stems and Earthly Branches, and the concept of Five Elements. These further limit the choice sometimes to a handful of characters provided by a fortune-teller if the namegivers wish to have the name created this way. Both in Japan and Taiwan, a name was traditionally chosen after the child's birth, when the time and other circumstances of birth that were believed to influence the child's fate were already known and the namegivers had had a chance to see the child.

In the second half of the last century, it was still common for grandparents, other family members or even outsiders to choose the child's name or participate

in the selection process; men were generally more involved than women. Sakuma's survey among 1,250 Japanese children born in the post-war years shows that 41% of the children had their names chosen by the father and only 5% by both parents. No children had their names selected only by the mother (Sakuma 1964, 65–66; Makino 2020). Liao's survey conducted with 99 students born in the early 1980s showed that 48.5% were named by the father, 22.2 % by both parents and 7.1 % by the mother (Liao 2000, 243).

In Taiwan, it was a widely spread practice to visit a fortune-teller (算命師 *suanmingshi*, 命理師 *minglishi*) – often associated with a temple in some way – once the date and time of birth were known. The fortune-teller would then calculate suitable characters based on the concept of Celestial Stems and Earthly Branches, known as *bazi* (八字), the number of strokes, the Five Element Theory, Chinese Zodiac, and other astrological concepts, and offer a set of suitable, auspicious characters to be used in the name of the particular child. Namegivers would then combine two of the set of approximately 10–12 characters to form the official name. Some namegivers who chose the name themselves asked a fortune-teller to confirm their choice was suitable (Liao 2000, 45). While this was not the only naming practice used in Taiwan, it was common and often referred to by the interviewees as the standard approach (see below).

In Japan, it was also quite common to receive suitable characters or names from a fortune-teller (占い師 *uranaishi*). The most frequently used fortune-telling method is called *seimei handan* (姓名判断), or fortune-telling from the number of strokes in names. It is traditionally believed to have originated in China, but according to Kobayashi (2007), it was invented in Japan at the beginning of the twentieth century. Sakuma (1964, 65) found out that in the years right after the Second World War it was not widely used, but this changed in the following decades, as Jugaku (1979, 67–68) comments on its frequent use in the 1970s and Kobayashi (2007) points to surveys confirming its popularity at the beginning of this millennium. There are various methods of *seimei handan*, but, in general, multiple combinations of *kanji* used in the given name and the family name are considered from the point of view of the number of strokes (e.g., Nakagawa 1996; Tamiya 2003). The number of strokes is categorized according to lucky and unlucky numbers. Louie (1998, 43) reports "a current fashion" with regards to selecting "lucky" Chinese names based on the number of strokes in a character.

2. Methodology

Ten semi-structured interviews with Japanese parents – two couples (J3, J4), seven mothers (J2, J5, J6, J7, J8, J9, J10), and one father (J1) – and ten interviews with Taiwanese parents – one couple (TW7) and nine mothers – who named their

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child within the last decade were conducted between October and December 2021 via Zoom. They were recorded and later translated from Japanese and Chinese into English so that the information could be compared. Three of the Japanese respondents (J1, J4, J6) also had older children. These were taken into the data as well. The Japanese couples had one to four children: one child (J3, J8, J9, J10), two children (J2, J5, J6, J7), three children (J1), and four children (J4). The Taiwanese couples had one to three children: one child (TW1, TW5, TW7, TW8), two children (TW2, TW3, TW4, TW9), and three children (TW6, TW10). Aside from one couple (J8) who had a high-school education, all the other parents had a two-year college education or higher. The Taiwanese parents all had a four-year college education or higher. Naming data were collected for a total of nineteen Japanese children (M=12, F=7) and eighteen Taiwanese children (M=15, F=3).

Table 1: The interviewed Japanese families

Inter-viewee	Family member	Education father/mother	Children	Year of birth
J1	father	4-year college or above	Eishin 瑛心 (m)	2009
			Yūjin 勇仁 (m)	2011
			Satsuki 咲気 (f)	2020
J2	mother	4-year college or above	Yayoi やよい (f)	2017
			An 杏 (f)	2019
J3	both parents	4-year college or above	Kairu 海瑠 (m)	2020
J4	both parents	4-year college or above/2-year college	Rikuto 陸翔 (m)	2010
			Mio 海緒 (f)	2011
			Sara 咲空 (f)	2014
			Seiya 星弥 (m)	2018
J5	mother	4-year college or above/2-year college	Yūto 裕大 (m)	2011
			Kotone 琴音 (f)	2013
J6	mother	4-year college or above/2-year college	Haruto 大翔 (m)	2005
			Towa 叶羽 (m)	2010
J7	mother	4-year college or above	Kandai 幹大 (m)	2013
			Gendai 玄大 (m)	2015
J8	mother	senior high/vocational school	Ryūsei 琉聖 (m)	2014
J9	mother	4-year college or above	Hana 花椰 (f)	2016
J10	mother	4-year college or above	Sōsuke 草介 (m)	2017

Source: Authors

Table 2: The interviewed Taiwanese families

Interviewee	Family member	Education father/mother	Children	Year of birth
TW1	mother	4-year college or above	Kaixu 愷旭 (m)	2019
TW2	mother	4-year college or above	Yueshi 悅石 (m)	2017
			Yuezhen 悅真 (f)	2021
TW3	mother	4-year college or above	Jiashu 家樹 (m)	2013
			Jiamei 家枚 (m)	2019
TW4	mother	4-year college or above	Yunjue 允覺 (m)	2013
			Jinrong 境容 (f)	2016
TW5	mother	4-year college or above	Shuyan 書宴 (m)	2017
TW6	mother	4-year college or above	Yuanzhen 元箴 (m)	2014
			Youze 又澤 (m)	2016
			Yunliang 允量 (m)	2018
TW7	both parents	4-year college or above	Zhaorui 照睿 (m)	2020
TW8	mother	4-year college or above	Yunqi 允祈 (m)	2019
TW9	mother	4-year college or above	Yijie 奕潔 (f)	2016
			Qi'an 祈安 (m)	2018
TW10	mother	4-year college or above	Xinjie 忻潔 (m)	2010
			Yicheng 奕橙 (m)	2013
			Daihang 岱航 (m)	2015

Source: Authors

During the interview, the respondents were first asked to recall and describe the name selection process from the very first moment they started thinking about a name. They were encouraged to mention every detail they could think of. After that, follow-up questions were asked. The aim was to find out from the respondents 1) when they started the process of name selection, 2) who participated in it, 3) what criteria they considered, 4) how they actually proceeded, 5) whether they considered relating the name to the names in the family, and 6) whether they used any naming books, the Internet, or any other aids.

3. Findings

3.1 When does the naming process start?

All the Japanese parents interviewed already started choosing the name during pregnancy. Some of them began discussing possible names ("if we had a girl...," "if we had a boy...") soon after they had found out they were expecting a child and

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more seriously after they had learned the sex of their child. J8 started considering the name only approximately a month before birth because they had repeatedly failed to carry a pregnancy to term in the past. Parents with more children started earlier when expecting their first child than with their other children, born when they were already more experienced. J1 had chosen the names for their two boys before birth but still had not chosen a name for their youngest daughter by the time she was born. All the parents had decided on the name before their child's birth except for J1 with their youngest child and J4 with their third-born child, a girl, because they had expected a boy.

The majority of the Taiwanese families started selecting their child's name during pregnancy, which was "quite early," according to the respondents (TW6, TW8). The only parent to wait until after giving birth was TW9, who waited so they could use the correct data to calculate the name according to the principles of Chinese astrology. The traditional method of name selection seemed to be the main factor in selecting the name only after giving birth; consequently, not using the services of a fortune-teller or the principles of Chinese astrology allowed the families to consider and decide the child's name before birth. The actual time could be as early as seven weeks into pregnancy, as in the case of TW6, through about mid-pregnancy (5–6 months) after learning the child's sex, to a period just before birth. The anticipated date of birth seemed to be "the deadline" by which the name should be agreed upon, either due to practical reasons, as in the case of TW10, who wanted to purchase insurance for their newborn right away and did not want to go through a "slow and ineffective" process of name selection after birth, or due to mere parental anxiety to have the name ready in time.

Most of the Japanese and Taiwanese parents started selecting the name during pregnancy, in some cases already in its early stages. Unlike their Japanese counterparts, the Taiwanese parents considered this an "early beginning" of the process. The only exception among the Taiwanese parents was TW9, who named the child shortly after birth as they maintained the tradition of using fortune-telling for choosing an auspicious name (which the other interviewees also referred to as the standard and common way of choosing a name). The generation of Taiwanese parents who were interviewed thus seems to have changed the name selection process and bestowed names in a different way – and at a different time – from the way their own names were given. Some of them explicitly stated that a fortune-teller chose their name based on their time of birth. While in Japan names had also been traditionally chosen only after the child's birth to take into consideration the circumstances of birth, a similar shift as seen in Taiwan occurred several generations earlier (Barešová 2016).

3.2 Who chooses the name?

Except for J2, all the Japanese parents stated that they had decided on the name themselves, usually the mother taking a more active role. Some mentioned consulting possible name options with grandparents, sisters, and friends. J4 also engaged their older children in naming their youngest brother. On the other hand, J6 stressed that they "had not at all considered their parents' hopes/ideas' and decided themselves, although their parents "probably had had some expectations." J7 did not consult with anyone and only announced the name after the baby was born. Only in one case (J2), the maternal grandfather had chosen the name of the firstborn girl, and the mother considered it rare. Later she chose the name for her younger daughter. J10 consulted the final decision with a professional fortune-teller:

> After giving birth, I got quite concerned about the character for *suke* [in the name *Sōsuke*] I had chosen. [...] and so I called a fortune-teller – a name specialist. I found out the number of strokes of the character we had chosen was good and, moreover, the same as my husband's. That we also found a bit interesting, fate [...]. (J10)

The Taiwanese interviewees also claimed they selected the names themselves, i.e., the mother and father, or even the mother exclusively (TW4), except for TW3, who accepted names provided by the paternal grandfather. It seems that even in cases where both parents participated in the name selection, the mother had the initiative and spent more time and effort choosing the best name. Fathers usually joined in later and eliminated some of the options provided by the mother (TW4, TW5, TW10). In one case (TW1), each parent provided one character for the name. Grandparents were sidelined and given a consultation role similar to that of other friends, principally asked to help choose between several – usually two – options offered by the parents. As grandparents themselves (or relatives of their generation) grew up under different circumstances and their names were chosen differently, they often voiced objections (TW1, TW2, TW6) or other proposals; nevertheless, such complaints generally went unheeded. There was even a case of conflict in the family (TW6): "we knew she [grandmother] meant well, but I did not want that kind of interference, so it was a bit unpleasant." Even though the interviewees regarded going to a fortune-teller as a standard practice in name selection in Taiwan, none of them actually did so. TW9 used a fortune-telling website, and the paternal grandmother went to a fortune-teller after the fact; others used a website or books to either select the name (TW10) or confirm its auspiciousness (TW4, TW5). Nevertheless, the responsibility for bestowing the name was – willingly – borne by the parents and primarily the mother.

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In sum, both Japanese and Taiwanese parents had the main say in the name selection. While both partners were usually engaged in the process, women seemed to play the leading role more often.

3.3 What matters – selection criteria

The main criteria mentioned by all the interviewees were the sound of the name and images related to it, the meaning or motif of the characters, the images they evoke and associations they allude to, and, surprisingly, the number of strokes. Another criterion mentioned a few times was the uniqueness of the name or at least its uniqueness among relatives (and friends).

3.3.1 Pronunciation

The choice of the phonological form was motivated by various things. J1 and J2 got inspired by the time of the year their daughters were born and chose names homophonous with the old names of the months; *Yayoi* (J2) means March and *Satsuki* (J1) May. Moreover, due to Studio Ghibli's anime *Tonari no Totoro* [My neighbor Totoro], the name *Satsuki* has a good image in Japan, an image of a solid, responsible girl (J1). Similarly, the name *Haruto* (J6) was influenced by the image of a TV drama protagonist, *Haru*, whom the mother liked at that time. J3, who has experience interacting with foreigners, wanted a name that would be easy to pronounce for people from abroad and decided on *Kairu* (Kail, Kyle).

The Taiwanese parents considered pronunciation in two principal respects. Firstly, they tried to avoid unpleasantly sounding homophones that might have their child being laughed at by their peers or bearing a bad reference – to "grave" (TW10), for example, which met with opposition from the senior generation. The other factor was a pleasant or "smooth" sound of the name, especially of particular tone combinations, where, e.g., the 3rd tone was viewed as unsuitable for the last syllable of the name.

3.3.2 Meaning

The meaning of the characters used in children's names seems to be the most important factor considered by the majority of the interviewed Taiwanese parents. They all looked for characters with positive meanings which would bring their children good fortune. As a matter of fact, the parents often referred to "liking" a particular character as the main reason for choosing it for the name. TW5 and TW10 chose the characters also with respect to the Chinese Zodiac, i.e., suitable for a child born in the particular year of the Chinese Zodiac. TW10, for example, chose the character 忻 *xin* for her baby born in the Year of the Tiger (2010) because it included the components 心 (heart) and 斤 (pound), as tigers "eat meat" and "heart is the most important piece of meat in the human body [...] 忻 feels like a

lot of outstanding meat." TW4 expressed their hopes and aspirations for the child through the characters – she used the character 覺 *jue* as in 先覺 *xianjue* (sage), explaining: "I hoped he would become a certain kind of person, and that is why I picked this name." Christian families (TW2 and TW6) chose names related to the Bible or Christianity in general (e.g., TW2 included the character 石 (stone) in her son's name *Yueshi* (悦石), as stone was "the building material mentioned in the Bible").

The Japanese parents generally looked for characters that could be ascribed to the chosen phonological form and created a nice image and associations with the child's desired qualities and/or time of birth. J6 was also inspired by the Zodiac: "The name of our older son [大翔 *Haruto*] means to fly high in the future, to spread wings. He was born in the Year of the Rooster (2005), so we used a *kanji* with the meaning to fly." Some parents chose a character for the name of their younger child from the name of their older child or somehow related to it: "For the second son, we also wanted the sound /to/ and decided for *Towa*. And we also used *kanji* with the meaning of wings [翔]. He was not born in the Year of the Rooster, but we included the wish for him to fly high" (J6).

3.3.3 The number of strokes

Interestingly, amongst the Japanese parents, all but J2 paid attention to the number of strokes. Several parents mentioned they considered it quite common. For J3 and J10, it was an important criterion to have a name that would be auspicious. Others just wanted to make sure the name would not cause a bad fate, and the number of strokes also helped them choose from the possible characters. Women seemed to be more concerned about the number of strokes than men. Some stated they somewhat believed in fortune-telling and that one's life is determined by *kanji*: "I felt we could not just ignore the number of strokes, good omens or good luck; it is not a mistake to use the things people have been using for a long time to avoid bad things" (J6). Some did so "just in case."

> I don't believe it that much, but I wanted to give the child only good things, and, if possible, avoid bad things. I wanted to give her a name with a good number of strokes rather than bad (J9).

J1 admitted checking the number of strokes of the name of their eldest son and getting concerned, although he said he did not believe in it. He described as follows: "The result did not seem good. Then it, of course, becomes difficult to use that name, right? [...] If you get: health – not bad [meaning that the number determining the name bearer's future health is not inauspicious], marriage – not bad, but with the rest [meaning other aspects of future fate], you get bad, bad, bad [...] well, you do get a bit concerned."

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The interviews confirmed that this criterion seems to have more weight when choosing a name for a boy. J5 commented: "It [the result] is not as perfect as in the case of her older brother, but she is a girl, and her surname will change one day, so we did not worry so much about it but checked that it was not bad [...]." TW9 and TW10 paid great attention to the number of strokes in their children's names, as they believed it might influence their children's good fortune. While other families also considered the number of strokes, the motivation was completely different. In most cases, the parents wanted to avoid "too many strokes" so that the child would not encounter difficulties when writing the name later (e.g., at school); TW6 considered aesthetic reasons and felt the full name would look "balanced" if the middle character had fewer strokes than the first (i.e., the surname) and the last character.

J1 and J10 also paid attention to choosing easy characters; J1 compensated for the difficult characters in the surname and J10 chose easier characters due to their opposition to the recent usage of rare and complex characters. J6 and J9 were a bit concerned with the difficulty of the chosen characters but decided on them anyway. Others admitted they "did not think that far" (J4, J5, J7, J8).

3.3.4. Uniqueness

J1 and J7 explicitly mentioned they searched for names that would sound unique or uncommon: "[W]e wanted a name that is not very common, and so we chose *Eishin*. I had not heard the name at that time, and I think that it is quite a rare name" (J1). The other parents made sure the name was not already used within the family, checked on the Internet whether it was not too common, etc. J9, who chose a recently popular name *Hana*, thought of a rare *kanji* combination, 花梛 ("flower" + "nagi, species of conifer"). The Taiwanese parents generally tried to find a name different from those frequently bestowed upon children of the particular generation. Only TW9 mentioned avoiding rare characters so that "people [would] know how to read the name."

Given the large pool of characters available for Chinese names, a unique name is relatively easy to achieve, and the Taiwanese parents were consciously looking for a combination of characters that would not be too common. The Japanese parents mainly paid attention to avoiding a name already used in the family, but some aimed at a name that would be unique or uncommon in their phonological or graphic form.

3.4 The naming process

The Japanese parents followed a very similar pattern when selecting the name for their firstborn. They started with the sound, choosing one or more favourite phonological forms, making sure it was not too frequent, and there was no such name among relatives or friends (see *Uniqueness* above). Then they looked up various

possible characters that would match the sound and had a good meaning and/or evoked a nice image. Most of them checked the number of strokes to choose the most auspicious option. The selection of the names for younger children was in some cases influenced by the idea of sharing some common feature with the name(s) of the older sibling(s) (see below). For example, J4 chose 陸 (continent) for the name of their eldest son and wanted a similar motif evoking largeness in the names of their other children. The reading of the chosen character thus determined the first syllable of the name. After completing the phonological form, they chose the other character with respect to its reading, meaning, and also the number of strokes.

The Taiwanese parents first selected characters according to several criteria – primarily their liking for a particular character, but some also according to astrological criteria such as an auspicious number of strokes in the full name, or Chinese character components suitable for a particular Zodiac sign. The set of potential characters was then reduced by filtering for how they sound – in particular, pleasant-sounding tone combinations and removing potentially laughable homophones – and, in some cases, also filtering for character complexity ("so that it is not too difficult to write," TW7). If they still could not decide between the final two variants of the name, friends, and the broader family were asked to voice their preferences.

In both cultures, parents consider similar criteria of sound, meaning, the appearance of characters, etc. However, the weight of each criterion differs from family to family. Nonetheless, our interviews suggest that nowadays the Japanese tend to start with the desired sound to which they ascribe suitable characters, while the Taiwanese start with the desired characters and then consider the resulting sound of each choice to eliminate those with undesirable pronunciation.

3.5 Sharing common features in names within the family

None of the respondents gave a name which would share a common feature with the names of previous generations, although according to J1, "there are families where the grandfather, father, and son share the same character in their names." J5 also mentioned friends who still kept this tradition.

In several families, the child's name shared a common feature with a parent's name. J2 has a plant name lily, written in *hiragana* (ゆり *Yuri*). Her older daughter received a name also written in *hiragana* (やよい *Yayoi*) while the younger received a plant name apricot (杏 *An*). The two sons of J6, *Haruto* and *Towa* received names containing /*to*/ after their father, *Masato*. J7 chose four-mora names for their two boys to match the father's name. J8 wanted to combine their names, *Chiyo* (千葉), and *Haruichi* (陽一), and name their daughter *Chiaki* (千陽), but the number of strokes was extremely unfortunate so they chose a different name.

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Some common features can be found in the names of siblings. J1's sons, *Eishin* and *Yūjin*, received names following, according to the father, a similar sound pattern. Similarly, J7's two sons *Kandai* (幹大) and *Gendai* (玄大) have names of similar sounds and also graphic patterns. The two brothers *Haruto* and *Towa* (J6) mentioned above not only share /to/ with their father but the two of them have it written in the same character (翔). J4 connected the names of their four children through characters with following meanings: continent (陸), sea (海), sky (空), and stars (斗). They all evoke wideness/largeness and express the parents' wish for their children "to be active widely."

Except for TW3, whose children were named by a member of the older generation and all of them had a character *jia* (家) in the name, the names of the children were not related to the names of other members of the family. Some interviewees did mention the existence of genealogy books in their families or friends' families, but they did not apply any prescribed characters to their children's names. Names of siblings did not have any common features either.

Neither the Japanese nor Taiwanese parents followed traditional practices of sharing common characters or other features in male or female names over succeeding generations in Japan and within the same generation in Taiwan. Six out of ten Japanese respondents displayed an effort to connect the names of a parent and a child and/or siblings.

3.6 Naming books, the Internet, and other inspiration for the name selection

When selecting the name, most of the Japanese parents consulted various naming books, typically of the popular Tamahiyo series, and also used the Internet to check the frequency of their selected name (J7, J10) and to do *seimei handan*, i.e., to check the auspiciousness of the name (J1, J3, J4, J8, J9, J10). Only one respondent (J10) contacted a fortune-teller.

While the interviewed Taiwanese namegivers did not use professional fortune-tellers, they compensated for the lack of expertise by resorting to online resources. As a matter of fact, half of the parents used a fortune-telling website in one way or another. TW9 relied on such a website to provide characters to choose from; others, such as TW1 and TW4, used a website to reconfirm the auspiciousness of the characters they had already selected. Others consulted websites for advice regarding the suitability of characters in relation to the particular year and its Chinese Zodiac sign (TW5, TW10). Dictionaries are another tool used by the parents to help in the selection of characters or to confirm the meanings of favourite characters. TW2 used another, rather specific online resource, an "index of Biblical verses," to find characters in accordance with their religious beliefs.

4. Discussion

Based on the interviews, several observations can be made about contemporary naming practices in both societies, which at the same time manifest more general social trends such as the growing independence of the nuclear family which places the child at the centre of attention.

4.1 Lesser involvement of the extended family, greater involvement of mothers

Extended families seem to play a smaller role in the naming process than in the past, in both societies. Parents seem to be eager to decide upon the best name by themselves and involve grandparents to a much smaller degree – if at all – than former generations (cf. Unser-Schutz 2019). The interviews showed that most grandparents – or extended family in general – only had a consulting role in the final stage of name selection, similar to the role of close friends.

Furthermore, the children's names were not inspired by the names of family members beyond the nuclear family. Ties tend to be cut with ancestors and with members of the extended family within the same generation maintained through prescribed characters in genealogy books in Taiwan, and such traditions are often discontinued. Similarly, sharing a common feature such as one *kanji* in names across several generations, which was common in Japan in the past (Satō 2007), is not as frequent now, and common features are usually limited to names within the nuclear family. On the other hand, there is a tendency in Japan to relate siblings' names through a common feature.

These developments indicate and also contribute to strengthening ties within the nuclear family. The observations made during the interviews resonate with those made by Unser-Schutz (2019, 12) about Japanese society, who pointed out that "[a]lthough naming practices in the pre-contemporary period played an important part in strengthening larger familial relationships [...] contemporary names appear to be playing an equally important role in the establishment of today's smaller family unit."

The nuclear family became the prevalent socio-economic unit in Japan soon after the end of World War II, partially due to legal changes and rapid urbanization. In Taiwan, where the atomization of the family started later, the nuclear family of parents and children seems to be gaining in importance even though cross-generational solidarity, such as handing over a part of salary to parents, sharing accommodation with them, eating together, etc., is still quite common (e.g., due to the prohibitive cost of housing). Regardless of whether or not the traditional ideal of "three generations under the same roof" is being maintained, the relationships within the nuclear family seem to be increasingly prioritized in both Japan and

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Taiwan. In other words, the ties between members of the nuclear family are growing stronger – and more intimate – while links to members of the extended family are gradually being weakened, as reflected in the practice of child naming.

Furthermore, within the nuclear family, the mother has become more prominent in the naming process (for Japan, see Barešová 2016 and Makino 2020). While traditionally women raised children and maintained the smooth functioning of a family, they had little voice in major decisions – such as choosing a name for their child. On the contrary, the female interviewees were mostly fully involved in the name selection, or rather, they were often the initiators and the main driving force in the process. This implies the re-balancing of roles within the family and between the parents in particular.

4.2 Different actors – different process

The roles of individual actors in the naming process have changed, and so has the naming process itself. As discussed above, it has moved into the intimate space of the nuclear family. The desire to assume control over the resulting name not only limits the role of grandparents and wider family but also partially eliminates fortune-tellers and other external actors from the process. None of the Taiwanese respondents went to a fortune-teller, although they believed that many people still used such services to some extent. Similarly, only one Japanese mother consulted by phone the already-decided name with a fortune-teller to ensure it would not be unfavourable.

However, the cosmological principles and fortune-telling methods of name selection were by no means abandoned; they are still widely used, but increasingly through new technologies and available literature, even by those who do not necessarily hold such traditional beliefs but wish the name to be perfect in every aspect. As J10 aptly noted, "one does it for one's own satisfaction." Expectant parents can choose from a wide range of free or paid online services and phone applications. Websites "calculating" baby names seem to be particularly popular. New baby name books and fortune-telling manuals come out every year. All the Japanese respondents had used or were at least aware of the numerous Tamahiyo maternity books published by the Benesse Corporation.[3]

In Taiwan, a shift can be observed towards practices which do not require the knowledge of the exact time of birth and thus allow for selecting the name even before the baby is born. Only one of the Taiwanese couples waited until their babies were born so that they could choose their names with respect to

[3] This company runs a number of publications, magazines (e.g., *Tamago kurabu*) and websites, posts rankings of the most popular names for each year, analyzes latest trends and provides recommendations for name selection.

the birth data. Early preparation for the arrival of the child, which is also encouraged by the possibility of actually seeing the fetus in the mother's uterus and knowing its sex, naturally leads to thinking about the child's name during such preparations.

The selection of a name is always a unique process. It depends upon the particular namegivers (their preferences and beliefs, education, religion, fondness of tradition, or attraction to new fashions) but social conventions and naming criteria also influence it. In both societies, a name has always been selected for a particular individual in the hopes that it would ensure a good fate; traditionally, it was tailored based mainly upon cosmological principles and other fortune-telling practices. At present, a liking for particular characters which can convey parental wishes and aspirations through their meaning or associations is prioritized.

The current name selection criteria are similar in both societies; however, each seems to emphasize different aspects. The interviews illustrate the contemporary tendency to start the selection of a Japanese name by choosing a phonological form to which the characters are consequently assigned. In contrast, the Taiwanese generally start choosing a name by looking up desirable characters, and then consider the pronunciation of the whole name. Up until the late 1970s, the Japanese also placed emphasis on the graphic form. Kobayashi (2009, 18) explains that the shift in the name selection method is due to considering the name primarily with respect to the child's existence within the family circle (or private space) rather than their future role in society (or public space) and the need to call the name or refer to the baby during pregnancy.

The gradual change in who chooses the name and how – in particular starting with the sound rather than the graphic form and increasingly seeking uniqueness – is reflected in the striking differences in names given to Japanese children in the last several decades compared to names of older generations (Satō 2007; Kobayashi 2009; Otake 2012; Barešová 2016; Unser-Schutz 2019). These differences concern the selection of characters and, even more distinctly, the name structure. On the other hand, while the changes described above also significantly affect the choice of characters in Taiwanese names, the continuity in proceeding from characters to sound maintains a traditional structure.

5. Conclusion

The trajectories of socio-economic development in Japan and Taiwan seem to follow similar trends, although with some temporal differences (Barešová and Janda 2022). Together with changes in society, especially within the family, naming practices in both countries have undergone various changes. The interviews provided insight into various aspects of the actual process of choosing, or more

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precisely, creating a name for a baby. The analysed examples of the naming process differed in particularities but displayed some general tendencies specific to each society, such as the continuous practice of proceeding from the characters to the sound in Taiwan and the contemporary tendency to proceed from the sound to the graphic form in Japan. The latter reflects a shift in the perception of the name's function, placing more emphasis on its use within the family (as explained by Kobayashi 2009). The interviews also showed some tendencies common to both societies, such as weakening links between names within the extended family, intergenerational in Japan and intragenerational in Taiwan, and increased parental control over the whole process. A change in mothers' involvement is especially apparent. Furthermore, parents in both cultures now prefer choosing a name before the child is born. While this practice seems to have been established in Japan for several decades, in Taiwan this has been a more recent phenomenon related to what appears to be a departure from fortune-telling methods requiring the exact time of birth.

In the course of our research, the issue of fortune-tellers kept re-emerging. Fortune-telling businesses can be seen in towns and the Taiwanese interviewees referred to them as the standard way of selecting names. However, they did not use their services themselves, but some of them turned to Internet versions of fortune-telling instead. Thus, it remains an intriguing question for further research to establish what the actual role of fortune-tellers is today, whether or not and to what extent fortune-tellers and fortune-telling as such will remain relevant in the future. Currently, it seems the business is still vibrant both in its traditional and modernized form, though our present research seems to suggest a shift away from employing traditional fortune-tellers in favour of using the Internet when choosing a name for a baby, rather similar to what could be observed in Japan earlier.

It is important to note that this study has limitations. The interviews were conducted with a limited number of participants, most of whom had higher education. The level of education probably has some effect on the gender roles in the family, the attitude toward traditions and traditional beliefs, and other aspects related to the naming process. Investigating the actual impact of education on name selection would be an interesting direction for further, presumably quantitative, research.

It also became clear during the interviews that two Taiwanese families were Christian, which influenced the way they chose the names for their babies. The potential influence of particular religious beliefs on the manner of naming children in the two cultures would be yet another area to explore.

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