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Gender Bias in the use of Teknonymy as Spousal Terms: Insights from Online Surveys in China, South Korea, and Japan

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ABSTRACT: *This study aims to uncover gender bias in the use of teknonymy as spousal terms through online surveys conducted in China, South Korea, and Japan. The study focuses on how married individuals address their spouses in private settings. The findings reveal that teknonymy is significantly more prevalent in Japan and South Korea than in China, with usage patterns in the former two countries varying according to age and educational background. In contrast, the use of teknonymy in China is infrequent and relatively unaffected by these factors. In Japan and South Korea, teknonymy is more frequently employed by women, suggesting the continued influence of traditional gender norms that reinforce patriarchal family structures and male authority. Despite these patterns, evidence of generational and educational shifts suggests a gradual transformation toward more egalitarian modes of spousal terms. The cross-national differences observed in this study highlight the complex interaction among language, culture, and gender, and underline the need for further research into the sociocultural factors that shape evolving spousal terms in contemporary Asian societies.*

Key words*: East Asia, Gender bias, sociocultural norm, spousal term, teknonymy.*

1. Introduction

In sociolinguistics, research on how spouses address each other has examined how language reflects sociocultural norms, power dynamics, and emotional bonds within marriage. These studies have also examined how cultural, social, and individual factors influence the selection of spousal terms, providing insights into gender roles, relationships, and communication patterns. Needless to say, different cultures and societies have varying expectations regarding how spouses should address each other. For instance, in some cultures, affectionate or casual terms such as “honey”, “darling”, “dear”, “sweetheart”, “love” or “baby” are preferred, while in others, kinship-based terms like “mother”, “father”, “big brother” and “little sister” are commonly used between spouses. Notably, the use of kinship-based terms as spousal terms is a prominent feature of many Asian languages and cultures, often reflecting social gender norms and expectations within marriage. Furthermore, since spousal terms are expressions used between husbands and wives, employing kinship-based terms in this context carries deep social implications, indicating intimacy or affection, differences in authority, and hierarchical dynamics within the marital relationship.

In East Asia, addressing each other by “mother” and “father” between husbands and wives can also be seen as a linguistic phenomenon related to the concept of “teknonymy”, a coined term used in the field of cultural anthropology to refer to the practice of addressing or referring to someone by their relationship to their children rather than by their names. For example, in Japan, husbands address their wives as “おかあさんokāsan” (mother) and wives address their husbands as “おとうさん otōsan” (father). Similarly, in Korea, married couples address each other by “엄마 eom-ma” (mom) and “아빠 a-ppa” (dad) after their

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child's names. Likewise, in China, married couples use "孩子他妈 háizi tā mā" (the child's mother) and "孩子他爸 háizi tā bà" (the child's father) to address their spouses.

Originally, "teknonymy" is an anthropological term, so there has been little analysis from the perspectives of language and gender. However, as examples above used in the three East Asian countries, "teknonymy" itself is constantly linked to gendered cultural and social norms, and gender bias can emerge in many ways when it comes to how these spousal terms are used in daily social lives. This study aims to uncover gender biases in the use of "teknonymy" as spousal terms through online surveys in China, South Korea, and Japan.

1.1. Gender Bias Reflected in Spousal Terms

China, South Korea, and Japan have long been influenced by Confucianism, which has shaped distinct gender norms. In particular, it has created different gender norms for men and women by emphasizing the differences between them, such as "男女有别Nánnǚ yǒu bié" (Men and women should be treated differently) and "男女七岁不同席Nánnǚ qī suì bùtóng xí" (Men and women cannot sit together after getting seven years old).

One of the key gender principles for women is "三从 Sān cóng" (three obedience): A woman was required to obey her father before marriage, and her husband during married life, and her son in widowhood. This gender principle, rooted in Confucian texts such as the "礼记 Lǐjì"(the Book of Rites), was formalized during the Eastern Han dynasty and was most emphasized during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Confucian ideals reinforced hierarchical family roles, particularly through texts such as "女诫 Nǚjiè" (Women's Precepts), which codified women's moral behavior. These norms solidified the expectation that women should submit to male authority figures and maintain moral integrity. While modern views on gender equality challenge these ideas, remnants persist in societal expectations.

Confucian influence extended to Korea and Japan, shaping social roles and kinship terms. Historical texts indicate that teknonymy, the practice of referring to individuals based on their fathers, husbands, and children, was influenced by Confucian ethics. In China, kinship terms such as "从父称谓 Cóng fù chēngwèi" (kinship terms following the father), "从夫称谓 Cóng fū chēngwèi" (kinship terms following the husband), and "从儿称谓 Cóng ér chēngwèi" (kinship terms following the children) used mainly by married women reflect this tradition. Similar patterns appear in Korean, such as "종자명 호칭jong-ja-myeong ho-ching" (addressing the spouse based on their child's name), further embedding Confucian gender roles into language and culture. Overall, Confucianism has historically reinforced gender divisions, shaping societal expectations in which men assume leadership roles while women are confined to domestic responsibilities. Although these norms have evolved, their influence remains deeply embedded in East Asian societies.

However, the extent to which Confucianism has specifically influenced the usage of spousal terms in these countries has yet to be systematically examined. Nin (2023b) conducted an online survey on the use of spousal terms in Japan and found that gender bias in Japanese spousal terms was more significant than in Chinese (Nin, 2023a). This finding was rather surprising because Japan, which is often considered the most advanced and Westernized country in Asia, lags behind China in gender equality regarding spousal terms.

Nin (2023a) found that the most commonly used spousal terms among both young and older Chinese couples were "老公 lǎogōng" (old lord) for husbands and "老婆 lǎopo" (old granny) for wives. While not entirely symmetrical, since "公 gōng" (old honorable gentleman) is a somewhat more respectful term than "**婆**po" (old woman), the usage of these terms exhibited relatively less gender bias. In contrast, Japanese couples commonly used "主人 shujin" (master) for husbands and "家内 kanai" (one inside the house) for wives (Nin, 2023b), reflecting a stronger adherence to traditional male-centered gender roles. Although the term "家内 kanai" has recently been replaced by the more gender-equal term "妻 tsuma" (wife), "主人 shujin" remains the most frequently used term for husbands in Japan.

Nin (2024) further examined gender bias in Korean and found that South Korean couples tended to use spousal terms that aligned more closely with those of Japan than with China. Spousal terms such as "바깥양반 bakkat-yangban" (outer nobleman) for husbands and "집사람 jibsaram" (a person at home) for

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wives emphasize traditional gender roles, bearing similarities to “主人 shujin” (master) and “家内 kanai” (one inside the house) in Japanese.

Comparing these findings with previous research, it becomes evident that while both Korean and Japanese spousal terms exhibit gender biases, they do not closely align with Chinese patterns. However, the degree of gender bias in Korean terms appears to be less pronounced than in Japanese terms. Nin (2024) concluded that husband-wife relationships in South Korea and Japan remain unequal and patriarchal, with wives often accepting their husbands' use of derogatory terms, which are almost absent in Chinese research (Nin, 2023a).

1.2. Teknonymy in East Asian Languages

Teknonymy is a coined term introduced by anthropologist Tylor (1889) in the study of kinship systems worldwide, originating from ancient Greek: “tékn” (child) and “ōnumía” (name). Later, Lowie (1921) expanded research on the subject. According to the Cultural Anthropology Encyclopedia (1987), teknonymy is a globally widespread practice found across almost all continents, including Africa, the Americas, Oceania, and Asia. Its use and association with other kinship systems vary depending on the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of each ethnic group.

Nin (2024) identified a similarity in spousal term usage between Korea and Japan. That is, South Korean and Japanese couples frequently use kinship-based terms to address their spouses. For instance, Japanese couples often refer to each other as “お父さん o-tō-san” (father) / “お母さん o-kā-san” (mother) or “パパ papa” (papa) / “ママ mama” (mama), even in the absence of children. Similarly, Korean couples exhibit this pattern, using “아빠 a-ppa” (dad) and “엄마 eom-ma” (mom), incorporating the child's name when addressing their spouses. Another recent survey by Nin (2025) on Indonesian spousal terms revealed that more than 30% of Indonesian men and women address their spouses using kinship-based terms like “ibu/mama/bunda/mami” (mother/mom/mommy) and “bapak/papa/ayah/papi” (father/dad/daddy), even in the absence of children.

Before proceeding with the present surveys, it is essential to review the previous studies on teknonymy in Chinese, Korean, and Japanese that have been conducted.

1.3. Previous Studies on Teknonymy in Chinese

Feng (1936) argued that long before Tylor (1889) introduced the concept of teknonymy in cultural anthropology, the Chinese Confucian scholar Qian Daxin (1728–1804) had already identified this linguistic phenomenon. Feng (1936) further examined the role of teknonymy in Chinese kinship terms and discussed it in the American Journal of Anthropology, bringing wider recognition to the Chinese kinship system within anthropology. Based on Feng (1936), Rui (1945) translated teknonymy into Chinese as “亲从子称 Qīn cóng zǐ chēng” (addressing the spouse by their child’s name).

Wu (1985) later introduced the term “从儿称谓 Cóng ér chēngwèi” (kinship terms following their child’s name), which sparked renewed academic interest in Chinese kinship terminology. It is noteworthy that Wu (1985) also identified additional kinship patterns, including “从夫称谓Cóng fū chēngwèi” (kinship terms following the husband) and “从父称谓Cóng fù chēngwèi” (kinship terms following the father), primarily used by married women, extending the scope of the study of teknonymy.

Moreover, Li (1997) highlighted a gender imbalance in the Chinese kinship system: men had specific terms to address their wives' families, while women lacked equivalent terms for their husbands' families, forcing them to use teknonymy-based references. This imbalance reflected the longstanding patriarchal Confucian family structure. However, modern efforts to promote gender equality have reduced the use of teknonymy, though informal kinship-based spousal terms such as “孩子他爸 háizi tā bà” (the child’s father) and “孩子他妈 háizi tā mā” (the child’s mother) remain commonly used among less-educated Chinese couples (Chen, 1999; Kim, 2002).

1.4. Previous Studies on Teknonymy in Korean

In Korean, Lee and Kim (1973) examined “teknonymy” and “geononymy” in Korean kinship terminology. Later, Wang (1989) translated “teknonymy” into Korean as “종자명 호칭 jong-ja-myeong ho-chin” (addressing the spouse by their child’s name) and “geononymy” as “종지명 호칭 jong-ji-myeong ho-chin” (addressing a married woman by her parental home’s name). Wang (1989) attributed the widespread use

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of teknonymy to Korean cultural norms that discourage direct personal address and emphasize practical identification.

Furthermore, Yoon (1995) argued that teknonymy reflected a mother's higher social value over a wife's status, which depended on having children in Korean families. In contrast, in Western societies, the status of a wife is not related to the presence of children, resulting in the absence of such kinship-based spousal terms. Several sociolinguistic studies (Han, 1994, 1996; Hong, 2007, 2017; Seo, 1984; Yoon, 2012) found that Korean couples with children often address each other as "엄마 eom-ma" (mom) and "아빠 a-ppa" (dad). Hong (2007) linked this practice to Korea's extended family system, where three generations live together, and the couple may have to address each other by their child's name because it is embarrassing to use an endearment term in front of their parents and children. However, as nuclear families become more prevalent and women's socioeconomic status rises, the use of teknonymy as spousal terms is expected to decline, with couples increasingly addressing each other by their first name, indicating greater equality.

1.5. Previous Studies on Teknonymy in Japanese

Sociolinguistic research has examined how Japanese spouses address each other (Language Journal Language Life Editors, 1973; Agency for Cultural Affairs, 1999; Hasegawa, 1988; Hong, 2007; Kanamaru, 1997; Mizumoto, 2017; Sugihara, 2000; Terasawa, 2007, 2009; Yoneda, 1986, 1990; Watanabe, 1963). Previous studies show that Japanese couples with children often use kinship terms like "お母さん okāsan" (mother) and "お父さん otōsan" (father) or "ママ mama" (mama) and "パパ papa" (papa) to address spouses, especially wives to husbands.

Fischer (1964) and Suzuki (1967a, 1967b) identified teknonymy in Japanese families. Fischer (1964) described it as a "child-centered viewpoint", while Suzuki (1967a) expanded on Tylor (1889) and Winick (1956), coining the term "oikocentric" (family-centered) as an extension of the teknonymy study. Suzuki (1967b) compared Turkish and Japanese kinship term usage, noting that Japanese kinship terms are used allocentrically, except when addressed by the youngest child. Suzuki introduced the term "oikonymy" from the Greek "oikos" meaning family, to describe the allocentric and child-centric use of kinship terms in Japanese. However, the term "oikonymy" has not appeared in any of Suzuki's subsequent research. Later, Suzuki (1973) describes the address based on the youngest in the family as "the second fictional usage", also interpreted as "empathic identification" (Suzuki, 1973). In the *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology* (1987) published in Japan, "teknonymy" is defined as follows: It is a form of address for a person, generally referred to as the "child-centered naming system", clearly the definition is based on Fischer (1964) and Suzuki (1967a; 1967b).

2. Method

Based on previous studies, this study aims to examine gender bias in the use of teknonymy as spousal terms across three East Asian countries as a follow-up investigation. This study adopts the same methodology used in Nin's previous research (Nin, 2023a, 2023b, 2024, 2025), employing online surveys to examine how couples address each other privately at home and systematically analyze how gender bias is reflected in spousal terms among married couples. Google Forms was used for the Korean and Japanese questionnaires, and "问卷星 wènjuàn xīng" (Questionnaire Star) for the Chinese questionnaire, as Google is not available in China.

To target married individuals with children, participants were recruited through graduate students at several universities in Beijing, Seoul, and Tokyo, who invited their parents to complete the questionnaire. The online surveys were conducted simultaneously in China, South Korea, and Japan from November 2023 to October 2024. Moreover, the survey was conducted anonymously, collecting only basic information (gender, age, and educational background) to ensure respondent confidentiality while allowing for meaningful analysis of linguistic patterns related to gender roles.

3. Results

2024. A summary of the valid respondents is presented in Table 1.

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Table 1. Summary of Valid Respondents.

Country	**China**		**South Korea**		**Japan**	
Gender	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**
Respondents	348	196	101	134	425	369
Age	40s-60s	40s-60s	40s-60s	40s-60s	40s-60s	40s-60s
Educational background	High school ~ Graduate school	High school ~ Graduate school	High school ~ Graduate school	High school ~ Graduate school	High school ~ Graduate school	High school ~ Graduate school

The results are presented in two sections: the age group and the educational background of the respondents. In each section, the results for the three countries are presented in the order of China, South Korea, and Japan. For each analysis, the use of teknonymy as spousal terms was analyzed separately for female and male respondents.

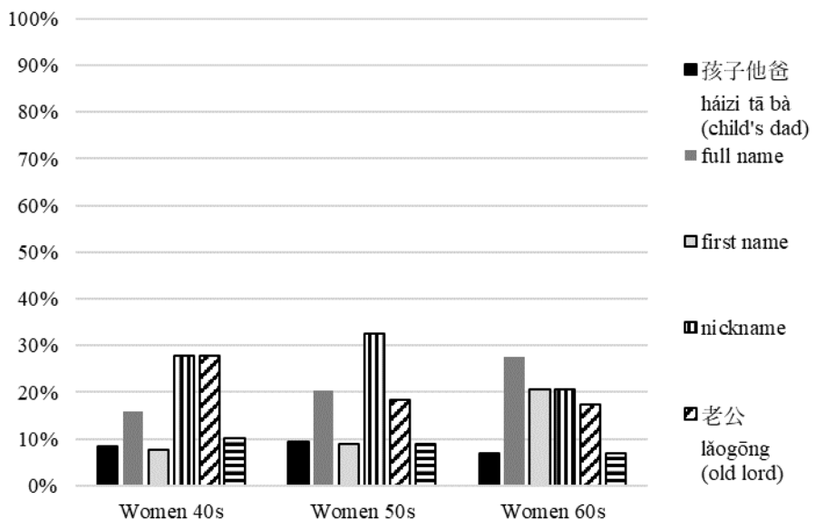
3.1. The Use of Teknonymy as Spousal Terms Based on Age

3.1.1. Teknonymy in Chinese Spousal Terms

Figure 1 presents the findings from the online survey conducted in China. When alone at home, married couples address their spouses using various terms, including nicknames, first names, and endearment terms such as “亲爱的 qīn'ài de” (dear). They also use full names, spousal terms like “老公 lǎogōng” (old lord) and “老婆 lǎopo” (old granny), as well as kinship-based terms (black bars) such as “孩子他爸 háizi tā bà” (child’s dad) and “孩子他妈 háizi tā mā” (child’s mom).

For both female and male respondents, the use of teknonymy as spousal terms is generally low in China. The percentage of female respondents who reported using teknonymy was 8.4% in their 40s, 9.5% in their 50s, and 6.9% in their 60s. Among male respondents, the rates were 10.6% in their 40s, 5.4% in their 50s, and 5.5% in their 60s. Overall, less than 10% of both men and women use teknonymy, indicating that teknonymy is rarely used as a spousal term in China.

Meanwhile, Chinese women use nicknames across all age groups. Additionally, younger women in their 40s tend to use “老公 lǎogōng” (old lord) more frequently, whereas older women in their 60s are more likely to address their spouses by their full names. Among Chinese men, younger respondents tend to use nicknames, while older respondents tend to use full names when addressing their spouses in private settings.



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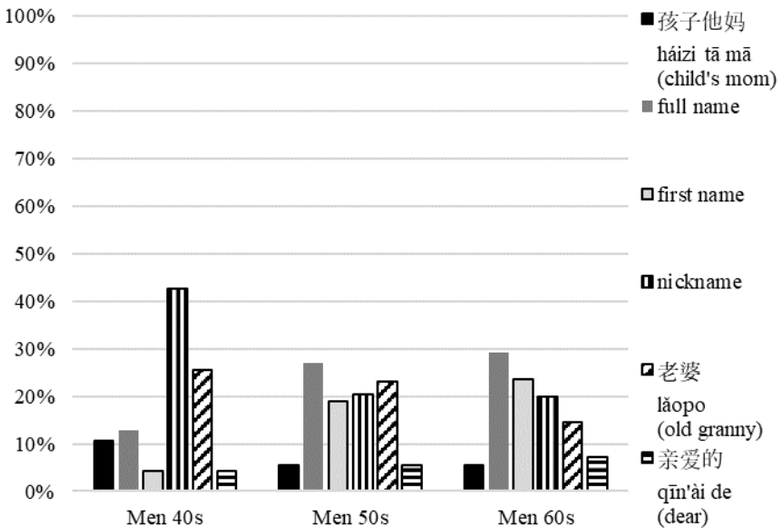


Figure 1. How Chinese couples address each other at home based on age: Women's (top) and men's (bottom).

3.2. Teknonymy in Korean Spousal Terms

Figure 2 presents the results of the online survey conducted in South Korea. When a married couple is alone at home, they address their spouse using various terms, including nicknames, first names, and endearment terms such as "여보 yeobo" (honey). They also employ kinship-based terms, such as "자녀의 이름+엄마 janyeoui ileum+eomma" ([Child's name] + mom) and "자녀의 이름+아빠/아버지 janyeoui ileum+appa/abeoji" ([Child's name] + dad/father), as well as "애 엄마 ae eomma" (child's mom) and "애 아빠 ae appa" (child's dad). Additionally, Korean couples use the second-person pronouns "자기 jagi" (self) and "당신 dangsin" (a polite form of 'you'). Notably, some female respondents in their 40s and 50s address their spouses as "오빠 oppa" (big brother), a unique usage not observed in the other countries surveyed.

As shown in Figure 2, teknonymy-based spousal terms rank second in usage frequency, significantly surpassing their use in China. Particularly, teknonymy is most frequently used among Korean couples in their 50s and 60s. The percentage of female respondents using teknonymy was 18.2% in their 40s, 38.9% in their 50s, and 30.0% in their 60s, while among male respondents, the rates were 3.6% in their 40s, 31.7% in their 50s, and 17.1% in their 60s. Notably, teknonymy is rarely used among Korean men in their 40s. Furthermore, less than 20% of female respondents in their 40s use teknonymy, indicating a clear decreasing trend in its use among younger generations. On the other hand, Korean men and women in their 40s are observed to be more likely to use "여보 yeobo" (honey), which reflects gender equality.

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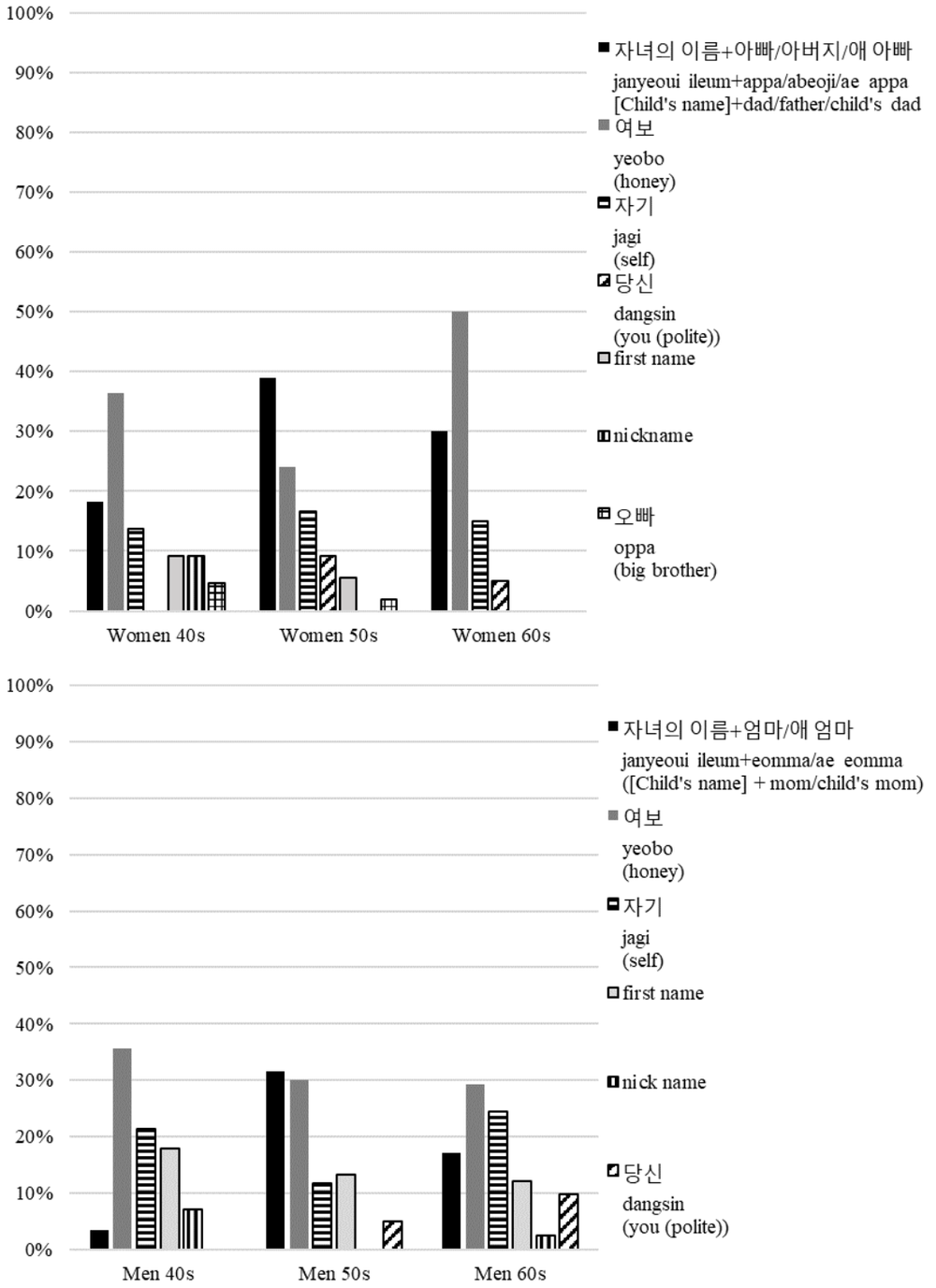


Figure 2. How Korean couples address each other at home based on age: women's (top) and men's (bottom).

3.3. Teknonymy in Japanese Spousal Terms

Figure 3 shows the results of the online survey in Japan. When a Japanese couple is alone at home, they address their spouse by kinship terms such as “おかあさんokāsan” (mother) and “おとうさん otōsan” (father) or “ママmama” (mom) and “パパpapa” (dad), and the second-person pronouns such as

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“あなたanata”(polite form of you), “おまえomae”(derogatory form of you), rather than by nicknames and first names. Both female and male respondents most frequently addressed their spouses by teknonymy. Moreover, the higher the age of the respondents, the higher the use of teknonymy. For female respondents, 47.7%, 53.45%, 88.9%, and for male respondents, 35.8%, 42.5%, 62.5%, for their 40s, 50s, and 60s, respectively. This use trend is particularly noticeable for female respondents. Women are more than 10 points higher than men in every age group. Most strikingly, women in their 60s used teknonymy almost twice as much as women in their 40s, indicating that age can be seen as an important factor in using teknonymy as spousal terms when a married couple is alone at home in Japan.

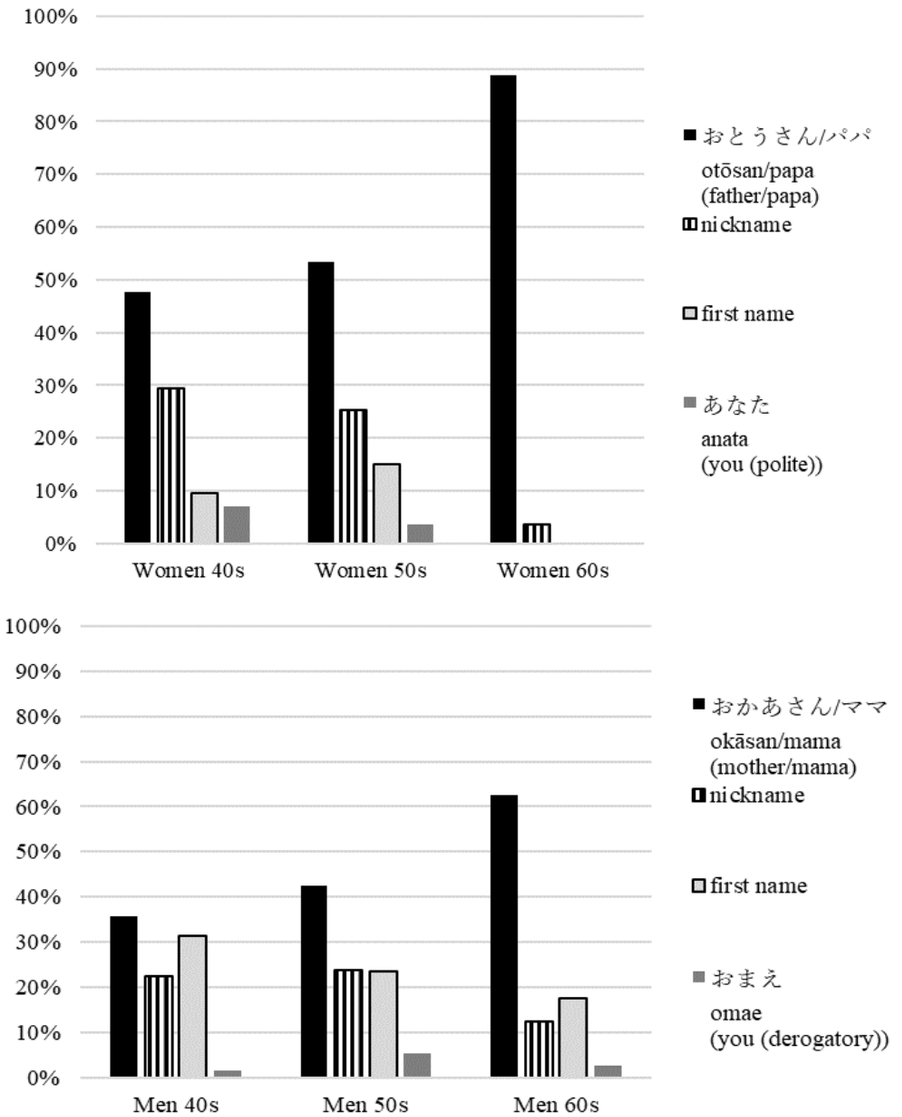


Figure 3. How Japanese couples address each other at home based on age: women's (top) and men's (bottom).

3.4. The Use of Teknonymy as Spousal Term Based on Educational Background

3.4.1. Teknonymy in Chinese Spousal Terms

Figure 4 shows the results of the analysis of Chinese respondents by education level. The major characteristic of the Chinese data is the low rate of teknonymy. Accordingly, the usage rates of teknonymy are

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not correlated with the educational background of either female or male respondents: for female respondents, the use rates of teknonymy are 7.6% for high school graduates, 8.5% for college graduates, and 6.8% for graduate school graduates; for male respondents, 7.1%, 6.6%, and 9.4%, for each education level, respectively.

Chen (1999) and Kim (2002) claimed that Chinese people with lower levels of education used terms such as "孩子他爸 háizi tā bà" (child's dad) and "孩子他妈 háizi tā mā" (child's mom) more often to their spouse. However, the present data show no relation between the use of teknonymy and the users' educational background. It became clear that as society changes, the terms people use to address their spouses also change over time.

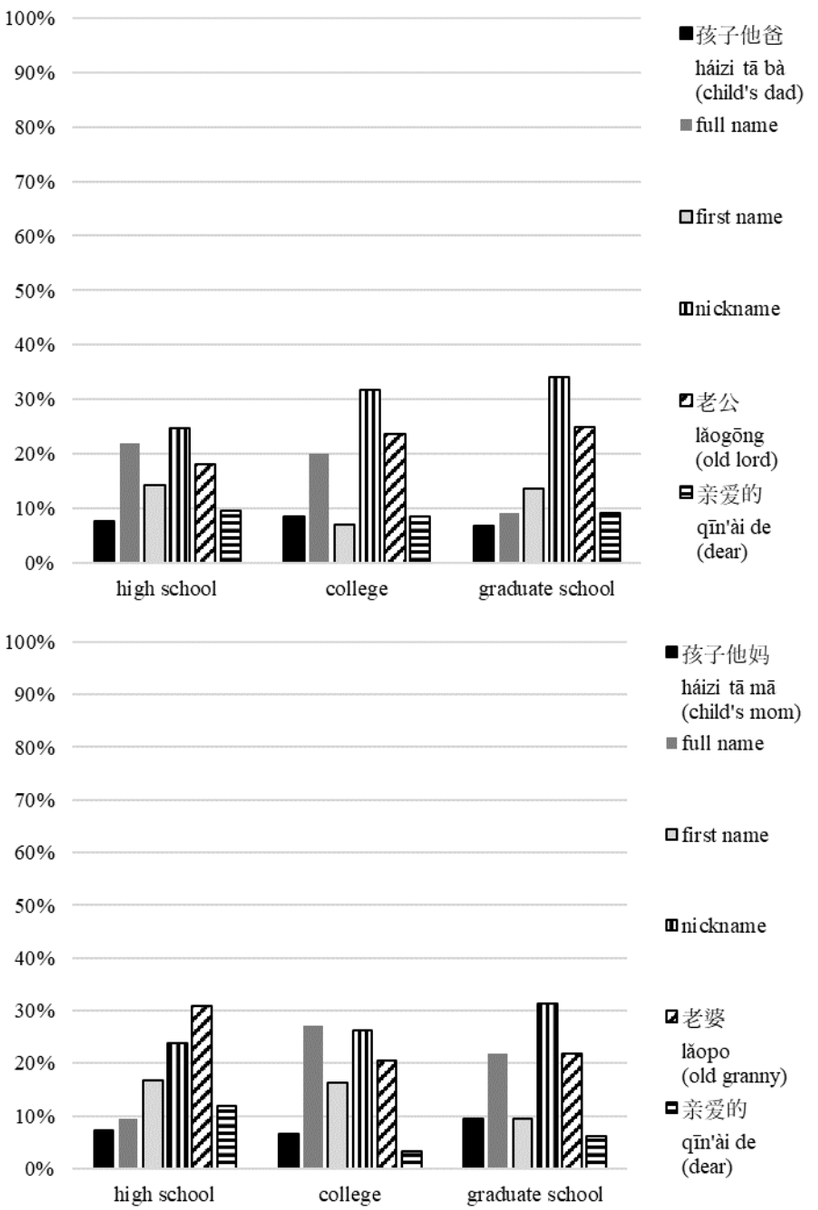


Figure 4. How Chinese couples address each other at home based on educational backgrounds: women's (top) and men's (bottom).

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3.5. Teknonymy in Korean Spousal Terms

Figure 5 shows the results of the analysis of Korean respondents by educational background. Regarding the use of teknonymy, different trends are observed between female and male respondents. In the case of women, there is no correlation with educational backgrounds: 34.1% for high school graduates, 29.5% for college graduates, and 36.4% for graduate school graduates. On the other hand, the use rate tends to be higher for male respondents with higher educational backgrounds: 17.4% for high school, 24.1% for college, and 27.8% for graduate school. In other words, educational backgrounds were found to be an important factor in the use of teknonymy as spousal terms for Korean males.

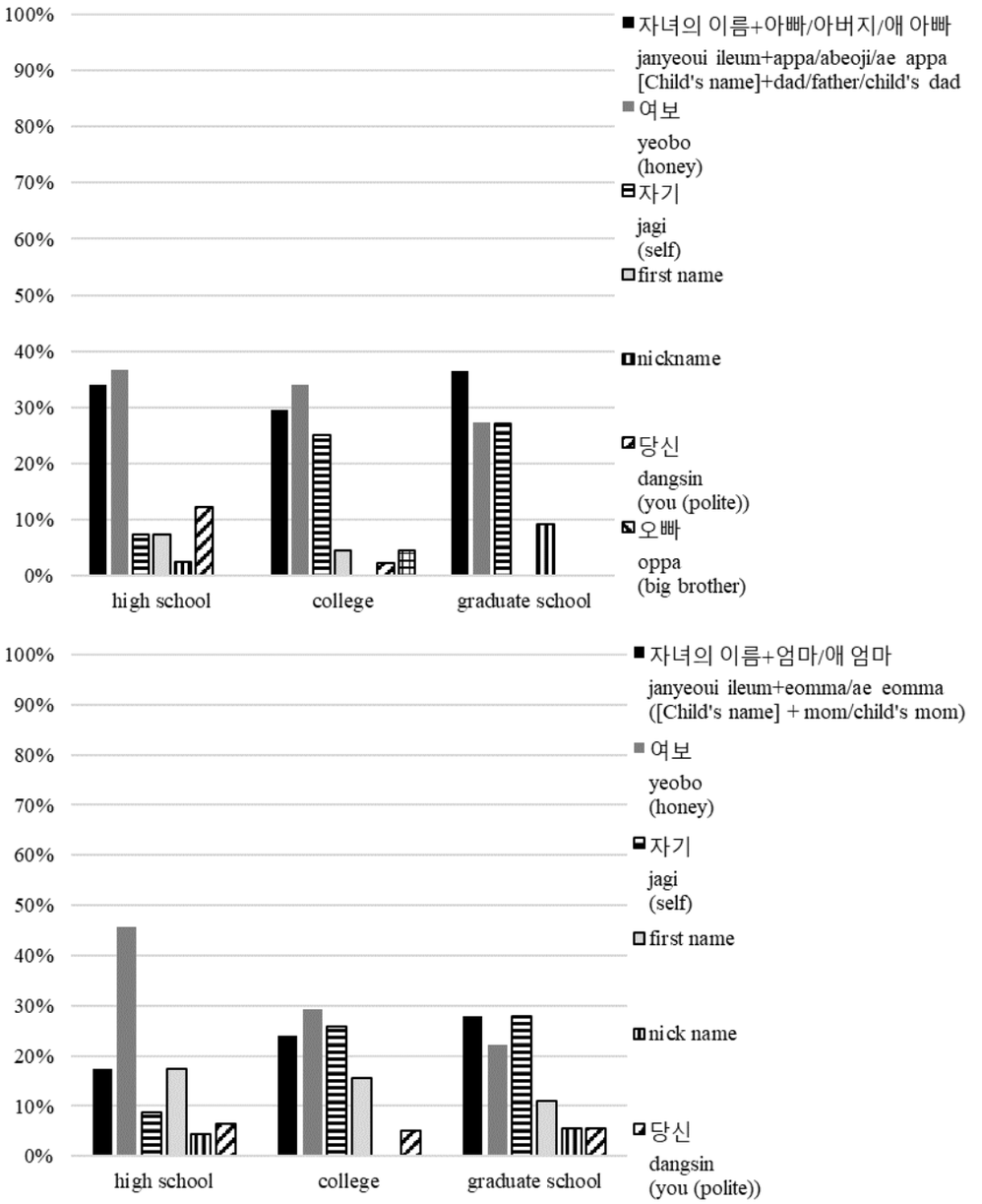


Figure 5. How Korean couples address each other at home based on educational backgrounds: women's (top) and men's (bottom).

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3.6. Teknonymy in Japanese Spousal Terms

Figure 6 shows the results of the analysis based on the educational background of Japanese respondents. Master's and doctoral degree holders use teknonymy more frequently than high school graduates, and this tendency is particularly pronounced among female respondents. The higher the educational background, the higher the rate of teknonymy use. For high school graduates, 44.4% of women and 34.5% of men; for university graduates, 56.4% of women and 45.6% of men; and for graduate school graduates, 50.0% of women and 45.9% of men. Educational background was found to be an important factor in the use of teknonymy as spousal terms, especially among Japanese female respondents.

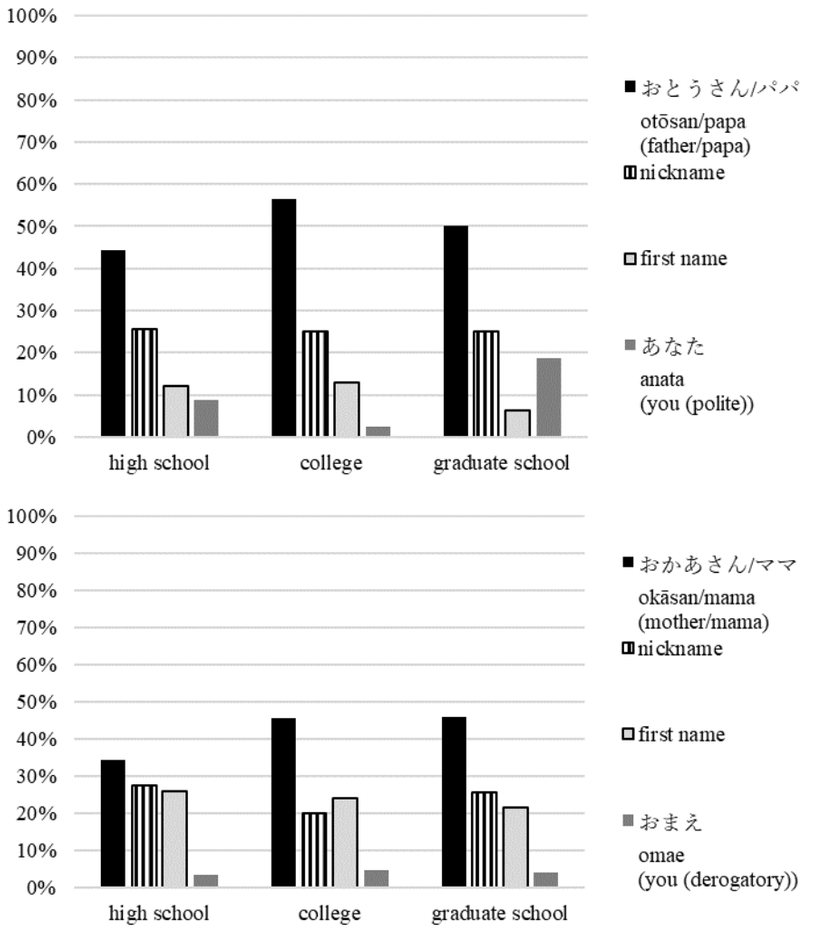


Figure 6.
How Japanese couples address each other at home based on educational backgrounds: women's (top) and men's (bottom).

4. Discussion

The analysis of online survey results across three East Asian countries based on age and educational background revealed that Japan and South Korea exhibit broadly similar patterns in the use of teknonymy as spousal address terms, whereas China diverges notably from these trends. Specifically, the use of teknonymy in China is significantly lower than in Japan and South Korea. Furthermore, in Chinese, the use of teknonymy shows no significant correlation with either age or educational background, for both male and female respondents. These results suggest that since the early 20th century, China has undergone a series of rapid socialist transformations that have improved the promotion of gender equality within and outside the family, and the use of spousal terms tends to differ from Japan and South Korea.

Although the general patterns in Japan and South Korea align, certain subtle differences were observed.

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First, in Japan, both female and male respondents most frequently addressed their spouses by kinship terms, which is referred to as "teknonymy" in this study. Moreover, the higher the age of the respondents, the higher the use of teknonymy. This use trend is particularly noticeable for Japanese female respondents. However, in South Korea, the use of teknonymy is primarily observed in middle-aged and older generations, specifically those in their 50s and 60s, for both female and male respondents, with the highest usage rate in the 50s and the lowest in the 40s. This use trend is also particularly noticeable for Korean female respondents. There is a clear decreasing trend in the use of teknonymy as spousal terms among younger generations. In other words, regarding spousal terms, the degree of gender bias in South Korea appears to be less pronounced than in Japan when a married couple is alone at home.

Second, both in Japan and South Korea, educational backgrounds were found to be an important factor in the use of teknonymy as spousal terms. However, Japanese with master's and doctoral degrees tend to use teknonymy more frequently than those with high school degrees, especially for female respondents. On the contrary, Korean men with master's and doctoral degrees tended to use teknonymy more frequently than those with high school degrees. Conversely, in the case of Korean women, there is no correlation with educational backgrounds. In other words, educational background was found to be an important factor in the use of teknonymy to address one's spouse only among Korean men.

These findings prompt the question: why do married couples in Japan and South Korea tend to use teknonymy as spousal terms when they are alone at home? Particularly, why is this use trend noticeable for female respondents? The reasons are rooted in cultural, social, and familial dynamics that reflect traditional gender roles and expectations. These ways of addressing each other are linked to the gender roles that men and women traditionally play within the family and society. In traditional Japanese and Korean families, the husband is often regarded as "the head of the family", who is responsible for supporting and leading the family. The wife is expected to do household chores, raise children, and support their husbands. By using teknonymy as a spousal term, addressing the husband as "father", the wife reinforces his role as "the head of the family", even within the marital relationship. It also highlights the respect given to him as the "head" of the family. East Asian cultural traditions often focus on gender roles within the family and household, with patriarchy (male-dominated family structures) deeply ingrained.

However, in modern East Asia, the educational level of women has improved significantly. Furthermore, the number of women entering the workforce has increased, especially in urban areas, and the awareness of gender equality in occupational opportunities has also improved. Therefore, another question needs to be considered: why are highly educated people in Japan and Korea more likely to use teknonymy as spousal terms than less-educated people, and why is this tendency particularly pronounced among highly educated Japanese women?

Generally, higher education is associated with progressive values. However, it has been observed in this study that highly educated men and women hold more deeply ingrained patriarchal views in East Asia. This seemingly paradoxical phenomenon can be understood through a combination of cultural, institutional, and psychological factors. Educated people often see themselves as rational and egalitarian. However, this self-image can blind them to their own implicit (unconscious) gender biases. While they may explicitly support gender equality, their behaviors or decisions may still reflect traditional gender expectations.

The fact that gender bias can persist among highly educated individuals is not necessarily a contradiction. Rather, it reflects how deeply embedded cultural norms, institutional incentives, and unconscious biases can operate even in spaces that appear "modern" or "rational". To truly address gender inequality, it is essential not only to increase education levels but also to critically examine the cultural narratives, institutional structures, and invisible biases that continue to shape our assumptions about gender.

5. Conclusion

This study aims to uncover gender biases in the use of teknonymy as spousal terms through online surveys in three East Asian countries. The survey focused on the context of how married couples address each other when they are alone at home. Among the three countries, results based on age and educational background revealed that Japan and Korea tend to be similar in the use of teknonymy as spousal terms. China, however, shows a different trend from Japan and Korea. In contrast to the findings in Japan and Korea, the use rates of teknonymy as spousal terms are significantly lower for both female and male respondents in China. The major difference from Japanese and Korean data is that the use of teknonymy as spousal terms in China does not

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correlate with the age and the educational background factors of either female or male respondents. Conversely, in Japan and South Korea, married couples tend to use teknonymy as spousal terms when they are alone at home, and this tendency is particularly noticeable for female respondents. The reasons are rooted in cultural, social, and familial dynamics that reflect traditional gender roles and expectations. In other words, traditional family roles are emphasized, reinforcing male authority and suggesting a subordinate role for women. These uses revealed that East Asian spousal terms continue to reflect patriarchal norms, but that a social shift toward gender equality is underway. Further research is needed to uncover the deeper cultural dynamics of spousal terms across East Asia.

It is essential to acknowledge the limitations of this study. Data collected through online surveys may not fully represent the general population due to the exclusion of individuals without internet access. Although the widespread use of smartphones may mitigate this limitation to some extent, caution is advised when interpreting online survey results. Moreover, the samples were restricted, primarily consisting of parents of university students, predominantly in their 40s and 50s, and mostly from highly educated backgrounds. Therefore, future research needs to aim for more diverse samples, including a wider range of ages and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Significant strides have been made in promoting gender equality over the years, but there are still challenges. One of the reasons why the gender gap has not been easily bridged is the lack of awareness among East Asians. Although this is a stark fact that should be taken extremely seriously, few people are aware that China, Japan, and South Korea are countries with a large gender gap. To change this situation, the time has come to realize gender-equal societies by being well aware that historically East Asia has a social structure that makes it difficult to see gender discrimination, questioning the traditional consciousness that has been hidden for a long time, and taking concrete measures to close the gender gap. Language and gender studies always provide valuable insights into such social issues.

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Appendix. East Asian Languages in This Study.

For readers unfamiliar with Chinese, Korean, and Japanese, words appearing in this paper are written in standard orthography, followed by their pronunciation, and their English translations are given in parentheses. Accordingly, the main spousal terms in this paper, their pronunciations, and their English meanings are listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Chinese, Korean, and Japanese words appearing in this paper.

Chinese	**Pronunciation**	**English meaning**
老公	Lǎogōng	old lord
孩子他爸	háizi tā bà	child's dad
亲爱的	qīn'ài de	dear
老婆	Lǎopo	old granny
孩子他妈	háizi tā mā	child's mom
Korean	**Pronunciation**	**English meaning**
여보	Yeobo	honey
자녀의 이름+ 아빠/아버지/애 아빠	janyeoui ileum+ appa/abeoji/ae appa	[Child's name]+ dad/father/child's dad
자기	Jagi	self
당신	Dangsin	you (polite)
오빠	Oppa	big brother
자녀의 이름+ 엄마/애 엄마	janyeoui ileum+ eomma/ae eomma	[Child's name] + mom/child's mom
Japanese	**Pronunciation**	**English meaning**
おとうさん/パパ	otōsan/papa	father/papa
あなた	Anata	you (polite)
おかあさん/ママ	okāsan/mama	mother/mama
おまえ	Omae	you (derogatory)

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